

'By your poetique fire they are refin'd': Reading for form and forms  
of reading in Constance Aston Fowler's verse miscellany, HM904

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## Abstract

This thesis takes Constance Aston Fowler's verse miscellany, HM904, as a case study to explore what verse miscellanies can tell us about how and why early modern readers valued poetry. It attends to several central elements of reading by considering the materiality, poetics, community engagement, and embodied experience of the text. This thesis aims to invigorate the study of verse miscellanies by studying the text as a collection of poetry. It argues that miscellanies are evidence of close engagement with poetic form by compilers and readers. Throughout this work, ideas of form as the 'enabling condition' of reading provide a methodology for comprehending the act of reading. This thesis works to reclaim Aston Fowler's miscellany as a testament to a Catholic work of form, drawing on the text's material life and its presentation of poetics. In the course of this analysis, this thesis uncovers the core concepts that structure the miscellany as a poetic text: the coherence and collaboration of human effort and divine forces, especially configured through acts of devotion, and an appreciation for interactive processes of textual engagement. By reading the early modern verse miscellany in this way, this thesis recovers an appreciation for poetry that has been overlooked in the literary canon, but which was read prevalently in the seventeenth century. It proposes that there is value in reading these texts as traces of varied reading lives that are guided by poetic form and presents a new method for reading diverse literary manuscripts from the period, texts that are sometimes fragmentary or seemingly inconsequential but are nonetheless substantial works of form. The wider ramifications of this work enrich the field of early modern literary studies by offering a renewed appreciation of how early modern readers engaged closely with poetry as part of their cultural, social, and devotional lives.

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This thesis is dedicated to my grandmother, Domenica Moorman, an inspiring, well-read Catholic woman.

### **Author's Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

Introduction - 'By your poetique fire they are refin'd': Reading for form and forms of reading in Constance Aston Fowler's Verse Miscellany, HM904

'Such sweet lines!' continued Harriet—'these two last!— But how shall I ever be able to return the paper, or say I have found it out?—Oh! Miss Woodhouse, what can we do about that?'

'Leave it to me. You do nothing. He will be here this evening, I dare say, and then I will give it him back, and some nonsense or other will pass between us, and you shall not be committed. —Your soft eyes shall chuse their own time for beaming. Trust to me.'

'Oh! Miss Woodhouse, what a pity that I must not write this beautiful charade into my book! I am sure I have not got one half so good.'

'Leave out the two last lines, and there is no reason why you should not write it into your book.'

'Oh! But those two lines are'—

'—The best of all. Granted; —for private enjoyment; and for private enjoyment keep them. They are not at all the less written you know, because you divide them. The couplet does not cease to be, nor does its meaning change. But take it away, and all *appropriation* ceases, a very pretty gallant charade remains, fit for any collection. Depend upon it, he would not like to have his charade slighted, much better than his passion. A poet in love must be encouraged in both capacities, or neither. Give me the book, I will write it down, and then there can be no possible reflection on you.'

- Jane Austen, *Emma*

### **Introduction and Methodology**

This thesis takes as a starting point a general question: what can verse miscellanies tell us about how and why early modern readers valued poetry? I have undertaken to answer this question by approaching the verse miscellany as a poetic text. Instead of focusing solely on the material circumstances of collection and circulation of verse, my analysis is defined by an interest in the poetry itself. Taking the unique example of Constance Aston Fowler's verse miscellany HM904<sup>1</sup> as a case study, I hope to show how the field of miscellany studies can be invigorated by a renewed appreciation of the verses that make up these literary manuscripts.

The close reading of a single miscellany has allowed me to approach this question not only as a scholar trained in historicist criticism and manuscript studies,

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<sup>1</sup> Constance Aston Fowler, verse miscellany, c. 1630s, Huntington Library, San Marino, CA. For a modern scholarly edition see Deborah Aldrich Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany of Constance Aston Fowler: A Diplomatic Edition* (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies in conjunction with Renaissance English Text Society, 2000). Quotations are referenced in line with manuscript foliation, page numbers for the printed edition are given in footnotes.

but also as a reader of poetry. Although a presentist fallacy must be carefully kept at bay in this study, it is nonetheless true that the poetry in miscellanies such as Aston Fowler's was collected to be read. Of course it is impossible to gain a full comprehension of how early modern men and women read and valued poetry; we can never know how any individual in the past *actually* read a poem. Nevertheless, by harnessing this role as a reader I hope to find some common ground with the *manuscript's past readers*, not to equate my own reading with theirs but to gain an appreciation for the texts which were certainly read closely and actively by their compilers. I hope to demonstrate how texts such as Aston Fowler's miscellany can be taken as evidence of a varied and rich reading life that encompassed family, faith, and artistic expression.

This interest in 'reading' as an object of study has been reinvigorated by the Modern Language Association of America's recent publication of a two-part special issue 'Cultures of Reading' that heralds a new wave of criticism within literary studies interested in reading as the act at the very heart of our discipline.<sup>2</sup> The editors, Deirdre Lynch and Evelyne Ender, see this recuperation of reading as an effort to mitigate the liability of alienating the field of literary studies from the actual reading lives of a broader public, past and present.<sup>3</sup> Verse miscellanies provide an opportunity to glimpse how poetry was read in an ordinary life and can perhaps find common ground in the close reading of a scholar and the close reading of a collector.

Although my epigraph is anachronistic, it is illustrative of just how many intricate motivations, feelings, and personalities can contribute to reading acts throughout the process of compiling verse into unique manuscript texts.<sup>4</sup> In fact, Emma and Harriet's 'charades' are not dissimilar to the short, pithy verse epigrams that were popular in early modern verse miscellanies. Crucially this passage reveals just how much is left off the page of the manuscript text: Mr Elton's 'sweet lines' will appear in Harriet's little book without any evidence of her emotionally-charged reading act, which is nonetheless embedded within the miscellany's compilation. Here the two friends read not only for poetic form but also with a mind to the

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<sup>2</sup> Deirdre Shauna Lynch and Evelyne Ender (eds.), *Special Topic: Cultures of Reading*, *PMLA* vols. 133.5 (Oct 2018) and 134.1 (Jan 2019).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Introduction: Time for Reading', *Special Topic: Cultures of Reading*, *PMLA* 133.5 (Oct 2018): 1076.

<sup>4</sup> Jane Austen, *Emma* (New York: Signet Classic, 1996), 86.

material circumstances of compilation and with highly personal editorial motivations. Indeed, directly following the scene between Emma and Harriet, the verse is read out to Mr Woodhouse and takes on yet another life in the polite society of parlour entertainment. To draw out the scene into the realm of the hypothetical, it is possible to imagine Harriet's book as one of many unique manuscripts preserved in research libraries today awaiting discovery by an intrepid scholar. Upon reading the page that contains Mr Elton's charade, such a scholar would certainly pause at the change of hand and perhaps read that verse more closely. If the form of the other charades in the book adhered to strict conventions, the missing couplet might present another mystery. The ensuing reading, attending to this particular charade's verse-text itself, reading for the poetic as well as the material form, would take extra care to draw out the possible explanations for these peculiarities, perhaps casting the riddle's resolution, 'Courtship', in a new light.

Harriet's charade book is an evocative starting point as it brings to life a scene of miscellany composition that can never be recreated through scholarship. The hypothetical scholarly scenario offers an example of how my critical practice could be constructed in reverse, working backward from the fictional scene of reading and compilation to the critical act upon the miscellany text. In this critical act, the poetic form and the material text taken together offer a productive method for understanding the complex reality of how two young women read and valued poetry, how art and life coalesce to produce a singular literary artifact. After all, as the scene quoted as my epigraph makes clear, the compilers of the miscellany read the verses in their book with great care, ardent feeling, and lively enjoyment. In the analysis that follows, I attempt to read both the material literary object and the text, a 'booke' of poetry in its own right as Aston Fowler describes it,<sup>5</sup> for clues that can illuminate how art and life and *faith*—a particularly strong force in Aston Fowler's miscellany—coalesce in early modern acts of reading and writing. My starting question can be framed more specifically: how did Constance Aston Fowler read her verses and why?

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<sup>5</sup> Aston Fowler describes the miscellany as 'my booke' in a letter to her brother Herbert Aston. Constance Aston Fowler to Herbert Aston, 31 July 1639, B.L. Add. MS 36452; printed in Clifford, (ed.), *Tixall Letters, of the Correspondence of the Aston Family and their Friends, during the Seventeenth Century. With Notes and Illustrations*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: James Ballantyne & Co., 1815), Letter XXIV, 'Your selfe', 128-33.

### **Discovering HM904 and Tixall Poetry: reading ‘poetique fire’ and new formalism**

The manuscript at the center of my study is a volume of verse compiled in the 1630s by Constance Aston Fowler (c. 1621-1664). In many ways, this manuscript is remarkable both as a material object and, more pertinently, as a unique book of verse. Upon first inspection, Aston Fowler’s manuscript book urges attention to detail. Huntington Library’s MS 904 is a quarto volume in original calf binding measuring 7 ¾” long and 5 ¾” wide. The covers are embellished with gold tooling: a simple dashed-line border along the edges and in the center a rectangle with flower embellishments enclosing an intricate knotted crest. A pattern of dotted lines, also in gold, adorns the binding, the pages are gilt, and the covers bear two holes along the fore-edge, 1 ¾” from the top and bottom, where it was likely tied with ribbon. Such a gilded presentation introduces an evocative and expressive readerly object. Within this impressively decorated volume there are 200 leaves with 65 verses copied mainly in Aston Fowler’s hand across two discrete sections, which are separated by 82 blank leaves.<sup>6</sup> The transcriptions in Aston Fowler’s hand include decorative borders between verses, mostly geometric in design, and ciphered symbols used as signatures for valued poems. In the first section, there are fourteen religious verses in an older semi-secretary hand and bearing the marks of more formal scribal practice, including ruled pages (the left margin in pencil, horizontal scored lines) and catchwords. Reading these material details alongside the poetry held within the manuscript pages, I hope to show how this literary manuscript presents a unique ‘work of form’.<sup>7</sup> This was clearly a cherished volume, and yet it was not identified as a document of literary interest until well into the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup>

The afterlife of Aston Fowler’s miscellany within the field of early modern literary studies is one of multiple discoveries. Jenijoy La Belle recounts her first encounter with the manuscript at the Huntington Library as a playful challenge set to her by her mentor at Cal Tech, Professor Hallet Smith: ‘One day Hallet Smith took

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<sup>6</sup> For a fuller description of the manuscript see Chapter One. See also Aldrich Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, lvii-lviii. A full list of contents is given in Appendix 1.

<sup>7</sup> This phrasing is borrowed from Ben Burton and Elizabeth Scott-Baumann (eds.), *The Work of Form: Poetics and Materiality in Early Modern Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), as well as Ellen Rooney, ‘Form and Contentment’, *Modern Language Quarterly* 61.1 (March 2000): 38-39. See further discussion below.

<sup>8</sup> B. H. Newdigate, ‘The Constant Lovers—I’, *Times Literary Supplement*, Issue 2098 (April 18, 1942): 204.

me into the Rare Book Room and handed me this small volume and said, “Here, figure this out.” It contained about sixty-five poems, and I pored over them for several hours every day for about a month.<sup>9</sup> La Belle describes her meticulous inspection of the text, deciphering the handwriting and identifying as many of the verses as she could by cross-referencing the Bodleian first-line index. She passed Hallet Smith’s test with flying colors and her efforts eventually led to the first major scholarly article on Constance Aston Fowler.<sup>10</sup> This literary detective work, however, never dominated La Belle’s stance as a critic of poetry. Working in the 1970s and ‘80s she was a descendant of the New Critics, and her work focused on poetry and fiction across literary periods.<sup>11</sup> La Belle subverts later debates over the literary merit of women’s writing by applying a close reading analysis not only to the poems in HM904 but also to Constance Aston Fowler’s letters, a non-literary genre that would not acquire the full attention of scholars within English departments for another two decades.<sup>12</sup> La Belle goes so far as to claim for Aston

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<sup>9</sup> Jenijoy La Belle, interview with Heidi Aspaturian, Pasadena, CA, February-May 2008, April 2009, transcript, Oral History Project, California Institute of Technology Archives, accessed online: [http://resolver.caltech.edu/CaltechOH:OH\\_LaBelle\\_J](http://resolver.caltech.edu/CaltechOH:OH_LaBelle_J).

<sup>10</sup> Jenijoy La Belle, ‘A True Love’s Knot: The Letters of Constance Fowler and the Poems of Herbert Aston’, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 79.1 (Jan 1980): 13-31.

<sup>11</sup> Her first major work was on Theodore Roethke: *The echoing of the wood of Theodore Roethke* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976). Subsequent work spanned several periods, including *Herself Beheld: The Literature of the Looking Glass* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

<sup>12</sup> The study of early modern letters flourished in the 1990s and 2000s invigorated by work on the humanists’ model letters of the Republic of Letters and as part of the movement toward material readings of manuscript texts. See Lisa Jardine, *Erasmus, man of letters: the construction of charisma in print* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); Roger Chartier (ed.), *Correspondence: Models of Letter-Writing From the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997); Lynne Magnusson, *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue: Dramatic Language and Elizabethan Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Susan Fitzmaurice, *The Familiar Letter in Early modern English: a pragmatic approach* (Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 2002); Gary Schneider, *The culture of epistolarity: vernacular letters and letter writing in early modern England, 1500-1700* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2005); and Alan Stewart, *Shakespeare’s Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Worth noting is James Daybell’s work on women’s letters and the materiality of early modern letter-writing; see *Early modern women’s letter writing, 1450-1700* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) and *The material letter in early modern England: manuscript letters and the culture and practices of letter-writing, 1512-1635* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). He has also written on early modern letter-books and the place of letters within wider manuscript networks; see Daybell, ‘Early Modern Letter-Books, Miscellanies, and the Reading and Reception of Scribally Copied Letters’, in *Manuscript Miscellanies in Early Modern England*, eds. Joshua Eckhardt & Daniel Starza Smith, 57-72 (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).



Fowler a wholly literary life: ‘By the evidence of her letters, it would seem that Constance did not live in history, but in language: she created a little self-contained world made cunningly of love and rhetoric’.<sup>13</sup> Although to some extent La Belle’s discovery of Aston Fowler as a literary figure was at the expense of her historical context, the impulse to read her miscellany as a book of poetry compiled by a reader with a unique poetic sensibility is one I share and which has been lacking in the subsequent work on Aston Fowler. Following La Belle’s initial critical discovery, the manuscript was caught up in the feminist reclamation of overlooked women’s writing and benefitted from Deborah Aldrich-Watson’s thorough and engaging editorial eye in producing the Renaissance English Text Society edition.<sup>14</sup> Aldrich-Watson’s aim was to place Aston Fowler within her historical context in relation to her familial and literary heritage. This has been followed recently by Helen Hackett’s productive analysis that discovered answers to several persistent mysteries of the manuscript’s origin and compilation.<sup>15</sup> This overview of the scholarly afterlife is itself a broad-strokes depiction of the critical movements within literary studies over the past forty years. The miscellany, defined as it is by poetic zeal and its uniquely heterogenous form, is designed for such re-readings and rediscoveries.

As I will discuss in the following chapters, HM904 is a book that encourages close reading in various contexts. My goal of recapturing the spirit of Aston Fowler’s initial compilation as an act belonging to a passionate reader and lover of poetry also calls to mind quite a different moment in the poetic history of the Astons and the community of poets known as the Tixall coterie, so named for the Aston

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<sup>13</sup> La Belle, ‘A True Love’s Knot’, 17.

<sup>14</sup> Aldrich-Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*.

<sup>15</sup> Helen Hackett, ‘Women and Catholic Manuscript Networks in Seventeenth-Century England: New Research on Constance Aston Fowler’s Miscellany of Sacred and Secular Verse’, *Renaissance Quarterly* 65 (2012): 1094-124; ‘Sisterhood and Female Friendship in Constance Aston Fowler’s verse miscellany’, in *Early Modern Women and the Poem*, ed. Susan Wiseman (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 131-47; ‘The Aston-Thimelby Circle at Home and Abroad: Localism, National identity and Internationalism in the English Catholic Community’, in *Region, Religion and English Renaissance Literature*, ed. David Coleman (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 123-38; ‘Unlocking the mysteries of Constance Aston Fowler’s verse miscellany (Huntington Library MS HM 904)’, in *Manuscript Miscellanies in Early Modern England*, eds. Joshua Eckhardt and Daniel Starza Smith (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 91-112. Sajed Chowdhury’s recent article on Aston Fowler shows a renewed interest in the miscellany’s poetry and takes several examples from the miscellany as commentary on poetic ‘making’; see ‘The poetics of “making” in the manuscript writings of Constance Aston Fowler’, *The Seventeenth Century* (2019): 1-23, DOI: 10.1080/0268117X.2019.1596832.

estate in Staffordshire. The miscellany's rebirth through rigorous scholarly attention has proven immensely valuable to reclaiming this history but this academic work is starkly contrasted with the Tixall coterie's original entrance into the literary field. The survival of the Tixall poets in the annals of literary history is owing to the amateur historian Arthur Clifford, one of the Aston's nineteenth-century descendants who discovered a trove of family papers and brought out a sentimentally-edited collection with modest aspirations. Clifford introduced his work and the work of his poetic ancestors with a flowery, overdone *apologia* that endeavors to preclude any rigorous critical attention:

I am very far from flattering myself, that this work will be considered as any valuable addition to our stock of ancient poetry, or that it will ever become extensively popular. I consider it, myself, rather as an object of curiosity. The poems of which it consists, were accidentally discovered; they were snatched from the very jaws of destruction; in a few years more, they would perhaps have sunk, with their authors, into the dark abyss of overwhelming oblivion: they would most probably have perished. Under these circumstances, it was to me a sort of religious feeling, a sacred duty, to attempt to give them a 'habitations and a name.'<sup>16</sup>

This editorial flair veers into self-aggrandizement, which is heightened by Clifford's addition of his own verses in the preface as well as in his meandering and sometimes arbitrary notes. Now it is Clifford's text that is an 'object of curiosity' as a somewhat exasperating addition to the literary history of Tixall. His preface to *Tixall Poetry* begins in a style that could be mistaken for the opening passages of a gothic tale. The narrator, inspired by the remembrances of a deceased sister, inquires after an ancient chest thought to have belong to an illustrious ancestor, but is told the papers within it have been ruined by age and neglect or else eaten by mice. When he opens the chest, he dusts away dirt and scraps of paper to find several hitherto unnoticed drawers clearly designed for the preservation of papers. Further trunks are brought out and Clifford recounts rifling through accounts and letters from generations past before reaching the final case: '...when I came to open the great trunk—"visions of glory, spare my aching sight!"'.<sup>17</sup> Despite this romantic presentation and the setting

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<sup>16</sup> Arthur Clifford, preface to *Tixall Poetry: With Notes and Illustrations* (Edinburgh: James Ballantyne & Co., 1813), xxxii.

<sup>17</sup> Clifford, Preface to *Tixall Poetry*, vii; quotation from Thomas Grey, *The Bard: A Pindaric Ode* (1757).

in the home of an ‘ancient Catholic family’,<sup>18</sup> the particular vision of glory revealed to Clifford was not crumbling manuscript pages telling a ghastly tale of a family curse (translated out of the Italian). Yet Clifford’s discovery has proven more valuable than he originally imagined in his deferral to sentimental familial interests. His editorial exuberance does not recommend Clifford’s edition for use in modern critical practice, but as the only surviving record of most of this poetry it is indispensable to our knowledge of the Tixall group. My appreciation for Clifford’s work is not due to his scholarship, for his edition certainly does not stand up to standards of the academy, but it has one important thing in common with his ancestors: a clear joy in poetry.

‘Joy’, however, is not easily captured nor less acknowledged in conscientious criticism. Instead I will attempt to read the ‘poetique fire’ of Aston Fowler’s miscellany—or rather, the more legible trace of such ‘fire’, the poetic form. In doing so, I hope to recover the forms of reading that situate this unique text within the literary life of its community. The fuller passage from which I have taken my title, the final lines of Herbert Aston’s commendatory verse to his sister the poetess Gertrude Thimelby (‘To My Honer’d sister GA’, fols. 155r-158r), witnesses both reading and writing acts specific to Tixall. Aston admires his sister’s poetic ‘splendour’ as akin to the metaphysical fire of creation:

...like the glorious sun  
 Neuer denye us that inspiring light,  
 Which we receau’d, with such a high delight  
 From your pierian straines; but still inspire,  
 Vs, with the heate of your poetique fire;  
 For as the sun by uertue of his great  
 Masculin luster and his quieckning heate;  
 Of slime; and Mud, produceth liuing creatures;  
 Diffring in nature; and of seuerall features;  
 According to the mould from which they’r made,  
 So your lines’ heate; and splendour; doth inuade  
 Our dul, dead mudding minds; and doth create  
 New Creatures; of what seem’d inanimate:  
 As euen these lines though creatures of my minde,  
 By your poetique fire they are refin’d;

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<sup>18</sup> Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, Preface to the First Edition (1764), ed. Michael Gamer (London: Penguin Books, 2009), i.

Notably, the ‘high delight’ of the community’s reading is itself an act of creation. Active reading is an invigorating force; Aston’s formula of inspiration and readerly engagement suggests that it is also a discerning one: ‘poetique fire’ molds ‘diffring’ forms, ‘of seuerall features’. Reading at Tixall is thus presented as an act of refinement and enlivenment.

This praise for Gertrude Thimelby is significant as a first-person account of the literary community at Tixall. In earlier lines, Aston describes his personal and social relationship with his poet-sister: ‘First blest in hearing your phebean lines / which all our Iugements and our witts refine / And by them to the happy knowlege grow / Of you’ (lines 35-38). Here Aston’s verse foreshadows the scene from *Emma* I chose as an epigraph and situates the exchange of verse at Tixall within scenes of communal reading and socializing. Aston describes the reception of Gertrude’s poetry through ‘hearing’, indicating an auditory form that cannot be captured through the materiality of the manuscript book. The literary culture of Tixall, like other poetic coteries of the period, is not structured upon solitary and silent reading experience. Aston’s evocation of the poetic recitals among family and friends at Tixall recalls the scene in Mary Wroth’s *Urania* of Perissus’s delight in the queen’s verse performance when he exclaims ‘that he never had heard any like them, and in so saying, he did right to them’.<sup>19</sup> The praise is indulgent, and, like the scene in ‘To My Honer’d sister’, it is couched in the personal relationships that not only inform the tenor of the judgment but also bestow the vigor of social efficacy to the verse. Perissus performs his part just as well as his queen—‘he did right to them’—and thus participates in the creation of meaning through his judgment. Aston’s reception of his sister’s verse signals a more nuanced act of collaborative poetic engagement particularly as he invokes the first-person plural to gather together the multiple voices of the community: ‘all our Iugements and our witts refine’. This is not only a shared act of reading but also a mixing of poetic agency.

‘To My Honer’d sister’ begins with a routine invocation of the muse, which takes on more complex signification given the verse’s meditation on art and reception: ‘Infuse into me all your choycest straines’ (line 1). This line could stand

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<sup>19</sup> Mary Wroth, *The Countesse of Mountgomerie’s Urania* (London, 1621), 416. Printed in *The First Part of the Countess of Montgomery’s Urania by Lady Mary Wroth*, ed. Josephine A. Roberts (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1995), 490.

as a profession of a specific miscellanizing agency, one where reading poetic form is a collaborative act. The verse goes on to assert the conflation of Herbert and Gertrude's acts of reading and writing as enacted through the 'fire' of poetic form (the 'lines' heate'), which is not only a force of 'quieckening' but also of refinement. Although the genre of the ode is given to stylized exaggeration, the scene of social reception and collective critique goes beyond simply claiming communal significance—which I do not mean to diminish and which will be given its due in the following discussions, especially in Chapter Three—by introducing the metaphysical conceit of refinement as constitutive to the poetic practice of Tixall, especially in active reading for form.

The idea of refinement requires some unpacking here. The term is repeated several times in the miscellany, notably in Herbert Aston's and William Pershall's verses in relation to both love and poetry.<sup>20</sup> The metaphysical context of this notion of refinement draws on early modern alchemy's concern for the process of refinement and the distillation of the Philosopher's Stone, specifically analogous to the processes of incineration or calcination as part of the extraction of the 'dross' from the pure. Early modern alchemy, however, was framed not as a pursuit of wealth and glory but rather as a spiritual project. Mary Anne Atwood has specified the alchemist's project as one of self-realization: man was 'the true laboratory of the hermetic art, his life the subject, the grand distillatory, the thing distilling, and the thing distilled'.<sup>21</sup> The metaphorical dimension of this alchemy is also put to use in religious contexts as well, including Donne's sermons.<sup>22</sup> A 1605 English translation of Joseph Quercetanus's *The Practise of Chymicall, and Hermetical Physicke* specifically defines the eschatological context of such alchemy:

Moreover, as the omnipotent God, hath in the beginning, by his divine

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. 'The perfect Louer' (fols. 24v-25r): '...for his owne fire / Is his owne happiness, and its owne hire; / yet he hath one desire nor doth that staine / The purity of Loue; tis Loue againe / This the most perfectly refined approue' (lines 33-37); 'Loue's Meritt' (fols. 31v-32r): '...now I finde, / Thou art a passion pure refine' (lines 3-4); 'whilst here eclipsed' (fols. 46v-47r): 'Butt wher fath loues / It liues and Feeds upon the inward sight / Refin'd delight / By which I iuew my heart thy form my flame / euer the same' (lines 10-14).

<sup>21</sup> Qtd James. R. Keller, 'The Science of Salvation: Spiritual Alchemy in Donne's Final Sermon', *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 23.3 (Autumn 1992): 486.

<sup>22</sup> James R. Keller, 'The Science of Salvation', 486-93. See also, Stanton J. Linden, *Darke Hieroglifphicks: Alchemy in English Literature from Chaucer to the Restoration* (Louisville, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1996) and Bruce Janacek, *Alchemical belief: occultism in the religious culture of early modern England* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011).

wisdom, created the things of the heavens & earth, in weight, number, & measure, depending upon the most wonderfull proportion & harmony, to serve the time which he hath appointed: so in the fullnesse & last period of time (which approacheth fast on) the 4 Elements (whereof all creatures consist) having in every one of them 2 Other Elements, the one putrifying and combustibile, the other eternal & incombustibile, as the heaven, shall by God's *Halchymie* be metamorphosed and changed. For the combustibile having in them a corrupt stinking feces, or drossie matter, which maketh them subject to corruption, shall in that great & generall refining day, be purged through fire: and then God wil make new Heavens and a new Earth, and bring all things to a christalline cleernes, & wil also make the 4 Elements perfect, simple, & fixed in themselves, that al things may be reduced to a *Quintessence of Eternitie*.<sup>23</sup>

'Refining' is here not only an act of purifying and perfecting, but also of transcendence and heavenly creation. Notably it is also the form of humanity 'in weight, number, & measure', the orderly and well-balanced arrangement of elements, that prevents destruction in the purging fire and allows refinement unto 'a new Earth'.

The '*Quintessence of Eternitie*' is effected through the refinement of form just as the afterlife of Gertrude Thimelby's verse is ensured through active reading by her family and friends; the *quintessence* of Thimelby's verse is not gold but rather the invigoration of her readers likened to the spiritual effect of salvation. The blending of agency in such refinement defines the closely connected acts of poetic reading and writing that structure the social and literary lives of the Tixall group. It is noticeable that even within the domestic and social context he describes for the reception of Gertrude's verse, Herbert Aston ultimately defines the process of poetic refinement as a close engagement with form—'your lines' heate; and splendour; doth inuade / our dul, dead mudding minds'. This reading is an internalizing and enlivening act undertaken through engagement not only with ideas but also the form that holds the 'poetique fire'.

To 'refine' also contains another meaning that comes to the fore in relation to material and linguistic form: 'To polish or purify (a language, composition, etc.); to render in a more cultured or elegant aesthetic style', which the OED glosses by citing an example of a printed book's title page announcing the text as 'newly

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<sup>23</sup> Joseph du Chesne (Quercetanus), *The Practise of Chymicall, and Hermetical Physicke*, trans. by Thomas Timme (London, 1605), A3.

refined, and published for the delight, and profit of the READER'.<sup>24</sup> This is a meaning that accords with the popularity of writing and style guides during the early modern period, including Angel Day's *The English secretorie* (1592), the full title of whose second edition describes it as 'studiously, now corrected, refined & amended, in far more apt & better sort then before'.<sup>25</sup> The popular dictionary *Glossographia* (1656) also connects language and refinement, its title page designating the text as 'A dictionary interpreting the hard words...as are now used in our refined English tongue'.<sup>26</sup> To refine a text is a literary act that can be mapped onto compositions such as poetic miscellanies in this editorial sense. Just as Herbert Aston's verse is refined through his engagement with his sister's poetry, so Constance Aston Fowler's miscellany is refined as a text through her close and active reading. On the other hand, Aston Fowler's textual agency is itself a refining force in the editorial sense of material arrangement and presentation of her verses.

I hope to show in the following analysis of both the miscellany's material and poetic form that Aston Fowler's acts of refinement have another, subtler effect that accords with her brother's metaphysical conceit: a transcendence that is conceived as an immortalization of her poetic coterie, a living monument in verse to the literary world at Tixall. Reading the layering of meanings and the complex multivalency of the language of refinement reveals how Herbert Aston's metaphysical version of the concept in 'To My Honer'd Sister' places the miscellany itself and the literary practices at Tixall in conversation with formal questions on multiple levels: most notably, the spiritual and the linguistic or the poetic. As I've noted, reading for form—and refining form—is in this formulation a process of close textual engagement. Herbert Aston's verse also affirms that this literary activity is imbued with the affective experience of joy in art and friendship. It is clear that family and friends at Tixall in the 1630s viewed their poetic efforts with as much feeling as their 19<sup>th</sup>-century relative. Attending to the act of reading in the early modern period requires taking into account this meeting of the literary, the spiritual, and the affective; it is just as important to note the 'high delight' as well as the 'inspiring light' that are both part and parcel of the reading acts inscribed in

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<sup>24</sup> *OED*, s.v. 'to refine, v.', 3.; citing Thomas Mallory, *The most ancient and famous history of the renowned prince Arthur King of Britaine* (London, 1634), title page.

<sup>25</sup> Angel Day, *The English secretorie*, 2nd ed. (London, 1592), title page.

<sup>26</sup> A. B., *Glossographia: or A dictionary* (London, 1656), title page.

Aston Fowler's miscellany. As I hope to trace in the miscellany's secular and devotional poetry, it is not far off to describe the literary life at Tixall as Arthur Clifford did: 'a sort of religious feeling, a sacred duty'.

My thesis aims to situate Aston Fowler's 'poetique fire' and its effects within the context of a critical framework that attends to form on several levels. Though the phrase 'poetique fire' is nicely expressive, I am wary of relying on a vague sense of aesthetics or 'literariness'. By addressing the miscellany as an act (or rather numerous acts) of historically-situated reading, I am hoping to trace not just the 'lines' heat but also what Aston might call the act of refinement: the 'work of form', a phrase which Ben Burton and Elizabeth Scott-Baumann took from Ellen Rooney's seminal essay and put to use as a title for their recent volume of historically-minded formal criticism of poetics and materiality in early modern culture. The *work of form* is the action of a text, to *refine*, in Herbert Aston's terms. Reading for form in my thesis is not merely an assessment of aesthetic or literary features, but rather reading for the *refining* action of form, that is, what poetry *does*. Burton and Scott-Baumann note that the variety of approaches taken in the critical movement of New Formalism 'unite in looking less for the uniqueness of a particular artefact than for its ability to mobilize aesthetic features from literary tradition'.<sup>27</sup> Citing Carolyn Dever's idea of form's 'afterlife', Burton and Scott-Baumann go on to draw out their understanding of the 'work of form' as the action of reading:

For us this is about how a poem would have been created by early modern readers as well as what it means to us now, without implying that we can know what an early modern reader would have thought, nor homogenizing modern or early modern readers. Here the *work* is our own as critics, and it is valuable for the process as well as its results.<sup>28</sup>

I also value the methodology of nuanced attention to form as a literary critic and view such 'close reading' as a means to recover if not a complete notion of how an early modern reader would have interacted with a text, then at least a better understanding of what processes of meaning might have been set in motion by the intricacies of language and form impacting those interactions. In this way, my thesis

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<sup>27</sup> Ben Burton & Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, Introduction to *The Work of Form: Poetics and Materiality in Early Modern Culture*, 1-22 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.



endeavors to come closer to seeing how the work of form was crafted within a historical moment.

This practice is, as I have mentioned, attuned to an awareness of the act of reading as elusive. Roger Chartier warns us that reading ‘cannot be deduced from the texts it makes use of’.<sup>29</sup> Yet the miscellany text offers a singular opportunity to study not only the individual poem, but also the material acts of collecting and editing. As the scene from *Emma* makes clear, these acts are closely tied to reading and offer another way to approach that elusive subject in order to avoid the potential analytical slip of subreption, which Kant defines as the illegitimate transfer of properties from the judging subject to the object judged.<sup>30</sup> This methodology of close, literary reading as a gateway to understanding how the work of form frames and directs the act of reading follows Robert Lehman’s recent theoretical adaptation of new formalism to attend to the process of aesthetic judgment rather than questions of formal qualities as meaningful in their own right. Lehman disputes the consequence of any ‘certain formal something’ that formalist critiques all too easily fall back on as indicative of the potency or value of ‘the literary’ or in Lehman’s terms, ‘art *qua* art’.<sup>31</sup> Taking Kant’s example of an ancient stone utensil to question the ‘purposiveness’ of an art object, Lehman surmises, ‘We fail to declare the stone utensil beautiful not because it lacks some certain formal something but because we fail to approach it as an occasion for aesthetic judgment, as the sort of thing that one might find beautiful’.<sup>32</sup> And thus, ultimately art—or poetry—is made meaningful not by form but by judgment, that is through the action of reading: ‘we fail to judge this utensil beautiful because we fail to judge it as the sort of thing that one might

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<sup>29</sup> Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, trans. Lydia Cochrane (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 23.

<sup>30</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by J. M. D. Meiklejohn (New York: P. R. Collier & Son, 1901).

<sup>31</sup> Richard Strier traces this dispute over formalist ideology vs practice, noting that even the most notable New Critics—so often derided for reducing critical practice to judgment of ‘literariness’—recognized that ‘[t]he “literary” nuances of the poem “itself” may help us understand its historical moment, just as, in turn, detailed knowledge of the historical moment may—in a richer way than [Cleanth] Brooks suggests—help us to understand the nuances of a poem.’ Strier, ‘How Formalism Became a Dirty Word, and Why We Can’t Do Without It’, in *Renaissance Literature and Its Formal Engagements*, ed. Mark David Rasmussen (Houndsmill: Palgrave, 2002), 210.

<sup>32</sup> Robert S. Lehman, ‘Formalism, Mere Form, and Judgment’, *New Literary History* 48.2 (Spring 2017): 252.

judge beautiful'.<sup>33</sup> Although I will not be asking questions of beauty or aesthetics in my analysis, I take Lehman's version of new formalism on board as I attend to the miscellany as a record of Aston Fowler's particular literary taste. Constance viewed these verses as worthy and that act of judgment structures the text of the miscellany as a whole. As follows, I am interested in the 'poetique fire' as something born of reading, which Herbert Aston also posited in his metaphysical conceit of verse that 'all our Iudgments and our witts refine'.

By taking the act of reading as the starting point for my reconsideration of poetic form in early modern miscellanies, I consider how reading as an engagement with form is a means of generating social and religiopolitical meaning. I hope my study will correlate with Danielle Clarke and Marie-Louise Coolahan's assessment of reception and form in early modern women's writing. Clarke and Coolahan posit that 'form might be understood more broadly as a key element in reception, the interface between text and reader which in its *techne* (verse form, rhyme, metre, layout, stanza divisions, paratexts, and so on) mediates meanings in ways that shape reception'.<sup>34</sup> The dearth of formal criticism of women's writing following the feminist reclamation of 'Judith Shakespeare's' forgotten texts, as Clarke and Coolahan note, has left open the critically inviting questions: 'which forms do women poets use, and to what uses do they put them?'<sup>35</sup> Reading Aston Fowler's miscellany for form suggests several intriguing answers to these questions especially in the poetry by Katherine Thimelby and Dorothy Shirley, as well as the unique female-voiced poem 'On the Passion' (fols. 8r-12v).<sup>36</sup> The miscellany, however, offers the added layer of a woman's close textual engagement with form across many genres and thus provides an opportunity to investigate not only the instances of literary creation, but also the more common experience of reading—which is ultimately how the 'work of form' is refined.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.; Lehman's distinction between 'phenomenal form' and 'mere form' is noteworthy here: 'the spatial, temporal organization of an object', or 'phenomenal form [which is] the proper object of formalist criticism' as distinct 'from mere form, which is what we judge when we judge by taste', that supposedly 'irreducible singularity of a representation insofar as it is constructed through an act of aesthetic judgment' (252-53).

<sup>34</sup> Danielle Clarke and Marie-Louise Coolahan, 'Gender, Reception, and Form: Early Modern Women and the Making of Verse', in *The Work of Form*, eds. Burton & Scott-Baumann, 145.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 149; Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Hogarth Press, 1929), 41-49.

<sup>36</sup> Aldrich-Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poem 4: 6-14.

My study is of course indebted to the new historicist scholarship that has been a mainstay of the critical field for the past twenty years, and it is evident that this mode allowed the interest in both women's writing and religion to find important successes. Yet the 'poetique fire' of my title is a reminder of the central concern of my work. Aston Fowler's miscellany is a fascinating text within its cultural and historical context: the criticism up until now has demonstrated this fact very well. It has lacked, however, a full appreciation of the 'poetique fire' that so inspired the writers and readers engaged in its compilation. I attempt to reclaim this consciousness of poetic form in my reading. Yet the question of the miscellany's interest in form requires a nuanced consideration of what aesthetic and evaluative assumptions are implied in formalist readings. Lehman recently critiqued the naivete of scholarship that attempts to have it both ways: to attend to formal qualities of 'art' while ostensibly relinquishing the biases of taste.<sup>37</sup> Indeed one of the reasons the poems within Aston Fowler's miscellany have never benefited from the close literary reading of critics is that much of the verse is of the ubiquitous type of amateur poetry that abounds in seventeenth-century literary manuscripts. It is one of the motivations of this thesis that verse miscellanies such as HM904 derive their value not through the number of aesthetically or artistically impressive verses they contain but in the collective force of a literary practice that values poetry's potency of form as well as its social and devotional efficacy. The 'evaluative-formalist assumptions' that cannot be fully circumvented are, I hope, contextualized and elucidated by attending to how the miscellany and its makers conceptualize poetry as 'art', or as what I view more specifically as a self-consciousness of form. Crucially, it is Aston Fowler's evaluative biases that are most prevalent in her verse miscellany, a fact that has been hitherto under-appreciated. The critical assessment of the verses collected by Aston Fowler has, for the most part, failed to recognize the exercise of the young Catholic woman's taste and her specific appreciation of poetic form.

My thesis will attempt to fill this gap in the scholarship and attend to how Aston Fowler and her fellow members of the Tixall group read for form and how 'poetique fire' enlivened their reading, be it for devotion, sociability, or pleasure. As a testament to a *reader's* engagement with poetry, the miscellany presents a challenge

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<sup>37</sup> Lehman, 'Formalism, Mere Form, and Judgment'.

to a literary critic who cannot read in the same way as a seventeenth-century Englishwoman could. Deidre Lynch and Evelyne Ender observe this quandary in their special issue of PMLA: '[T]he obstacle lies in part with the counterintuitive arrangement that sees scholars taking as objects of study and labor the very works that lay readers have treated as scenes of pleasure and leisure'.<sup>38</sup> And yet, pleasure and interpretation are two sides of one coin, whether for a literary critic or for a young woman with literary interests in seventeenth-century England. Ellen Rooney has notably linked 'Form and Contentment', responding to Susan Wolfson's idea of the elusive action of texts:

Reading is the disclosure of this action...This elusiveness is not, however, a matter of aesthetic complexity or even of linguistic subversion; it is what the reading seeks in the text, what reading produces in the text, the reason it is necessary to read texts at all, long after one has acquired theoretical assumptions and ideological assumptions and commitments, it theorizes and reads theory, history, ideology as it is being read and theorized. Form is its sharpened tooth.<sup>39</sup>

The 'contentment', Rooney asserts, is the 'possibility of form', not only in refining and engaging theory but also in the reading itself. The work of form, its teeth, 'cannot be foreseen from the outside, or from the moment before reading begins'.<sup>40</sup> This meeting of reading and formalism need not mean a loss of pleasure nor a lessening of critical rigor. Moreover, as I hope to show in my first chapter, such active reading is congruous with Aston Fowler's literary practice as evidenced in her miscellany: she read both as an editor and as a laywoman. The work of form was in action for the miscellany's seventeenth-century readers as much as it is for me.

We are now almost twenty years on from Susan Wolfson's call to read for form.<sup>41</sup> During this critical period, the proposal has been slow to reach the corner of book history devoted to reading *material*. Although such criticism is concerned with reading, much of the work has been on the material forms of the activity.<sup>42</sup> William Sherman's influential work *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England*

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<sup>38</sup> Ender and Lynch, 'Introduction: Time for Reading', 1075.

<sup>39</sup> Ellen Rooney, 'Form and Contentment', *Modern Language Quarterly* 61.1 (March 2000): 38-39.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>41</sup> Susan J. Wolfson, 'Reading for Form', *MLQ* 61.1 (March 2000): 1-16.

<sup>42</sup> See for instance Anne Moss, *Printed Commonplace Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Fred Schurink, 'Manuscript Commonplace Books, Literature, and Reading in Early modern England', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 73.3 (2010): 453-69.

shows how reading in the early modern period was ‘no less a manual art than writing or printing’.<sup>43</sup> In the instance of Aston Fowler’s miscellany, this multifaceted art of reading is at once a material act and a creative one: Fowler not only engages with the poems she collects, but edits and arranges them to create a book of verse, a literary work of her own. It is this manually-created material object that is left to us; the evidence within the pages speaks to how poems were read in their specific time and place. I have chosen the term ‘reading’ for my study, rather than book use or reception history precisely for its fluidity as it pertains to form. While I am attentive to the material cues left by Aston Fowler in the composition of her book of verse, I am interested not in ‘a punctual, self-contained act’, but rather ‘the complex, layered, and extended temporalities’ that Lynch and Ender have brought into view.<sup>44</sup> Roland Barthes’ deconstructionist energy is not far off from this formulation of reading and his ‘mirage of citations’ that dissolves the authority of the text serves as a reminder of the slippery nature of reading itself, which can work on texts according to innumerable variables.<sup>45</sup> Skirting around the ledge of this drop into deconstruction’s devolution of textual meaning, the material facts of reading can ground a critical method that attends to manuscripts such as miscellanies, commonplace books, and unique texts such as the Little Gidding Harmonies. The question of reading as both material and textual history is, as Whitney Trettien has put it, ‘How can we extrapolate from material evidence of used books to build larger narratives that help us connect to and make sense of the past, without reducing it again to grand progressivist theories?’<sup>46</sup> Trettien’s answer for the Little Gidding Harmonies is that ‘we cannot appreciate the innovations and interventions of “used books” like the harmonies unless we approach them as operational objects that work on and in the world, twining different moments together’.<sup>47</sup> Aston Fowler’s miscellany does not show many marks of habitual use in its afterlife (the handful of markings is discussed in Chapter One), but the twining together of moments through

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<sup>43</sup> William Sherman, *Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). See also Helen Smith, *Grossly Material Things: Women and Book Production in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>44</sup> Ender and Lynch, ‘Introduction: Time for Reading’, 1079.

<sup>45</sup> Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, translated by Richard Miller (New York: Hill & Wang, 1974), 10.

<sup>46</sup> Whitney Trettien, ‘Media, Materiality, and Time in the History of Reading: The Case of the Little Gidding Harmonies’, *PMLA* 133.5 (Oct 2018): 1137.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 1149.

reading and writing is evident in its textual history within the scholarly field as well as in the process of its compilation, which took place over several years and records a community's poetic activities of reading and writing across time. By refocusing our attention on the many forms of reading within Aston Fowler's miscellany and the poetic effusions of the Tixall coterie, we discover an evocative example of how art and life are embedded within each other, melded together through 'poetique fire'.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to answer the question, *why do we read poetry?*, though the question haunts the margins of all formalist critiques. However, as I stated at the outset, there is a much more specific question closer at hand: why did Constance Aston Fowler read *these* poems? By looking at *how* Aston Fowler read, I hope to show that poetry stages a consummation of art and life, what early moderns would view as the human and the divine, and therein lies a unique power of literary reading to resonate historically, culturally, and personally.

### **A Catholic Miscellany**

HM904 bears no title page or date. The only ownership signature is the initials 'C T' in the lower corner of the inside back cover. Within its pages is a unique collection of secular and devotional verses in two main hands. B. H. Newdigate was the first to attribute the manuscript commonplace book, held by the Huntington Library, to Constance Aston Fowler, having stumbled across the book in his research on Michael Drayton.<sup>48</sup> The main hand [Figure 1], an italic that varies at times in neatness but not fundamentals, matches Aston Fowler's surviving letters.<sup>49</sup> The second hand [Figure 2] is a slightly older style of italic script with a number of secretary forms and was initially thought to belong to Aston Fowler's sister Gertrude Thimelby until evidence of Gertrude's hand as present in her profession document from St Monica's convent in Louvain conclusively refuted this attribution.<sup>50</sup> Recent

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<sup>48</sup> Newdigate, 'The Constant Lovers—I'.

<sup>49</sup> B.L. Add. MS 36452; see also Jenijoy La Belle, 'The Huntington Aston Manuscript', *The Book Collector* 29 (1980): 542-67.

<sup>50</sup> Vows under Mother Throgmorton, c. 1633-66, (Item unnumbered) Box WMLK1, folder K2, Douai Abbey Library, Reading. Victoria Van Hyning discovered the document. Helen Hackett also explains the practical impossibilities of Gertrude as Hand B due to the presence of the same hand in a Warwickshire manuscript unconnected with the Astons or Tixall; see 'Women and Catholic Manuscript Networks'.

impressive archival work by Helen Hackett and Cedric Brown has identified the second scribe as the Jesuit priest William Smith.<sup>51</sup>

They walke like ghosts, all who that roise did keepe  
 In nature name that dead men could not sleepe  
 yea all these strange portents did not Infuse  
 one Atome of beleefe to th' razinge Jews:  
 O murther, farre more poiſenous then if Hell  
 Hag Lodged in your brains a charmed spell:  
 Did not the Heavens speake him to bee right  
 And true messias by that heavenly Light  
 that did report his comminge to bee true  
 And were three kings slight messengers with you  
 did not the sea and waters closely meete  
 And make a marble pavement for his feete  
 Saw yee not ~~how~~ how the Earth when that hee side  
 with tremblinge pathes syon terrifide:  
 The stupide stones and walls his frowe speake  
 when like sad mourners they in heeces breake  
 yea your dull soules deceivd with fencer toys  
 Nothinge beleefe but what (true Faith) destroyes:

Figure 1 Constance Aston Fowler's hand, HM904 fol. 12v.

O Jesu make grant that I may  
 repose my trust in thee  
 for thou sweete Jesu art the waye  
 and true tranquillitie

Thou Jesu art the waye  
 and quietnesse of mind  
 the onely rest unto the soule  
 that seeks thy favoure finde

Therefore sweete Jesu Doe provide  
 my soule this waye may see  
 and for thy painfull passion sake  
 have mercy now on mee  
 Amen,

Figure 2 William Smith's hand, fol. 7v.

All images of HM904 reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library.

It is notable that the manuscript's first attribution to Constance Aston Fowler came from the connection to Drayton as it signals the specific, personal literary

<sup>51</sup> Helen Hackett, 'Unlocking the mysteries', and Cedric Brown, 'William Smith, Vere Southerne, Jesuit Missioner, and Three Linked Manuscript Miscellanies', 113-32, both in *Manuscript Miscellanies in Early Modern England*, eds. Eckhardt and Starza Smith.

heritage of the book. Constance Aston Fowler was the daughter of Lord Walter Aston, Baron of Forfar, and Gertrude Sadleir.<sup>52</sup> Lord Walter was the son of Edward Aston of Tixall, Staffordshire and Anne, daughter of Sir Thomas Lucy of Charlecote, Warwickshire.<sup>53</sup> The literary interests of Lord Aston can be traced to his youth when he was patron to Michael Drayton, who dedicated several works to Aston from 1598 (*The Black Prince*) to 1612 (*Poly-Olbion*) and who served as esquire when Aston was created a knight of the Bath in 1603. Aston's poetic interests continued through his political career as is evidenced in his daughter's miscellany, family letters, and in his reputation leading to a misattribution of Donne's verse letter 'That unripe side of earth' to him in contemporary manuscript sources.<sup>54</sup> It is through Michael Drayton's verse that Tixall gained notice as a literary house and when Arthur Clifford published the poetry he discovered in family papers, he added the quotation from *Poly-Olbion* to the title page of his book, *Tixall Poetry*.<sup>55</sup> Aston, however, is chiefly remembered for his diplomatic career. From 1619 to 1625 he served as joint ambassador to Spain with John Digby, Earl of Bristol, and survived the political fallout from the failed Spanish Match without

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<sup>52</sup> Aldrich-Watson includes a useful genealogical table in her edition: *The Verse Miscellany*, xii-xviii. See also her introduction, xix-xxix, for a detailed historical and biographical overview of the Aston family. Though the birthdate of Constance Aston Fowler is unknown, she is described consistently as Aston's youngest daughter. Given the age given on the records of elder sister at St Monica's Convent determining Gertrude Aston Thimelby as 48 in 1668, Constance cannot have been born before 1621. Given the family's residence with their father during his embassy from 1619-25, it is likely that both daughters were born in Spain.

<sup>53</sup> A. J. Loomie, 'Aston, Walter, Baron Aston of Forfar (1584-1639)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>54</sup> HM904, fol 33r, 'A congratulation For the happy Retorne of L:A: From spaine' by William Pershall; *ibid.*, fol. 188r, 'A stranslation [*sic*]' signed LWA for Lord Walter Aston; this translation is referenced in Constance Aston Fowler to Herbert Aston, Letter, 11 August 1636, B.L. Add. MS 36452, printed Arthur Clifford (ed.), *Tixall Letters*, 89: '[S]ence I receued this Letter from you which I haue now writ to you of, I haue receaued another from you some fiue dayes a goe, which you writ to my sister and mee together and in it sent us most admireable verses of my Lords translateing, which are justly admired by all here'. See W. Milgate (ed.), *John Donne: The Satires, Epigrams and Verse Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 82, for manuscript copies of 'To the Countesse of Huntington' misattributed to Aston. This literary reputation was cited by Dennis Kay in attributing an elegy signed 'Sir W:A' collected in Bodley MS Eng. Poet. e. 37 to Aston. The elegy begins 'Weepe, weepe, even mankinde weepe, so much is dead', see Kay, 'Poems by Sir Walter Aston, and a Date for the Donne/Goodyer Verse Epistle "Alternis Vicibus"', *Review of English Studies*, New Series, vol. 37, no. 146 (May 1986): 198-210. This poem is elsewhere attributed to Henry Skipwith; see Arthur F. Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996): 197.

<sup>55</sup> '...by Tixall grac'd, the Aston's ancient seat, / Which oft the Muse hath found her safe and sweet retreat.' Clifford (ed.), *Tixall Poetry* (title page).



lasting damage to his standing with Prince Charles, who upon his ascension forgave Aston for prosecution of recusancy. Charles honored Aston with the baronetcy in Scotland, forgave his debts, and commissioned him again to Spain as envoy from 1635 until his health began to fail in 1638.<sup>56</sup> Lord Aston died in 1639 and of his several poet-children it was Gertrude Thimelby who penned his elegy, celebrating his influence on his children's poetic efforts. Thimelby specifically frames her act of poetic creation in relation to the family's literary tradition: 'Teares I could soone have brought unto this hearse, / And thoughts, and signs,<sup>57</sup> but you command a verse' ('Upon the Command to Write on My Father', lines 1-2).<sup>58</sup> As patriarch of a poetic family, Aston's influence is manifest not only in his children's literary lives, but also, as Gertrude Thimelby's elegy makes clear, in the artistic endeavors of the Tixall coterie as a whole. Gertrude writes to her father, 'If you will be obey'd, Ile hold the pen, / But you must guide my hand, instruct me then' (7-8). This sentiment does not lessen the creative agency of the daughter, but rather demonstrates the strength of Aston's legacy.

As I will show in the following sections, Constance Aston Fowler's work as compiler and creator of her own book of Tixall poetry was closely attuned to her family's status and their literary heritage. And yet, this familial devotion does not lessen the poetic endeavors and ambitions displayed in the miscellany. Its literary and political heritage imbues Constance Aston Fowler's verse miscellany with a unique outlook. My thesis attempts to delineate this stance, which straddles the public and the private realms of early modern poetic culture, and how it defines Aston Fowler's creative acts of reading and making. Aston Fowler's literary work is most strikingly distinguished by another facet of her family's history: their Catholicism. Although the exact date is not known, it was most likely during Aston's first embassy that the family converted to Catholicism given the fact that all of the Aston children made Catholic marriages in the 1620s and 1630s.<sup>59</sup> A report as early

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<sup>56</sup> Loomie, 'Aston, Walter'.

<sup>57</sup> possibly sighs; this may have been a miscopying by Clifford.

<sup>58</sup> Printed in Clifford (ed.), *Tixall Poetry*, 92-93. Herbert Aston's verse-praise of his sister also notes her poetic gifts as fitting offerings for memorials: 'How blest were one to dye if on his herse, / As others dropp a teare, you sticke a uerse' ('To My Honer'd sister GA', 105-6).

<sup>59</sup> In 1629 Aston's eldest son and heir Walter Aston married Mary Weston, daughter of Richard Weston, the first earl of Portland and one of the most prominent politicians of the Caroline court. Herbert Aston married Katherine Thimelby in 1638/9. By the time of the miscellany's compilation from 1635-40, Frances Aston had married William Pershall,

as 1629 gives evidence of a Jesuit at Tixall: a priest known as ‘Father Francis Foster, newly come out of Spain. A Yorkshire man; was agent for the English Jesuits at the Court of Spain, when his Majesty was there; resorts much to London, and to the Lady Aston’s house, Staffordshire’.<sup>60</sup> The connection between the ‘Court of Spain’ and the Aston’s Catholic community in England is particularly provocative, given the context of the family’s conversion and the political fallout from the failed Spanish Match.<sup>61</sup> Recent work on Aston Fowler’s miscellany has been instrumental in revealing the Catholic context for the poetic community centered at Tixall. Helen Hackett and Cedric Brown’s work identifying William Smith’s hand links the miscellany to the missionary work of the Jesuits and this Jesuit connection is heightened by the Aston family’s closeness with the Thimelby’s of Irnham in Lincolnshire. The families were connected through the marriages of Herbert Aston to Katherine Thimelby and Gertrude Aston to Henry Thimelby.<sup>62</sup> The Thimelbys’ maternal grandmother was Eleanor Vaux Brooksby whose family was linked to Edmund Campion and who sheltered Robert Persons at her home in Essex. Eleanor and her sister Anne Vaux later set up several safe houses for Jesuits in England, working with and sheltering the Jesuit superior Henry Garnet for two decades.<sup>63</sup> The

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Gertrude Aston had married Henry Thimelby, and Constance had married Walter Fowler.

<sup>60</sup> Henry Foley, S. J. *Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus*, vol. 2 (London, 1877-83): 233-34.

<sup>61</sup> One of Bristol’s political mistakes was offending Prince Charles, who accused him of pressing the issue of religion so far as ‘to foresee our intention to change our religion, [and] you were so far from dissuading us, that you offered your advice and secrecy to concur in it’. Despite Walter Aston’s changing religious sympathies, he did not accrue any such accusations as Charles recognized that ‘he durst not give his consent for fear of his head’. Aldrich-Watson, xxiii, quoting Thomas Bayly Howell, *Cobbett’s Complete Collection of State Trials*...vol. 2 (London: R. Bagshaw, 1809): 1277). For an account of the politics of the Spanish Match, especially in relation to the negotiations for toleration of English Catholics, see A. J. Loomie S. J., ‘Toleration and Diplomacy: The Religious Issue in Anglo-Spanish Diplomacy’, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, new series 53.6 (1963): 1-60; see also Alexander Samson (ed.), *The Spanish Match: Prince Charles’s Journey to Madrid, 1623* (London: Routledge, 2003), esp. Chapter Three, David Sánchez Cano, ‘Entertainments in Madrid for the Prince of Wales: Political Functions of Festivals’, 51-73; Glyn Redworth, *The Prince and the Infanta: The Cultural Politics of the Spanish Match* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); for a contrasting interpretation of the ‘cultural politics’ of the match, see Robert Cross’s review of Redworth’s book, ‘Review: Pretence and Perception in the Spanish Match, or History in a Fake Beard’, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 37.4 (Spring 2007): 563-83.

<sup>62</sup> The families are further connected through William Pershall: another Aston sister, Frances married William Pershall whose first wife had been a Thimelby sister.

<sup>63</sup> Colleen M. Sequin, ‘Brooksby [*née* Vaux], Eleanor (c. 1560-1625), recusant and priest harbinger’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

Fowlers of St Thomas Priory, Constance Aston Fowler's family by marriage, were also staunchly Catholic and the house was a center of recusant activity known for priest-harboring throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>64</sup>

This Catholic, and specifically Jesuit, heritage is intertwined with the poetic culture of the Aston-Thimelby set. It has been well-established in the scholarship of the early modern English Catholic community, as well as the Jesuit Mission, that writing and literature played an integral part in Catholic devotion and communal life in post-Reformation England.<sup>65</sup> This context is particularly significant for Aston Fowler's miscellany due to the volume's association with the Jesuit priest William Smith. The manuscript is noteworthy as a multi-faceted text: a repository for a family's devotional and social interests, as well as for a missionary's work within the larger recusant community and Counter-Reformation context. William Smith (1594-1658) was a Staffordshire local and benefitted from the well-developed and maintained Catholic network to which the Astons were linked. He was educated first at St Omer and then he continued onto the English College at Valladolid in 1619, where his entry records name him 'Sutheron alias Smith'.<sup>66</sup> In 1625, after his ordination, he entered the Jesuit community at Watten and was next at Ghent as a 'theologian' and tertian until he was sent back to England. Michael Greenslade has connected Smith to the town of Acton Trussell, near Stafford and in the parish of Baswich, which was dominated by the house of the Fowlers at St Thomas.<sup>67</sup> This

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<sup>64</sup> Michael W. Greenslade, *Catholic Staffordshire 1500-1850* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2006), 82.

<sup>65</sup> This scholarship is extensive. Notable examples include Thomas M. McCoog, S.J. (ed.), *The reckoned expense: Edmund Campion and the Early English Jesuits: essays in celebration of the first centenary of Campion Hall, Oxford (1896-1996)* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1996); Arthur F. Marotti (ed.), *Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism in Early modern English Texts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999); Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Gerard Kilroy, *Edmund Campion: Memory and Transcription* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); and James E. Kelly and Susan Royal (eds.), *Early modern English Catholicism: identity, memory, and counter-Reformation* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), chapters by Jaime Goodrich and Earle Havens and Elizabeth Patton. Several studies on Robert Southwell are also notable; see Scott Pilarz, *Robert Southwell and the Mission of Literature, 1561-1595* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); Anne Sweeney, *Snow in Arcadia: redrawing the English lyric landscape, 1586-95* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006); Robert S. Miola, 'Publishing the Word: Robert Southwell's Sacred Poetry', *Review of English Studies* vol. 64, issue 265 (2011): 410-32. For a fuller discussion see Chapter Two.

<sup>66</sup> Cedric Brown, 'William Smith, *Vere Southerne*', 114.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-15.

local connection offers an explanation for Smith's whereabouts upon his return to England as he appears to have been attached to the local Catholic houses during the 1630s. Interestingly, Smith left a paper trail of his movements in the mission. During his time in Staffordshire, he contributed to Aston Fowler's miscellany and he continued as a scribe in the years following. By 1640, Smith professed his final four vows in Worcester with the Residence of St George and during this decade he was compiling another manuscript, TCD 1194. Cedric Brown has described this manuscript as a collection of materials for 'vocational purposes, within the mission and in the context of an embattled recusant community in the 1640s. Much is meditational and historical, in a more inward-looking collection than [Smith's] two other miscellanies, a storehouse and a source for strengthening of faith'.<sup>68</sup> Finally, in the 1650s, Smith was based in Wootton Wawen where a third extant manuscript, Bodleian Eng. poet. b.5, was compiled and used for his ministry to local families. This manuscript is a collection of accessible devotional texts including ballad texts and verses specified for the Christmas and Easter seasons. This personal and scribal history offers a glimpse of the Jesuit mission in the midlands and the network of Catholic families and communities that were tied together not only in confessional identity, but also in a specific devotional culture of religious verse and popular ballads as is recorded in the manuscripts Smith used in his ministry.

The miscellany is in many ways a unique text within the Jesuit mission and it is this Catholic context that has garnered critical attention in recent years.<sup>69</sup> As a Catholic text, the miscellany is poised at the meeting of three thriving areas of scholarship: early modern women's writing, the history of the book and manuscript studies, and the resurgence of scholarly interest in early modern Catholicism that has been described as the 'Turn to Religion'.<sup>70</sup> Early modernists have been caught in this

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>69</sup> Helen Hackett, 'Women and Catholic Manuscript Networks'; Femke Molekamp, *Women and the Bible in Early Modern England: Religious Reading and Writing*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 196-206.

<sup>70</sup> Ken Jackson and Arthur F. Marotti, writing in 2004, noted the phenomenon and identified Debora K. Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics, and the Dominant Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) as an opening salvo of sorts. The movement was hitting its stride at the turn of the century with Stephen Greenblatt's, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). See Jackson and Marotti, 'The turn to religion in early modern English studies', *Criticism* 46.1 (Jan 2004): 167-91. A few years later, Gregory Kneidel was already reassessing the movement, *Rethinking the turn to religion in early modern English literature: the poetics of all believers* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

turning for two decades, the resultant work unspooling in many productive new directions. A complete overview of this work would require more space than this introduction allows, but as James Kelly and Susan Royal's recent publication on early modern Catholicism makes clear, this field of study is indebted to the diligent work of many historians over the past two decades.<sup>71</sup> The question of the origins of the early modern Catholic community has been a point of contention since John Bossy's seminal work *The English Catholic Community, 1570-1850*: Bossy first introduced the idea of the post-Reformation English Catholic community as born of the Counter-Reformation and the Council of Trent.<sup>72</sup> Christopher Haigh, however, argued for continuity with a pre-Reformation Catholic communal identity marked by late-medieval piety and resistance to 'new' religion.<sup>73</sup> Historians including Alexandra Walsham, Peter Lake, and Michael Questier have been instrumental in fostering our understanding of how the nuances of this historical community were structured along the lines of religious identity and politics during the early modern period: as Walsham writes, these studies of the contexts for conformity and recusancy, 'alert us to the plurality of Catholic communities and identities engendered by the Protestant Reformation in Britain'.<sup>74</sup> This reading of Catholic

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<sup>71</sup> For a useful overview see James E. Kelly & Susan Royal, editors' introduction to *Early Modern English Catholicism: identity, memory and counter-Reformation*, 1-14

<sup>72</sup> John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570-1850* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1975); see also 'The Counter-Reformation and the People of Catholic Europe', *Past & Present* 47 (1970): 51-70.

<sup>73</sup> Christopher Haigh, 'The Continuity of Catholicism in the English Reformation', *Past & Present* 93 (1981): 37-69.

<sup>74</sup> Alexandra Walsham, *Catholic Reformation in Protestant Britain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 12. Work on the relationship between religious identity and the Catholic community includes Walsham, *Church Papists: Catholicism, conformity, and confessional polemic in early modern England* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1999), and *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England, 1500-1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); Peter Lake and Michael C. Questier, *Conformity and orthodoxy in the English church, c. 1560-1660* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2000). For an in-depth exploration of one Catholic community see Michael C. Questier, *Catholicism and Community in Early modern England: Politics, Aristocratic Patronage and Religion, c. 1550-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). For how recusants negotiated their identities as both English and Catholic, see Christopher Highley, *Catholics Writing the Nation in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Several studies of anti-Catholicism have helped to draw out the consequences of controversies of religious identity and non-conformity, especially Frances E. Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999) and Raymond D. Tumbleson, *Catholicism in the English Protestant Imagination: Nationalism, Religion, and Literature, 1660-1745* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

identity as dialectically conceived in relation to Protestantism and the political world reveals varied Catholic communities across the period. Anne Dillon has drawn attention to the significant role of martyrdom narratives as a means of ‘mediating the Catholic faith’ through shared texts and images, a reminder of the power of stories and metaphors in unifying and clarifying a Catholic identity in response to the Reformation and the politics of religion.<sup>75</sup> Catholic identity—multifaceted, dialectically and symbolically constructed—was filtered through practice and experience, as the work of Eamon Duffy’s studies of material and liturgical religious practice both pre- and post-Reformation cogently elucidates.<sup>76</sup> The question of devotion as a practice that is constitutive of identity and community has proved especially productive in historical scholarship, not as a means to sidestep issues of ‘belief’ or ‘faith’, but rather as a matter of practicality: faith leaves no overt trace in the archive, whereas devotion is witnessed in texts, objects and records. For example, we can come to comprehend the contours of the Jesuit mission through printed materials, accounts of patronage, diaries and letters of supporters and priests, court records, and manuscripts composed during missionary work (like William Smith’s ‘holster book’, Bod. Eng poet. b.5).<sup>77</sup> Questions of faith must be discerned through culture as well as through cultural artefacts. The important collection *Catholic Culture in Early Modern England* serves as a reminder that religious experience is always related to materiality: essays are spread across the fields of literary studies, history, and material culture, attending to material objects, physical spaces, and written texts.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Anne Dillon, *The Construction of Martyrdom in the English Catholic Community, 1535-1603* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); see also Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Susannah Brietz Monta, *Martyrdom and literature in early modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and James E. Kelly, ‘Creating an English Catholic Identity: Relics, Martyrs and English Women Religious in Counter-Reformation Europe’, in *Early Modern English Catholicism*, eds. Kelly and Royal, 41-59.

<sup>76</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: traditional religion in England, c. 1400 - c. 1580* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992) as well as *Marking the Hours: English people and their prayers, 1240-1570* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press); ‘Praying the Counter-Reformation’, in James E. Kelly & Susan Royal (eds.), *Early Modern English Catholicism*, 206-25.

<sup>77</sup> For a comprehensive historical account of the mission see Thomas McCoog, SJ, *The Society of Jesus in Ireland, Scotland, and England, 1589-1597: Building the Faith of Saint Peter upon the King of Spain’s Monarchy* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

<sup>78</sup> Ronald Corthell, Frances E. Dolan, Christopher Highley, & Arthur F. Marotti (eds) *Catholic Culture in Early Modern England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

By recognizing the merit of the material approach to devotion, I hope to place the miscellany within a context of lived religious experience. My thesis attempts to read the manuscript as physical evidence of devotion inscribed into the book-object. As I will discuss in Chapter Four of this thesis, the miscellany presents evidence of a unique experience of faith through this textual, readerly devotion. In reading the miscellany as a literary text first and foremost, this work follows Alison Shell's call to bring Catholic literary texts back into the canon. Shell specifically sheds light on the imaginative consequences of religious controversy and cites Robert Southwell's cross-confessional popularity as a reminder that devotional literature finds varied resonances with readers.<sup>79</sup> This material and textual devotion is, of course, also intertwined with questions of gender, privacy, and theology, themes that are threaded throughout the following chapters. I hope to add this study of Aston Fowler's miscellany to the feminist cultural project that has run alongside studies of Reformation religion. Work by Susanna Monta, Jaime Goodrich, and Heather Wolfe has been invaluable for understanding early modern women's textual and material devotions: acts of patronage, translation, and manuscript transmission were crucial not only for personal devotion but also for communal religious experience.<sup>80</sup>

Particularly relevant for studies of gender and religion during the early modern period is the major scholarship on nuns and the English convents, particularly the work of Caroline Bowden and James E. Kelly.<sup>81</sup> The efforts to reclaim an appreciation for the role of women has been spearheaded by the AHRC-funded 'Who Were the Nuns?' project, which has been indispensable for tracing the lineage

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<sup>79</sup> Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination*.

<sup>80</sup> Susanna Brietz Monta, 'Anne Dacre Howard, Countess of Arundel, and Catholic Patronage', in *Women, Religion and Textual Production, 1500-1625*, ed. Micheline White, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 59-82; Jaime Goodrich, "'Ensign-Bearers of Saint Clare": Elizabeth Evelinge's Early Translations and the Restoration of English Franciscanism', in *Women, Religion and Textual Production*, 83-100; and *Faithful Translators: Authorship, Gender, and Religion in Early Modern England* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2013); Heather Wolfe, 'Dame Barbara Constable: Catholic Antiquarian, Advisor, and Closet Missionary', in *Catholic Culture in Early Modern England*, eds. Corthell, et. al., 158-88. See also Lisa McClain, *Divided Loyalties? Pushing the Boundaries of Gender and Lay Roles in the Catholic Church, 1534-1829* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). McClain's overview pays particular attention to Mary Ward's English Ladies in relation to the religious agencies alternately afforded and denied to Catholic women in early modern Europe.

<sup>81</sup> Caroline Bowden and James E. Kelly (eds.), *The English Convents in Exile, 1600-1800: Communities, Culture and Identity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013). See also Nicky Hallett, *The Senses in Religious Communities, 1600-1800: Early Modern 'Convents of Pleasure'*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008).

and patronage networks of Catholic families in England.<sup>82</sup> As Micheline White notes in her editor's introduction to the collection *Women, Religion and Textual Production*, the discovery of women's religious writing in the feminist movement presented a unique opportunity, not an inhibition, for literary critics and cultural historians interested in early modern women's writing. Indeed, the prevalence of religious writing by women of the period reveals how:

women from different social classes, religious factions, and kinship networks used literary texts to respond to [the complex] religiopolitical matrix in different ways: some explored widely held beliefs or elements of the status quo; some cautiously explored new religious impulses or engaged in independent reflection; some challenged the authority with acts of factional resistance and subterfuge; and other drew on religiopolitical marks in moments of strategic self-representation.<sup>83</sup>

White's description of the intricate work of self and faith in women's religious writing demonstrates the unique richness of texts such as Aston Fowler's manuscript. This historical and cultural context provided by the scholarship on early modern Catholicism is embedded throughout my study even as I approach the miscellany first as a poetic text. One of the answers to my opening question of how Constance read poetry is that she read her poems as part of her devotional practice. However, I also hope to show how Aston Fowler's Catholicism is active not only in relation to the poetry added by William Smith but also in the many ways the miscellany negotiates identity through reading.

One of the key features of the Catholic community that Aston Fowler's miscellany and the religious engagements of the Tixall group witness is the international reach of the Catholic diaspora, spread across Europe and reaching back to Rome no matter the physical distance. This international tenor resonates with the Aston family's connections to Spain and English convents abroad. The miscellany is thus part of a literary practice that actively seeks to commune with disparate friends and family through acts of poetic reading and writing. Yet the miscellany is also testament to how the Astons, Fowlers, and Thimelbys participated in a faith community of local and familial experience. The miscellany encompasses these

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<sup>82</sup> 'Who Were the Nuns?', Queen Mary, University of London and Arts and Humanities Research Council, <<http://wwtn.history.qmul.ac.uk/>>.

<sup>83</sup> Micheline White, editor's introduction to *Women, Religion and Textual Production, 1500-1625* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 5.



stories of Catholic faith and culture, ranging from the ordinary meeting of belief and social life to the realities of the English Mission to the popular devotion linking communities across socio-economic divides. Texts such as Aston Fowler's miscellany and William Smith's manuscripts are enmeshed in the network of Catholicism that Alison Shell has described as essential to the political goals of the community:

The swift, reliable, controllable operation of information networks was essential to the effective functioning of this community... English Catholics needed emotional information about the state of Catholicism, as well as faction; and literary texts best-suited to deliver that information, could be communally performed as well as read in private. Ballads, protest-songs, and the imaginative liturgies of John Austin are only a few examples of the way that verse could define a community, contribute towards its sense of solidarity or unite the literate with the unlettered.<sup>84</sup>

The communal efficacy of verse is a striking feature of the poetic life at Tixall, substantiated in the miscellany's diverse forms, religious and secular. As I will discuss in the following chapters, especially in relation to the Catholic ballads and meditations, the poetry in the miscellany encourages emotionally and politically inflected readings as a valuable engagement with the wider community. For the English Catholic community this is a crucial work of form.

The textual and religious experiences of the Astons are interconnected not only through poetry but also in their letters, especially those of Herbert Aston and his aunt Winefred Thimelby, prioress of the English convent of St Monica's in Louvain.<sup>85</sup> This religious textuality is affirmed by Walter Aston who writes of his faith as a cultural and textual experience in a letter that reads as a religious disputation similar to those that were common in print throughout the period. In an undated letter addressed to 'My deare friend', he discusses his reasons for conversion as stemming from a historical understanding of an English Catholic Church as well as the international Roman one.<sup>86</sup> Aston writes of reading not only Scripture but also 'our owne chronicles (that speake of the most memorable things

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<sup>84</sup> Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy, and the English Literary Imagination*, 15-16.

<sup>85</sup> Helen Hackett, 'The Aston-Thimelby circle at home and abroad'; Jane Stevenson, 'The Tixall circle and the musical life of St Monica's, Louvain', *British Catholic History* 33.4 (2017): 583-602.

<sup>86</sup> B.L. Add. MS 36452; printed in Clifford (ed.), *Tixall Letters*, vol. I, 63-70.

that have been done in this realm since Christ's time till now)'.<sup>87</sup> His faith, born in Spain, is thus held up as a product of English history. In this defense, he does not profess any passionate or mystical experience, but instead offers a reasoned and deliberative act of faith that is the result of active reading. He has studied history and Scripture to support his argument for the authentic English Catholic tradition. Ironically, though he was brought up a Protestant and cannot claim lifelong loyalty, it is the continuity and the ancient heritage of the Catholic Church that sways him. Perhaps anticipating the critical debate over Counter-Reformation Catholicism's continuation or rupture, Aston traces the Catholic lineage back in time:

... although I had not much learning, I could easily perceive a being from age to age, and that many cuntries and kingdomes have continued in the same for hundreds of yeares together. Yea, it was plaine to me, out of our chronicles of England, that no other religion flourished heere in this realme for almost a thousand yeares together but that [Catholicism]... Our owne cronicles make mention of a succession of Bishops of Canterbury, all Roman catholiques, one after another, for nine hundred yeares together, which was from the time of Pope Gregory till the time of Edward VI.<sup>88</sup>

The accumulation of time, persons and even kingdoms situates Aston's conversion within an international, continuous Catholicism. His deliberate faith is supported not only by his reading but also in writing and engaging in the close analysis of disputation. The letter itself encourages a kind of close deliberative reading and engagement, with scripture citations noted in the margin and the main points of argument listed at the beginning of the text. This is a humanistic devotion as much as a literary one, related to the religious practice James Kearney has read in Erasmus's writings: for humanists such as Erasmus, Kearney writes, 'the center of the Christian experience was, or should be, the text of scripture. To transform one's relationship to these texts, to transform one's reading, is to transform one's life'.<sup>89</sup> In this letter, Aston professes a textual faith as much as a spiritual one. Just so, his daughter's creative and deliberative text is a part of a readerly (and writerly)

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 68-69.

<sup>89</sup> James Kearney, *The Incarnate Text: Imagining the Book in Reformation England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 54. Kate Narveson notes that such humanistic devotional writing is a productive mode of self-fashioning: 'Writing biblically based devotion gave ordinary people a sense of purpose and a creative idiom... In their transformation of received material, their texts become writs of ownership over their identity'. Narveson, *Bible Readers and Lay Writers in Early Modern England: Gender and Self-Definition in an Emergent Writing Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 7.

devotion. Although the poetry in Constance's miscellany is somewhat removed from scripture, the transformative nature of textual devotion is at the core of her 'booke'.

My first three chapters are structured by paired readings of secular and devotional verse. Despite the facts of compilation which has led to the assumption that Aston Fowler and Smith possessed divergent interests, the miscellany's secular and religious poetry are not at odds. On the contrary, the miscellany serves as an example of how early modern readers and writers harmonized their faith with their art and vice versa. One example of this harmony is the life and work of one of the Thimelby brothers, the poet-priest Edward Thimelby who was brought up and educated by Eleanor Brooksby and later became a Jesuit priest.<sup>90</sup> Edward's verse is included under Clifford's heading 'Poems Collected by the Honourable Herbert Aston', himself a central figure in the Tixall coterie both as a poet and as a collector of verse. Although Edward Thimelby is a minor character in the Tixall coterie, several of Thimelby's occasional poems suggest a poetic community of Jesuits and English Catholics in Rome in the 1640s not unlike that at Tixall.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, Helen Hackett has recently traced the Astons' expanded poetic community, which surpassed the bounds of the local community centered at Tixall and spread internationally through the connections with both Edward Thimelby and Winefrid Thimelby, prioress of St Monica's, Louvain.<sup>92</sup> These Thimelby connections are particularly relevant as the family gives the Tixall group a direct line to the heart of English Catholicism and to a Catholic heritage established long before the Astons'

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<sup>90</sup> Several of his poems are printed in Clifford (ed.), *Tixall Poetry*, including: 'The Expostulation of St Mary Magdalen', 3-5, 'To Mr Normington Upon His Easterne Voyage', 10-12, 'To Connell Plater Upon His Easterne Voyage', 13-16, 'To Mr Kately On the Same Voyage', 17-18, 'Letters to Mr Normington', 37-42, 'Self-Love Mentayned, to the Faire Self-denyer, My Sister, Th.' 45-51, 'A Sigh to St Monica's Teares', 52-53; and 'To Mr Normington, at Piacenza'.

<sup>91</sup> On the Catholic community of poets in Rome in the 1640s, including Edward Thimelby, Richard Crashaw, and Thomas Normanton (or Normington), see Edward Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour: Anglo-Italian Cultural Relations since the Renaissance* (London: Routledge, 2006): 231-38.

<sup>92</sup> Helen Hackett, 'The Aston-Thimelby circle at home and abroad'. Mary or Winefrid Thimelby has garnered critical attention as a prolific letter-writer, writing frequently to Herbert Aston and his daughters. Jane Stevenson has also recently put forward the possibility of her authoring several poems in *Tixall Poetry*. See Jane Stevenson, 'The Tixall circle and the musical life of St Monica's, Louvain'; and Mareile Pfannebecker, "'Love's Interest': Agency and Identity in a Seventeenth-Century Nun's Letters', *Literature Compass* 3.2 (Mar 2006): 149-58.

conversion. Although the only Thimelby who is definitively included in Constance Aston Fowler's miscellany is Katherine Thimelby Aston, there is at least one verse that I have tentatively attributed to Gertrude Aston Thimelby and it is one of the most impressive and mysterious collected by Aston Fowler. Moreover, it is particularly notable as one of the few religious verses she copied.

There is a tendency in some criticism of the literary culture of the period to draw a harsh line between the devotional and the secular. This can in turn lead to judgments from critics that adhere to this binary as well: popular religious poetry tends to be appreciated solely for historical significance and cultural insight, judged lacking in poetic ingenuity.<sup>93</sup> As I will show in the following chapters, the miscellany is a product of a reading life that does not adhere to a strict secular-religious divide—the religious ballads in Smith's hand and the secular lyrics in Aston Fowler's coexist in the pages of the miscellany and make up a shared reading experience, one that may not have been regarded as such a contrast by seventeenth-century readers as it is by modern critics. If one of the reasons the 'turn to religion' has found such fruitful ground in early modern studies is the strength of religious convictions within everyday lives as well as in the culture at large, then it is a disservice to that culture to strictly delineate religious and secular art.

The coincidence of the 'turn to religion' with the movement to bring women's texts into the critical field has led to a reorientation of literary criticism's perspective on the varied significance of religion at all levels of textual production within the period.<sup>94</sup> Micheline White attends to this critical context for early modern women's

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<sup>93</sup> The term 'popular' is an elusive category, but I use it here to designate genres of verse such as the ballad that made up a great share of the wider literary culture but were not often considered artistically impressive. One obvious exception who is represented within the pages of the miscellany is Robert Southwell. His poetry underscores my argument for the miscellany's religious poetics in Chapter Two.

<sup>94</sup> A selection of this criticism includes Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Erica Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Femke Molekamp, *Women and the Bible in Early Modern England*; Victoria Brownlee & Laura Gallagher (eds.), *Biblical women in early modern literary culture, 1550-1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015); chapters in Andrew Hiscock & Helen Wilcox (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern English Literature and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017) include valuable work on early modern women and religion, Mary Sidney Herbert and Lucy Hutchinson and English convents abroad each garner a chapter (Sidney Herbert paired with her brother Philip Sidney); as well as the recent edition of women's writing, Rachel Adcock, Sara Read, & Anna Ziomek (eds.), *Flesh & Spirit: An anthology of seventeenth-century women's writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014).

writing and situates the feminist and religious movements in line with each other, especially in more recent work by critics attuned to a more nuanced version of both feminism and new historicism. White writes: ‘In considering this significant critical reorientation, we might note that new interpretive paradigms emerged as scholars began acknowledging the central (rather than marginal) place of religious writing in Renaissance England; began reading women’s religious texts as *religious* texts; and began positioning them in relation to a range of religio-cultural developments rather than solely in relation to early modern gender norms’.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, the attention given to religious texts need not marginalize women’s writing or reduce the interpretive force of literary readings. Although Constance Aston Fowler’s miscellany is in many ways an exceptional text, it shows an early modern woman who was reading and engaging with texts for devotional *and* literary purposes. As the miscellany makes clear in its confluence of devotional and secular verse, early modern readers and believers did not necessarily differentiate their experience of poetry according to sacred or profane topics. In Aston Fowler’s miscellany, I propose that the religious poems can be read both as objects of devotion and as poetic texts; concordantly, the secular poems can be read as sociable texts as well as philosophically (and politically) engaged verse.

Susannah Brietz Monta recently asked scholars of early modern English Catholicism a pointed question: ‘In which contexts ought early modern English Catholic poetry to be studied?’.<sup>96</sup> Despite the resurgence of scholarly interest in early modern Catholicism within cultural studies, Catholic texts are still rarely read for literary intricacy and with theoretical questions to the fore. In answering her opening question, Monta voices the central concern for my work: ‘[W]hile Catholic poetry is often held up as the archival find or neglected artefact that it usually is, it is not often read with the same interpretative pressure and broad literary-historical and theoretical perspective brought to bear on traditionally canonical poems. Much work remains to be done concerning ways in which early modern Catholic poetry might matter both for early modern studies and for histories and theories of poetry writ large’.<sup>97</sup> Following this call, my study of the Tixall coterie and Aston Fowler’s

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<sup>95</sup> Micheline White, Introduction, *English women, religion and textual production*, 2.

<sup>96</sup> Susannah Brietz Monta, ‘John Austin’s *Devotions*: Voicing Lyric, Voicing Prayer’, in *Early Modern English Catholicism*, eds. Kelly and Royal, 226.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

miscellany is responsive not only to historical questions but also to literary ones. It is one of the goals of this study to consider how poetry and devotion are linked both in the explicitly devotional verse and throughout all of the poetry in Aston Fowler's miscellany. The family's recusant identity takes on various, subtle and intricate forms in the coterie's poetry as well as in Smith's Catholic verses. And it is this coherence that allows the miscellany to stand as a testament to poetry's rich and varied role within the life of a community.

### **Material Form and Literary Capital**

In order to read the work of form within Aston Fowler's miscellany, it is first necessary to attend to the form of the miscellany itself—specifically the verse miscellany as a distinct literary genre. As the subtitle of Burton and Scott-Baumann's volume, 'Poetics and Materiality in Early Modern Culture', suggests, the materiality of texts (another kind of *form*) is of paramount interest in readings of early modern texts. This multidimensional appreciation of form guides my understanding of the miscellanizing process. Indeed, it is the material form of manuscript miscellanies that has most often garnered critical interest within the fields of book history and manuscript studies. This view of materialism branches from Raymond Williams's, whose theories of cultural materialism take 'the social creation of meanings' as 'a practical material activity'.<sup>98</sup> Work in manuscript studies and book history takes on how this materialism relates directly to the process of making the material object as well as the communication ideas. This materiality is not excluded from my understanding of 'the work of form'; while Aston Fowler's miscellany records an active reading practice it also demonstrates the material engagement of an editor and compiler. In fact, as I will discuss in my first chapter, Aston Fowler actively proclaimed her manuscript as 'her booke',<sup>99</sup> that is, a self-

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<sup>98</sup> Raymond Williams, *Marxism & Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 38. Williams is addressing semiotics in which what makes a sign is 'a formal process: a specific articulation of meaning'. He goes on to explain that 'the sign itself becomes part of a (socially created) physical and material world...It is not, as formalism would make it, and as the idealist theory of expression had from the beginning assumed, an operation of and within "consciousness", which then becomes a state or a process separated, *a priori*, from social material activity. It is, on the contrary, at once a distinctive material process—the making of signs—and, in the central quality of its distinctiveness as practical consciousness, is involved from the beginning in all other human social and material activity' (38).

<sup>99</sup> Constance Aston Fowler to Herbert Aston, letter ('Your selfe'), 31 July 1639, B.L. Add. MS 36452; also printed in Clifford (ed.), *Tixall Letters* vol. I, Letter XXIV, 133.

consciously literary object. The process of making the ‘booke’ is a ‘human social and material activity’; thus the acts of creating and reading literary form inscribed in the miscellany are both materially and poetically inflected.

Although the term ‘miscellany’ is helpfully descriptive regarding the nature of a complexly multifarious text, its use as a general category has led to a blurring of the distinct practices of miscellanizing, commonplacing, and anthologizing. A miscellany, as opposed to a commonplace book, is generally viewed as extracted texts collected together but not organized under the distinctive headings and indices that define the formal, humanistic practice of commonplacing. An anthology, conversely, is a compiled text that collects works by a single author or perhaps on a single theme. There is a good deal of cross-over among these categories and Aston Fowler’s ‘booke’ could be categorized as any one of them (for instance, the Huntington Library catalogue records HM904 as poetic commonplace book, not a verse miscellany).<sup>100</sup> For the purposes of my study, Peter Beal’s definition of the verse miscellany has proved most relevant: ‘a compilation of predominantly verse texts, or extracts from verse texts, by different authors and usually gleaned from different sources’.<sup>101</sup> This requires a purposeful act of compilation, whereas Julia Boffey has earlier viewed *miscellany* as a text ‘assembled in a random and unconnected way...[following] no particular sequence or plan of compilation beyond the arbitrary one dependent on the physical travels of the volume from

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<sup>100</sup> Peter Beal’s description of anthologies and miscellanies explains the murky demarcation: the ‘anthology is perhaps distinguished from the miscellany...in that the former tends to have a more formal aspect, being a deliberately assembled collection, rather than a miscellaneous compilation which may have evolved somewhat randomly over a period, though this distinction is easily blurred’, see Beal, *A Dictionary of English Manuscript Terminology, 1450-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 18. Piers Brown presents the term ‘rhapsody’, meaning ‘sing-stitching’ from the Greek, as another useful descriptor. Brown draws out the subtleties of the material and literary connotations as seen in John Donne’s reference of his act of collecting his poems to being ‘a Rhapsoder of [his] own rags’, see Brown, ‘Donne, Rhapsody, and Textual Order’, *Manuscript Miscellanies in Early Modern England*, eds. Joshua Eckhardt and Daniel Starza Smith (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 43-44.

<sup>101</sup> Peter Beal, *Dictionary*, 429. Joshua Eckhardt and Daniel Starza Smith’s description of manuscript miscellanies is particularly apt in highlighting the practical difficulties such texts pose for researchers: ‘Miscellanies typically feature texts from multiple sources and contributions from several hands, few of which scholars can identify with ease. neither can they easily distinguish and assign agency for the production of many of these books, especially in the cases of manuscript miscellanies and *sammelbände* of printed books—which require extensive experience in codicology, analytical bibliography, and subsequent modes of “materialist reading”’. See Eckhardt and Starza Smith (eds.), introduction to *Manuscript Miscellanies in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 2.

owner to owner'.<sup>102</sup> These contradictory definitions of the form demonstrate the wide variety of texts that fall under the umbrella-term. Beal's definition accords to the *literary* genre of the miscellany, a purposeful collection distinguished by the process of gathering of source material. Boffey's term is instead addressing a material or archival kind of text, one that holds a variety of texts but is filled up with texts over time rather than compiled from carefully chosen sources. The *miscellaneous* nature is the defining feature of the kind, but as my first chapter will draw out more fully, there is variance in the degree of miscellaneity within such texts. By attending to the miscellaneous nature of Aston Fowler's poetic text I approach head on a core question of the field: how do you read intention and agency in texts that are necessarily miscellaneous? Mary Hobbs's early, pioneering work on miscellanies illustrates the importance of attending to the scribal histories of miscellany texts to draw out the nuances of agency at work in such texts.<sup>103</sup> This work has been an adaptation of Robert Darnton's defining contribution to book history, which outlines a 'communications circuit' within the life of a book that situates a text within a cycle of production, circulation, and reception.<sup>104</sup> Following these frameworks, the field of manuscript studies has focused almost exclusively on material processes and social contexts in analyses of scribal practice and manuscript circulation. Notable in this critical work is Arthur Marotti's concept of 'social textuality', which productively glosses the meeting of the material malleability and the 'work of form' in early modern literary manuscripts by attending to the creative flux of lyric poetry within manuscript culture, especially in the seventeenth century.

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<sup>102</sup> Julia Boffey, *Manuscripts of English Courtly Love Lyrics in the Later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985), 11.

<sup>103</sup> Mary Hobbs, 'Early Seventeenth-Century Verse Miscellanies and Their Value for Textual Editors', *English Manuscript Studies* 1 (1989): 182-210. Steven W. May was also an early leader in the study of manuscript miscellanies. May and Hobbs both produced editions of miscellanies as PhD theses. May, 'Henry Stanford's Anthology: An Edition of Cambridge University Library Manuscript Dd.5.75', PhD Thesis (University of Chicago, 1968); Mary Hobbs, 'An Edition of the Stoughton Manuscript, An Early C17 Poetry Collection in Private Hands Connected with Henry King and Oxford Seen in Relation to Other Contemporary Poetry and Song Collections', PhD Thesis, (University of London, 1973). Both editions were published in the following decades: Steven W. May (ed.), *Henry Stanford's Anthology: and edition of Cambridge University Library manuscript Dd. 5.75* (New York: Garland Press, 1988), and Mary Hobbs (ed.), *The Stoughton Manuscript: a manuscript miscellany of poems by Henry king and his circle, circa 1636*, (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1990). See also Mary Hobbs, 'The Poems of Henry King: Another Authoritative Manuscript', *The Library* 5th ser. 31 (1976): 127-35.

<sup>104</sup> Robert Darnton, 'What is the History of Books?' *Daedalus* 111 (1982): 65-83.



He notes that “[i]n the manuscript environment the roles of author, scribe, and reader overlapped: in a poem written in a lady’s table book, Henry King, for example, invited her to be “both the Scribe and Authour””.<sup>105</sup> The active engagement with the poetic form is thus a means of garnering literary agency or literary capital, to borrow Sasha Robert’s term.<sup>106</sup> In placing the status of the miscellany as a scribally-produced material text alongside the multifarious and miscellaneous quality of the text as a volume of poetry I hope to bring the ‘work of form’ into sharper focus as an interactive and collaborative process, involving various actors upon the text including author, reader, scribe, compiler, and editor.

The active, readerly engagement with form that constitutes Aston Fowler’s miscellany is structured by the act of collecting, a gathering and a refining not only of material texts into the single, integrated volume but also of literary effort and effects. Study of commonplacing and miscellanizing has often situated the material act of compilation within the context of humanist scholarship and thus related to the intellectual history and the organization of knowledge.<sup>107</sup> My task of exploring the practice of reading through the early modern miscellany branches off from this work by critics of intellectual history who have taken on the topic of commonplacing. Fred Schurink has clarified the materialist implications of this work and he argues not only for contextualizing the historical acts of reading, but also interrogating the action of reading upon culture:

Only by analyzing in detail the interaction of reading with its many contexts can we begin to build up a wider model of the conditions that shaped the nature of reading and the reception of literature in early modern England. If, however, commonplace books show how the material, social and cultural contexts of reading shaped the reception of literature, they also reveal how reading literature affected those

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<sup>105</sup> Arthur Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric*, 135.

<sup>106</sup> Sasha Roberts, ‘Women’s Literary Capital in Early Modern England: Formal Composition and Rhetorical Display in Manuscript and Print’, *Women’s Writing* 14.2 (Aug 2007): 247.

<sup>107</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. W. Speed Hill (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1993), 131-48; Richard Yeo, ‘Notebooks as Memory Aides: Precepts and Practices in Early Modern England’, *Memory Studies* 1 (2008): 115-36; Anthony Grafton, ‘The Humanist and the Commonplace Book: Education in Practice’, in *Music Education in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, eds. Russell E. Murray, Jr., Susan Forscher Weiss, & Cynthia J. Cyrus (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), 141-57.

contexts.<sup>108</sup>

While this perspective attends to the historical and the material act of reading, it also enlivens the texts so that they are no longer static repositories of knowledge, but rather they are conversant texts and testament to readers that themselves become, as John Evelyn described, ‘*living Libraries*’.<sup>109</sup> This readerly engagement accords with Francis Bacon’s famous comment on attentive study that glosses such material and formal interactions not only as active pursuits but also as embodied experience:

‘Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested; that is, some books are to be read only in parts; others to be read, but not curiously; and some few to be read wholly, and with dilligence and attention.’<sup>110</sup>

Bacon’s metaphor is suggestive as it reminds us that reading, whether casual or diligent, is not only a historical act, but also a personal and embodied one. Helen Smith argues that the early modern conceptions of embodied reading, especially women’s reading which Adrian Johns’s analysis frames as ‘susceptible to the pathologies of reading’, reveal ‘an openness to processes of interaction and exchange between books, the body, and the world’.<sup>111</sup> This openness is a key feature

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<sup>108</sup> Fred Schurink, ‘Manuscript Commonplace Books, Literature, and Reading in Early Modern England’, 469.

<sup>109</sup> John Evelyn, *Publick Employment and an Active Life Prefer’d to Solitude* (London, 1667), I3v. My concept of ‘active’ is indebted to Lisa and Jardine and Anthony Grafton’s groundbreaking work on Gabriel Harvey’s humanist intellectual life demonstrates the political effectiveness of such reading practice. Jardine and Grafton’s notion of *activity* is ‘not just the energy which must be acknowledged as accompanying the intervention of the scholar/reader with his text, nor the cerebral effort involved in making the text the reader’s own, but reading as intended to *give rise to something else*’ (30). See Lisa Jardine & Anthony Grafton, ‘“Studied for Action: How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy”, *Past & Present* 129 (1990): 30-78. See also William Sherman, *John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995).

<sup>110</sup> Francis Bacon, ‘Of Studies’, in Brian Vickers (ed.), *Francis Bacon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 439-40.

<sup>111</sup> Helen Smith, ‘“More swete vnto the eare / than holsome for ye mynde”: Embodying Early Modern Women’s Reading’, *Huntington Library Quarterly* 73.3 (2010): 414-15; qtd Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 413. The study of women’s reading in the early modern period has required added nuance to gender as Heidi Brayman Hackel and Catherine E. Kelly have shown: ‘To ask if women read differently from men is to ask, after all, where gender falls in the hierarchy of motivations and constraints in human life’, Hackel and Kelly (eds.), Introduction to *Reading Women: Literacy, Authorship and Culture in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 4. See also Brayman Hackel, *Reading Material in Early modern England: Print, Gender, and Literacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). The study of embodied reading in early modern England has proven a worthwhile topic within the larger field of affective studies,

of Aston Fowler's miscellany, which evinces—both materially and textually—a reading practice that is both expressive and expansive. The affective experience of reading as well as the social life of texts are inextricably linked, as Herbert Aston's verse 'To my honer'd sister' so artfully illustrates. As I will discuss in Chapters Three and Four, the personal and the communal are threaded together in the miscellany's 'work of form' which is ultimately an affective process as well as a literary one. What's more, the reading practice that incites these actions of the texts also invites the reader to interact with the community as it reaches off the pages of Aston Fowler's 'booke' and into life.

Although the literary practice of collecting verse is certainly representative of a varied and vigorous reading life, it is also a creative endeavor. Herbert Aston's verse depicts the poetic relationships within the Aston family and the wider Tixall coterie as kindling artistic inspiration and invigorating literary community's close reading practices. Yet these acts are not contained within the bounds of the relatively intimate coterie; rather, the miscellany reveals a young woman writing and experimenting with form by engaging with the public literary community from her unique vantage point within her community. This complex undertaking constructs an outwardly-facing stance for Aston Fowler's 'booke'. The miscellany shows a marked interest in elite literary culture and hints at a poetic heritage descended from Philip Sidney and John Donne.<sup>112</sup> Though she passed the majority of her life in Staffordshire, far from court and from the cultural center of London, Aston Fowler did not view herself as so far removed from the literary world of the courtly elite as previous criticism has suggested. I propose that by staging the miscellany as part of a well-endowed literary culture, Aston Fowler claims 'her booke' and the work of form facilitated through her acts as compiler and editor as poetic achievements in their own right. In attending closely to the complexity and potency of literary form in the miscellany, I hope to show that Constance Aston Fowler's poetic engagements should be considered not only as part of a private, domestic literary life but also as an encounter with the public culture of arts and letters.

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see Katharine Craik, *Reading Sensations in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), esp. chapters 1-3; and Michael Schoenfeldt, 'Reading Bodies', in *Reading, Society, and Politics in Early Modern England*, eds. Kevin Sharpe and Stephen Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 215-43.

<sup>112</sup> Herbert Aston draws these lines of connection directly in 'To My Honer'd Sister' and 'To the Lady Mary Aston'. See discussion in my Conclusion.

Deborah Aldrich-Watson reads Aston Fowler's motivations in crafting her 'booke' as a 'family-oriented miscellany' and suggests that '[t]he coterie formed at Tixall among both the women and the men, related through blood, marriage, or love of verse, produced comradeship, intense friendship, and joy in one another's company that led to the verses in Constance Aston Fowler's family book'.<sup>113</sup> Helen Hackett also foregrounds familial relationships, specifically the prominence of sisterhood, in the literary acts featured in Aston Fowler's miscellany.<sup>114</sup> These familial contexts are certainly potent (as I will discuss in future chapters), but privileging the domestic and the familial at the expense of the literary contexts in this case has resulted in an unduly narrow scope for studying this unique miscellany. A quarter-century has passed since Margaret Ezell's prescient commentary, but it bears repeating even now: if we do not continue to work against the subjective hierarchy that has for so long diminished the standing of women's literary engagements, we will continue to 'deny them mastery of their chosen forms and impoverish our understanding of the abilities and influence of early women writers in general'.<sup>115</sup> The multiple perspectives and mutable nature of Aston Fowler's miscellany offer a particularly dynamic subject for reclaiming such literary engagements, not by denying the familial contexts but by reading again for integration and co-operation. As much as the personal and domestic held sway in Aston Fowler's reading and editing practices, so too did the public and literary influence her compositions. Aldrich-Watson's view of the Tixall literary coterie's interests springing from the friendships and familial relationships is perhaps too simplistic a narrative. Although her thoroughly researched commentary on the miscellany's contexts takes into account the family's connections to public figures such as the Duke of Buckingham, Michael Drayton, and John Donne, she fails to acknowledge how by commemorating and celebrating such connections, Aston Fowler's miscellany is constructing not only a vaunted literary reputation for her coterie but also claiming a literary heritage that imbues the text itself—the individual poems and the 'booke' as a whole—with an interest in poetic practice and form.

Ezell takes note of Aston Fowler's miscellany specifically in her reassessment of

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<sup>113</sup> Aldrich-Watson, introduction, xxxvii, liv.

<sup>114</sup> Hackett, 'Sisterhood and Female Friendship'.

<sup>115</sup> Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History*, 159.

the critical commonplace of simplistic public-private dichotomies in literary culture. She groups HM904 with other seventeenth-century collections of verse in manuscript, such as Lady Ann North's edition of her husband's poetry and Marie Burghope's 1699 fair copy of 'The Vision', which she reads as 'literary compositions that complicate the concept of publication'.<sup>116</sup> The seventeenth-century is taken by Ezell as well as Marotti and other scholars of manuscript studies to be particularly unique in regards to manuscript and print literary cultures, which overlap and cross-pollinate throughout the century and even into the next. Within this shifting literary landscape, writers such as Katherine Philips often negotiated the material text in ways that illuminate the politics of privacy and sociality in early modern women's writing. Despite its 'private' setting within a coterie manuscript network, Constance Aston Fowler's miscellany, as I will discuss in my first chapter, bears the mark of a self-consciously constructed book of verse within the style of the public, extravagant folio volumes of poetry found in her family's library. Thus, Aston Fowler's role as 'author' of her book requires careful shading within this context of social authorship. The social author of manuscript texts, as Ezell defines it with reference to Roger Chartier's understanding of 'the networks of practices that organize the historically and socially differentiated modes of access to text', defies the traditional view of print vs. manuscript that for so long upheld a strict demarcation of public and private:<sup>117</sup>

We traditionally have used "public" in the sense of meaning "published" and "private" in the sense of "personal." Here [in manuscript] we have texts whose readership was controlled through physical access to them rather than censorship imposed from an external agency and which was limited by the author's design... On the other hand, they were not "private" in the sense that their readership was restricted only to God and the author, or even to the author's immediate family. What we tend to see is a "private" model that, by its very nature, is permeated by "public" moments of readership, when the text is circulated and copied. The text, although not universally available to any purchasing reader, nevertheless engages in a "social" function.<sup>118</sup>

In this formulation, the status of Aston Fowler's miscellany as a 'booke', composed with an acute editorial eye and active reading practice, clearly engages the 'social'

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<sup>116</sup> Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 25-28, 34-40.

<sup>117</sup> Chartier, *The Order of Books*, 53.

<sup>118</sup> Ezell, *Social Authorship*, 38-39.

function. Here Aston Fowler emerges as an author as much as a reader: her editorial talent and presentation of poetic form in authoring her manuscript ‘booke’ can be seen as a literary composition. My critical method of reading the work of form is thus a method of recovering the miscellany itself as a literary work.

Regaining a sense of Aston Fowler’s multifaceted role as editor-author of her ‘booke’ follows the call in recent scholarship to read early modern women’s literary texts with a more discerning eye and a more expansive perspective. Critics including Sasha Roberts and Gillian Wright have recognized the need to move beyond the material and biographical factors that were the focus of the first wave of feminist recovery efforts. Wright defines this effort against materialist readings specifically, asserting that ‘[i]f we are to do justice to early modern women’s writing we need to take as much account of form, ideas, imagery and genre—the traditional stuff of literary criticism—as we do materialism’.<sup>119</sup> Roberts, on the one hand, highlights a broad view of women’s literary engagements, coining the term ‘literary capital’ to encompass a wide range of factors including ‘literacy and education; familiarity with literary forms, tropes, genres, and histories, reading and writing networks; publication, whether in manuscript or print, and professional resources and experience’.<sup>120</sup> Form is instrumental to Roberts’s notion of ‘literary capital’ as a mobilizing force and she notes eloquence, such as that of Katherine Philips’s “‘rich becoming words’”, as particularly effective as it ‘may persuade the reader not only of their chosen arguments and emotions but also of [women’s] skill with words: the very substance of literary capital’.<sup>121</sup> Wright, whilst sharing a professed commitment to reclaiming the work of form in early modern women’s writing, nonetheless falls back on a critical method that foregrounds the *production* of texts. She places the literary capital of women into the process of literary history, that is the encoding of women’s poetic engagements within a public literary sphere—specifically in the creation of *collections* of women’s verse such as the texts of Anne Southwell’s, Anne Bradstreet’s, and Katherine Philips’s poetry, all edited by men. This is a worthwhile endeavor, but Wright doesn’t remain wholly true to her commitment to ‘the traditional stuff of literary criticism’. Nevertheless Wright’s contemplation of

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<sup>119</sup> Gillian Wright, *Producing Women's Poetry, 1600-1730: Text and Paratext, Manuscript and Print* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 10.

<sup>120</sup> Sasha Roberts, ‘Women’s Literary Capital’, 247.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

the production of early modern women's writing as part of a literary history is part of the valuable movement within the field to align women's texts with a broader literary history, a trend to which my work also belongs.

Patricia Phillippy's recent volume on this 'history' describes how this view of women's writing as part of a process of literary history is, in turn, reflective of the chosen forms of women writers: Æmelia Lanyer's 'golden Chaine' imagines a network of connections between women poets, and such a history is miscellaneous in itself, made of 'diverse, expansive, multiple writings' all part of a 'processual, collective history'.<sup>122</sup> I hope to show how these two approaches to early modern women's literary engagements can come together by attending not only to the composition of a set of 'rich becoming words', but also to the reading and appreciation of the work of form, acts which forge the links to the 'golden Chaine' as well as to wider literary communities and histories. Thus the literary capital accessed and constructed through engagement with poetic form is expansive, reaching off the pages of a single manuscript volume and connecting the work of form to literary history.

### **Intertextuality, Influence, and Forms of Engagement**

In order to gain a more complete view of Aston Fowler's 'literary capital', it is necessary to attend to engagements on and off the page. The literary life at Tixall can be traced through diverse sources beyond the poetry produced by the family and friends connected to the Astons. Glimpses of the full expanse of the coterie's poetic interests can be seen in their letters, the patronage of members such as Lord Aston and Lady Dorothy Shirley, and their manuscript sources and networks extending beyond their group of family and friends. More fragmentary evidence such as the catalogue of books held in the library at Tixall and the record of the lost manuscript poetry collected in *Tixall Poetry* is also valuable for appreciating the complex literary life of which Constance Aston Fowler's miscellany makes up only a part. Citing the writings of Jane and Elizabeth Cavendish (in conversation and contrast with their famous stepmother Margaret Cavendish), Sarah Ross has noted that coterie culture 'exemplif[ies] a mode of elite literary sociality and aristocratic

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<sup>122</sup> Patricia Phillippy, introduction to *A History of Early Modern Women's Writing*, 1-24 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 24.

household cultural production'.<sup>123</sup> Yet the Cavendishes' familial context—like that of Tixall—is not closed or insular; rather these aristocratic family coteries illustrate 'the way in which the elite 1630s household expands outward into wider social circles and networks of authorship, readership, and shared cultural production in the period'.<sup>124</sup> Victoria E. Burke has also highlighted the expansive quality of women's literary engagements of the period, specifically contextualizing the manuscript miscellany of Elizabeth Lyttelton in a similarly open familial network: 'Her literary activities...demonstrate that she was in contact with a circle of like-minded people, that she had access to some of the most popular literature of the day, and that she was interested in playing an active role in the preservation of her father's literary reputation after his death. For Elizabeth Lyttelton the family offered a congenial

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<sup>123</sup> Sarah C. E. Ross, 'Coteries, Circles, Networks: The Cavendish Circle and Civil War Women's Writing', in *A History of Early modern Women's Writing*, ed. Patricia Phillippy, 334. The criticism of the Cavendish sisters has mainly read their writing in the contexts of their familial identity, see Jane Milling, 'Siege and Cipher: The Closet Drama of the Cavendish Sisters', *Women's History Review* 6 (1997): 411-26; Margaret Ezell, "'To be your daughter in your pen": The Social Functions of Literature in the Writings of Lady Elizabeth Brackley and Lady Jane Cavendish', in S. P. Cerasana & Marion Wynne-Davies (eds.) *Readings in Renaissance Women's Drama: Criticism, History, and Performance, 1594-1998*, 246-58 (London: Routledge, 1998); Findlay, Alison, "'She gave you the civility of the house": household performance in *The Concealed Fancies*', in *Readings in Renaissance Women's Drama, 259-71*; and Marion Wynne-Davies, "'My Fine Delitve Tomb": Liberating "Sisterly" Voices during the Civil War', in *Female Communities 1600-1800: Literary Visions and Cultural Realities*, eds. Rebecca D'Monté and Nicole Pohl (London: Macmillan, 2000), 111-28. Also of note is Alexandra G. Bennet's reading of the manuscript editions of the sisters' poetry and drama compiled during their captivity, which offers new questions about the household's literary life during the Civil War, see Bennett, "'Now let my language speake": The Authorship, Rewriting, and Audience(s) of Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth Brackley', *Early Modern Literary Studies* 11.2 (Sept 2005): 1-13. Sarah Ross also broke new ground recently in reading Jane Cavendish's occasional verse as acts of political imagination and formal engagement with her idealized, absent father, see Ross, *Women, Poetry, and Politics in Seventeenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), chapter 4. Most recently Kate Chedgzoy has argued for a political poetics of feeling and sociability in Jane Cavendish's verse, see Chedgzoy, 'Cavalier and she-majesty: the cultural politics of gender in Jane Cavendish's poetry', *The Seventeenth Century* 32.4 (2017): 393-412.

<sup>124</sup> *ibid.*, 338-39. Ross cites Timothy Raylor here and makes a distinction between 'circles' (closely bound) and 'networks' (more diffuse), see Raylor, 'Newcastle's Ghosts: Robert Payne, Ben Jonson, and the "Cavendish Circle"', in *Literary Circles and Cultural Communities in Renaissance England*, eds. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 92-114. Writing in the same volume, Paul Parrish finds the metaphorical shape of the circle as quite inadequate and instead traces the connections of influence in the poetic community at Cambridge in the 1630s and 40s in terms of a 'literary ellipse' between Herbert and Crashaw, see Parrish, 'Reading Poets Reading Poets: Herbert and Crashaw's Literary Ellipse', in *Literary Circles and Cultural Communities*, eds. Pebworth and Summers, 115-27.



space for manuscript compilation.’<sup>125</sup>

The family household at Tixall was a site of active engagement with the wider literary community not only through the collection of verse or the dynamic reading and writing practices, but also through social connections and the points of contact witnessed in letters, patronage, and print dedications. This fuller appreciation of the literary lives of early modern women through coterie participation offers a fruitful mode of reading a ‘feminist formalism or formalist feminism’ of the kind Elizabeth Scott-Baumann has urged.<sup>126</sup> The work of examining literary engagement beyond the bounds (or grounds) of Tixall means attending to the connections that flow not only from social and historical traces, but also from more oblique forms such as reading and influence. I follow Scott-Baumann’s assertion that ‘reading for influence is reading for form’, and as she persuasively argues, ‘[i]n order to understand women’s place in literary history, we need to excavate and analyse their dialogue with existing traditions...[to see] women immersed in their literary culture, and transforming it’.<sup>127</sup> In her choice of form, that of the manuscript verse collection, Aston Fowler aligns her literary work within this wider network of culture and artistic tradition, showing awareness of the practices of elite coterie that profit from the cultural capital of well-read aristocratic women.<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, as I discuss below, Aston Fowler’s miscellany overtly displays its literary influences in various ways, imbuing the text with particular interests beyond the immediate and the familial. Thus, although the ‘forms of engagement’ that early modern women within these elite coterie chose do not display overt public aspirations, they are nevertheless indicative of an open poetic life and one that is structured by an equally open reading practice.

The form of the verse miscellany is by nature an expansive one: it collects many

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<sup>125</sup> Victoria E. Burke, ‘Contexts for Women’s Manuscript Miscellanies: The Case of Elizabeth Lyttelton and Sir Thomas Browne’, *The Yearbook of English Studies* 33, *Medieval and Early Modern Miscellanies and Anthologies* (2003): 316.

<sup>126</sup> Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, *Forms of Engagement: Women, Poetry and Culture, 1640-1680* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 9.

<sup>127</sup> *ibid.*, 9-10

<sup>128</sup> The creation of miscellanies and participation in miscellany culture is present in the texts of elite coterie at court (the Devonshire manuscript, Anne Cornwallis’s manuscript, which is associated with the Earl of Oxford’s circle, and Marie Maitland’s manuscript, which is connected to the Scottish court of James VI) and also in the Sidney network (Mary Wroth’s verse exchanges, and in the broader network of Sidney-connected poet’s, Anne Southwell’s miscellany). Miscellany practices were not limited to elite groups, however, as is evidenced by Anne Bowyer’s manuscript and Elizabeth Lyttelton’s.

voices and many forms in conversation with one another and with the wider literary community that unfolds from each text. In the act of collecting, the fluidity of poetic texts is exploited and exacerbated through open engagement, which I present as a kind of intertextual reading.<sup>129</sup> In order to analyze the forms of engagement that are predicated on textuality and form, which this thesis sets out to do, it is necessary to explore the concept of *intertextuality* briefly here. I am partial to a broad definition of intertextuality, which Gérard Genette would rather call *transtextuality*, one that attends to the relationship between texts rather than the strict notion of ‘actual presence’ of one text within another.<sup>130</sup> In this view, intertextuality is the mechanism through which texts can take on layers of meaning by way of the multi-faceted nature of literary texts, which can never be self-contained and instead are composed of a ‘mirage of citations’.<sup>131</sup> The broader view of intertextuality is partially informed by Julia Kristeva, though her concept of intertextuality is part of a vast, psychoanalytic approach that I do not attempt: ‘Intertextuality is a way of placing us, readers, not only in front of a more or less complicated and interwoven structure (the first meaning of ‘texture’), but also within an on-going process of signifying that goes all its way back to the semiotic plurality... Intertextuality accesses the semiotic, that trans-verbal reality of the psyche from which all meanings emerge’.<sup>132</sup> I borrow the terminology of texture and the notion of an interwoven literary text in my concept of the miscellany as a unique form that is defined by the act of collecting texts to be read together, in dialogue and in concert with each other.

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<sup>129</sup> The terminology of intertextuality was first theorized by Julia Kristeva in 1969, writing in the context of Saussurian structuralism and drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin’s study of dialogism and Roland Barthes ‘text’ theory. See Julia Kristeva, *Semeiotiki: Recherches pour une sémalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1969); Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981); Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Richard Howard & Annette Lavers (New York, NY: Hill and Way, 2012, first published in France by Éditions du Seuil, 1957).

<sup>130</sup> Genette’s exploration of transtextuality names several kinds of transtextual relationships, most important in his view is *hypertextuality*. Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman & Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 1-2. Peter Barry has noted that here, Genette’s definition of intertextuality relies on the term ‘actual presence’ to an extent of ‘almost a liturgical or religious feel, as if a form of transubstantiation were taking place. Barry, ‘Re-Thinking Textuality in Literary Studies Today’, *Literature Compass* 7.11 (2010): 1001-2.

<sup>131</sup> Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, 10.

<sup>132</sup> Julia Kristeva, “‘Nous deux’ or a (his)story of intertextuality”, *The Romanic Review* 93 (2002): 9.

In reading miscellanies through the lens of intertextuality, it is possible to see the miscellanizing process as analogous to both the *bricolage* of ‘making new things out of old’, which Genette’s describes through hypertextuality, as well as to Michael Riffaterre’s ‘L’Inscription du sujet’.<sup>133</sup> The miscellany is not only a record of reading certain texts together and in relation to each other; it is a *new text* made by and through intertextual reading. Riffaterre poses a subjective process of intertextual reading, which reminds us that Constance Aston Fowler’s collection of verse could not have been created by anyone other than Constance Aston Fowler: ‘si la référentialité est suspendue parce que les manques, le non-dit du texte, ne peuvent être complétés et expliqués que par un intertexte, le récit est forcément subjectif, puisque contrairement à une réceptivité passive qui nous fait accepter de référents stéréotypés, le choix d’un intertexte est un acte privé, personnel, une marque de l’intention. L’énigme est subjective’.<sup>134</sup> Moreover, the subjective interaction of reading intertextually means that subsequent readers of the miscellany bring new intertexts to the fore, creating new texture and weaving new meaning into the literary tapestry. This expansive form aligns with the dynamics of coterie practices and dialogic reading practice that define such communal forms of literary engagement. This is most clearly presented in verse exchanges and answer poetry, as I will discuss in my third chapter, but it is also discernible in the layering of allusions, influences, and forms. The dialogic nature of coterie writing not only ushers these texts into the wider networks of literary engagement, but also produces a fertile intertextuality that brings the practices of reading and writing together in a cooperative and creative act. Aston Fowler weaves together occasionality, devotion, and literary engagements in her text, resulting in a unique form that requires a discursive reading that attends to this intertextual texture.

In applying this intertextual reading to the miscellany, I hope to show how the composition of HM904 is a creative act and an intricate engagement with form. As I

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<sup>133</sup> Genette, 398; Michael Riffaterre, ‘L’Inscription du sujet’, in *Qu’est-ce que le style?*, eds. Georges Molinié & Pierre Cahné (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994), 283-312.

<sup>134</sup> ‘If referentiality is suspended because the absences, the things left unsaid in the text, cannot be explained except by an intertext, the narrative must necessarily be subjective, because in contrast to a passive receptivity which forces us to accept stereotypical referents, the choice of an intertext is a private, personal act, a sign of intention. The riddle is subjective.’ Riffaterre, ‘L’Inscription du sujet’, 289; quoted in Kristeva “‘Nous deux’”, 11. Translation courtesy of Hugh Macfarlane.

will discuss in Chapter One, Aston Fowler took her ‘booke’ seriously as a literary work and carefully designed her manuscript according to print and manuscript conventions for formal, presentation texts. Though her execution is not always neat and orderly, she keeps to her ornamental design of her “printer’s flowers” borders throughout. The meeting of the material design of the miscellany and its poetic ‘ornamentation’ is an example of the multifaceted literary capital displayed in the miscellany, specifically as an early modern woman’s work of form. Sasha Roberts contextualizes her concept of women’s literary capital with reference Puttenham’s *Arte of English Poesie* (1589), a manual of poetic forms notable for its dedication to Elizabeth I, a woman he celebrates as a ‘most excellent poet’.<sup>135</sup> Puttenham also addresses women readers in his preface to the third book of the *Arte*, ‘Of Ornament’:

And because our chiefe purpose herein is for the learning of Ladies and young Gentlewomen, or idle Courtiers, desirous to become skilful in their owne mother tongue, and for their priuate recreation to make now & then ditties of pleasure, thinking for our parte none other science so fit for them & the place as that which teacheth *beau semblant*, the chiefe profession as well of Courting as of poesy...<sup>136</sup>

Although Puttenham specifies the occasion of ‘private recreation’ for such women’s poetic efforts, the fact of his thorough and precise explanation of rhetorical figures that follows is evocative of the significant effort entailed in composing such ‘ditties of pleasure’. As Puttenham explains, ‘Eloquence is of great force’, and as I will discuss in my second chapter, this potency of form is a particular drive within Aston Fowler’s miscellany. Roberts denotes manuscript miscellanies as a rich site of literary capital specifically due to dialogic readings that ‘add up to something more’ than mere accumulation of texts: ‘If, at the level of content, the juxtaposition of modes and voices, genres and personae that one finds in manuscript miscellanies fosters an intertextual scepticism, then it also compels formal awareness—an attention to the specificities of literary form and artifices’.<sup>137</sup> Placing forms, cultures, and voices in conversation through the act of collecting is thus a dexterous act of creation as well as a deployment of literary capital.

This practice of collecting poetry was shared by several members of the Tixall circle: Constance’s brother Herbert Aston and her niece Catherine Aston née Gage

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<sup>135</sup> Roberts, ‘Women’s Literary Capital’, 248-49.

<sup>136</sup> George Puttenham, *The arte of English poesie* (London: Richard Field, 1589), S4v.

<sup>137</sup> *ibid.*, 259.

created miscellanies. Herbert's manuscript, Osborn MS b4 is held at the Beinecke Library, while a record of Catherine Gage's manuscript survives in Arthur Clifford's edition of *Tixall Poetry*. Yet neither miscellany was produced as a similarly formal 'booke': Herbert's is a neat, but relatively plain transcription that bears none of the formal, paratextual flair of his sister's, and Clifford does not offer a material description of Gage's manuscript.<sup>138</sup> Perhaps the most closely related project among the group was also undertaken by one of the women, Aston Fowler's sister-in-law Katherine Thimelby Aston, her brother Herbert's wife. Katherine Thimelby was a poet in her own right, but when she took up the task of creating a 'booke', it wasn't her poems but those of her husband Herbert Aston which she chose to collect and edit. The manuscript has not survived and the missing text, like that Catherine Gage's missing manuscript, is a telling reminder of the vulnerability of manuscripts and an intriguing example of the archive's flaws as witness to early modern women's literary work.

Thimelby's act of collecting is described by Herbert Aston in his request to friends for copies of his scattered verses, which Paul Trolander and Zeynep Tenger read in terms of reputation management and coterie politics. Trolander and Tenger implicate Aston's advertisement of his wife's forthcoming edition in a social process as much as a literary one: 'The circulation of such requests created a series of obligations binding the family circle of collectors more closely, just the act of compiling the collection reinforced the social and familial bonds linking husband and wife'.<sup>139</sup> Yet this perspective foregrounds Herbert's interests at the expense of his wife's, ascribing the literary consequence to Herbert and equating Katherine's editorial work to the emotional work of the marital relationship. The social bonds of the family and the coterie are just one facet of the work of form in collected texts such as Katherine Thimelby's and Aston Fowler's. In choosing the role of editor, these women engage an active reading practice that refines the work of form, both

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<sup>138</sup> The lack of description does not necessarily suggest a materially uninteresting document but despite Clifford's haphazard editorial practice, it is still likely that he would have recognized and described any features that would suggest a formal presentation copy of the book. The poems collected by Catherine Gage are transcribed in Clifford (ed.), *Tixall Poetry*, 107-205. Herbert Aston's miscellany ascribes more directly to the literary genres prevalent in miscellanies from the universities and the Inns of Court including verses by popularly collected poets such as Walter Raleigh and Henry Wotton.

<sup>139</sup> Paul Trolander and Zeynep Tenger, *Sociable Criticism in England, 1625-1725* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2007), 35.

materially and poetically. The creative agency of both Katherine Thimelby's edition and Aston Fowler's miscellany is not merely enacted through engagement with received texts, however; rather it is through the expansive work of *collecting*, weaving together disparate parts through critical reading and editing, that the women of Tixall craft their texts and claim crucial roles within their coterie. This literary work does not simply create a fixed record; instead such poetic practice composes a dynamic form, one that expands outward and urges dialogic reading. The miscellany, like a tapestry woven from single strands, is greater than the sum of its parts.

### **Reading the Miscellany**

In the following chapters I will address my opening question—how did Constance Aston Fowler read her verses?—by attending to several central elements of reading. I will consider the reading practices represented in the miscellany by attending to the materiality, poetics, community engagement, and embodied experience of the text. Throughout this thesis, ideas of form as the 'enabling condition' as well as the product of reading provide a methodology for comprehending the act of reading, both early modern and modern.<sup>140</sup> Aston Fowler read her poetry for a variety of reasons and in many different ways, but my thesis attends to two core concepts that structure the work of form in her miscellany. As my readings show, the poetry collected in HM904 foregrounds the coherence and collaboration of human effort and divine (or transcendent) forces, especially as that co-working is structured through acts of devotion. And as a document of a dynamic reading life, the miscellany is further defined by an interest in interactive (and intertextual) processes of textual engagement. These frameworks as well as more specific questions of art, knowledge, grace, and subjectivity are presented through the miscellany's verses. In attending to form, we can see how such essential issues of human life are mediated through acts of reading.

My first chapter looks at how the miscellany has been materially composed through the work of readers over time. Made and remade through new readers, the miscellany is a 'text in process', a concept that offers a way of reading the multiple

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<sup>140</sup> Ellen Rooney, 'Form and Contentment', *MLQ* 61.1 (2000): 37.

textual lives that coalesce in miscellany texts.<sup>141</sup> I look at the various iterations of the miscellany for evidence of the reading practices that inscribe the form as well as those that are prompted by that form. This discussion proposes several alterations to the accepted narrative for Aston Fowler's compilation and collaboration with the recently identified Jesuit William Smith. I propose a new version of the miscellany that reclaims a collaborative work of form within the miscellany's early textual life and extends through multiple periods of readerly engagement and composition. This chapter explores the role of Aston Fowler as a Mediatrix for the 'verses presented' in her book and draws on theories of material religion to place the miscellany in a network of belief and practice marked by active cooperation between the human and the divine.

In Chapter Two, I turn to early modern poetic theory to explore how poetry was understood to yield real effects. This chapter considers the potency of form within the miscellany, a self-consciousness of verse as 'wrought'. The Tixall poets' admiration for Philip Sidney directs my readings of the miscellany's verses as form that can 'substantially...worketh'.<sup>142</sup> I attend to the process of poetic making, which is figured through the conceit of textile craft, as an act of artistry and an act of sufferance and find evocative resonances between the miscellany's romantic and devotional lyrics. The lyric poetry of Herbert Aston, William Pershall, and Robert Southwell are read in conversation with one another, and their intertextual renderings of 'Tixall poesy' reveal how well-made and well-read form is dynamically potent. This chapter proposes a Southwellian theory of sacramental poetics at work in the text, one that structures a subtle coherence of form and meaning. The sufferance of making meaning and of obtaining grace are drawn together on the page, enabling the realization of divine presence (or true love) through active reading practices.

The final two chapters of my thesis build on this theoretical background and proceed with focused close readings that consider more specifically the effects of reading poetry and the uses to which the verses are put in the lives of its readers. Chapter Three explores how a variety of the miscellany's communal verses inscribe

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<sup>141</sup> Jonathan Gibson, 'Synchrony and process: editing manuscript miscellanies', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 52.1 (2012): 86-87.

<sup>142</sup> Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poesy* (c. 1580, printed 1595), in Gavin Alexander (ed.) *Sidney's 'The Defence of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 9.

political and social textual engagements that are imaginatively constructed. This force of imaginative effort is offered as a particularly potent form of communal reading, whether in meditation or in subtle interpretive work. I interpret the structures of equivocation, ciphering, and self-created landscapes as readerly negotiations of textual meaning that construct a community through coded forms of knowledge. The readings of this chapter range from Catholic ballad to pastoral eclogue, and I attend to the poetic work of the Jesuit mission as well as the Tixall coterie's social connections through verse. This analysis of the communal role of the miscellany is followed in my final chapter with a study of the most potent form of reading presented in Aston Fowler's book: the exercise of intimate piety sparked by two Passion poems, unique to the network of texts stemming from Tixall. Chapter Four takes as its subject the affective, self-inflected act of reading that reminds us that reading is a lived experience. I read the confluence of faith and form that instantiates a meeting between reader and text in a 'face-to-face' moment. It is in this personally composed, readerly devotion that the text is revealed to be a meeting place for life and art. The text is made by the reader. Reading is an act of enlivenment: verses may be collected by the miscellany, but it is in the active reader that they come alive. 'By your poetique fire they are refin'd'.



## Chapter One - '[M]y booke': reading and mediating form in the composition of HM904

### **Reading process and form in manuscript miscellanies**

Verse miscellanies present a uniquely complex challenge to literary critics, one that has proved fascinating to critics across several decades. The blossoming of manuscript studies beginning at the tail-end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has resulted in an assortment of impressively varied methodologies for approaching the critical hazards of miscellanies.<sup>1</sup> As the field has continued to grow, it has been helped along by the efforts to bring manuscripts to a wider audience—Peter Beal's work on the *Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts* has been invaluable to the new generation of manuscript scholars.<sup>2</sup> The production of scholarly editions of miscellany texts, such as the Aldrich-Watson's edition of Constance Aston Fowler's miscellany for the Renaissance English Text Society, has also allowed for a wider engagement with such texts that are scattered across the archives and usually inaccessible, especially for undergraduate and postgraduate researchers.<sup>3</sup> Yet the introduction of miscellany texts in the format of a modern scholarly edition often has the effect of presenting a 'unified singular objects' that flattens the reading experience, as Jonathan Gibson notes in reference to Jean Klene's 1997 edition of

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<sup>1</sup> Influential studies of early modern manuscript culture and book history from this period build on and respond to Elizabeth Eisenstein's *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). See also Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Arthur F. Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995); H. R. Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts*; Peter Beal, *In Praise of Scribes: Manuscripts and their Makers in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); David McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript, and the Search for Order, 1450-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Victoria E. Burke and Jonathan Gibson (eds.) *Early Modern Women's Manuscript Writing: Selected Papers from the Trinity/Trent Colloquium* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Peter Beal (ed.), *Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts, 1450-1700*, <http://www.celm-ms.org.uk/>.

<sup>3</sup> Other printed editions include Anne Southwell, *The Southwell-Sibthorpe commonplace book: Folger ms. V. b. 198*, ed. by Jean Klene (Tempe, AZ: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1997); and John Strangways, *The Commonplace Book of Sir John Strangways (1645-1666)*, ed. by Thomas G. Olsen (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies in conjunction with Renaissance English Text Society, 2004).

the Southwell-Sibthorpe miscellany, also for the Renaissance English Text Society, making ‘it hard for readers to appreciate the shifts in structure and function through which the manuscript passed’.<sup>4</sup> Book historians such as Roger Chartier and D. F. McKenzie, however, remind us that ‘new readers of course make new texts, and that their new meanings are a function of new forms’, or more concisely, ‘forms produce meaning’.<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that we are also ‘new readers’: criticism on Constance Aston Fowler’s miscellany has read a text of social and historical interest, productively gleaned from the material form and the general outline of the poetic forms held within the manuscript. I hope to read a text that is closer to the one Constance Aston Fowler and William Smith produced through their own active reading process. In this chapter, I explore the complex matrix of reading by addressing the physical manuscript ‘booke’ and poetic form, attending to both material and literary form as processual. This perspective reveals how reading sets form in motion in an act of mediation, made possible by the status of the miscellany as a ‘text in process’, to borrow Jonathan Gibson’s term. Reorienting our awareness of the miscellany as a ‘text in process’ also allows the complex and multiple agents working upon the poetic texts to come into view. The miscellany is a unique form, one that places the act of reading—in its multiple incarnations in the life of a text—at the forefront. This chapter will discuss how Aston Fowler’s editorial work and compilation, when recognized as a co-operative process with William Smith, resulted in a composition of open and fluid form, a unique text that is defined by collaborative reading, writing, and devotion.

Constance Aston Fowler’s miscellany’s status as a ‘text in process’ is discernable clearly in intricate compilation practices, which could be read as haphazard on first viewing but which come into focus as indicative of a more purposeful process upon closer inspection. The material evidence offers several clues and presents plentiful questions for analysis of the complex literary engagements at work in the manuscript pages. The book has no signatures, inscriptions, or dates on the flyleaf or on the initial blank pages with which to situate the text in a specific time or place

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<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Gibson, ‘Synchrony and process: editing manuscript miscellanies’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 52.1 (2012): 89.

<sup>5</sup> D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the sociology of texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 29; Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, trans. by Lydia Cochrane. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 3.

upon first glance.<sup>6</sup> Instead, the manuscript opens with several blank pages followed by a short but messily copied verse in a disputed hand, under the heading ‘Verses presented [...] to Celestinae’ (fol. 6r).<sup>7</sup> In the pages that follow, poems of varying genres and subjects are copied in at least three different hands. Unlike manuscript verse collections such as the Southwell-Sibthorpe manuscript and Hester Pulter’s miscellany, Aston Fowler’s book lacks any prefatory materials or introductory statements and displays no overt evidence for the miscellany’s conception as a purposeful literary project.<sup>8</sup> This lack of framing, along with the disjointed method of compilation, explored below, might suggest to the casual reader that the manuscript book was never meant for any readership beyond Aston Fowler’s personal use. Certainly it would be dubious to posit a wide, public readership given the facts that can be positively established: the manuscript’s compilation and provenance, which this chapter will examine in depth, do not suggest a life for the text beyond Aston Fowler’s family and immediate social environment. The circumstances of the inheritance of the Fowler estate passing to Thomas Belasyse, Earl Fauconberg (b. 1699) of Newburgh Priory through his marriage to Catherine Fowler-Betham in 1726, along with William H. Robinson’s purchase of the Newburgh Priory’s library in 1924, suggest that Newburgh Priory in Coxwold, North Yorkshire as a possible final home for the manuscript. Next, it appears in the William H. Robinson sale catalogue and then onto the Huntington where it remains today. This provenance indicates a familial life for the text within the Fowler estate, but as Ezell’s work on social authorship demonstrates this archival history does not mean that the miscellany was composed as a private text.<sup>9</sup> The miscellany’s place

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<sup>6</sup> The inside of the back cover bears the initials CT in the bottom right corner. The letters are vertically aligned and there is a smudged word to the right of the C that is faint and illegible.

<sup>7</sup> Aldrich-Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany of Constance Aston Fowler: a diplomatic edition* (Tempe, AZ: Renaissance English Text Society, 2000) poem 1: 1-2. I have retained Aldrich-Watson’s numbering for the verses for ease of reference.

<sup>8</sup> Hester Pulter’s miscellany is inscribed ‘Hadassas Chaste Fancies’ (Brotherton Library, BC MS Lt q32, fol. 1r); the manuscript containing Anne Southwell’s poetry bears the inscription, ‘The works of the Lady Anne Southwell December 2 1626’ (Folger Shakespeare Library, Folger MS V.b.198). Gillian Wright has explored the production of early modern women’s poetry into collections, both in manuscript and in print, and discusses the Southwell-Sibthorpe miscellany’s compilation as a discreet literary project. See Wright, *Producing Women’s Poetry, 1600-1730: Text and Paratext, Manuscript and Print* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 27-56.

<sup>9</sup> Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

within the literary community centered at Tixall, Aston Fowler's active role in forging a literary reputation for her group of family and friends, and the collaboration evidenced within its pages all open the 'booke' into a fluid textual space where the personal—feeling, faith, self—is constantly in collaboration with the external—God, community, literary culture. Moreover, the mediation of meaning, memory, and devotion across this divide is enacted through the process of reading that stages the work of form. By bringing reading into view as critical to my understanding of the miscellany as a 'text in process', I hope to show that the life of manuscript texts is iterative and open-ended. This chapter proposes that in order to uncover how the miscellany was used by its early modern readers, including its compilers, it is necessary to understand how 'new readers...make new texts'.

Jonathan Gibson has called for a new kind of editing for manuscript miscellanies to present them 'less as single, coherent texts and more as a sequence of disjunct forms'.<sup>10</sup> The production of an edition of HM904 that presents the multiple stages of its compilation would be an unwieldy project and unlikely to result in a readable text. And yet, while Aldrich-Watson's Renaissance English Text Society edition of the miscellany is an invaluable resource, it has authorized a version of the text that obscures the fluidity of the manuscript, which is in reality 'just the last of many' versions or iterations.<sup>11</sup> This chapter continues Helen Hackett's work in reconstructing the circumstances of the miscellany's composition and compilation, which I will discuss in the next section.<sup>12</sup> However, I will add this material analysis to an examination of the role of reading in the creation of this 'text in process'; this work, in turn, allows another view of the miscellany to come to the fore: the miscellany as form in process.

I am aware that engagement with the miscellany in this way actively creates new versions of the miscellany even in our own critical practice. My version of the miscellany has several material differences from the Hackett's and Aldrich-Watson's, as I will discuss below, but first I would like to describe the versions of the miscellany that have already been presented. The modern edition of the

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<sup>10</sup> Gibson, 'Synchrony and process', 86-87.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Helen Hackett, 'Unlocking the Mysteries of Constance Aston Fowler's Verse Miscellany (Huntington Library MS HM 904): The Hand B Scribe Identified', in *Manuscript Miscellanies in Early Modern England*, ed. by Joshua Eckhardt and Daniel Starza Smith, 91-112 (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

miscellany offers readers a text arranged for study: the verses are numbered, separated by page breaks between verses, line numbers and original folio pagination are given in the margins, and footnotes give context including material description and identification of the scribe.<sup>13</sup> This scholarly edition obfuscates several other iterations layered into the miscellany, including the versions that Helen Hackett uncovered: firstly, the original gatherings and booklets into which Constance Aston Fowler made her transcriptions before they were bound together into a collected volume, additionally, the version of the miscellany as a bound book prior to William Smith's transcriptions.<sup>14</sup> There are potentially two other texts in the process of the miscellany's compilation: an unknown version that existed prior to Aston Fowler's editing of the first section, which resulted in the removal of several gatherings, and the unrealized expanded text with the blank middle section filled in. Ultimately, however, the manuscript in the Huntington today is the most important iteration, and the one I will be reading closely in this chapter, as it contains textual and material evidence that can reveal the miscellany 'in process' throughout its history. Although it is a daunting project to recreate a complete history of HM904, Gibson has argued for the worthiness of a critical practice that maintains an awareness of the text in process: 'There is perhaps a comparison to be made between the separate versions through which a single miscellany can evolve and the textual history of an individual poem existing in a number of different manuscripts and/or printed books. In both cases, full understanding of the synchronic functioning of a single artifact must depend upon the investigation of the bumpy histories that have led to the existence of its current form'.<sup>15</sup> This comparison is apt. The complex synchrony of the writing process in manuscript networks has long been established and in this chapter I discern this formal fluidity as crucial to the reading process as well. Ruth Connolly, writing on the example of manuscript witnesses of Robert Herrick's poetry, suggests critics take on 'a full genealogical analysis' in order to fully understand the shifting forms of manuscript texts. As she explains, '[t]here is no consistent intention (or text), but rather a series of rewritings and re-readings by poet and copyist alike'; nevertheless, she goes on to say, 'there is agency...[and] it is

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<sup>13</sup> The second main hand is incorrectly identified as belonging to Gertrude Aston Thimelby in this edition.

<sup>14</sup> Hackett, 'Unlocking the mysteries', 103-6.

<sup>15</sup> Gibson, 'Synchrony and process', 95-96.

possible to offer a series of answers, however tentatively and provisionally, to questions that ask “who did it, what was meant by it and how was it taken”.<sup>16</sup> These questions that make up the ‘bumpy’ textual process of Constance Aston Fowler’s miscellany—“who did it, what was meant by it and how was it taken”—have answers that are still reverberating as reading keeps the text in process, as new readers continue to make a new text of HM904.

My aim in considering the miscellany as a whole—that is, as material object and literary text—is to illuminate the shadowy corners not only of Constance Aston Fowler's closet, but also of repositories holding potentially revelatory manuscript miscellanies in need of deeper, fuller readings. I find that the unique example of HM904 requires a practice that merges the material history, the ‘process’ of the manuscript’s compilation, with attentive reading of the intellectual elements, the literary texts themselves. Gibson’s criticism of misguided readings of manuscript miscellanies which treat them ‘as if they were unified and singular objects that could be studied and analyzed like sonnet sequences or novels, their compiler presented as if the author’, is warranted for any work that privileges the literary over the material, but so too must critics working with manuscript miscellanies be wary of privileging the material over the literary.<sup>17</sup> After all, not all miscellanies are completely miscellaneous and some, like Aston Fowler’s, can be read as products of a guiding compiler with particular ends in mind. Aston Fowler’s miscellany, I contend, benefits from a reading that appreciates the fluid text as one that is ‘in process’; but it is also a singular work of literary form and the process cannot be detached from the literary text. Aston Fowler’s continued ownership of the miscellany testifies to her agency, collaborative and social as it may be, in composing—authoring?—her ‘booke’.

The material document of HM904 is arranged in two separate sections with eighty-two blank leaves in the middle. The manuscript as it exists in the archive today is a curious object as much for its blank pages as for its transcriptions, which are recognizably distinct according to the different scribal practices of Constance Aston Fowler (Hand A), William Smith vere Southerne (Hand B), and William Persall (Hand C). The miscellany’s early readers, namely Constance Aston Fowler

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<sup>16</sup> Ruth Connolly, ‘Editing Intention in the manuscript poetry of Robert Herrick’, *SEL* 52.1 (2012): 80.

<sup>17</sup> Gibson, ‘Synchrony and process’, 86.

and William Smith as compiler-copyists, did not impose a finalized order or completion upon the ‘booke’ but, whether by accident or intention, delivered a flexible and dynamic text to future readers, one that is open to interactive future readers and thus constantly in process. In this way, the fluidity of the miscellany form is evident not only in the facts of the manuscript’s compilation, but also in the reading practice it encodes. It must be noted that, although the miscellany bears evidence of Aston Fowler’s continued engagement with her ‘booke’ after her initial compilation activity, the manuscript has survived without subsequent readers’ additions.<sup>18</sup> However, upon closer inspection, there is at least one marginal note that has gone unexplored in relation to the miscellany’s afterlife and as an example of reception that actively and creatively continues the process of interactive reading. The print edition does note the marginal annotation of an additional couplet on fol. 12r [Figure 3], but Aldrich-Watson incorporates the lines into the text of the poem, the unique and intriguing Passion poem in Aston Fowler’s hand (‘On the Passion’, fols. 8r-12v).<sup>19</sup> Aldrich-Watson does not comment on the timeline of the line’s addition, which most likely took place after the book was bound: the annotation is added at a right angle to the main text, clearly minding the edges of the page and written in a different ink. The handwriting is also incompatible with Aston Fowler’s and presents the only example of this unidentified Hand D in the manuscript. It is a messy script of mainly italic letterforms: noticeable variants from Aston Fowler’s hand include the d-minuscule’s left-reaching ascender and the k-minuscule consisting of a non-looped stem and two straight limbs.

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<sup>18</sup> Aldrich-Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, 157, note 1, glossing William Pershall’s initials which are crossed out after the final verse, ‘A Pastorall Egloune on the death of Lawra’, which is copied in his hand. His initials are also crossed out after his other poems, ‘The first altar’ (fol. 26v), ‘An Elegy on the death of Lady Frances Draicott’ (fol. 28r-v), ‘A congratulation’ (fols. 32v-33r), and ‘On Louers Tears’ (fol. 145v). Aldrich-Watson describes Pershall’s fall from grace, citing evidence discovered by La Belle, and explains: ‘La Belle’s discovery, as well as Gertrude’s changed initials on Poem 53 [‘To My Honer’d Sister’, GA is amended possibly to read GT], emphasizes how important Constance Fowler’s book was to her and for how long she continued to tinker with the poems.’

<sup>19</sup> Aldrich-Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, 13, notes 10 and 11.

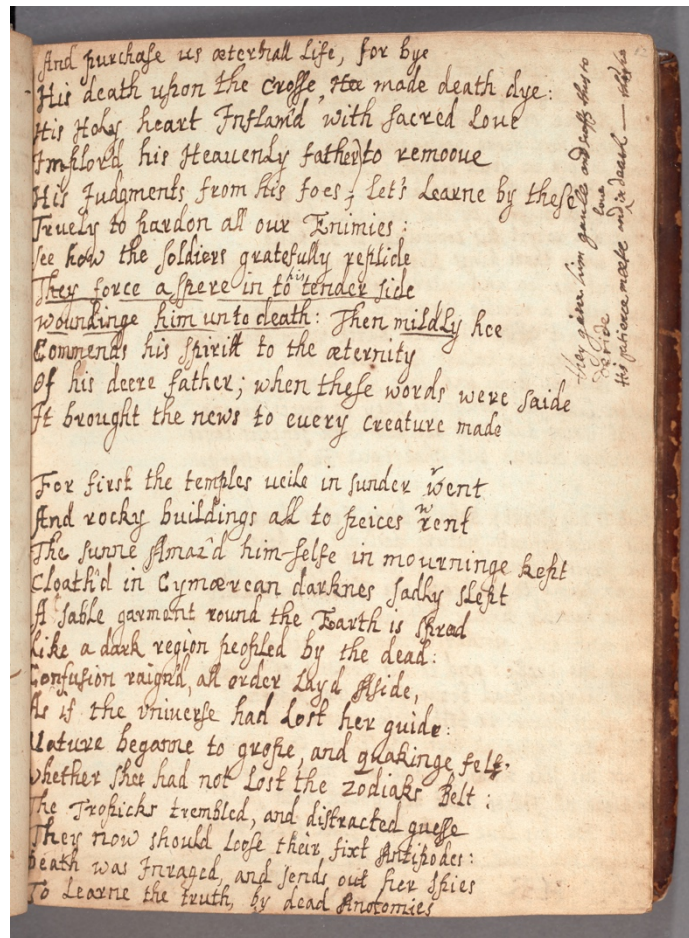


Figure 3 Marginal note in an unidentified hand, fol. 12r.

As I will discuss in my final chapter, the verse is not only a unique composition, but it also bears the signs of being one of Aston Fowler's most highly-prized verses: this is most clearly attested in her use of an elaborate cipher, a distinction she reserves elsewhere for poetry by her brother. The status of this poem within the miscellany makes it unlikely that the marginal annotation is a copying error. In fact, 'On the Passion' is one of the most cleanly and carefully copied verses in the miscellany. The note makes more sense if viewed as a reader's engagement with the verse. In the main text, this reader has underlined portions of two lines that the marginal annotation directly responds to and expands upon. Here, then, is a reader taking up the miscellany as a bound book and reading with pen in hand, engaging directly with the poetic form in such a successful moment of collaboration that it has been subsumed into the verse itself by later readers due to its close formal engagement with the text.

Although it is a small addition, this marginal note is just one example of how the



material practice of reading sets form in motion. This collaboration between text and the reader *through* form is also a continuation of the miscellany's process of material reading and writing that I will be exploring in this chapter. Recognizing the meeting of these disparate acts of reading and writing—that of the annotator, the editor-compiler, and the critic—allows us to view the miscellany as an object of 'untimely matter', a term coined by Jonathan Gil Harris in his theories of polytemporality in early modern material culture (and our critical reception of it).<sup>20</sup> The ongoing process of reading and writing that constitutes the miscellany as a poetic (and cultural) text is a conversation through the 'untimely matter' of the form itself, made possible through the folding of moments into the single artefact of the manuscript.<sup>21</sup> Thus the miscellany is a layering and a folding together of reading-moments. The process is never complete: the miscellany form is made and re-made through reading, a living document that narrates and nurtures active engagement with poetic form. Here Ellen Rooney's insight is once again a guiding light: 'Form is both the enabling condition and the product of reading'.<sup>22</sup>

### **Intention and Agency: the composition of Aston Fowler's 'booke'**

Although Aston Fowler did not sign her name to the book, her ownership and her agency in the compilation is clearly professed in the contemporaneous letters she wrote to her brother Herbert during the period that can be definitively linked to her literary activity. In a postscript added to a letter to Herbert dated 31 July 1639, Aston Fowler asserts a clear intent for her literary project: 'Send me some verses, for I want some good ones to put in my booke'.<sup>23</sup> This statement not only reveals the familial and social contexts for the miscellany, infusing Aston Fowler's literary

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<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

<sup>21</sup> Harris's wording is particularly suggestive when applied to the manuscript context: 'objects *collate* many different moments' (emphasis mine). In quoting Michel Serres's observation of an object existing in time that is 'gathered together, and with multiple pleats', Harris draws out how this poly- or multitemporality is also a *collection*: an assemblage of moments that is especially evocative given the unique parameters of the miscellany as a gathered text. Harris, *Untimely Matter*, 3-4, quoting Michel Serres, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*.

<sup>22</sup> Ellen Rooney, 'Form and Contentment', *MLQ* 61.1 (2000): 37.

<sup>23</sup> Constance Aston Fowler to Herbert Aston, 'Your selfe', 31 July 1639, B.L. Add. MS 36452; printed in Clifford, (ed.), *Tixall Letters, of the Correspondence of the Aston Family and their Friends, during the Seventeenth Century. With Notes and Illustrations*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: James Ballantyne & Co., 1815), Letter XXIV, 128-33 (qt 133).

pursuits with the passionate affection that abounds in Aston Fowler and Herbert's correspondence, but also underscores the making of the miscellany as ongoing, purposeful work. As early as August 1636, she is soliciting poems from Herbert and the manuscript shows evidence of her continued ownership of the book into the 1650s. Helen Hackett's productive and illuminating work on the miscellany has dated the transcription by William Smith to no later than 1651 at which point he was recorded in Warwickshire; Cedric C. Brown more precisely dates Smith's transcriptions prior to his vows in Worcester on 22 June 1640. This earlier date for Smith's additions gives considerable weight to my claim that Aston Fowler maintained control over the manuscript throughout the period of Smith's transcriptions. My argument that Fowler and Smith worked on the manuscript alongside one another, along with material evidence of Aston Fowler's work on the manuscript after binding, demonstrate her ongoing engagement with these verses, and her investment in her 'book' as a coherent and expanding literary project. The challenge of 'unlocking the mysteries of Constance Aston Fowler's verse miscellany' (to borrow Hackett's phrasing) requires a much fuller appreciation of Aston Fowler's ownership of and agency in relation to her text throughout its compilation, including the period of collaboration with William Smith. By attending to the process of compilation as one of collaboration, the fluid space of the miscellany is revealed to be an effective setting for cultivating active reading. Aston Fowler's agency in the composition of her 'booke' is not lessened by this collaboration, but rather it is her role as reader that comes to the fore.

The traditional view of the miscellany's composition has worked on the assumption that Aston Fowler completed work on the manuscript before Smith made his transcriptions. This theory supposes that Aston Fowler's transcriptions must all pre-date the manuscript's binding. The support for this theory is thoroughly described and the narrative contains several useful insights: Hackett cites evidence that Aston Fowler copied poems into gatherings of papers, or sometimes several booklets affixed together, maintaining the flexibility of working with loose papers before the book was bound.<sup>24</sup> This proposed method of compilation offers an

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<sup>24</sup> Evidence for this theory of compilation is discussed in depth by Helen Hackett, 'Unlocking the mysteries', esp. 105-9. Aston Fowler's transcriptions are in general very neat, impossibly so given the fact that her writing goes deep into the gutter and directly to the edge of the pages.

intriguing view of a young woman preparing a text over the course of several years, collecting, copying and organizing poems initially in a flexible format. It is certainly true that the vast majority of verses in Aston Fowler's hand were copied onto booklets or gatherings before the book was bound together, but there are several examples of verses in Aston Fowler's hand that appear to have been added after binding, as I describe below.<sup>25</sup> Given that the latest dating evidence for the poems clearly copied prior to binding is 1638 or 1639 and Brown's contention that Smith added his verses to the manuscript before June 1640, it is quite possible that Aston Fowler's and Smith's work on the miscellany coincided.<sup>26</sup> Although Aston Fowler's inscriptions into the bound book have thus far been overlooked, it has been noted by La Belle and Aldrich-Watson that she continued to interact with her book after her loose sheets were bound. This is most notable in the blotting out of William Pershall's initials [Figure 4] in several places and in the emendation of her sister's initials from GA upon her marriage [Figure 5].<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See Appendix 3 for a complete collation designating the gatherings and transcriptions.

<sup>26</sup> 'A congratulation For the happy Retorne of L: A: From spaine' can be dated to 1638; the use of the initials K T for Katherine Thimelby's poems is more ambiguous as she married Herbert Aston in either 1638 or 1639. At least one of Katherine Thimelby Aston's poems must pre-date Lady Dorothy Shirley's death in 1636 as it is titled 'upon the L D saying K T could be sad in her company', and the date of Herbert and Katherine's marriage could be as late as 1639 given at least one letter addressed to Katherine Thimelby from that year. See Hackett, 'Unlocking the mysteries', 108-9; and Cedric C. Brown, 'William Smith, Vere Southerne, Jesuit Missioner, and Three Linked Manuscript Miscellanies', in *Manuscript Miscellanies in Early Modern England*, ed. Eckhardt and Smith, 117.

<sup>27</sup> La Belle posits that Pershall lost favor with the Astons over his financial conduct, she cites an account of Staffordshire history that describes how Pershall filled his estate, Canwell, 'with incumbrances, and likewise sold all the rest of his estate, and became as bad as a beggard if not worse'. La Belle also notes a land dispute brought by Pershall against his brother-in-law Walter Aston in 1656. See La Belle, 'Huntington Aston Manuscript', *The Book Collector* 29 (1980): 551. Aldrich-Watson's notes also date Gertrude Thimelby's marriage to between 1651 and 1654, see 'To My Honer'd sister GA' in Aldrich-Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poem 53: 128 note 1.

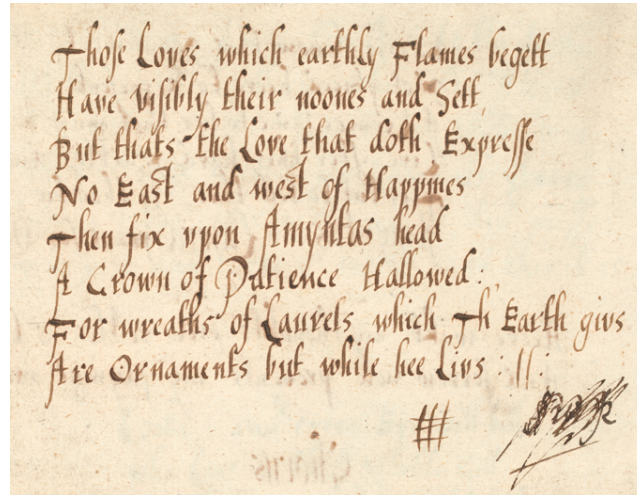


Figure 4 William Pershall's initials crossed out, fol. 200v.

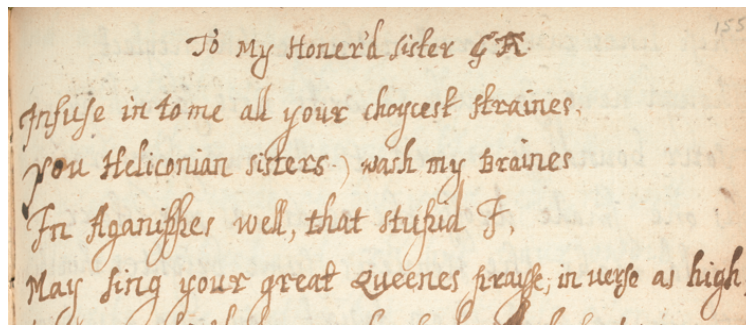


Figure 5 Gertrude Thimelby's altered initials, fol. 155r.

There are also several instances of textual ambiguity that suggest some overlap of the two scribes' acts of copying and perhaps also a close proximity for the acts of poetic composition and compilation. At the very least this shortened timeline for the final stages of compilation indicates a much greater coherence to the miscellany than has previously been recognized. Reading for continuities and thematic connections in a miscellany is a challenge, but the question bears asking: how miscellaneous is Constance Aston Fowler's verse miscellany anyway?

The organization of the manuscript, and especially the ordering and process of transcription for the poems in Aston Fowler's hand, is of particular relevance to this question. The editing practices apparent in the miscellany's organization as well as the decorative embellishments used in formatting and cataloguing the poems suggest that the text was carefully constructed, both before and after binding. As I discussed in my introduction, the context of coterie entertainment does not degrade authorial agency or artistic intention. In fact, the confluence of creative effort and idle recreation is a generic feature of the miscellany, as is the mixing of miscellaneity

and order. This is seen in the conventions set by the popular print miscellanies, notably George Gascoigne's *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowers* (1573). Gascoigne's fictional compiler Master G. T. describes his effort in producing the miscellany and presents the 'sundrie' verses as 'a number of *Sonets*, layes, letters, Ballades, Rondlets, verlayes and verses...[which] I had with long trauayle confusedly gathered together'.<sup>28</sup> The 'trauayle' of gathering he may claim to be haphazard—miscellaneous and likely the result of various occasions—but it is in the production of the 'written booke' that G.T. edits the verses and 'reduce[s] them into some good order'.<sup>29</sup> Aston Fowler's efforts in collecting her verses also likely spanned several years and as Helen Hackett has described, she was copying the verses into separate gatherings, which were later arranged 'into some good order' while compiling her 'booke'. This work of collecting and ordering verses is a process of unique creation and thus reveals a distinct editorial intention. Yet as Joshua Eckhardt has shown, editorial readers do not necessarily make one single, stable text but rather manuscript volumes can take on new lives and new meanings as they develop over time.<sup>30</sup> In making her miscellany, then, it is useful to think of Constance Aston Fowler as undertaking a process of composition rather than a straightforward editorial enterprise of simply ordering verses for her collection. It is, of course, a difficult task to discern editorial or authorial intention as the modern editors of early modern poetry have long understood—swift and often disordered transformations in manuscript witnesses attest to the fluidity of textual authority during this period.<sup>31</sup> However, in the case of a miscellany text, it is this fluid nature of manuscript textual authority that allows editorial intention to be realized: Constance Aston Fowler can claim her agency in creating her 'booke' precisely because it is born of collaborative reading and writing techniques.

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<sup>28</sup> George Gascoigne, 'The letter of G. T. to his very friend H. W. concerning this work', in *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowers* (London, 1573), A2v.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Joshua Eckhardt, *Manuscript Verse Collectors and the Politics of Anti-Courtly Love Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>31</sup> The essays in a 2012 *SEL* special issue explore these unique challenges: Christopher Burlinson and Ruth Connolly (eds.), 'Editing Stuart Poetry', special issue, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 52.1 (2012). See especially Gavin Alexander, 'Final Intentions or Process?', 13-33; Ruth Connolly 'Editing Intention in the Manuscript Poetry of Robert Herrick', 69-84; Jonathan Gibson, 'Synchrony and Process: Editing Manuscript Miscellanies', 85-100; and Alice Eardley, 'Hester Pulter's "Indivisibles" and the Challenges of Annotating Early Modern Women's Poetry', 117-41.

The material and formal decisions that are preserved in HM904 depict a complex process of literary creation. Furthermore, though the manuscript lacks any prefatory text to mark the book as an outward-facing project, the decorations in Aston Fowler's hand present telling evidence that the book was envisaged as a formal work, a carefully orchestrated presentation of her chosen texts. Before and after verses in Aston Fowler's hand, she has drawn embellished borders of varying styles, though generally incorporating dots, circles, and crosses in standard patterns [Figure 6].

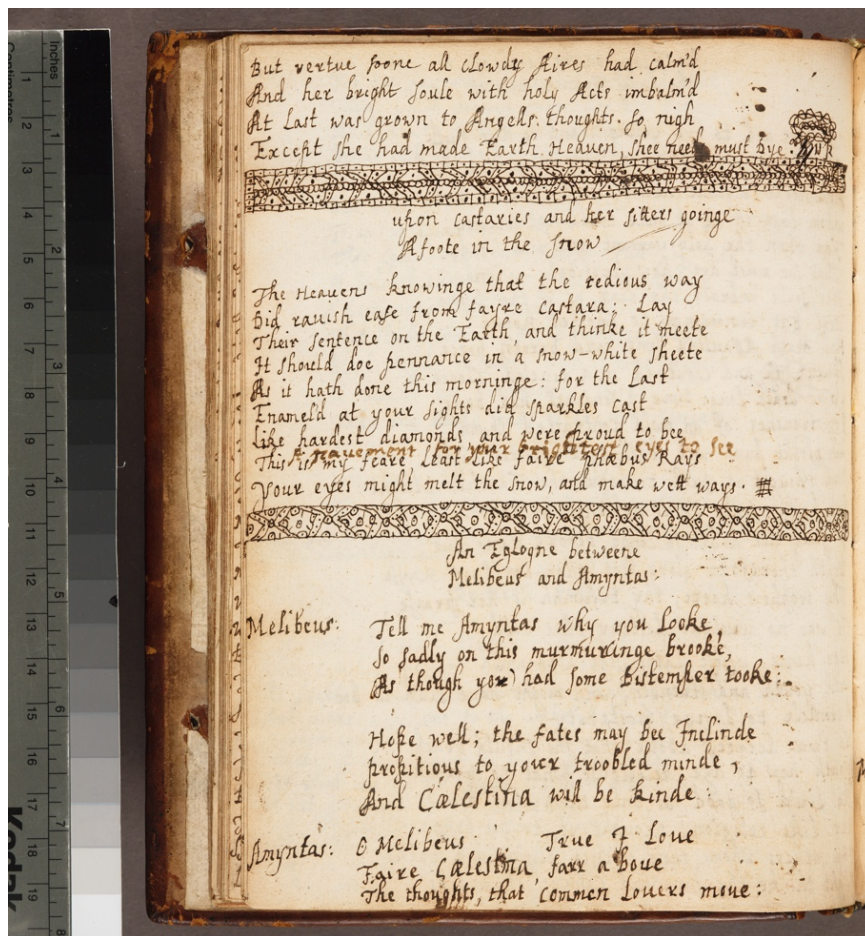


Figure 6 Aston Fowler's distinctive, decorative borders, fol. 28v.

The style of these borders is reminiscent of printer's ornaments found in printed books of the time, such as fleuron borders and even factotum initials.<sup>32</sup> It is certainly

<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of early modern printer's flowers see Juliet Fleming, 'Changed opinions as to flowers', in *Renaissance Paratexts*, ed. by Helen Smith & Louise Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 48-64. See also Hazel Wilkinson, 'Printers' Ornaments and Flowers', in *Book Parts*, ed. by Dennis Duncan & Adam Smyth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 109-22.

an evocative choice by Aston Fowler to materially emulate the textuality of print, suggesting an editorial desire to align her book with the public literary community even beyond the bounds of coterie manuscript culture. Indeed the use of ‘printer’s flowers’ calls to mind the floral imagery often used in relation to poetic miscellanies in general, a commonplace represented in the titles of print miscellanies such as *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowers*. Joshua Eckhardt and Daniel Starza Smith have commented on the early modern miscellany’s reliance ‘on the ancient Greek notion of anthology—or a gathering of flowers’, and they note that ‘English printers and publishers regularly extended the metaphor of the anthology by marketing a host of collections and gardens and garlands, poesies and nosegays, whether their floral contents constituted secular or religious poems or prose’.<sup>33</sup> The etymological connection between the floral motif and the genre also evokes an image of the text as a garden, a metaphor that resounds with the miscellany’s presentation of poetry that is tilled and tended to, designed and developed for enjoyment (among other uses). The early, print examples of the miscellany genre reveal the precedent for creating a poetic collection to be a stylistic choice: books such as Gascoigne’s and Tottel’s are well-designed not only for appreciating the beauty of the poetic form but also the printed book itself. Throughout the seventeenth century, the marketing of aesthetically pleasing books was a growing industry and this concern could tilt the scale toward objectification of literary texts.<sup>34</sup> Yet as I hope to show in this chapter’s coordinated reading of the material and the literary, texts such as HM904 reveal how reader-compilers can be inspired by both the design of print and the materiality of manuscript to engage closely with literary form. Thus it is in this interaction of the material and the literary that the complex process of reading is shaped by the intention and agency of the compiler.

Aston Fowler’s decorative borders are graphic shapes rather than floral, but the practice of embellishing the verses suggests a careful editorial practice: the miscellany is not merely the product of the act of collecting or even just of reading, but it is an attentive act of creation. It is noteworthy, especially in light of the compilation practice I will discuss below, that this editorial flourish is consistent

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<sup>33</sup> Joshua Eckhardt and Daniel Starza Smith, editors’ Introduction to *Manuscript Miscellanies in Early Modern England*, 7.

<sup>34</sup> Seen, for example, in the emergence of the folio format for prestigious editions of popular authors such as Shakespeare and Donne.



throughout the whole of Aston Fowler's editorial process. The distinctive decorations are found on pages she transcribed both before and after the book was bound. For example, the borders photographed above on fol. 28v were added after the transcription of all of the verses on the page in order to fill in the blank space.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, examining the borders as evidence of the timeline for transcription offers several interesting possibilities, indicating a process of copying sections of verse together including embellishment prior to ordering the texts for binding. Viewed in relation to the design of the miscellany as a 'booke', however, it is also worthwhile to consider them as part of the *mise en page*. The visuality of the miscellany's material form is clearly appreciated by its editor and thus manifests in Aston Fowler's aesthetic choices. One such is her effort to vary the designs for each border; though keeping to a simple pattern of design, the attention to detail in creating a medley of material embellishments is striking. This variety of visual elements demonstrates a stylistic penchant for intricate design, a preference that is also reflected in the dense layout of pages that weaves poems tightly with decorative elements. When a transcription leaves a gap at the bottom of a page, for example, Aston Fowler often uses wide borders to fill the blank space and in these spaces she has created some of her most ornate designs.<sup>36</sup> Even in her less carefully transcribed additions to the miscellany, however, Aston Fowler is consistent in adding embellishment to the page: fol. 13r is an example of a messy, likely ad hoc transcription by Aston Fowler post-binding and still she has added a border after each of the two short verses.<sup>37</sup> Here she is mindful to keep to the style of the 'booke', but her copying and editorial practices are also revealed to be fluid. It is this shifting textuality that implicates the material efforts in creating the book within a larger process, one that incorporates the multiple strands of intention and agency found in the miscellany's writings and readings.

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<sup>35</sup> The border in between 'An Elegy on the death of The Lady Frances Draicott' and 'Upon castaries and her sisters' is traced over the descenders of her p, y, and g minuscules in the top verse's final line as well as going over the ascender of the d-miniscule in the title of the second verse. The border inking over final-line descenders is a habit seen throughout the miscellany, see fols. 12v, 26v, 31v, 32v, 33r, 47r, 137r, 146r, 153v. She also varies the size and detail of the border depending on available space, fols. 158v and 186r illustrate the opposite ends of the spectrum.

<sup>36</sup> See for example fols. 15v, 25r, and 31r.

<sup>37</sup> Other examples of later transcriptions by Aston Fowler that keep to the practice of ornamenting the verses are seen on fols. 47r and 185r.



As this introduction to the miscellany's material form makes clear, Aston Fowler's engagement with the verses in the miscellany is clearly not that of a casual reader or collector. She is an active editor and her use of ornaments is creative and purposeful. This impulse to fill blank spaces with ornaments further indicates a formal status for the book as a cherished copy, reminiscent of a public-facing, presentation text. And yet once again the personal and the public dimensions of the



Figure 7 Decorative symbol above Katherine Thimelby's initials, fol. 154v.

miscellany are intertwined in the 'booke': the material adornments display an awareness of print convention and suggest an ambition beyond a private reading and devotional practice, but the miscellany's design is also personalized for the specific context of the Tixall coterie. The most intricate of Aston Fowler's embellishments often correspond to poems written by those

closest to her: her brother Herbert, her future sister-in-law Katherine Thimelby, and her brother-in-law William Pershall, or else decorating poems highly valued.<sup>38</sup> Fol. 154v, for example, includes a typical border, not especially intricate but particularly neatly drawn (Aston Fowler's drawings can be messy), and above the initials MKT designating the poem as one of Katherine Thimelby's is a detailed illustration of a crown [Figure 7]. This doodle is also seen in Aston Fowler's letters to her brother Herbert that discuss Katherine and throughout the miscellany Aston Fowler has embellished Katherine Thimelby's initials similarly: on fols. 31v and 158v she has added doodles above the initials like a crown.<sup>39</sup>

She also uses a decorative cipher of her brother Herbert's initials and occasionally she incorporates the symbol into the design of the decorative border itself, such as on fol. 158r and as attempted on fol. 152v but the symbol is scribbled over and

<sup>38</sup> See folios 26v (poem by Pershall), 31r (a pastoral eclogue associated with Lady Dorothy Shirley), 186r (following a poem by Richard Fanshawe and preceding a poem by Herbert Aston).

<sup>39</sup> The decoration is seen on the overleaf of a letter from Constance to Herbert, B.L. Add. MS 36452, fol. 28v. The letter is printed by Clifford (ed.), Letter XXIII, *Tixall Letters*, 109-24. For a discussion of Aston Fowler's use of symbols for her brother and sister-in-law see La Bell, 'A True Love's Knot', 19.

added above instead.<sup>40</sup> In these examples it is clear that Aston Fowler's ornaments do not merely adorn her book, but also assert her editorial perspective and bestow literary distinction to her favored poets. She is both composing her own book and establishing her literary status, and that of her coterie, through material acts that are particularly designed to present her miscellany's poetry to great effect. By drawing attention to the miscellany's status as a valued literary 'booke', the paratextual ornaments manifest the editorial process as one of reading with intention. Indeed, Aston Fowler's agency adheres to Patricia Pender's formulation of collaborative authorship through editing, which she discusses in relation to Mary Sidney Herbert and Philip Sidney's shared agency. Pender calls on the imagery of the 'ghost in the machine' to describe Mary Sidney Herbert as the elusive force at work behind the scenes of Philip's career as 'the creator and caretaker of her brother's corpus'.<sup>41</sup> As the main hand and compiler at work in the miscellany, Aston Fowler is clearly both a creator and a caretaker. By editing disparate verse into a single volume, she is creating something new—the miscellany is, after all, *her* 'booke'.

Manuscript miscellanies are often described in terms of the fluidity of texts. Harold Love, for instance, has termed the act of adapting text to new circumstances throughout manuscript circulation as 'serial composition', a process that disperses agency across a text's scribal trajectory.<sup>42</sup> Recently Jessica Edmondson has responded with the observation that this fluidity is not itself a stable feature and in fact the 'practices that took advantage of the potential "malleability" of manuscript texts could at times coexist with an interest in authorship and textual integrity'.<sup>43</sup> Aston Fowler's editorial interventions, including her use of scribal ornamentation and particularly in relation to signatures for authors she valued, suggests an interest in commemorating authorship in the texts she collects. Yet she is also creating her own 'booke' and in several verses, poetic form is adapted to her miscellany in unique ways, as I will discuss below. Aston Fowler's act of creation, it is useful to

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<sup>40</sup> See Jenijoy LaBelle, 'A True Love's Knot', for a discussion of the use of the cipher in relation to Herbert Aston and Katherine Thimelby's courtship. I discuss the practice of ciphering in relation to the social work of form in Chapter Three.

<sup>41</sup> Patricia Pender, 'The Ghost and the Machine in the Sidney Family Corpus', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 51.1 (Winter 2011): 74.

<sup>42</sup> Harold Love, *Scribal Publication*, 53. See also, Eckhardt, *Manuscript Verse Collectors*.

<sup>43</sup> Jessica Edmondson, 'Poetic Exchanges and Scribal Agency in Early modern manuscript Culture', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 80.2 (Summer 2017): 250.

remember, is an act of reading, which is itself a variable process inflected by personal feelings, literary tastes, religious conviction, and material concerns in compiling the miscellany. Moreover, these questions of intention and agency are inevitably slippery as the seventeenth-century readers and writers can never fully come into view except through the murky lens of history. Gavin Alexander has described this characteristic elusiveness as a haunting: referring to the difficulties in editing (and reading) Fulke Greville he notes, ‘in a case such as Greville’s, we might instead allow the author to haunt the text we hold in our hands, to continue to render it unstable, provisional, ambivalent, and to require interpretation of process as well as of result’.<sup>44</sup> Aston Fowler—and William Smith—certainly haunt HM904—the tracings of their hands on the page are an ever present reminder of the makers of the miscellany. Thus, in order to read the miscellany as a ‘booke’ of poetry, we must account for this elusive closeness by reading the process of making and mediating verse as well as the result.

In this reading of the miscellany’s material attributes, we can see that Aston Fowler’s editorial activity developed in four distinct phases:

1. Collecting poetry, by soliciting her friends and family as can be seen in her letters and by means of social interactions that place the generation of poetry into her domain as muse and/or patron, as well as from her general reading;
2. Making transcriptions into manuscript booklets and adding decorative elements;
3. Ordering and arranging her ‘booke’: this includes planning, or at least providing ample opportunity for, a larger project by preparing the layout not only with blanks left at the ends of gatherings, but also with a large blank section (fols. 51-135) set aside in the middle;
4. Editing and augmenting the ‘booke’, including the collaborative act of opening the book up to Smith's additions and her select emendations and late additions.

Each step of this process can be traced from material evidence in the miscellany, the object itself opening a portal to its past, albeit only allowing a hazy glimpse.

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<sup>44</sup> Alexander, ‘Final intentions or process?’, 30-31.

Attending to the composition and compilation of the miscellany, however, also brings to the fore questions of the *literary* process. As I will discuss throughout this chapter, Constance Aston Fowler has placed her reading on the page as a kind of literary agency, one that is realized through close engagement with poetry. Indeed, the ‘booke’ as it is presented to its readers is a work of literary form, which means that the follow-up question to my first is not the one which most of the criticism on the Aston Fowler miscellany attempts to answer. The question is not merely how the poems were collected, but why these poems? And what does the process of compilation reveal in relation to the larger question of this thesis, that is how do the material acts of the manuscript’s creation guide the reading process and thereby enact the miscellany’s work of form?

### **Introducing the mediatrix: verses presented to (and by) Constance Aston Fowler**

The miscellany opens with a verse that sheds light on the material and poetic principles at work in the making of the miscellany. It is a fourteen line verse without any signature or attribution, under the heading ‘Verses presented with a beautiful image to Celestinæ’. Deborah Aldrich-Watson posits that the first poem inscribed in the miscellany was copied and authored by Lord Walter Aston, though this attribution contradicts Jenijoy La Belle’s view that the hand is a messier scrawl by Aston Fowler herself, a view which Hackett has allowed to stand.<sup>45</sup> Aldrich-Watson’s consequent theory that Lord Aston presented the bound book inscribed with the dedicatory poem along with the ‘beautiful picture’ of the Virgin Mary on the occasion of his daughter’s marriage has been refuted given the circumstances of the manuscript’s composition during the period of 1635-1640. The material evidence for the theory of initial transcription into loose gatherings or booklets is supported by the fact that for most of Aston Fowler’s transcriptions the pages are cut without margins so that it would have been impossible to have written such neat script both in the gutter and up to the very edge of the page. Given this layout, and the collection of poems in Aston Fowler’s hand into specific groupings, it is more likely that Aston Fowler’s ‘booke’ began with her own desire to collect poems rather than

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<sup>45</sup> Aldrich-Watson, 1, note 1; La Belle, ‘Huntington Aston Manuscript’, 554; Hackett, ‘Unlocking the mysteries’, 106. The hand also displays several distinctive letterforms found in Aston Fowler’s other transcriptions and her letters, see below.

as a gift. Aston Fowler's motivation toward literary creation is attested not only through her letters with Herbert soliciting verses from him, but also in the text of her miscellany. The very first heading in Aston Fowler's miscellany begins, 'Verses presented', and although the poem is addressed to Celestinae, it is also a statement to the readers of her 'booke' that introduces the poems to follow as belonging to the figure of Celestinae (a sobriquet for Aston Fowler).

Upon first inspection of the manuscript in its final iteration, the reader would flip several pages before reaching a poem and in that first encounter with verse one might erroneously judge that the miscellany was hastily composed. It is striking that the care taken in organizing and editing later sections of the miscellany is at odds with the untidy hand and rough composition of the opening verse of fol. 6r. Still the poem is well-suited to its task as preface to a unique literary work, and crucially, it was deliberately placed in a position of prominence as the first poem in the miscellany. The informal hand is noticeably different from most of the transcriptions attributed to Aston Fowler, but there are several examples in the miscellany of Aston Fowler transcribing poems in a script that is decidedly less formal (poems 5 and 6 on fol. 13r and poem 57 on fol. 185r are generally accepted as Aston Fowler's hand).<sup>46</sup> The more informal script retains many of Aston Fowler's habitual letter-forms and although 'verses presented' is one of the messiest transcriptions in the miscellany, it bears several marks of Aston Fowler's hand most notably her p minuscule [Figure 8].<sup>47</sup> The informal script is also noteworthy as it is used for transcriptions made after binding: 'Verses presented' on fol. 6r as well as the poems on fols. 13r and 185r, each have left-hand margins spaced out from the gutter and most noticeably, the script condenses at the end of lines as it approaches the edge of the page.

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<sup>46</sup> Aldrich-Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, 15, 16, 139.

<sup>47</sup> Aston Fowler's p minuscule is unusual. It is formed of a descender, often looped, and an unclosed chamber off of the stem, which extends above slightly—almost becoming an ascender. The unclosed chamber is quite similar to the arch of the h minuscule. Aston Fowler's r minuscule is also distinguishable by the tailing flick at the base of the stem (like a serif), though this is less common in her more casual script. Her g and y minuscule loops are also somewhat distinctive, always quite long and often extending into the line below even in her most formal script. For a seventeenth-century copy-book including the italic hand, see Martin Billingsley, *The pens excellencie, or The secretaries delight* (London, 1618), 18.

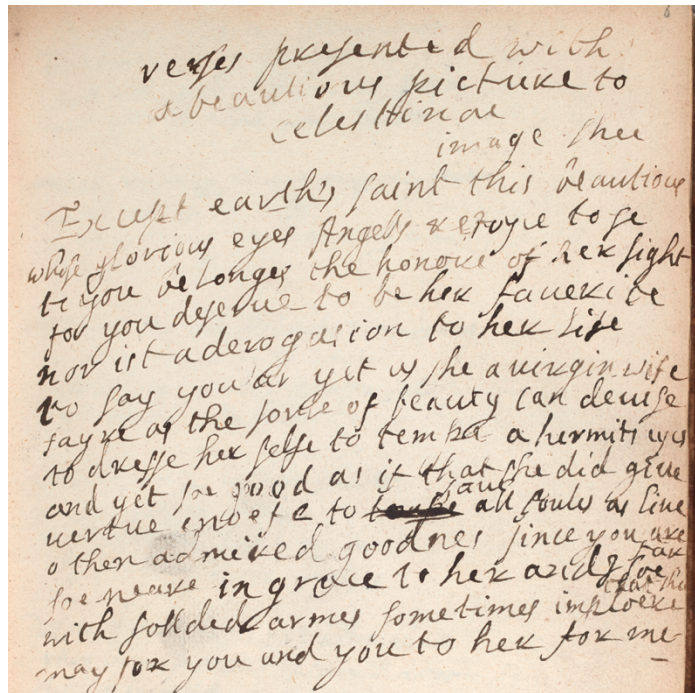


Figure 8 Aston Fowler's messy script, likely transcribed post-binding, fol. 6r.

As Appendix 2 shows, the organization of the miscellany when originally arranged for binding, prior to William Smith's and other post-binding additions, Aston Fowler often grouped several gatherings together (likely also joined together as booklets) and spaced the groupings with blank gatherings. The status of 'Verses presented' as a prefatory verse of sorts is revealing for understanding the compilation of Aston Fowler's 'booke', especially as a cohesive volume as opposed to a composite text or haphazard collection. Although it is not possible to definitively date 'Verses presented' in relation to the other verses added into the miscellany once bound, it is likely that it was added after William Smith's transcriptions as it is not placed at the very front of the initial blank section (in which case Smith, who habitually filled blank spaces as he came across them, would have filled up the intervening leaves before the first pre-binding transcription by Aston Fowler), but rather it is placed just before William Smith's first verse, poem 2 'O Iesu' (fol. 7r-v). Given the rather ornate binding itself, including gold tooling, gilt edging and ribbon closure, the placement of a prefatory verse into the bound book further suggests a formality to the project and Aston Fowler's prevailing vision in the creation of her 'booke'.

Aston Fowler's editorial eye is strongly felt in the first section of the miscellany, which is the most heavily altered from its initial version. Following the binding of Aston Fowler's loose papers into an ornate volume of verse, she can be seen engaging closely with her text through several material interventions (see Appendix 2). The section is now missing several leaves, including two complete gatherings, but it is still possible to envisage the original arrangement of gatherings. Following the first gathering (A) that consists of the pastedown and flyleaves, there is a blank gathering (B) inserted prior to the gatherings containing the first pre-binding transcription, poem 4 'On the Passion' (C, D). This verse crossed over the end of the gathering and onto folio 12, but at some point after the book was bound, the remaining 3 leaves of D were removed. There are 6 stubs of removed pages in between fols. 12 and 13, which suggests that these gatherings (C, D, E) were transcribed together or at least inserted as a group when bound and that the missing pages contained several transcriptions later judged as unnecessary or inappropriate. Fol. 13r-v includes two messy post-binding transcriptions on the recto and the first twenty-one lines of poem 7/8 'O Lord direct my hart' on the verso, and then there are 9 more missing pages: thus it becomes clear that at the time of editing the book, Aston Fowler had filled several gatherings with fol. 13 as a blank casting. When editing the book, then, Aston Fowler excised the original transcription of the opening lines of 'O Lord direct my hart' and needed to keep the blank leaf for re-copying. The two missing gatherings (F, G) between fols. 13 and 14 may also have been copied together with the gathering that survives (H), perhaps including several more devotional poems as these alterations are made in the only section containing explicitly religious poetry in Aston Fowler's hand. In the second section of the miscellany, Aston Fowler arranged her gatherings in larger groups, such as in the section of fols. 135-161 (gatherings MM-SS), though they were not necessarily transcribed together: in fact, within this grouping, the changes in ink indicate as many as six copying stints.<sup>48</sup> In light of this scribal process of arranging several

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<sup>48</sup> In gathering MM, fols. 136r-137r, for example, were copied together in one sitting as companion poems, but there is no space left before the next stint, 137r-139r, which crosses into gathering NN. A page was removed in this stint between fols. 137 and 138 (the final leaf of MM), most likely during the copying due to some error as the verse continues without change in ink on the following page. It is possible that these two gatherings were copied together, perhaps attached as a booklet, which would make sense given that this section of two gatherings is cast off with two blanks. The next stint, also two gatherings (OO, PP), is cast on with two blanks so that, in arranging the groups of gatherings/booklets,

gatherings together, separated by blank casting on/off or by added blank gatherings, these six original gatherings at the beginning of the miscellany may have been conceived of as a grouping at the time of binding, but were radically edited, perhaps at the time of William Smith's addition of further devotional poetry. This discussion of the collation of the manuscript offers a view of Constance Aston Fowler as an active editor of her 'booke'. Her editorial reading is a fluid yet purposeful process that connects texts together and draws out a narrative of poetry in motion. The strong force of this refining process reinforces that the placement of 'Verses presented' as the first verse should not be taken lightly.

Thus, despite the messy script, it can be supposed that 'Verses presented' was intentionally given the place of prominence in the miscellany. I propose that this placement and the poem's subject matter together can be read as a unique statement of literary agency. The full title or heading—'verses presented with a beautiful picture to Celestinae'—describes a precise moment for the poetic setting and places Aston Fowler at the center of the scene of the poem's origin. The picture of the Virgin Mary is now lost nor is there conclusive evidence of this opening dedicatory poem praising Aston Fowler being presented as part of a collection of multiple verses despite the heading describing it as such.<sup>49</sup> Instead the poetic gift is presented on its own, serving to introduce Aston Fowler as a figure of poetic, social, and religious power. She is reader, muse, and patron: a multi-faceted literary identity that is personal and social, her reading and, notably, her faith working not only for herself but for her community. In this context, it is quite natural that the opening

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the blanks create separation between discrete collections of connected verses in the bound book. Succeeding these booklets/gatherings there is no gap at all and three more gatherings (QQ-SS, fols. 150r-159r) are clearly copied together, though transcription took place over several stints. Here again I think it likely that the gatherings may have been sewn together as a booklet. This would explain the changes in ink with new copying stints that do not always align with the end of a gathering, as in the case of fol. 153v where the ink changes at the bottom of the page in transcribing poem 52 'The ansure' and continues onto fol. 154r, the beginning of a new gathering. Here Aston Fowler copies the companion poems 51 and 52 ('To the honourable G T', fols. 152v-153v, and 'The ansure', fol. 153v-154v) across the break of gatherings (QQ and RR), which she does again in her transcription of 'To My honer'd sister' (gatherings RR and SS). In these sections, Aston Fowler is transcribing poems together in groups and arranging them for binding with care. The fluidity of scribal publication is balanced with her editorial agency in presenting her 'booke' as a stable volume according to her tastes.

<sup>49</sup> The late transcription of this poem post-binding suggests that it was not linked to any of the poems transcribed before binding, which make up the bulk of Aston Fowler's contributions.



verse does not state any comprehensive vision for the literary community centered at Tixall and celebrated in the miscellany, but instead serves as an introduction to a text that is fluidly composed, professing the varied literary agency of the young woman at the center of it all.

The untidy composition lends an openness to the verse and an ambiguity to the form of the poem on the page, as quoted in full below.<sup>50</sup> The phrase ‘image shee’ stands alone above the first line, a fragment of the opening line that starts just below. Although it belongs to the line below, the material text separates the phrase apart and above so that it is easy to read on its own, conjuring a female figure onto the page. Thus the miscellany opens with a woman in view, the persons of Constance Aston Fowler and the Virgin Mary merging into a single form as the reader, lacking the particular picture linked to the verse, encounters the scribal error without initially knowing which woman to call upon with the injunction to ‘image shee’. It is an innocuous quirk of Aston Fowler’s copying, but this material fact is reminder of the unique process of manuscript compilation: the miscellany records Aston Fowler’s version of the text, informed by the circumstances of her reading and writing. The poem reads:

Image shee

Except<sup>51</sup> earth’s saint this beautious  
 whose glorious eyes Angells reloyce to se  
 to you belongs the honore of her sight  
 for you deserue to be her fauerite  
 nor ist a derogacion to her life 5  
 to say you’ar yet as she a uirgin wife  
 fayre as the soule of beauty can deuise  
 to dresse her selfe to tempe a hermits eyes  
 and yet soe good as if that she did giue  
 saue  
 uertue enoefe<sup>52</sup> to ~~tempe~~ all soules as liue 10

o then admired goodnes since you are  
far  
 soe neare in grace to her and I soe  
that she  
 with follded armes sometimes imploere  
 May for you and you to her for me.

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<sup>50</sup> I have retained Aldrich-Watson’s formatting, which recreates where Aston Fowler has been forced to copy the ends of lines cramped above the main line due to condensing at the edge of the page.

<sup>51</sup> Accept

<sup>52</sup> enough

Although the ‘beautious picture’ is absent, the materiality of the devotional image is evocatively present in these lines. This practice of poetic meditation aided by an image is described again in verse 28, ‘In meditation where I sate’ (fols. 36v-37v),<sup>53</sup> which begins with a description of the speaker ‘thinking of my soules estate / beholding with Attentive eye / christ his picture that stood me by’ (lines 2-4). It is not only the ‘Attentive eye’ of a solitary act of artistic appreciation, however, that is at work in ‘Verses presented’, but rather the invocation of sight, multiplied and interactive, calls attention to the power of perspective. As *Celestinae*—the sobriquet used in several other poems connected to William Pershall in particular—views the picture, the speaker directs her gaze, along with the gazes of a host of angels, to Mary’s eyes, which are looking at *Celestinae* in turn. The visual force of these multiplying gazes is linked to the sacred potential of the Virgin Mary’s favour. The power of sight is forcefully acknowledged in these lines, serving as a reminder of the bodily experience of reading itself: the picture of the Virgin may be missing, but the verses then become the ‘beautious image’ that the reader is urged to accept. The verses are thus framed as presented *to* Aston Fowler, but as her active compilation and editorial practice suggests she is also presenting the verses to her reader. In the transposition of the ‘beautious image’ onto the miscellany’s verses, the power of the Virgin’s sight is then captured not in the art object but in the poetic form that gazes at the reader from the page. By claiming the ‘honore of her sight’ for Aston Fowler, then, this opening verse illustrates the role of the mediatrix—one who mediates—as integral to the process of reading: Aston Fowler presents her verses so that we may read them as read by her. Just as the presentation of the ‘beautious image’ requires the observer to view the Virgin’s eyes so that she may bestow her gaze.

The speaker goes on to praise *Celestinae* not only as deserving of special esteem from the Virgin, but even as her equal: ‘nor ist a derogacion to her life / To say you’ar yet as she a uirgin wife’ (5-6). This styling of *Celestinae* as a virgin wife refers to Aston Fowler directly and suggests a dating for this poem. Aston Fowler was married to Walter Fowler (b. 1620) in or about 1635 when she and her husband were fourteen and fifteen respectively, but Aston Fowler did not begin cohabitating with her husband for several years and the couple’s first son was not born until

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<sup>53</sup> Aldrich-Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poem 28: 72-74.

1644. This poem, then, coincides with the years between Aston Fowler's marriage negotiations and the consummation of the marriage, the period to which Helen Hackett has dated the majority of the poems copied in Aston Fowler's hand (c. 1636 - 1639). Celestinae's unique status as a virgin wife and her likeness to the Virgin Mary is figured as distinctly compelling when juxtaposed against physical beauty, and in the following lines, the power of virginity is intertwined with a conspicuously sexualized gaze: 'fayre as the soule of beauty can deuise / to dresse her selfe to tempe a hermits eyes' (7-8). The physicality of the female form is vividly conjured in these lines, specifically attractive and tempting even to a cloistered monk. Yet the speaker gives the image an ironic twist by keeping the 'soule of beauty' detached from her sexually attractive charms. Here the poem presents the Virgin Mary as the idealized form of female beauty, with her body consciously evoked in the verse. The slip of copying 'tempe' for 'sauē' further intertwines the transcendence of the Holy Mother with her status as a sexualized woman, her reproductive and salvific potential knitted together on the page albeit erroneously. The conceit is enhanced by the materiality of the 'beautious picture' as a physically perceptible sign and by the poem's fixation on vision: the eye is tempted, but the 'soule of beauty' is merely dressed in the physical form of woman. The speaker asserts a divide between the Virgin Mary's physical beauty and her sacred perfection and yet his verse nevertheless reminds the reader how easily the material can be substituted for the spiritual.

In an ironic twist, at the point of professing the Virgin's perfect virtue, the verse falters: the profuse grammar of line 9 straining not only the sense of the line but the flow of the verse as well: 'and yet soe good as if that she did giue / uertue enoefe to ~~tempe~~ saue all soules as liue' (9-10). Beginning with the belabored conjunction 'and yet', the line structures the crucial opposition of physical beauty and spiritual perfection. The force of the juxtaposition is somewhat muddled, however, by the cumbersome conditional phrase 'as if that', which qualifies the Virgin's agency in confusing syntax. Subsequently, the critical statement falls awkwardly, the enjambment producing metrical ambiguity on 'uertue enoefe': flowing from line 9, the line begins with a trochaic foot and the copying error further interrupts the statement. The verse has an actively maintained metrical regularity as is seen in the syncopes, which are unmarked in lines 1 ('beautious') and 2 ('glorious') and explicitly directed in lines 5 ('ist') and 6 ('you'ar'). Here, though, as the reader is

introduced to the paradox of the Virgin the poetic form itself becomes more difficult. Yet while the grammar of these lines is strained, the verse does not fail in asserting the salvific power of the Virgin's virtue. The power of the Mother of God is interwoven in the opposition of the material and the spiritual. Moreover, the sacred agency of the Virgin, specifically coded in her beauty and her virtue, is conspicuously singular and solitary. She has 'uertue enoefe to saue all soules as liue', a striking statement of grace in her own person rather than as co-redemptrix with Christ, who is absent from the verse entirely.

In conjuring the solitary 'image shee', the verse urges an active devotion—figured through reading, given the loss of the portrait—that is focused on the person of the Virgin, but its status in the miscellany invites a co-subject into the reading process. Indeed, the poem elevates *Celestinae*, whose name implies proximity to or association with the heavens, to the role of *mediatrix*:

o then admired goodnes since you are  
soe neare in grace to her and I soe far  
with foldded armes sometimes imploere that she  
may for you and you to her for me

11-14

The metrical break introduced by the spondaic foot at the start of line 11 again produces a heightened impact: a forced pause in the exclamation to *Celestinae*, 'o then', introduces an emotional urgency to the verse. Here the verse is most recognizable as a prefatory text as the speaker appeals directly to *Celestinae* for favor. This is a starkly feminist evocation of literary capital and the speaker is notably self-conscious of the gendered agency at work in this formulation: the *mediatrix* is a controversial figure of female devotional power. In the context of the verse's Marian devotion, *Celestinae* is placed in proximity to heavenly grace, filling the space reserved for Mary as the middleman (or middle-woman) in Catholic theology. Marian devotion and the Virgin's intercessory power was one of the most hotly derided and debated aspects of Catholic belief and practice in seventeenth-century England. That anti-Catholic discourse so often linked the Virgin's sexualized body to the carnality of papist devotion signals a potent inflection point in the verse's work of form as a prefatory text: the placement of 'Verses presented' as an introductory text directly signals a Catholic identity, but crucially it is a feminine

devotional and poetic power that is invoked.<sup>54</sup> By celebrating the intercessory power of the Virgin while simultaneously honoring the literary status of Celestinae, the miscellany makes a dual-claim for the work of form presented in its pages. The mediatrix possesses a readerly agency that is determined through both faith and poetry. Taking up her book, the reader is thus ushered into a process of devotion as

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<sup>54</sup> For a recent comprehensive study of early modern Mariology see Gary Waller, *The Virgin Mary in Late Medieval and Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Waller explicitly links the Reformers' censure of Marian devotion to their discomfort with materialist devotion. In the Protestant imagination, the controversial Mariological focus on the Virgin's sexualized body was linked to the carnality of early modern Catholicism. Although the materialism of early modern religion has been explored across the confessional divide—Richard Rambuss's study of devotion as desire in seventeenth-century religious poetry is especially compelling—the misogyny traced by Waller in his evaluation of Reformist conceptions of the Virgin Mary is an example of a clear fault line in early modern devotion. Frances Dolan's influential work on the construction of anti-Catholic discourse through the concept of disorderly women demonstrates the extent to which the Protestant denunciation of Catholicism is a rejection of both feminized religious ideology and transgressive devotional practice. There is also a political vein to anti-Marian discourse during this period, stemming from anxieties about the influence of the Catholic queens. See Richard Rambuss, *Closet Devotions* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998) and Frances Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), especially chapter three on Henrietta Maria and Mariolatry. For an earlier examination of Mariology across the changing pre- and post-Reformation landscape, see Donna Spivey Ellington, *From Sacred Body to Angelic Soul: Understanding Mary in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001). For an early analysis of Marian literature focusing on the 1630s, see Danielle Clarke, 'The Iconography of the Blush: Marian Literature of the 1630s', in *Voicing Women: Gender and Sexuality in Early modern Writing*, ed. by Kate Chedgzoy, Melanie Hansen, & Suzanne Trill (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1996), 111-28. Other recent studies of Marian devotion and Mariology in early modern culture include Regina Buccola and Lisa Hopkins (eds.) *Marian Moments in Early Modern British Drama* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) and Bridget Heal, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Early Modern Germany: Protestant and Catholic Piety, 1500-1648* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Heal's analysis reveals how Reformist devotion focused on Mary as the preeminent example of Christian virtue, especially in humility, and rejected her role as divine intercessor. This accords with Ellington's earlier evaluation, which found a shift from a veneration of an 'active' Virgin in Medieval Christianity to a 'quiet and passive' Virgin following the Reformation, in both Reformist and Counter-Reformist contexts. Yet the popularity of Marian devotion in early modern Catholic poetry, most notably in Robert Southwell and Richard Crashaw, as well as the continuing debates in polemical tracts over the role of Mary suggests that such an easy narrative of Reformation Mariology cannot be conclusively asserted. The conflict between Robert Persons and Edmund Bunny over the Virgin's state of purity and role at the foot of the Cross demonstrates the vehement dispute over the figure of Mary, see Robert Persons, *The First Booke of the Christian Exercise* (Rouen, 1582); Edmund Bunny, *A Booke of Christian Exercise appertaining to the Resolvtion* (London, 1584). The conflict led to an impassioned defense in print of Marian doctrine including the anonymously authored *Maria Trumphans* (St Omer, 1635). For discussion of this controversy see Robert Miola, 'Stabat Mater Dolorosa: Mary at the Foot of the Cross', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 48.3 (2017): 653-79.

well as a literary engagement.

The gesture of the speaker approaching *Celestinae* with ‘folded armes’ to implore her intercession with the Virgin is intriguing, denoting a bodily action that is not an accessory to the prayer but a constituent part. The syntax foregrounds the pose, since the subject of action (*Celestinae*, styled not by name but by the fact of the speaker’s admiration) was called upon two lines earlier, sufficiently removed that the adjectival phrase ‘with folded armes’ functions almost as a synecdochal phrase in the line that introduces the pivotal prayer. The description conjures an image of the traditional gesture of prayer, with arms bent and hands brought together



Figure 9 Antonello da Messina, *Maria der Verkündigung*, c.1473, oil on panel, 42.5 x 32.8 cm. Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

Artwork in the public domain; photography provided by Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

either palm to palm or crossed before the chest. Setting this scene within a woman’s closet evokes the conventional depiction of the Annunciation, the Virgin Mary caught in the act of reading and posed with her book, sometimes foregrounded as in *The Munich Virgin Annunciate* by Antonello da Messina (1473) [Figure 9]. Messina’s Virgin is presented alone with the book open and its columns of text in view across two pages. Mary’s folded arms, in this image, mirror the open book on the table before her, visually linking text and body, as well as Mary’s affective experience, captured as much in the vivid shape of her hands as in her plaintive expression. It is tempting to imagine the missing ‘beautious image’ referred to by ‘Verses presented’ as a similar portrait: the allusion to the shared physical state of ‘virgin wife’ is suggestive in this regard.

Though we may never know how closely the verse and the portrait were linked, it is nevertheless constructive to read the verse that survives in relation to a material experience of devotion: notably, the verse imagines a scene of sensory devotion in viewing a ‘beauteous image’ and in the physical act of prayer. By evoking a formal

either palm to palm or crossed before the chest. Setting this scene within a woman’s closet evokes the conventional depiction of the Annunciation, the Virgin Mary caught in the act of reading and posed with her book, sometimes foregrounded as in *The Munich Virgin Annunciate* by Antonello da Messina (1473) [Figure 9]. Messina’s Virgin is presented alone with the book open and its columns of text in view across two pages. Mary’s folded arms, in this image, mirror the open

act of veneration to an image, especially of the Virgin, and implicating that devotion in a social and sexualized context—seen in the earlier lines mimicking secular love poetry (‘fayre as the soule of beauty can deuse’) as well as the scribal slip ‘tempe’ for ‘saue’—the speaker can be read as self-consciously responding to Protestant fears of devilish popery rather than heedlessly authenticating those fears. Regardless of the speaker’s intention with respect to religious polemics, the contentious context is readily apparent in the text and discernible to informed readers. Moreover, these subtleties arise in the reading through close awareness of the work of form.

Although the reading process of this thesis is vastly distant from that undertaken by the manuscript’s compilers and early readers, the practice of reading for form allows us to glimpse the multifaceted processes of meaning that are revealed across the miscellany’s textual lifetime. The ‘work’ of the poetic form as a prefatory text as well as the lines themselves produce in ‘Verses presented’ a clever presentation of a self-aware feminine, Catholic agency mediating reading and material devotion. The verse sets the tone for the ‘booke’ as a text beholden to the complex literary agency animated by the mediating process.

This poetic act of transposing the Marian theology of mediatrix onto Celestinae, and thereby onto Aston Fowler, is a radical reconfiguring of the sacred and the literary. The term ‘mediatrix’ was available to seventeenth-century writers in diverse metaphorical configurations, including in relation to the transmission of literary texts. While use of the term in the seventeenth century was most common in printed discourses on religion, especially in controversies over the Virgin Mary, the word is found in discussions of astronomy and politics, as well as in literature.<sup>55</sup> John Donne notably used the metaphor in relation to his literary relationships, referring in a letter to Henry Goodere to his future patron Lucy Harrington Russell, Countess of

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<sup>55</sup> Some examples of the diverse uses of the term include: in Robert Tofte’s poem on lost love the speaker describes his beloved as ‘my *Mediatrix*, my best *Aduocate*’ [Tofte, *Alba, The months minde of a melancholy louer* (London, 1598), sig. G6v]; Michel de Montaigne’s essay ‘Of friendship’ depicts the ‘inexplicable and fatall power’ of friendship as a ‘*Mediatrix* of this indissoluble vnion’ [Montaigne, *Essays*, tran. by John Florio (London, 1613), 92]; Jean-Louis Guez Balzac discusses the exchange of books and pronounces his friend’s power in recommending texts as that of a ‘*Mediatrix*’, [Balzac, ‘To Madame Desloges’, *A collection of some modern epistles* (Oxford, 1639), 150-53]; in *The pseudo-martyr*, John Milton recounts Queen Henrietta Maria’s influence over King Charles as that of a ‘mediatrix’ [Milton, *The life and reigne of King Charls, or, The pseudo-martyr* (London, 1651), 62-63]; and William Lilly characterizes the moon as a ‘*Mediatrix* between Superior and Inferior Bodies’ [Lilly, *Anima Astrologiae* (London, 1676), 19-20].

Bedford, as a potential ‘Mediatrice’ for his writings.<sup>56</sup> This evocative integration of literary and devotional agency has been picked up by Julie Crawford and applied more specifically to the role of women in textual production in the seventeenth-century. Crawford’s work on the women of the Sidney circle reveals that the intercessory nature of early modern women’s textual acts such as patronage, reading, and editing were active engagements that reveal how ‘texts and textual meanings are produced by both writers and their addressees, and in moments of consumption as well as creation’.<sup>57</sup> This view is particularly productive when considering literary agency in the compilation of verse miscellanies and is related to the act of literary ‘vouching’, a term coined by Paul Trolander and Zynep Tenger and applied specifically to Aston Fowler’s role in her literary community.<sup>58</sup>

As several critics have noted, the letters between brother and sister from the years of Herbert’s residence with their father Lord Aston in Spain, 1635-1639, offer a unique view into the relationships and exchanges upon which seventeenth-century literary communities were founded.<sup>59</sup> Trolander and Tenger attest to the social and evaluative function of Aston Fowler’s ‘vouching’, but they relegate her agency to the social sphere, reducing her work to a ‘channel through whom her brother’s verse is circulated in order to reap the prestige of being the first in the group to have it and distribute it’.<sup>60</sup> Yet the role Constance claims for herself in these letters is not merely that of reader; she inhabits a more authorial space, becoming not only a ‘voucher’, but also something more active and complex. In her letters to Herbert, Aston Fowler not only solicits and sends poems, she also critiques the poetry she receives, imparting the blessing of her active reading and literary taste. Writing effusively to her brother, she gives an account of the value of the poetry to her community: ‘I received with this your last letter...which you had writt afore your being sicke, and in it you sent me a copy of your verses made to Mr Win—. They are much

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<sup>56</sup> John Donne, ‘To my good friend S. H. G.’, *Letters to severall persons of honour* (London, 1651), 193.

<sup>57</sup> Julie Crawford, *Mediatrice: Women, Politics, and Literary Production in Early modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 4.

<sup>58</sup> Trolander and Tenger, *Sociable Criticism in England, 1625-1725* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2007) 21-35.

<sup>59</sup> La Belle, ‘True Love’s Knot’, 14-21; Hackett, ‘Women and Catholic Manuscript Networks’, 1097-98; Trolander and Tenger, *Sociable Criticism*, 33-34; Victoria Burke, ‘Women and early seventeenth-century culture: four miscellanies’, *The Seventeenth Century* 12.2 (1997): 135-39.

<sup>60</sup> Trolander and Tenger, *Sociable Criticism*, 34.



commended by all, as they deserve; and you have ganed the English ladye's harts extreamely by them, to see you so constant a favorite of ther miritts'.<sup>61</sup> The community of readers sharing Herbert Aston's poems is expanded in Aston Fowler's description to include all 'English ladye's harts', the communal power of sharing poetry crossing the bounds of local society and connecting both reader and writer with a wider culture.

Aston Fowler is more personal in her opinions in another letter, critiquing her future sister-in-law Katherine Thimelby's writing: 'With such infinit affection doe I admire each word she writes'.<sup>62</sup> Though the affection of close friends and the social function of verse are prominent in these literary connections, the reading described is specifically critical. She notes the praise lavished upon her brother's verses is owing to 'ther miritts' and the admiration she gives to Katherine Thimelby is a result of close reading, an appreciation of 'each word'. In her insistent request for more verses, she displays her discerning taste.<sup>63</sup> After commending her brother's verses within an open community of admirers, Aston Fowler clarifies her role as mediatrix, 'I have sent you all the verses that I could gett perpetuly, never omieting the sending of any...that were good ones; therefore, I desire you will make an end of the quarell, with sending mee some as sune as you can; for I asure you, they can not come to one that will more esteem them'.<sup>64</sup> The driving force for her literary activities is stated clearly: 'I want some good ones to put in my booke'. Though the exchange of verse is embedded within the social ties and intimate affection that mark the personal experience of her community, the miscellany is claimed as an act of critical engagement and creative impulse toward the composition of a 'booke'. Viewed in this light and alongside her editorial agency in making her miscellany, the literary work shown in Aston Fowler's letters is an active process of reading for form as an editor, a 'voucher', and a mediatrix.

Given the explicit relationship established in the opening verse between Aston

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<sup>61</sup> Constance Aston Fowler to Herbert Aston, Dec 8 1636, Letter XX, in Clifford (ed.), *Tixall Letters*, 96.

<sup>62</sup> Letter XXIV, in Clifford (ed.), *Tixall Letters*, 133.

<sup>63</sup> Her insistence is dramatically voiced to Herbert: 'You writt me word in your letter by Mr Fanshaw, that heretofore you sent me verses which begun (Whilest here eclipsed,) this letter I did never receive, nor verses, which I am most truely afflicted att; and if you doe truely love me, doe not denye me, but send them me againe; for you know not how much I suffer that they are lost. Therefore, prethee dere brother, send them agane, and I hope they will have better locke.' Letter XXIV, in Clifford (ed.), *Tixall Letters*, 132.

<sup>64</sup> Letter, XX, in Clifford (ed.), *Tixall Letters*, 95.

Fowler and the Virgin, the term ‘mediatrix’ is especially advantageous. Although Crawford’s application of the term to early modern women’s writing harnessed the political resonance of the term ‘mediatrix’, her work fails to account for its theological significance. Adopting the term as removed from the Mariological context, Crawford describes the women of the staunchly Protestant Sidney circle as mediatrixes, ‘politically and culturally powerful, but with an edge of oppositionism; at once a patron to be honored and a force to be reckoned with; a maker of texts and a maker of careers’.<sup>65</sup> The theology of the term, however, cannot be overlooked in ‘Verses presented’, as the Virgin is given a specifically literary life through Aston Fowler and her miscellany. The Mariological significance of the act of mediation was a topic of heated controversy during the seventeenth century, especially as it related to questions of intercession and redemption. The Protestant rejection of Mary’s role as intercessor correlates to the Reformation’s renegotiation of the process of grace as Reformers did away with another perceived obstacle between the believer and God. The Protestant tract *A gagge for the Pope, and the Iesuits*, for example, staunchly asserts that ‘Christ is our onely *Mediator*’ and condemns the Catholic veneration of the Virgin Mary as ‘arrogancy, nay blasphemy vnheard of’.<sup>66</sup> Counter-Reformation Catholic doctrine, however, balances Christ and Mary in the process of salvation with more nuance than the author of *A gagge*’s metaphor ‘that as the necke is betweene the head, and the body, so the *Virgin Mary* is between *Christ* and his *Church*’.<sup>67</sup> The author of *Maria triumphans* addresses the vexed issue by placing the Virgin as a link between heaven and Earth, but with a mix of actions and agency: ‘*Hayle thou, who passing, as Mediatrix betweene God, and Man, procurest that the interposed Enemyes may at length be ouerthrowne, and earthly things ioyned to Celestiall*’.<sup>68</sup> In this formulation, it is through Mary’s liminal position that she gains agency to ‘*procureth*’ the ability for man’s sin to be ‘*ouerthrowne*’. Here she is an enabling condition for the process of redemption, as the author goes on to explain, ‘Where this Authour speaketh of the Mediation of *Intercession* only; not of *Redemption*, which belongeth only to Christ’.<sup>69</sup>

This awareness of the role of the mediatrix inflects the sobriquet of *Celestinae* as

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<sup>65</sup> Crawford, *Mediatrix*, 2.

<sup>66</sup> Anon., *A gagge for the Pope, and the Iesuits* (London, 1624), B4v-C1r.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Anon., *Maria Triumphans*, details F4v-F5r..

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*

a stylized compliment of Aston Fowler's proximity to the heavenly realm with another layer of Mariological meaning: 'you are / soe neare in grace to her and I soe far' (12). The doctrine of the Assumption, rejected as apocryphal by Reformers, teaches that because of Mary's perpetual purity, her human body was physically accepted to heaven—the nearness is thus of body and of soul. By depicting Aston Fowler's role as mediatrix within the Mariological context, 'Verses presented' places Celestinae among heavenly things, in between the human and the divine. Or rather, by the literary connotation, she is in between the authors of the texts she collected and the readers of her miscellany.

It is of note, however, that the speaker of 'Verses presented' conspicuously omits any mention of Christ in his description of the passage of grace, celebrating the mediating and intercessory act instead of the origination of grace with Christ the Saviour. Although Catholic doctrine delineated between the acts of intercession and redemption, 'Verses presented' is concerned with the mediating agency of the Virgin and transposes this focus onto Celestinae as a reader and literary mediatrix. This is striking not as evidence of the sacrilege Protestant critics feared in Catholic veneration of the Virgin—the poems directly following this one profess a strong Christ-centered devotion—but as a recognition of the agency inherent in acts of female devotion that are expansive and relational. The reliance on recusant women in the Jesuit mission and the attacks by Protestants on these close relationships reveal an awareness of the potency of women's roles in household devotion as well as within the wider context of English Catholicism.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, the potency of Catholic women's devotion for the vitality of the Church was contextualized by the

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<sup>70</sup> Marotti, 'Alienating Catholics in Early Modern England: Recusant Women, Jesuits and Ideological Fantasies', in *Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism in Early Modern English Texts*, ed. by Artur Marotti, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 15-20. Marotti cites the Thimelby's grandmother and maternal great aunt, the Vaux sisters, as prominent examples of the Jesuit mission's reliance upon recusant women, their devotional lives reaching beyond their personal relationship with confessors to affect the fate of English Catholicism at large. The essays in Caroline Bowden and James Kelly (ed.), *The English Convents in Exile, 1600-1800: Communities, Culture and Identity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013) demonstrate the role of English nuns within the wider framework of the international Catholic community. The work of Jaime Goodrich and Heather Wolfe on women's role in the English Catholic community's textual life, both at home and abroad, is also illuminating, esp. Goodrich, 'Translating Lady Mary Percy: Authorship and Authority among the Brussels Benedictines', in Bowden and Kelly (eds.) *The English Convents*, 109-22; and Wolfe, 'Dame Barbara Constable: Catholic Antiquarian, Advisor, and Closet Missionary', in *Catholic Culture in Early Modern England*, edited by Ronald Corthell, et. al. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 158-88.

revelation of the Virgin's intercessory role, thus drawing out the mediating function of their piety.<sup>71</sup>

In 'Verses presented', the female, Catholic devotion of Celestinae is one that acts in the interstices, in the meeting of gazes and the exchange of grace. The muddled grammar of the final lines breaks down the boundaries between the individuals involved in this act of devotion: 'with foldded armes sometimes imploere that she / may for you and you to her for me' (13-14). The speaker, Celestinae, and the Virgin flow together in the multiplication of personal pronouns. The expansion across the enjambment and the missing verb for the final line's proliferation of prepositions heightens the sense that the devotional agency is in flux. Even more noticeable is the change in meter: the final line breaks the iambic pentameter and instead employs a transitional cretic foot (- ~ -), 'may for you', to balance the uneven syllables of the tetrametric line. Although it is an unusual rhythm, the line is structured by a mirroring of the mediating actions as the speaker makes the request that the Virgin 'may for you' in syntax and rhythm that repeats in the paired action of 'you to her'. This unusual formal intricacy makes it even more difficult to decipher where the agency of this transmission of grace originates at the climax of the verse. Instead it is shared and spread across the line, devotional agency only coming into view in the act of mediation.

This celebration of the mediatrix introduces the text as a fluid and collaborative process of making that opens the text to the reader. This dynamic agency of the mediatrix is created in a process of reading that forges a relationship between the individual reader-compiler and the literary community, as well as between reader-editor and poetic form. Aston Fowler's work is collaborative and conversant, both in the partnership with the Jesuit missionary William Smith and in the substance of the

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<sup>71</sup> The mediating function of women's virtue is attested through the anxieties of control exhibited in early modern conduct books. To cite an early example, in the preface to the 1529 English translation of Juan Luis Vive's *Instruction of a Christian Woman*, Richard Hyrde justifies the project of conduct books with reference to this mediating process: 'For what is more frutefull than the good education and ordre of women, the one halfe of all mankynd, and that halfe also, whose good behaviour or evyll tatchis giveth or bereveth the other halfe, almost all the holle pleasure and commodite of this present lyfe, byside the furtherance or hyndrance forther growyng there upon, concernyn the lyfe to come?'. See Richard Hyrde, preface to *Instruction of a Christen Woman*, by Juan Luis Vives (London, 1529), 12v. For a discussion of early modern conduct literature see Jessica Murphy, *Virtuous Necessity: Conduct Literature and the Making of the Virtuous Woman in Early Modern England* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2015).

miscellany. The text that she claims as her ‘booke’ is the result of reading that sets poetic form in motion. Its prefatory verse prompts this fluid, mediating process of reading to continue in the miscellany’s afterlife. As we will see in the following section, the poems in Aston Fowler’s miscellany transact relationships between the devotional and the secular, the personal and the communal, the book and the reader.

### **The ‘middle place’ and collaborative work of form: cooperative reading and composition in HM904**

Critics have often noted Aston Fowler’s miscellany as a unique devotional text and indeed it is the Catholic context that has garnered renewed attention for the manuscript in the meeting of two growing fields of critical interest: the study of early modern Catholic texts and early modern women’s writing.<sup>72</sup> The identification of William Smith vere Southerne as a Jesuit priest in ministry for the English Mission in the 1640s reinvigorated this vein of criticism, but the theory of Aston Fowler’s and Smith’s wholly distinct scribal processes has obscured the collaborative work of form of the miscellany’s material devotion. The choice of prefatory verse highlights the layering of mediation at work in the text, Aston Fowler’s editorial agency rising her to the role of mediatrix within the complex system of material devotion. Veneration of the Virgin as mediatrix draws attention to the passage of devotion, which one seventeenth-century treatise describes particularly well as a passage through ‘the middle place’: ‘she possesses the middle place, between the Sun and the Moon; that is, between her son *Christ Jesus*, and the Church Militant upon earth...we mortalls should have nothing, but what passes through *Mary*’s hands.’<sup>73</sup> So, too, it is true that the verses in the miscellany pass through several hands in the process of production and reception of the manuscript.

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<sup>72</sup> Alison Shell and Arthur Marotti have discussed the miscellany in relation to the circulation of Catholic texts, see Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy, and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 98-100 and Marotti, *Manuscript, Print and the English Renaissance Lyric*, 45-46, 51. Femke Molekamp has read the miscellany’s unique Passion poem, ‘On the Passion’, alongside other devotional poetry by early modern women, see Molekamp, *Women and the Bible in Early Modern England: Religious Reading and Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 196-206. Jenna Lay has also placed the miscellany in the context of Catholic women’s writing, see *Beyond the Cloister: Englishwomen and Early Modern Literary Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), chapter 4.

<sup>73</sup> A. C., *Jesus, Maria, Joseph, or The devout pilgrim of the ever blessed Virgin Mary* (Amsterdam, 1657), 68.

Placing the miscellany in an ongoing process and a collaborative space—‘the middle place’, to use the evocative Marian term—gives the role of mediatrix even more significance when considering the relationship between Aston Fowler and William Smith. My proposed timeline for the miscellany’s compilation is significant in order to comprehend the work of the ‘mediatrix’, especially for this central relationship between the miscellany’s two main scribes. Although Aston Fowler’s transcriptions have a fair amount of evidence dating the majority of her copying to the period of 1636-38/9, Smith’s additions can be dated from his movements in the course of his mission work. As mentioned above, these movements as well as Smith’s composition of the Trinity College Dublin and Bodleian manuscripts, TCD 1194 and Eng. poet. b.5, place Smith in Staffordshire and working among the Fowler estates in the late-1630s and remove him from the area by June 1640.<sup>74</sup> It is possible that in 1639 or 1640, following the final concrete dates of her transcriptions, Aston Fowler could have ceded control of her newly created ‘booke’ to the visiting priest. I find it fairly unlikely, however, especially given the added evidence of her own transcriptions in the miscellany as a bound book, which must post-date 1638.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, the contention that transcriptions by Aston Fowler and Smith closely coincided is supported not only by evidence of Aston Fowler adding poetry into the bound book, but also by the potential for Smith’s compositions to pre-date the binding.

This possibility is suggested by several curiosities of compilation in the opening pages of the miscellany. The most intriguing of these is the clearly discontinuous transcription of the seventh poem, ‘O Lord direct my hart’.<sup>76</sup> Following two poems on fol. 13r in Aston Fowler’s informal hand, ‘O Lord direct my hart’ begins on fol. 13v in a disputed, messy hand and like the poems on 13r, was clearly copied after binding.<sup>77</sup> The transcription is interrupted, and several pages are torn out after fol.

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<sup>74</sup> See Cedric Brown, ‘William Smith vere Southerne’, 114-18.

<sup>75</sup> ‘A congratulation’ can be dated conclusively to 1638 as it celebrates Lord Aston’s return from his second embassy to Spain. This verse was transcribed into an unbound gathering. If 1638 is the earliest date for the manuscript’s binding, Aston Fowler’s transcriptions into the bound book such as ‘Verses presented’ cannot be dated any earlier. Smith’s departure from Staffordshire in 1640 leaves only a two year gap during which time Aston Fowler could have lost control of her book. Her transcription of Smith’s own verse, ‘O Lord direct my hart’ pre-binding makes the period of their association more likely to coincide with her active compilation efforts.

<sup>76</sup> Aldrich-Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poem 7/8: 17-21.

<sup>77</sup> This hand is similar to the example of fol. 6r discussed in the previous section as an

13v before the verse picks up on fol. 14r. This second part of the poem is in Aston Fowler's neater, formal hand and bears the distinguishing features of Aston Fowler's pre-binding transcriptions.<sup>78</sup> Though the verse is in Aston Fowler's hand, it is linked to Smith, which makes the evidence of transcription spanning the two periods of the miscellany's compilation of particular interest. The poem is subscribed 'M.W.S.', according to Aston Fowler's habitual practice of initialing names, and this most likely refers to Mr William Smith (or Southerne). The poem's inclusion in TCD 1194, another manuscript in Smith's hand and containing materials relating to his work in the Jesuit mission in the 1640s, reinforces the poem's association with Smith. The poem is unique to these two manuscripts and the connection through the Jesuit makes the attribution to Smith more stable.<sup>79</sup> The copying of this poem into an unbound gathering indicates that Aston Fowler and Smith were textually connected during the earlier period of the miscellany's life. Furthermore, the pages torn in the middle of the poem's transcription links this textual relationship to a material manifestation of Aston Fowler's editorial agency. Her major interventions in the opening pages of the miscellany are telling as evidence of her engagement with the book post-binding, especially as it relates directly to a verse connected to the Jesuit priest.

In order to evaluate this editorial engagement, it is useful to recreate the opening pages of the miscellany as it was initially bound, before any later additions by either Aston Fowler or Smith. The opening section was as follows:

- 6 blank leaves
- \*Fol. 7r-v possible early transcriptions by Smith, including two versions of an acrostic verse, 'Off the Blessed name, of Iesus'<sup>80</sup>
- Fol. 8r - 12v, 'On the Passion of our Lord and sauior Iesus'
- 6 leaves

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example of Aston Fowler's informal hand.

<sup>78</sup> Aston Fowler's more formal transcriptions display the markers of pre-binding transcriptions discussed previously. They are distinguished by the neat and evenly spaced lines, sometimes condensing toward the bottom of a page but never at the fore edge. Although her lines are not always straight, her copying is always neat with only minor ink blots or errors, which are corrected in-line. Aston Fowler's formal hand is distinguishable as such by its unslanted individual letter-forms mainly without joins. Her informal hand was clearly written without lifting the pen as often; it is slanted and includes more frequent joining for the looped g- and y-minuscules particularly.

<sup>79</sup> I discuss this poem and its context within the genre of Passion poetry in Chapter Four of this thesis.

<sup>80</sup> This verse and its inconclusive status as to its transcription pre- or post-binding is discussed below.

- Fol. 13 blank
- 9 leaves, originally including the opening stanzas of ‘O Lord direct my hart’
- Fols. 14-15 the latter section of ‘O Lord direct my hart’<sup>81</sup>

Though the missing pages will remain a mystery, it can be deduced that the opening stanzas of ‘O Lord direct my hart’ were initially copied on the verso of the final of those missing leaves. The verse directly preceding the post-binding transcriptions on fol. 13r-v is a passion poem in Aston Fowler’s hand, fols. 8r-12v, and the following leaves, now missing, likely contained several more transcriptions, at the very least including the original copying of lines 1-21 of ‘O Lord direct my hart’ given that the missing stanzas of ‘O Lord direct my hart’ were known to fit exactly onto a single verso page. The fact that the recto of the edited leaf holds two short poems in Aston Fowler’s hand, decorated with borders in the style of her customary embellishments throughout the book, lends support to the conjecture that it was Aston Fowler herself editing this portion of the text. We cannot know whether the text of ‘O Lord direct my hart’ underwent any editing in this process, but the interrupted transcription implicates the verse in a moment of Aston Fowler’s editorial agency, a constitutive element of her work as mediatrix. Here she is mediating a text in its physical form to the reader by correcting the arrangement of verses to suit her guiding vision for the ‘booke’. The cut pages reveal how the manuscript in its current form is just one of many texts made and re-made as it passed through the hands of its creators, a transformative process that solicits participation from readers. In this instance of material reading, we can catch a glimpse of Aston Fowler at work in the ‘middle place’, ordering her poems precisely and orchestrating how her reader will engage with her carefully constructed text.

Smith is present on the page as a collaborator in this act, as it is ‘his’ words (whether as supplier or author) that pass through the mediatrix’s hands. The reader, the writer and the compiler are thus brought together in the process of mediating the poetic form through the miscellany. In fact, the final line of ‘Verses presented’ traces the knot of the mediatrix’s poetic form quite succinctly: ‘May [she] for you and you to her for me’. If we translate this climactic line for the miscellany in order to illustrate the mediating process, then the reader takes the place of the Virgin. In

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<sup>81</sup> For the full collation see Appendix 3.



reading the miscellany, this reader is transposed onto the Marian figure much as Aston Fowler herself is equated to Mary in the verse's celebration of her reading prowess, which is, in turn, layered into the mediation of the speaker's devotion. The layers compound and the threads of agency loop over and amongst each other: the readerly 'she' approaches Aston Fowler's work first by accessing her 'booke' ('May she for you'), and it is then through that reading that the speaker's verse is mediated ('you to her for me'). Ultimately the reader accesses the writer voiced by the speaker *through* Aston Fowler, who possesses the 'middle place' in the line and in the literary transaction. In this process, especially for his verse 'O Lord direct my hart', Smith is at a remove, reliant upon Aston Fowler to present his text to the reader. Yet the collaboration between Aston Fowler and Smith is at times more complex than this straight line of transference. His acts of composition and transcription in Aston Fowler's 'booke' indicate a collaboration that was purposeful and authorized in cooperative acts of reading and composition.

As discussed above, the timeline for Smith's contributions suggests that it is much more likely that his work coincided or overlapped with the period of Aston Fowler's composition and editing of her 'booke'. There is one final piece of evidence that makes the possibility of concurrent collaboration at least a tantalizing probability. The twice-copied acrostic verse 'Off the Blessed name'<sup>82</sup> at the bottom of fol. 7v is yet another example of a disputed hand at work in Aston Fowler's miscellany: it is an italic hand with a distinctive capital form of O and I. Aldrich-Watson notes that it is probably the work of Hand B while Hackett offers no firm attribution.<sup>83</sup> Though Smith (Hand B) writes in an old-fashioned semi-secretary hand, several of the letterforms in the italic hand of 'Off the Blessed Name' bear a striking similarity to Smith's distinctive letters, most notably the embellished O majuscule and the long descender on his I majuscule. Cedric Brown has noted that, although Smith writes most often in his semi-secretary hand, he does have an italic hand, which can be seen in the marginal annotations of TCD 1194.<sup>84</sup> This possible

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<sup>82</sup> Aldrich-Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poem 3: 5.

<sup>83</sup> Aldrich-Watson (ed.), 5 note 1 (she attributes Hand B incorrectly to Gertrude Thimelby); Hackett, 'Unlocking the mysteries', 104.

<sup>84</sup> I have viewed each of Smith's manuscripts and find the hand of 'Off the Blessed name' to closely match his script. The distinctive O-majuscule as well as the similarities with several variations in his script in both TCD 1194 and Bodleian Eng. poet. b5 make my attribution to Smith quite confident. See for example of similar script in Smith's hand TCD 1194, fol. 17r and Eng. poet. b.5, fol. 7r.

identification of the hand of the acrostic poem as Smith is noteworthy as the poem does not adhere to Smith's usual scribal practice with regards to his careful margins. Though the left margin aligns with that of his transcription above (the final three stanzas of his first poem 'O Iesu'), the writing continues well into the gutter of the page leaving no right margin at all. This would seem to suggest that this page was written before binding, when it would have been easier to reach the right-hand edge of the page. The second attempt at 'Off the Blessed name' corrects this scribal error and shifts the left margin outward to the edge of the page. The curiosity of this verse cannot conclusively prove whether Smith made this transcription prior to the manuscript's binding, and perhaps his skill as a scribe could ensure neat copying even into the curve of the spine.<sup>85</sup> However, the fact that the poem was copied twice—the second version editing the first—indicates a different method of transcription as well. This is particularly conspicuous in light of Smith's scribal proficiency: his copying is near-perfect, bearing very few mistakes and those few that occur are neatly emended with a single line.<sup>86</sup> The material space of the manuscript page is here revealed to be a dynamic textual and creative landscape. The fluidity of the miscellany's composition not only brings the compilers into conversation through the material page, but also allows for the reader to glimpse the 'text in process'. The writing and the reading (as well as the compiling) are brought together. The work of the scribe's hand is shown here to be an enigmatic force in the manuscript.

If Smith is the scribe of 'Off the Blessed name', then it is an example of a more flexible method of transcription marked out by the double copying without crossing out the initial imperfect copy [Figure 10]. Interestingly, it is also a generically unique composition in all of Smith's manuscripts—unusual for Smith's clear taste in devotional ballads, but akin to the short verses Aston Fowler often inserted into blank spaces to fill the page after a longer poem.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Such a skill would be quite remarkable as the curve of the binding is fairly steep making the gutter very narrow. He condenses line 4, but not the end of line 5. There is no ink spot on the facing page, which might be expected for writing so close into the spine.

<sup>86</sup> Smith makes small corrections a handful of times, see fols. 35r & v, 42v. He also emends the placement of stanza on fol. 45r, crossing out the first two lines that he began to copy at the bottom of the page to avoid splitting the stanza. He opted to copy the stanza together as a whole on the overleaf.

<sup>87</sup> 'The Complement', 47r; 'On Louers' Tears', 145v; 'Mistres goodmorrow', 146r; 'A louer if beloued', 146r. Printed in Aldrich-Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poems 35, 45, 47, and 48: 94, 113, and 115.

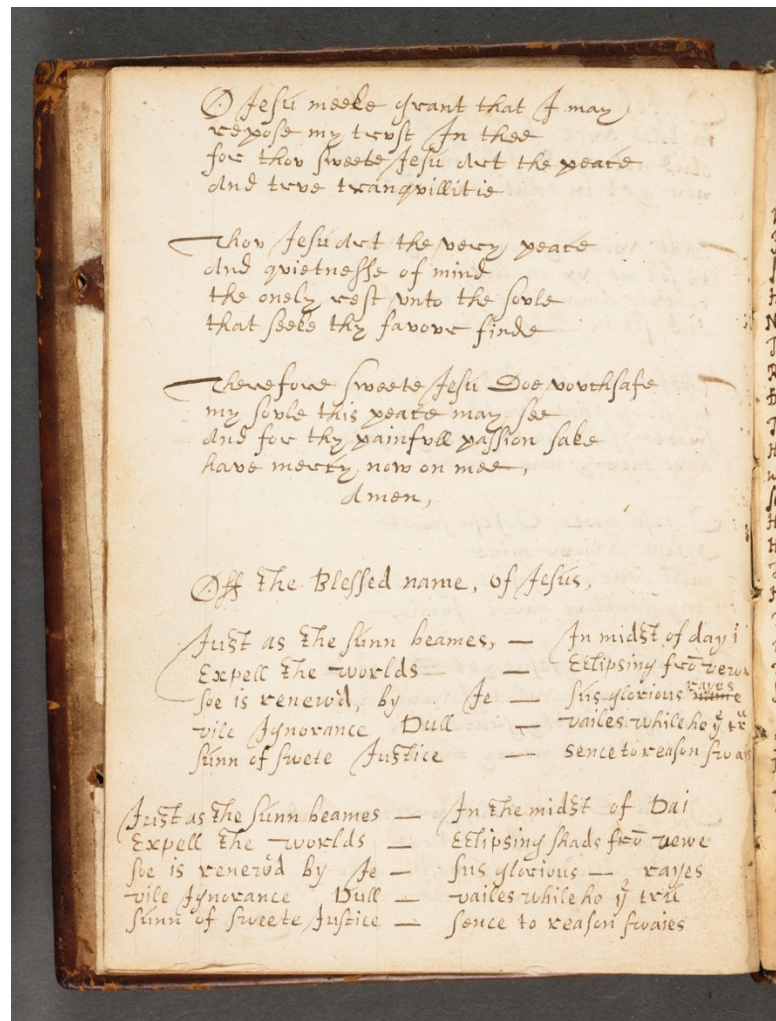


Figure 10 William Smith's edited transcription of 'Off the Blessed name', fol. 7v.

Here then is Smith adhering to the literary taste of Aston Fowler, trying his hand at the poetic forms that his editor shows a preference for. Even more significant is the possibility this transcription implies of Smith working on the manuscript before the book was bound. The fact that 'O Lord direct my hart' was partially copied prior to binding lends support to an earlier textual collaboration between Aston Fowler and Smith than has been previously recognized. It is possible to imagine Aston Fowler and Smith's collaboration beginning in the final stages of compilation when Aston Fowler was preparing her verses for binding. The location of Smith's first verses, 'O Iesu' and 'Off the Blessed name', on the final leaf of a gathering is less odd if we consider Aston Fowler planning the prefatory material for her 'booke'. Smith's additions to this gathering, then, could be part of a co-operative process of presenting the finished 'booke': assuming the first gathering was added by the binder as endpapers, Aston Fowler could have prepared gathering B for prefatory

material and allowed Smith to make an early transcription as long as he cast on several leaves for additional front matter of her choosing. The choice of ‘O Iesu’, which I will analyze in in the next section, is particularly suited for this textual dance between the mediatrix and her collaborator as it is an instance of ‘serial composition’ wherein the editorial reading process creates a new text for Aston Fowler’s ‘booke’. ‘Off the Blessed Name’ is also fluidly composed for the manuscript: written to fit into the small space in a form suited to the miscellany’s literary genres, and possibly produced directly for Aston Fowler’s project. If Smith did cooperate with Aston Fowler in planning the initial pages of the miscellany, beginning to compose verse for the ‘booke’ in the final stage before it was bound, then these pages are an example of the work of form truly composed in the ‘middle place’. Even in the manuscript’s uniquely interactive process of compilation, Aston Fowler is still influencing the poetic form as mediatrix: she inspires and guides the acts of reading and writing brought together in the pages of her ‘booke’.

### **Reading Catholic forms of devotion**

Thus far this chapter has addressed the miscellany’s work of form as both the product and the material vessel of reading through an analysis of Aston Fowler’s editorial processes. Now I would like to turn to the important correlative process at work in the miscellany: the collaborative composition evidenced in the Jesuit William Smith vere Southerne’s transcriptions. Regardless of how early in the miscellany’s creation Smith began his scribal activity, it is evident that the ‘booke’ is collaborative in its form as much as in its composition. Aston Fowler’s reading process tangibly constructed the text through editorial activities that actively composed the form, structure, and theme of her booke. The opening verse shows how this readerly work is inextricable from her patronage and her role as a mediatrix, the agency threading a Gordian knot in the process of mediation. Yet, as Smith’s work on the miscellany comes into view, the text is revealed to bear the marks of multiple other literary agents and these disparate readerly acts weave together into a single ‘booke’ that is made and re-made through material and literary mediation. As I have shown, a close reading of the opening verse introduces the miscellany’s shifting, shared agency and expansive poetic process. This copiousness not only ushers the reader into close engagement with the many layers of the

miscellany text, but it is also a testament to the way that the text is set in motion by each new reader in new ways. Reading in the ‘middle place’ is a process that forges new texts through collaboration with the mediatrix; and crucially, in relation to the miscellany’s devotional life, this authorization of collaborative process is significant even beyond the Mariological context presented at the outset. The verses that follow, ‘O Iesu, thou my glory Art’ and ‘Off the Blessed name’, appear to narrow the focus to a more straightforward Christ-centered devotion, but a close reading of the verses in light of their material composition reveals a corollary to the poetry of the mediatrix. The textual history as well as the scribal process signal a material devotion that was composed within a network of belief and practice marked by active cooperation between the human and the divine. By situating the compilation of the miscellany in line with the reading process it evidences and evinces, I hope to show how this exertive devotion composed on the page by Aston Fowler and William Smith is enabled by poetic form that is calibrated for a collaborative and dynamic relationship with God.

‘O Iesu’ (fol. 7r-v) is a simple verse in common or ballad meter, one example of the religious verses Aldrich-Watson deemed ‘rather uninteresting’.<sup>88</sup> The nine stanzas are formulaic, consisting of fourteen couplets with a repeating refrain layered into the hidden structure that I will discuss below. Despite this generic and formal simplicity, ‘O Iesu’ rewards close reading as an example of an multifaceted material and literary act of devotion. Recent work on religious poetry and particularly the ballad form has helped to reclaim poems such as this from literary disdain and ushered them into the light of critical attention, with scholars newly attentive to the nuances of form and style that are often woven through even the simplest verse.<sup>89</sup> Rather than dooming verses such as ‘O Iesu’ to the dustbin of literary history as the inconsequential and uninteresting dregs of early modern

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<sup>88</sup> Aldrich-Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poem 2: 3-4; Aldrich-Watson, Introduction, xxxiii.

<sup>89</sup> For recent insight into the ballad form see Christopher Marsh, “‘The Blazing Torch’: New Light on English Balladry as a Multi-Media Matrix’, *The Seventeenth Century* 30.1 (2015): 95-116; and Emilie K. M. Murphy, ‘Music and Catholic culture in post-Reformation Lancashire: piety, protest, and conversion’, *British Catholic History* 32.4 (2015): 494-525. Susannah Brietz Monta’s recent work on John Austin’s *Devotions* and the ‘poetics of prayer’ offers an example of literary engagement with devotional texts hitherto overlooked by literary criticism; see Monta, ‘John Austin’s *Devotions*: Voicing Lyric, Voicing Prayer’, in *Early Modern English Catholicism: identity, memory, and counter-Reformation*, eds. James E. Kelly and Susan Royal (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 226-45.

culture, reading the seemingly undemanding form of popular poetic texts can often reveal facets of the everyday experience of literature. ‘O Iesu’, despite its short length compared to the other religious verse added by Smith, earns a peculiar place in this larger project of reclaiming the diversity of literary lives due to its intriguing prominence of place in Aston Fowler’s carefully constructed miscellany. Although it is an unremarkable verse in terms of poetic artistry, it is nonetheless set to work as an opening invocation of sorts. As discussed previously, the evidence for Smith’s transcription of folio 7 prior to binding remains uncertain; yet, regardless of the original timing, I posit that the text is well suited to a role as a devotional prelude and that Smith’s transcription shows conscious design as such. ‘O Iesu’ stands out not only because of its position in the miscellany but also for the hymnic quality that is legible (and audible) both in the poetic form of the verse and in its material forms as it manifests throughout Smith’s textual network. By attending to these forms of devotion, I propose a reading of ‘O Iesu’ as an invocation and more specifically as a prayer that draws out the role of the miscellany in the devotional life of Tixall and in doing so unravels an intriguing strand of textual devotion knitted through several Catholic manuscripts.

To understand the miscellany as a *form* of devotion requires taking into consideration the religious connotations of the term in early modern England. As Ben Burton wryly observed in *The Work of Form*, ‘If you think “formalism” is a dirty word today, try living in early modern England’.<sup>90</sup> Burton’s explanation of early modern critiques of devotion viewed as overly depended on form relates specifically to liturgy and to the divisions amongst Protestants as conformist or nonconformist. At stake in these debates was the meaning of ‘form’ in relation to ceremony and ritual, which Arthur Newman makes clear in his description of a ‘formalist Bible bearer’ as ‘Hee that is holy in profession, but hollow in condition’. John Bartlett also attacks ‘Formalistes’ who ‘teache formes, and ydle apparayling of things, with manners andd circumstances, that edifye not’.<sup>91</sup> The term is certainly loaded with existential import for Protestants during the period, partially due to the evacuation of ritual efficacy in a Protestantism that stresses faith alone and relegates

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<sup>90</sup> Ben Burton, ‘Forms of Worship: Shakespeare’s Sonnets, Ritual, and the Genealogy of Formalism’, in *The Work of Form: Poetics and Materiality in Early Modern Culture*, ed. by Ben Burton & Elizabeth Scott-Baumann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 56.

<sup>91</sup> Arthur Newman, *The Bible-bearer* (London, 1607), sig. B4v; John Bartlett, *The Pedegrewe of Heretiques* (London, 1566), 48-9, both qtd in Burton, 57.

the ritual act to a communication or representation.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, how the external patterns and internal convictions of devotion met in the practice of Protestant religion was a much-contested topic fought in polemical treatises throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>93</sup> For early modern Catholics the question of the ‘form’ of religious practice is perhaps less vexed: the ritualization of gesture and sign in Catholic devotion derived from a closer alignment of human action and divine grace. Yet the gap between external form and internal conviction was at stake in questions of conformity especially as it related to church papists. Writing in 1593, Henry Garnet, for example, denounces any attendance at ‘hereticall seruice’ as unacceptable: ‘Neither can you excuse your selfe with saying that you are not attentiuely and deuotely present, because there wanteth your goodwill and affection: For there is an inward acte of religion...and an outward, and sometimes the one and the other ioined together’. Crucially for the liturgical participation, the exterior action and inward experience of religion is inextricable because ‘the going to the Church howsoever, doth alwaies betoken...devotion and religion, in Catholicke churches to the true faith: in hereticall to their detestable sinogogues’.<sup>94</sup> In this construction, the devotional act and the faith experience itself cannot be separated, a connection determined by the ritual efficacy of Catholic doctrine. Outward form and the inner substance are one and the same in a religious life oriented by Catholic formalism that upholds the *real presence* of the divine in the material practices of faith and sacrament. Matthew Milner has elucidated this ritual and devotional efficacy as reliant upon the power of the senses: ‘Realising liturgy acted sensibly upon churchgoers reorients our views of agency in religious experiences. Seeing the host or hearing the Word were not simply about receiving a “message” about the story of salvation. These were inherently physical acts where sensing meant being acted on by the sacred.’<sup>95</sup> This sensory devotion implicates the materiality of the experience, the bodily conditions of devotion that situate salvific agency not only

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<sup>92</sup> Edward Muir explores the Reformation as a ‘revolution in ritual’, noting that ‘the rejection of a divine presence in rites brought the efficacy of the entire ritual system into question’. See Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 10-11, 174-75.

<sup>93</sup> A search on Early Modern English Books Online for the term ‘formalist’ turns up over 300 texts, many concerning controversies over acts and gestures of devotion such as kneeling to receive the Eucharist.

<sup>94</sup> Henry Garnet, *An apology against the defence of schisme* (London, 1593), 71-72.

<sup>95</sup> Matthew Milner, *The Senses and the English Reformation* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 8.

within the material world but in the human acts and sensations themselves, the ultimate critique of Catholicism by Reformist detractors.

Such liturgical and ritual acts were reliant upon a formal religious practice that could be hard to come by for recusants, divorced as they were from the official structures of the Catholic Church. In this context, the domestic devotions took on more formal consequence: the work of form in material acts of devotion could be enacted in private homes and among friends, the sacred working through objects and passing through human hands. Recent methodologies for studying religion through its material fixtures and accoutrement conjecture a coherence of practice and faith in devotional life.<sup>96</sup> Fragmentary and desultory though such remnants may be, the material *stuff* of early modern Catholic devotion is not merely an excess or offcut of faith, but rather it is the very matter and marrow of religious experience.<sup>97</sup> Despite the fact that the clandestine nature of recusant domestic devotion has occluded the historical record, efforts to chart this material landscape have turned up a variety of evidence scattered throughout the archive including objects as disparate as an illicit playing card and embroidered priests' vestments.<sup>98</sup> I posit placing Constance Aston Fowler's miscellany within this context as textual devotion: the text itself and the reading it inscribes constitute a domestic devotion that is seamlessly enmeshed in the literary and social life of the home. William Smith's role in the English Mission links this textual devotion to the Jesuits' strategies for cultivating and sustaining the Catholic faith through the fluidity of a decentralized pastoral system of itinerant priests. Indeed, as the case study of 'O Iesu' makes clear, the manuscript life of this textual devotion is far-ranging and powerfully protean. As the Jesuits moved through the English Catholic community, it is possible to trace their paper trail as remnants

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<sup>96</sup> The interdisciplinary journal *Material Religion* is at the forefront of this approach. Writing an introduction to the methodology the editors detail their framework: 'A materialized study of religion begins with the assumption that things, their use, their valuation, and their appeal are not something *added* to a religion, but rather inextricable from it.' Birgit Meyer, et. al. 'The origin and mission of *Material Religion*', *Religion* 40.3 (2010): 209.

<sup>97</sup> David Morgan, *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief* (London: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>98</sup> Sophie Holroyd, "'Rich Embroidered Churchstuff': The Vestments of Helena Wintour", in *Catholic Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. Corthell, et. al, 73-116; Richard L. Williams, 'Contesting the Everyday: The Cultural Biography of a Subversive Playing Card', in *Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and Its Meanings*, ed. by Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 241-56.



of the material, textual devotion that provided spiritual invigoration of English Catholics in a multitude of circumstances. Nancy Pollard Brown first described this scholarly effort as a ‘Paperchase’, a striking term that easily applies to my own archival experience: I’ve chased William Smith’s papers, which survive in various states from cherished manuscript to manuscript waste used as endpapers, across the globe, from California to Dublin to Oxford and to London.<sup>99</sup> To these papers we can add other evidence of devotion that make up the religious experience of Aston Fowler and her community in Staffordshire: the letters and poetry that survive in HM904 as well as those that were once housed in the trunk Arthur Clifford discovered at Tixall, the inventory of the Catholic chapel at St Thomas, Constance’s marital home, and the printed *Devotions* by John Austin, who was tutor to the Fowlers at St Thomas during the 1640s.<sup>100</sup> The larger project of detailing the entirety of this complex tapestry of religious experience is beyond the scope of this thesis, but in reading the miscellany’s verses closely it is possible to glean valuable information of the fluidly composed textual devotion as manifest in the poetic form. While this chapter has begun to vex the categories of the material and the literary in relation to reading and authorship, the process of devotion overlays these questions with the texture of prayer, yet another multifaceted work of form. This process of prayer is enacted and enlivened not through the actions or words of one devotee, but rather it is always a cooperation between the human and the divine, the material world and its inhabitants collaborating with the heavenly realm of inspiration and grace.

To return to the miscellany’s opening pages, the form of ‘O Iesu’ once again reminds us of the collaboration between text and reader that generates meaningful

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<sup>99</sup> Nancy Pollard Brown, ‘Paperchase: The Dissemination of Catholic Texts in Elizabethan England’, *English Manuscript Studies* 1 (1989): 120-43. The papers that I have gathered together in this study as Smith’s textual remains are HM904, held at the Huntington Library in San Marino, CA, TCD 1194 held at Trinity College Dublin, Eng. poet. b.5 held at the Bodleian Library in Oxford, and several pages of manuscript waste used as endpapers in the binding of Abraham Fleming’s *A Panoplie of Epistles*, held at the British Library, shelfmark 92.d.25.

<sup>100</sup> British Library Add. MS 36452; Clifford (ed.), *Tixall Poetry*; Birmingham Archdiocesan Archives, Account book 1684-1754 (number c 110); John Austin [pseud. William Birchley], *Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices* (Paris, 1668). For readings of John Austin’s lyric prayers see Alison Shell, ‘Intimate Worship: John Austin’s *Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices*’, in *Private and Domestic Devotion in Early Modern Britain*, ed. by Jessica Martin & Alec Ryrie (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 259-80; Susannah Brietz Monta, ‘John Austin’s *Devotions*’.

connections across a transtemporal landscape. There is an interesting provenance to this verse, namely its adaptation from its print source, William Hunnis's *A Handfull of honisuckles*, appended to his most popular work *Seuen sobs of a sorrowfull soule for sinne*, first printed in 1583 and reaching fifteen editions by 1636.<sup>101</sup> The verse is also one of the two shared between HM904 and the Trinity College Dublin manuscript in Smith's hand, a connection that reinforces the potency of Smith's agency on the page.<sup>102</sup> The verse is a unique textual drifter, passing from print to manuscript in fluid adaptations and unique compositions, and then in an odd twist of fate, travelling back to the landscape of print in an in-between space, taking on a transitory identity as manuscript waste bound as endpapers of a print book.<sup>103</sup> These manuscript transcriptions reveal how a text is read—and un-read—across time and materially composed for unique purpose as determined by varied agents in its history. The collection of various authorial forces that coalesce in this single verse indicates the fluidity of form in collaboratively composed manuscript texts. 'O Iesu' began its life as a 'short and pithy prayer' written and set to music by William Hunnis. The music itself is silenced in the manuscript transcriptions (there are no tunes identified), but recent work on music in domestic devotion has revealed that recusant reading, writing, and singing were often closely intertwined.<sup>104</sup> In reading 'O Iesu' for form, then, one of the material forms of devotion that must be kept in mind is that of music, which is at once ephemeral and embodied in performance, inscribed and encoded in song-texts. These various forms of 'O Iesu' reveal how Hunnis, Smith, and Aston Fowler come together in a seemingly simple verse, one that compiles and reforms authorial agency as well as faith in its shifting material from print to manuscript, Protestant to Catholic, popular medium to personal, musical form to literary.

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<sup>101</sup> William Hunnis, *Seuen sobs of a sorrowfull soule for sinne...wherevnto are also annexed his Handfull of honisuckles, The poore widowes mite, a dialog betweene Christ and a sinner, diuers godlie and pithie ditties, with a Christian confession of and to the Trinitie* (London, 1583). See Clare Costly King'oo, 'William Hunnis and the Success of Seven Sobs', *Renaissance Studies* 29.4 (September 2015): 615-31.

<sup>102</sup> TCD 1194 fol. 26r ('O Iesu') and fols. 30r-32v ('A meditation for Good fryday', beginning 'O Lord direct my hart').

<sup>103</sup> See Abraham Fleming's *A Panoplie of Epistles*, held at the British Library, shelfmark 92.d.25. The writing of these papers, which also include 'A praier for the ommission of synne and the leadinge of a godlye life', bears a striking similarity to William Smith's secretary hand.

<sup>104</sup> Emilie Murphy, 'Music and Catholic culture in post-Reformation Lancashire: piety, protest, and conversion', *British Catholic History* 32.4 (2015): 494-525.

Despite this profusion of perspectives and forms, the poem opens with a moment of abstraction. The first stanzas offer a profession of selflessness that collapses all human agency in devotion to Christ:

O Iesu, thou my glory Art  
 in thee will I reioyce  
 And not Good Iesu in my selfe  
 nor yet in that mans uoice

That worldly honour may me giue  
 to set me up on high  
 to rule Among the sonnes of men  
 And sit in Dignitie

These Are but shadowes to compare  
 to glory thats with thee  
 sweete Iesu, for thy gloryes sake  
 haue mercy now on mee

1-12

The ballad meter amplifies this effacement as the form flattens the affect of the lines, the simple rhythm divorced from its musical setting. The print source notes the ballad tune to be repeated throughout the collection of separate, versified ‘short and pithie praiers vnto Iesus Christ’, with the melody repeating every stanza and each of the ‘praiers’ consisting of three stanzas.<sup>105</sup> This tune is not identified in the manuscript, whether because it was well known to its scribe, who did not see the need to add a written reminder, or because the lines were translated from song to verse within the context of the miscellany and its users, set for readerly devotion as opposed to musical performance. ‘O Iesu’ as it is presented as a single, cohesive verse is actually three separate ‘short and pithie praiers’ re-combined from the original twenty-five, the first, quoted above, is numbered as prayer 14 in the print source. The following three stanzas, lines 13-24, form prayer 1 and lines 25-36 make up prayer 4 in Hunnis’s text. Thus, the composition of the verse in the miscellany is a textual reformation, the transcription itself an act of mediation of source material put to new purpose through the poetic act of compilation and composition for a new reader.

As a ‘text in process’, to recall Jonathan Gibson’s term, ‘O Iesu’ can be read as

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<sup>105</sup> William Hunnis (1583), E1r-E6v. The ‘praiers’ are numbered in the 1587 edition.

personally and poetically active in its devotion, the scribal agency of Smith as well as the editorial agency of Aston Fowler collaborating on the page and in devotion. Susannah Monta has looked to John Austin's *Devotions* as an example of a literary voicing of devotion not through a stable, lyrical 'I' but rather an open and adaptive self in prayer. In this light, the self-effacement of these opening lines is perhaps a preparation for the miscellany reading process that will mediate a myriad of poetic forms. Monta notes that Austin's *Devotions* offers 'language [that] is not something one owns or instrumentalizes to express the self, but something one temporarily inhabits. Like the liturgy of which it is a part, Austin's lyric offers language into which the self may step, by which the self may be shaped'.<sup>106</sup> Given this collaboration of poetic and textual agency, the self-effacement expressed in these lines is never fully realized and in fact can be read as another act of mediation, the speaker's poetic voice occupying the 'middle place' between Christ and self, human and divine.

These stanzas of the first 'praier' self-consciously contend with the central act of religious faith and devotion, reflecting the tension between personal and heavenly agency. The injunction to 'reioyce' in Christ is placed in tension with the work of 'mans uoice'; and this tension is then staged in a series of oppositions. The first line presents the opposition constitutive of this faith as closely intertwined: the grammar is inverted to stack the pronouns 'thou' and 'my' directly next to each other. The following line repeats the effect, turning the grammar inside out so that the indirect object 'in thee' is given prominence, but the closer meter of iambic trimeter exacerbates the contrast at the core of the 'praier', the pronouns 'thee' and 'I' separated but balanced in accent. The contrast is brought to a head in the direct statement of the third line: 'And not Good Iesu in my selfe' (3). The personal self is consigned to the lower station as the word 'Iesu' bifurcates the line so that the contradiction hinges on Christ, in whom the polarity of human and divine are unified through the Incarnation. And yet, the following line topples the oppositional structure by adding a third figure, 'that mans uoice'. This human voice can be read as a moment of self-awareness, especially in the miscellany context: the reader takes ownership of the devotional experience voiced through the 'praier' by denying the authorial other. The speaker's prayer and 'that mans uoice' diffuse into the act of

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<sup>106</sup> Monta, 'John Austin's *Devotions*', 239.

devotion, just as the miscellany text disperses the agency away from any single author and into the poetic form itself, so that the readerly self—the devotional self in this instance—can be immersed into a process of mediation.

Taking the poetic form here as the enabling condition of the devotional reading offers a glimpse of how a textual experience of religion is composed in motion, in the movement of the scribal pen or the readerly eye over the page. This is noticeable in the contrast between William Smith's transcriptions of 'O Iesu' in particular. The verse is presented in HM904 as a smooth progression of stanzas, the reading is carried along swiftly and eases into a carefully composed communal devotion. Smith's transcription of 'O Iesu' in TCD 1194 (fol. 26r), however, is set alongside another verse, the page split into columns of text. Here the material form of the text resists the natural flow of the verse as the stanzas of the side-along poem remain in the reader's peripheral vision. The proximity of this intertext allows the two texts to converse in a concurrent flow of disjointed stanzas. While each stanza of 'O Iesu' begins with a direct address to Christ, in the peripheral poem in TCD 1194 these calls to Christ are set against stanzas that begin with 'I sayd'. The page itself stages a dialogue between the two poems even as the poems are contrasted in form and theme, one a prayer that seeks the mediation of grace and the other an internal meditation that spirals inward with each couplet beginning 'I sayd to my selfe'.

In HM904, the form of the verse on the page without a heading plunges the reader into a verse that subsumes the self into the process of prayer. The stanzaic form itself reflects effacement as the clauses flow from one stanza to the next, a particularly striking feature given the containment of stanzas in a sung ballad tune structured by repeating with each quatrain. In the translation from a musical to a poetic setting, the miscellany has erased the regulating force of the ballad tune's set limits, making the invisible boundary of the stanza malleable in manuscript form. The stanza that flows across the invisible boundary is noticeably smooth: 'nor yet in that mans uoice / That worldly honour may me giue' (4-5). Oppositions have fallen away and the description of 'worldly honour' is presented in a one-dimensional narrative, a listing of human honours with the lines beginning 'to set... / to rule... / And sit' (6-8). Gone is the dynamic tension of complex devotion in the preceding lines, the poetic form itself reinforcing the negation of worldly concerns and the trappings of human ambition.

The tension and the opposition return in the third quatrain, crucially at the

introduction of a complex, collaborative salvation. Human honors are set in proper juxtaposition and the speaker rejects improper materiality: 'These Are but shadowes to compare' (9). The process of prayer as enacted on the manuscript page, however, is not only an effacement of the sinful adoration of the human world, but it is also an almost alchemical refinement of materiality to ephemerality. The material of the manuscript page and the embodied, human tasks of devotional reading and writing become a part of a collaborative, mutable faith. The manuscript context allows for literary and material forms to act as 'shadowes' in the collaborative, mediating process of material devotion. In the shadows of 'the middle place', a ballad transforms into verse, Protestant source material morphs into Catholic devotion, the communal experience typical of ballad-singing melds into an expression of individual faith. The duality of the miscellany's collaborative composition—the mediatrix and the scribe coming together on the page—matches the blurring of agency and self that occurs in the prayer's final invocation to Christ. It is the state of contrast that the line presents as almost an end unto itself, the foil withheld until the next line and expressed indirectly at first: 'These Are but shadowes to compare / to glory thats with thee' (9-10). The sentence is drawn out so that the completion of the comparison expresses Christ's agency in conspicuously tenuous grammar, pushing the possessive into a predicative clause. 'Iesu' is not named outright until the following line and then the direct appeal offers another potential qualification onto Christ's salvific agency. In an ironic twist that is repeated throughout the poem, the personal entreaty for salvation implies a suprisingly modified form for Christ's act of salvation: 'Sweet Iesu, *for thy gloryes sake* / haue mercy now on mee' (11-12, emphasis mine). It is a slippery line, the meaning shifting the opposition of human and divine glory into a more collaborative form. The meaning slips from a pure petition for mercy into a negotiation. Astonishingly, the speaker implies in his call to Christ that the act of granting mercy to a human sinner will confirm or even determine the divine glory praised in the earlier lines. Thus the 'praier' which started with the exclamation 'O Iesu' and the speaker's self-effacement, ends with the agency of the speaker in view. The end rhymes of 'thee' and 'mee' finally links the figures of the human and the divine with a balanced and equal weight in meter, intertwining the speaker and Christ in a collaborative tension that reflects the consortium of dualities at play in the space of the miscellany.

**'For thy...sake': collaborative grace and the process of prayer**

While lines 13-24 and lines 25-36 comprise two further, separate 'prayers' from *A Handfull of Honisuckle*, Smith's translation amalgamates his chosen 'prayers' into a single verse. The original setting of the text suggests that the three-quatrain 'prayers' were interconnected, sharing common refrains and perhaps intended for a chorus-verse structure in domestic devotional performance. In thinking about the flexibility of form within the miscellany, 'O Iesu' offers a particularly intriguing example not only for its poetic expression of duality and collaborative agency, but also as its textual history is marked by fluidity and adaptation. The verses in *Seven Sobs* and *A Handfull of Honisuckle* are examples of texts collected as a repository open to adaptation according to personal or communal use.<sup>107</sup> Notation of simple tunes for the verses does not designate a stable musical form, but rather a starting point for arranging and re-arranging the verses for a particular purpose. The stanzaic form of the poetic text, which Smith shuffled around in his transcriptions to create new texts for each manuscript, correlates to a strophic form for musical performance that allowed each stanza to be adapted to the tune in any order.<sup>108</sup> Books such as *Seven Sobs*, then, offer a glimpse of how domestic devotion was an adaptive and collaborative meeting of literary and musical form. The musical and literary afterlife of William Hunnis's book reveals how popular devotional verses and metrical psalms were a particularly active site for such textual collaboration and adaptation. This flow of form between poetry and music is predicated on a material devotion that finds common ground in the fluidity of the manuscript page, which records only a glimpse of a varied textual life of verses such as 'O Iesu'. And yet in noting these layers and iterations of a single verse, we can come to understand how a manuscript text is 'in process'. In the case of 'O Iesu', it becomes clear that reading for form is really reading *by way of* form and, as is often the case for early modern texts, that form often records only part of the story.

William Hunnis was a gentleman of the Chapel Royal under Edward VI and

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<sup>107</sup> John Morehen posits that printed metrical texts such as *Seven Sobs*, although primarily intended for domestic use, constitute 11% of the source material for compositions of liturgical music during the period, 'The English Anthem Text, 1549-1660', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 117.1 (1992): 62-85.

<sup>108</sup> Strophic form is also known as verse-repeating: the same melody is repeated according to each verse or stanza, the term comes from the Greek 'strophē' for 'turn'.

Elizabeth I and was made master of the children's chapel in 1566. In this position, Hunnis trained the choirboys of the Chapel Royal for dramatic and musical performances.<sup>109</sup> In addition to great popularity in print, his verses and the tunes included along with the poetic texts found favor with composers of the age. His metrical texts served as source material for verse anthems, with settings made both for ecclesiastical use as well as for private devotion, and secular partsongs by composers such as Thomas Tallis ('Like as the doleful dove'), Thomas Morley ('O Jesu meek'), the elder John Hilton ('O Jesu mild'), Thomas Weelkes ('Give ear O Lord'), and most prominently William Byrd.<sup>110</sup> Tallis and Byrd were also Gentlemen of the Chapel Royal, their tenures overlapping with Hunnis's, and certainly in the case of Byrd there was clear musical influence shared between them: Craig Monson describes the relationship between Byrd and Hunnis as an 'example of Byrd's characteristic spirit of "friendly aemulation"'.<sup>111</sup> There is evidence not only of Byrd's adaptation of Hunnis's metrical text to a musical setting, but also of Byrd following Hunnis's influence in musical composition as seen in the process of incorporating elements of Hunnis's setting for his 'Alack when I look back' into his own anthem. Byrd adapted several elements found in a manuscript setting for the verse most likely of Hunnis's composition—the use of interior choruses after each couplet in addition to longer choruses following each stanza, an unusual setting—as well as including the tune noted for the verse in *Seven Sobs*.<sup>112</sup> Byrd also went on to use two more verses by Hunnis as metrical texts for verse anthems, 'Let us be glad' and 'Thou God that guid'st'.

This collaborative relationship between composers as well as the textual exchange found in setting poetic text to music corresponds closely to the relationship at the heart of Aston Fowler's miscellany. Just as Byrd chose elements from Hunnis' text and music to elaborate in his own composition, Smith made choices that molded the flexible source text into a literary verse, creating a poetic

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<sup>109</sup> Andrew Ashbee, 'Hunnis, William, musician and conspirator (d. 1597)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>110</sup> See John Morehen, 'The English Anthem Text', 67; and John Milsom, 'Songs, Carols and "Contrafacta" in the Early History of the Tudor Anthem', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 107 (1980-81): 42.

<sup>111</sup> For a description of Byrd's debt to Hunnis see Craig Monson, 'Authenticity and Chronology in Byrd's Church Anthems', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 35.2 (Summer 1982): 295-99, qt at 297.

<sup>112</sup> Monson, 'Byrd's Church Anthems', 296-7.



text in reading Hunnis's metrical, musical prayers as textual devotion. This creative scribal process does not simply erase the verse's origins, but rather it re-appropriates the form and gives new life to a text that was already fifty years old by the time Smith made his additions to the miscellany. By selecting and editing 'O Iesu' for a literary collection, Smith connects Aston Fowler's 'booke' to a history of domestic devotion, one that will be partially remembered through its manuscript remnants. These manuscripts mediate the poetic and the devotional, connecting verse to prayer as well as to more readerly forms of devotion: for example, in TCD 1194 and the endpapers of *A Panoplie of Epistles* the verse stands alongside religious meditations. Ramie Targoff differentiates the poetic claims of Hunnis's metrical psalms from his secular poetry, noting that his metrical psalms and prayers are not included in *The Paradyse of dainty devises* (1576) and that his *Seven Sobs* does not claim the status of poetry or poesy on its title page. Nevertheless, Targoff goes on to note, '[a]ttention to the aesthetic dimension of these texts does quietly inform the ways in which translation is described...*framed, reduced, and drawn* all convey a sense of artful labor, an act of creating a carefully delineated object out of a more amorphous or formless original. And yet, although these clues suggest that something other than strict translation is at work, there was no explicit connection made during most of the sixteenth century between the composition of metrical Psalms and what we would now consider the poetic production of lyric'.<sup>113</sup> Thus the textual history of 'O Iesu' is one of multiple forms, varied readings, and unique compositions. The staunchly Protestant Hunnis is obscured in the manuscript texts—indeed the original source for this poem has been overlooked in all of the criticism on the miscellany—and the transcription into two Catholic manuscripts so transformed the text that the line between Catholic and Protestant devotion is not merely blurred, but subsumed. In the transference, something new is created that is personal, literary, and Catholic.

This Catholic appropriation for mission work as well as for private devotion speaks to the malleability of the modest form of such metrical psalms and song texts. The simplicity of the verse can be read in many ways and transposed to unique circumstances, from Church of England liturgy to literary coteries to Jesuit mission work with communities lacking literacy. The process of prayerful reading presented

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<sup>113</sup> Ramie Targoff, *Common Prayer: The Language of Public Devotion in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 73.

in the miscellany's version of 'O Iesu' is one attuned to the layers of agency and mediation at work in moments of devotion as well as poetry. In this light, the self-effacement and fracturing of divine and human agency found in the opening stanzas can be seen as corresponding to the kind of readerly (and writerly) agency introduced in 'Verses presented': one that is actively interpretive and cooperative, forging new connections between form and (literary and devotional) effect. This is seen in how the reordering of 'O Iesu' unsettles the configuration of the devotion from straightforward supplication to a more complex collaboration that places greater onus on the personal in the act of salvation. As the verse continues, it is injected with this anxious fervor, even as it voices a dutiful, direct call to Christ:

O Iesu meeke, O Iesu sweet  
 O Iesu sauour mine  
 most gracious Iesu to my Call  
 Thy gracious eares Incline

13-16

The repetition of the opening 'O Iesu' signals a turn to feeling, an intensifying accumulation of personal fervor in the call to heaven. In the original setting by Hunnis in *A Handfull of Honisuckle*, these lines are set directly to the musical arrangement, a placement that suggests a more straightforward celebratory tone. Transposed to the middle of the verse by Smith, the repetitive calls that open the stanza have a more pleading effect, less a laudatory song and more a longing sigh. The feeling elicited by the echoing 'O' is personally expressed through the verse's representation of fervent prayer:

Now I good Iesus yet Doe Call  
 thou knowest what I would haue  
 Iesu I know thy grace it is  
 that bids me mercy craue

O Iesu Deare, whose precious bloud  
 was shed on crosse of tree  
 sweete Iesu for thy passion sake  
 haue mercy now on mee

13-24

Despite the transformations of the text for the miscellany, the presentation of the verse as a 'praier' in its original form can be felt in these lines, with the speaker explicitly describing the act as a 'Call' to Christ. The prayer is depicted as a specifically oral act, and particularly as a liaison between the personal and divine.

There are two agents interacting in this prayer, the act is dependent upon the participation of both the speaker and Christ: ‘most gracious Iesu to my Call / Thy gracious eares Incline’ (15-16). It is a shared agency and the syntax plays with the equilibrium of the conversational structure. The speaker is actively expressing supplication and the elevated status of the divine requires that Christ’s act of listening is a decline to the human plane. Yet, the language for Christ’s action is also noticeably passive in comparison to the speaker’s impassioned call; the verb for Christ’s act is withheld to the very end of the stanza and the act itself, to ‘incline’, is complexly evocative: the OED gives several definitions that help to gloss the line, including variations on the sense of ‘To bend or bow forward, downward, or towards a person or thing, esp as a sign of reverence or courtesy’ (I.1b) as well as ‘To listen or give attention to an inferior’ (I.2b), meanings that convey contradictory standing for the subject as superior or inferior in the interaction.<sup>114</sup> The most apparent sense of ‘to listen or give attention to an inferior’ is shaded by the conflicting meanings, and the stance of Christ in relation to the speaker shifts in those more obscure readings, which are brought closer to hand by the tension between human and divine at work throughout the verse.

Though the verse is divorced from its original musical setting in the translation to the literary miscellany, the prayer is specifically coded as oral. The speaker’s ‘Call’ is audible and Christ’s divine power is figured through his ‘gracious eares’ (16). The opening of these lines also evoke the missing music more directly than the prior stanzas, the repeated calls and epithets for ‘Iesu’ nimbly rolling along the rhythmic, sing-song meter. Although the lines are copied in common meter (or ballad meter), the especially strong rhythm of these refrain-like lines reveals the hidden form of the fourteener or iambic heptametre and exposes the scaffolding of rhyming couplets that shape the stanzaic form. While the fourteener employs a caesura after the fourth iambic foot corresponding to the line break when transcribed into quatrains, the flow of the united, extended line is particularly well-suited to musical setting. This cohesion of form gives space for a longer melodic phrases that can balance neatly in the binary structure of the rhyming couplet. The repetition in the poetic text across the caesura and line break smooths the phrase into the couplet form as well: ‘O Iesu’ tripled across lines 13-14, and the descriptive

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<sup>114</sup> OED, s.v. ‘incline, v.’.

‘gracious/gratious’ repeated in lines 15-16. This continuity amplifies the harmony of the lines, the more palpable couplet enhancing the dualities at play in the verse. Yet it is a tenuous harmony, rising to the fore in the jarring eye rhyme of ‘haue’ and ‘craue’ that is all the more unsettling without the musical setting to harmonize the weight and tone for the ends of the phrases/couplets. Intriguingly, the effects of transposing the verse from a musical to poetic text heightens the personal, in-the-moment experience of prayer. The lines ring with feeling brought to the verse by the reader instead of those provided by the somber tone of the music. This ‘silencing’ of musicality is less an act of stifling, than a kind of *contrafactum* (to use the musicologist’s terminology), a substitution of a new text without changing the form.

The act of translating the ‘praiers’ from their original context of popular, musical devotion to the uniquely personalized setting in the miscellany cannot force an estrangement between the source and the copied text. The ‘new’ text is never wholly new: it is an iteration of form, part of a long and collaborative process of devotion mediated through reading. Particularly in the case of Smith’s transcriptions, the passage of the text through the copyist is a smooth one, the ‘praiers’ selected and put to a new order but copied faithfully. Reading the form of ‘O Iesu’ closely throughout its textual and scribal history reveals how the verse is malleable. As such, the discrepancy between the following stanza, the fifth in Smith’s verse, and Hunnis’s original text is striking. Hunnis’s stanza is a statement of self-assurance, in spite of the devotional stance of humility and inferiority:

I know, good Iesu, ere I speake  
 thou know’st what I would haue:  
 Iesu, thy grace I know it is  
 that bids me mercie craue<sup>115</sup>

Compare this to the unsettled version by Smith:

Now I good Iesus yet Do Call  
 Thou knowest what I would haue  
 Iesu I know thy grace it is  
 That bids me mercy craue

17-20

The original asserts the speaker’s intellectual knowledge, opening with the outright

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<sup>115</sup> William Hunnis, *Handfull of Honisuckle* (1583 ed.), E1r.

declaration, 'I know', before breaking to acknowledge Christ. The completion of his statement, 'ere I speake', privileges the position of understanding that precedes his spoken prayer. The speaker's knowledge mirrors Christ's own in a circular formulation of faith: the speaker knows that Christ knows what the speaker desires. The knowing is privileged over the wanting, faith over the purpose of the prayer itself. Smith's version subtly undermines this privileging of faith. The speaker in Smith's version is also in the forefront, but without such strong assurance. Instead the speaker introduces himself, but his statement is interrupted, acknowledging Christ before making any claim for himself: 'Now I good Iesus, yet Doe Call'. The completion of the line confirms a weakened stance for the speaker's prayer; without claiming any self-assurance the speaker seems to call into question the usefulness of his prayer given Christ's all-knowing status. The prayer is not reliant on the knowing in this formulation but on the craving for mercy, that yearning which is the manifestation of feeling the disparity between the human and the divine. Smith's speaker is not speaking but calling—an emotional outpouring as opposed to a moment of dialogue; it is a moment of feeling, devoid of ego or self-assurance. The reversal of 'thy grace I know' in Hunnis to 'I know thy grace' in Smith reflects this more personal, felt experience. Hunnis's speaker is again subtly more self-assured, his faith in Christ's grace rising above all else; Smith's speaker is awash in the experience of an impassioned prayer and assuaging the suffering of his yearning with a statement of reassurance of Christ's grace.

Theologically the question of 'knowing' Christ's grace, or 'preparation' for grace, was vigorously contested along confessional lines.<sup>116</sup> The seemingly innocuous reversal of 'thy grace I know' to 'I know thy grace', then, inserts the verse into a thorny theological issue, whether by accident of scribal form or actively resistant reading. Hubert Jedin's intensive account of the Council of Trent elucidates the fine-grained question of preparation for grace and how it corresponds to the human and divine participation in justification. The topic is deeply rooted in the theology of Reformation as it relates to Luther's tenet of 'absolute gratuitousness', but, Jedin notes, '[i]n order to counter this notion, Catholic theologians were bound to own that, according to their teaching, the sinner is incapable of crossing, by his

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<sup>116</sup> See Brian Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 328-64.

own strength, the chasm created by sin between himself and God'.<sup>117</sup> More recently, Brian Cummings has presented an illuminating question central to this formula: 'Does this incapacity, the blindness of sin, mean merely an inability by natural powers alone to obtain salvation, or does it mean an absolute powerlessness, which negates even the possibility of the sinner's disposing himself for salvation, or co-operating, once given the aid of grace, in that salvation?'.<sup>118</sup> Smith's verse takes on this question by juxtaposing human and divine agency in the act of prayer—and prayerful reading. Smith and Hunnis present a particularly potent variant: if it is God's grace that 'bids' a soul to 'craue' salvation, what is the power of prayer in securing it? The verb to 'bid' is crucial here, indicating that agency is only a starting point. Cummings clarifies the subtlety of distinction as presented by the canons of Session VI of Trent: '[...] the co-operating will is not operative of grace, but only concomitant with it. Human nature has no power on its own, the argument runs, but its assent assists a process already begun'.<sup>119</sup> Yet Smith presents this vital theological point by slightly undermining the words of the staunchly Protestant Hunnis's original composition, the more personal tenor of his call inevitably glossing the profession and placing the speaker's agency clearly in view. There is a more intimate structure to the line, as the speaker addresses Christ in dialogue: 'Iesu I know'. This intimacy allows the speaker's perspective to precede mention of Christ's grace, his assent or preparation thereby given greater prominence. The meter is evenly distributed, and read in Smith's formulation this reflects a subtly orchestrated collaboration, each iamb matching to a distinct two-syllable phrase—'Iesu / I know / thy grace / it is'—thus weighting each phrase in a perfect balance.

Here then is an example of the power of prayer as work of form, the material, textual, readerly devotion is just beginning in this verse and will continue through the miscellany's first section. The verses added by Smith include several that apply directly to sacramental poetics, a theme that is shared with the coterie's love poetry in a repeated conceit of loving as devotion, as I will discuss in my next chapter. Among these, the miscellany's only discussion of salvation to use the term 'grace', though less self-aware as a textual act of material devotion, nevertheless presents an

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<sup>117</sup> Hubert Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, trans. by Ernest Graf, 2 vols (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, Ltd., 1957-61), 170.

<sup>118</sup> Cummings, *Grammar and Grace*, 340.

<sup>119</sup> *ibid.*, 342

active interaction between the sinner and God. The verse, ‘My wretched soule with sinne opprest’ (fols 44r-45r),<sup>120</sup> is a narration of personal, emotive penance that ties an active devotion not only to preparation for grace, but to collaborating in salvation: discussing the thief on Golgotha with Christ who ‘by humble suite did grace obtaine’ (50), and Peter after his denials, ‘by repentance came to grace Againe’ (52). The speaker ties his own fate to a similarly active desire and states ‘still to craue I will not cease ... I hope to get through grace / In heauen to haue A Dwelling place’ (57-60). This is a process that requires not a passive acceptance, but a collaborative moment of assent. Devotion is never solitary in the miscellany’s construction of faithful, prayerful reading.

### **Forms of reading, writing, and devotion: now and again**

It bears remembering that, in collecting verses that are inflected with Catholic religiosity, Smith and Aston Fowler have created a text that can be *used* for devotion: their acts of reading and writing enabling as well as enacting attentive acts of faith. This creative and artfully composed method of devotion is made possible by the form itself, by the pliability of the manuscript page and the plainness of the religious verses themselves. To take ‘O Iesu’ again as our example, the form is compiled in reading as well as in Smith’s transcription. In their original printed form, the ‘praiers’ are flexibly presented on the page, ordered by number so as to separate each one while also organizing them for ease of use in domestic devotion. These printed texts were written for versatility, able to be reconstructed for a single voice or for communal performance, and as Targoff notes, they are able to ‘embody a voice at once individual and representative, human and divine’.<sup>121</sup> The Psalms especially provide an open and inviting voice for creating a variety of forms of devotion.<sup>122</sup> Hunnis’s ‘short and pithy praiers’ function similarly, providing a

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<sup>120</sup> Aldrich-Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poem 32: 88-90.

<sup>121</sup> Targoff, *Common Prayer*, 66.

<sup>122</sup> The popularity of English metrical Psalters attests to this efficacy for devotional practice. Hannibal Hamlin reminds us that we cannot underestimate the importance of the Psalms, which were ‘recorded in diaries, interpreted in commentaries and sermons, alluded to in the sacred texts of the liturgy and in the secular plays of the theater alike; they were among the most familiar texts in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England’ (6). The great variety of form in English Psalters from Sternhold & Hopkins metrical simplicity to the intricate poetic experimentations of the Sidney Psalter is another signal of the formal flexibility of common devotional poetry to be accommodated, as Hamlin notes, to ‘personal agendas, whether religious, political, or aesthetic’. See Hannibal Hamlin, *Psalm Culture and*

flexible form that can be molded by its users. Smith's composition creates a singular, whole verse, one that turns on the stanza that calls to Christ to attend to the speaker's prayer (lines 13-16). The speaker, particularly in Smith's version, interrupts himself at several turns in the verse's central section: the clunky line 'Now I good Iesus yet Doe Call', though lacking punctuation to set off the direct address, is fragmented; and the repetitive 'Thou knowest' and 'I know' likewise break the flow of the prayer itself. Anxiety rises to the surface in this process of prayer, fraught with the discomfort of human yearning. In collating these short 'praiers' into a longer, unified, and specified verse Smith has instigated a progression of feeling and devotion that unfolds in a heightened urgency. The colloquy of self and Christ in the opening lines leads to yearning, which moves inward to a more potent moment of feeling. The prayer is released from the looping melody in this poetic structure and the verse instead moves with a personally-conducted tempo for devotion.

The fervent emotional state is one that is also recognizable in the miscellany's profusion of love lyrics. Interestingly, these potent texts often make use of the metaphors of devotion, as I will discuss below. When reading the agency and process at work in the miscellany's material practice of prayer, however, it is worth noting that the anxious state of uncertainty is consciously placed at the center of the Tixall poets' acts of secular devotion as well. The question then of *how* to pray—or how to read—in the personal and liminal space of the miscellany is curiously recounted in the miscellany's opening, prefatory texts that have structured this chapter. 'Verses presented' recounts a series of material exchanges that take on new light alongside the cooperative prayer of 'O Iesu': Celestinae first accepts 'this beautilous image', which in turn portrays the Virgin's physical loveliness that 'giue[s] / uertue enoefe to saue all soules' and in gazing upon the Mediatrix herself, Celestinae may 'with foldded armes sometimes imploere'. These devotional postures ultimately prepare the final act of mediation: 'she for you and you to her for me'. The mediating functions in 'O Iesu' are less transactional and more collaborative: the speaker addresses Christ intimately as 'O Iesu Deare' (21), the personal affectation bringing the divine into the wholly human realm of emotional relations. Yet the final acts of devotion in 'O Iesu' repeat the formula of negotiation with

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*Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), qtd at 6 and 1.



Christ in salvation: ‘for thy passion sake / haue mercy now on mee’ (24). Here there is agency in the craving. Ultimately, the process of devotion staged in the miscellany’s prefatory verses is an ongoing dialogue between the human and the divine.

In ‘O Iesu’, one of the miscellany’s most compelling compositions despite its modest form on the page, the progress of devotion comes full circle as human and divine is reconciled, not by self-effacement (lines 1-12) or by attempting to call across the gap (lines 12-20) but by a mutual meeting. At the crux of the verse, the central stanza, the speaker acknowledges his assent to receiving Christ’s grace, and in this final section, the ‘peace / And true tranquillitie’ (27-28) of devotion is imagined as Christ offering his matching assent to the sinner. The speaker voices a desire to ‘repose’ as a fantasy of mutual acceptance, to give himself to Christ with assurance of heavenly peace:

O Iesu meeke grant that I may  
repose my trust In thee  
for thou sweete Iesu Art the peace  
And true tranquillitie.

Thou Iesu Art the uery peace  
And quietnesse of mind  
the onely rest unto the soule  
that seeke thy fauour finde

Therefore sweete Iesu Doe uouchsafe  
my soule this peace may see  
And for thy painfull passion sake  
haue mercy now on mee,

25-36

Tension and anguish fall away in these lines. This union will bring a ‘quietnesse of mind’; the soul will rise above conflicted human feelings. The subjunctive is potent in these final moments, the ultimate hope of devotion driving the text to continue in process. The speaker is still seeking, still praying, and still living the imperfect human existence. The lines are almost detached from time and place, the syntax becoming muddled and the verbs disordered: ‘the onely rest unto the soule / that seeke thy fauour finde’. It is a hopeful haze, the speaker omitting the uncertainty a modal or auxillary verb would bring to the line (‘the soule / that seeke thy fauour [may/will] finde’) and arranging the complementary actions, ‘seeke’ and ‘finde’ into one somewhat compressed line. But the sense is inconsistent: the sentence should

read either without the prepositional phrase ('Thou Iesu Art...the onely rest the soule that seeks thy fauour will finde') or layered with another tenuous clause ('Thou Iesu Art...the onely rest unto the soule that in seeking thy fauour finds'. This clunky grammar is a departure from Hunnis's clarity in the original: 'The onelie rest vnto the soule / that shall thy fauour finde'. Smith's alteration, however, emphasizes the act of seeking. The confused grammar detaches the sense from a prospective future and brings the line into the present. This transtemporal grammar is left open to the reader for interpretation. Even as the prayer ends in a straightforward request to 'Therefore sweete Iesu doe uouchsafe<sup>123</sup> / my soule'—suggesting a conclusion to a logical argument—it is made in recognition that fulfilment is in Christ's accommodation, a ending with the hope of cooperation. This is another testament to prayer as an open text: not a single-authored work waiting to be read or a sinner presenting his devotional oeuvre to Christ for review, but rather a 'text in process', hopeful and unfinished. The hidden complexities of form in 'O Iesu' reveal a textual devotion that mirrors this open text of prayer; for the intertextual reading practice prompted by a book written in multiple hands always opens a cooperative process between a profusion of texts and readers.

The miscellany is structured by this continual presentation of intertexts. Indeed, the theme of material devotion that is anxiously negotiated in miscellany's prefatory verses recurs throughout the text and is just as potently figured in the secular poems. One of Herbert Aston's poems, 'To his Mrs on her outward Beauty' (fols. 33v-34v),<sup>124</sup> for example, begins with a vividly conjured conceit of love as religious zeal:

Iust (Seraphina) as a priest doth doubt  
 If to the gods he truly be deuoute,  
 Each word each action in the sacrifice,  
 As if int'ention would not Heaue'n suffice  
 With what a trembling hand he comes to touch  
 The sacred offering, and his Zeal is such  
 In all the ceremonyes, it doth make  
 Him fearfull, and that feare makes him mistake  
 When yet another to whome doth adheare  
 Far lesse deuotion, as well as feare  
 May seeme more holy to the vulgar eyes  
 Because he erres not in the sacrifice,

<sup>123</sup> The OED gives several definitions that could gloss this line, though it is an unusual construction. The clearest meaning is likely a variant of 'To grant, permit, or allow, as an act of grace or condescension'. *OED*, s.v., 'vouchsafe, v.', definition II. senses 5a & 5b.

<sup>124</sup> Aldrich-Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poem 25: 65-67.

Hauing a tounge deuouter then his heart,  
 That which he wants in Zeale, supplies with art  
 Yet the eternall, and Iust powers of Heauen  
 Prefer the offering deuoutely giuen,  
 They looke not on the sacrifice, nor art,  
 That doth adorne it, but upon the heart

1-18

The doubt and fear, even by a priest, are constitutive elements of devotion and not a sign of insufficiency. The acts of faith are correspondingly imbued with this feeling, the body's experience of emotion becoming part of the ritual efficacy: 'Each word each action in the sacrifice' is inextricably tied to the intention of the speaker and the 'trembling hand' that touches the 'sacred offering' is more acceptable to God than the more assured performance by the eloquent but unfeeling devotee. This 'offering deuoutely giuen', its language of sacrifice and ceremony calling directly on the ritual process, is effective specifically because of the uncertainty and hope that imbues both the form and the feeling of devotion. Aston goes on to describe himself as a 'loue-deuine' and depicts the act of poetic creation as a religious, almost paganistic observance: '[I] doe bring / My heart for sacrifice, for offering / I doe present these lines unto your prayse' (21-23). Here then is a writer presenting verses to his reader—in this case also his lover—for judgment as a material, ritualized act. The role of discerning lover is thus likened to that of a discerning reader.

The verse goes on to tie the creation of art and its reception to devotion, denoting how the work of form in poetry shares in the same process as prayer and sacrament. Notably for both acts, the doubt must be paired to effort as seen in Aston's description of his writing process in excruciating detail:

Oh how my hand now trembles, my mind doubt  
 Each word I write, sometimes I doe blott out  
 What I before did Interline, and then  
 What I new blotted out strate like agen,  
 Sometimes I thinke this uerse it doth not flow,  
 This word too common, this expression low  
 ...  
 Now that I am most serious, and doe striue  
 To write what to eternity may liue,  
 Nothing but errours from my pen doe flow  
 And tis too much care that make's it so

27-32, 37-40

Aston's hands, like the priest's he described in his opening lines, betray his feeling

but crucially it is their human frailty that makes his verse meaningful. This is a material act of writing, narrated in each blotting and crossing of the pen—though Aston Fowler’s copying is not as belabored as the imagined scene. The lover perhaps will read the material form of this written devotion in much the same way that we read the material form of literary manuscripts, attending to the physical traces left by a writer’s hands. The speaker of ‘To his Mrs’ enacts a self-conscious writing process, writing always with his reception in mind. Yet for a verse penned to a lover’s beauty, the writer is conspicuously self-consumed in these lines; he is even touting his poetic reputation: ‘...though what I haue uoluntary writt / hath bene by many men approued witt’ (35-6). But his reader/beloved does not want artistry, the speaker knows this: ‘I am almost confident that you, / whose nature is deuine, your selfe as true, / And Iust as gods themselues, will prize no art / like to the true deuotion of a heart’ (45-48). The effort and care and suffering of the speaker is powerful as a means for this devotion.

This writing is offered not as a confident expression of a self-assured faith, but as part of a process. The writer’s material exertions with trembling hand and blotted ink—the hallmarks of manuscript production’s imperfections, traces that bespeak human inconsistency and solecism—do not stand on their own but are met in the complementary act of sensitive reading. In fact, this verse is marked by one of Aston Fowler’s slips in transcription that required doubling back, rededicating her attentive eye to the poetic form. Interestingly, the mis-copied lines read: ‘with the bright sun, quite dazel’d with the light / of your fayre eyes, yet raiisht with delight / those eyes, which non ere saw sans preparation’ (69-71). The light is blazing, refracted through Seraphina’s eyes like a prism. Those eyes, which the speaker dwells on at length, are present on the page not only through the speaker’s compliments but also cooperating in the process of poetic making, thus recalling the power of *Celestinae*’s gaze to confer prominence of place in the miscellany.

Aston’s poetic devotion is seemingly at a distant remove from Smith’s version of ‘O Iesu’ and yet the religious feeling processed through material reading and writing is a compelling theme in these generically disparate texts. Although modern editors would never bring these two verses together, Aston Fowler has done just that. The transcription of these two verses may have taken place across a wide gap of time, but the miscellany has brought them into conversation. Perhaps this conversation was not orchestrated by explicit design—the two texts are separated by many pages

and a variety of verses—but reading the miscellany as a work of form guided by expansive, critical engagement exposes how the intricate acts of collecting and compilation create an interwoven text that opens up an interactive process for future readers. The textual conversations facilitated through this unique manuscript remind us of the liminality of the ritual space where devotion takes place. Here is yet another kind of ‘middle place’ where mediation of grace (and love) is set in motion by poetic form. In this formulation of textual devotion, the transtemporal and transtextual work of form is predicated on the properties of ‘untimely matter’ as cited at the outset of this chapter. These texts do not only narrate devotional reading and writing belonging to a particular historical moment or belonging to a single mediatrix; rather the devotion that is inscribed on the page is processual and iterative, recurring in each new reading and belonging to each new reader.

Understanding how the collaborative reading, writing, and devotion occurring across the life of the miscellany is affected by and effected through form requires undertaking analyses such as those I’ve begun in the chapter: attending to the complexity of the form as poetic and material compositions, taking into account the processual modes of making and re-making inherent in such dynamic texts. The editorial efforts of Aston Fowler and Smith as collaborators must be read in relation to the forms they produced and as a single interwoven text. It is likely that Smith began collaborating with Aston Fowler in the later stages of the text’s compilation, perhaps approaching the manuscript as a bound book with spaces left open for accumulating more poetic voices. Yet it was not a text relinquished completely or left to the whims of an unauthorized user. Unlike many other manuscript miscellanies from the period, HM904 does not bear any evidence of the book passing through other uses conflicting with its initial literary ambitions. There are no inclusions of domestic or personal memoranda or accounts such as those often found in manuscript books that passed through several hands in a household, sometimes over multiple generations.<sup>125</sup> It is a text left invitingly open, but with a strict purpose and inspiration. Given the evidence cited for Aston Fowler’s continued engagement with her manuscript after binding and the precise ordering of the poems in her hand,

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<sup>125</sup> For example, both the Southwell-Sibthorpe manuscript includes accounts for domestic reference, despite its literary framing.

it is likely that when Smith was invited to participate in her work, the book had a strong poetic intention and perhaps even a clearly planned program for future additions. While Aston Fowler's editorial activity is plainly felt in the organization and presentation of her poems, it is most prominent in the early pages of the book where she has made the most interventions post-binding. The timeline for these alterations allow for another element of collaborative editorial process: in editing the early pages of the miscellany, removing the multiple leaves and re-copying part of Smith's verse 'O Lord direct my hart', Aston Fowler may have been revising the 'booke' according to Smith's influence or in conjunction with the planned additions by the Jesuit.

In this chapter I have traced the fluid lines and liminal spaces that belong to manuscript texts. This work is attuned to various kinds of reading and writing, including those that remain unfinished. Needless to say, the miscellany's most puzzling mysteries are its gaps, the empty spaces and the endless possibilities they represent. Of course we cannot know what was intended for the blank middle section, but we should recognize the manuscript's openness. The manuscript holds as many questions as it does answers. The curiosities of the text invite modern readers to interact with the form, to join their readerly effort to that of Aston Fowler and Smith. Without any other framing materials, the two opening poems discussed in this chapter set the stage for the miscellany, introducing a literary text that is never fully fixed in one perspective or one position, but is in that 'middle place', still in process. The reader with pen in hand cited at the outset of this chapter is significant not only as evidence of the text's historical reception: here is an act of reading that continues the creative process and it is effected through the poetic form itself. The reader has underlined the main text as follows, 'see how the soldiers gratefully replide / They force a spere in to tender side / woundinge him unto death: Then mildly hee'. In the margin is written, in a different hand, 'they giue him gaul and scoffs thus to deride / His patience meeke and loue in death—\*\*\*\*\*'. The final word is compressed at the edge of the page and written over illegibly, but the first line of the marginal couplet is clearly responding or perhaps rewriting the the main text. '[T]hey giue him gaul and scoffs thus to deride' could complete the main text's couplet by pairing the end-rhyme 'replide'. Aldrich-Watson suggests 'they chide' as a possible ending for the marginal line after the em-dash, but even with the line open to interpretation, the marginal intervention is noteworthy as a moment of interactive

reading. Here is a truly writerly reader, who not only makes a new text but fuses the reading and the writing process into one moment. The survival of this fragment of the miscellany's reading history sheds a light, the slightest glimmer, on how the text had a continued life in the years before it arrived at the Huntington in 1925.<sup>126</sup>

One of the guiding principles of this thesis is that verse miscellanies be read for their poetry, not merely as repositories of information on manuscript networks, and the markings of repeated reading and re-reading throughout the life of a text are valuable validation for this practice. While the verses are presented to us through the material form and imprinted by the editorial reading that constructed the text, it does not encode a specific reading to be passed down through time. Rather the reader enters into the 'middle place' where the mediatrix works and collaborates in the process of making meaning through the poetic form. And it is not a singular, cohesive experience. This kind of reading invites re-reading, just as 'O Iesu' structures prayer through a repeated formal refrain. In the versified prayer, the unification of the human and divine is held forth for Christ's final act. The self is present in the liminal space of contrition and hope through to the end. Yet third time's the charm in the well-composed prayer, each prior encantation proving invaluable in progressing the devotional force of the lines. The invocation is powerful in each iteration: 'haue mercy now on me'. Devotion is composed on the page for personal practice, verifying the efficacy of regular prayer. This is devotion in process, prayer that requires personal co-operation and steadfast hope: 'And for thy painfull passion sake / haue mercy *now* on mee'. The 'painfull passion' is fulfilled in the suffering of a sinner, composing his devotion by praying again and again and again.

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<sup>126</sup> Although the hand does not suggest a modern reader, the marginal addition is clearly added after the miscellany was bound and so suggests a reader interacting with a completed version of the text.

## Chapter Two - Tixall Poesy: form and faith in the lyric poetry of Constance Aston Fowler's miscellany

### **Miscellany Poetics: attending to form**

My work to merge the material and the literary in the study of manuscript miscellanies has thus far required a thorough understanding of process as well as a close reading of the text that is the end-product. The previous chapter began by attending to the material construction and use of the manuscript as part of an ongoing process of reading and re-reading guided by form. This chapter will further this project by examining the poetic theories of form that the poems themselves and the compiler enact on the page. The ‘work of form’ that I aim to uncover is not only found in reading for the effects of the poems, but also in engagements behind the scenes: the ‘poesy’—that is, the theories of art and poetics specific to the early modern period—at work in the miscellany and its verses. If my first chapter answered the question of why Aston Fowler and her collaborator read poetry and what kinds of reading their miscellany urges through its unique poetic forms, this chapter addresses a more amorphous question: why *poetry*? What did poetry as an artistic form offer for Aston Fowler, her community, and readers of her miscellany? The layering of agency in the miscellany text, through the creative and energizing work of the mediatrix, foregrounds questions of how meaning is made in poetry across genres and modes. In this chapter I suggest that the miscellany is a self-conscious work of form and that its readerly (and writerly) awareness of form is founded in a theory of refinement—a metaphysical fusing of material, textual craft as well as the divine, transcendent *idea*.

This kaleidoscopic array of semiotic questions is especially critical for the miscellany’s most prominent genre, the lyric, and as my readings of Aston and Southwell will address, the stakes for these artistic dilemmas vary in the form’s multiple manifestations. By attending to the problems of how signs and material forms produce meaning, it is possible to discern how the miscellany implicates the polite literary practices of poetic reading and writing in the vital questions of early modern culture. Whether it be lyric or epigram, devotional or secular, the poetic form is highly valued within the miscellany for personal and communal purpose. Such a potency of form is founded in a belief that art—verse—can *do* things; well-made and well-read form is dynamic, efficacious, and forcible.



Although the miscellany most likely never achieved any public readership, Aston Fowler's literary work in authoring her book of poetry displays a clear awareness of the forms and practices of the popular literary community to which she was connected through her father and brother as well as through the other poets of her acquaintance.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the evidence discussed in the previous chapter suggests that Aston Fowler's book may be a literary project that ended prematurely and incomplete. The 164 blank leaves in the middle of the book loom large in the imagination. Aston Fowler's collaboration with the Jesuit William Smith, moreover, asks us to remain alert to the specific uses of poetry in articulating and shaping the Catholic community's devotional interests. Aston Fowler's 'booke', despite its gaps and silences, speaks to a personal and communal appreciation of poetry as a unique form of art and devotion.

In taking the analysis of poetic form as my starting point, I am working within the recently reinvigorated critical framework of New Formalism.<sup>2</sup> For my understanding of the miscellany, the 'rededication' to form that Marjorie Levinson designates as the movement's impetus is centered not only on *how* poetry functions but also *why* poetry is valued.<sup>3</sup> My previous chapter directed attention to how form is implicated in the textual and devotional process of mediation. Awareness of form

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<sup>1</sup> Helen Hackett has noted Aston Fowler's consciousness of form and influence in relation to popular poets of the day, including those connected to Ben Jonson: Constance's collection and selection of materials for her miscellany also participate in what Adam Smyth calls "the genre of the verse miscellany." When she included poems by Herrick, King, Jonson, and Randolph, or poems about the Duke of Buckingham, she was not necessarily reflecting particular family lines of acquaintance or allegiances, but was conforming to verse miscellany norms of the time. Her inclusion of such poems suggests her awareness of some of the conventions of verse miscellanies, and also her access to relatively mainstream networks of manuscript transmission.' Helen Hackett, 'Women and Catholic Manuscript Networks in Seventeenth-Century England: New Research on Constance Aston Fowler's Miscellany of Sacred and Secular Verse', *Renaissance Quarterly* 65 (2012): 1101. The epitaph on Ben Jonson and those by Thomas Randolph also suggest a specific association with the 'Sons of Ben'. For a discussion of the 'Sons on Ben' as a distinct community of adept *readers* as well as writers, see Ruth Connolly, 'Model Followers: *Imitatio* amongst the "Sons of Ben"', in *The Oxford Handbook of Ben Jonson*, ed. by Eugene Giddens (online publication 2015).

<sup>2</sup> For a useful review see Marjorie Levinson, 'What Is New Formalism?' *PMLA* 122.2 (March 2007): 558-69; Levinson views new formalism as a movement, rather than a theory or methodology, that has a shared interest in 'form' but varied philosophies.

<sup>3</sup> Form is here taken broadly to mean the structures of poetry and genre, qualities of conscious artistry from traditional literary and rhetorical devices at work in the text to the more overt textual patterns such as stanza, punctuation, grammar, etc.

in this manner accords with Stephen Cohen's idea of form as 'shaped by specific historical circumstances *to perform specific ideological tasks*' (emphasis mine).<sup>4</sup> This model insists 'on literary forms not simply as containers for extrinsic ideological content, but as practices with an ideological significance of their own'.<sup>5</sup> Thus this 'work' of form is a process of mediating meaning, from specific historical contexts and with particular motivations. The miscellanizing process activates the poetic forms by destabilizing the self-sufficiency of singular texts and centering dynamic, intertextual close reading practices. In this light, the intertextuality of these verses could also be described with Peter Barry's term 'co-textuality', which he defines using the example of a sonnet sequence as a 'composite' literary form: 'Each individual sonnet is a complete literary text, with its own argument, tone, technique, and so on, but, at the same time, it is also part of a developing sequence of texts, across which a situation, or narrative, or argument is gradually unfolded and developed'.<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of this chapter, this 'co-textuality' or intertextuality bears out a thematic interest in poetic form and its various roles within the community centered at Tixall. Of particular interest is the self-conscious work of form in two of the miscellany's most valued poets: Herbert Aston and Robert Southwell. Both Aston and Southwell concern themselves with the efficacy of their verse, specifically within their shared genre of lyric poetry, not only in conveying meaning in artful and compelling form but also in validating poetic form as a means to enact true feeling and devotion. This chapter will continue my exploration of collaborative and collective process by tracing how the literary traditions and theories bound together through Aston Fowler's expansive creative agency speak to a kind of Tixall poesy. In accumulating numerous genres and voices on the page, the miscellany stays true to what I argue is its guiding precedent: at the heart of Aston Fowler's book is an appreciation for 'poesy', a love of verse, and a testament to the varied effects of poetic form. The verses return again and again to the question of how meaning is made on the page and in the soul.

As my previous chapter revealed, the miscellany form invites an awareness of

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<sup>4</sup> Stephen Cohen, 'Between Form and Culture: New Historicism and the Promise of a Historical Formalism'. In *Renaissance Literature and its Formal Engagements*, ed. Mark David Rasmussen, (Houndsmill: Palgrave, 2002), 32.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Peter Barry, 'Re-Thinking Textuality in Literary Studies Today', *Literature Compass* 7.11 (2012): 999-1008.

the actively composed processes of reading and writing. The miscellany's poems belong to the 'middle place' where new or renewed meaning is created through acts of mediation, most crucially through active reading that is structured by an attentiveness to the *work* of form. Herbert Aston, for example, theorizes poesy as enlivened both through the inspiration of a perfect, heavenly ideal and through attentive reading. His verse 'To My Honer'd sister' celebrates how reading skillful verse is a creative endeavor:

Yet nether Beauty, uertue; nor the name  
Of brother; doth so much my mind inflame  
To honour you; as doth that witt, and skill  
By which you guide your high poetique quills  
I loue you for the rest, this I admire,  
In nothing more then this do I desire  
To imitate you in...

95-101

Here Aston is reading as a writer and writing as a reader. He illustrates this dual-process in a description of creatively and actively reading for form at Tixall. Aston goes on to characterize Tixall poesy as collaboratively and self-consciously a *working* and a *refining* of form:

By your poetique fire they are refin'd;  
From there dull mould, you on them life bestow  
Ther's nothing in them from my witt doth flow:  
By you they moue...

124-27

Aston's verse is crafted through engagement with the form of his sister's verse, but it is also a living art. The process is circuitous: he is inspired by an artistic ideal, he forges his verse by refining that ideal for his own art, this form is then refined through its reception and given new life in close reading that is, in turn, attuned to the layering of inspiration and artistry. Thus, the form is set in motion: 'By you they moue'. My Introduction unpacked the alchemical associations of the language of refinement, but it is notable here in its metaphysical and neoplatonic context. Gertrude, in inspiring the verse, is also guiding her brother's act of literary creation, but it is in the Platonic sense: she is the heavenly *idea* of the poet-figure and her verse is the ideal of poesy that galvanizes Aston's writing. His verse is refined through this aspiration toward and engagement with that perfect image while he also refines the *idea* to something entirely new for his own readers to access.

This language of imitation, refinement, and skill places this passage in

conversation with contemporary poetics elucidated by the Tixall poets' most admired literary figure, Philip Sidney. Elsewhere in the miscellany, Herbert Aston draws inspiration directly from Sidney, describing his writing as guided by 'sidney's starr' ('To the Lady Mary Aston', line 45).<sup>7</sup> The most famous passage of Sidney's *Defence* is particularly relevant for understanding the theories of poetry that serves as a foundation for Tixall 'poesy':

Neither let this be jestingly conceived, because the works of the one be essential, the other in imitation or fiction, for any understanding knoweth the skill of each artificer standeth in that *idea* or fore-conceit of the work, and not in the work itself. And that the poet hath that *idea* is manifest by delivering them forth in such excellency as he had imagined them; which delivering forth also is not wholly imaginative, as we are wont to say by them that build castles in the air, but so far substantially it worketh not only to make a Cyrus, which had been but a particular excellency as nature might have done, but to bestow a Cyrus upon the world to make many Cyruses, if they will learn aright why and how that maker made him.<sup>8</sup>

I will return to Sidney's poetics throughout the chapter, but here it is noteworthy as a model of how writing and reading are intertwined in a poesy that is crafted with imaginative vigor and committed to a refined *idea*. This is paired with a readerly effort and vitality, not only to be inspired by the refined *idea* of the poesy—'to make many Cyruses', in Sidney's formulation, which posits Cyrus as a character written not as a base imitation but as a refinement of the spiritual *concept* of a hero. Sidney's theory of reading requires engaging closely with the form, to 'learn aright why and how that maker made him'.

A simple epigram offers a glimpse of how the miscellany was itself a space for formal inventiveness that 'substantially...worketh'. The epigram is in a semi-secretary hand that bears several distinctive features of William Smith's hand, discussed in Chapter One. It is of note for several reasons: it is copied twice in two successive drafts with both verbal and material changes between the two versions, and its relatively simplistic language and subject is structured by a triple acrostic of

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<sup>7</sup> 'To the Lady Mary Aston', fols. 150r-152v; Aldrich-Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany of Constance Aston Fowler: a diplomatic edition* (Tempe, AZ: Renaissance English Text Society, 2000), poem 50: 120-23. Mary Aston née Weston was Herbert's sister-in-law, married to his brother Walter.

<sup>8</sup> Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poesy* (c. 1580, printed 1595), in Gavin Alexander (ed.) *Sidney's 'The Defence of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 9.

the letters of the name ‘JESUS’.<sup>9</sup> The epigram’s title, ‘Off the Blessed Name, of Iesus’, specifies that the form of the acrostic, the letters of the name, is the focus of the verse and not the apparent subject-matter, which is a meditation on Christ as the ‘Light of the World’. The first version of the verse includes several errors that are likely due to poor copying as the scribe approaches the inner margin of the page.<sup>10</sup> The final version reads:

Iust as the sunn beames — In the midst of Dai  
 Expell the worlds — Eclipsing shads frō uewe  
 Soe is renew’d by Ie — sus glorious — rayes  
 Uile Ignorance Dull — uailes while he y<sup>e</sup> tru  
 Sunn of sweete Iustice — sence to reason swaies

If one reads only the first two vertical acrostics (the left margin and the inner margin after the dashes), several of the errors in the first version appear as simple copying mistakes. Yet there is another acrostic hidden at the end of the lines. ‘Iesus’ is spelled in the final letters of each line, which explains the spelling of ‘Dai’ as a conspicuous choice after the first attempt uses the more common spelling ‘day’. The opening line of the first version makes sense not as a simple copying error but as evidence of conscious editing: the second half of the line reads ‘in midst of day’ with an added ‘i’ at the end. This could be read as a use of first-person point of view given the requirement of proper metre (‘Iust as the sunn beames — In the midst of day, I ...’), but it is odd to use the lower-case letterform in that case. More likely is that in drafting Smith noted down the letter to work out the final acrostic. The alteration to the third line is equally brought into view as a possible editing choice as opposed to a simple copying error. Crossing out ‘name’ and appending ‘rayes’ changes the sense of the epigram from a wordplay equating ‘name’ and ‘light’ in literal substitution to a more metaphorical reading that shifts the wordplay fully onto the poetic form.

The choice to use dashes to regulate the spatial organization of the words on the page also makes more sense in light of the triple acrostic. Smith is always careful with his margins and here this attention is given to the three margins that contain the

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<sup>9</sup> fol. 7v; Aldrich-Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poem 3: 5; the modern edition prints both versions together for comparison.

<sup>10</sup> As discussed previously, Smith’s inscriptions to the manuscript were most likely added after the book was bound, yet the material evidence of this verse offers a curious anomaly. See my discussion in Chapter One.

acrostics: the dashes align the letters of IESUS vertically even in the middle of the lines and the second dash in the third line (added in the second version) re-arranges the final word 'rayes' to align with the ends of the other lines. Thus by reading the third acrostic as an editorial revision undertaken on the page, the poem is revealed not only as an example of *otium theologicum* (religious leisure) that was practiced by religious epigrammists as part of a devotional poetic life, but also as a contrivance of formal flair.<sup>11</sup> Here is poetic form composed on the page, likely as a unique creation for the miscellany. The act of making is clearly in view and the form is savored as much as the meaning. Indeed the epigram stages a transubstantive cohesion of the Sidneian *idea* or the heavenly form (in the Platonic sense) of Christ as the Light of the World with the material, textual form. This coherence of material, textual sign with epigrammatic substance constitutes a particular characteristic of potent poetic form, the metonymic function that is also at the heart of Christian devotion.

I will return to this forcible purposiveness of form to mediate signification in this transubstantive and incarnational context in several readings in this chapter. For now, I draw attention to 'Off the Blessed Name' as an example of the expressivity of poetic form on several levels: artistically, textually, and sacramentally. The epigram is not only a distillation of a clever idea into an elegantly concise form, it is also a textual object meant to be read for hidden clues and appreciated for formal intricacy as much as for godly truth. From this poetic curiosity it is possible to see how reading the miscellany rewards close attention to how meaning is made and mediated, especially in poetic acts that are self-consciously consumed by questions of truth, authenticity, and faith. Indeed, it is through such attention to form that the truths inscribed in the verses take on fuller meaning: it is in reading that form is given life, 'by you they moue'.

This idea of poetics born of the fusion of reading and writing form corresponds to Northrop Frye's view that 'the impulse to write can only come from previous contact with literature, and the formal inspiration, the poetic structure that crystallizes around the new event, can only be derived from other poems'.<sup>12</sup> Poetic

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<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of the adoption of the epigram to religious life see James Doelman, 'The Religious Epigram in Early Stuart England', *Christianity and Literature* 54.5 (2005): 497-520.

<sup>12</sup> Northrop Frye, *Northrop Frye on Milton and Blake*, vol. 16, edited by Angela Esterhammer (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 30.

form itself is intertextual in this way, never wholly cohesive in its own right but rather born of an interactive literary system and continually refined, reformed, and regenerated. The miscellany text draws out this characteristic of poetic form particularly well: Aston Fowler's book originated in her wide-ranging poetic reading and the resulting text displays a keen awareness of the effectiveness of poetic art in a variety of forms, following Sidney's theory of poesy and how 'substantially it worketh'. Moreover, the work of form in the miscellany relies on a creative process like that of a woven tapestry, which recalls Kristeva's theory of 'interwoven' texts within a broad semiotic system: made of individual threads that together, through skillful craft, create an intricate design, an artwork that is new and unique.<sup>13</sup> The imagery of textiles is shared by the poets at Tixall, who follow a Sidneian premise in theorizing a woven poesy: 'Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as diverse poets have done'. Such 'set[ting] forth' of the poetic tapestry manifests a potency of form, effortfully crafted and refined.

### **'Thus much for forme': writing and reading in knots**

Jenijoy LaBelle's early work on the miscellany frames the literary production of Aston Fowler and her brother Herbert within the imagery of weaving a 'true love's knot', drawing on the distinctive symbol Aston Fowler designed for her brother's



Figure 11 The knot cipher for Herbert Aston's verses, fol. 25r.

poetry [Figure 11]. The knotted cipher for Herbert Aston's poetry is evocative of the unique material embellishments Aston Fowler employed in her editing practice, her creative efforts simultaneously designing decorative art and potent symbols that invite close study in order to decipher a hidden meaning. Aston Fowler use of the 'knot' as an editorial conceit

codes Herbert Aston's poetry as highly prized material, while also taking on a more metaphorical cadence as a productive symbol for illustrating the miscellany's poetics. As I will discuss in my reading of Herbert Aston's lyric, the 'knot' is a symbol that resounds on several levels. Most notably in relation to the miscellany's poetic interests, the knot is a meditation on form and embodies a view of art as a

<sup>13</sup> See Julia Kristeva, *Semiotiki: Recherches pour une semanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1969).

self-conscious construction of meaning finely ‘wrought’ like a woven or knotted textile. Like the graphic symbol Aston Fowler designed, poetry figured thus as a ‘knot’ engenders close reading both for appreciation of form and interpretation of truth coded in the artistry. La Belle recalls this process and describes a specifically focused reading, ‘After studying this cipher for some time, I discovered that the key to its meaning was not to be found in the major outlines, but in the interstices between the intersections, where Constance has intricately woven together the initials H. A. of her brother’s name and the word *gOD*, written twice to form a cross of five letters’. This mirroring of critical practice to the form of the text on the page leads to the revelation that ‘[h]uman and heavenly love are bound together pictorially in Constance’s love knot, as they are frequently intertwined in metaphysical poetry’.<sup>14</sup> La Belle’s attention to these interstices, another kind of ‘middle place’, reminds us that reading such intricate, woven texts and symbols often requires a shifting perspective. The knot structures multiple layers of meaning in its twisting lines of ink and in its pictorial form. The symbol not only signifies on a simple metaphorical register in relation to Aston’s lyric love poetry, but it also creates a key for understanding the significance of the knot beyond its cord-like loops to the letterforms hidden within the symbol’s ligatures: there the reading and writing of the love-knot is revealed to be an act of faith that imbues Tixall poetry with divine significance. This prismatic perspective is well-suited to the miscellany, a text that is inherently predisposed for considered attention to the intricacies of the woven text. Such texts break apart in reading, but not into shards of incomplete meaning; rather when the hidden parts are unveiled the text shines in a new polychromatic light. A tightly woven tapestry, like lattice or knotwork, is similarly kaleidoscopic, and the miscellany reinforces the significance of this particular kind of weave, artfully crafted and tightly twined into a cohesive form. For these kinds of texts reading and making meaning are never casual acts. The forcefulness of these forms is imbued with a sense of urgency, an anxiety and a care that deepen the texts’ effects as their self-conscious work is coded with an awareness of the philosophical complexities of the processes of making.

The literary heritage of Tixall provides some context for this rendering of poesy

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<sup>14</sup> Jenijoy La Belle, ‘A True Love’s Knot: The Letters of Constance Fowler and the Poems of Herbert Aston’, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 79.1 (Jan 1980): 19.



in terms of textile creation. One of the most intriguing invocations of textile poetics is in the Sidney *Psalms*, a text with a direct link to Tixall. In one of the most tantalizing curiosities of Tixall's literary life, the Astons held one of the earliest copies of the Sidney Psalter, a presentation copy intended for Queen Elizabeth.<sup>15</sup> Of note for the poetic theories at work in Aston Fowler's miscellany, the Tixall copy of the Sidney Psalter includes the prefatory verse by Mary Sidney Herbert 'Even Now That Care', unique to the Tixall manuscript, that describes the psalter's literary form in terms of textile craft and portrays a process of collaborative poetic making: 'But hee did warpe, I weav'd this webb to end; / The stuff not ours, our worke no curious thing' (25-7).<sup>16</sup> The act of weaving and the image of livery is particularly significant here. The Oxford editors of the Sidney *Psalms* call attention to Sidney Herbert's use of the imagery in Psalm 139 as a uniquely feminine trope, but as Michele Osherow has noted, the language is also found in the original Hebrew.<sup>17</sup> Osherow draws our attention to the imagery of weaving, embroidering, and needlework, then, as potent symbols of devotion: 'The sacred potential of the needle could not have been lost on early modern needleworkers, nor could the association of Scriptures to things "well wrought"'.<sup>18</sup> In Osherow's reading this intricate material is poetically wrought, the sacred potential fully realized through '[t]he sheer number of poetic variations—one hundred and sixty-four stanzaic patterns, and ninety-four metrical patterns—mirror the kind of elaborately worked display characteristic of women's embroidered scenes'.<sup>19</sup> Such resonance rests on the implication of effortful artistic creation, text and textile read as finely and deliberately 'wrought'—that is, well-made and for a specific purpose. This attention to the needle in early modern literary culture has been productively glossed in recent work, such as Susan Frye's *Pens and Needles*:

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<sup>15</sup> It is not known how the manuscript founds its home at Tixall, although it may have passed to Walter Aston through his friend William Herbert, Mary Sidney Herbert's son and Philip Sidney's nephew. See Bent Juel-Jensen, 'The Tixall Manuscript of Sir Philip Sidney's and the Countess of Pembroke's Paraphrase of the Psalms', *Book Collector* 18 (1969), 222-3.

<sup>16</sup> *The Sidney Psalter: The Psalms of Sir Philip and Mary Sidney*, ed. by Hannibal Hamlin, Michael G. Brennan, Margaret P. Hannay, & Noel J. Kinnamon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5-7.

<sup>17</sup> Michele Osherow, 'Mary Sidney's embroidered psalms', *Renaissance Studies* 29.4 (2015): 650-70. See also Sophie Holroyd, "'Rich Embrodered Churchstuffe": The Vestments of Helena Wintour', in *Catholic Culture in Early Modern England*, eds. Ronald Corthell, et. al. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 73-116.

<sup>18</sup> Osherow, 652.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, 655.

*Women's Textualities in Early Modern England*, which traces the relationship between early modern women's material and literary cultures.<sup>20</sup> Although this thesis reads woven texts made only of ink and paper, this merging of critical frameworks has led to a reappraisal of how well-made texts can forge meaning through the cooperation of the hands and the soul, the human and the divine transubstantially refined. Making meaning (or sacrament) is a realization of a composite force of divine truth and human form.<sup>21</sup>

Mary Sidney Herbert's formulation posits a poetic act that is 'no curious thing' as it derives from a holy source—the Bible. 'Curious' is used in the sixteenth-century meaning of 'devoting attention to occult art'.<sup>22</sup> Just as the textile is made by hand, the poetry is also described in terms that eschew any mystical process of making art by foregrounding not only the direct, Biblical source material but also the authenticity of their divine inspiration. This manual work of form is thus part of a formula for poetic creation made legitimate through the act of mediation from one form to another, the refinement of form and *idea*. '[T]he stuffe not ours' is a mark not of lesser creativity, but of the power of mediation for compounding and creating new meaning. Philip Sidney delineates the uses of 'heavenly poesy' and other secular genres, but he unifies all poetry as 'an art of imitation...a representation, counterfeiting or figuring forth'.<sup>23</sup> His poetic theory is figured in mediation of the '*idea* or fore-conceit', and, as he makes clear, the 'delivering forth [of the *idea*] also is not wholly imaginative'.<sup>24</sup> Mediation, then, in the Sidney poetics, is the essential 'work' of form, making and mediating form are two sides of the same coin. As the imagery of textiles makes clear, meaning is 'wrought' not in a fixed process, rather it is a relational and regenerative. The *Psalms* are meant to be part of a devotional life, to create religious feeling that inspires moral action; the miscellany text is meant to be read (and deciphered) for the refinement of the reader's understanding of the poetic *idea*.

This meeting of woven and poetic form is also displayed in the printed

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<sup>20</sup> Susan Frye, *Pens and Needles: Women's Textualities in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

<sup>21</sup> In this formulation, I am keeping to my definition of 'form' as the physical attributes of an object/text. When adapting Aristotle's philosophy of hylomorphism, Aquinas uses the terms 'matter' (accidents), 'form' (being), which together make 'substance'.

<sup>22</sup> *OED*, s.v., 'curious, adj.', I.5a.

<sup>23</sup> Sidney, *Defence*, in Alexander (ed.), *Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, 10.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, 9.



tradition of knotwork, which could be similarly elaborate and was embraced in a range of genres including jewellery, gardens, and print engravings.<sup>28</sup> Knotwork or braiding in the early modern period implied complex interlacing designs as illustrated in braiding manuals.<sup>29</sup> Similar interlacing is recognized as a feature of poetic form: knots are described by George Puttenham in relation to ‘concord’ or rhyming made ‘by interweaving one with another by knots’.<sup>30</sup> Yet the gathering together implied by knotting is not always so easily read as a simple, even weave; a knot can become a tangle, strands twining round themselves or twisting together in a snarl. Nevertheless, as Osherow notes regarding the interplay of text-textile in needlework poetry, the total effect of such texts is only comprehensible with an eye to the cohesion of form: we must view ‘the effect of the whole...it is not a single stitch or figure that is magnificent, rather it is the combination of patterns, colours, and textures across a canvas that distinguish the finished piece’.<sup>31</sup> The knot-work of a knitted or crocheted text/textile can be woven into an impressive and cohesive whole through manual work that draws attention to its artistry as meaningful and efficacious.

Herbert Aston’s poem conjures not just the image of the knotted cipher, but also evokes the gestures and style of textile handicraft in a dexterous play upon the theme. Throughout the poem, love is phrased in the language of sewing and knitting: ‘cast mee off a gaine’ (3), ‘slacken in my strettnees’ (7), ‘thinke to knitt’ (11), ‘drawne by hand’ (13), ‘not made too loose, too fast’ (19), ‘Doe slipp the yoake’ (21-22), ‘haue no endes’ (27), and ‘hart stringes’ (34). The further conceit of an intricately embroidered poem as a ‘fancy for a newyears gift’ likens the ‘well wrought’ poetic tapestry to the elaborate textiles often exchanged between friends at New Year. Though Michelle Osherow describes these gifts as belonging to the female sphere and commonly exchanged between women, the practice of

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<sup>28</sup> For a particularly ornate example of an early modern decorative knot, see Albrecht Dürer’s Knots woodcuts which copy a design attributed to Leonardo da Vinci. See Eileen Costello, ‘Knot(s) Made by Human Hands: Copying, Invention, and Intellect in the Work of Leonardo da Vinci and Albrecht Dürer’, *Atharor* XXIII (2005): 25–33. Claire Canavan also explores the intricacy of knots and braids across several genres, see ‘Textual and Textile literacies in early modern braids’, *Renaissance Studies* 30.5 (November 2016): 684-707.

<sup>29</sup> For example, ‘Instructions for Making Laces’, 1651, BL Add. MS 6293, and others discussed in Canavan, ‘Textual and Textile literacies’.

<sup>30</sup> George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesy* (1589), Book Two, Chapter 11, in Alexander (ed.), *Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, 128.

<sup>31</sup> Osherow, 655.

exchanging ‘fancies’ for New Year’s celebrations was prevalent.<sup>32</sup> Herbert Aston co-opts the imagery of the feminine gift exchange of embroidered textiles to theorize a poetic theory of creative artistry not unlike the knot his sister designed for coding his poems in the miscellany. The form holds potential both in its representation of true feeling and in the manual work that it embodies. In professing and proving his love, the speaker calls attention not to the purity of feeling but to his heart’s passion as an ornate creation embroidered in poetic form. Thus, the conceit of ‘A true loue’s knott’ is amplified by attending to its knotted meter and form: the lyric is composed in lines that tie around themselves. It is an almost-sonnet composed of sixteen rhymed fourteeners, split not into the customary 4-iamb and 3-iamb lines of Poulter’s measure but instead split into lines of five and two feet. This splicing and the indentation of the final two iambic feet reinforce the partnering of the rhymes, which loop back to knot the end of each completed heptametric line upon itself.

Make me thy fancy and if I proue not	
A true loues knott	
That neuer faides, then cast mee off a gaine	
With more disdayne	
Then with loue you receau’d mee, but if I	5
Doe neuer dy	
Or slacken in my strettnees, lett mee still	
Inioy my fill	
Elce wher I cannot hope so sweet a rest	
As in your breast	10
There I’le discouer all that thinke to knitt	
A counterfitt	
Thus then it must bee drawne by hand deuine	
To be like mine	
For t’were in uayne for mortalls to indeauour	15
What last’s for euer	
And that’s a true loues knott all other date	
S’adulterate	
Next looke it bee not made to loose, too fast	
For nether last	20
The looser ty’d at fortunes harder stroake	
Doe slipp the yoake	
And what are drawne together by a force	
Breake or doe worse	
They only hold that in a golden meane	25
A uoy’d extreame	

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<sup>32</sup> Osherow, 664. On friendship and gift exchange in the seventeenth century see Cedric C. Brown, *Friendship and Its Discourses in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Last it must haue no endes, for such a Tye  
   Is pollicy  
 True loue could neuer tell how't came to passe  
   But so it was  
 Or if compell'd to answeare to a why  
   T'was I am I  
 Thus much for forme, the matters not forgott,  
 The hart stringes only tye a true loues knott

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Herbert Aston's lyrics, including his more traditional sonnets, frequently display this unusual style of couplets comprising a line of either pentameter or hexameter paired with a dimeter fragment. Here the form takes on greater potency, however, as it is married to the knotted conceit, its poetic structure coming into view as a series of knots, looped rhymes and ensnarled meter marked with an unruly pattern of enjambment and caesura. The verse coils and curls. It is a single knot, the titular 'true loue knot', made of many twining threads. Viewed in this way, the pattern evokes the Da Vinci/Dürer knots: a single ornate image made of densely threaded individual loops that interlock in several layers, a kaleidoscope of knots hidden within knots. It is a unique form in Aston's oeuvre, lacking stanzaic breaks and building upon itself until the final couplet. Yet the poem wrestles with the idea of containment and fixity, especially as it relates to the sign/symbol as a medium for holding meaning.

The opening lines thwart the fulfilment and containment of the secure knot that is imagined as a cohesive figure of fixed love. Instead of an evenly tied couplet, the meter spills over into the third line even as it draws the vision of the knot to the fore, tying the first 'knotted' couplet to the next line and flowing until the caesura so that the phrase completes as 'A true loues knott / That neuer faides'. This overflowing meter mimics the practice of knitting, each knot and loop connecting together in a strand and thus collecting to form a textile. The prosody of the verse tangles, catching on caesurae at lines 5 and 7, linking across line breaks through the first seven lines and again preceding the caesura in line 17. These unruly strands of meter coincide at the start with a lengthy negotiation of the speaker's standing with his lover: the conditional tense of these lines frays with the uncertain hopes of the speaker and the fate of his poetically knotted gift. Within this tangle, the prefatory lines present a weave of clauses and tenses, beginning with the imperative ['make mee thy fancy'], slackening to a conditional ['if I proue not...then cast mee off'], retreating to the past ['you receau'd mee'], and looping back to a conditional ['if I /

doe neuer dy/] and an imperative [‘let mee still / Inioy’]. The speaker’s lover is endowed with the ultimate judgment of his carefully constructed form; she is the ultimate maker or unmaker of the knot. Still the speaker wields his craft with an audacious vigor. His argument begins in force at line nine and proceeds in a more orderly fashion, as though to prove the speaker’s ‘strettnees’. Notably in its building of form without stanzaic breaks, the ‘strettnees’ is a tightly drawn, strait knot.<sup>33</sup>

The ending couplet turns in a climax reminiscent of a Shakespearean sonnet’s volta, one that twists the conceit in a surprising new perspective as the poem abruptly disrupts its straightforward argument for the significance of its form. The speaker self-consciously comments on the efficacy of such artful knotting or braiding, in a pointed phrase that calls his own poem to the reader’s attention as a similar work of artistry: ‘Thus much for forme, the matters not forgott’. The blasé contextualization of ‘forme’ in relation to ‘matter’ is starkly ironic. ‘Thus much’ has included 32 lines, after all, and ‘forme’ has been the speaker’s main topic. As the poem turns, the speaker reminds the reader to attend to the ‘matter’ of his love in language that glances metatextually at his own use of metaphor. We do not know if the New Year’s gift described in ‘A true loues knott’ included a handmade ‘fancy’ as well as a poetic one that could be read as a material substantiation of the textile semiotics, and so the verse-text reads metaphorically as a model of poetic as well as material ‘making’. The ‘matter’, as Aston clarifies in the final line, is couched in his conceit, the metaphorical language extending into his final profession of feeling: ‘The hart stringes only tye a true loues knott’. The speaker’s love is traced back to the source in the ‘hart’. It is not an abstract fount of feeling, nor a bodily site; rather, it is another textile. Curiously, in a poem that is an argument on the process of making or crafting true feeling, the ‘matter’ is ultimately metaphor.

The interpretive signaling of this volta-like heroic couplet that refers directly to ‘forme’ and ‘matter’ prompts a recognition of the creative process at work in the verse. Claire Canavan’s recent work on the correspondence of textual and textile practice, specifically in relation to ‘braiding’, has drawn out these ‘meaningful effects of making’ in posies such as those accompanying technical charts in the braiding manual, the ‘Nun’s Book’.<sup>34</sup> One such posy employs strikingly similar

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<sup>33</sup> *OED*, s.v., ‘strait, adj.’, lb.

<sup>34</sup> Canavan, ‘Textual and Textile literacies’, 695.

language to ‘A true loues knott’: ‘Dear freind [*sic*] I’le doe my best Indeauer / To Knit your affection unto me for euer.’<sup>35</sup> As Canavan notes, this language foregrounds ‘the emotive and connective semiotics of textile structures and techniques [...and] suggest[s] that tightly woven, interlocking patterns might express bonds more effectively and affectively than verbal promises’.<sup>36</sup> The conceit of ‘A true loue’s knott’ shifts the interpretive weight fully onto the rhetorical device of the metaphor that plays on this dichotomy of affect and made-object. Absent a material (or pictorial) knot, the ‘hart stringes’ are imaginative artistry that rely on the function of metaphor to tie meaning onto a disparate linguistic sign.<sup>37</sup> ‘A true loues knott’, though it claims a dichotomy of ‘forme’ and ‘matter’, extensively glosses the poetic crafting of the love-knot—the effort of writing, the imaginative resonance of metaphor—as the productive mode of meaning. Craft, then, is not merely a mediating force, but a substantive element for inscribing meaning. Reading the knot requires tracing the movement of the craftsman’s skill.

### **‘The Heauens paper’ and the ‘hand deuine’**

As the conclusion of ‘A true loues knott’ makes clear, ‘[t]he hart stringes *only*’ (emphasis mine) can make art that is truly meaningful: feeling is expressed effectively only when the form on the page is a direct refinement of the heart. In this material and poetic construction, the speaker finds that solitary thinking—detached from the affective communion of true love (‘so sweet a rest / As in your breast’)—knits ‘A counterfitt’. The fact that the language of making is not changed for the counterfeit foregrounds the performative nature of artistic creation: the form of the artifact could be identical, in this case a knitted fancy, but it is the somatic and affective communion of love that legitimizes the speaker’s gift. This act of making, then, is reciprocal and collaborative, implicated in the politics of gift-exchange as well as poetic creation. The title of the poem presents a past-tense description of ‘A true loues knott that was giuen / As a fancy for a newyears gift’, but in the opening

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<sup>35</sup> ‘Nun’s Book’, seventeenth century, Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, 2008.67.1, 9v; qtd Canavan, ‘Textual and Textile literacies’, 695.

<sup>36</sup> Canavan, ‘Textual and Textile literacies’, 695.

<sup>37</sup> Or onto a physiological phenomenon of the early modern body: ‘The midriff and heart-stringes do burn and beat very fearfully, and when this vapour or fume is stirred, flieth upward, the heart itself beats’, Robert Burton, *The anatomy of melancholy* (London, 1623), I.iii.2.4.



line the reader-lover is invited to participate in the *making* of the gift. First, the reader is drawn into a direct act that is not merely acceptance but is an imaginative fabrication: ‘make me thy fancy’. Later the participation is framed in a negotiated contract; the reader-lover can *un-make*—or unravel—the gift, ‘cast me of [sic]’, but if she approves of the love-knot, her agency is infused into the form and into the speaker’s experience of love: ‘lett mee still / Inioy my fill’. Feeling is married to form and love is realized in the tying of two lovers together in the exchange of the gift. The poetic process also reflects the duality of knotting as the speaker’s act of composing the verse-knot joins with the lover’s act of reading/interpreting the gift to create the meaning of ‘true loue’, which is proved not only in the transcendence of feeling beyond mortal understanding but also in the material form of the gift (‘if I / doe neuer dy / or slacken in my strettnees’). Meanwhile, these acts of composition and the consummation through the gift-exchange remain distinct events: the ‘knot’ tied between lovers must stretch across time and space, much in the same way writer and reader are brought together on the page.

In another semiotic knot, the occasional mode such as that of the New Year’s gift poem brings poetry and everyday life together on the page through verse that is ‘of the moment’ as a historically and personally specific entity. The lyric form, as the movement of New Lyric Studies (prevalent in scholarship of Romantic poetry) has clarified, is always historicized, despite its utterances of presence and subjectivity, which have long been understood as ‘representation[s] of isolated spots of time’.<sup>38</sup> There is a tension between temporal fixity and textual transcendence that blurs the moments of past, present, and future especially in relation to the lyric’s construction of anxious desire: the speaker is aware of his text’s futurity, in addressing the readerly ‘you’ he anticipates the moment of reading within his present composition. Indeed, the verse’s survival in Aston’s sister’s manuscript miscellany as well as his own restoration of the verse when collaborating with his wife on an edition (now lost) of his collected works suggest that the text’s afterlife was actively promoted. The verse’s commemoration of personal feeling and poetic making, then, problematizes the ‘occasional’ mode’s relationship to the past; the process of composition is conjured in the verse, but the New Year could be 1636 or 2019.

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<sup>38</sup> Virginia Walker Jackson, *Dickinson’s Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005). For an overview of New Lyric Studies see Stephanie Burt, ‘What Is This Thing Called Lyric?’ *Modern Philology* 113.3 (2016): 422-40.

Lacking personal or occasional details, the topic of ‘A true loues knott’ is the act of artistic creation, more than the hopes of the lover or even love itself.

By recounting the details of poetic and textile fabrication and insisting on the significance of process, ‘A true loues knott’ belies the ironic dismissal of form in the final couplet. Despite the mediation of meaning required through the gift-exchange, the speaker is eager to authorize the artistry of his craft, in a writerly tradition of the ‘defense’ of poesy. By insisting upon the importance of poetic collaboration with the divine, the speaker not only implies a coalescence of the human and the divine in his poetic creation, but also likens his role as ‘maker’ to a godlike vocation. ‘Thus then’, the speaker resolves, ‘it must bee drawne by hand deuine / to be like mine’. The poet as ‘maker’ is, of course, a commonplace taken from the Greek root of the word (*ποιητής*).<sup>39</sup> Puttenham and Sidney both define the terms of poetic creation in relation to this idea of godlike ‘making’. Puttenham notably foregrounds the relationship as the first image in his defense, opening with the straightforward statement: ‘A poet is as much to say as a maker’. He goes on to elaborate this statement, noting the contrivance of both form and matter:

Such as (by way of resemblance, and reverently) we may say of God, who, without any travail to His divine imagination, made all the world of nought, nor also by any pattern or mould, as the Platonics with their ideas do fantastically suppose—even so the very poet makes and contrives out of his own brain both the verse and matter of his poem...<sup>40</sup>

Aston’s ‘A true loues knott’ plays on this theory of poetic making by transferring the work of divine creation into the realm of the tactile.

Puttenham’s version of making, both divine and poetic, is specifically immaterial in its execution: God works ‘without any travail to His divine imagination’ and the poet ‘contrives out of his own brain’. The speaker of ‘A true loues knott’, however, designates the act of poetic making as ‘drawne by hand’, in terms that aptly describe the physical actions of textile handicraft.<sup>41</sup> Crucially these

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<sup>39</sup> *OED*, ‘maker, n.’, 5. Sidney also explains the connection: ‘The Greeks called him a ‘poet’, .... It cometh of this word, *poiein*, which is ‘to make’, wherein, I know not whether by luck or wisdom, we Englishmen have been with the Greeks in calling him a “maker”’. Sidney, *Defence*, in Alexander (ed.), *Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, 8.

<sup>40</sup> Puttenham, *Arte*, (London, 1589), Ci. Also in Alexander (ed.), *Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, 57.

<sup>41</sup> Canavan has surveyed the intricate corporeal skills enacted through braiding and weaving techniques, which sometimes required four hands working in tandem. She suggests

lines imply a consolidation of the human and the divine in art; the speaker cites this heavenly affiliation as evidence of the authenticity of the ‘*true loues knott*’. The question of sincerity and labor, what it means ‘to knit a counterfitt’ and for ‘mortalls to indeauour’, is framed in language that recalls the trope of posies Canavan has found in the Nun’s Book, which link textile practices to the expression of true feeling, the form working ‘To Knit your affection unto me for euer’. The rhyming of ‘deuine’ and ‘mine’ neatly affirms the speaker’s claim of heavenly distinction. It is the marrying of human feeling and divine art that makes the true love’s knot eternal, separate from human ‘indeauour’ that is tied to ‘adulterate’, or debase, mortality.

Sidney describes a version of this poetic elevation as the poet, in his theory, ‘lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect into another nature’.<sup>42</sup> ‘Vigour’ here implies a forceful effort that corresponds to the emphasis on finely wrought form espoused in Aston’s verse. Sidney’s poet can exceed the ‘adulterate’ world in his imaginative force, but it is through access to the divine, the heavenly *idea*, that it is then refined in the poet’s craft. Thus, Sidney posits an artistic endeavor that can ‘deliver forth’ not the ‘brazen’ world of nature but the ‘golden’ world.<sup>43</sup> Gavin Alexander glosses this passage with reference to Julius Caesar Scaliger’s *Poetices libri septem* (1561), noting that the artist ‘is not an imitator of nature but of the creative workings of nature’.<sup>44</sup> The new, literary creation is thus a presentation of a refined ideal, not merely an imitation of nature. In making his fancy, the speaker does not merely copy the artifacts often exchanged as symbols of love, rather he is working with divine material that he knots in a ‘golden meane’ (25). This version of artistic making—an act of refining the human and the divine—is held up throughout the miscellany as a powerful mode of mediation. However, it is not celebrated merely for producing a form to be judged in light of the heavenly or the transcendent, that is, a form to be read for ephemeral eloquence, sublime beauty, or abstract *idea*. Rather, it is the material text/textile that reifies the

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that ‘braids embody physical practices of making which are themselves meaningful. Knitting together participants, the co-operative handiwork of braiding incorporates makers into collaborative communities and suggests connections with other corpuses of collaborative writing’; See ‘Textual and Textile literacies’, 698.

<sup>42</sup> Sidney, *Defence*, in Alexander (ed.), *Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, 8.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, 9.

<sup>44</sup> See note 27 for *The Defence of Poesy* in Alexander (ed.), *Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, 323.

‘golden’ for readerly engagement and the miscellany honors this work of form as well.

This interweaving of the human and the divine is presented in several lyrics originating within the Tixall coterie.<sup>45</sup> William Pershall’s verse to the mediatrix Celestinae, ‘The first Alter’ (fol. 26v),<sup>46</sup> begins with lines that echo Herbert Aston’s ‘To his Mrs’ by placing the poetic process within a scene of religious devotion. He sets a stage for material devotion, mediating his love through a metaphorical altar:

Chast Flames of sacred virgins purely bright  
Like hallowed Tapers on the Alter; light  
My zealous loue

1-3

This rendering of the altar scene gathers the central image of light into a metaphor, with the illumination of the candles representing ‘Chast Flames’. The physical space of devotion is embedded into the speaker’s poetic offering, another reminder of how the circumstances of making artful devotion (for love or for God) are critical for the Tixall poets. Pershall’s staging here is paired with a strikingly Sidneian Neoplatonism founded in a recognition of the ineffability of his lover’s soul. He acknowledges the difficulty of his project, attempting effectual devotion to ‘shee / whose euery thought’s a Deity’ (8):

Sprunge from the uertues of her soule  
If parts bee taken for the whole:  
And can I guide my penn to raise  
A stepp to her deserued praise  
No I must needs those Merrits misse  
That haue no part of what shee is.

9-14

The construction is complex: in thinking about Celestinae, the speaker accesses the divine, even though it is only a ‘part’, as an emanation into the human form. Yet in writing his verse he must reach beyond ‘those Merrits’ belonging to that partial,

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<sup>45</sup> Herbert Aston returns to the idea of the human and divine in love and art several times: ‘The Perfect Louer’: ‘...his loue / which when his bodie dies, findes no remoue / Being rooted in his soule, but doth assend / with her, and like her, neuer hath an end’ (49-52); ‘To the Lady Mary Aston’: ‘For nothing more then this drawes soules to heauen / vertuous example that by beautyes giuen’ (91-92); ‘To My Honer’d sister G A’ plays extensively on the conceit: ‘...were the large Heauens their booke / The starrs their pens; and had the sea forsooke / His coulour and were inke, all would not serue / To expresse what your perfections doe deserue’ (27-30), ‘Being taken all together you doe shrine; / In human flesh; so true, and so deuine / A diety, methinkes that it should mooue / Vertue it self to be with you in loue’ (79-82).

<sup>46</sup> In Aston Fowler’s hand, Aldrich-Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poem 15: 46.

human form. This quandary for the lyrical lover echoes the angst expressed by Sidney's Astrophil, the prototype of writerly anxiety who recognizes in Sonnet 52 that his approach to Stella is similarly structured by the human and the divine in his beloved: 'Stella is / That vertuous soule, sure heire of heau'nly blisse. / Not this faire outside, which our heart doth moue' (6-8).<sup>47</sup> Pershall ultimately finds it impossible to express his beloved's perfection except through the conventions of devotion, which offer an example of how affective practice can be effectual in reaching unto the divine. His poetic endeavor is made possible through the potent efficacy of an imagination that works with the divine, like Aston's speaker who collaborates with the 'hand deuine' to knot his poetic fancy. This task is possible with recourse to a particular set of tools for the craft:

He then (who blest) shall undertake  
To say what Celestina is: must make  
An angels quill the penne: wisdom must thinke,  
The Heauens paper: and contrite teares the Inke.

23-26

Pershall's lyric, like Aston's 'A true loues knott', suggests that the making of meaning in poetic form becomes possible through a sacred communion of true feeling and conscientious craft. The material accoutrements of writing are in focus, but the speaker has, through pious devotion, elevated his act of writing beyond the human. His method for achieving this transcendent skill is not in the gratuitous spilling of ink nor in relying on insufficient conventions of writing. Sidney's Astrophil laments in Sonnet 93, 'What ink is black enough to paint my woe?' (3),<sup>48</sup> having already rejected the sentimental poetic practice of other poets for whom 'tears pour out his ink, and sighs breathe out his words / His paper, pale despare, and pain his pen doth move' (Sonnet 6, 10-11).<sup>49</sup> Sidney's anxious lover struggles with inadequate writing tools and insincere recourse to affective experience: Astrophil recognizes that 'delivering forth', to use the Sidneian term, meaningful and true love is a formidable task. Pershall's speaker addresses the lyric writer's strife by transforming the materials and conventions Astrophil finds so flawed. He writes with pen, paper, and ink but is making a sacred offering. In this construction it is not

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<sup>47</sup> *Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. by Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 173.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, 204

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, 155.

merely love or imagination that lifts the speaker's art; it is the convergence of human and divine in the act of devotion that imbues the poetic form with an effective potency.

Sidney's theory of poesy posits a relationship between human and divine form, but maintains a stricter delineation between even 'the highest point of man's wit' and true perfection of form:

Neither let it be deemed too saucy a comparison to balance the highest point of man's wit with the efficacy of nature, but rather give right honour to the heavenly Maker of that maker, who, having made man to His own likeness, set him beyond and over all the works of that second nature; which in nothing he showeth so much as in poetry, when, with the force of a divine breath, he bringeth things for surpassing her doings—with no small arguments to the incredulous of that first accursed fall of Adam, since our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it.<sup>50</sup>

Tixall's theories of form partly correspond to this formulation: in Sidney, the 'force of divine breath' is opposed to 'erected wit', whereas Herbert Aston's 'A true loue knot' contrasts that which is 'drawn by hand deuine' with 'all that thinke to knitt'. Sidney attends to the gap between the 'incredulous of that first accursed fall of Adam' and the comprehension of the 'perfect', while Aston's verse focuses on the 'true' that is set apart from the era of the fallen or the 'date / [...] adulterate'. Thus, in their views on 'making', both Aston and Sidney engage subtly with the Neoplatonist view of the 'emanation' of the perfect into the phenomenal world which in any Christian context is ultimately traced back to the incarnational poetics of 'The Word made flesh'. The alchemy of this artistic creation is dualistic, neither wholly human or divine but a paradoxical solidarity of man's skill and heaven's brilliance. Yet the miscellany's poetics cannot be equated directly to Sidney since its fusion of the human and the divine is a distinctly Catholic rendering of poesy, which Pershall's lyric also introduces in his manipulation of material devotion for poetic force. The miscellany's verses are evidence not only of delight in poetic art, but also of a belief in the potency of form to mediate meaning that is truly felt. The true love's knot is made by hand on the page (and possibly also in a more material practice of textile-craft) as well as by feeling in the heart; but importantly, it is crafted through collaboration with God so that the poet makes a gift that is not only

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<sup>50</sup> Sidney, *Defence*, in Alexander (ed.), *Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, 9-10.

a potent symbol but a manifestation of true love and devotion.

### **'[T]he inward sight' and lyrical devotion**

As Pershall's staging of his verse in 'the closett of the mind' suggests, the Tixall lyrics' attention to conscientious form reveals a poetic theory that relates the act of artistic creation not only to true feeling but also to understanding of the self. The Sidneian influence can be identified once again by way of Astrophil and Herbert Aston's poetry is a touchstone for understanding Tixall's idea of lyric selfhood. Aston's repeated attempts to capture his love for his beloved Katherine Thimelby, though never collected or presented as a sonnet sequence, recall the conventions of lyric poetry's persistent efforts to capture feeling in verse.<sup>51</sup> My readings of 'A true loues knot' and 'To his Mrs on her outward beauty' have discerned a writerly self-awareness at the heart of the lyric writing process that accords with the call in the opening of *Astrophil and Stella* to 'look in thy heart, and write' (1.14). While the lyric genre never resolves the riddle of how to mediate truth and meaning in art, it was valued at Tixall, I argue, not for the wit that attempts such a lofty goal but rather as a more intimate and affective form.

The Tixall lyric activates the problematic of poetic representation for several kinds of reading, including a personal and self-creating practice of devotion. Rebecca Wiseman notes that Sidney's sonnet sequence introduces the premise of lyric writing as one of self-presentation and poetic efficacy, a dualistic project that follows the Muse's exhortation to 'look in thy heart': 'the project of wooing Stella becomes at the same time a project of subjective self-constitution, and Astrophil's success is closely bound up with his ability to look inward in proper and productive ways'.<sup>52</sup> Astrophil, the fictional representation of the archetypal lovelorn sonneteer, grapples with how the 'radically personal, private image'<sup>53</sup> found by looking inward can not only lead to affective consummation with Stella but also 'grace obtain' (1.4). Read in relation to Aston's other lyric poetry, 'A true loves knott' can be seen as

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<sup>51</sup> Constance Aston Fowler collects three other lyrics by Herbert Aston to his beloved: 'The Perfect Louer' (24v), 'Whilist I here absente' (25v), and 'To his Mrs on her outward beauty' (33v). Arthur Clifford collects an additional lyric 'To his Mistress upon returne from travells', see Clifford (ed.), *Tixall Poetry*, 74-7.

<sup>52</sup> Rebecca Wiseman, 'Introspection and Self-Evaluation in Astrophil and Stella', *Sidney Journal* 30.1 (2012): 64.

<sup>53</sup> Wiseman, 'Introspection and Self-Evaluation', 69.

participating in a nuanced conversation with Astrophil. Aston's poet-maker is strikingly self-assured in contrast to Astrophil's continual anguish in his lyrical efforts. Sidney's anxious sonneteer spills his ink again and again in frustration. Francis Connor has observed that Astrophil's focus on 'ink', as quoted above from Sonnets 6 and 93, reduces his attempts to 'material artifacts that cannot reproduce the text the author imagines', collapsing his poetic making in on itself so that lyric writing becomes no more than inscribing pen-strokes on the page.<sup>54</sup> Aston's speaker in 'A true loues knott' is able to present his beloved with a material artifact imbued with his true love precisely because his 'forme' is coherent with his 'matter'. The material of Aston's 'hart stringes' is an affective self-knowledge that is not a solitary introspection but a knotting of love and self.

While Astrophil's attempt to 'deliver forth' his true love ultimately leads him to turn his introspection into fiction, Aston's speaker is able to offer his beloved a form that can transcend the writer's moment of making. Yet Astrophil declares in Sonnet 45 that his lyric writing must be transposed to fiction in order to survive: 'I am not I; pity the tale of me' (14). Wiseman proposes that Astrophil's introspection leads away from affective self-expression and instead 'shift[s] from the lived register to the realm of the literary. The visually enigmatic 'I', a kind of cipher that resists elaboration, is replaced at the line's end by the 'tale of me,' in a promise of narrative coherence'.<sup>55</sup> Astrophil looked inside his heart and found a 'tale' made of 'ink'. Aston's conceit of textile creation, however, inscribes his poetic *idea*, his true love, onto a more stable material artifact and does so through fully realized affective self-expression.

In 'A true loves knott', the speaker ends by facing the reader directly, answering the implied question behind any poetic effort: 'if compell'd to answeare to a why / T'was I am I' (31-2). Aston's act of writing has come full circle here. He presents himself to the reader, and quite conspicuously. In the context of lyric poetry's capacity for self-expression, Aston may be read as answering directly to Sidney's line as well as the Biblical gloss which undoubtedly underwrites both Sidney's and Aston's lines: one a self-effacement in fulfilment of a courtly, Protestant poetics, the other a bold profession made all the more potent by the writer's recusant identity.

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<sup>54</sup> Francis X. Connor, "'Delivering forth': Philip Sidney's idea and the labor of writing", *Sidney Journal* 31.2 (2013): 67.

<sup>55</sup> Wiseman, 'Introspection and Self-Evaluation', 73.



Condensing God's famous pronouncement, 'I am that I am' (Exodus 3:14), the line in Aston's verse plays on both a need for self-understanding as well as a requirement for accepting of the ultimate unknowability of God and of love. The context of (self-)knowledge and writing called on by this biblical gloss and literary reference, foregrounds a dichotomy always just below the surface of religious art: true faith is a structure of unknowability and surrender, while the act of writing is an attempt at understanding and control. In Exodus, Moses is anxious for language that can represent the glory of God to the Israelites, but the very fact of God's existence is all that Moses receives as guidance: he must grapple with God's unknowability, resorting to his necessarily faulty understanding as a means for mediating his faith. God's enigmatic 'I am that I am' directs the believer to look inward, to his own experience of 'I am' which in true faith becomes 'I believe'.

In Sidney and Aston, the anxiety of representing truth in art similarly relies on self-understanding, even though Exodus 3:14 has undermined the act of self-representation. The act of naming is futile: the experience of selfhood posited in 'I am that I am' is structured on the insufficiency of representing one's true self by any other means than through faith. Aston's questioning of the grounds of self-representation and artistic creation opens up these tensions directly. The attempt to justify art—'If compell'd to answeare to a why'—is an anxiety that underlies the genre of lyric poetry as well as the practice of miscellanizing, which is perhaps even more indulgent than writing in its bold delight in poetic form. My opening question for this chapter poses just such 'a why' that Aston's lyric addresses, and his answer indicates that it is poetry's personal and faithful work of form that defines the miscellany's interest in poesy. The refinement of human and divine effected through well-wrought literary texts is a collaborative operation: the writing and/or reading self must actively reach beyond herself armed with an active and affective faith (in love and/or in God).

Although my comparisons of Sidney's and Aston's lyric writing reveals that Tixall poesy is invested with the core questions of early modern literary theory, the social and religious context of Aston's verse and his sister's miscellany is also crucial to understanding the work of form that is adopted in 'Tixall poesy'. After all, 'A true loues knott' and the other lyrics by Herbert Aston and William Pershall have survived not in courtly manuscripts or printed collections, but in a unique verse miscellany that played a crucial role in the poetic life of a prominent Catholic family

with ties both to an elite literary heritage linked to the Sidney circle and to Catholic literary culture connected to the Jesuit mission. Whereas Astrophil attempts the poetic-alchemy of making meaning upon the instructions of his Muse and by way of his ‘erected wit’, Aston’s speaker is assisted by his collaboration with ‘hand deuine’. The writer (and reader) at Tixall is working in ‘the closett of the mind’ where the affective self-knowledge inscribed in lyric poetry—the felt experience of ‘I am I’—is steeped in meditative practices which are rendered throughout the miscellany in various forms, in explicitly devotional contexts as well as in the secular love lyrics. This attempt to circumvent the anxiety of lyric poetry through ardent devotional exercise conforms to the miscellany’s portrayals of interrelated religious and secular art as cooperative acts of heavenly and human creation.

Within the Catholic context, such meditative acts of art and devotion adhere to what Anne Sweeney has described in Robert Southwell’s poetics as ‘both an inner human force, meditative, but directed always towards God, an “inward eie” that “to heavenly sights / Doth draw my longing harts desire”’.<sup>56</sup> Herbert Aston elaborates on this Southwellian convention in another of his lyrics, an untitled verse that begins ‘Whilst here eclipsed’ and is included in the first section of his sister’s miscellany. It is in this section of the miscellany that the unique weave of Aston Fowler’s verse-tapestry comes into view as a particularly potent work of form. This section (gatherings K-R) mixes Smith’s Catholic poetry with Tixall verses and follows the heavily edited gatherings discussed in my previous chapter. Aston Fowler grouped Tixall’s religious verses together at the beginning of her book and left a gap of blanks (gatherings I and J), before inserting her friends’ and family’s poems. Gatherings K, L, and M comprise a selection of verses associated with her brother Herbert and her brother-in-law William Pershall (including ‘The first Altar’). This is followed by two more blank gatherings and then the Tixall poetry picks up with ‘Whilst here eclipsed’. Into the gaps, Smith has added a variety of Catholic verses, weaving in and out of the secular poetry; the resulting text-tapestry illustrates not only Aston Fowler’s diverse reading life but also Tixall’s poetic theory of human and divine power coalescing in art. When a reader takes up such a manuscript, she encounters a densely braided form which draws together sacred and profane

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<sup>56</sup> Anne Sweeney, *Snow in Arcadia: redrawing the English lyric landscape, 1586-95* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 72.

resonances, whose shared conceits and images manifest a striking potency of poetic form. The Sidneian view of form that ‘substantially...worketh’ is embroidered with this miscellanizing effect and the working of form, like of thread, is revealed to be dazzlingly versatile.

While attending to the reading life represented in Aston Fowler’s miscellany, it is worth noting the example of the Sidney psalms as a compelling reference point for the miscellany’s devotional lyrics. The Psalter offers a guiding light for the multifarious uses of form. The Sidneys’ text illustrates the complexity and elaborate profusion of feeling and form implicated in both devotion and lyric. Skillfully wrought poetic form is shown to be acceptable for intimate religious expressions of faith, and such utterances, significantly, do not preclude artistry. The example of the Psalter persuasively demonstrates how embellishment born of intricate formal stitches can cohere in the ‘effect of the whole’ for greater devotional force. The variety of verse forms displayed in the Psalter, a truly astonishing array as Susanne Woods and others have documented, is not a supplemental effect but part of the argument of the text, as Hamlin attests: ‘The Sidney Psalter was both a practical argument for the literary value of the Psalms, and an argument for the poetic potential of the English language’.<sup>57</sup> This work of form is recognizable in the Psalter as a model for the miscellany’s richly woven, effortfully crafted and refined poetic tapestry. Osherow and Hamlin have observed how Pembroke’s psalmistry depicts this artistry in the language of textile craft as in Psalm 139: ‘How to this whole these partes did grow, / In brave embrodry faire araid’ (54-55). Yet this ‘brave embrodry’ is not an act of posturing or artifice. Rather, Pembroke’s psalm, a metaphysical meditation on God’s omniscience and omnipotence in creation, begins in the ‘closest clossett of my thought’ (6). The psalmist offers herself to God through the art of her meditative craft: her ‘closest clossett’ is a place for looking inward and thereby coming to understand herself as a work of form, made by God in ‘brave embrodry’. Addressing the efficacy of poetic form in the lyric, and in the psalm, is thus a journey inward—to find the central faith of ‘I am I’—through the act of

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<sup>57</sup> Hamlin, *Psalm Culture*, 120; Susanne Woods, *Natural Emphasis: English Versification from Chaucer to Dryden* (San Marino, CA: The Huntington Library, 1984), appendix B, records the variety of forms found in the Sidney psalms. See also the ‘Table of Verse Forms’, in *The Collected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke*, vol. II, ed. by Margaret P. Hannay, Noel J. Kinnammon, & Michael G. Brennan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 469-84.

making. The Sidneys and the Tixall poets manifest their faith in their acts of creation: they make art as a testament to their faith in the ingenuity of their Maker, to honor their own existence as ‘drawne by hand deuine’.

Reading the miscellany’s intertextual weave allows a distinct devotional theme to come to the fore in ‘Whilst here eclipsed’ and a related untitled poem beginning ‘I strive to love’, which are bordered in the miscellany by Catholic ballads and lyrics by Robert Southwell. Read in this context, ‘Whilst here eclipsed’ and ‘I strive to love’ are revealed as the only examples of religious poetry attributed to Herbert Aston, their devotional connotations all the more noteworthy given their formal resemblance to several of his secular lyrics. The poems share Aston’s typical form of fourteener couplets made of a line of iambic pentameter and a dimeter fragment, but in this incarnation he has composed in stanzas each made of two or three split fourteener couplets and a heroic couplet. This more complex meter accords with the precedent set by the Sidney Psalter of ornate poetic art suited to devotional ends. Hannibal Hamlin describes the Psalter’s metrical and formal intricacy as a ‘source-booke for English poetic form’.<sup>58</sup> As Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, wrote of the endeavor, the siblings’ artistry is a refinement of holy form: ‘My Muse with thine, itself dared to combine / As mortal stuff with that which is divine / ...transformed / In substance no, but superficial ‘tire’ (‘To the Angell Spirit’, 5-6, 8-9).<sup>59</sup> It is its stylistic ingenuity that makes the poetic raiment a potent offering, as Donne’s praise of the Sidney Psalms recognizes in describing the work as ‘The highest matter in the noblest forme’.<sup>60</sup> The sacred ‘substance’ is thus refined for poetic effect into an accessible form and it is all the more adept as the forms engage active, readerly engagement. Certainly it is apt to describe the Psalter in Philip Sidney’s own terms for judging the merit and success of poetry: ‘so far substantially it worketh not only to make a Cyrus...but to bestow a Cyrus upon the world to make many Cyruces’. George Herbert’s *The Temple* is perhaps the most famous example of one of the ‘many Cyruces’ bestowed upon the world through the Sidneys’ example, but the Psalter also inspired Donne, Vaughan, Milton, and—as this chapter

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<sup>58</sup> Hannibal Hamlin, *Psalm Culture and Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 119.

<sup>59</sup> *The Sidney Psalter*, 5-7.

<sup>60</sup> John Donne, ‘Upon the Translation of the Psalms by Sir Philip Sidney and the Countess of Pembroke his Sister’, 1. 11, in *The Complete Poems of John Donne*, ed. Robin Robbins, rev. ed. (London: Longman, 2010), 581.

adds to the list—the lesser-known Tixall poets, who had exclusive access to the text through the Tixall manuscript of the Psalms.

In attending to Aston's genteel, metaphysical love poetry alongside the model of poetic devotion so near at hand in the Tixall library, I am suggesting that although his verses may seem at first glance to be removed from the religious lyrics it is presented alongside in the miscellany, the woven texture of the text brings the lyrical meditations together. The interwoven texture of the miscellany is readily apparent in these twining threads of form. It is not necessary to separate out the secular and the religious matter in Aston's lyric; instead we can read them as intricate knots, like the cipher his sister uses to adorn the poems. The examples of 'Whilst here eclipsed' and 'I striue to loue', I hope to show, are of note in this respect as they display a meditative devotion that is all the more recognizable as Catholic and specifically Southwellian given the lyrics' proximity within the miscellany to the religious poetry copied by Smith.

These two short poems narrate a lyrical construction of longing, variously the soul's longing for the consummation of God's love through salvation as imagined through the conceit of a lover separated from his beloved and *vice versa* (the longing for an absent lover figured through the religious conceit of the soul's desire for salvation). In fact, one of Aston's lyrics to Seraphina, the sobriquet for his future wife Katherine Thimelby, most likely penned while he was abroad with his father in Spain, embraced this romantic formulation of the conceit. 'Whilist I here absente' (fol. 25v), and its cousin 'Whilst here eclipsed' open with strikingly similar lines which describe the absence in visual terms. The romantic lover announces 'whilist I here absente languishe out my time / wher those blest eyes nere shone [...]' (1-2), just as the Christian speaker begins 'whilst here eclipsed From those hapy beames' (1). It is in reference to the contrast of external and internal vision that the experience of faith is metaphorically described in Aston's first stanza:

Whilst here eclipsed From those hapy beames  
   I liue by dreames  
 Absence the certaine bane of comon loue  
   Apt to remoue  
 Oft traytor-like inuades with Fayre pretence  
   My partiall sence  
 To leaue this seruitude in which I sterue  
 And here take present pay before I serue

Aston takes up the subject addressed by John Donne in his disavowal of ‘Dull sublunary lovers’ love / (Whose soul is sense)’ (13-14) and which ‘cannot admit Absence’ (15) in not one but two of his lyrics, turning the same conceit to contrasting romantic and devotional ends.<sup>61</sup> Donne’s version of the separated lovers hinges on a contrast between a love/faith born of ‘sense’ and one that is ‘so much refined’ (17), an emphasis that is directly picked up by Aston in ‘Whilst here eclipsed’.

The Catholic experience of an absent Church heightens the force of the isolated speaker’s longing, adding greater consequence to his ‘dreames’ and remembrances of God’s love. The pleasures of the material world offered to the sinner while absent the ‘hapy beames’ of God’s light must be defied:

To sensuallists this stroung temptation proues  
   Butt wher fath loues  
 It liues and Feeds upon the inward sight  
   Refin’d delight  
 By which I uiew my heart thy forme my flame  
   Euer the same  
 Though shades of absence reach my Earth, those lights  
 Do neuer know corruption nor nights

9-16

The poem’s censure of ‘sensuallists’ defies the critical commonplace of associating early modern Catholicism with materialist or sensory devotion. Here the speaker draws a distinction between a devotion that is too reliant on the senses, easily tempted in the state of mortal estrangement, and an imaginative meditative practice that is inspired by a process of faith that ‘liues and Feeds upon the inward sight’.<sup>62</sup> This ‘inward sight’ safeguards against temptation not through a purely creative act of imagination but through a refinement of the sacred. The pairing of ‘inward sight / Refin’d delight’ contrasts introspective meditation with worldly temptations, another kind of delight. But the play on illumination and visibility in the poem also draws the ‘light’ out of ‘delight’ and nimbly casts ‘inward sight’ as a refinement of God’s

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<sup>61</sup> ‘A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning’, in *The Complete Poems of John Donne*, 257-62.

<sup>62</sup> On the relationship between vision and the imagination see Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 42-50. Of further note, in relation to the senses and Catholic devotion, see Wietse De Boer, ‘The Counter-Reformation of the Senses’, in *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Counter Reformation*, ed. by Alexandra Bamji, et al. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 225-39.

illumination. Here, then, is an introspection that participates in a proactive faith and effectively constitutes a colloquy with God: ‘thy forme my flame / Euer the same’. Moreover, Aston’s practice of faith and art requires not only a deeply felt motivation, but also an affective introspective that embeds layers of emotion and divine truth into his poetic form. Aston echoes himself again, his religious lyric recalling the ‘true loue knott’: the genesis of both the devotional practice and the aesthetic making is in the heart. It is in the heart that the lover and the believer engage with heavenly ‘forme’ in order to produce worthwhile devotion; here Aston figures this refinement as a contemplative act akin to that of Sidney’s writer who engages his *idea* in writing his verse. Sweeney also finds in Southwell just such a ‘two-way’ poetics, one that looks inside to find ‘a streaming of perfect forms, graces and inspiration from God which we must try to capture and comprehend’.<sup>63</sup> Thus, the speaker can resist the ‘Fayre pretence’ (5) of worldly, ‘partiall sence’ (6) by turning inward to his own heart where affective selfhood (‘my flame’) is so refined by true faith that it is fused with God’s ‘forme’.

Aston’s Sidneian devotion draws a link between loving God and making art, a theme that will be picked up elsewhere in the miscellany. It is a formula that finds powerful precedent in ‘Whilst here eclipsed’, which stages lyric devotion as a self-conscious work of form. Though the human soul is ‘eclipsed From those haply beames’ of God’s light, Aston’s poet can be ‘lifted up with the vigour of his own invention...[and] grow in effect into another nature’; indeed, the speaker creates his own ‘Earth’ with his imaginative devotion. This act of creation, grounded in an ‘inward sight’ that is both affective and imaginative, is certainly meditative but it is telling that the contours of the poet’s heart-rendered ‘Earth’ and the details of his ‘dreames’ are never described, despite the reference to ‘sensuallists’ suggesting a vivid experience. ‘Whilst here eclipsed’, much like ‘A true loves knott’, is more concerned with form than substance; Aston meditates on *how* to enact (and write) devotion, but the object of his faith is left to the imagination, so to speak.

Though Aston attends to the process of devotion rather than the process of artistic creation, the question of literary representation is insinuated in the third stanza:

By which when I compare their faces here

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<sup>63</sup> Sweeney, *Snow in Arcadia*, 72.

To thy Forme there  
 And waigh the sacraledge I shuld comitt  
 Defacing itt  
 As soone to sell my knowledge dearly bought  
 I may be wrought  
 As this False fruite can me againe intise  
 To loose my inosence and paradice.

17-24

The play on ‘Forme’ and ‘face’ brings to the fore ideas of Platonic forms as well as issues surrounding God’s image, the ‘sacraledge’ of improper religious imagery.<sup>64</sup> This also draws out the dichotomy between external appearance, which is discernible by the human eye, and hidden truth, which can only be garnered through the ‘inward sight’. The speaker is wary not just of the temptation to turn to earthly delights, but also of the misrepresentation and demeaning of the divine through comparison with worldly beauty. The opening line of the stanza casts a sidelong glance at the tradition of sonnets that attempt to capture a lover’s beauty through insufficient metaphors. Sidney’s *Astrophil* is still near at hand, musing in Sonnet 5, ‘It is most true, that eyes are formed to serve / The inward light; and that the heavenly part / Ought to be king’ (1-3). *Astrophil* acknowledges that earthly ‘beauty can be but a shade’ (10) and yet *Astrophil* declares, ‘I must Stella love’ (14), his spilt ink and poetic making tied inextricably to the enactment of that love. Sidney’s introspection, though it leads to a recognition of the fallen status of the visual image, is ultimately directed to loving and celebrating Stella’s beauty, an earthly form. ‘Whilst here eclipsed’ denies as ‘False fruite’ such shades of earthly beauty that could entice the speaker to direct his ‘inward sight’ away from ‘thy forme my flame’.

Aston’s verse resists a conclusive narrative, however. The opening octet introduces the speaker’s struggle against ‘Fayre pretence’ that could persuade him to take ‘present pay before I serue’, but he is steadfast; the second octet gives strong rebuttal to the ‘shades of absence’. It is striking, then, when the ending couplet of the second stanza is unbalanced metrically, at least in an accentual-syllabic prosody (quantitatively, ‘corruption’ could be extended in a trisyllabic measure). The surety of the stanza is shaken by the off-balance heroic couplet, the enjambed lines and uncertain prosody unnerving the fixed assurance professed in the preceding lines.

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<sup>64</sup> For a discussion of images in Protestant and Catholic imagination (and devotion), see Clark, *Vanities of the Eye*, 168-72.



This metrical stumbling block sets the following stanza on edge. Form has faltered just as the poem takes on a self-conscious tenor in contemplating the mode of lyric poetry itself. The speaker's eventual surrender to uncertainty is notable: 'I may be wrought' (22). The Countess of Pembroke's Psalm 139 is brought to mind again as an intimate rumination on her existence as a form 'wrought' by God, which leads her to find God at work in her close, personal act of introspection: 'Each inmost peece in me is thine' (43). Aston's intriguing admission is all the more compelling since the connotations of 'wrought' which are linked to making, especially to artistic and handicraft work.<sup>65</sup> Yet Aston's declaration, 'I am wrought', plays on another definition relating to salvation: God's working on the soul.<sup>66</sup> The speaker acknowledges that this working upon his soul could find him wanting, the 'False Fruite' proving too enticing in the open-ended operation of salvation. The human experience of devotion is an experience of longing, here figured as the longing of a lover, and the ending of the poem reminds the reader that such an experience remains unrealized in this mortal life. The process of devotion, then, is one of uncertainty and the speaker dramatizes this continuous struggle, accepting that he must work for salvation by keeping his 'inward sight' trained on 'thy forme my flame'.

Taken together with the following devotional lyric 'I striue to loue', also by Aston, the irresolute ending of 'Whilst here eclipsed' unfolds into a process of faith that is sustained and habitual in the face of agonizing paradox. The poem recounts a 'scrupulous' exercise of devotion:

I striue to loue with out reward in vaine  
 For loue is gayne  
 Fayne would I suffer But my soule's disease  
 It selfe doth please  
 And my loue soares so emminent a height  
 That I am scrupulous of this delight

1-6

The act of loving is once again more salient than the object of the speaker's desire;

<sup>65</sup> The *OED* lists several relevant glosses in relation to textile craft, including 'Wrought, *adj.*', II. 6. 'Of a fabric, garment, etc.: decorated or ornamented with needlework; embellished, embroidered. Also: designating embroidered needlework.' This is also related to the definition of 'Work, *v.*' IV. 25a, 'To make (a fabric, garment, etc.); to weave, spin, sew, knit, etc. Now chiefly: to embroider (a garment, tapestry, etc.)'.

<sup>66</sup> In a similar sense to *OED*, 'Work, *v.*', I. 3. 'Of a person or (now only) God, the Holy Spirit, etc.: to do something; to operate, act. Also: (of God, the Holy Spirit, etc.) to operate *through* or be active *in* a person.'

‘loue is gayne’ so much so that even the sufferance of the unrequited experience ‘It selfe doth please’. The power of such love is akin to flight as the speaker attempts to reach heaven itself: ‘I couet death’ (7). The speaker is right to be scrupulous, for although the process of devotion is celebrated and the act of loving is key, it must be carefully executed. The vertical trajectory of such love is suspended between the exquisite pain of loving God while isolated on Earth and the exaltation that love gives as it ‘soares’ toward heaven—the speaker must fly the middle path. Ultimately the speaker can soar, but he must be diligent in his devotion: ‘I fall a dayly sacrifice’ (24). The soul ‘may be wrought’, but it is not a certainty—the crux is the subjunctive ‘may’.

The pairing of these two lyrics is suggested not only by their proximity within the miscellany. At the time of binding, these poems began a new gathering and were copied in sequence: the intervening epigram ‘The Complement’ was likely added after the book was bound, copied into the blank space on fol. 47r but not filling the following verso leaf which was also left blank at the time of binding. This adheres to Aston Fowler’s preference for beginning poems with a new page and, in the case of a poem ending in the middle of a leaf, her tendency to leave ample space for copying another verse to fill up the blank.<sup>67</sup> These lyrics have been overlooked in the criticism on HM904 and their explicitly religious tenor refutes the accepted division between the religious and secular poetry in the miscellany. Here Herbert Aston’s style is recognizable, but he self-consciously converts the poetic form of his ‘fancies’ into religious lyric. The potency of form is so compelling in these two lyrics that they have been misidentified as two more of Aston’s typical, secular love poems. Aston’s attention to the effects of form is implicit in this transfiguration of the indulgent love lyric to devotional purpose. It is also explicit in the focus of ‘Whilst here eclipsed’ on the correct form of devotion: through ‘dreames’ fed by ‘inward sight’ that are the only uncorrupted access to the divine, ‘those hapy

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<sup>67</sup> See Appendix 2. This is by no means a consistent practice, as Aston Fowler varied her scribal routines, sometimes copying verses one after another without starting at the top of a new page. This particular copying practice, however, is also seen at fol. 13r, a blank space later filled by two short verses, and fol. 185r, a blank leaf filled at a later time with two short poems. In these examples, the verses used to fill the blank spaces, like ‘The Complement’ interspersed between Aston’s religious lyrics, are unconnected with the theme of the surrounding poems. The extra blank leaf suggests that at the time of copying Aston Fowler might have had a particular poem in mind to later fill the space, perhaps another of her brother’s lyrics.

beames' of God's love. 'I strive to love' questions the form of devotion, however, by balancing on an acutely Southwellian paradox. At issue is not the gap between the immaculately imagined 'inward sight' and mortal experience of faith, but instead Aston destabilizes the ability of any form of devotion to accommodate true meaning at all.

The poem's conceit is directly congruent with one of Southwell's verses, 'Life's Death, loves life', which is included in the miscellany, copied by Smith along with several other Southwell poems (fols. 35v-36r).<sup>68</sup> 'Life's Death, loves life' is almost overwhelmed by paradox, each stanza sinking in deepening quagmires of meaning. The short verse is laced over and over again with the four words of its title, its compulsive repetition straining the structures of meaning. Southwell's wordplay not only displays 'an ingenuous fondness for words and word sounds' but also, Aldrich-Watson notes, ties itself into a knotted 'religious conundrum'.<sup>69</sup> Southwell's paradox can be readily traced in Aston's lyric 'I strive to love', which presents the conceit in a potent knot: true devotion is to live by loving God, but that love of God cannot be realized in life; only by dying can the joy of God's love be consummated and eternal life be granted. This binding of life and death—mortal and immortal, human and divine—is the looping paradox inherent in the Christian faith. The central Christian story is a knot, a perpetual loop like Aston's fancy that 'must haue no endes': out of love for man, God lived a human life in order to suffer and die a mortal death, thereby granting immortal life to all souls who have, in turn, suffered and lived by loving God. The seven stanzas of 'Life's Death loves life' accumulate impenetrable contradictions: Southwell's strange statements such as 'Loue where it lou's, life where it liues / Desires most to be' (15-16) threaten to unravel, especially when followed immediately by contradictory lines: 'And sith loue is not where it liues / Nor liueth where it loues' (17-18). Yet Southwell is jarringly matter of fact in his conclusion:

Mourne therefore no true louers deeth  
Life onely him Annoyes  
And when he taketh leaue of life  
Then loue begins his Joyes.

29-32

The Gordian Knot of 'Life's Death, loves life' entangles 'life' and 'love', which

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<sup>68</sup> Aldrich-Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poem 27: 70-71.

<sup>69</sup> Aldrich-Watson, Introduction to *The Verse Miscellany*, xxxi.

twist together in the uncertainty of unrealized longing until this final stanza secures the knot of meaning: death is joy, love is immortal. The poem is almost too neatly tied off, given how understanding constantly slips out of reach. Aston’s rendering of this paradox, however, is attuned to the value of sufferance inherent in it, not just playing on the contradiction but narrating a personal experience of the doubt and uncertainty. In Aston’s formulation, the experience of this life of love is both a soaring delight and an insufferable torment: the suffering is unbearable to the extent that death becomes alluring, but he is ever aware of the pain as necessary in its own right.

The speaker of ‘I strive to love’ winds his version of the knot, declaring ‘I couet death’ (7) but recognizing the need to suffer life: ‘To dare to liue is louers boldest height’ (11). Again he twists this thread out of an easy certainty: ‘But if I liue my torments I discreditt / Which plead some merrit’, he admits while also contending that ‘If I die my soule must from this Heau’n remoue / And change her loue’ (13-16). He can neither live nor die: ‘life nor death my soule can please / For death’s inconstancy and life seemes ease’ (17-18). This experience of devotional uncertainty is left fraught, but finely ‘wrought’, to use this chapter’s key term:

This new found mischiefe intricate distress  
   Strangely possesse  
 A soule that’s trulie touch’t: it doth re priue  
   Makes me suruiue  
 A paine that’s infinite; yet t’can’t suffice  
 Although I fall a dayly sacrifice.

19-24

Not only ‘intricate’ suffering, but an ‘intricate’ meaning is constructed in the gathering of contradictions. The verse suggests that the ‘mischiefe’ and the mystery of divine meaning is its paradox, its ultimate transcendence of signification. Rosalie Colie’s seminal work on paradox in Renaissance literature explains that such interpretive vexation ‘play[s] back and forth across terminal and categorical boundaries—that is, [paradoxes] play with human understanding, the most serious of all human activities’.<sup>70</sup> Understanding is not the promise of this version of

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<sup>70</sup> Rosalie Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox*; qtd in Sadia Abbas, ‘Polemic and Paradox in Robert Southwell’s Lyric Poems’, *Criticism* 45.4 (Fall 2003): 460. See also Hannah Crawforth, ‘Gender and reproduction in the *Spirituell experiences*’, in *Conversions: gender and religious changed in early modern Europe*, eds. Helen Smith and Simon Ditchfield (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 81-101.

devotion, even for a ‘soule that’s trulie touch’t’. The grammar and meter of the stanza mirrors the process of vexed understanding and the ‘intricate distress’ of uncertainty and longing is seen in both sufferance and reprieve of meaning. There is ‘mischiefe’ of form in both balance and discord.

Instead of culminating in a distillation of doubt to certainty or discord to harmony, the final stanza undermines the structure of poetic or salvific resolution. The lines’ enjambment and caesurae knot the stanza in a web of compact clauses and phrases that resist an easy flow of reading: each line is broken into distinct parts and the sentence’s disordered syntax lurches in a tortuous reading that mirrors the speaker’s ‘intricate distress’. The disjointed phrases jilt the rhythm even as the dispersal of the three clauses (split by punctuation at the colon and the semicolon) shifts the sense of the stanza out of the containment of the line and couplet. Thus the form reinforces the sufferance of uncertainty and heightens the tension, which never disperses. The final lines condense the interminable elusiveness of knowledge: the ‘intricate distress’ is both reprieve against ‘infinite’ pain and a continuance of suffering. Such poetic and devotional effort is both a salve to the pain of longing even as it must be composed of the suffering. And yet the pain cannot be lessened; it must be acutely, routinely felt, and devotion must be acted out ritualistically. Aston’s verse enacts this form of devotion: one that cannot ‘suffice’ or claim certainty, and whose speaker must ‘fall a dayly sacrifice’. If the meaning is beyond mortal understanding and if salvation is never certain, form is either all or nothing, and it is made all the more potent as the speaker’s only recourse. ‘Thus much for forme’, indeed.

### **Sacramental Poetics**

The poems discussed above, and their complex weaving of poetic theory and theology, are all the more intriguing for their survival at the hands of a young Catholic woman, collected by the poet’s sister into a volume that combines lyric poetry and courtly verse with Catholic devotion. Though disguised as occasional love lyrics, couched in the genre’s tropes and tucked away into groupings of social and secular poems, Aston’s verses posit a model of poetic creation and devotional conviction that is striking for its potency of form. His fruitful trope of textile craft invokes a materiality that reminds the reader that, like a fancy exchanged between

lovers as a New Year's gift, the miscellany is a text that makes meaning through materiality as well as through poetic art. Likewise, it is the miscellany's weave of intertextuality and collaboration that composes its devotional and literary meaning. Just as the tapestry of the miscellany is complexly threaded by interweaving secular and religious themes, so the embroidered text of 'A true loues knott' with its conceit of knot-craft and the 'intricate' paradoxes of faith in Aston's religious lyrics recalls not only the literary theory of elite, literary circles but also the poetics of the pre-eminent Catholic poet-priest, Robert Southwell.

The lyrics that make up the majority of Aston Fowler's miscellany seem at first glance the work of those wits denounced by Southwell as 'spilling much Arte in some idel phansie'.<sup>71</sup> Yet this chapter has drawn out the fluidity of the lyric genre for effortful devotion as much as for passionate love. Southwell's own lyric offerings display an acute awareness of the form's adaptability. Indeed, Southwell recognizes the conceit of embroidery as a potent one and uses the imagery to illustrate the salvific implications of faith well 'wrought'. In *An Epistle of Comfort*, Southwell describes the intricacies of God's work upon a soul in language that draws on the concepts of the contemporary poetic theory I have quoted throughout this chapter:

And as a cunning imbroderer hauinge a peece of torne or fretted veluet for his ground, so contryueth and draweth his worke, that the fretted places being wrought ouer with curious knottes or flowers, they farr excell in shew the other whole partes of the veluet: So God being to worke vpon the gronde of our bodyes, by you so rente & dismembred, will couer the ruptures, breaches, & wounds, which you haue made, with so vnspeakable glory, that the whole partes which you lefte shalbe highlye beautified by them.<sup>72</sup>

The language of contrivance is recognizable, but the artistry of embroidery and knot-work is here given signification beyond that of merely making/creating, instead becoming a means for salvation and attaining God's glory. The fabric of the soul figured as 'torne or fretted veluet' also relates to the soul's uncertain struggle, a particularly resonant inflection for recusants. The image offers the comfort of knowing that though devotion can be anxiety-ridden and may even require the sufferance of violence, God will restore beauty and happiness. God is not only a maker of souls: he also embellishes artfully, creating holy art out of human material.

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<sup>71</sup> Robert Southwell, 'To the Reader' in *Marie Magdalens Funerall Teares* (London, 1591), A7r.

<sup>72</sup> Robert Southwell, *An Epistle of Comfort*, (London, 1587), Bb4r-v.

Despite the altered context of the embroidery trope, the language of ‘contrivance’ invokes theories of art and poetry, and the imagery of embroidery in this passage gives way to a different conceit connected directly to the act of writing. Southwell expounds on God’s salvific power with another image of material transfiguration: ‘And as the paperer of olde rotten shreddes [...] by his industrie maketh so fyne white, and cleane paper, that it is apte to receyue anye curious drawinge, paynting, or limminge: so oure scattered partes [...] he will restore to such puritye & perfection that they shal be more capable of his glorious ornamentes, then they were before.’<sup>73</sup> The basest parts of humanity in Southwell’s formulation, the parts ‘cast into dunghills’, can be transfigured specifically through the *artistry* of the divine craft of salvation, work that not only purifies but creates ‘another nature’ and is thus specifically related to art. An early observer of Southwell’s use of ‘embroidered’ style, Brian Oxley has noted the ‘deep connection between “art” and “devotion”’ in Southwell’s poetics: ‘the “curious knots or flowers” of Renaissance rhetoric become a metaphor for the divine art which rewrites a mutilated into a glorious body; a means of representing the transfigured reality, which is seen or imagined in meditation’.<sup>74</sup>

Southwell also makes use of textile imagery to justify using poetry in his devotion and his ministry, commenting on the need to encourage poets to apply their talents to the worthy cause as he does:

And because the best course to let them see the error of their workes, is to weave a new webbe in their owne Looome, I haue here layd a few course threds together, to inuite some skilfuller wits to go forward in the same, or to begin some finer peece, wherein it may be seene how well verse and vertue sute together.<sup>75</sup>

The miscellany is an example of one such ‘peece’ testifying to ‘how well verse and vertue sute together’. The act of weaving, like that of tying a knot or embroidering flowers, is transformative and the ‘threds’ of art and devotion brought together in Aston Fowler’s miscellany become, through the unique poetics of the miscellany, more than disparate parts. Celebrating both secular and devotional art, the

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., Bb4v.

<sup>74</sup> Brian Oxley, ‘The Relation between Robert Southwell’s Neo-Latin and English Poetry’, *Recusant History*, 17 (1985): 206.

<sup>75</sup> Robert Southwell, ‘The Author to his loving Cousin’, in *Saint Peters Complaint* (London, 1595), A2v.

miscellany is a ‘webbe’ that combines the fallen and the divine. The poetic process works through the ‘threads’ of the miscellany’s verse in ways that Southwell and Sidney, as well as Herbert Aston and Constance Aston Fowler, recognized as transfiguration and mediation, a sacramental communion of meaning and signification.

Recent criticism has taken a particular interest in Southwell’s sacramental poetics as well as the poets who followed his lead in suiting ‘verse and vertue’ together. Sophie Read places Southwell alongside Donne, Herbert, and Milton as exercising a ‘eucharistic’ poetics. The term is especially weighty as applied to Southwell, given the recusant context and his Jesuit mission, as his poetic project was tied to the estrangement of English Catholics from the Church of Rome as well as the loss of the Catholic Mass in England. This is the crux of Southwell’s poetic sacrament, which Read defines as ‘an attempt to make present what is absent’.<sup>76</sup> The survival of his verse in a miscellany such as HM904, particularly with its connection to Smith, is evidence of poetry’s continued efficacy in the Jesuit mission. Shaun Ross recently cited Bodleian MS Eng Poet B.5 (Smith’s Warwickshire manuscript) as a specific example of Southwell’s legacy of poetic pastoral work that ‘extend[s] through his poetry not only Christ’s body, but also his own mediating authority as confessor and priest’.<sup>77</sup> Ross sees the Warwickshire manuscript as mirroring a breviary and it is true that Eng. poet. b.5 is structured as a more explicitly pastoral book compared to HM904 and includes poems relating to the liturgical calendar and entries relating to local families in Southwell’s ministry. Though the Southwell poems are shared across the two manuscripts, the context of Aston Fowler’s verse miscellany is self-consciously literary and the intricate poetics of Southwell’s verse is brought to the fore, especially in juxtaposition with the secular poetry collected by Aston Fowler, including her brother’s love lyrics.

The first half of this chapter set out to show that Aston Fowler’s miscellany displays a marked interest in the efficacy of poetic form, concerned not only with the enjoyment or sociality of verse but the process of making (and mediating) meaning through the dual actions of writing and reading. This self-consciousness

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<sup>76</sup> Sophie Read, *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 42.

<sup>77</sup> Shaun Ross, ‘Robert Southwell: Sacrament and Self’, *English Literary Renaissance* 47.1 (2017): 79.



about poetic form is not only indebted to Renaissance literary theory but is also linked to eucharistic or sacramental beliefs, as Kimberley Johnson explains: ‘The eucharistic event, at its most basic level, involves the worshipper’s encounter with material signs for the substance of the body of Christ’.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, as Johnson goes on to argue, attention to ‘the mechanics of sacramental worship catalyzes a poetics that foregrounds the ritual’s inherent tensions between material surface and spirit, a poetics remarkably attuned to the complicated interdependence of the body and the word’.<sup>79</sup> Southwell’s writing is imbued with a specifically Catholic hermeneutics of the Eucharist, underwriting a process of devotion that culminates in the ultimate coherence of ‘word and body’ through martyrdom. This meeting of sign and meaning is made possible by suffering, just as the lyric poet suffers to make meaningful art. In Southwell’s textile imagery, it is the ‘fretted places’, the ‘ruptures, breaches, & wounds’, that become most beautiful through the transformative effects of God’s work. Elsewhere in the *Epistle*, Southwell’s textile imagery is related to *imitatio Christi*, referring to a common conceit of the Incarnation as God clothed in human form but here specifying suffering as Christ’s ‘liuerye’: ‘[The Christian] can not but thincke it a most comfortable thinge to suffer aduersitye, for a good cause, seing it is not onlye the liuerye and cognizance of Christe, but the very principall royall garment, which he choise to weare in this lyfe’.<sup>80</sup> Southwell’s advice to his imprisoned and persecuted friend is to wear his suffering. ‘[A]ffliction is our cote’, he reminds Philip Howard and the recusant community, but he does not encourage a retreat into masochistic fantasy. Instead he clarifies the activating agent of the devotional stance informed by suffering: ‘the Crosse [is] our cognizance’.<sup>81</sup> ‘Cognizance’ could signify variously understanding or recognition as well as a ‘badge, emblem, mark, token’.<sup>82</sup> Christian suffering thus makes meaning and identity. As Read explains, in the Passion and in martyrdom—the ultimate *imitatio Christi*—it is the ‘experience of shame and suffering which is also, and consequently, the moment of greatest glory and exaltation’.<sup>83</sup> The sacramental

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<sup>78</sup> Kimberley Johnson, *Made Flesh: Sacrament and Poetics in Post-Reformation England*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 26.

<sup>79</sup> Johnson, *Made Flesh*, 27.

<sup>80</sup> Robert Southwell, *An Epistle of Comfort*, D1v.

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *OED*, ‘cognizance, n.’, I.1a & b, III.5b.

<sup>83</sup> Read, *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination*, 42.

poetics at work in Southwell's poetry is not only a mechanics of presence, but also a practice of productive suffering. Furthermore, this mode of making meaning is potently poetic and noticeably lyrical.

The tradition of reading Southwell's poetry as relics of his martyrdom passed among an English recusant community has led to a view of Southwell's writing as relying on a limiting literalism, a one-to-one mooring of material sign to the body.<sup>84</sup> Yet the paradox of sacrament and of martyrdom is that it is never terminal: the communion of sign and signified is not a fixed moment but a process that is personally transformative and thus carried on through life (and after-life). The recent eucharistic and sacramental readings such as Ross's have reclaimed Southwell's poetic clout by noting his use of the lyrical mode of affective literary creation: 'Preempting Donne and Herbert, Southwell makes the poetic word a sacramental sign not via some ostensibly Catholic insistence on the static immanence of divine presence, but in the sense that the kind of presence made available in poetry, like that of the sacrament, elicits an intimacy in which longing and gratification dynamically interplay'.<sup>85</sup> The Mass is a living ritual, a process shared by congregants, rather than a single magic moment of meaningful transubstantiation enacted by a priest. It is an experience of subjectivity and love, not just a realization of symbolic resonance. As Susan Karant-Nunn has described, the early modern Catholic Mass was 'the basis and the evidence of commitment to the Catholic faith. Although this was a seasonal and cathartic ritual, the spirituality [of the Mass] was now held out as the proper foundation of Catholicism the whole year around'.<sup>86</sup> The survival of Southwell's poems in manuscript is evidence of the process of literary devotion that sustained this living sacrament among the English Catholic community through the seventeenth-century, a tradition that was supported and

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<sup>84</sup> Sophie Read draws out how this 'Catholic literalism': '[T]he complex set of interrelated substitutions that is such an important trope for Southwell, book for body and words for wounds, is fulfilled finally beyond the text. This is because he was able to inhabit his own metaphor with unmatched immediacy and conviction: for him, its terms were realised in being reversed. His books stood in for his body in his mission as a recusant priest, ministering to the recusant community he could not physically reach; in martyrdom, the final act of his apostolate, that body was instead to stand in for his books, and the figurative was to give way to the literal.' *Ibid.*, 41-42. See also Brian Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 330-32.

<sup>85</sup> Ross, 'Sacrament and Self', 78-9.

<sup>86</sup> Susan Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling: Shaping the Religious Emotions in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 60.

encouraged by the Jesuit mission specifically.<sup>87</sup> In Aston Fowler's miscellany, the poetic ritual is devised through a variety of 'course threads together' that draw out the process in new forms and voices. The threads work together not by simply accumulating eclectic (or miscellaneous) views on devotion and love, but by bringing into focus how the formal techniques of poetry are effective in such sacramental acts.

### **The 'soule wracke' and productive sufferance**

Southwell's poetry has been described as baroque, implying decadence.<sup>88</sup> Anne Sweeney accounts for Southwell's oft-derided sensuality as a mode that collapses the distance between the human and the divine, but notes that 'baroque' poetry can be 'a quivering extravaganza of repetitions on an emotional theme perhaps too hectic for English literary tastes, at least as the English prefer to define them'.<sup>89</sup> This description could certainly be applied to 'A prodigall childs soule wracke' (fols. 22v-23v),<sup>90</sup> a veritable tempest of sensory and emotional imagery figured through the conceit of a ship on storm-tossed seas. Yet the drama of the verse is deployed in the miscellany to surprising effect, expanding the narrative by presenting it alongside 'Man to the Wound' (fols. 23v-24r),<sup>91</sup> which is one of Southwell's most obviously eucharistic poetic conceits. When brought together, the two poems, though not published elsewhere as a sequence, narrate the personal process of sacrament: suffering and transformation enacted through a eucharistic lyrical form. Read has found the long-recognized 'immediacy' of Southwell's verse, the almost cinematic force of its emotionally-wrought imagery, to be specifically sacramental: 'it is not simply a vivid and empathic imagination of scriptural events, but one that conceptualises itself as usefully sacramental. [Southwell's] verse occupies a position at once central and nebulous in the complex of related tropes that allows an equation

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<sup>87</sup> On Southwell's writing and the Jesuit mission, see Pierre Janelle, *Robert Southwell, the Writer: A Study in Religious Inspiration* (London: Sheeds & Ward, 1935); Christopher Devlin, *The Life of Robert Southwell, Poet and Martyr* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1956); Scott Pilarz, *Robert Southwell and the Mission of Literature 1561-1595* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); and Sweeney, *Snow in Arcadia*, esp. 7-28. On Jesuit poetics see Anthony Raspa, *The Emotive Image: Jesuit Poetics in the English Renaissance* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1983).

<sup>88</sup> See Anthony Raspa, *The Emotive Image*.

<sup>89</sup> Sweeney, *Snow in Arcadia*, 11.

<sup>90</sup> Aldrich-Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poem 11: 36-38.

<sup>91</sup> Aldrich-Watson, *The Verse Miscellany*, poem 12: 39-40.

between book and body—word and flesh—in terms of both function and symbolic resonance'.<sup>92</sup> The poetic mode of such intense imaginative experience is one that is predicated on a process of introspection and meditation that is enhanced by a view of signification based in the Eucharist, an interpretive equivalence of body and bread, word and flesh, form and substance. Southwell's 'immediacy', his forceful and affective imagery, is not simply a 'poetic elixir' as Brian Cummings neatly describes it in relation to the paradigm of *The Poetry of Meditation*,<sup>93</sup> but rather a potency of form that collapses the real and the imagined into a sacramental cohesion. Crucially, the literary and the devotional are never separate in Southwell's verse: acts of reading and writing are always related to the soul's progress and to Christ's Passion.

The 'soule wracke' of Southwell's verse conjures not only the thematic image of the shipwreck but also that of torture (the 'rack'), encouraged perhaps by the historical fact of the poet-priest's imprisonment and death. The experience of the verse is one of turmoil, but also of suffering. Yet Southwell does not begin with the violence of the storm, but instead opens by describing a state of rupture: 'Disankered from A blissfull shore / and lancht into the maine of cares' (1-2). The disruption of estrangement ushers in the suffering of the 'wracke'/wreck, the soul is unmoored and the speaker's misery, it is suggested, results from this rupture. Though the imagery of the first six stanzas is evocative, it is telling that the speaker is tossed about, suffering the onslaught of sea, winds and 'hellish faries [*sic*]' without actively struggling against these forces. The accumulation of turbulent images overwhelms in its immediacy, with speaker and reader carried along in a vivid experience of sensation:

I found my selfe on Euery syde  
 Enwrapped In waues of woe  
 And tossed with A toylsome tyde  
 Could to noe port for refuge goe

The wrastling mindes w<sup>th</sup> raging blasts  
 Still hold me in A cruell chase  
 They breake my Anchors saile And mast  
 Permitting no repossing place

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<sup>92</sup> See Read, *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination*, 62, for discussion of Southwell's 'immediacy'.

<sup>93</sup> Brian Cummings, *Grammar and Grace*, 350, citing Louis Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation: A Study in English Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962).

The boysterous seas with swelling floods  
 On Euery syde Did worke their spite  
 Heauens ouercast w<sup>th</sup> stormy cloudes  
 Denide the plenets guiding light

5-16

Pierre Janelle accuses these stanzas of relying on feeling and generality: the force of the scene, Janelle maintains, 'is produced, not by picturesque realism, but by the heaping up of conventional epithets'.<sup>94</sup> Yet when the conventional imagery of 'boysterous seas' and 'stormy clouds' is added to the striking emotional tumult of the lines, the effect is of a scene swept along more by sensation than visuality. The overall sense is of chaos, even of time and language: the stanzas shift back and forth between past tense and present; alliteration swirls through the lines, stirring up gusts of feeling; the internal and external dangers mutate and morph as they chase and rage and maliciously 'worke their spite'. As the speaker is 'disankered' and unmoored from stable ground, the upheaval also disrupts even the strictest distinctions: 'Thus heauen & hell, thus sea And land / Thus stormes And tempests did conspire' (17-8). Opposites have broken down and instead of contrasting, 'heauen & hell', 'sea And land' now conspire together with the doubled 'stormes and tempests': antonyms become synonyms, words 'disankered' from their signification. Such is the force of the storm that engenders Southwell's 'soule wracke': the world of vice and the life of sin is a storm of chaos, forcibly unanchored from divine order.

The confusion of these stanzas which make up the first half of the verse draw the reader into the speaker's subjectivity; the vagueness that Janelle noted, or what has been described as Southwell's 'impersonal' lyric mode of abstraction, allows for an absorbing reading experience based in an emotional facade that can be transferred across time and space.<sup>95</sup> When the speaker states, 'I plunged in this heauie plight' (25) he is voicing another sacramental effect of Southwell's verse, the immersive experience of suffering. This sufferance, however, is not merely a torturous passivity. As noted above, the chaotic stanzas of the tempest are marked by the speaker's lack of control, but once the speaker is engulfed by the sea of despair, the verse allows the speaker his agency:

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<sup>94</sup> Janelle, *Robert Southwell*, 277.

<sup>95</sup> Read, *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination*, 68.

I plunged in this heauie plight  
 Found in my faults Iust cause to feare  
 My darknes taught to know my light  
 The losse therof enforced teares

I felt my Inward bleeding sores  
 My festered wounds began to smart  
 Stopt far within deaths fatal dore  
 The pangs therof went neare my hart

I cryed truce, I craued peace  
 A league with death I would conclude  
 But uaine it was to sue release  
 Subdue I must or be subdude

25-36

The paradox of immersive, overwhelming suffering granting an opportunity for agency mirrors the sacramental paradox of the Passion, the purest act of submission and sufferance becoming the most glorified agency of salvation. Southwell elsewhere plumbs the crux of this question several times over, most notably specifying the heuristic element of such sacramental suffering by citing St Paul as the ‘perfecte scholer...of patient sufferance’.<sup>96</sup> Here he gives a succinct appraisal of the value of the Catholic doctrine of contrition: ‘My darknes taught to know my light / The losse therof enforced teares’ (27-28). The syntax of this revelation is convoluted, structured to foreground the negation of darkness and loss which paradoxically become instructive, transformative forces. The activating effects of contrition were defined in Counter-Reformation doctrine by the Council of Trent’s Session XIV as ‘a sorrow of mind and a detestation for sin committed, with the purpose of not sinning in the future’.<sup>97</sup> Contrition is not merely an experience of despair, but an internal, instructive process that commits the actor to expiation. This dramatization of the ‘soule[s] wrack’ brings to mind the model of ‘perfect’ contrition, a doctrine that allowed for reconciliation with God even in the absence of a priest and was thus particularly relevant for the English recusant community.<sup>98</sup> Yet Southwell’s model places a strict demand on the contrite soul. Following the chaos of sin dramatized in the first half of the verse, this internal work is a precise process of acute feeling. The immediacy of this moment of self-examination is one of

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<sup>96</sup> Southwell, *An Epistle of Comfort*, D5v.

<sup>97</sup> Cap. 4, qtd Brian Cummings, *Grammar and Grace*, 338.

<sup>98</sup> See Introduction, *Poems of Robert Southwell*, eds. James H. McDonald & Nancy Pollard Brown, lxxviii–ix.

specific, visually and affectively arresting imagery as opposed to the generalized, sensory-overwhelming effect of the storm. Southwell magnifies internal sensation: ‘I felt my Inward bleeding sores / my festered wounds began to smart’ (29-30).

This inwardness aligns Southwell’s verse with the practice of confession, one of the most controversial doctrines in the Reformation, especially for its role in the Catholic Mass. Ross has described Southwell’s verse in terms of ‘eucharistic interiority’, a term that is particularly relevant to the pairing of ‘The prodigall child soule wracke’ with ‘Man to the wound in Christs syde’ in the miscellany. The progression suggested in the pairing of the two verses figures the ‘soule wracke’ as a longing for the ‘pleasant port’ (‘Man to the Wound’, line 1) of the Eucharist. The ‘prodigall child’ enacts a process of productive suffering; his ‘soule wracke’ is not one of self-destruction, but of preparation for grace. Moreover, the agency of this preparation is notably Catholic. ‘Subdue I must or be subdude’ (36) is a telling line: the speaker, by submitting to suffering and to God’s judgment, is acting in his salvation albeit by way of the uncertain, indirect agency of longing. His desire for God’s grace, however, is not enough and he must also present an altered stance, one of active resistance to sin. The following lines pose an opposition of the ‘snares’ of sin and the speaker’s resistance:

Death And defeat had pitcht their snares  
And put their wonted proofes in ure<sup>99</sup>  
To sinke me in despairing cares  
Or make me stoope to pleasures lure

They sought by their bewitching charms  
soe to enchant my erringe sence  
That when they sought my greatest harmes  
I might neglect my best Defence

37-44

This struggle continues, even after the speaker has been ‘taught’ by his own darkness to recognize his light. The consistent meter and rhyme of the verse reinforces this ongoing struggle and emphasizes the hazy temporality of the verse. As early as the third stanza, in the midst of the tempestuous seas of uncertainty, the speaker muddles the timeline of the verse: the wrestling forces in the mind, the sinful thoughts and seductions ‘still hold me in A cruell chase’. The past tense

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<sup>99</sup> *OED*, ‘ure, n.’: I. ‘in ure’ 1a: ‘In or into use, practice, or performance. Often with verbs, as *bring, come, have*, and esp. *put* (frequently c1510–1630)’.

narration of the speaker's contrition and revelation grounds the verse in a more stable timeline, only to be uprooted by the subjunctive: 'A league with death I would conclude' (34), 'I might neglect my best Defence' (44), 'my dazled eyes could take no uew' (45). The effect of this muddling of time contrasted with the placid evenness of form is a sense of perpetual suffering, but one that can be tempered through devotion such as ritualized confession and self-reflection.

In contrast with the naturalistic language of awful but earthly forces, the 'snares' that tie the speaker to sin in the second half of the verse are figured in language of the supernatural: 'bewitching charms' that 'enchant my erringe sence' (41-2), 'Deceiuing shifts' (46) and 'deused drifts' (48), 'siren songs', 'lore' and 'Idle toys' (52-3). Following the self-reflection and contrition, the forces of sin are more readily discernible as treachery and pretense, and the speaker can resist such 'Idle toys' (54) instead of becoming engulfed in the 'waues of woe' (6). Yet the speaker cannot fully escape the reach of such lures, remaining 'Chained in sin' (57). This is a stance that accords with the doctrines of original sin and salvation. Perfect contrition, though always a relevant possibility given the recusant situation of absent or rare acts of ministry, is not the ultimate goal of Southwell's verse; instead, the verse enacts the absent ministry so that the confession is offered not as a solitary process but a sacramental colloquy. Sweeney reads this verse as 'a metaphor for the relationship between an exercitant and the spiritual director designed to stimulate, in its turn, a colloquy between sinful Self and God the Father'.<sup>100</sup> The speaker, and the reader, can confess and reject sin, but it is only through God's 'mercy' and 'grace' that they can be saved. And so the speaker remains at the threshold, continually tempted by sin's 'lore' and 'trained to [the] prison dore' (55):

Where Chained in sin I lay In thrall  
 Next to the Dungeon of dispaire  
 Till mercy raisd me from my fall  
 And grace my ruine did repaire

57-60

Man is 'in thrall',<sup>101</sup> captive to original sin, until he receives God's release through mercy and grace. The speaker resists sin but is not able to fully escape and thus he remains 'next to the Dungeon', waiting for salvation. Following the drama of the

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<sup>100</sup> Sweeney, 76.

<sup>101</sup> *OED*, 'thrall, n.', II.2: 'The condition of a thrall; thralldom, bondage, servitude; captivity'.



‘soule wracke’ and contrition, the speaker must wait in ‘patient sufferance’.

**The Southwellian poetic ritual sequence: reading 'the Wound'**

The threshold image that emphasizes the productively open-ended suffering of the ‘soule wracke’ is repeated in the opening of ‘Man to the wound’ as the speaker narrates his approach *to* Christ’s body. In this progression across the bounds of the single verse, the ritualistic capacities of the liminal space come to the fore and enhance the eucharistic reading of the poems as companions in a process of poetic devotion. Smith’s copying of the verses together highlights several striking resonances. Following the imagery of stormy seas and the soul figured as a ship tossed among the waves, the opening of ‘Man to the wound’ gives a more specific image of the refuge that the soul should seek:

O pleasant port O place of rest  
 O royall rest o worthy wound  
 Come harbor me A weary guest  
 That in the world no ease haue found

1-4

The accumulation of descriptors for the place of refuge heightens the sense of longing, already intensified by the chaos and emotional drama of the ‘soule wracke’ in the preceding verse. This longing for refuge is conflated with the desire for Christ’s body, imagining the site of Christ’s pain and physical embodiment of his suffering as a haven from the speaker’s own mortal strife. These opening lines recall the experience of estrangement so deeply felt by Southwell’s recusant audience, whose separation from the body of the Catholic Church was a separation from Christ’s body both metaphorically and literally due to their lack of access to the transubstantiated Host through the Mass. The weariness is that of a traveler hoping for sanctuary after a troubled journey. Yet the speaker is presented as waiting on the threshold, not yet ready to enter the sacred space of refuge and rest:

I ly lamenting at thy gate  
 Yet Dare I not Aduenture In  
 I bare with me a troubleous mate  
 And combred Am with heape of sinne

Discharge me of this heauie loade  
 That easier passage I may find  
 Within this bower to make Aboade  
 And in this glorious tombe be shrin’d

5-12

Just as the chains of sin hold the speaker of ‘The prodigall childes soule wracke’ in the threshold, so too is this speaker laden with baggage of his journey and waiting at the door to be welcomed in and relieved of his ‘heavie load’. The ritualistic power of the threshold is an accepted concept, most influentially explored by Victor Turner in his seminal work illuminating the states of ‘liminality’ and ‘communitas’ in ritual.<sup>102</sup> The terms of the eucharistic ritual process have been equally well-established by Eamon Duffy’s major work *The Stripping of the Altars*.<sup>103</sup> Here it is useful to note that the stance of Southwell’s speakers as ‘betwixt and between’<sup>104</sup> is particularly pronounced when the two poems are paired together in a sequence in Aston Fowler’s miscellany. The first verse ends in the threshold between sin and grace (at the ‘prison dore’, ‘next to the Dungeon’) and the second begins there (‘lamenting at thy gate’). Even the titles of the poems serve to remind the reader of the narration as *in medias res*: ‘The prodigall childes soule wracke’ institutes a focus on the progression of the soul, not on the salvific conclusion; ‘Man to the wound In christes syde’ tells of an approach *to* the central figure of Christian piety and not a description of consummation (it is not ‘Man *in* the wound’). The prodigal child is ‘plunged in’ his suffering and brought to the edge of endurance as he pleads for relief: ‘I cryed truce, I craued peace’ (25, 33). Similarly the speaker of ‘Man to the wound’ has traversed an anguished terrain and approaches his destination, but must still beg for refuge: the opening lines vocalize the cry implied in the previous verse, the repeated ‘O’ harkening to that emotional intensity. Suffering and emotional strife have brought the speaker to the threshold, but there he must wait.

Taken together with the self-examination and contrition of ‘The prodigall childes soule wracke’, the longing and petition of the opening lines of ‘Man to the wound’ participate in a preparatory rite, essential to the ritual process that is composed in the pages of Constance Aston Fowler’s miscellany. The submission of the ‘soule wracke’ as explicitly stated—‘subdue I must or be subdude’ (36)—is comparable to the classic formula of ritual ‘liminality’ as a process of ‘being reduced or ground down’.<sup>105</sup> Brian Cummings has described this act of confessional submission as

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<sup>102</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (London: Aldine Transaction, 1969, 3rd printing 2011), esp. 94-130.

<sup>103</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, 2nd ed. 2005).

<sup>104</sup> Turner, 95.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*

‘emptying...the self from the self’,<sup>106</sup> a reading that corresponds closely to Donne’s description of the ‘purgative’ effect of penitential rites as a ‘free and entire evacuation of my *soule* by *confession*’.<sup>107</sup> The submission, as is made clear in ‘Man to the wound’, is a relational stance, the position of the speaker particularly noted in relation to Christ. The synecdoche of ‘the wound’ heightens the awareness of the spatial dimensions in play, especially as the poetic form bends time and space to find purchase with the reader’s personal devotional experience.

The self-examination of the confessional rite is also a recognition of one’s subject position within the divine framework, which Ross elucidates: ‘What is for Southwell so central about the Eucharist to this account of subjectivity is the way that it provides a devotional rubric for moving from self-examination (confession) to the intimations of one’s own symbolic position within Christian history and God’s own self-representation through creation (particularly human beings) and in the church (the mystical body of Christ in the world)’.<sup>108</sup> Thus the vantage point of the speaker’s approach ‘to the wound’ is crucial, and the verse focuses attention on the spatial relationship:

Here must I liue, here must I Dye  
Here would I utter all my grieffe  
Here would I all those paines Discry  
Where here Did I meete for my reliefe

Here would I uew that bloodye sore  
Which Dint of spitfull speare did breede  
The bloodie wounds layd there in store  
Would force A stony hart to bleede

13-20

The repetition is almost an incantation, a refrain that situates the speaker in an immersive experience of devotion. He narrates the actions of this devotion which encompass a cycle of life and death, thus imbuing the present moment of devotion—viewing Christ’s wound in an imaginatively eucharistic moment that calls to mind the viewing of the Host in the Mass—with a ritualized signification. The time and space of a single moment of devotion resonates with the density of a whole life’s worth of experience and feeling. By dramatizing the dual nature of the threshold devotional experience—the submission of self and expansive symbolic resonance of

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<sup>106</sup> Qtd Ross, ‘Sacrament and Self’, 94.

<sup>107</sup> John Donne, *Devotions vpon emergent occasions* (London, 1624), 527.

<sup>108</sup> Ross, ‘Sacrament and Self’, 91.

ritual acts—Southwell draws out the fluid moments of devotion and the reader is invited into the depths of his sacramentalized lyric expression.

This narrowing of perspective and the immediacy of the moment, however, have an unusual effect due to Southwell's 'impersonal' style. His lyric 'I' is anonymized and universalized, in a mode Read has described as a poetic offering to overcome the liturgical deprivation of English Catholics.<sup>109</sup> The verse fulfils the promise of sacramental poetics, not merely to entertain and delight as the spilled art of 'idel [*sic*] phansie', but to provide the devotional effects of the Catholic sacraments to which Southwell's recusant readership had limited access. The poetic form of Southwell's 'course threads' of literary art, such as his lyric voice and the baroque techniques of picturesque (or grotesque) imagery and paradox, make meaning and devotion through sacramental engagements. By reversing the Eucharist in 'Man to the wound', Southwell invokes the 'real presence' of transubstantiation, suggesting not only that the experience of the ritualized lyric subjectivity is effective in stirring feeling but also that material, substantive transformation is possible—Christ's body is available to the communicant not merely as symbol but as reality. The reversal of the conceit not only exacerbates the physicality of Christ's body as present in the Catholic Mass, it also makes the symbolic resonance a reality: the communicant entering Christ (his body and the body of the Church) through the Eucharist, according to Catholic doctrine, is the ultimate effect of taking the Host into her own body. The recusant audience, denied the Catholic Mass, is able to make the ultimate effect a reality through Southwell's sacramental verse. Southwell's speaker self-consciously notes the forcefulness of his imagery: 'the bloodie wounds layde there in store / would force A stony hart to bleede' (19-20). The excessiveness of Christ's wounds is not merely an arresting image, but engenders a responsive, imitative act and the forcefulness of the poem's devotion is one that cultivates a change of one's personal state.

The affective and effective force of the imagery is couched in the subjunctive, yet the distancing 'would' is part of the paradox of the eucharistic ritual, as Ross notes: the 'transformation occurs precisely when the subject's distance from God and estrangement from himself, through sin, is reinterpreted as the very location of

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<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*, 79-80.

divine presence'.<sup>110</sup> The subjunctive grammar is a layering of ritual acts with divine potentialities, a hopefulness in the efficacy of the process but a grounding in the sufferance of uncertainty. The structure of the successive lines, each beginning 'Here' (lines 13-17), is a progression of personal feeling and expression, beginning with the speaker's fervent commitment to living in Christ ('Here *must* I liue, here *must* I Dye') then deferring to a subjunctive as he immerses himself in the imagined experience, his longing and imagining growing intense and forceful so much so that it 'would force a stony hart to bleede'. The next stanza continues the pattern of beginning with 'Here', switching into the indicative mood:

Here is the spring of trickling teares  
The mirrou of all mourning weights  
With dolfull tunes for dumpish eares  
And solomne shewes for sorrowed sights

21-24

The switch to the indicative is noticeable as the speaker has at last interpretively closed the distance between his longing for and experience of Christ's body. The preceding stanza of acute visualization ushers in this closer understanding of the 'wound' as both a physically available site and a construction of ritualized meaning. It is interesting that the stanza recognizes the wound as a site of pure, naturalistic origin, a 'spring' of blood/tears. Yet there is a tension between the purity of natural, unfeigned effects and the performative aspect of any devotion, especially ritual. The 'wound' becomes a mirror, and Southwell's liquid imagery seems to suggest Christ's blood as a mirror-pool from the Narcissus myth; thus the authenticity of the eucharistic ritual is reliant upon the sincerity of the communicant's faith and feeling, recalling the efficacy and devotional force of the 'soule wracke' and the resultant self-examination and contrition.

The phrasing of 'mourning weights' is perhaps confused given Smith's odd spelling choice, but the rhyming provides a clue to deciphering Southwell's word choice as 'wights'. The *OED* glosses the now archaic term as 'a human being, man or woman, person...(often implying some contempt or commiseration)',<sup>111</sup> which lends an earnest tone to the line, emphasizing the lowliness of mortals even as they attempt to raise themselves through ritualized acts which facilitate the soul's preparation with 'dolfull tunes' (23) and 'solomne shewes for sorrowed sights' (24).

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<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*, 86.

<sup>111</sup> *OED*, 'wight, n.', 2a.

Brown and McDonald have noted how Southwell connects the wound to sacrament, reading this stanza in terms of ritual, following on from their gloss of the description in line 19 of the wound ‘layd there in store’ as referring to ‘the wound as the continuing source of restitution for sin by means of the sacrament of penance.’<sup>112</sup> As the speaker has realized the ritualized process, including the sights and sounds and feelings engendered in the devotional acts, the potentialities ‘in store’ are brought closer to fruition.

The Catholic sacraments of penance and the Eucharist are inextricably linked; one is needed for the other. The sacramental remission of sin can be incorporated into the ritual of the Mass, but whether the rituals of penance and Communion are taken together or separately the confession of sin is necessary for the reception of Christ’s body in the Host. The pairing of ‘The prodigall childes soule wracke’ and ‘Man to the wound in Christs syde’ dramatizes the devotional process of the two sacraments, grounding each in the personal experience of lyric poetry that allows the reader to benefit from the sacramental effects of Southwell’s poetics even when a local practice of Catholic sacraments was out of reach. The fulfilment of each of the two verses is an open-ended appeal, a structure that adheres to Catholic doctrine on sacraments and grace. In both verses, Southwell’s speaker is posed prostrate, specifically describing himself as ‘lying’ before God. In ‘The prodigall childes soule wracke’ the speaker has engaged in the interior work of confession; in ‘Man to the wound in Christs syde’ he has undertaken the preparations of ritual, but the act of justification cannot be achieved by human effort alone. Instead, as Cummings puts it in relation to *Saint Peters Complaint*: ‘The marks of penance and contrition “humbly beg relief”, they do not exhort, demand, or buy it...[Peter merely] places himself in the way of grace’.<sup>113</sup> The stage is set for grace and in ‘Man to the wound’, the speaker can imagine the resulting gratification:

O happie soule that flies soe high  
 As to Attaine this sacred caue  
 Lord send me wings that I may fly  
 And in this harbour quiet haue

25-8

Grace is imagined as an act of the soul, to fly to a great height. And yet God must

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<sup>112</sup> Note to line 19 of ‘Man to the wound in Christs side’, *The Poems of Robert Southwell, S.J.*, eds. MacDonald and Brown.

<sup>113</sup> Cummings, *Grammar and Grace*, 361.

provide the wings. The grammar is almost exhortative, ‘Lord send me wings’, but Southwell is careful to ground the statement in the optative mood in the dependent clause: ‘that I *may* fly’ (emphasis mine). Just as Saint Peter concludes ‘I should, I would, I dare not say, I will’ (*Saint Peters Complaint* II. 762), so the speaker of ‘Man to the wound’ stops short of attempting the final flight: ‘Dare I not adventure in’ (6). As Cummings notes, this “poore desire” is itself a kind of co-operation in grace, but is restrained from becoming an operation, by being expressed by an unfulfilled verb: ‘I wish, I may’.<sup>114</sup> The act of longing, such as that exuded by love lyrics, is here made into a cooperation in grace, and Southwell structures the longing as part of a process of ritual and sacrament. Southwell’s poems, then, posit that verse can not only act as ministry to an isolated congregation, but can also be a means of participation in grace through sacramental preparation. Though the speaker is left in a state of longing at the end of Southwell’s verses, the poem envisions the accomplishment of grace as the ultimate eucharistic act: Christ’s body made real, its physicality become the site of sanctification through the consummation of eucharistic devotion.

Southwell’s verses, when placed together, invite an active reading for these devotional effects. His language of the wound as a ‘sacred caue’ and a quiet refuge calls to mind the enclosed space and seclusion of a private closet used for reading and meditation. The imagined physicality of the wound’s spatial dimensions specifically as a place for habitation and confinement has feminized connotations,<sup>115</sup> and the poem’s placement within a young Catholic woman’s miscellany is intriguing for such a reading.<sup>116</sup> Yet it is the sacramental practice of sacred attention and interiorization through self-examination that is put forward most strikingly in these verses. If it is true that ‘[r]eceiving the Eucharist rightly is as important as receiving

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<sup>114</sup> *ibid*, 363.

<sup>115</sup> See criticism of Crashaw’s feminized devotion such as Richard Rambuss, *Closet Devotions* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), and Ryan Netzley, ‘Oral Devotion: Eucharistic Theology and Richard Crashaw’s Religious Lyric’, *Texas Studies in Literature & Language* 44.3 (2002): 247-72.

<sup>116</sup> Femke Molekamp, for example, reads Aemilia Lanyer’s depiction of Christ’s wounds in relation to feminine affective meditation: ‘In presenting Christ (and his wounds) as a text within a text, Lanyer permits herself greater flexibility in the confessional associations of her (still preeminently textual) material for female meditation’. Femke Molekamp, ‘Reading Christ the Book in Aemilia Lanyer’s *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (1611): Iconography and the Cultures of Reading’. *Studies in Philology* 109.3 (2012): 332.

it at all',<sup>117</sup> then the ability of Southwell's verse to mediate eucharistic effects to an alienated recusant readership, must surely also rely on right reception. As is suggested in the act of miscellanizing, this productive and valuable reception is specifically a work of reading. Therefore, it is necessary to attend to the evidence of how the poems were received and read as part of poetic and devotional practice.

Attending to the theoretical poetics at work in the texts copied in the Aston Fowler miscellany illuminates the processes of interpretation entailed in the close reading and textual engagement of miscellanizing, but it is not only the forcefulness of a sacramental theory of signification that lends devotional efficacy to Southwell's religious poetry. The intertextual resonances of these verses within the context of the miscellany demonstrate that the act of reading his poetry could offer more effective modes of devotion when incorporated into a wider literary and religious practice. Southwell's *Epistle of Comfort* makes explicit the importance of thoughtful, effective reading to devotion. One of the most famous quotations likens the Passion, and specifically Christ's suffering body, to a text that requires close reading. St Paul, as an exemplary 'scholar in this doctrine' is described as a model for Christians:

He woulde haue no other vniuersitye but Hierusalem, no other schole but mount Caluarye, no other pulpitt but the Crosse, no other reader but the Crucifixe, no other letters but his Woundes, no other commaes but his Lashes, no other full poyntes but his Nayles, no other booke but his open syde, and finallye no other lesson But scere Iesum Christum & hunc crucifixum: to know Iesus Christe & him Crucified.  
(Cap 3, D5v-6r)

Here Southwell figures the wound of Christ's side as a text to be read. The ritual of the Eucharist is visualized from the outside in, the reader's perspective narrowing from the scene of Calvary and the sight of the Crucifix to a tighter focus on the specific wounds, lashes, and nails. The final image is the open side, significant as the threshold between Christ's exterior form and his interiority. This mirrors the process of interiorization required in lyrical self-examination as well as the sacramental devotion composed through Southwell's verses. Here the practice of devotion is one of close reading. Reading for form—reading letters, punctuation, and text—gleans a full apprehension of the 'lesson', the true meaning of the devotion.

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<sup>117</sup> See Ross, 'Sacrament and Self', 100.



### **Form, Sacrament, and Incarnation**

The longstanding tendency of critics to disregard Southwell's poetic form as overwrought or baroque in favor of the religious lyricists who followed his example has begun to be corrected. Southwell was a popular poet in his own right and a forebear of the tradition of devotional poetry that flourished in the seventeenth century, most notably in the verse of Donne and Herbert. Though it is worthwhile to reclaim a wider and more influential role for Southwell in Renaissance literary culture as a whole, his resonance among the early modern Catholic community should also reap the benefits of the renewed attention to his poetry, coinciding as it does with the resurgence of critical interest in Catholic culture and history of the period. The example of Smith's copying of Southwell's verses into both a book of religious verse used in his ministry and into Aston Fowler's 'booke' is evidence of an active readership across different Catholic contexts and communities. In Aston Fowler's miscellany, Southwell's verses are interposed between the lyric poetry of the Tixall coterie; indeed, this pair of poems leads into the first secular poems of the miscellany. Though it is certainly true that these verses along with the majority of the devotional poems copied by Smith were added in the later stages of the manuscript's compilation, post-binding, the intertextuality of the miscellany offers glimpses at complex reading and devotional activity. The poetry collected in Aston Fowler's miscellany, though it was added in separate acts of compilation, was chosen for the 'booke' and this purposeful composition of form invites attention to the processes at work between the verses and throughout the 'booke' as a whole. The miscellanizing process destabilizes the self-sufficiency of a single text, drawing new formal engagements both within and without the manuscript text.

The meeting of the material and the verbal—form and meaning—illuminates sacramental poetics from yet another angle. Southwell's verses sit either side of the lyrics of Aston and Pershall surprisingly comfortably.<sup>118</sup> The sacramental value of text that affords Southwell's devotional lyrics their immediacy and ritualistic potency also imbues the lyrical meeting of sufferance and meaning, human and

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<sup>118</sup> 'The prodigall child's soule wracke' and 'Man to the wound' directly precede the first collection secular, coterie poetry in gatherings K, L, & M. Directly following this section Smith has continued copying Southwell, adding 'A Child my Choyse' (fol. 35r-v) and 'Lifes Death, lous life'. See Appendix 3.

divine. Yet the miscellany's co-textuality or intertextuality is always grounded in the material, the poems as written on the page. This materialism is implicated in theories of art and poetry as well as, most notably, in the eucharistic debates of the Reformation. The Eucharist must always be relevant to the making of meaning in Christian contexts for the crux of the sacrament is a question of signification. In Catholic doctrine, the material signs of the bread and wine are not only given the power of signification but are 'made flesh' through transubstantiation. Yet the 'accidents' of the bread and wine remain. This interpretive mode of reading the 'accidents' of material form as meaningful and containing more significance than their external appearance suggests, is a powerful framework for reading the miscellany. The material 'accidents' of the miscellany's composition—questions of compilation and circumstance, how Aston Fowler acquired and copied her verse, how Smith distributed poetry through his ministry—give new meanings to the texts themselves and to the substance of the 'booke' as a whole. Yet it is also worthwhile to read the poems themselves with this appreciation.

Directly following the two Southwell poems discussed above is a love lyric by Herbert Aston, 'The perfect Louer', the first example of his poetry in the book and fairly typical of his style (fol. 24v).<sup>119</sup> Just as Aston drew on the tropes of love lyrics in his religious verse, here he calls on theological theories of signification in the service of effective styling of his true love. His judgment of a poor lover is interesting in light of the sacramental poetics at work in the religious poetry of the miscellany: 'Hee meanelly loues whome accidents can moue' (13). A true or perfect lover is, in Aston's view, one who is 'Transform'd so perfectly in what he loues' (17). 'Accidents' and substance cannot be taken separately. Symbolic resonance is not sufficient in the reading of true feeling: There must be a transformation, or a transubstantiation. It is 'meane' love and 'meane' devotion to honor frivolous form, to force meaning from 'accidents' alone. It is worth noting how Southwell's poetics, taken as a rubric for devotional reading that corresponds well with the miscellany's literary motives, rests on a dichotomy of transubstantiated and suffered meaning. One of his most interesting verses, not included in Aston Fowler's miscellany but relevant to several of the poems in the collection, explicates this contrast in both its

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<sup>119</sup> Aldrich-Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poem 13: 41-42.

form and its substance. ‘Christ’s Bloody Sweat’<sup>120</sup> recalls the bloody imagery of ‘Man to the Wound’ as well as the anonymous Passion poem copied by Aston Fowler (fols. 8r-12v). It is a poem that relies on a potency of form that is most readily discernible in its life in manuscript. The text on the manuscript page reveals an intricate conceit that is not visible in the printed version: the first stanza, quoted below, can be read either horizontally or vertically in columns.

Fat soile,	full spring,	sweete olive,	grape of blisse,
That yeelds,	that streams,	that pours,	that dost distil,
Untild,	undrawne,	unstampt,	untoucht of presse,
Deare fruit,	cleare brookes,	faire oile	sweete wine at will:

Thus Christ unforst prevents in shedding blood  
The whips, the thornes, the nailes, the speare, and roode.

1-6

Read across the lines the language heaps upon itself in an excessiveness that almost exhausts meaning. Meanwhile, the hidden form mirrors the liquefied imagery of Christ’s bloody sweat dripping to the garden floor, illustrating the meaning quite literally and embodying Christ’s physicality directly. The ‘accidents’ of the poetic form, like the bread in the Mass, cannot be regarded as separate from its meaningful effects. Ross sums up this reading: ‘The concrete structure of the poem suggests a parallel between understanding the full range of meaning in the text and recognizing the true content of the sacraments. The vertical reading, especially since it results in an identification of the words with Christ’s sacrificial blood, acts like the faithful Catholic ability to affirm the sacramental identity of the elements’.<sup>121</sup> There is no distancing of symbolic referentiality between form and meaning; the full effects of the verse are embedded in the reader’s comprehension of poetic form as material text. The text itself foregrounds this coherence: meaning and grace are ‘untild, undrawne, unstampt, untoucht of presse’ (3). Yet this naturalistic cohesion of form and meaning paradoxically requires attentive reading and displays impressive creative effort and ingenuity.

This act of reading requires a kind of sacred attention similar to that which Southwell describes in the passage on St Paul as ‘scholer’ of the Passion, but the persistence in manuscript of this structure suggests that the hidden meaning, like

<sup>120</sup> *Poems of Robert Southwell*, eds. MacDonald and Brown, 18-19.

<sup>121</sup> Ross, ‘Sacrament and Self’, 87.

sacramental affirmation, is a knowledge accorded to those who know how to read rightly. This is privileged knowledge, and due to the recusant experience in seventeenth-century England, the poetic texts passed in manuscript among the Catholic community become codes and ciphers themselves. The divine unity of form and substance is not involuntary, even though it is described as natural—it is a process of ‘will’, just as Christ’s Passion, accepted in the Garden, is enacted by submitting to God’s will. Meaning and sacred significance cohere to form, but the reading of such a sacrament must be done ‘at will’. As the lyrical poetry of devotion collected in Aston Fowler’s miscellany demonstrates, full consummation of the sacrament through personal comprehension requires sufferance, submission to the Passion which ultimately fulfils the covenant of the Incarnation that is re-enacted in the transubstantiated Eucharist. The rhyming couplet that completes Southwell’s stanza explains the crux of the sacramental signification: Christ’s ‘unforst’ suffering grants the signs of sacrament their metaphysical consummation of ‘accidents’ and ‘effects’; his suffering ‘prevents’ ‘The whips, the thornes, the nailes, the speare, and roode’ not by nullifying their effects but by anticipating the forms and materials of suffering and imbuing them with divine significance.<sup>122</sup> Here again is the central tenet of Christian faith that confirms all acts of signification and grants all meaning: Christ’s suffering and death.

Like the sacramental poetics of Southwell’s verse, the work of form in Aston Fowler’s miscellany is a meeting of the materialist text and sufferance of meaning. The miscellany is a ‘booke’ to be read for form and for meaning, though the act of reading can only combine the two through careful and faithful practice. It is worth returning briefly to the example of the acrostic poem ‘Off the Blessed Name’ that relies on a similar coherence of the concrete structure of the poetic text and the comprehension of its devotional truth. The conceit of the epigram is a simple one based on the figure of Christ as the Light of the World. The description of ‘the worlds eclisping shads’ (2) calls to mind Herbert Aston’s repeated use of trope of the ‘eclipse’ in his lyrics. Whereas Aston’s lovers languish in the shadows of uncertainty and can only access ‘those lights’ (‘Whilst here eclipsed’, 15) through faithfully attending to his ‘inward sight’ (11), in Smith’s epigram the shadows of the world of

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<sup>122</sup> *OED*, ‘prevent, v.’ I. 4a: ‘To act in anticipation of, or in preparation for (a future event or point of time, esp. a time fixed for some action); to act as if (the event or time) had already come’.

sin are overcome in a poetic form that invokes the Incarnation itself. The materialist text of the triple acrostic realizes the name of 'IESUS' as a potent force in decoding the Johannine dualism of light vs darkness, ignorance vs knowledge, sense vs reason. Indeed the acrostic is not the only instance of the epigram's application of the name of IESUS for verbal and formal impact: the structure of the epigram's well-balanced simile hinges on the name as well, it is the fulcrum at the very center of the verse on which the metaphor's careful equilibrium rests. Just as Christ is the Light of the World, so too is his name a means of bringing formal order and balance to the verse. The dualism of the poetic form of the simile matches the epigram's description of opposition at work in the world and in the experience of faith. It is Christ and the unification of opposition realized in the Incarnation that provides the correct balance to the dualism at work in the epigram.

The effortful creation of such an intricate yet compact epigram imbues the text with a devout artistry that recalls the holy art of God as 'cunninge imbroderer'. Here the name of IESUS is traced onto the page not merely as a sign to be deciphered but as a realization of divine presence, the material letterforms re-enacting the Incarnation in the inscription of the initials and in the unification of the coded letters with the process of sacred reading that discerns the holy message of the epigram. The Incarnation is similarly not only a work of inscribing divinity into human form, but an enactment of human feeling and suffering that ultimately finds completion in the Passion. The acrostic is a work of form that is a textual incarnation and a material act of sufferance. The language of renewal is significant: the devotion effected through the 'cunninge' work of sacred reading and writing is given meaning through the renewal of Christ's Incarnation and Passion. Furthermore, the miscellany itself is a testament to this regenerative process of meaning. Aston Fowler's 'booke' inspires the sacramental and incarnational effects of the texts by encouraging close reading that renews true feeling and true devotion through a recurring practice. The composition of her miscellany, like the artistry of poetic creation held within its pages, is a weaving of form and substance together in order to make something new: a 'golden', a 'finer peece', a sacrament.

## Chapter Three - Constant Friends: communal form and political reading in the miscellany's social verse

### **Text, Mission, and Community**

In reading for the miscellany's consciousness of form and appreciation for the effects of verse, I have so far considered the poetics of making meaning and realizing devotion in relation to the theories of poesy that structure the miscellany's interest in lyric, both at the level of composition and reading. Yet the miscellany is a text that is imbued with a commitment to the communities extending beyond its pages. The guiding principle of this thesis is that the work of form, even at the level of poetic theory, is enacted through reading. In this chapter and the next, I will be attending to how reading is both socially inflected and personally felt. I explore how the expansive miscellany text is outwardly engaged and socially active, while it remains grounded in close, personal experience. My chosen texts for this exploration include Catholic ballads and coterie poetry that show the work of form serving communal as well as literary purposes. Such poems are forcefully implicated in specific social circumstances, but through compilation they also forge new connections and take on new meanings for the community that Aston Fowler captures and authorizes within her pages. This consideration of the miscellany's expansive connections and perspectives is paired in the next chapter with the most potent form of reading represented in the miscellany: that of intimate, affective, self-inflected piety sparked by that most vital occasion in Catholic devotional life, Christ's Passion. My previous chapters have established the importance of the miscellany's fluid and processual forms of reading to understanding the material and poetic 'booke' as well as the distinct perspective on poetic form that structures those readings. In this second half, I approach the question of how the work of form is implicated in the social and personal lives of the miscellany's readers. How do the miscellany's poems and the miscellany text itself forge a meeting of life and form through acts of reading and writing?

The community-oriented stance I consider in this chapter does not limit the miscellany's motivations to the realm of interpersonal relationships (so often critically relegated to the domestic or private sphere wherever women are involved). Rather the text reaches out to claim a space for both its coterie verse and its Catholic

ballads within a wider community. This communal work of form is grounded in the poetic, while also taking into account the life of the text within its social environment. Though the secular, coterie verse, which is at times occasional, and the distinctly Catholic balladry may not at first appear to share many interests, these contrasting genres serve a similar purpose within the miscellany. Following the sacramental poetics traced in the previous chapter, real effects of poetry within the Catholic community are of particular interest and I propose a complementary reading of the devotional and congregational effects of the miscellany as a social text, most overtly seen in the coterie verse of the Tixall group. The meeting of this devotional intent with the social and literary representation that defines coterie verse, such as the eclogue and friendship poem, is a key question for this chapter: how do the poems collected in Aston Fowler's miscellany compose a multifaceted communal identity in which religious, social, and personal perspectives are cooperatively aligned? In reading the seemingly disparate genres collected in the miscellany, it is possible to see how the work of creating communal bonds and affirming a communal identity is central to the miscellany's mission, even as it is imbued with the specific 'mission' of two seemingly separate movements.

Though the recusant community is just one of several groups brought to life in the pages of Aston Fowler's miscellany, the Catholic mission is an active context for the book as a whole. If we view poetry as mission (i.e., an operative force), the Jesuit stance represented in the miscellany's devotional poetry and the sociality of the coterie verse can be seen more clearly as two sides of a coin. 'Missionary' verse can be seen in this broader formulation as form that is activated for consequential textual, communal, and emotional work. While the miscellany's Catholic heritage need not relegate the manuscript to the purview of recusant manuscript networks, its religious identity must not be glossed over in an attempt to recover the text for mainstream poetic culture. Here is a construction of a unique literary and religious 'mission' that commingles the text's two formative impulses. The community that is enlivened through the verses collected by Aston Fowler is one of believers who are also readers and writers, or conversely, readers and writers who are also believers. Tixall is immortalized through the miscellany not merely in the poems directly touching on the community's literary activities, but also in the bold readerly engagement inspired by the verses and their mission.

The term 'mission' is difficult to disentangle from the Jesuits in the early modern

context, but it is worth noting the theological underpinnings of the term more broadly. The OED defines ‘mission’ in relation to the Christian Church and specifically Trinitarian theology as ‘the sending into the world of the Son or Spirit by the Father, or of the Spirit by the Son, esp. for the purpose of salvation’, a gloss that draws on the etymology of ‘mission’ from the Latin ‘mittere’ (to send).<sup>1</sup> This ‘sending forth’ is thus active, externally-oriented and purposeful.<sup>2</sup> Mission is also communal, as the early modern context makes clear: it is the communal body that undertakes the operation. Applying these generalized meanings of ‘mission’ to the miscellany is a theoretical contrivance, but it allows for a new kind of reading. The verses are active and externally-oriented toward communal goals, while also constituting an internal poetic community. Reading for the mission of the miscellany means attending to how the verses are sent forth, that is how they expand beyond the pages of the miscellany, while also recognizing the text itself as a communal entity.<sup>3</sup> The community held within the pages of the miscellany, however, can only come to life through readings that bring intimate, personal experience to the text for communal intercourse, as I will discuss in my next chapter.

Though my thesis strives to subvert the tendency to relegate the miscellany wholly to the private sphere, the fact of the relative insularity of the miscellany’s afterlife suggests that the caretakers of Aston Fowler’s book kept the manuscript not as an publicly-oriented text but as a testament to a specific community. Its close, local existence also hints at a reading life that preserved the exclusivity of the coterie Aston Fowler embedded within her text. Viewed in this way, the oracular power of ciphering, including the divine monograms and the knot-symbol attached to Herbert Aston’s poems, as well as the self-consciousness of form in both the religious and the secular poems, are part of a strategy of imaginative community building. Although the full scope of the miscellany’s communal signification is out of reach for modern readers, the method of coding a community within a book is

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<sup>1</sup> OED, ‘mission, n.’ I.1; see also, II.6: ‘The action or an act or instance of sending or being sent.’

<sup>2</sup> Biblically, the prophecy of Joel describes this act spreading salvation as ‘pouring forth’: Joel 2:28-29.

<sup>3</sup> Bronwen Price & Páraic Finnerty elucidate this approach, which ‘treat[s] texts as literary performances of friendship, companionship and community, [while] also signal[ing] how literary texts create their own external communities of readers’. For an application of this approach to early modern texts and communities, see Price and Finnerty (eds), ‘Introduction: Communities & Companionship in Early Modern Literature and Culture’ [Special Issue 22], *Early Modern Literary Studies* (2014): 1-8, qt at 3.



recognizable as a subtle, but compelling work of form.

As I hope to demonstrate through the readings in this chapter, the sociality expressed in the secular, coterie verse not only draws on elite influences but is enlivened by the imaginative force of community-building that underpins recusant devotion and the Jesuit mission. I argue that Aston Fowler's unique miscellany is as functional as well as an idealized text, composing within its pages a community born of lived, social experience and the imaginative communion of hearts and souls. This work reads the miscellany's community not only as a singular instance but as a communal code sent forth beyond its pages: the miscellany's call to close reading and attention to form invites the reader into the community. As my final chapter will explain, this personal communion through reading is a full realization of the Catholic faith so productively charted throughout the text. With these ideas in mind, Aston Fowler can be seen both as a missionary, advancing her communal ideals, and as keeper of a mission-text that has immortalized a community within its pages.

The first 'mission' written onto the pages of the miscellany is that of the Jesuits for the English Catholic Church. Though the presence of the polite courtly verse tempers the religious animus, the fact of Smith's missionary commitment should not be overlooked.<sup>4</sup> The miscellany's role within the Catholic community must be understood both within the context of Catholic gentry who were so instrumental in the endurance of the old religion in England and within the more subversive Jesuit mission.<sup>5</sup> Helen Hackett and Cedric Brown have laid the groundwork for this work by connecting the miscellany to various levels of Catholic communal experience, but their analyses take a broad view of the miscellany and do not look for communal engagements within the poems themselves.<sup>6</sup> Reading the Jesuit mission within the

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<sup>4</sup> Cedric Brown's work on Smith and his manuscripts has proved invaluable for placing the Jesuit within the context of the English Mission, see Brown, 'Recusant community and Jesuit mission in parliament days: Bodleian MS Eng. poet. b. 5'. *Yearbook of English Studies* 33 (2003): 290-315; and 'William Smith, Vere Southerne, Jesuit Missioner, and Three Linked Manuscript Miscellanies', in *Manuscript Miscellanies in Early Modern England*, eds. Eckhardt and Starza Smith (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 113-32.

<sup>5</sup> On Catholic patronage networks, see Michael C. Questier, *Catholicism and community in early modern England: politics, aristocratic patronage and religion, c. 1550-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). For an in-depth study of one prominent Catholic family's use of manuscript and music within their social network see Emilie K. M. Murphy, 'Music and Catholic culture in post-Reformation Lancashire: piety, protest, and conversion', *British Catholic History* 32.4 (2015): 492-525.

<sup>6</sup> See Hackett's articles on the miscellany: 'Women and Catholic Manuscript Networks

miscellany, however, reveals that the poetic texts such as the Catholic ballads inscribed by Smith not only offer a connection to his missionary work throughout his tenure in Staffordshire and Warwickshire, but also provide imaginative devotion that can elevate personal piety within the dispersed recusant experience to communal engagement. The ballad texts collected within Aston Fowler's miscellany are an intriguingly flexible verseform, cultivating devotion within the literary milieu of the Tixall coterie as well as in Smith's missionary work among the less literate congregations of his Warwickshire ministry. Of the ballads and other somewhat trite devotional verse in HM904, ten are shared with Smith's more functional, pastoral manuscript, Bodleian Eng. poet. b.5.<sup>7</sup> One of these, 'The soulse meditation' (fols. 16r-19v),<sup>8</sup> is described by Hyder Rollins as a remarkable example of the genre, for its stridently Catholic tone in comparison to the other ballads collected in his manuscript source BL Add. MS. 15225:

No man knows the glory of the new Jerusalem save he who actually experiences it, says our ardent Catholic poet; yet he manages to give a concrete and detailed account of its unparalleled joys. Into these joys, however, only true Catholics can hope to enter: there is no place for heretics or for those potentates who use Tyburn and the rack in an attempt to root out the true faith. The other ballads in [BL Add. MS. 15225] describing Heaven are only slightly Catholic in tone, and were, with slight judicious excisions, acceptable to Protestants. The present ballad would mortally have offended.<sup>9</sup>

This offensiveness is stark in Aston Fowler's miscellany as well, though it is

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in Seventeenth-Century England: New Research on Constance Aston Fowler's Miscellany of Sacred and Secular Verse', *Renaissance Quarterly* 65 (2012): 1094-124; 'Sisterhood and Female Friendship in Constance Aston Fowler's verse miscellany', in *Early Modern Women and the Poem*, ed. Susan Wiseman (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 131-47; 'The Aston-Thimelby Circle at Home and Abroad: Localism, National identity and Internationalism in the English Catholic Community', in *Region, Religion and English Renaissance Literature*, ed. David Coleman (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 123-38; 'Unlocking the mysteries of Constance Aston Fowler's verse miscellany (Huntington Library MS HM 904)', in *Manuscript Miscellanies in Early Modern England*, eds. Eckhardt and Smith, 91-112.

<sup>7</sup> These are 'My wretched soule with sinne opprest', 'O Blessed God O Sauour sweet', 'O God of thy great might', 'The prodigall child's soule wracke', 'Man to the wound', 'Lifes Death, lous life', 'In meditation where I sate', 'The soulse meditation', 'When Abraham was an old man', and 'A certaine king'. See Brown, 'Recusant Poetry and Jesuit Mission', 209-15 for an index of Eng. poet. b.5.

<sup>8</sup> Aldrich Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poem 9: 22-30.

<sup>9</sup> Hyder Rollins, ed., *Old English Ballads, 1553-1625. Chiefly from Manuscripts*. (Cambridge: The University Press, 1920), 152.

certainly not the first reminder of the text's Catholic allegiance. In addition to the Marian devotion of the prefatory verse ('Verses presented with a beautiful picture to celestinae'], the two passion poems directly preceding the ballad possess distinct Catholic resonances, as will be discussed in the following chapter. The most notable mark of Catholicism in the opening pages, however, is not within the poems but in Aston Fowler's inscription following one of the most intriguing verses in her miscellany, the unique poem 'On the Passion of our Lord': instead of signing the poem with initials to record the author, as she does throughout the text, Aston Fowler has inscribed the monograms IHS (*Jesus Hominum Salvator*) and MRA (*Maria Regina Angelorum*).

The divine monogram of IHS denotes divine presence, which Gary Kuchar has noted in relation to Richard Crashaw's 'Hymn to the Name'.<sup>10</sup> The IHS cipher is also a Jesuit commonplace and its Catholic resonance is heightened by its pairing with the Marian monogram. This inscription ties Aston Fowler's religious compositions for the miscellany to William Smith's Jesuit creed, not only in the monograms as symbols of allegiance to that sect, but also in the intertextual parallel with Smith's acrostic verse, which places similar representational emphasis on letter-forms in ciphering hidden meaning. Moreover, reading the monograms alongside the Marian devotion of the prefatory verse reinforces the status of the Holy Mother within the miscellany as a potent literary symbol. These traces of religious coding could seem quite mild in isolation, charged with the flavor of Rome but tempered by intermixing politely innocuous verses. Yet the miscellany's call to attentive reading—reading that is structured as an act of deciphering for hidden meaning—places a value on ciphers. Aston Fowler's fondness for textual symbols has already been noted; she reserves her most elaborate symbol for her brother Herbert Aston's poems, coding not only the metaphysical poetics within the 'true love knott' but also her own personal relationship with the verses. The divine monograms also offer another layer of coding, as Aston Fowler has intertwined the initials 'MRA' with hidden initials that could be a signature for the anonymous poem's author [Figure 13]. Reading sideways (along the vertical axis of the page, from top to bottom) it is possible to discern a G in first 'MRA' monogram, which

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<sup>10</sup> See Gary Kuchar, 'Poetry and the Eucharist in the English Renaissance (review article)', *George Herbert Journal* 36.1/2 (2012/2013): 139. Kuchar notes the presencing function as part of a Laudian devotion.

offers the intriguing possibility of coding Gertrude Thimelby as the writer. And yet the second ciphered monogram offers a more baffling cryptogram.<sup>11</sup> If Aston Fowler meant to encode a hidden message through the cipher, then it has been successfully encrypted to an illegible past. Nonetheless, it is likely that her message was accessible to privileged readers with personal knowledge of the verse's history. The community is suggested here in contrast to our belabored (and uncertain) reading: Aston Fowler's chosen readers were more likely to have been able to read this tangle of inked lines.

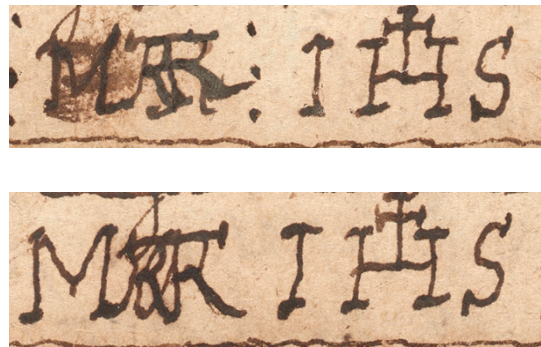


Figure 13 Monogram MRA IHS with ciphered initials, fol. 12v.

Regardless of our own access to the text's symbolic system, this elaborate ciphering displays an interest in identities that can be interpreted through *communal* signs. Taking this communally-oriented ciphering as paratext for a specially prized verse within the miscellany suggests that Aston Fowler designed her 'booke' with an understanding that attentively reading form could be an act of community engagement. Thus, the Catholic community is not only condensed into the symbols of the divine monograms, but also disseminated throughout the miscellany's poems in overt and covert ways.

This chapter attends to the imaginative construction of community by reading the miscellany in light of the missionary functions of form. I explore how the force of readerly, imaginative effort can effect communal bonds through a variety of means. These strategies of communal reading are seen variously in meditative

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<sup>11</sup> If Gertrude Thimelby is ciphered in this monogram, the bar across the top could be for a 'T'. However, this would have been another late-emendation by Aston Fowler following her sister's marriage. The second monogram could include a capital 'Q' intertwined with the 'R'. See Aston Fowler's 'Q' majuscule on fol. 155r, 'To My Honer'd sister GA', in which Herbert Aston refers to Gertrude as queen of verse, see Figure 4.

practices and social engagements, differing genres plying densely-coded form and urging subtle interpretive work. This chapter traverses widely in the miscellany, reading imaginative meditation, dreams, and pastoral dialogues. Throughout the pages of Aston Fowler's book, texts take on multilayered political and social dimensions activated by the interpretive force of deciphering. Thus the text enshrines and enlivens its community of discerning readers. My readings in this chapter show that the reading and writing of the communal text is a practice of sending forth poetic form beyond the miscellany's page.

**Imaginative Community: physical spaces, affective voices, and ballad meditation**

'The soule meditation' suggests, as Rollins notes, that the most perfect community is at once unknowable and only available to true Catholics. The paradox of a heaven that can never be fully experienced in the mortal world and a perfect communion of souls only available to Catholic believers is unraveled in the ballad's celebration of the imaginative realm. The heaven described in extraordinary detail is both real and idealized: vivid and sensuous dreams of heaven can serve a devotional purpose and thus become real to the true believer, but it cannot be fully experienced until she is called from human life. Dreams abound in Aston Fowler's miscellany (see, for example, 'A discourse of a dream' and 'A dreame', both discussed below),<sup>12</sup> but in this ballad the imaginative process is one of meditation, imbuing the mental work summoned in the verse with devotional efficacy.<sup>13</sup> The ballad opens with a direct call to the intended power of the meditation:

Amount my soule from earth Awhile  
Swoure [*sic*] up with wings of loue  
To see where saints And angells Dwell  
With christ In Blisse Aboue

1-4

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<sup>12</sup> c.f. 'Whilst here eclipsed': 'I liue by dreames' (2), 'On the Death of the Duke of Bucchingham' is an exploration of death through the conceit of sleep and dreaming; 'A Pastorall Egloune on the death of Lawra' also features a long dream-meditation, see below.

<sup>13</sup> The seminal work on Catholic meditation practice and seventeenth-century religious poetry is Louise Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation: A Study in English Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962). For a useful account of mysticism in early modern Catholic Europe see Moshe Sluhovsky, *Believe not every spirit: possession, mysticism, and discernment in early modern Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), esp. ch. 4.

The act of meditation is figured as an opportunity to set the soul aflight in order to catch a glimpse of heaven. Later the speaker refers to St Paul's visit to heaven as an example of the perfect meditation, while also calling attention to the irony at the heart of the ballad's attempt to describe heaven: 'Saint paul wch did these secrets see / could not those pleasures name' (145-6).<sup>14</sup> Although Paul stops short of describing the revelation of heaven he glimpsed, the speaker of the ballad has attempted just such a description. It is a hopeful, dreamlike meditation, and the speaker frames the ballad as a prayer of petition for God to make the imagining a reality. Yet the sheer length of the ballad (192 lines) and the extent of its visual scene-setting of heaven (over 100 lines are devoted to detailing the physical glory of heaven) suggests that the meditation is not merely serving a purpose of supplication. Indeed the speaker sets up the meditation in the context of consolation:

I silly wretch In earth Alone  
 Amongst professed foes  
 The world, the flesh, the diuell And none  
 But such As seeke my woes

Remember thou A stranger Art  
 A wandring pilgrime heare  
 A pilgrime till that thou Depart  
 To saints thy fellowes there

5-12

The speaker longs for respite from his suffering, which is especially acute as he is not only impaired by the usual afflictions of the human experience but must also contend with the 'professed foes' that surround him. This is suffering of a sort not yet found in the miscellany, detached from the sacramentalism of the poetics in Robert Southwell's lyrical devotion. Instead of suffering the torments of sin as an act of *imitatio Christi*, the speaker experiences the unjust pain of loneliness due to the lack of friendly community. It is not his estrangement from God due to the experience of sin that makes the speaker 'A wandring pilgrime' but the physical reality of recusant life. The repetition of 'pilgrim' highlights the meaning not only of

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. 2 Corinthians 12: 1-4: 'It is not expedient for me, doubtlesse, to glory, I wil come to visions and reuelations of the Lord. I knewe a man in Christ aboue foureteene yeeres agoe, whether in the body, I cannot tell, or whether out of the body, I cannot tell, God knoweth: such a one, caught vp to the third heauen. And I knew such a man (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell, God knoweth.) How that he was caught vp into Paradise, and heard vnspeakeable wordes, which it is not lawfull for a man to vtter.' *KJV*, 1611.

a soul on a journey through mortal life toward heaven, but also the connotation of a wanderer persecuted for his faith and in exile.<sup>15</sup> It is in this stark language, ‘Remember thou A stranger Art’, that the ballad speaker evokes a Catholic experience that has not yet been recognized in the miscellany. Remembering the Christian narrative, the metaphorical rendering of faith as a journey allows the devotional speaker to face the recusant experience with a stalwart heart.

It is telling that Smith finds this position of estrangement worth addressing directly in his ministry: even within a robust Catholic enclave, the experience of recusancy marked the believer with the experience of being a ‘stranger’ in her own land. While the community at Tixall was cushioned by Lord Aston’s political success, any Catholic identity during this period was structured through an understanding of injustice.<sup>16</sup> In his index to *An Epistle for Comfort* Robert Southwell sets out the denomination of suffering as the marrow of Catholic identity, claiming for his third chapter the topic ‘that we are moued to suffer tribulation willinglye, both by the president of Christ and the title of a Christian’.<sup>17</sup> Suffering, then, is the condition of a personal experience of passionate devotion and of communal identity.

Estrangement, as Herbert Aston’s religious lyrics illustrate, is also a potent devotional stance and it is not necessarily one that precludes communal experience. The verse goes on to illustrate this paradox of estrangement and confederacy in later stanzas, as I show below. It is striking, however, that this first allusion to the political status of religious belief and practice in the miscellany is figured through the language of isolation and persecution. Indeed, ‘professed foes’ places the

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<sup>15</sup> *OED*, ‘pilgrim, n.’, definition 3; for a helpful work on the early modern experience of pilgrimage and its conceptual frameworks, see Wes Williams, *Pilgrimage and Narrative in the French Renaissance: ‘The Undiscovered Country’* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998). Williams relates the efficacy of pilgrimage for the soul to a literary impulse, one that is born of an ‘internalized trajectory, one allied to reading in detail, and harnessing the movement of the imagination’ (8).

<sup>16</sup> J. C. H. Aveling and John Bossy offer two early studies of the recusant experience: Aveling, *The Handle and the Axe: the Catholic recusants in England from Reformation to Emancipation* (London: Blond and Briggs, 1976) and Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570-1850* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1975). Alexandra Walsham’s work illuminates the variance in the Catholic experience, especially *Church Papists: Catholicism, conformity, and confessional polemic in early modern England* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1999); see also James E. Kelly and Susan Royal (eds.), *Early modern English Catholicism: identity, memory, and counter-Reformation* (Leiden: Brill, 2017); and Lisa McClain, *Divided Loyalties? Pushing the Boundaries of Gender and Lay Roles in the Catholic Church, 1534-1829* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). A more comprehensive overview is given in my Introduction.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Southwell, *An Epistle for Comfort*, A3r.

meditation within a field of conflict, not merely a conventionally wicked mortal world but pointed hostility. The text, however, is not polemical. Rather, the verse proceeds into a metaphorical realm where the speaker, shifting into a second person address, urges the reader to ‘forsake this world And frame thy selfe’ (23). Within the ballad, a genre of heightened emotion, this language of wandering, isolation, and persecution amplifies the longing for comfort and community, but similar to the lyrical construction of longing, the form directs the believer to find that consolation within her own heart specifically through the theological configuration of a believer’s agency in disposing herself toward God. The terminology of framing, relevant especially in Renaissance *techne* of poetics, implicates a particular ‘work’ of form here: to ‘frame thy selfe’ is to orchestrate one’s own experience of faith, recalling how God has framed mortal flesh.<sup>18</sup>

The verse form, however, suggests a unique kind of consolatory process at work. In calling for the reader (or, crucially for the ballad genre, hearer) to ‘frame thy selfe’, the verse does not replicate the solitary self-focused suffering in sacrament in Southwell. ‘The soulse meditation’ is one of the Catholic texts that connects the Tixall literary community to a wider Catholic context beyond their family and social life.<sup>19</sup> Another ballad ‘meditation’ in the miscellany, ‘In meditation where I sate’ (fols. 36v-37v) is shared not only with Smith’s Eng. poet b. 5, but also with the Lancashire manuscript belonging to the Blundell family, *The Great Hodge Podge*.<sup>20</sup> These ‘meditations’, materially spanning three disparate manuscripts and their communities, expand the solitary experience of contemplation to a more communal purpose. Alison Shell reads texts such as these manuscript ballads as evidence of ‘Catholic oral commonality’.<sup>21</sup> The work of the ballad form, either in manuscript or in performance, is in Shell’s formulation, ‘liturgical and collective...powerfully reminding the listeners that their prayers and praises should be united with those of

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<sup>18</sup> Rayna Kalas, *Frame, Glass, Verse: The Technology of Poetic Invention in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007).

<sup>19</sup> On the importance of ballads and oral culture for connecting the English Catholic community, especially across the literate and semi-literate divide see Alison Shell, *Oral Culture and Catholicism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> For a general study of *The Great Hodge Podge* see Julie van Vuuren, ‘The manuscript culture of an English recusant Catholic community in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: a study of *The great hodge podge* and the Blundell family of Little Crosby, Lancashire’ (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Reading, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Shell, *Oral Culture and Catholicism*, 122.



the saints'.<sup>22</sup> When set in the framework of meditation, this work of form is not lessened, but re-framed. The ballads each give voice to the ruminations of a single speaker, but their role as textual bonds between Catholic enclaves across England suggests a communal role for this kind of imaginative practice. Smith deploys his ballad-meditations within a specific communal function, as Brown has glossed in reference to the Warwickshire manuscript: 'This scribe [Smith] was transmitting texts into his community in order to strengthen socio-religious bonds. In the main, the book encourages solidarity in difficult times and is compiled with the spirit of an educator'.<sup>23</sup> Work by priests such as Smith needed to go beyond local acts of pastoral care such as communal reading or even musical performance.<sup>24</sup> That meditative forms of devotion are implicated in this project indicates a pastoral, missionary value for an *imaginative* construction of community. Constance Aston Fowler's miscellany lacks the overt pedagogical motive of Smith's other manuscript, but the strengthening of religious bonds through imaginative community building is evident throughout its pages. Solidarity is effected in 'The soulse meditation' through an awareness of the state of persecution in the worldly realm and the immersive, excessive imaginative scene-setting of the idealized, true and rightful heaven. The 'meditation' is not only a personal act of devotion, but also offers textual evidence of the attitude of idealism and exemplifies the vividly visualized hope that bound the Catholic community together through hardship.

There is a subversive strategy at work in such a verse as 'The soulse meditation', however, one that proposes a hidden kingdom belonging to the persecuted. In this sanctuary, the reader's 'foes'—who are ultimately not Protestant neighbors or even zealous polemicists, but the establishment and government—cannot reach them. The verse not only consoles, but also offers escape. In contrast to the turmoil of recusant life, the speaker stresses the refuge of heaven:

There thou shalt rest out of reach  
And wayes of wicked men

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Cedric C. Brown, 'Recusant Community and Jesuit Mission', 290-91.

<sup>24</sup> Emilie Murphy describes the social practice of musical devotion with reference to *The Great Hodge Podge* and its ballads: 'Music and Catholic culture', *passim*. Jane Stevenson has recently proposed a convergence of musical performance and religious devotion within the Tixall coterie. She puts forward the possibility that some of the poetry collected by Arthur Clifford in *Tixall Poetry* was composed for musical performance at the English convent of St Monica's Louvain; see 'The Tixall circle and the musical life of St Monica's, Louvain', *British Catholic History* 33.4 (2017): 585-602.

Blaspheamous tongues And filthy speach  
Shall not Annoy thee then

Noe threatninge words to prison uile  
Shall not torment thy mind  
But Angels sweet And saints most mild  
Shall welcome thee most kind

153-160

This polarizing language is the most overt demarcation of ‘us vs them’ in the miscellany. It is all the more startling as a Jesuit text given the controversial doctrine of equivocation that priests such as Southwell deployed during their trials to evade questioning. Alice Dailey comments that this practice ‘abstracts the Catholic speaker from the bounds of temporal law and deposits him or her under the superseding banner of religious doctrine’.<sup>25</sup> In explicitly relating the speaker’s meditative retreat to rhetoric and ‘threatninge words’, the verse draws on this context. The mention of ‘prison’ conjures the treason trials and legal prosecutions that threatened the text’s readers and compilers.<sup>26</sup> Though the Astons were forgiven recusancy fines prior to the Civil War, the appeal to grievance voiced here would likely have stoked a feeling of sympathy, certainly for their community of believers but also for their close friends and kin who were not so lucky and suffered consequences for their faith.

Regardless of personal experiences of violence, however, Catholic identity rested on a valorization of suffering, especially within a Jesuit context that celebrated martyrdom.<sup>27</sup> Yet, as noted above, ‘The soule meditation’ differs from texts that offer a polemic of sacramental suffering, such as Southwell’s in *An Epistle for Comfort*. Instead it presents a reassuring promise of relief in the realm of heaven entered through imaginative meditation:

Nor persecutinge potentate  
Doth rule or gouerne there  
No temperrisinge schismatike

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<sup>25</sup> Alice Dailey, *The English Martyr from Reformation to Revolution* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 188-89.

<sup>26</sup> Dailey offers a useful analysis of the controversies faced by the English Catholic community following Elizabethan and Jacobean legal developments, the Papal Bull of 1570 excommunicating Elizabeth I and the ensuing laws targeting Catholic priests as traitors. Addressing the Jesuit identity forged through hagiographic texts, her work elucidates the Jesuits’ struggle to recontextualize a productive martyrological narrative in light of conflicting spiritual and temporal institutions. See Dailey, *The English Martyr from Reformation to Renaissance*, chapter 5 and *passim*.

<sup>27</sup> The martyrological mindset was not unique to early modern Catholics. See Susannah Brietz Monta, *Martyrdom and literature in early modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Hath office there to beare

There tyborne nothing hath to doe  
 No rope nor rack is knowne  
 Tormentors All And sathan too  
 Are wholly Ouerthrowne

165-72

This passage is near the end of the verse, following over one hundred lines of dream-like visions not only of comfort but of luxury. The contrast implies a potency of poetic form like that deployed elsewhere in the miscellany: the verse exploits the emotional force of recusant experience in order to intensify the joy and relief inspired by poetic meditation. It is a strikingly English and emotive narration; the ballad calls upon strong domestic feelings of grievance in referring to Tyburn, the site of some of the most violent moments in the collective memory of the recusant community. Here, the speaker offers a constructive narrative of suffering as fodder for emotional action of retreat. This meditation is a purposeful political act, not a defeatist withdrawal from the world. The imaginative realm conjured so vividly throughout the ballad is not merely an idealistic dreamworld; the recusants' present reality is never forgotten. Yet, although the physical dangers of the political reality remain a threat, the reader's present moment is also grounded in meditative rigor that reaches across time and space to connect believers across the world and circumvent history. 'Tormentors All [...] / Are wholly Ouerthrowne' in this act of imaginative devotion.

While the polite tone of Aston Fowler's miscellany suggests that her personal taste did not run toward bitter polemic or dramatic grievance, it must be noted that her book layers the subversive work of the Jesuit mission with a poetic 'mission' that emboldens the work of form. Self-conscious poetic form—forcible, efficacious, and aware of the potency unleashed through close reading—allows the polite coterie practices and the political resonances of the texts to come together in the manuscript's textual ciphers. The structuring of meaning—and communion—through texts that solicit a subtle reading practice imbues the form with layers of signification and foregrounds interpretive effort. In the miscellany, this ciphering is even valued in the experience of love. A verse dialogue collected in the second part of the miscellany, 'Tell me (Lucinda)' (fols. 143v-145r),<sup>28</sup> deliberates over discretion

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<sup>28</sup> Aldrich-Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poem 43: 110-111. Aldrich-Watson attributes the poem to Thomas Carey according to its inclusion in Richard Fanshawe's 1648

as Lucinda advises her lover to keep his passion hidden: ‘And I my selfe would choose to know it / First by thy care and cunning not to shew it’ (14-15).

Interestingly the dialogue concludes with an exhortation to riddles (39-46) so that the lovers can only speak intelligibly in the language exclusive to their hearts.

Throughout her ‘booke’ Aston Fowler displays an interest in privileged reading and interpretive tactics that serve a communal identity using secrecy as currency. Her miscellany is a space structured by insider knowledge, and thus the text’s invitation to close reading works not only to prompt appreciation of the potency of poetic form but also to unlock the hidden world created within its pages. ‘The soule meditation’ brings this ciphering function into the open: the ballad, a form often overlooked as a hackneyed textual surface, describes a glorious world, out of sight and unreachable by an ordinary reader.

When read closely for the text’s hidden structures, the ballad’s generic condition of simplistic form and straightforward narration is at odds the imaginative potency of the verse. The easy meter and rhyme is effective, however, in drawing the reader or listener into the meditation. This inviting form even slips into a direct address to the reader as the verse shifts from first to second person in the third stanza (‘Remember thou A stranger Art’). The balladeer’s voice at is at once inward, verbalizing an inner monologue of self-consolation, and outward, addressing his audience and directing a communal meditative experience. When the speaker instructs the reader (and himself) to ‘forsake this world And frame thy selfe / to liue As saints haue Done’ (23-24), he follows on directly from exhortation to dramatic scene-setting. The framing of the ‘selfe’ is not to be undertaken by keeping the mind shut up in the confines of solitary experience, but is enacted in a company with the ballad-speaker and the community at large (including the saints). The ballad urges the reader to join with the speaker and ‘swoure up’ (2), high above the human world. Intriguingly, this height is also a hidden depth within the miscellany text, a meditative space accessed through poetic form on the page and in an imagination at work in the ‘closett of the mind’ (to recall Pershall’s description).

From this vantage point, the verse describes a dazzling vision of heaven:

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edition of *Il Pastor Fido* as by ‘Mr. T. C. of his Majesties Bed-Chamber’. It is attributed to Sidney Godolphin in British Library MS. Harl. 6917. See Aldrich-Watson, introduction to *The Verse Miscellany*, lii. Arthur Clifford also includes a verse by Godolphin in *Tixall Poetry*, 216-18.

A Cittie there renowned is  
 Of statly statures rare  
 A princly place Adorn'd with blisse  
 Of building passinge faire

Ierusalem this place is call'd  
 most sumtuous to be hold  
 The gates with precious pearles Are fram'd  
 The streets Are pau'd with gold

24-32

The scene is resplendent, a curious blend of natural beauty with the trappings of earthly luxury such as jewels, palaces, and even princely clothing (lines 104-8 and 177-80). Seemingly material attributes of heaven are described in detail, and its physicality is at once otherworldly and recognizable. The architecture is reminiscent of an earthly city and is even built upon the banks of a river: 'Thorowe the streets the floud of life / with siluer streames Doth flow' (37-38). Yet the city shines and shimmers with an otherworldly light:

The cittie shines with endlesse blisse  
 In glory passinge bright  
 There god himselfe the lanthorne is  
 And lampe which giueth light.

The bodies there of Euerione  
 Are like to Cristall fine  
 Showinge more brighter then the sunn  
 When it most Cleerly shines

45-52

This city of light recalls the recurring Johannine trope of Christ as the Light of the World. The imagery here draws on the emotive effect of this spiritual truth, the 'endlesse blisse' of heaven's light.

Poetic figurations of light and visibility recur throughout the miscellany's secular and devotional verses in iterations that attest to the enlightening and invigorating effects of poetry. Here the visually bright imagery is not tied to the Christological conceit but to the physical space of heaven, lighting up the speaker's surroundings, that is, the holy landscape he has imaginatively constructed. 'There god himselfe' shines from every surface and the holy light is all-consuming. Even the human body is transformed and made brilliant by the light of God in heaven. Such an enlightenment of human form imitates the incarnational model presented in the Fourth Gospel: 'In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light

shineth in darknesse, and the darknesse comprehended it not' (John 1:4-5).

Curiously, the simile likening this brilliance to 'Cristall fine' ties the image of heavenly bodies to the man-made luxury of glass, a popular poetic conceit and a favorite of the Tixall poets.<sup>29</sup> The splendor of heaven is experienced in the body, but it is figured through an image of earthly materialism: 'Cristall' could refer to either transparent lead glass like our modern crystal or to the opaque and reflective mirror of George Gascoigne's *The Steele Glas* (1576). Both were expensive items in early modern culture, the fragility of the glass proving especially powerful for metaphysical emblems.

Despite this material image, however, it is the quality of capturing and reflecting or shining forth the ethereal light of God that marks the 'Cristall' bodies of heaven's occupants as holy. The conceits of a shining city and of heavenly bodies that glow with God's light is vividly mystical, although the mysticism is born from a meditative practice that is wholly imaginative. That is, there is no scriptural precedent or 'composition of place' that is called upon, nor is the speaker's personal experience of God's love the topic at hand.<sup>30</sup> Instead, the wonder of the scene is directed fully by the ballad, with poetic tropes and imagery deployed as an imaginative strategy of communal revitalization. The ballad paints a vision of wonder in every stanza: the accumulation of imagery intensifying the speaker's immersion in the dream-world and thus providing relief from the real-life anxiety of recusant experience.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Herbert Aston collected a sequence of short metaphysical poems on the theme of glass, meditating specifically on the effects of broken glass. The poems imagine and re-imagine the conceit in different metaphysical permutations. Examples include: 'A Glass Lampe Broken' that 'taught how beauty may expire' (line 4), 'A Glasse Watch-Cover' that signifies how 'every giant attome poysoning can / Turne, lyke it self, to dust the proudest man' (lines 9-10), 'A Broken Looking-Glasse' that warns the viewer, 'The cobby's broke, look to th' originall' (line 2), and 'A Glass, on the one side concave, on the other convex, broken', which is fantastically 'protean' and transforms 'Pygmies to gyants, and to dwarfes agen' (lines 9, 12). There are 15 in all, mostly short epigrams of 2-4 lines but several longer examples. See Clifford (ed.), *Tixall Poetry*, 57-66. See also Kalas, *Frame, Glass, Verse*.

<sup>30</sup> Louis Martz proposes the meditative 'composition of place' as typical of seventeenth-century religious poetry, a model inspired by the Ignatian meditational practice directed in *The Spiritual Exercises*. See Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation*.

<sup>31</sup> The tradition of dream-vision poetry is near at hand here, and in 'The Pastoral Eglogne on the Death of Lawra' to be discussed below, a remnant of a Medieval literary heritage. See Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) and Peter Brown (ed.), *Reading Dreams: the interpretation of dreams from Chaucer to Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). For collection on early modern dreams see Katharine Hodgkin, Michelle O'Callaghan, and Sue

In addition to the ballad's extensive descriptive language, the ballad also celebrates the community that is assembled in the heaven it imagines and the power of the communal experience. Several stanzas recount the order of angels and the presence of Church patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, dramatizing heaven's orderly hierarchy in a consolatory recitation of Catholic structures. In this form of communality, the descriptive cataloguing recalls that of the country house poem, a genre which also composes place through a veiled political register. Though it imagines a city rather than a bucolic country retreat, 'The soulse meditation' utilizes the imaginative force of visualization in much the same way that Heather Dubrow has designated for the country house poem, an attempt 'to control the relationship between inside and outside'.<sup>32</sup> Ben Jonson's 'To Penshurst' is a typical example, the country estate metonymically signifying an idealized community in its orderly description of the natural, Edenic landscape. Yet the communal order, like the estate, is haunted by the shadows of contrast, even in the opening line: 'Thou art not, Penshurst, built to envious show' (1).<sup>33</sup> 'Not-Penshurst' is brought to mind in a negative formula that defines the idealized estate by glancing at its *other*. Similarly, the 'professed foes' signaled in 'The soulse meditation', even as they are kept at bay, structure the community of heaven by shading the negative space outside the bounds of the celestial city's dazzling light. The community shines brighter through its dual emotional imaginings: political turmoil contrasted with a restoration of order and worldly persecution contrasted with heavenly solidarity.

The fullness of this emotional immersion is introduced, tellingly, in the figures of the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene:

Our lady there most heauenly sings  
With sweete melodious uoyce  
The saints And all Celestiall thinges  
For Ioy of her Reioyce

Good magdalen hath left her mone

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J. Wiseman (eds.), *Reading the early modern dream: the terrors of the night* (London: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>32</sup> Heather Dubrow, 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner? Reinterpreting Formalism and the Country House Poem', *MLQ* 61.1 (March 2000): 68. Hugh Jenkins also attends to how country house poems take part in a communal project by forging 'feigned commonwealths': *Feigned commonwealths: the country-house poem and the fashioning of the ideal community* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998).

<sup>33</sup> Ben Jonson, *Ben Jonson, Vol. 8: The Poems; The Prose Works*, ed. by C. H. Herford, Percy Simpson, and Evelyn Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947): 93-96.

Her siths<sup>34</sup> And sobbs Do cease  
 And sith her plaints And teares be gone  
 She liues In endlesse Blisse

65-72

These lines present a female voice that is prized for its affective harmonizing. The Marian figures take center stage in this community of saints and angels in heaven, which is all the more recognizably Catholic in this valorization of women's emotional labor. In this ballad, women's influence within heaven is upheld not only in the veneration of the Virgin Mother as mediatrix, but also in Mary Magdalene's status as an ordinary woman of faith who has earned a role in heaven as the exemplar of affective piety. Mary's voice is 'sweete' and 'melodious', inspiring devotion that is striking as an offering 'For Ioy of *her*'. It is through the energizing influence of Mary's euphoric song to God that the 'saints And all Celestiall thinges' can add their voices in order to glorify God. 'Our lady there most heauenly sings' shines the spotlight on a brilliant soloist, but the line is itself an ambiguous moment of meter: the lack of punctuation on the trisyllabic 'heauenly' forces the reader to either provide the elision or offers a feminine ending. The enjambment and metrical copiousness of the feminine ending slow the rhythm and allow the reader to luxuriate in the 'sweete melodious uoyce' for a moment too long, the awe of her solo voice casting a momentary spell. When the heavenly chorus takes up Mary's song, the meter picks up again and the stanza swells to harmonious fulfillment in the polyptoton. The redundancy is yet another moment of overflowing response: the Blessed Mother inspires joy, which then must be immediately expressed and reproduced in the call to 'Reioyce'.

While the Virgin is thus celebrated as a muse for communal song, Magdalene is held up as an example of the affective experience of heaven. Mary Magdalene is part of a community of feeling as much as a physical congregation of believers. She numbers among the 'saints And all Celestiall thinges', but is singled out from the heavenly host. Thus her experience of joy is presented as communally orchestrated and intimately felt. Magdalen, known to early modern Catholics as figure of affective devotion due in part to Southwell's *Marie Magdalen's funeral teares* (1591), is the most compelling character in the verse, the only person whose internal life is imagined on the page. She is a familiar figure for the reader, a literary trope in

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<sup>34</sup> 'sighs'; *OED*, 'sithe, *n.*', 2.



herself, that the reader can recognize as an emotional archetype. Yet here, the Magdalene is relieved of her characteristic sighs and sobs, those anguished effusions that had traditionally fulfilled cathartic devotional functions. Instead of relying on this expected trope, the ballad presents Magdalene as a coded emotional figure, a cipher for the reader to interpret.<sup>35</sup> The two Marys are contrasted in these stanzas, the Virgin singing and Magdalene falling silent. Magdalene's quieting is not an effacement, but a transformation of feeling: her sighs and sobs are affective effusions that nonetheless vocalize her subjectivity. In heaven her anguish is soothed, transformed into 'endlesse Blisse' and joined with the Virgin and saints in song.

This interlude dramatizes a congregational experience. Crucially, both the Virgin and Mary Magdalene are posed as central to the forging the emotional bonds of the community. The holy women epitomize a mode of expressive faith essential to ideal models of devotion, and this idealization makes the women into patterns to be inhabited by the Catholic community, in heaven and on Earth. Thus the balladeer recounts the exultant song and deeply felt joy of the holy women as directly shared with the community:

Where thousands thousands Angels dwell  
 And soules in glory braue  
 And Euery one reioyce to see  
 The Ioy his fellowes haue

73-76

The legion of angels multiplies the joy amongst its individuals exponentially through communal bonds. This effect is glossed again and again in the verse, the speaker and the ballad's audience participating vicariously (but also imaginatively) in the collective feelings of joy. These repetitive stanzas and the ballad's simplistic style enliven the communal effects here. Yet the form is intricate in its own way: marked by repetition, alliteration and anaphora, bearing the pleasing sing-song meter typical of ballads as musical texts, and a flowing reliance on polysyndeton to accumulate imagery and create narrative emphasis. When describing the heavenly community of saints, the stanzas flow together, piling up lines and clauses, and the imaginative longing for communal connection builds apace. The speaker has vanished from the lines, speaking as one of the community and sharing his account

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<sup>35</sup> See Elisa Oh, "[T]he art to desifer the true Character of Constance": Female Silence in Wrother's *Urania*', *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 15 (2010): 45-76.

for their wider benefit.

In this form of affective communality, the Catholic tradition of saints and prophets is a mirror of the ideal Catholic community in England: the reciprocal and amplifying experience of communal feeling represented in the heavenly host's shared joy is a model for recusants to find solace in their community. The personal experience of the devotional congregation, however, is also reinforced. In his address to the intimate relationships that make up a community, the speaker returns to the verse, calling directly to reader, and to himself as he is restored to self-consciousness:

Ten thousand tongues cannot expresse  
Nor Angels skill Indite  
The perfect pleasures there Remaine  
And Ioyes with their Delights

There do thy faithfull friends Remaine  
There do thy parents Dwell  
And thou in blisse shall meete Againe  
With them thou loudst soe well

O blissefull Ioy to meete our friends  
And louinge kinsfolke there  
And liue in blisse that neuer ends  
With them thou lou'dst soe Deare

81-92

Language fails; indeed the voices of a populace of thousands fail in the face of the 'perfect pleasures' of the ballad's imagining. The simple intimacy of these lines is striking and the break in the rhyme scheme (at lines 81 and 83) exacerbates the aposiopesis, language overcome by feeling. It is telling that despite the ballad's descriptive detail when it comes to the physicality of the heavenly city, this account of affective experience (starting in the stanzas quoted above, lines 65-92) is especially repetitive and marked by polyptotons of 'bliss' and 'blissful' as well as 'joy' and 'joyful' and 'rejoice'. Indeed, the imaginative efficacy of these communal moments is grounded in shared feeling, the balladeer's voice extolling the 'blisse' but leaving space for the audience to turn inward and find the feeling within themselves.

My reading has drawn from this seemingly simple verse-form a kind of imaginative communality. The ballad urges an interactive process of expansive meditation. It is the love between family and friends that grounds the ballad's

meditative devotion and deepens its affective allegiance to the wider Catholic community, including that of heaven. The ballad's placement in Aston Fowler's miscellany realizes the layering of the form's imaginative effects and incites a reading practice of personal feeling priming communal solidarity. Likewise Aston Fowler's miscellany materializes a solitary reading experience even as it carries out a communal project, forging bonds through ink and paper. The miscellany tells the story of an idealized community based on the lived history of Aston Fowler's friends and families at Tixall, just as the ballad's hopeful imagining of a perfect communal experience in heaven starts with the intimate connections that make up an individual's personal experience within the community.

Much of the recent scholarship on the seventeenth-century Catholic community has foregrounded its familial and local contexts and certainly Aston Fowler's miscellany is one such communal text that reflects the significance of such close bonds.<sup>36</sup> The close bonds of family and friends, however, need not be physically local. Poetry such as that exchanged among the Tixall coterie and ballad meditations such as 'The soulse meditation' could stretch across time and space to enliven a communal experience often hindered by absence. The ballad offers a poetic mode of shared meditation that extols the power of the Catholic congregation, disparate yet bound together by faith. It is in the act of reading that the imaginative potency of form can provide a means to strengthen those bonds through affective solidarity and faithful collegiality.

I have thus far attended to the miscellany's ballads as part of a reading life rather than considering their other potential uses. The ballad texts in Aston Fowler's manuscript bear no mark of performance and no tunes are noted. My limited scope, however, does not lessen the ballad's force of collective feeling. Although the miscellany's documentary evidence cannot attest to the Tixall coterie's specific cultural tradition, the genre links it to a diverse social life. The celebration of community that is so vividly expressed in 'The soulse meditation' suggests a purposeful efficacy for the verse in recusant devotional circles. As Emilie Murphy has described, the musical performance of ballads was an important part of the

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<sup>36</sup> Michael Questier, *Catholicism and Community in England: Politics, Aristocratic Patronage and Religion, c. 1550-1603* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). On the miscellany's context within its local community see Hackett's recent work, especially 'Sisterhood and Female Friendship', and id., 'The Aston-Thimelby Circle at Home and Abroad'.

social and devotional life of the recusant community in Lancashire. Though Smith's inclusion of this stridently Catholic ballad in both Aston Fowler's miscellany and his own manuscript of missionary verse does not suggest such an active musical culture as is represented in the Lancashire manuscript studied by Murphy (neither of Smith's transcriptions bear any evidence of musical setting or performance), the social capital of the ballad genre is evident. As discussed in Chapter One, the miscellany provides a fluid textual space for verses to be customized or reinterpreted, and thus the loss of explicit musicality for the ballads collected by Smith and Aston Fowler does not limit the verse's participation within the social life of Tixall.

Although the cultural life of ballads such as 'The soulse meditation' at Tixall can only be guessed at from textual remains, the enjoyment of such social and popular texts is not necessarily lessened by its existence as written rather than musical media. In the seventeenth-century, reading is a kind of social media as much as ballad-singing. The dual nature of the verse within the miscellany invigorates the communal spirit of sociality: the verses are cherished as poetic texts and mementoes from friends, they are read for solitary enjoyment as well as for a connection to a shared culture. The ballad need not be sung to be socially efficacious by way of gratifying delight: the sensory experience of the verse's vivid imagination is one of visuality and sensuality rather than aurality. Its imaginative drama and extravagance, moreover, is one of delight and pleasure:

No blisse no pleasure there doth want  
 Which man Doth wish to heaue  
 No braue nore fine delight is scant  
 Thou canst request or craue

97-100

Imagining such 'blisse' and 'pleasure' has become a poetic act of piety, a devotional meditation that can provide its own wish fulfilment. Early modern Catholics hoped that their dream would become a reality and that the wonderment of such visions could be a kind of mysticism, active meditation allowing for a glimpse of the divine.<sup>37</sup> This kind of meditation, though the ballad does not ascribe to a particular

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<sup>37</sup> See Sluhovsky, *Believe not every spirit*. Sluhovsky notes a development in meditation and mystical practice in the early modern period: 'Ignatian, Teresian, Salesian, and Theatine spiritual techniques—as elaborated, for example in Teresa of Ávila's *Way of Perfection* and in the Jesuit authorized (ascetic) interpretation of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*—instructed practitioners to visualize concrete images (the Passion, the life of the Virgin, the Holy

school exactly, presents itself as a preview of heaven, a means of glimpsing grace:

Then o my soule, take up the wings  
 Of faith of hope and of loue  
 And sore Aloft to uew the thinges  
 Prepar'd for thee Aboue

O happie time when thou shalt leaue  
 This flesh those Ioyes to see  
 No hart can thinke or once conceiue  
 The ioyes prepar'd for thee

181-88

The ballad genre is at several removes from the mystical practice of contemplative exercises, yet it is interesting that the technologies native to mysticism are deployed in ‘The soule meditation’, transposed to a popular text and potentially to a common tune. Here the ballad expresses a hope that the ‘meditation’ of the verse’s title will not only offer entertainment or solace, but also produce a revelation such as ‘Saint paul wch [*sic*] did these secrets see’ (145). The language draws on mystical contexts, denoting a meditative act ‘Of faith of hope and of loue’ opposed to any scholastic or theological reasoning. The specifically Spanish mysticism of ‘No pensar nada’ (think nothing) looms nearby: ‘No hart can thinke or once conceiue’.<sup>38</sup> Thus the ballad’s ‘meditation’ is not an act of thought, but a hopeful dream. The term ‘dream’ is not usually part of the vocabulary of mystical practice which instead speaks of contemplation and revelations of divine grace, but it is used throughout the miscellany and will structure my readings of Tixall’s communal poetry. Though dreams serve many functions within the miscellany, as we will see further below, they are notably a valorization of the poetic acts of visualization, idealization, and communal commemoration.

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Infancy, the Rosary, and the Secret Heart) and to advance slowly, moderately, and under tight supervision toward their goal, rather than emptying their souls and wait passively for the encounter with the divine.’ (265-66). See also Mary Baine Campbell, ‘Imputed Dreams: Dreaming and Knowing in Tudor England’, *Etudes Epistémè* 30 (2016). URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/episteme/1337>.

<sup>38</sup> The Aston’s Spanish connections are worth noting. Constance Aston Fowler may have been born in Spain as the Aston family accompanied Lord Aston on his embassy to Spain during the years 1619-25 (Constance’s likely birthyear is 1621). Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, 6.1.1; cited in Sluhovsky, 101. Teresa of Avila is delineating between intellectual and experiential knowledge of the divine, derived from the tradition of *recogimiento*. See Elena Carrera, *Teresa of Avila’s Autobiography: Authority, Power and the Self in Mid-Sixteenth-Century Spain* (London: Legenda, 2005).

### **Reading ‘dreame[s]’: deciphering social and literary forms of dreaming**

Though the real devotional and poetic lives of Aston Fowler and members of the Tixall group were marked by the religious and political experience of recusancy, communal identity is most often imagined in the miscellany’s pages as an ideal of friendship. While the religious texts copied by Smith suggest a process of textual communality through imaginative effort in visual and affective meditation, the social verses conjure a community of readers and writers in more self-consciously romanticized artistic renderings. Indeed, the community of writers and friends represented in the pages of Aston Fowler’s miscellany is a dream in itself, a carefully curated idealization. Yet, as I discuss below, the sociality of the miscellany’s verses reveals that the potent imaginative effort that I trace throughout this chapter can be harnessed as a self-fulfilling force.

The language of dreaming in a literary context calls to mind perhaps the most famous example of shared dreaming in our canon, that of the four lovers in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Yet theirs is a false dream, not a dream at all, but an imperiled memory of real experiences. Theseus’s commentary on the lovers’ dream-tales denounces ‘the lunatic, the lover and the poet’. He disavows imagination as ‘tricks’ (5.1.18) of the mind, even as he ironically lifts the veil of stagecraft: Shakespeare’s characters are none of them real. But as Hippolyta discerns, the *shared*, communal effect of ‘dreaming’ can make a vision more than an ‘airy nothing’ (5.1.16):

And all their minds transfigure so together,  
More witnesseth than fancy’s images  
And grows to something of great constancy.

5.1.24-26

The communal meditation enacted in the miscellany’s ballads functions similarly. The shared dream-meditation becomes a witness, a future-memory, passed on from St Paul who ‘did these secrets see’ and compounded through the communality of the ballad. There is a similar operative dreaming at work in the miscellany’s social verses. In ‘A discourse of A dreame’ (fol. 31v), Katherine Thimelby bemoans the treachery of restless, solitary dreaming which has the capacity ‘my hart to take / By giuing Ioyes I can not find a wake’ (‘A discourse of A dreame’, lines 7-8).<sup>39</sup> This is

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<sup>39</sup> fol. 31v; Aldrich Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poem 21: 60.

an unruly dream, unwanted and beyond the imaginative control of the sleeper. By contrast, the other dreams in the miscellany are framed as meaningful moments of transcendent vision. Dreams such as in Richard Fanshawe's poem ('A Dreame', fols. 185v-186r)<sup>40</sup> and the pastoral vision recounted in William Pershall's eclogue participate in the miscellany's communal work of form, both as social verses and as energetic imaginative constructions.

It must be noted that the miscellany is invested with Aston Fowler's personal interests and biased toward presenting the literary life at Tixall in a positive light. These motivations can be read critically as a hopeful fantasy or more favorably as a strategic act of communal reputation management. In this light, the miscellany participates in the social function of literature that Margaret Ezell has defined, an active engagement that not only responds to a social context but also composes communal experience. Citing Earl Miner's analysis of Cavalier verse and Harold Love's view of the literary clique, Ezell traces 'the extent to which intellectual and literary life, as well as politics, was created, invigorated, and sustained through the writing and reading of script texts'.<sup>41</sup> The sociality of verse at Tixall is an act of community-building and a means of engaging with the specific community of friends as well as a wider community of readers. As I have noted, the creation and circulation of manuscript Catholic manuscript texts often took on a politically subversive layer of privacy. The illicit nature of Catholic information networks necessitated a layer of secrecy that made texts into ciphers and required active reading even of seemingly innocuous and frivolous texts such as a popular ballad. It is true that reading the socially ciphered text can be a beguiling undertaking, much like dream interpretation, in searching for meaning in mists and shadows. However, it is not the myriad potentiality of dreams that I mean to suggest as a meaningful force, but rather a notable specificity of the privileged means of discernment.

The romantic vision of dream-like mists and shadows is presented evocatively in Pershall's 'A Pastorall Egloune' (fols. 196r-200v).<sup>42</sup> In the eclogue, the grieving lover Amyntas recounts a vision that leads him through a maze. He must find his

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<sup>40</sup> Aldrich-Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poem 59: 141.

<sup>41</sup> Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print*, 40. Citing Earl Miner, *The Cavalier Modes from Jonson to Cotton* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) and Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

<sup>42</sup> Aldrich Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poem 66: 157-63.

way through the 'misty Aire' (line 62) in order to gain full comprehension. Amyntas narrates: 'And after severall wandrings in the Maze / At last I Light vpon the middle place / where did Appeare a gloriouse Palace built' (69-71). The reference to the 'middle place' recalls my analysis of the Marian concept of the mediatrix. In my conception of the miscellany's fluidity of form, the 'middle place' is a realm of possibility, where the mediatrix reigns and reading is a dynamic process. Here it is also a space between dreaming and reality, where the 'dreamer' must be a reader of signs that will impart useful information. Upon entering the 'gloriouse Palace', Amyntas is presented with characters and scenes that he must interpret rightly as 'distracted' (99) and 'mechanick Lovers' (112). It is then that he can enter, with his courteous guide, the 'Sumptuouse Gallery' (116) of statues 'Curiously-Contrivd' (117) and comprehend the art's true meaning:

Then on a sodaine would appeare a Light  
 As twere behinde ye Images so bright  
 As Ravisht all my senses, and would bee  
 In severall places of each Imagry  
 Sometimes in the Eye of one it would Appeare  
 And then my thoughts were only fixed there  
 In others 'twould ye Face alone possesse  
 And then I thought that peece my happines  
 And though it Came in parts, yeat where it hitt  
 I Could not Chuce but love ye whole for it:  
 This (sayd ye good old Mann) doth aptly shew  
 The way that Lovers to Affection grow  
 That flame you see so bright, is part of that  
 Of which all Creatures doe participate

121-134

The dream must be guided by a discerning eye and readerly skill. Amyntas's dream does not present a murky, shifting world of uncertain meaning. Rather, it enacts an interpretive ritual that ultimately leads to a comprehension not merely of a single ciphered lesson, but of the interconnected forces found in a community of artists, readers and writings. Following this moment of ecstatic understanding, he meets 'A quier of witts Like to the Muses nine / All writinge Elegies for Lawraes Shrine' (145-46). This is a dream of reading, a vision structured by the work of form (artistically rendered 'Images so bright') to usher the dreamer into full communion 'all Creatures'. Laura refers here to the pastoral character for Lady Dorothy Shirley in the Tixall set, but the lines describing Amyntas's experience in the 'Sumptuouse Gallery' (116) also recall Petrarch. As Amyntas admires the 'Curiously-Contrivd'



(117) statuaries, he self-consciously contemplates the work of form, here dramatized in the artistic renderings of beautiful features that reads as distinctly Petrarchan: ‘It’s brightnes in the Eye, and thence it goes / In others to the lipps, ye Cheeke, ye Chinne / And where it shews itself, it draws Love in:’ (140-42). In comprehending this ‘Light Devinely bredd’ (135), Pershall demonstrates Amyntas’s readerly skill. Pershall goes on to embed an epitaph to Laura into the dream, making his own poetic form part of that ‘Sumptuose Gallery’ and implicating the text’s social function—commemorating Lady Dorothy Shirley—into this productive mode of discerning dreams and transcendent reading-as-communion.

There is, then, an instance of ‘more witnesseth than fancy’s image’ hidden at the heart of the dream. The vision, though it is not actively directed as is ‘The soulse meditation’, ultimately leads to Laura, or rather to Lady Dorothy Shirley. Indeed, the dream is structured as an elaborate framing device that guides the dreamer/reader to read the epitaph well. The verse-within-a-verse reminds the reader that the form of the epitaph is itself a means of personal connection:

Reader, know this Monument’s  
Not placed heere to Represent  
A Living fame to her that must  
Live after this hard Marble’s dust  
Tis but to tell thee; If thou bee  
Amyntas : Lawra prays for thee:

165-170

The poetic form is thus a moment of real communication, but it is embedded within layers of signs and ciphers. Amyntas had to *read* his way through the dream in order to reach this moment of fully realized social connection. Within the communal text of Aston Fowler’s miscellany, Amyntas could stand for any member of the Tixall coterie who mourns for their lost friend, Lady Dorothy. Although we need not restrict our reading to such rigid interpretations of the historical figures, it is nonetheless relevant for considering the miscellany’s social life to recognize who is most forcefully implicated in the intriguingly open statement, ‘If thou bee / Amyntas’. A non-coterie reader likely reads the epitaph as a part of the fictional narrative and as the climactic moment of the text. Yet these lines draw close a coterie reader who identifies with Amyntas in his grief. The conditional ‘*If* thou be Amyntas’ leaves the text open—the reader must have the knowledge within herself to realize the social exchange.

The miscellany's social life is a strong force within the text: in all there are 27 verses by members of the Tixall coterie or praising the family and friends.<sup>43</sup> This chapter proposes that this communal status requires a new way of reading the miscellany's verse as well as coterie verse more broadly: a close engagement with form that attends to the poetic effects realized through community-oriented moments of reading and writing, which in turn forge community and sociality. In the case of Aston Fowler's miscellany and the literary life of the Tixall coterie, this social function is inscribed in the manuscript 'booke' thus creating a material, readerly repository of communal interests. As my readings throughout this thesis have shown, the verses are themselves social texts. The book is not only a collaboratively made object; in many ways, it is a communally composed text: it includes at least three different hands and the choice of poems often relates to community life at Tixall. For instance, 'A dreame' by Richard Fanshawe was written during the poet's visit to Tixall as a compliment to Constance and her older sister Gertrude. The verse is in sonnet form and begins 'I saw two swans come proudly downe the streame / Of Trent', situating the poem in Staffordshire. Hackett has read the poem in relation to an affective community between Fanshawe, the Aston sisters, and their absent brother Herbert. During this period, Fanshawe was secretary to Lord Walter Aston and also transported letters between Tixall and Spain where Lord Aston was ambassador with Herbert Aston as part of his convoy. Hackett views the poems Fanshawe composed at Tixall as 'construct[ing] a relationship in which the three companions in Staffordshire—Constance, Gertrude and Fanshawe—are bound together not only by mutual affection and esteem but also by their affection for Herbert, and his role as imagined reader'.<sup>44</sup> It is true that Aston Fowler comments on the social life of verse at Tixall in her own letters to Herbert, describing the circumstances of Fanshawe's composition on Gertrude's hair, 'Celia hath for a brother's absence sworne' (fols. 187r-v).<sup>45</sup> She tells him: 'The occasion of making them was this: We had bin one eavening at bowles, and when we caime in, my sister was opening her hayre with her fingers, and bid him tell you that she would not

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<sup>43</sup> This includes the *Celestinae* poems, which are unattributed, though I posit William Pershall as a possible author/source as I discuss in relation to the hashmark symbol's editorial function below.

<sup>44</sup> Hackett, 'Sisterhood and female friendship', 136.

<sup>45</sup> Aldrich-Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poem 61: 144-45.

curl her hayer no otherwaies then it curled itselfe till she saw you again'.<sup>46</sup> Though Constance describes the poem as belonging to a singular 'occasion', it is the social interaction that the verse both enacts and commemorates that is most appreciated. Instead of reading such verse as flatly polite and occasional, static in time and stifled by the courtesy of formal coterie participation, the miscellany enlivens the occasional by celebrating the communal and the literary. Aston Fowler delights in the sociality and artistry of the poetry exchanged amongst her friends and family: the miscellany itself is a testament to this appreciation for verse as an art form and her letters add to this a clear awareness of the social function of the poems she and her brother exchanged.

The inclusion of this poem in the miscellany, along with Aston Fowler's commentary to her brother, illustrates the miscellany's communality in a straightforward presentation of poetry's social role in the familial and social relationships. Moreover, Fanshawe's two Tixall poems transport the idyllic (and idealized) moments of sisterly affection to a more public literary milieu as they are collected in another manuscript miscellany, HM 116, a university collection with Oxford connections which also includes poems by some of the most popular poets of the early seventeenth century.<sup>47</sup> In HM 116, the poem is situated in its specific social moment and copied under the heading 'Of two most beautifull Sisters rowed on the Trent; under the allegorie of swans'. The version in the Oxford miscellany shows that Fanshawe has edited the original into a more polished product, which suggests that the sociality of the verse's inception did not lessen the poet's appreciation for it. Despite the conceit of Spenserian imitation (taking his cue from 'Prothalamion'), Fanshawe finds originality and an unexpected twist in the poem. This occasional verse does not merely narrate an idyllic scene, but instead Fanshawe transports the 'occasion' out of time and place in titling it in HM904 'A dreame'. The picturesque imagery of two elegant sister-swans and the commonplace allusion to the myth of Leda gives way in the second part of the verse to a metaphysical contemplation of the duality of fire and water.

In Aston Fowler's version of the verse, the form is copied in stanzas, highlighting the structural form of the English sonnet.<sup>48</sup> Although the use of

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<sup>46</sup> Clifford (ed.), *Tixall Poetry*, 215.

<sup>47</sup> See the entry in *CELM* for an overview of the contents.

<sup>48</sup> Aldrich Watson prints the final two stanzas as tercets, but Aston Fowler's copying

quatrains in the English sonnet could be seen to condense and break the flow of the argument, here the effect is one of neat ordering, making the turn of the sonnet all the more striking. The final quatrain and concluding couplet introduce a starkly different tone, with polite Spenserian convention giving way to passionate metaphysical conceit. This change comes as the poet addresses the swans directly and questions the implications of the social relationship between the swans and their admirers:

Fayre Birds, allide to him that sett on fire  
 The world, why doe yee so delight in floods,  
 And kindling in a thousand hearts desire  
 Quench his soft moouings in your gentle bloods?

Ah! Since so manhy liue in flames for you,  
 Leaue to bee swans; grow salamanders too.

9-14

Here the swans serenely floating ‘downe the streame’ (1) are now shown to be ‘allide to him that sett on fire / The World’ (9-10). The swans ‘delight in floods’ while also ‘kindling’ fire in the hearts of their admirers. The polite vision of the pastoral idyll is set aflame and transformed into the potent metaphysics of sacred and secular love poetry. This mixing of fire, water, and blood is almost eucharistic, transposing the sociality of the poem (the celebration of sisterly affection and polite friendship) into devotion. The poem imagines a communion of souls, not only of the speaker in his love of the sisters but of ‘a thousand hearts’.

By recreating the scene of beauty, situated locally but contextualized through conventional imagery, the verse calls upon the imaginative effort of pastoral idealization that makes a fantasy or a dream of reality. Aston Fowler’s description of the experience that inspired the poem in the letter to her brother paints a familiar scene for him to aid in the visual effect: ‘[We] wer all walking in the owld halle, and looking upon Trent, and I was speaking how you used to course your boy Dick about that medow, and talking of many such things’.<sup>49</sup> Constance provides a personal vantage point for her brother to imagine the poetic scene by mentioning his own particular experience in the ‘medow’, but she is careful to leave the specifics for Fanshawe to conjure in the verse, leaving open ‘many such things’ that were

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does not necessitate this break and keeps to the traditional form of three quatrains and a couplet.

<sup>49</sup> Clifford (ed.), *Tixall Poetry*, 215.

discussed while viewing the Trent and the surrounding meadows. Herbert's reading is anticipated as an active deciphering and enlivening force: he will receive the verse as a talisman of his intimate poetic coterie, but it is in reading it closely, and in collaboration with his sister's commentary as well as his own memories, that the verse comes fully to life in a moment of social engagement. The 'sending forth' of this verse to Aston in Spain—a literary mission that reverses the trajectory of the Jesuit mission—is an illustrative example of how imaginative communion through the work of form can connect readers across time and space.

The verse invites the reader be a part of the scene, to be one of 'a thousand hearts' that are aflame for the salvific effects of the sisters' 'gentle blood'. In the heading used for this verse in HM116, the form is designated specifically as 'allegory', directing the reader from the outset to read closely for hidden meanings. Aston Fowler's title of 'A dreame' similarly introduces the form as one that should be parsed carefully. The emblematic imagery that structures the verse concentrates densely coded significance into the imagistic ciphers that represent the sisters: the swans troping purity and gentle beauty, the salamanders exemplifying ardent feeling. Deciphering the 'dreame', however, is not merely an act of matching imagery to conventional meanings, as you could do with the aid of a symbol dictionary. Rather, a reader must keep in mind the social moment and literary analogue as well, a layer only discernible to those intimately acquainted with the coterie and their literary context. A knowing reader will recognize the setting amongst friends at Tixall and recognize that the sexualized (or romanticized) connotations of the swan—though here the gender dynamics of the myth are reversed—are transposed for the realization of communal affection. The ending image, 'growe salamanders too', does not implicate the sisters in passionate love as it would in traditional Petrarchan love poetry. Rather the verse narrates a shared, communal dream, a socially-efficacious idealization: it is not just Fanshawe who writes in awe of the sisters' beauty, but 'so many liue in flames for you'. Thus, like the symbolic implications of nuns' virginity, the sisters' purity and perfection has become collective. Reading the swan and the salamander requires acquiescing to a productive paradox: the sisters can be both pure and desired, inspiring 'delight in floods' and 'kindling...desire'. And such fire of desire is made pure through its collective purchase. Just as the Eucharistic ritual is a communication between congregant and Christ, a dialogic exchange made possible through the effects of ritual to remove restraints of time and space, so does the

communal work of form in the ‘occasional’ verse here offer a means of communing in an imagined, dream-scape of social devotion. In sending Fanshawe’s verses with personalized commentary to Spain, Aston Fowler invites Herbert to participate in the scene of metaphysical friendship and the social life of form, even if in a ‘dreame’.

This is an open and expansive work of form. The texts do not dissolve into flights of fancy but take on new layers of meaning. These meditations and dreams, in fact, are sent forth with missionary zeal. The Jesuit mission can be seen as a campaign aimed at the hearts and minds of the English populace; in this light, missionary poetry such as that collected in HM904 is not any less effective for employing ‘fanciful’ form. Indeed, the dream-like quality of this poetry, as I have argued, encourages the reader to inhabit the communal code by prompting the imaginative effort of discernment, a mode of reading that constructs the community through subtle artistry. Furthermore, this work of form is fully realized in the material life of the text. The communal meditation of Smith’s Catholic balladry is an example of a text that sustains and invigorates a community of readers in its transmission through Smith’s Jesuit mission work as well as in the verse’s narrative of imaginative communion in heaven. Aston Fowler’s miscellany does not display the markers of more habitual communal use as found in Smith’s Warwickshire manuscript of missionary verse, Bodleian manuscript Eng. poet. b.5,<sup>50</sup> but Smith’s additions to the manuscript nonetheless suggest a material connection to Catholic information networks and assert a valuable place for poetry within his missionary work. Though Aston Fowler’s manuscript differs from other more explicitly missionary texts, it is also a means of ‘sending forth’ communal ideals, arguably more evocative as a communal book than Jesuit and Catholic manuscripts that were working texts for missionary priests compiled for a single purpose.

The social life centered at Tixall—of which recusant devotion was but one part—is captured and commemorated within the miscellany, albeit in an idealized version carefully presented for positive effect. Smith’s Eng. poet. b.5, in contrast, captures only glimpses of the community where he lived and worked in Warwickshire. That text is inextricably tied to Smith’s Jesuit mission work and thus

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<sup>50</sup> Interestingly, Eng. Poet. B.5, Smith’s earliest manuscript, is a tall and narrow book written in columns of verse: this makes it useful as a performance text or a co-reading text as the reader(s) would not need to turn the pages as frequently.

the communal work of form is mainly kept off the pages of the book, even if the performance of the ballads within the community plausibly engaged similar effects. The miscellany's literary 'mission work' is more dynamic and varied, spanning genres as disparate as pastoral eclogues, religious ballads, and occasional poems. Across these genres the miscellany enacts inventive communal engagements, tracing and energizing the lines of connection that sprawl off its pages. Moreover, the poetic performance of community in turn invites readers to enliven the communal experience beyond the bounds of the miscellany's structure as a solitary text. The miscellanizing process is one of collecting and cohering the disparate into a new form; this is mirrored in the social function of Aston Fowler's 'booke' as a gathering of voices and forms that together constitute a communal experience. Reading the dreams and imaginative meditations in this selection of verses has revealed the way that the work of form for a communal text such as Aston Fowler's miscellany is predicated on layers of hidden meaning. Here is yet another call to an active close reading practice, shown now as a means of communal engagement. This potency of form is compounded by the miscellany's origin in the dual perspective of a woman and a Catholic, both subject positions that rely upon the oblique forms of power and politics. It is a testament to the miscellany's complex layering of ciphers and formal strategies that the reader is so often rewarded by delving deeper into verses that often contain more than meets the eye.

### **Communal Spaces: pastoral landscape, imaginative devotion, and textual community**

Aston Fowler includes three pastoral eclogues in her miscellany, two in her own hand and another copied in a hand identified by Hackett as William Pershall's.<sup>51</sup> It is likely that Pershall is the writer of the first and the last pastorals, 'An Eglogne [*sic*] betweene Melibeus and Amyntas' (fols. 28v-31r)<sup>52</sup> and 'A Pastorall Egloune on the death of Lawra', given the stylistic similarities, the shared hashmark cataloguing by Aston Fowler, and the initialing of the final verse 'SWP' for Sir William Pershall.<sup>53</sup> The other pastoral 'The Constant Louers' (fols. 189r-195v)<sup>54</sup> is by Thomas

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<sup>51</sup> See Hackett, 'Unlocking the mysteries', 107.

<sup>52</sup> Aldrich Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poem 20: 55-59.

<sup>53</sup> The final verse upon the death of 'Lawra' is also in Pershall's hand.

<sup>54</sup> Aldrich Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poem 65: 149-56.

Randolph, printed by B. H. Newdigate in the *Times Literary Supplement* (1942).<sup>55</sup> The couple celebrated in ‘The Constant Louers’ is Lady Dorothy Shirley and William Stafford, represented as Laura and Amintas in the two final pastorals. However, as I’ve mentioned previously, we need not affix any explicit biographical situations onto the poems in order to decipher the miscellany’s social verses. Nevertheless, the social context is relevant for fuller breadth of comprehension. While ‘The Constant Louers’ and ‘On the death of Laura’ share a connection to Lady Dorothy Shirley, ‘An Eglogne’ stands out as a dialogue on the figure of Celestinae, Pershall’s poetic muse, possibly a representation of Aston Fowler. These verses fashion the relationships between the friends and lovers of the Tixall community in a stylized and idealized poetic realm. The pastoral realm thus maps the expansive, trans-spatial, and transtemporal workings of social poetry beyond the bounds of miscellany’s pages and beyond the grounds of the Tixall estate. Although the physical place is not described in such vivid detail as in ‘The sourse meditation’, the pastoral realm is nonetheless an important imaginative space: it is an ethos as well as a space.<sup>56</sup> The imaginative meeting place figured in eclogues allows friends to converse in a space of natural beauty, one that is removed from society, a hidden world of friends. In a Catholic context this sanctuary is infused with heightened communal significance, and the pastoral realm can be seen as a parallel to the holy refuge of heaven in ‘The sourse meditation’ as well as an imaginatively consecrated space, which Lisa McClain has noted as a particular strategy for recusant devotional life structured as a Church without a Church.<sup>57</sup>

As I discussed in the previous chapter, the miscellany’s secular themes of

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<sup>55</sup> ‘The Constant Lovers—I’, *Times Literary Supplement*, Issue 2098 (April 18, 1942): 204; ‘The Constant Lovers—II’, *Times Literary Supplement*, Issue 2099 (April 25, 1942): 216. Thomas Randolph, who is described as one of the ‘sons’ of Ben Jonson and was read and admired by Constance Aston Fowler, was tutor to William Stafford’s son around the time of Stafford’s marriage in 1634 to Lady Dorothy. See also W. Kelliher, ‘Randolph, Thomas (bap. 1605, d. 1635), poet and playwright’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>56</sup> See Nancy Lindheim, *The Virgilian Pastoral Tradition: From the Renaissance to the Modern Era* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2005).

<sup>57</sup> McClain cites Southwell, who directed imaginatively consecrating a domestic space: ‘By making such creative adjustments in thought and imagination—by concentrating on the function of space rather than on material form—“the whole house will be to me in manner a paradise,” as Southwell described earlier. By following Southwell’s instructions, each member of the household could live simultaneously in his own home and in a religious space constructed to meet his needs. English Catholics could find the sacred in the ordinary.’ Lisa McClain, *Lest We Be Damned*, 59.



romantic love are never wholly separate from its devotional themes. Pastoral love lyrics and mystical devotion are connected not only in the happenstance of their material placement in the same miscellany, but in the shared force of true feeling and communal efficacy. In ‘An Eglogne’, the shepherds talk not only of love but of the correct orientation of inner feeling to external world, which is both a devotional and a political question. Amyntas and Melibeus consider the natural world of the pastoral realm as implicated in the experience of love, the politics of landscape imbuing the questions of love and community. Their dialogue comments on the political dimension of landscape in a distinctly Catholic way, a perspective that Sweeney has read in Southwell as a ‘psychologicalised’ spatial imagination. Sweeney posits that the Jesuit poetic mission exemplified in Southwell’s vividly imagistic poetry, trained priests and their recusant congregants to read their landscape well:

Landscape to a missionary Jesuit trained to find God in the real could never be a mere collection of blazons to be assembled in response to a personal agenda. Where the others were using self-created landscapes to comment on the political, or at least their place in it (as Dyer in his tree), Southwell was in turn commenting on the self-created landscapes, the paucity of spiritual creativity that in his view rendered them invalid...he was insisting that a landscape, whether internal or not, is informed by God, and must have God acknowledged in it.<sup>58</sup>

The scene of ‘An Eglogne’ is similarly a comment on ‘self-created landscapes’ and whether true love is present and acknowledged in it. ‘Tell me Amyntas’, Melibeus begins, ‘why you looke, / so sadly on this murmuring brooke’ (1-2). The pastoral world is here presented as a decipherable text, a self-created landscape even within the imagination of the pastoral characters themselves: the ‘murmuring brooke’ signifies something particular to Amyntas, though it appears perfectly ordinary. Melibeus chastises the lovelorn Amyntas, who believes he will not find fulfilment in his love for Celestinae until ‘Riuers runne the other way’ (23) as foretold by an oracle. Curiously, Amyntas has not taken the oracle’s prophecy as an apocalyptic and impossible future but rather a challenge for his interior landscape, despite the physical reality of his surroundings seeming to discredit his love.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Anne Sweeney, *Snow in Arcadia: redrawing the English lyric landscape, 1586-95* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 183.

<sup>59</sup> The imaginative hydraulic engineering of a river to run backwards is tied to the mythography of the early modern waterscape to which Louise Noble has called attention in

The ‘deciphering imperative’ of the pastoral invites the knowing reader to recognize another dimension to Amyntas and Melibeus’s dialogue.<sup>60</sup> Celestinae, as I have discussed previously, is likely a cipher for Aston Fowler.<sup>61</sup> However, the posing of Constance as a romanticized figure in these verse can be read as deference to her status within the Tixall coterie as a literary mediatrix and does not necessarily suggest any erotic attachment.<sup>62</sup> Celestinae’s status as mediatrix (made explicit in ‘Verses presented’) injects celebratory and amatory verses addressed to her with meaningful communal significance. Although pastoral personae need not limit readings to autobiographical circumstance (just as occasional verse need not be collapsed wholly into a singular historical moment), the communal ramifications of addressing Celestinae is noteworthy: the questions of how to remain true to Celestinae and how to engage in poetic communion with her miscellany’s coterie readers are inextricably linked. Moreover, political readings lurk just below the surface even in this coterie function: the question of how to love Celestinae in an inauspicious landscape has at its crux an anxiety over maintaining faith absent material support. Hope requires an urgent forcefulness in order to maintain its imaginative consecration within this realm.

Melibeus advises a grounded, polite (and politic) act of love: ‘Lett Riuers runne which way they will / Cannot you loue as you doe still’ (28-29). The poetic dialogue places emphasis on the pastoral landscape, that is his physical experience in the world, as a space interpreted according to personal feeling. Melibeus regards the experience of loving in the natural world as an act of patience (‘Lett Riuers runne’) and counsels constancy: ‘A constant Faith all Feare Expells / And hope subdues Impossibles: / Loue often worketh Miracles’ (31-33). In a political sense, this stance

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regards to the drainage of the East Anglian Fens. Controlling the waterscape was a kind of ‘collective dream’ for ‘such enterprise requires more than skill and dedication: it also requires enormous vision’: ‘A Mythography of Water: Hydraulic Engineering and the Imagination’, in *The Palgrave Handbook of Early Modern Literature and Science*, ed. by Howard Marchitello and Evelyn Tribble (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 445-66 (at 450).

<sup>60</sup> On the ‘deciphering imperative’ see my discussion in the following section.

<sup>61</sup> The use of ‘Verses presented to Celestinae’ as a prefatory verse for the miscellany suggests Constance Aston Fowler is represented by the figure of Celestinae, as does the reference in ‘On Celestinæ goinge a Journey’ [fol. 27r-v] to the arc of the rainbow represented ‘In the first letter of her Name’ (line 16).

<sup>62</sup> This would have been unlikely given Pershall’s authorship of several Celestinae poems. He was married first to Katherine Thimelby’s sister Mary Thimelby and then to Constance’s sister Frances Aston.

is particularly potent for recusant Catholics in seventeenth-century England. Remaining true to Catholic faith could be a polite act, though quite a contrary sentiment to the rebellious stance of 'The soule meditation'. In this formulation, the interior soul-scape is separate and superior to the external world, sustained through constancy.

This stance falls in line with the view of Protestant England as a tarnished landscape, as seen in Southwell's vivid and imagistic poetry where England is depicted as fallen and inhospitable, as in 'A vale of tears' and 'The Burning Babe'. Yet this patient, passive love is not sufficient for Amyntas. Melibeus judges his friend over-indulgent in his love, placing too much stock in the external landscape and the desire for consummation, but he has misread Amyntas's fervent devotion. Amyntas is not despondent, rather his 'soule was busied' (16) in contemplation. Though he suffers some doubt, his love is imaginatively discerning: 'Is nature prostituted if we prize / The beauties of the spacious skyes' (74-75). He does not love materially whilst his lover is absent; he can only love the *idea* of Celestinae that lives in his heart and remain in hope. The river's natural movement is a reminder of this, a prompt to fortify his imaginative devotion. As he cleverly points out, discretion is unnecessary in hope. 'Lord, how discrete you fayne would show', Amyntas chastens his polite friend. He is not merely a sensualist, or a 'Dull sublunary lover', in Donne's terms: instead he looks to the river where he constructs active, meditative hope. In the beauty of the pastoral realm Amyntas encounters a call to dedicated, imaginative devotion that can sustain itself as a self-created landscape, a consecrated space in his heart. Until the rivers confirm the grace of Celestinae's love, Amyntas's love is an imaginative meditation, vivid and potent:

Behold in Cælestinas Eyes  
where harts doe dayly sacrifice,  
A light that Mortalls glorifies:

Her Motions such a gesture beare's  
As Cynthia (when she full Appears)  
Danct to the Musick of the sphæres:

Her speech Like Orpheus doth Intice  
Her accents breathing balme and spice  
With all the sweets of paradice:

Her forms and graces may compare  
with natur's skill: nay more I dare

say, They Incorporate all are

79-90

Loving Celestinae is here likened to an explicitly religious meditative devotion, one that reads as strongly Marian, complementing the power of the mediatrix's gaze asserted in the miscellany's opening poem. Amyntas offers his heart to Celestinae the mediatrix, who has agency here likened to that of Cynthia, goddess of the moon. This feminine power is figured as an otherworldly agency but with the ability to manifest real effects: she can conjure 'balme and spice', her motions are forcible. Interestingly, the moon's 'gesture' could have direct bearing on the physical world through the tides and perhaps have effect on rivers.<sup>63</sup> Yet Amyntas's love hopes to find favor through imaginative devotion to Celestinae that transcends the natural world, even the idealized landscape of the pastoral. It is in looking to the sky that Amyntas hopes to see more than the rivers can tell him. This transcendence through discerning love for Celestinae is akin to the ballad's visionary meditation that effectively raises the reader to glimpse heaven: the force of the imagination is aided by hopeful faith in a celestial, or heavenly, mediatrix. The person of Celestinae exceeds nature by belonging to another realm, a heaven, or a 'golden' (to use Sidney's term). Amyntas's attention to the gaze ('Behold in Cælestinas Eyes') as well as the ballad's call to visualization resonates with the 'inward sight' Herbert Aston champions, a gaze always turned toward the divine and all the more potent as devotion given this a heavenly trajectory. Robert Southwell's example is also near at hand: 'When inward eie to heavenly sights / Doth draw my long harts desire' ('Man's civill warre', 9-10).<sup>64</sup> The very name of Celestinae makes the celebration of love a direct call to the heavens and in the context of the miscellany's invocation of Celestinae as muse and patron, this call to the heavens implicates a divine force for poetry as well as romantic love. 'An Eglogne' makes a direct call to Celestinae's mediating creative agency, which the opening verse tied to her privileged access to

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<sup>63</sup> On the development of tidal theories in medieval and early modern science, see Frederico Bonelli & Lucio Rus, 'The origin of modern astronomical theories of tides: Chrisogono, de Dominis and their sources', *British Journal for the History of Science* 29.4 (Dec. 1996): 385-401. Astronomical motifs were prevalent in Renaissance poetry and literature, see Alistair Fowler, *Time's Purpled Masquers: Stars and the Afterlife in Renaissance English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

<sup>64</sup> *Poems of Robert Southwell*, eds. by McDonald and Brown (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), 49-50.

the Virgin Mary: the honor of Mary's sight invigorates the 'verses presented' to her gaze and amplifies the transcendental effects of the miscellany's work of form. Here it is worth noting that the light in Celestinae's gaze, her discerning and forcible attention, is paired with her 'forms and graces' that 'Incorporeall are'. The 'work' of these 'forms and graces', like the effects of poetic devotion and social verse, can thus transform individual and static reading and writing practices to an expansive and communal performance.

Again the material conditions of the manuscript text are worth noting: the social verses such as 'An Eglogne' and 'The soulse meditation' transform from fanciful indulgence to substantial communal acts as they are manually circulated among friends and congregants, tangibly connecting the community as shared cultural and imaginative objects. In one way the poetic 'forms and graces' are corporeal, but it is the expansive force of the *imaginative* object that extends the life of the text beyond the bounds of the physical page. This social efficacy is not a latent force: the verses reveal a self-awareness to this work of textual community-building. Amyntas acknowledges the poetic and philosophical underpinnings of the power of imaginative devotion for transcending physical absence:

For as the soule's in euery part  
As in the whole; and doth Impart  
Her residence with equall Art:

Soe her perfections beinge knowne  
In euery place: Assign'd to none:  
Makes her soule and body one:

91-96

Amyntas's love of Celestinae can disperse across space precisely because it is not tied to the physical. In the pastoral dreamscape, the natural world can be superseded by the power of true love: Amyntas's love for Celestinae needs no confirmation as he finds his beloved 'In euery place: Assign'd to none'. The ultimate effect of the communal work of form in the miscellany is to send forth true love and devotion, constancy amongst friends and lovers, no matter the limitations of the physical landscape. This 'sending forth' of verses recalls a mission of poetry that not only works across great distances, but can create a 'Church without a Church'. Though the pastoral mode is generically distant from devotional meditation, this movement of finding expansiveness within dreamlike shared visions is employed to the same effect here as in 'The soulse meditation', calling for an active readerly engagement

that imaginatively composes the communal space of the miscellany.

The pastoral mode is one that often fashions a poetic world unto itself, created for and by a specific group often through the manuscript circulation of texts.<sup>65</sup> Within the miscellany's verses, this shared realm is created and sustained through the constancy of the friends who were often geographically distant. The manuscript is thus a liminal textual space that holds open the door to that hidden place and is entered through the active reading practice of deciphering the nuance of the shepherds' allegiance to Celestinae. Although Melibeus's advice to remain constant through any circumstance is sound (and a familiar refrain throughout the miscellany; see for instance 'Of unconstancy', 'The ansure to these verses', and 'A stranslation [sic]'),<sup>66</sup> it is Amyntas whose devotion acknowledges Celestinae most faithfully. He does not merely endure his uncertain fate but is able to overcome the limitations of lived circumstance. Viewing this conclusion in relation to its communal significance, hope and constancy are also a means of alleviating the disparate communal experience. Amyntas can appreciate her perfection 'in euery part / As in the whole', 'In euery place: Assign'd to none:'.

The eclogue is particularly effective in this social process as it is an open and inviting poetic form: the structure of dialogue draws out meaning through collaborative exchange. Even in Amyntas's soliloquy, a final response that stretches on for eleven stanzas, he develops his argument through an outwardly engaged rhetoric, addressing and commanding his readers/listeners to engage with his formal address: 'I challenge Anchorites to be / My Iudge' (70-71), 'tell me you that seeme so wise' (73), 'Behold in Cælestinas Eyes' (79). Reading even the solo-voiced rhetorical argument is an interactive process, encouraging social engagement between friends in the act of reading or listening. Amyntas's words usher his conversation partner out of himself and into his imaginatively constructed devotion. This is another moment of readerly creation that exceeds the limitations of the textual object, akin to the acts of visualization that create a landscape sensible to the 'inward eie' or the 'beautious picture' of the miscellany's preface that is painted in

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<sup>65</sup> For a recent overview of Renaissance pastoral poetry across several contexts and including verse by Thomas Randolph and Richard Fanshawe, see Sukanta Chaudhuri (ed.) *A Companion to Pastoral Poetry of the English Renaissance. An Anthology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

<sup>66</sup> fol. 136r-v; fols. 153v-154v; and fol. 188r. Aldrich-Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poems 40, 52, and 62: 105, 126, and 146.

the reader's imagination. Amyntas clearly recognizes Celestina's 'forms' as uniquely powerful precisely because 'They Incorporate all are' (90). This is subtly reflected in the concluding stanzas (lines 88-96, quoted above) as the poetic form becomes less fixed and the lines appear to transcend the strict assignment of rhythm to part, which has defined the iambic tetrameter previously. The meter is marked by caesura and enjambment, the language expanding beyond the structure of the line. This is exacerbated in the use of the colon and semicolon, a striking feature throughout the eclogue, and one that proliferates in these final lines, opening each clause onto the next. Thus the form of the eclogue ends with a transcendence and an opening that is finalized in the conflation of soul and body in the concluding couplet. Here the pastoral unexpectedly enters into conversation with the sacramental poetics of the miscellany's devotional verse. Sajed Chowdhury reads the soul-body conflation in these lines as a distinctly feminine metaphysical force.<sup>67</sup> It is a feminine and Marian metaphysics that is notably left open in the final line of 'An Eglogne', a contrasting vision to those Renaissance tropes that, Chowdhury notes, 'portrayed women either as the sanitized untouchable or the purely corporeal'.<sup>68</sup> The imaginative devotion charted in this poem thus relies on a process that is not limited to Celestina's body or the tangibility of her 'forms and graces'. It is through 'being knowne / In euery place' that the sacramental effect of soul-body unification is possible. Loving Celestinae becomes a communal act, a sacrament. The process is left invitingly incomplete: the colon of the final line invites the reader into the community, into the imaginative realm of friends, and into an unending sacrament of spiritual-physical integration.

The use of the colon in the final lines could be read as an innocuous scribal choice. Yet notably, Aston Fowler does not show any scribal flair for punctuation and instead the verses in her hand appear to preserve whatever pointing was present in her sources. The prevalence of the colon, especially at line endings is a formal attribute shared by several other poems in this section of the miscellany, particularly 'The first Altar', 'On Celestinæ's goinge a Iorney' (fol. 27r-v),<sup>69</sup> and 'Loue's Meritt' (fols. 31v-32v).<sup>70</sup> These verses as well as 'An Eglogne' are all coded with a

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<sup>67</sup> Sajed Ali Chowdhury, 'Dissident Metaphysics in Renaissance Women's Poetry', PhD Thesis, University of Sussex (2012), 157-58.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Aldrich-Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poem 16: 47-49.

<sup>70</sup> Aldrich-Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poem 22: 61-62.

hashmark and share another distinctive characteristic: they are all addressed to Celestinae. Collecting and coding these four verses together indicates that they have significance as a group, and this is even more intriguing given the stylistic similarities which point to a shared authorship. The prevalence of the hashmark's conjunction with verses for Celestinae is suggestive of editorial organization by content/topic, but also as a signal of the converging interests of editing and community-making in the miscellany. There are several non-Celestinae verses also marked with the hash whereas the opening verse addressed to Celestinae lacks the mark. Of the other hashed verses, two are in a similar mode but addressed to Castara (both included in Kenneth Allot's edition of William Habington's verse as doubtful attributions)<sup>71</sup> and the final hashmarked verse is the funeral eclogue 'on the Death of Lawra', in William Pershall's hand. This collection is diverse enough to suggest that the mark denotes provenance rather than topic or authorship. It is also a much simpler symbol than those Aston Fowler uses to embellish the initials signing Herbert Aston's, Katherine Thimelby's, and Pershall's verses, the intricacy of those designs displaying a decorative flair coinciding with personal intimacy. The verses in this section, including several coded with the hashmark, include ornate decorative borders, but the simplistic designation of the hashmark seems to belong to a different editorial mandate, marking but not adding prominence. Moreover, these hashmarked poems are included in a section of secular, communal verse interspersed with verses by Aston, Pershall, and Thimelby. In this section (gatherings K, L, & M), the social life of the Tixall group comes to life.

Indeed, this section, more than any other in the miscellany, is made up of verse that draws attention to the function of poetry within the group of friends and family as a community-making tool. The poetry of each friend, sister, and brother is collected, coded, and embellished with particular care. In Pershall's verse 'A congratulation [*sic*]', he professes: 'Tis boldly dune and rash I needs must say / To write; and write to you, and write this way' (lines 17-18). The speaker is acutely aware of the act of writing as a multifaceted undertaking, and the language heightens this attention in the elaborative diacope, expanding the verse's literary

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<sup>71</sup> 'On castaraes sittenge on Primrose banks', fol. 27v, poem 17 Aldrich Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, 50-51; and 'Upon castaries and her sitters [*sic*] goinge A foote in the snow', fol. 28v, Aldrich Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poem 19: 54. See also *The Poems of William Habington*, ed. Kenneth Allott (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1948), 160.



function from a simple act of inscription ('to write'), to a social act ('to write to you') and further to a formal act ('write this way'). The poem's full title is 'A congratulation For the happy Retorne of L:A: From spaine', denoting a specific occasion but once again this verse is not limited to a circumstantial reading. Instead, as a celebratory gift from son to father (by marriage) the verse illustrates how a relationship within the poetic community is confirmed and upheld through poetry that is expansive and communal. Pershall's speaker dares 'to write; and write to you, and write this way' because it is part of family life and because it is a way to join poetic talents together in a textual community born of affection. The collection of this social verse brings together the friends who were so often separated physically into a communal textual space. In this light, the hashmark cipher is a testament to the circulation of verse within the poetic community at Tixall. The 'sending forth' of the missionary verse is a material, poetical, and imaginative endeavor.

### **Constant Love: mediating and deciphering constancy**

My argument for Aston Fowler's textual acts of community-building follows Julie Crawford's reading of the political effects of women's literary production within elite coterie such as the Sidney circle. It is useful to turn again to the Sidneys in this exploration of the miscellany's social function in order to gloss the Tixall coterie's model of literary community in relation to the prominent circle connected to the Sidneys. I posit that the close reading kindled in verses such as 'The soule meditation' as well as in the examples of pastoral poetry collected by Aston Fowler is akin to the recursive reading practice cultivated through the literary-political strategies of the Sidney coterie, which Crawford terms a 'deciphering imperative'.<sup>72</sup> The political perspective found in poems such as 'The soule meditation' aligns Aston Fowler's role as communal literary agent with a mode of textual engagement that actively connects interpretive effort with socio-political effect. Crawford's political staging of the mediatrix attends to how women's texts (those they claim ownership over in various forms, as writers, readers, and patrons) were politically aware. She notes that such texts 'encoded, in ways both subtle and explicit, their affiliation with a given community and cause, and these codes depended on readers

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<sup>72</sup> Julie Crawford, *Mediatrix: Women, Politics, and Literary Production in Early Modern England*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 37.

for their dilation and propagation'.<sup>73</sup> The project of interrogating such codes is not a retreat from literary form, but rather a reading of how poetic forms—in Mary Sidney Herbert's words 'these dearest offerings of my hart / dissolv'd to Inke'—are sent out into the world to do their work'.<sup>74</sup> Aston Fowler's text presents a similar offering to the work, one that works through reading. The almost mystical effect of communal meditation, the reading of dreams, and the prevalence of textual ciphers suggest a layering of truth and meaning within the verse miscellany that is a simultaneous activation of interiority and communal engagement.

The social function of verse in Aston Fowler's miscellany has long been recognized in relation to the Tixall poems specifically; indeed it is the manuscript's status as a record of the Tixall literary community that has prompted critical attention in recent years. Hackett for instance has read sisterhood and friendship as crucial interpretive frameworks. My reading of the communal form of the miscellany follows Hackett's analysis which also usefully attends to the material facts of the miscellany: 'Both acts of composition by Constance's friends and relations and acts of selection and transcription by Constance were social transactions, fashioning identities and relationships within a particular set of social coordinates'.<sup>75</sup> Such material acts of community-making through manuscript circulation and poetic composition enhance the social function of the verses. Thus the imaginative communion and idealization produced in the miscellany's verses is shaded by coterie interests as well as the Catholic community's reliance on the internal work of visually and emotionally evocative personal devotion. As I have shown, this social work of form is richly expansive, invigorating solitary acts of reading to inspire real communal effects. It is striking that the miscellany's poetic community-making is often structured around dreams, or, as in the pastoral eclogues, set within an idealized landscape. In these half-places of dreamscapes and pastorals, things are more than they seem—all the more so when they are placed in the 'middle place' of a miscellany 'booke' where poetic texts take on unique lives across various reading contexts. Criticism of the Renaissance pastoral mode has defined such poetry not as an escapist artform but as distinctly political.<sup>76</sup> Early

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<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, 27.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, 29; quoting Mary Sidney Herbert's prefatory verse to the Sidney Psalter, 'To the Angell Spirit of the Most Excellent Sir Philip Sidney'.

<sup>75</sup> Helen Hackett, 'Sisterhood and Female Friendship', 132.

<sup>76</sup> William Empson gives a most useful but broad definition of the pastoral as a 'process

modern theorists likewise acknowledge the political efficacy of the pastoral, which Puttenham describes as a form that hides a depth of meaning ‘under the veil of homely persons’ in order to glance at greater matters’.<sup>77</sup> This layering of meaning is true of the dreams and idealizations that abound in Aston Fowler’s miscellany, as I have shown. Read with an eye to the political efficacy of indirect forms of critique, particularly those that embrace coded knowledge, the miscellany’s dreamlike and idealized verses, especially the pastorals, solicit the ‘deciphering imperative’ Crawford has theorized. Texts that present themselves as occasional, social, and fanciful poetic entertainments can be seen not only as ‘putting the complex into the simple’, but doing so through a Sidneian poetics that aims to ‘teach and delight’.<sup>78</sup>

The nostalgia of pastoral, like that of ‘The soulse meditation’, is designed for communal effect. Writing of the Jacobean Spenserian poets who draw on Virgil’s fourth Eclogue and Meliboeus’s remembrance of a Golden Age, Jane Tylus writes that ‘[C]ommunality is asserted in the potentially dangerous form of remembrance: a remembering of shared histories which a new sovereign is attempting to take away’.<sup>79</sup> The political resonance of Catholic poetry of this kind is clear, though in the pastorals’ celebration of the Tixall community it is camouflaged in friendly affection. Thus the miscellany’s poetry, even when recounting dreams or encouraging contemplative meditation or otherwise safely removed from worldly concerns, retains multilayered political and social dimensions, especially as it relates

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of putting the complex into the simple’ (53). Critics such as Louis Montrose and Raymond Williams have critiqued the characterization of the pastoral as insular. Their view proposes that, if the pastoral is a political genre, one that comments on society by using the guise of ‘the simple’, then the structure of the critical-pastoral or political-pastoral is always one of layering. New Historicists such as Montrose and Williams refocused attention to the political rather than attending to the efficacy of the allegory or the pastoral as a critical-aesthetic process in itself. William Empson, *Some Versions of the Pastoral* (New York: New Directions, 1947); Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975); Louis Montrose, “‘Eliza, Queene of Shepheardes’”, and the Pastoral of Power’, *ELR* 10 (1980): 153-82. See also Robert Stillman, *Sidney’s Poetic Justice* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell UP, 1986). For a knowledgeable overview see Michael Everton, ‘Critical thumbprints in Arcadia: Renaissance pastoral and the process of critique’, *Style* 35.2 (2001): 1-18.

<sup>77</sup> *The Art of English Poesy*, in Alexander (ed.), *Sidney’s ‘The Defence of Poesy’ and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 89. Sidney similarly notes the generic veil of the pastoral that uses the ‘poor pipe’ of the shepherd to ‘show the misery of people under hard lords or ravening soldiers’ (26).

<sup>78</sup> Sidney, *The Defence*, ed. Alexander, 10.

<sup>79</sup> Jane Tylus, ‘Jacobean Poetry and Lyric Disappointment’, in *Soliciting Interpretation: Literary Theory and Seventeenth-Century English Poetry*, ed. Elizabeth D. Harvey and Katharine Eisaman Maus (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 180.

to the miscellany's status as a communal Catholic text.

The deciphering imperative is perhaps most straightforward in the miscellany's pastoral eclogues. 'An Eglogne', as discussed above, took up the virtue of constancy in relation to discerning love and its im-/material evidence. Following Julie Crawford's consideration of constancy as politically resonant, I suggest that the virtue of constancy is presented in Aston Fowler's miscellany as a critical ideological posture for the Tixall poets and readers. At times, the text seems to become a book of constancy. This is *Constance's* book and throughout the verses the reader is met again and again with the virtue of its main author's name.

The call to constancy in the pastoral eclogues and throughout the miscellany is more than seventeenth-century virtue-signaling. Philip Sidney noted the pastoral as a particular vehicle for teaching virtue, but placed the poetry within an active political context: '[U]nder the pretty tales of wolves and sheep,' he writes, '[pastoral poetry] can include the whole considerations of wrong-doing and patience'.<sup>80</sup> The pastoral idealization in Sidney's formulation is granted real consequence and depth of purpose. Justus Lipsius in *De Constantia* (1586, trans. 1594) defines patience as 'the true mother of Constancie' and describes not only a virtue, but a 'strength of the minde'.<sup>81</sup> In the miscellany, 'constancy' is a watchword for the community as a whole and it is in another of the pastoral verses that it is most potently decipherable. Like 'An Eglogne', 'The Constant Lovers' places a romantic relationship at the heart of the communal coding of constancy. Instead of *Celestinae* functioning as the expansive figure for community identification, it is Lady Dorothy Shirley who acts as a communally-charged cipher in the pastoral romance. The eclogue to Lady Dorothy and William Stafford narrates an idealized love story, while the pastoral scene provides an expansive mode that opens the valorization of the couple into a kind of communal panegyric. Shirley, in her representation as Laura as well as in her own verse, becomes a mediating figure similar to *Celestinae*, as the coterie's political and religious interests are articulated through Shirley's constancy.

'The Constant Louers' was written by Thomas Randolph in 1634 as an eclogue between Laura and Amintas. The eclogue begins with a rumination on the communal dimensions of the lovers' reunion, which is here a joining of two flocks

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<sup>80</sup> Sidney, *The Defence*, ed. Alexander, 26.

<sup>81</sup> *De Constantia*, first printed 1586, translated into English 1594. Quoted in Crawford, *Mediatrix*, 43 note 36, and 45.

in the pastoral scene. Taking on a common trope of the genre, Randolph's opening scene plays on the georgic idyll of the shepherd conceit:

The halfe staru'd lambe warm'd in her mothers wool  
 Feeles not a ioy so perfect and so full  
 As this my soulse? conceaues; now I behold  
 Long sought Amintas; hether driue his fould,  
 A Sickly flocke (alas) poore, weake and leane  
 As death or famine had there keeper beene,  
 And such are mine, for twould be wondred att  
 By all the swaines if louers Ewes were fatt,

1-8

The idyllic scene is warped by the lovesickness that is transferred from the separated lovers to the sheep. Amintas's and Laura's flocks are described as sharing in their masters' suffering, upending the pastoral conceit of honest and moral rustic work that soothes the pangs of modern life. It is not the pain of star-crossed love that has distracted the shepherds from their duty, but rather a philosophical commitment to true love and constancy in sentiment: 'We know to prise our nobler thoughts, and proue / There needes no other weald, where there's true loue' (9-10). The title of 'The Constant Louers' is born out in an extreme form in this first scene, with the shepherds and their flocks never betraying their love even in admitting worldly needs. The reunion of the lovers and their flocks is celebrated as a renewal of pastoral prosperity, with communal unity signifying more than affectionate consolation:

Ile goe with thee,<sup>82</sup> and goe thy flockes with mine  
 Ile trauell all the meades [*sic*] and as I passe  
 Marke where's the sweetest of the three leau'd grasse  
 Feed and increase deare lambes, that when you goe  
 Ouer yon hills you couer 'em like snow

18-22

The community is rejuvenated by the lovers' reunion and the pastoral ideal of agrarian industry is restored. Though the fantastical tone of the pastoral romance is less overtly political than the religious ballad discussed earlier in this chapter, the focus on reunification after trials and tribulations is a powerful force in both verses. The main dramatic action of 'The Constant Louers' is filtered through the safety of this reunion scene, a framing device for the lovers to recount their adventures while

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<sup>82</sup> c.f. Christopher Marlowe's 'The Passionate Shepherd to His Love': 'Come live with me, and be my love' (1). *The Complete Poems of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. by Patrick Cheney and Brian J. Striar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

attempting to return to one another. Thus, just as ‘The soulse meditation’ heightened the ardor of communal sentiment through pointed invocation of persecution, so the pastoral lovers’ reunion is celebrated not only for the simple pleasure of the lovers’ presence together once again but also for the constancy shown in separation.

The structure of the eclogue foregrounds the reunion, but the physical joining of the flocks is not enough to confirm the lovers’ status as true partners. It is only through the exchange of stories, and the effort of interpretation expounded through the pastoral’s deciphering imperative—the characters’ attentive listening and the readers’ comprehension—that the pastoral courtship ritual can be fulfilled. Laura settles ‘vnder yon mirtle’, which she names as ‘venus tree’ (58) in reference to the myrtle’s symbolic association with Aphrodite or Venus, to listen to Amintas’s tale of love. As Amintas gives the account of his long and arduous journey, Laura assures him that she is actively engaged in listening to his story: ‘my t’eaes<sup>83</sup> shall paint thy speach, when thou hast donne / Ile pay thee for thy tale as sadd a one’ (61-2). She joins her response to the artistry of his tale and claims her reciprocal role as storyteller. The reader is thus invited to marry our readerly effort to that of Laura who guides us to emotional response. Laura’s listening is not merely responsive, however, it is part of a transaction: she will do her duty to her lovers’ tale and ‘paint [his] speach’ and she will bring her own experience to the exchange as well. Reading is not a passive act of reception, but an interaction in which the reader brings her own story to the text. In the pastoral, Laura brings her experience to an act of attentive, emotionally expressive listening, promising ‘as sadd a one’ to come. Her story is not merely waiting in the wings, but actively glossing her reading/listening of Amintas’s tale.

This ritual of reaffirming love through the interpretation of stories implicates the ‘deciphering imperative’ in the maintenance of communal bonds. Shirley has previously been presented in the miscellany as a powerful interpreter and arbiter of relationships, particularly in the emotional well-being of friendship. In a poetic dialogue with Katherine Thimelby—‘Upon the L D saying’ (fol. 158r-v) and ‘The L. D. Ansure’ (fols. 158v-159r)<sup>84</sup>—Shirley’s words are shown to have great effect on her friend. By questioning whether Thimelby was sad in her company, she has

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<sup>83</sup> Though the mark may be erroneous, it is unique in the miscellany and is an odd orthography conflating tears/ears.

<sup>84</sup> Aldrich Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poems 54 and 55: 132-34.

created so great an anxiety that Thimelby is induced to write to assure her, but her response is tempered with the sadness of which Shirley accused her: ‘But mores your wright whoes truth doth wate of you’ (‘Upon the L D saying’, 4).<sup>85</sup> Yet Shirley’s divining-poetry is a balm in itself: ‘And I receaue this From you, and not take / It as a blessing giuen to me by you / That from this time I should no sorrow know’ ([U]pon the L D saying’, 22-24). The friendship is a text to be read and re-read between the friends, and even a seeming misreading is never invalid. Shirley’s response notes that because of their closeness, she remarks to her friend, ‘you alasse / Doe uiew me threw a multiplying glass’ (‘The L. D. Ansure’, 14). She goes on to assert, ‘But what I can be unto you I will / And wish increase in me for your sake still’ (lines 15-16). Friendship is here an expansive force and one that bestows a special sight that can make things appear more subtle than is apparent on the surface. Shirley and Thimelby both recognize the power dynamic within their relationship: Shirley is a deciphering force, by reading her friend’s feelings, and a mediating figure, who can take on her friend’s feelings and make them multiply or magnify as through a ‘glass’. However, Shirley’s reading is not always astute: it can be tricked, as in her verse ‘Of unconstancy’ (fol. 136r-v)<sup>86</sup> wherein she admonishes a former lover who did ‘fayne both sight’s and teares to gayne / My hart’ (1-2). But she is ever true to her friends, actively applying her readerly effort to her relationships. From a true friend, such as Katherine Thimelby, this endeavor is met with a willingness to reassess the emotional state of the relationship together, through a refreshed collaborative reading. In ‘The Constant Louers’, the act of reading is mediating communal bonds through subtle workings of empathetic and creative discernment. In the pastoral scene, Laura’s listening is thus not only an emotional reception but also an expansive act of mediation. She will feel for her lover in listening to his tale, and she shall ‘paint thy speach’ as collaborator and interpreter.

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<sup>85</sup> Aldrich Watson glosses the somewhat convoluted sense of this line in a note: ‘But more is your right to be praised because truth (i.e., that I am sad) only comes when you pronounce that that is what I am’ (132, note 2).

<sup>86</sup> This poem is also collected in Harvard MS Eng. 626, Bodleian MS Eng poet c. 50, Rosenbach Museum and Library MS 239/23, and British Library MSS Egerton 2725 and Sloane 1446. See Sajed Chowdhury, ‘Transcriptions of Lady Dorothy Shirley’s Poems’, blog post, *The Reception & Circulation of Early Modern Women’s Writing, 1550-1700* (Sept. 4, 2017): <http://recirc.nuigalway.ie/2017/09/transcriptions-lady-dorothy-shirleys-poems/> [Accessed Jan. 22, 2019].

This exchange of stories in ‘The Constant Louers’ presents the loving reunion as a kind of mystical communion that overcomes temporality. Amintas has set the scene in a fantasy realm detached from time, the space of their reunion eclipsing their time spent apart: ‘This hower a lone, will blesse our calendar’ (32). The pair’s constancy in love supersedes Earth’s passage through the hours and days. Amintas recounts a year’s seasonal changes: ‘springes haue bin parch’d a way with summers heate/ And summers drown’d in wealthy Autummes sweate / winter chain’d Autumme in his guizes of frost’ (38-40).<sup>87</sup> Yet the couple’s love is untouched by time, constant but never stagnant:

What ioy with in this speculation moues  
To find a change in all thinges But our loues  
Though oft the sickle filld the reapers hand  
Since we at mutall gazs might freely stand  
To the same height still our affections Climbe  
Hee loues by the howerglasse that is chang’d with time

51-56

The affective communion is an active act of ascendancy, a ‘Climbe’ born of shared love and collaborative constancy. Such a constant love is an important narrative for the Tixall community. The lovers and friends cannot stop the onward march of time—the accumulation of occasional verses between the friends, especially prevalent in Arthur Clifford’s edition of *Tixall Poetry* attests to this with many poems marking moments of celebration and loss, tracking the passage of communal life.<sup>88</sup> Instead the Tixall poets, like Amintas and Laura, must make constancy in motion. Amintas journeys around the world and every mile is a realization of his love: ‘know all these passions that our soules doe moue / Are seuerall climates in the

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<sup>87</sup> This conceit is shared by Lord Walter Aston’s ‘A stranslation [sic]’, a reworking of a Spanish verse on constant love which begins ‘sometimes by Aprill arrogantly deckt’. The poem describes a mountain’s changing appearance through ‘Aprill’, ‘Nouember’, ‘Iuly’, and ‘Ianuarie’: ‘But though she uary in her state and tire / In her true nature she is mountaine still’ (7-8).

<sup>88</sup> See for example, Gertrude Thimelby’s verses, such as ‘To her husband on New-Years-Day, 1651’: ‘Weeks, months, and years, but moments prove / To those that nobly are in love’ (3-4). The collection of Thimelby’s poetry in *Tixall Poetry* recounts family life in occasions filled with emotion that taken together sketch out a life, but crucially, one that is sustained through love and through poetry. Verses include ‘Upon the Lady Persalls parting with her daughter without teares’; ‘On faire Mrs Hall dying in her prime’; ‘To Sir William and my Lady Persall uppon the death of their little Franke’, ‘To Cannall in mourning’, ‘To the Lady Southcot on her wedding-day’, ‘To Sir William and my Lady Persall uppon the death of theire and our deare Mall’, ‘To the Lady Elizabeth Thimelby on New-Years-Day, 1655, looking dayly for her sonne from travaile’, and ‘An epitaph on a sweet little boy of Sir William Persall’. Arthur Clifford (ed.) *Tixall Poetry*, 86, 97-105.



world of loue' (127-28). These souls in motion are not wandering, but rather they are sent forth as steadfast soldiers.

Crawford traces the construct of constancy in the *Arcadia* as a neostoic virtue that would have been recognizably political to early modern readers and reads the conceit as a particularly powerful political narrative for the women of the Sidney circle, including Dorothy Shirley's aunt Lady Penelope Devereux Rich. '[C]onstancy', Crawford writes, 'is best understood not as passive or patient suffering, but rather as an active achievement of the will, and thus a statement of power'.<sup>89</sup> The meeting of elite political ethos with Catholic faith intensifies this reading. In the miscellany's imaginative forms of communal allegiance, constancy in motion requires 'amount[ing]' the soul with 'affections [that] Climb'. Yet it is also a readerly motion, one that enlivens the paper pathways connecting the English Catholic community. It is not only the form of 'The Constant Lovers' that accentuates the role of textual exchange, but the constant love itself. Constancy is industrious and creative, a subversive work of form, one that is sent forth and like a letter between friends: 'Loue hath a tricke a pretty art / To carry newes twixt hart and heart' (196-97).

It is intriguing that the marriage celebrated by the pastoral is endorsed in such political terms. The partnership of Dorothy Shirley and William Stafford was a mixed marriage, and yet 'The Constant Lovers' and Pershall's eclogue 'On the death of Lawra' both celebrate Shirley's faith and set forth her agency within the Catholic community. The elegiac eclogue 'On the Death of Lawra' includes a description of Shirley's inspiring faith:

when I a sleepy peece, like a dull Mann  
thought of no other Deity but our Pann  
She streight Inspir'd mee with deviner Love  
And brought mee to the Alter of great Jove

21-4

Though the religious reference is cast in the pastoral mode as pagan, the suggestion of Shirley's effect on her lover's faith is striking. She is cast with the power of a successful missionary. The influential social effect of marriage is also evidenced in Shirley's early life: her own Catholicism stemmed from her mother Frances Walsingham's third marriage to Richard de Burgh (or Burke), fourth earl of

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<sup>89</sup> Crawford, *Mediatix*, 45.

Clanricarde.<sup>90</sup> In tracing the social life of the miscellany's poetry it is clear that the Catholic verse entrusted to Aston Fowler benefits from the mediating agency of well-read, devote women. Figures like *Celestinae* and *Laura* take on similar communal significance and notably, they are both presented via religious language and imagery throughout. In contrast to most other literary coteries of the period, the poetic community at Tixall exists within a religious framework that venerates women: Aston Fowler and Dorothy Shirley, as well as their ciphers *Celestinae* and *Laura*, garner their unique agency through communal ideology that allows women a particular influence within the structure of the male-dominated political society. Though the patriarchal realities of Catholicism cannot be written away, the specific intercessory and interpretive agency of the Tixall women, real and fictional, is particularly relevant as a community-organizing force.

The prevalence of verse within the miscellany by and for the women of the Tixall community is a testament to an appreciation of these gendered forms of power. The Tixall women are not influential solely by way of the social dynamics of their relationships with prominent men, but rather the miscellany presents a community that is strengthened by women through the explicitly political virtue of constancy. This steadfast conviction was celebrated among the Catholic community as a means of communal invigoration and even a model for influencing conversion. Two years before Lady Dorothy's second marriage, the Jesuit press at St Omer printed a translation of Torsellino's *Life of St Francis Xavier* that was dedicated to her. The dedication describes Lady Dorothy as 'famous over our land, with how great *Resolution* and *Constancy*, your Honour had stood firme, and immoveable in the Profession of the Catholike Roman Faith, and this euen in the midst of strongest Reasons, Tryalls, & Prouocations to the contrary'.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Frances Walsingham's first two marriages were to Protestants: first to Philip Sidney and then Robert Devereux, second earl of Essex. Lady Dorothy's older siblings were Protestant: Elizabeth Sidney Manners, Countess of Rutland, Frances Devereux Seymour, Countess of Hertford, and Robert Devereux, third Earl of Essex. Her younger de Burgh siblings were Catholic, including Ulick de Burgh, the Marquess of Clanricarde. The Astons likely maintained a relationship with the de Burgh's: Arthur Clifford records a poem addressed to Constance Aston and directed to the 'Lady Marchiones of Clanricard's dowager' (*Tixall Poetry*, 256). This Constance is unlikely to have been Aston Fowler given the dating of the marquessate to 1645 (Constance was using her married name Fowler as early as 1636). I think it is more likely that this Constance Aston was one of her nieces.

<sup>91</sup> Thomas Fitzherbert, 'To the Right Honourable the Lady Dorothy Shirley', qtd Newdigate, 'The Constant Lovers—II', 216.

This description is particularly evocative when read alongside the narration of Laura's journey in 'The Constant Lovers'. Laura describes dramatic scenes that illustrate the 'strongest Reasons, Tryalls, & Prouocations' against her constancy:

[...] Fate made me stray  
 Through many an untrode walke, and pathes a way  
 And Then one glareinge with an hundred Eyes  
 Set 'em 'ore all my stepps, soe many spies  
 And after him a crowde of monsters thronges  
 And each of these fraught with a thousand tongues  
 Yet on I went beinge consciens [*sic*] of no wronge  
 And nether stooode in feare of eye nor tongue  
 I trauel'd still, and had no torch by night  
 But the faint glimmeringe of the glowewormes light

135-44

Through all this Laura continued, unfazed. It offers a striking contrast to Amintas's tale of wide-ranging travel. Laura is alone on 'many an untrode walke', all the while beset by threats and scorn. Amintas's tale is an Odyssean journey, a story of traversing exotic lands. He tells of surviving a shipwreck (69-76) and resisting sirens (79-82); being caught in a whirlwind (83) and transported to a land of 'ugly barrenesse' (94); and passing through the 'cold North' (98), the 'Araibian desert' (100) and 'Libian sandes' (101), over the 'cold Alps and the Agiptian Fenne' (103). He describes 'the hestperian orchard' (111), 'the Eastearn spice / And westerne golde' (113-14), and even passes 'by paradice' (114). Amintas weaves a thrilling tale, but he is never, it seems, in real danger. Laura, however, is chased by monsters and ominous creatures ('all the Lærnean broode' [150]), including snakes, scorpions, and buzzards.

Laura's unfailing constancy through these nightmarish horrors possesses an explicit religious significance:

I still persist my robes the brambles teare  
 And still those remmants they for trophees weare  
 The thornes haue pierc'd my feete, and scratch'd my thyes  
 The blood my limbes in Crimson tincture dyes  
 Which should loue please to know; he would preferre  
 Noe other for his martirs register

167-72

This is a journey on a *Via Dolorosa*, bloodied robes, pierced feet and all. The marks of Laura's suffering, reminiscent of stigmata, are bodily evidence of Christ-like suffering. Here Laura's constancy is represented as bought in blood: 'so shall these ebs and flouds of our chast blood / make constant tides, and an eternall flood' (189-

90). Note the change to the plural pronoun; as her blood is shed it becomes ‘our’ blood. This salvific imagery links Laura’s constancy to the ultimate act of communal consecration: the baptism of the Christian community. When read with the key Aston Fowler includes for the verse (The initials MWS and LDS are added below the title, for Mr William Stafford and Lady Dorothy Shirley), the deciphering of Laura’s suffering takes on significance in relation to the role of recusant women in the Catholic community. As a recusant wife she was a potent symbol in early modern politics.<sup>92</sup> The possibility of conversion-by-marriage is hinted at in ‘On the death of Lawra’ and there is a precedent within the Tixall history as well: Gertrude Sadleir Aston, the family matriarch, likely converted prior to her husband as she is named as early as 1629 in reports of Jesuits working in English households.<sup>93</sup>

Frances Dolan elucidates the political power of the recusant wife as facilitated by a kind of equivocation: ‘Conceptually eclipsed and subsumed, recusant wives might evade legal scrutiny; they might find an advantage in “cover” operation. Catholic wives might thus play one set of legal disabilities against another, the “femme cover” against the recusant, sometimes defining a status for themselves as legal untouchables’.<sup>94</sup> The Jesuit Henry Garnet defined equivocation as a ‘mixed proposition’, a formula which Dailey describes as ‘an instance when an individual utters part of a statement aloud and reserves another part for private communication with God’.<sup>95</sup> A recusant wife, in this view, is creating a private religious truth, structured by the political cipher of female agency (or lack thereof). This kind of ciphering—public perception strategically contrasted with private knowledge—is found in the imaginative devotion traced throughout this chapter. Mixed marriages, like the one celebrated in ‘The Constant Lovers’, become self-created landscapes beyond the control of the state. The knowing reader can access this land through the ‘deciphering imperative’ prompted by the ritualized imagery that codes Laura’s constancy as political action. Dorothy Shirley’s constancy is proclaimed to be ‘famous over our land’ and presented as an example to the recusant community, and

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<sup>92</sup> See Frances Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 62-70.

<sup>93</sup> Henry Foley, S. J. *Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus*, vol. 2 (London, 1877-83): 233-34. On the relationship between gender and conversion see Simon Ditchfield and Helen Smith (eds.), *Conversions: Gender and Religious Change in Early Modern Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017).

<sup>94</sup> Dolan, *Whores of Babylon*, 65.

<sup>95</sup> Dailey, *The English Martyr*, 179.

this fame was literalized through the covert means of the secret press at St Omer—texts that ‘carr[ied] newes twixt hart and heart’ (198), as the Chorus of the eclogue describes in more physical ways. Thus Laura’s suffering is not merely a test of her constancy. In telling her story, she creates a text that can be deciphered, coding her steadfastness for the reader and urging a political reading in which women’s power is self-determined and socially efficacious.

‘The Constant Lovers’ is the last poem Aston Fowler added to the miscellany (the final verse is in Pershall’s hand). The eclogues written for Lady Dorothy Shirley close the miscellany. The second section of the miscellany also opens with the Tixall coterie’s most prominent figure: the first poem of the after the 82 blank folios is Dorothy Shirley’s poem ‘Of unconstancy’. Reading these poems for and by Shirley together, constancy is revealed as a fraught construct. In Shirley’s short verse on the topic, she accuses her unfaithful lover of underestimating the power of constancy: ‘As if men soules were to be pauned in Iest’ (4). ‘Of unconstancy’ relates a failure, one that Shirley represents as a betrayal not only of love, but of the interpretive framework itself: ‘I could not thinke soe liuely any art / Could frame a passon [*sic*] so far frome the hart’ (5-6). Constancy is here presented as a means of communication, and it is thus implicated in the textual life of the community as a whole. The failure of the code is a failure of language. In ‘Of unconstancy’, the speaker’s anxiety at her incorrect reading of her lover’s words expands to endanger not just a single relationship but potentially every relationship or community that is founded upon trust in communication. How can she trust language, even sworn language such as ‘those oth’s you did protest’ (3) when ‘unconstancy’ haunts every utterance? Her lover proved ‘like to an echoe’ (11) only, that is, he gave an inauthentic recitation all the more subversive for its convincing sound. In Shirley’s bitter lover’s complaint, she admits to falling prey to a gullible reading practice, one that takes the surface of language at face-value. She has learned her lesson well and parts with goodwill: ‘Tis for your owne sake I would haue you true’ (19). Her unfaithful lover must learn constancy, which supports a skillful reading practice that can deepen social and communal bonds.

At Tixall, true love and friendship is interpreted through poetry, as this chapter has shown in tracing the communal work of form in the miscellany’s Catholic ballads, social verses, and pastoral eclogues. It is in verses more directly conversing with her coterie that Shirley finds constancy, when she begins to read and write with

her community as in her poetic exchange with Katherine Thimelby. It is not merely for her 'owne sake', but for that of her community that she has remained true and constant in her reading and her loving. This poetic mission, carrying texts and love 'twixt hart and heart', is a communal project.

## Chapter Four – Reading the Passion: feeling form and self in Catholic Passion poetry

### **Living Faith: reading for feeling and reading with feeling**

My thesis has taken up the miscellany as a readerly text in several contexts. The first part explored how the book is structured by forms of reading and how the poetry demonstrates a self-conscious interest in reading for form. This venture has led to a greater appreciation of the miscellany form's unique relevance for understanding the complexity of seventeenth-century literary practice. The second part of my project has turned to the effects of form produced by the specific kinds of reading presented in the miscellany. As I noted in the previous chapter, the expansive form of the communal text is activated through highly personal engagements with poetry. This is a reminder of the crucial condition of textually-orchestrated reading acts: the reader meets the text in an intimate, affective, and embodied moment.<sup>1</sup> Reading is *lived experience*.

Upon first glance, the contents of Constance Aston Fowler's book of poetry divide into two parts: religious and secular. I have added my work to that of Helen Hackett's in bringing the miscellany's poetry into conversation across this divide, which I view as an arbitrary separation. Close reading of the manuscript's material evidence has revealed that Aston Fowler's and William Smith's work on the miscellany could have overlapped, a view that contradicts the previously accepted narrative of wholly separate scribal efforts. The tendency to relegate Aston Fowler's textual agency to the social poetry depreciates the force not only of the recognizable traces of Catholic perspectives in the coterie verse but also the potency of poetic form within the context of early modern life. Such a neatly delineated view of the miscellany's genealogy overlooks the complex web of feeling and form woven throughout the texts, connecting the personal and the theological. It is true that the majority of the poems copied in Aston Fowler's hand are secular, relating to the

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<sup>1</sup> Adrian Johns is a guiding voice here for redirecting attention to the 'face-to-face confrontation between reader and read'. For an account of the physiology of reading see Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), ch. 6 (qtd at 386). Helen Smith has also applied this lens to women's reading, see Smith, "'More swete vnto the eare / than holsome for ye mynde': Embodying Early Modern Women's Reading', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 73.3 (Sept. 2010): 413-32.

social life of the Aston-Thimelby family circle and their literary connections, yet faith cannot be cleanly disentangled from either the literary aspirations or the mundane, lived experience presented by Aston Fowler in her miscellany.

The starting point for this chapter is the most conspicuous poetic evidence within the miscellany of the relationship between the personal and the religious, specifically the two passion poems copied in Aston Fowler's hand, one associated with William Smith ('O Lord direct my hart', fols. 13v-15v)<sup>2</sup> and the other an anonymous female-voiced poem 'On the Passion of our Lord and sauour Iesus' (fols. 8r-12v).<sup>3</sup> This chapter explores Aston Fowler's miscellany as testament to the compelling alliance of the secular and the holy in seventeenth-century reading lives. Although this confluence of faith and form has been a recurring theme throughout my thesis, it is worth examining more closely in relation to the miscellany's two Passion poems as they are the most definitive material evidence of Aston Fowler and William Smith's shared interests in devotional reading. When read together, these two Passion poems reveal an intimate, meditative devotional reading practice that is at odds with Aldrich-Watson's contention that Constance Aston Fowler's faith, 'while an integral part of her life, was neither complex nor all-consuming'.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Aldrich-Watson's statement exposes a flaw in the concept of 'faith' as a site for study that requires attention. How rigorously must faith be expressed in order to be of value as a defining structure within a life, and how closely does an expression of faith relate to the personal experience of belief?

Faith, like reading, is a lived experience, even though to some extent the notion of 'faith' is ephemeral. In this chapter I posit an understanding of faith as a structure *for* feeling (and self), as well as a structure *of* feeling. I borrow here from Raymond Williams, though in some ways my emphasis on form is at odds with his cultural materialism. Williams's 'structures of feeling' are emanations of emergent culture through affective experience.<sup>5</sup> I find it more expedient in working with texts such as

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<sup>2</sup> Aldrich-Watson (ed.), poem 7/8: 17-21. I've retained Aldrich-Watson's numbering for this verse. She interprets the verse's signature, 'MWS', as designating Mr William Stafford, Lady Dorothy Shirley's husband who is featured in the miscellany's pastorals on their marriage and Shirley's death. She also posits that the beginning of the verse, copied on 13v in a messy hand, could have been a hastily written draft and the numbering reflects this material split between lines 1-21 and the remainder of the verse. See Aldrich-Watson (ed.), 17 note 1.

<sup>3</sup> Aldrich-Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poem 4: 6-14.

<sup>4</sup> Aldrich-Watson (ed.), Introduction, xxx.

<sup>5</sup> See Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press,



Aston Fowler's miscellany to view a conceptual structure such as 'faith' not predominantly as an expression of culture, however, but as an idiosyncratic lived belief that is grounded in affective experience. This is perhaps a slight, semantic alteration from Williams's theory, which gave rise in literary studies to the kind of cultural materialism to which New Formalism responds, but it is an important shift. In exploring how Aston Fowler's faith is enacted in her reading process, I am conscious of how it is implicated in culture (ideology, hegemony, dominant systems of belief).<sup>6</sup> Yet I do not attend to her readerly text or her literary experience merely as evidence of the nuances of that culture. I am interested in the relationship between reader and text: the *work* of form and the reading itself as a process of imbricating external codes with personal narrative. The evidences for culture drawn out from this methodology are significant, but the nature of the subjective, lived-in, affective moment, the 'face-to-face confrontation between reader and read',<sup>7</sup> is not relegated to a critical stepping-stone on the path to culture.<sup>8</sup> In my account of faith, the personal—affective, embodied, subjective—is brought together with the interpretive framework of belief and the institutions of religion. Indeed, reading the miscellany's unique, female-voiced Passion poem, it becomes clear that the miscellany presents a *personal* faith as the ultimate configuration for devotion.

The everyday experience of faith by a young woman in the seventeenth century is to a point impenetrable. Literature, however, offers a productive entryway into the feeling of faith, as Michelle Rosaldo explains: 'Feelings are not substances to be discovered in our blood but social practices organised by stories that we both enact and tell'.<sup>9</sup> This composition of subjective (affective) experience as stories designates

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1977), 129-34.

<sup>6</sup> Williams specifies 'culture' as one of the most complex words in the English language. See Williams, *Culture* (London: Fontana, rev. edn. 1981).

<sup>7</sup> Johns, *The Nature of the Book*, 386.

<sup>8</sup> This is a change of perspective more than anything else and perhaps a reaction more specifically to Williams's descendants in New Historicism than Williams's own work. Williams was attuned to the paradoxes inherent in all critical work: 'If the social is always past, in the sense that it is always formed, we have indeed to find other terms for the undeniable experience of the present, not only the temporal present, the realization of this and this instant, but the specificity of present being, the inalienably physical, within which we may indeed discern and acknowledge institutions, formations, positions, but not always as fixed products, defining products.' Williams's concept of the 'social' recognizes itself as a fallacy: 'All the known complexities, the experienced tensions, shifts, and uncertainties, the intricate forms of unevenness and confusion, are against social analysis itself.' Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 128 and 130.

<sup>9</sup> Michelle Z. Rosaldo, 'Toward an Anthropology of Self and Feeling', in *Cultural*

*reading* as a process of feeling. Thus, even though present and personal feeling is always embodied and out of reach to external witness, the closest means for uncovering affective experience is through a kind of reading. Indeed, the miscellany's Passion poems encourage just such a reading, not merely asking readers to witness a past exemplar of faith but enacting that affective piety through the work of form. Reading for feeling and reading with feeling are acts that stretch across temporal borders to usher readers into faith together. Jonathan Gil Harris's theory of palimpsestic acts of reading and writing is once again pertinent to understanding this layering of disparate moments: the deeply personal reading is also a mode of connection and the lived, affective moment is not lost in becoming a 'fixed form' in the past tense.<sup>10</sup> In reading the text as still living, reading with and for feeling, we can come to recognize, as Harris does, 'that "some other time" is not necessarily long ago, nor even awaiting us in the future. It is here now, if we only learn to recognize its folds'.<sup>11</sup> Aston Fowler's miscellany presents a reading process that enacts a lived, felt, affective piety and in this work of form we can glimpse her faith as it was put in motion. Though Aldrich-Watson's dismissal of Aston Fowler's faith is too abrupt, she does highlight a sense of lived faith that is worth exploring: as an experience of religion and belief as part of an ordinary life and perhaps is not presented as 'all-consuming'. Instead it is part of a whole: a life that was varied and multifaceted, a tapestry of the ordinary and the mundane interwoven with the spiritual and the divine.

The Passion, as Debora Shuger has argued, is perhaps the most potent devotional narrative for composing the self in faith, or composing faith in the self. She notes that 'Christ's agony provides the primary symbol for early modern speculation on selfhood and society', and thus passion narratives 'attempt to produce a specific

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*Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion*, ed. by Richard Schweder and Robert Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 137-57, (qt 143); cited in Steven Mullaney, *The Reformation of Emotions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 22.

<sup>10</sup> Williams cautions against reading such 'fixed forms' and argues that the topic of all cultural criticism (what he terms the 'social') is the human 'experience which is still in process' (132). This finds a fruitful meeting place with Jonathan Gibson's theory of the manuscript 'text in process' as explored in my first chapter. See Williams, *Marxism and Literature*; and Jonathan Gibson, 'Synchrony and Process: Editing Manuscript Miscellanies', *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 52.1 (2012): 85-100.

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 166.

version of Christian selfhood—a divided selfhood gripped by intense, contradictory emotions and an ineradicable tension between its natural inclinations and religious obligations'.<sup>12</sup> It is a story of feeling, one that is read in acts of devotion. By inhabiting this Christian agony, living its uncertainty and its mysteries, the *Passion* becomes an affective composition of selfhood. The critical moment of Christian devotion, then, is highly personal and the miscellany foregrounds reading as a means to enact this pivotal moment of self-made (and self-making) faith. David Morgan offers an understanding of faith that places the *form* of devotion, which, on my reading, includes the work of form presented in Aston Fowler's miscellany, at the heart of lived religion. Belief, or faith, in the Christian example Morgan describes, is a 'slowly sedimentary practice...built up over the course of [the believer's] life and inflected with the feelings toward his family and friends and community, endlessly repeated, tirelessly educating the ear, the eye, the palette, the body's schemes of posture and gesture'.<sup>13</sup> Acts of material devotion, such as compiling a manuscript miscellany or reading a poetic text, go beyond 'speculation' on Christian selfhood and enact faith through a practice of embodied self-fashioning.

The Christian self that is at work in Aston Fowler's *Passion* poems is recognizably Catholic, as the text's material life affirms. Moreover, though 'On the *Passion*' is anonymous, its gendered language and its prominence within Aston Fowler's book suggest a feminine selfhood, or one of particular value to a female reader, configured through the emphatically affective piety inspired by poetic contemplation of the *Passion*. Neither of these categorizations need limit the devotional efficacy of the verses within a wider readership, but within the context of the miscellany the silhouette of a young Catholic woman casts a lively shadow.

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<sup>12</sup> Debora Shuger, *The Renaissance Bible: Scholarship, Sacrifice, and Subjectivity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 127.

<sup>13</sup> David Morgan, 'Introduction: The matter of belief', in *Religion and Material Culture: the matter of belief* ed. by David Morgan (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 4-5. The terms are not directly synonymous, given the claim of Christianity on 'faith'. Wilfred Cantwell Smith places the words in contrast to each other and describes 'faith' as 'an orientation of the personality, to oneself, to one's neighbour, to the universe'. 'Belief' has a broader definition, one that *Religion and Material Culture* expands beyond cognitive or intellectual acceptance of certain doctrine and includes 'knowledge, conviction, memory, imagination, sensation, emotion, ritual action' (3). He cites Wilfred Cantwell Smith, 'Introduction', 2. Given the Christian context of the miscellany I have chosen to use 'faith' particularly for its personal register.

Jenna Lay has recently read ‘On the Passion’ alongside some of the most famous examples of Passion poetry—John Donne’s ‘Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward.’, George Herbert’s ‘The Sacrifice’, and John Milton’s unfinished poem ‘The Passion’— and found the Christian selfhood at the heart of the verses to be working toward comprehension of the holy mystery through faith. Lay proposes that, of these, the three completed Passion poems ‘are complete in their very recognition of the incomplete comprehension of a fragmented self, displaced in space, time, and subjectivity— a fragmented self that corresponds to the fragmentary and multiple nature of early modern English literature and its many confessional perspectives’.<sup>14</sup> I follow Lay in her important work to place ‘On the Passion’ within a ‘more expansive and inclusive literary history’. Resituating the Passion poem within the diverse reading life represented by the miscellany’s poems has revealed an expansive work of form that animates the text. Faith and selfhood are intertwined throughout all of the miscellany’s poetry, but my readings depart from Lay’s focus on the fracturing of the self. Lay’s interpretation of the expansive and digressive use of perspective in these examples of seventeenth-century Passion poetry presumes a devotion that is an act of *comprehension* (whether complete or incomplete, successful or failed). Schoenfeldt proposes a similar version of devotion in such Passion poetry, marking a clear confessional line: ‘Whereas the Catholic meditational writers emphasize the emotional affect the event stirs, Donne, Herbert, and Milton focus on the psychological effects of the Passion’.<sup>15</sup>

If a deeply felt, affective piety is specifically Catholic, then ‘On the Passion’ is a particularly rich example. However, it does not follow that an engagement with the emotional affect kindled by the Passion is devotionally weaker for being less psychological or intellectual—or even that a psychological or intellectual Passion is at odds with an affective devotion. This perspective would uphold Aldrich-Watson’s assessment Aston-Fowler’s faith as one that lacks theological rigor. Aston Fowler ‘anguishes over Christ’s physical passion’, claims Aldrich-Watson, ‘but allows the poems in her book to reflect no doubt about what that passion means’.<sup>16</sup> Such a

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<sup>14</sup> Jenna Lay, *Beyond the Cloister: Catholic Englishwomen and Early Modern Literary Culture* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 169.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Schoenfeldt, “‘That spectacle of too much weight’: The Poetics of Sacrifice in Donne, Herbert, and Milton,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31.3 (2001): 562-3.

<sup>16</sup> Deborah Aldrich-Watson, Introduction to *The verse miscellany*, xxx.

dismissal of Aston Fowler's faith neglects the complex construction of devotion presented in 'On the Passion' and 'O Lord direct my hart', a devotion that requires theological engagement with the Paschal mystery through a deeply personal act of reading. It is a reading that structures a complex faith, grappling with the central theology of Christianity from the Incarnation to the Atonement. As I will show, the devotion put forth in these two Passion poems works through a faith that is imaginatively constructed and intimately felt, a composition of feeling rather than Martz's 'composition of place'. It is through imaginative contemplation—and its fulfilment in poetic form—that the personal is transposed within the holy and the self brought into contact with the divine. This is a kind of comprehension of the incomprehensible. Kate Narveson has recently noted that devotional reading 'allowed imaginative control of one's self-understanding'.<sup>17</sup> The imagination, when married to a personal and affective subjectivity, is a potent force for devotion, not merely for communal purpose in lieu of a liturgical practice but for constructing the self through faith.

### **'See...And read it': viewing and reading the Passion**

My previous chapters have limned the contours of the Catholic community through the Jesuit William Smith's poetry as evidence of devotion in practice through his work as a missionary. Smith's Passion poem, 'O Lord direct my hart' is at the perimeter of this communal work, where the reader is not only face-to-face with a fluid text but also with the question of faith itself. 'O Lord direct my hart' is a somewhat generic example of a Passion poem: the speaker imagines the narrative of the Passion in detail and with feeling. It is collected in Smith's manuscript TCD 1194 under the title 'A meditation on Good Fryday' (fols. 30v-32v) but is without attribution in that version. Aston Fowler's signature for the verse of 'MWS' could also support Smith as author as well as scribe. Smith's reputation in the English mission was not one of poetic prowess—indeed, he was described as thoroughly average '*Iudicium mediocre, par prudentia, experientia mediocris*'<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Kate Narveson, *Bible Readers and Lay Writers in Early Modern England: Gender and Self-Definition in an Emergent Writing Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 6-7.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas McCoy (ed.), *Monumenta Angliae II: English and Welsh Jesuits: Catalogues (1555-1629)* (Rome, 1992), cat. 473 (1631); referenced in Brown, 'William Smith, Vere Southerne, Jesuit Missioner, and Three Linked Manuscript Miscellanies', in *Manuscript Miscellanies in Early Modern England*, ed. by Joshua Eckhardt and Daniel Starza Smith

But his manuscripts display a robust literary practice. It is not possible to say definitively whether Smith authored the verse or if it was Dorothy Shirley's husband William Stafford or perhaps a different unidentified writer.<sup>19</sup> 'O Lord direct my hart' is not found in another manuscript catalogued in the *Union First Line Index* and so is likely to have originated in the Tixall coterie, whether through Smith's introduction to the poetic group or independently. Although the provenance of the verse in two manuscripts associated with Smith may seem to point strongly toward his authorship, it is just as likely that he encountered the poem at Tixall and took it with him when he left Staffordshire for the Residence of St George where he compiled TCD 1194. The verse does not show up again in his final manuscript, Bodleian Eng poet b.5.<sup>20</sup> The form of the verse, incorporating the split fourteeners couplets Herbert Aston was so fond of, and some of the poetic conceits, as I will discuss below, are similar to those that appear elsewhere in the Tixall poets' work. 'O Lord direct my hart' is thus an example of Tixall verse that found a life within the Catholic community. Although my thesis has worked to place the literary connections of the Tixall group within the broader framework of seventeenth-century poetic culture, the miscellany's main point of contact with the network of Catholic verse was through Smith and the texts he provided to the manuscript. Here, I suggest, is a Tixall verse that emanated outward into the Catholic community. This outward trajectory is all the more intriguing as it is a poetically potent verse of personal, affective meditation. The verse is a multiplex of perspective, with the personal voice giving way to the communal then back again. The Passion poem posits a subjective experience of faith sculpted in intricate relief from a communal identity that is present within the Passion itself.

'O Lord direct my hart' begins with a literary commonplace: a call to the muse, or rather a call to God to guide the writer's muse. It is a highly literary conceit and one which is familiar within the Tixall poets' oeuvre, especially in Herbert Aston's verse praising his sister Gertrude which begins with a lengthy call to the 'Heliconian

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(Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 115.

<sup>19</sup> I do not find much support for the possibility of William Stafford's authorship. There is no other evidence of his writing poetry or maintaining close bonds with the Tixall coterie other than through his wife Dorothy Shirley (Stafford). It is most likely through her brother, Robert Devereaux, 3rd Earl of Essex, that Lady Dorothy began a friendship with the Tixall poets. The Astons and Devereauxs were neighbors in Staffordshire.

<sup>20</sup> Brown, 'William Smith vere Southerne', 117.

sisters' ('To My Honer'd sister', 2). In the religious verse, the speaker addresses God and it is his 'hart' that is the first object:

O Lord direct my hart, direct my soul  
                                 O Lord controle  
 my weaker fancy, let thy spirit rayse  
 my calloe muse to a hight that so thy prayse  
                                 poore I may sing

1-5

The conceit of invoking a muse unfit for such holy subjects aligns the speaker with a mode of self-aware poetic aspiration that immediately aligns the poem with recognizable public literary forms. And yet the title of 'A meditation' given to the poem in TCD 1194 is at odds with these lines, which could almost read as the opening of a lyric or an ode. The speaker contrasts the work of the heart and the 'weaker fancy'; he recognizes that the 'calloe muse' of poetic fancies must require an intimate and affective inspiration to attempt a work of form such as a versified Passion. A few lines down, the speaker invokes yet another genre, the elegy: 'I proue close morner at this thy gran funeral' (8). The verse opens by glancing at disparate generic influences, giving a sense of fluidity to the form of the Passion. It is a faltering start, not merely a self-conscious posturing for literary ambitions. The speaker goes on to attempt a more traditional devotional form as well, referencing the singing of hymns 'In alleleuses' (6) or *Hallelujahs*. But whether in song, in elegy, in lyric, or even in intellectual contemplation—'my thoughts haue aim'd at something good' (9)—the speaker remains unsatisfied. He admits, 'I / could not descry<sup>21</sup> / My selfe companion in thy lesse<sup>22</sup> paine;' (9-11). This is not merely a devotional failing, but a failure of form:

Wants all inunewety [*sic*]<sup>23</sup> wants all sence  
 To imagin that we can be freed from sin  
 And nere desire to pertake in his sofering

14-16

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<sup>21</sup> The *OED* gives two senses that could gloss this line: I. 2a '*trans.* to discover or perceive (a person, thing, fact, etc.) esp. through careful observation; to detect, discern, observe', and II. 5b '*trans.* without implication of injurious revelation: to make visible or apparent'. Here the imaginative effort of the speaker is either to *perceive* or to *make* himself present in the scene with Christ.

<sup>22</sup> Aldrich-Watson glosses this usage as an odd instance whose actual sense is 'more', as in *OED*, 'less, *adj.*' sense A 2b, which is otherwise only found in Shakespeare. A more likely reading could be found in a sense referring to the spectrum of Christ's suffering, either bodily (less) or spiritually (higher).

<sup>23</sup> Ingenuity.

The fall of the feminine endings at lines 15 and 16 exacerbate the speaker's sense of inadequacy.<sup>24</sup> As the speaker recognizes his faulty verse, his utterances attenuate the fixity of the meter. The sin and suffering are inescapable, becoming more palpable as the line lingers too long. Yet it is not doomed to failure: the faith that unfolds from this moment of humility is stripped bare. The speaker has shed his ego and he shifts to the plural pronoun. He has become a member of a wider community of believers, all of whom experience this human failing.

Smith's transcription of the poem draws out the communal efficacy of 'O Lord direct my hart' in an institutionalized context of Jesuit devotion, but it does not lessen the *lived* experience of faith that is ushered into the devotion through the verse's affective contemplation. Smith's copy in TCD 1194 specifically marks the poem for practical use by including the title, 'A meditation on Good Fryday', and indeed his manuscripts often collected accessible verse, arranged for the liturgical season for ease of use in mission-work. There is a pragmatism in Smith's piety, and yet he still includes this self-consciously literary and affective verse in his mission-text. This transcription in a manuscript of mainly mission-related texts illustrates the versatility of a readerly meditation upon the Passion as more than an exercise of pious routine. It is felt, potently and vividly, and, as the two Passion poems in the miscellany illustrate, poetic invention and imagination could fulfil the highest goal of the affective devotion presented in the Christian narrative of Christ's redemptive suffering and death.

Following the introductory framing, 'O Lord direct my hart' picks up an imaginative scene abruptly, entering the narrative of the Passion *in medias res*. The sharp pangs of doubt are no barrier to entry, rather it is in the moment of humility that the door is opened onto the Passion. The speaker steps into the scene seamlessly, blending together with the disciples: 'I traueled with those tw[elve] that did prepare / with humble care/ thy last prouision' (17-19). The perspective is closely observant, but the position of the speaker is removed. He retains his personal experience of faith, one that can *witness* the Passion and this serves as a kind of participation as it does for the audience in a play. Within early modern scientific

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<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of feminine endings within a philosophical process of poetry see Brian Cummings, 'Philosophical Poetry: Greville and the Feminine Ending', in *Fulke Greville & the Culture of the English Renaissance* ed. by Rus Leo, Katrin Röder, & Freya Sierhuis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 29-46. Cummings reads Greville's hypermetric lines as a 'form of hiatus' and uncertainty.



discourse on vision, the act of visual witness was not merely a passive reception: in the Galenic model of sight by extramission the eye sends forth a ‘visual pneuma’ that interacts with the physical world, and even the Aristotelian concept of sight as light that travels into the eye affords some agency to the perceptive subject in the stages of intelligible representation in the mind (or heart). Helen Smith illustrates the embodied agency of reading through sight by drawing attention to women caught in the act of reading, such as those depicted by male writers in their dedications. She presents the eye’s action in reading as a kind of co-authoring: ‘the text is both authorized and newly authored by its reader, who does not mark it but makes it’.<sup>25</sup> The transformative power of reading is a recurring theme throughout the miscellany, where often this agency is attributed to the strength of the eye-beam itself, such as in ‘Verses presented’ and ‘An Eglogne betweene Melibeus and Amyntas’. In ‘O Lord direct my hart’, the inward eye of the imagination is activated in a moment of contemplative witness, not unlike Martz’s ‘composition of place’ through vividly imagined scene-setting.<sup>26</sup> In light of the early modern conception of sight, this structure of observation is participatory not only through the active imaginative force but also in the visualization itself, which is undertaken through the embodied reading act: the imaginative-eye is activated through the reading-eye.

Even so, entering the scene of the Last Supper in the midst of the action positions the reader as witness to a scene she is expected to recognize by force of her own imaginative vision. The speaker is returning to a familiar scene, treading a well-worn path: ‘I haue traueled with those twelve’. He does not offer a detailed visual description, but rather a narration of the dramatic action, which balances the physicality of the disciples participation with that of the readerly devotee: ‘the Lord of Lords / there feete with water wash the soule with words’ (19-20). Just as the disciples are bodily prepared for the Passion’s Atonement, so the reader is prepared in the literary act of reading that can ‘wash the soule with words’. The solitary, personal experience of the literary text is here likened to an embodied moment of discipleship. Yet, the speaker can witness more than the disciples, albeit in an overwhelming moment:

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<sup>25</sup> Smith, ‘Embodying Early modern Women’s Reading’, 415-16.

<sup>26</sup> Martz describes this function of religious poetry as ‘vivid imagination of a scene by means of the memory and the senses’, which instigated and guided the self-analysis of meditation. Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation: A Study in English Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 25.

I trauell'd up the mount; where Iesus wept  
   All others slept,  
 His weepinge not as ours, t'was a huge flood,  
 And all his pord's<sup>27</sup> were eyes, where gusht out blood.  
   Lord can I write  
 And shed no teare, uiewing this gastly sight?  
 And can my soule be light, and thine heauye  
 Euen unto death, and all cause I might not dye.

25-32

The image of Jesus' bloody sweat is intensified to the gruesome sight of blood gushing from every pore.

It is a strikingly Crashavian conceit, the profusion of orifices synthesizing the Passion's emotional secretion and bodily penetrations. Crashaw's 'On the wounds of our crucified Lord' proves an evocative intertext: 'O these wakefull wounds of thine! / Are they Mouthes? Or are they eyes? / Be they Mouthes, or be they eyne, / Each bleeding part some one supplies'. The equation of wounds and eyes and mouths suggests a body that can participate in the Passion through multiple means and find an entrance to Christ's suffering in each. Ryan Netzley has read this as Crashaw's 'refusal to determine the relevant receivers and suppliers', and he finds in this a faith that discovers personal efficacy through 'the "bleeding" and supplying itself, not its source or destination'.<sup>28</sup> It is the action of Christ's bleeding or his emotional suffering that is constructive for faith, though the speaker of 'O Lord direct my hart' ultimately finds the visual element of the scene in Gethsemane most affecting. It is in the eye that the speaker has become overwhelmed, the sight provoking tears that then subsume the bodily experience of writing into an affective moment of crisis. The form jars with an eye rhyme in the final couplet of the stanza, again privileging the reader's sight which has overtaken the scene. Here then is a devotion that does not rely on tasting the Host, hearing the Word, or participating in the ritual gestures of liturgy. The speaker can witness the *action* of the Passion and participate through that agentive vision. Christ's bleeding becomes a kind of visual extramission through his pore-eyes and thus the participatory power of the reader's sight becomes a colloquy in that suffering.

The visual imaginings of this Passion poem are also placed within a continuum of felt faith. The embodied moment of vision is generalized when placed within the

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<sup>28</sup> Ryan Netzley, 'Oral Devotion: Eucharistic Theology and Richard Crashaw's Religious Lyrics', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 44.3 (2002): 255.

context of the Jesuit mission, taking on a flavor of the ‘Spiritual Exercises’. A readerly subject like a meditative devotee does not separate the imaginative from the affective, nor the cognitive, nor the intellectual. Faith can be felt, reading can be embodied, and both can be theologically nuanced. Within a Martzian version of Jesuit-inflected poetic meditation, the visual ‘composition of place’ is paired with a composition of the subject in relation to God.<sup>29</sup> Thomas Healy has read in Crashaw, perhaps one of the most imagistic devotional poets of the seventeenth century, who marries visual excess to vibrant affect, not a simple affective experience through potent imagery, but an ‘exercise which renews the promise of the Resurrection for poet and reader, [and] allows them additionally to gain a sense of their own place in the continuing context of Christian history’.<sup>30</sup> It is a construction of the devotional self within a larger narrative of Christian experience that gives the imaginative, affective work of form a broader value in its theological context.

The structure of recusant Catholic faith is imbued with politics, doctrine, and rhetoric, as well as personal experience. In emphasizing the visual so forcefully throughout the verse, the speaker affirms a Catholic devotion that imbues visual signs with a metonymic power, a controversial point of Counter-Reformation doctrine. Ryan Netzley cites Heather Asals’ view of post-Tridentine devotion: ‘the metonym is the proper way to worship or otherwise relate to images or representations of Christ...Asals argues that “metonymy is not just a way of speaking: it is a characteristic Catholic way of thinking”’.<sup>31</sup> This peculiarly literary mode of Catholic faith places the work of form at the heart of devotion. The Passion narrative is a fitting vessel for this metonymic devotion; the careful witness provided in ‘O Lord direct my hart’ attests not a ciphering of the Passion narrative to be read closely for hidden meaning, but rather a smoother act of signification. Indeed ‘O Lord direct my hart’ signals the need for a deeper faculty for viewing (and reading) the Passion: ‘see it more wonder’ (49), ‘see... / and read it, nere was printed a better booke’ (67-68). The ‘booke’, however, is not merely the acts that the

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<sup>29</sup> The ultimate goal of meditative poetry, ‘the climax, the aim and end, of the whole exercise is achieved when the soul thus reformed is lifted up to speak with God in colloquy and to hear God speak to man in turn’. Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation*, 36.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas F. Healy, *Richard Crashaw* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 117.

<sup>31</sup> Netzley, ‘Oral Devotion’, 265-66, citing Heather A. R. Asals, ‘Crashaw’s Participles and the “chiaroscuro” of Ontological Language’, in *Essays on Richard Crashaw*, ed. by Robert M. Cooper (Salzburgh: Institut für Anglistik and Amerikanistik, 1979): 35-49.

speaker and the reader witness; rather the Passion signifies the entirety of Christian faith in the same way words on the page conjure a story. The form of faith in post-Reformation England is here built on an ‘antiabsorptive’ quality of signs, such as that Kimberley Johnson uses to define seventeenth-century poetry, marked by an ‘unwillingness to allow the word to become a mere transparent conduit to some imperceptible referent’.<sup>32</sup> The corporeal sign is stressed again and again in ‘O Lord direct my hart’, but not in a purely Eucharistic sense of the sign and the signified collapsed in poetics of presence. Rather, the reader must ‘see...And read’ the Passion, participating in the scene that is a metonym for the totality of Christianity. She must allow the form to expand in the act of reading, to imagine herself into the narrative, into the faith.

The speaker sees himself in the Passion and sees the Passion in himself:

And know each thought  
If ill, crucyfies him againe, who bought  
with pretious blood thy soule. Lord clense my hart  
And grant that I may feel of thine a little smart

45-48

Thought and feeling, body and soul, are tied together. The speaker longs to feel the physical pain of Christ even as he comprehends his own role in causing it. From this longing for bodily connection the speaker descends into a montage of images, snapshots of Christ’s body flashing before him (48-52), followed closely by scenes of bodily and emotional torment (57-61). The forcefulness of the images is not lessened by the quick succession; instead the Passion becomes divorced from the linear fixity of history. This imagistic assemblage of the reader’s meditative devotion renders the Passion a palimpsestic text: Christ’s body is overlaid again and again, and, in reading, the bodies of believers are etched across time in yet more overlays. Despite this profusion of potent imagery, the speaker does not lose himself. He returns to a pious prayerful stance in the midst of it all: ‘sweete Iesus giue me grace to follow thee / In this example of thy greatest uictorye’ (71-72). Moreover, it is a return to a communal devotion, a reminder of the brethren in Christ’s Passion even though it may be undertaken in a solitary closet. ‘Come now,’ the speaker urges, ‘wee’le here the judgment’ (73). This auditory moment in the verse is notable, especially as it coincides with the ‘vulgar uoyce’ (75) raised against

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<sup>32</sup> Kimberley Johnson, *Made Flesh: Sacrament and Poetics in Post-Reformation England*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 28.

Jesus. The cries of the crowd sweep over the reader in a moment of sensory unification that possesses an almost liturgical effect. Sensing the Passion has brought the reader to the heart of Christian history, joined with all of humanity to participate in the fateful moment: ‘weele him crucifye’ (78).

The sensory, affective piety of ‘O Lord direct my hart’, is not one of transcending human experience. The sights, sounds, and feelings of the physical scenes—the *lived* Passion—are gateways to a rich devotional experience, even if the reader’s personal experience of emotional turmoil can occlude these effects. As a mission-text, the verse is a stark contrast with the Catholic ballads Smith used in his pastoral work in Worcestershire. The poem’s language prioritizes memory, calling attention to the gap between the speaker’s devotional experience and the ideal ritualized commemoration through the Mass:

But now me-thinks, I feele my memory  
   ore-pres’t my eye  
 Fearful, and dull, back to its caue doth sinke;  
 ...  
 Yet though I cannot look on’s crosse; Ile thinke  
   Of gall, his drinke  
 I’le think of’s blood, that flow’d as if a tyde

81-3, 89-91

At the very moment of Christ’s death, the speaker is aware of his absence from the scene, his vision falters, and he is unable to bridge the gap of time and space between himself and his Saviour. Gary Kuchar’s reading of religious sorrow offers an insight into how this contemplative mode of heightened estrangement was a paradoxically powerful form of affective piety. Employing the imagery of ‘*kenosis*’ or ‘self-emptying’, Kuchar notes that ‘by becoming hypersensitive to one’s cognitive inability to locate God at the level of created beings one becomes all the more attuned to his transcendent nature at the level of affect’.<sup>33</sup> The transcendent nature of God was especially consequential for early modern Catholics and the Jesuit mission as the lay community had to practice their devotion in secret, often with limited access to the full rituals of the Mass that brought the divine into closer proximity to daily life. In this light, the speaker’s lament, ‘I cannot look on’s crosse’, calls to mind not merely an occluded moment of witness but also a material lack of iconography in every day recusant devotion. Though the private chapels of wealthy

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<sup>33</sup> Gary Kuchar, *The Poetry of Religious Sorrow in Early Modern England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 17.

Catholics did include religious imagery and a variety of devotional objects, the deprivation of the Mass as ritualized and institutionally substantiated participation within the Passion was a real loss for many recusants. Meditations such as ‘O Lord direct my hart’ filled the gap. The darkness of not seeing, not knowing, and not feeling—reflected in the devastation of Christ’s death blacking out the sun and in the speaker’s strange yet evocative image of the failure of his eye that ‘Fearful, and dull, back to its caue doth sinke’—is overcome through ritual remembrance. As Kuchar asserts, it is the work of affective remembrance, especially through devout sorrow, that, ‘as Augustine claims, allows one to acknowledge God’s presence as “secretissime et praesentissime”—as deeply hidden and yet abundantly present’.<sup>34</sup> The meditation manifested in ‘O Lord direct my hart’ is attuned to this nature of faith as figured in both mystery and in feeling. In lieu of the physical symbol of the cross, the speaker devotes himself to *feeling* and *sensing* Christ’s Passion: the taste of ‘gall’ in Christ’s mouth, the feeling of blood pouring from his body.<sup>35</sup> Here then the metonymic function of the *lived* Passion is given full breadth. These embodied moments can encompass the whole of Christian faith, the gall and the blood signifying for the Passion, Christ’s Passion signifying for the Atonement and Salvation.

On Good Friday, when this poem was singled out for devotional use, the personal experience of the Passion is not a solitary project, as images and memories are shared among the congregation of the Church. It is this ritualized commemoration that is offered as a process of making the mystery into truth. It is through the consolidation of the personal and the communal that ritual gains affective and devotional force.<sup>36</sup> In ‘O Lord direct my hart’ the crux of personal, affective devotion is realized in a full embodiment of the crucified Christ:

O Blessed sauour, hanging on thy tree  
pardon my sinn, nayle ‘em to it, me to thee.

95-6

Though the narrative of the poem has focused on visualization throughout, the failure of the speaker’s eye (‘Fearful, and dull’ in the end) has not precluded a

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<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Robin Macdonald, Emilie Murphy, and Lizzie Swann (eds), *Sensing the Sacred in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (London: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>36</sup> On the function of religion through collective emotion, see Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1912), specifically his theory of ‘collective effervescence’.



in a sequence of poems now mostly missing. Gatherings D through H have a total of fifteen leaves removed in between Aston Fowler's two remaining Passion poems.<sup>38</sup> The material history of the miscellany's Passion poems offers a glimpse of an intriguingly active editing and reading process at work in the presentation of these unique verses. Although the gaping void between the pages where so many leaves have been removed excites the imagination, the marks within the pages are equally intriguing. It is in these opening pages of devotional verse, with the marginal lines added to 'On the Passion' as well as the re-copying of the opening stanzas of 'O Lord direct my hart', that the material fluidity of the poetic texts is most evident. The miscellany form, as I have argued throughout my thesis, is a form in process and inviting to readerly engagement. Here the materiality of the form is one of endless possibility as the manuscript resists the fixity of a finished book. The reader encounters a text that invites her into gaps, silences, and even the mysteries of undecipherable symbols. Reading Aston Fowler's miscellany is in this way a practice of unknowing. It is a text structured as much by unresolved process and the illegibility of personal form as by historical specificity and active commemoration. The miscellany must be *read*, not merely analyzed, just as faith must be felt: composed of the self not simply of proscribed belief.

Michael Riffaterre's conception of subjective intertextuality is applicable again: '*L'enigme est subjective*'.<sup>39</sup> When reading any text, but especially one that is variably fluid and opaque, the work of form is subjective, unique to the reader. This is nowhere more evident than in the ciphered monogram assigned to 'On the Passion' (see Figure 13). The Jesuit monogram IHS, *Iesus Hominum Salvator*, and the Marian monogram MRA, *Maria Regina Angelorum*, are crossed over with unintelligible initials. Aston Fowler's intended signification is lost and instead the reader is presented with a material form that resists stable interpretation. The cipher remains an enigma and becomes a stark example of the malleability of form: even in the lines of ink on the page, the text can still take on new forms. Thus the materiality of the symbol as a representation of Catholic faith is imbued with the tension between fluid and fixed meaning. Though initials and anagrams elsewhere in the miscellany signal a concretized form that manifests a sacramental or transubstantive

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<sup>38</sup> See Appendix 3.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Riffaterre, 'L'Inscription du sujet', in *Qu'est-ce que le style?*, ed. by Georges Molinié & Pierre Cahné (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994), 289.



referentiality, such as in ‘Off the Blessed Name’, here the (in)comprehensibility of faith is nuanced, particularly for the Passion. In ‘O Lord direct my hart’, the Passion became a text to ‘see...And read’ as an embodied witness, the affective reading experience enacting a personal, subjective faith. ‘On the Passion’ urges an even more noticeably subjective act of interpretation. Reading the Passion becomes not merely an embodied act of witness and faithful participation, but through the private and personal act of literary engagement, the reader creates a new text, a new Passion. As a presentation of a consciously affective piety, the text of ‘On the Passion’ makes the self an intertext: in the absences and the things left unsaid, the reading self provides the necessary gloss.<sup>40</sup>

‘On the Passion of our Lord and sauioir Iesus’ opens with the Word made flesh. It is the human embodiment realized through the Incarnation that frames the Passion narrative. God’s human form is crucial as an example of the self. Richard Rambuss has read the incarnation at the center of seventeenth-century poetry as a Foucauldian technology of the self.<sup>41</sup> The inwardly composed, inwardly felt Passion is similarly a ‘work of the self upon the self’.<sup>42</sup> In this formulation, the reader encounters the text of the Passion as one that is unique to her, self-composed in the act of reading; and in that encounter, the self-composed Passion then in turn works upon the self. Foucault describes the technologies of the self as those which ‘permit individuals to effect by their own means...a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of perfection, happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality’.<sup>43</sup> This is the function of Christian life that is summed up in the Passion and it is through the Incarnation that Christ’s self-work is accessible to the Christian. The technology of the poetic form allows the reader to bring a hermeneutic effort that traces the text of the Passion through the self. Within the miscellany’s Passion poetry, the meditative form is more than an imaginative construction of narrative and vivid visualization. As we shall see, in ‘On the Passion’, the subjective,

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<sup>40</sup> I am here recalling Riffaterre’s fuller description of intertextuality as subjective. See my Introduction.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Rambuss, *Closet Devotions* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 8.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘Technologies of the Self’, in *Technologies of the Self: A seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. by Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 18.

incarnational reading prompts an engagement with the text through the body and through the soul.

These intricacies of personal devotion call attention to the question of form, which is introduced from the very start of ‘On the Passion’:

When that æternall word, with sacred loue  
In nature's robes came clothed from a boue  
Suited unto our shape...

1-3

The mutation of the trope of God’s artistic, formal creation from Genesis to the Gospels is interesting here, especially in light of the relationship between texts and bodies. God’s entrance into the physical world in human form is presented as a material act of clothing, a conceit that draws attention to the surface of Christ’s humanity rather than the body itself. Yet this construction also presents the human form as a form of fashioning, an evocative process of creation that recalls the miscellany’s interest in woven texts and textiles. The image is reminiscent of George Herbert’s vision of God undressing as he descends to human form and dons ‘new clothes’ (‘The Bag’, 18). As Paul Cefalu has clarified in his reading of Herbert’s image, this Christology is one that bears a Johannine configuration, the descent ‘from a boue’ emphasizing Christ’s human form as ‘singularly prepared to impart knowledge to a darkened world and then to reascend’.<sup>44</sup> ‘On the Passion’, however, designates the Word as clothed or adorned, rather than the Johannine imagery of God as Light. This brings a self-consciousness to the poetic form as stylistic. By stressing the Incarnation’s artistic connotations, the verse proposes that form is not merely a corporeal ornamentation, but also a refined shape that is an efficacious mode of presentation. The speaker designates the direction of the incarnation, ‘from above’, thereby retaining the full signification of the interplay of holy and carnal that is central to the theology of the Incarnation: Jesus is *both* God and man, and perhaps questions of form can possess the same duality. ‘On the Passion’ introduces incarnational form as a central conceit, a reminder that the Passion was both a human and a divine experience and should be read as such.

A few lines down, the speaker imagines the scene in Gethsemane with language that heightens the connections between faith, form, and body:

Th'Attendance of his chosen, only three

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<sup>44</sup> Paul Cefalu, ‘Johannine Poetics in George Herbert’s Devotional Lyrics’, *ELH* 82.4 (2015), 1049.

Hee tooke as witnes of his Agony:  
 Where hee th'æternall priest that hell controuls  
 Said vespers for Th'uniuersall states of soules  
 His zeale was to redeeme the world, the booke  
 Hee pray'd in was, the flesh of us he took  
 The rumours of the Iews the Euening bell  
 His closett was a solitary cell  
 The Earth his cushen, and his Taper Light  
 Was pale Moone that trembled at his sight

13-8

Here the scene in the garden is transposed onto the physical location of closet devotion. Crucially, prayer is presented as a physical ritual of the body in space as well as a spiritual act. The form of prayer is made explicit, detailed by likening the garden to the prayer closet. Indeed, the language of the 'solitary cell' carries with it the image of a specific kind of prayer: secluded, conventual meditation, the nightly ritual of formal prayer said at vespers. This specific view of cloistered devotion is imagined throughout the miscellany as particularly potent: William Pershall sets his lyric 'The first Alter' in 'this darke clossett', Amyntas in 'An Eglogne' likewise defends his devotion by comparing his love to the purity of 'the Anchorites', as does the speaker of 'Loue's Meritt' (fols. 31v-32v).<sup>45</sup> If the poet is presenting a correct form of prayer, then it is of a particularly Catholic, monastic flavor.

Although the scene recalls the consequence of witness that 'O Lord direct my hart' affirms, it is Christ's personal, physical experience of prayer that is celebrated. This material devotion is wholly embodied. The embodiment is not an unavoidable side-effect of the human experience of faith, but rather is presented as the crucial means to access the divine. 'On the Passion' promotes an incarnational reading practice staged through the human as well as the poetic form: the Word is made flesh and the coherence of sacred body and sacred text permits a substantive faith act through embodied reading. James Kearney finds in the early modern humanists a veneration of the written text that traces back to the Incarnation. He reads in Erasmus an active vein of textual faith: 'For Erasmus the unfolding of language, the unfolding of text through time is the movement of the spirit in the world...humanist scholarship does not exist to pin down the word of scripture, once and for all, but to assist in the ongoing articulation of the text of God through time'.<sup>46</sup> The miscellany

<sup>45</sup> 'The first Alter', the pastoral eclogue, and 'Loue's Meritt' are also each hash marked.

<sup>46</sup> James Kearney, *The Incarnate Text: Imagining the Book in Reformation England* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 66.

itself manifests just such a textual devotion: rather than presenting definitive knowledge or doctrine, the miscellany's copiousness posits a textual faith that unfolds through unique moments of personal, intimate reading. In 'On the Passion', Christ's human body as the Word made flesh is proffered as a text for the reader. Moreover, Christ's scene of prayer in Gethsemane illustrates a reading *of* the self as the correct mode of textual faith: 'the booke / Hee pray'd in was, the flesh of us he took'. The metaphor identifies the human body as not just a *mere* form. The act of faith is an act of the body. This sacred potential of the body is born out in the Passion itself: the sufferance of Christ's body mediates salvation. Reading Christ's body in the Passion is likewise an act of *lived* faith, as the scene in Gethsemane demonstrates. Thus the pivotal moment of Christian faith is realized through personal and embodied devotion, a process of reading the self and composing the self through incarnational reading that can articulate the 'text of God through time'.

The garden scene introduces the Passion as an affective mode of pious contemplation, spurred by Christ's 'zeale'. Yet 'On the Passion' narrates a dual emotional experience: that of Jesus and that of the speaker. Throughout the retelling of the Passion, the poet reinforces the relationship between the sensory experience of devotion and the affective manifestation of faith. After contemplating the form of Christ's prayer and the piety he embodies, the speaker is overwhelmed. 'But o where are my sences!' (21), she cries. The anguished tone enacts a release of emotion even as she regulates her devotional practice of imaginative contemplation by drawing herself back into the scene: 'what strange sight / my soule beholds' (21-2). Her act of imagination is not merely of the mind. The soul is sensing, by seeing and feeling through prayer.

In this moment of affective response, the speaker is led back to the question of Christ's form and the incomprehensibility of Christ as both human and divine. The verse becomes ensnared by paradox: the incompatibility of the God-figure as imagined in scripture and doctrine with the vulnerability of Christ in the garden threatens the speaker's devotion. The 'strange sight' is overwhelming precisely because it is an encounter with the unknowable. If the devotee becomes fixated on the surfaces of religion—the 'bright æternall Light' (22) shining through politics ('The hope of nations', 23) or doctrine ('the penns of prophets', 24)—then she could fail to enact a productive faith. She must attend to the affective and embodied and

*lived* Passion: to the ‘grammar of tears’ that Kuchar has defined as devout sorrow.<sup>47</sup> The anxiety prompted by this moment of human frailty cuts straight to the heart of the controversies over *form* and devotion. We have come across questions of form throughout Aston Fowler’s miscellany, and here we have Christ’s prayer offered as an example to the reader. In ‘On the Passion, reading the ‘grammar’ of Christ’s tears, however, necessitates reading form:

O strange Affliction: heere behold a loue  
 Rarely Deuine and true; so farr a boue  
 our Aery lou's that in Disorders range  
 At euery heate, and thawe at euery change  
 whose pale Effects produce a watry flood  
 But his pure flames dide all his tears in blood  
 Nor were they only Tricklinge Dropps let fall  
 From his bright Eyes alone, for ouer-all  
 His sacred flesh a scarlet Robe appears  
 As though hee had putt on a coate of tears:

31-40

It is indeed a ‘strange Affliction’, for the speaker presents the emotional experience of this moment of great sorrow in vexed terms. ‘Affliction’ immediately calls to mind a physical state, a feverish plight brought on by impassioned devotion. This ‘godly sorrow’ (to use Kuchar’s terminology) is inextricably linked to the sensory experience of the speaker’s contemplative imagination as she returns again to her visual experience of the scene, ‘heere behold a loue’.

The description of emotion—figured as love, the purest form of passion—is revealingly evocative. The speaker presents human feeling and passion as ‘Aery’, ‘pale Effects’. They are ethereal, changeable, elemental. The language of the elements is striking: human emotions ‘in Disorders range / At euery heate, and thawe at euery change’ (33-4); they ‘produce a watry flood’ (35).<sup>48</sup> This is juxtaposed against Christ’s feelings, which are ‘Deuine and true’ and ‘farr a boue’ the messy stuff of our human emotions. Christ’s affective piety is a refinement of human feeling, and his ‘pure flames’ can overcome the insufficiency of form. The form of godly love is proven through elemental language as well, but Christ’s divine love alchemically transfigures tears from ‘Trickling Dropps’ to blood, straight from the heart. Yet the image of ‘a coate of tears’ alludes to the performative nature of emotional expression in literature as well as meditation. Christ’s sorrow, however,

<sup>47</sup> Kuchar, *The Poetry of Religious Sorrow*, 2.

<sup>48</sup> To ‘range’ here is to be inconstant as in love, cf. *OED* ‘range, v.’, 2b.

effects a coherence of outward attire and inward feeling. This move is self-reflexive in light of the composition of 'On the Passion'. The verse, as a form of affective meditation, is a deliberate act of emotional drama, using the imagination to put on 'a coat of tears'. The crucial fact: it is inward and intimate, a glimpse into both Jesus' and the poets' own 'closett'.

The poem's affective meditation is deeply imagined, for not only does the speaker place herself with Jesus in the garden, she goes further still to cross the threshold from witness of Jesus's sorrow to communicant, entering into Jesus's anguished interiority. The speaker takes part in Jesus' act of heart-wrenching, passionate meditation:

Heere in the center of all sadnes hee  
 Laments our state, deplores our misery  
 The noise and rumors of our cryinge synns  
 As loud as thunder, in his Eare beginns  
 To enter, And he knew The'aeternall laws  
 Decreed him to pale Deathes Insatiate Iaws'  
 His poore Afflicted Mother he had left  
 Widow'd of all her comforts, and bereft  
 Of her deere sonne; O see her sadly weepe  
 prepared with teares his funerall to keepe  
 Hee saw The'Inraged Iews Like sauage Doggs  
 plottinge his ruine in their synagougs  
 The scribes (their own deuourers) stood in strife  
 To bloott their names out of the booke of life  
 All these lapt in a labourynth of fears  
 His greiued soule, and caus'd a sea of tears:

51 - 66

Jesus is once again a guide for affective piety as he was for prayer, shown here performing his own imaginative contemplation. He is attentive to the senses, hearing and seeing as well as feeling. The telescoping of this scene intensifies its emotive force: the visualization of the Virgin Mary's tears intensifies Christ's tears, and so on for the speaker and the reader of the poem. It is striking that Christ's preparation for the Passion is through this proliferation of emotion, the mediation of feeling through vivid, affective imagination thus presented as a profitable form of devotion worthwhile even at the threshold of salvation. The anguish is palpable, not simply through distant witness or external function of 'show and tell'. Christ, the speaker, and the reader come together in the layers upon layers of sensing and feeling. It is truly an effect of being 'lapt in a labourynth of fears'. The labyrinth of time is intricately folded in these lines, where present moment ('hee / Laments') and past

remembrance ('he knew') intertwine with the inevitable future. Christ has already left his mother 'Widow'd' and yet the reader is presented with the sight of Mary's tears in the present tense, 'see her sadly weepe'. All the while we are in the garden. Through *feeling*—in affective contemplation as well as in the acts of reading and writing evidenced in the miscellany—the Passion is dislodged from time and can cascade through the life of the Christian.

**'[W]hat am I': writing, reading, and suffering death**

The conceit of this imaginative contemplation is that by *feeling* and *sensing* the moment of faith can come true knowledge of God. An affective and embodied experience of faith is one that is subjective and thus highly personal. The speaker is aware of the power of this process and she does not exclude a thoughtful, humanistic reading practice from the experience of faith. She exhorts the reader:

O thinke but of the paine, for custome takes  
 Away the sence of sorrow, and it makes  
 Only Impression in ungratefull hearts  
 To speake the words, but not Iudge his smarts:

207-10

Custom is a hollow recitation of faith, a form of worship that is devoid of feeling. Yet even an analytical approach to the Passion can access its feeling. It is the close contact between reader and text that is crucial here. Intimate, affective reading need not abandon intellectual approaches to a text. The speaker of 'On the Passion' recognizes the value of active textual engagements. The dichotomy between body and mind is vexed here as a critical reading practice, seemingly associated with the mind, is valued above oral recitation such as takes place in a ritualized devotion. Affective contemplation like 'On the Passion' is nonetheless an embodied process, the eyes and the brain working together as much as the heart.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, 'close reading' implies a moment in space facilitated through an embodied encounter, a nearness between the book and reader realized in the physical body, perhaps the nose dipping low over the page to bring the reader even closer to the text. Thinking Christ's pain and judging his 'smarts' do not bypass affective experience but recall the multifaceted reading practices manifest in Aston Fowler's text.

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<sup>49</sup> To use early modern physiologies of reading, that is, at the expense of modern cognitive understanding of emotions.

The final stanzas of the poem, however, are noticeably filled with feeling. This is matched with an overflowing form, as the stanzas in the latter half of the verse are overblown to 30-50 lines. Interspersed among the detailed narrative of scenes of the Passion, the speaker interposes herself into the text through effusive asides. In these interjections, she self-consciously intermingles her physical experience with Christ's body, and brings her subjective, lived experience into the Passion story. Before contemplating, and thereby sharing in, Christ's final suffering and death, which together make up the two longest scenes in the poem, the speaker pauses:

But O my soule I feele my conscience say  
 I was an Actor in this bloody play  
 gaue thee some wounds, my guilty soule descries  
 Too, where they were, t'was neere those sacred Eyes  
 O tell me where I hitt, and frome this Day  
 These constant uows religiously I'll pay  
 Once euery day to fix a sorrowed looke  
 vpon the place, and say o there I strooke:

163-70

The realism of the speaker's imaginative contemplation again collapses time and place so that she is both acting in the Passion and tied to her present moment.<sup>50</sup> The speaker's body and Christ's body are brought into direct contact, specifically at the point of 'those sacred Eyes'. It is a curious location for the focus of the speaker's personal, felt expression of guilt. Interaction with Christ's wounded body is a common conceit of devotional poetry, as in Southwell's poem 'Man to the Wound in Christ's Side', which imagines residing *in* the wound. Perhaps the poem's peculiar focus on Christ's 'sacred Eyes' can be read as the speaker embodying her guilt and shame ('my guilty soule descries') through transposing her felt experience directly onto Christ. The experience of shame is often one viscerally felt through the gazes of others, real or imagined. Shame is an experience of being exposed, being *seen*. By locating the wounds personally inflicted by her sins, the speaker reverses the trajectory of her shame and traces it back to the embodied Christ, who sees her sins

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<sup>50</sup> Matthew Milner examines this effect of religious art: 'Its temporality was equally fluid, existing in tension with an historicised past, contemporaneous expressions, and the eternal present of the divine. In many respects this involved subsuming of linear time to divine atemporality. This shaped presentation of eternal events and truths not as points in the past, but as a contemporaneous reality through the theological notion of anamnesis, a recalling to the present, not for the purposes of remembrance, but to bring something eternal into the confines of time itself.' Milner, *The Senses and the English Reformation* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 71.



and yet still dies for them.<sup>51</sup>

The language of guilt is particularly feeling. Susan Karant-Nunn noted in her study of Passion sermons that ‘Catholics confidently, enthusiastically carried on a rhetoric of condemnation’,<sup>52</sup> and the zeal for self-castigation is present here. In the lines that instigate the speaker's soul to ‘feele my conscience’, she refers to herself as ‘vile sinner’, claiming herself to be unworthy of Jesus' suffering and consequent salvation:

O say (deere Iesus) was it for my sake  
 For me vile sinner thou didst undertake  
 such pains, such cruell torments, what am I  
 That thou for me shouldst suffer misery 145-8

The speaker's mortification trips the grammar into a dizzying circle, her self-deprecating protests serving ironically to draw her further into the drama of the Passion. The poem's form is inconsistent at times, noticeable in its sometimes haphazard enjambments and caesurae, but she—or her compiler—does make some attempts to mitigate the irregularities with careful punctuation. The lack of any clarifying punctuation here leaves a particularly fluid effect, a tantalizing fragment as two sentences flow together in one line: ‘such pains, such cruell torments, what am I’. The line can almost be read as an identification: the speaker nearly defining herself, her humanity, through ‘such pains, such cruell torments’, that is, through suffering.

By wholly embodying this suffering, I am proposing, the speaker (and the reader) constructs an affective faith that can access the incomprehensible. The Passion does, in the end, mean suffering, from the Latin *passio*. This process of embodying the Passion—through penitential suffering similar to that found in Southwell's verses—enacts an affective self-fashioning. Moreover, the theology of suffering is reflected in poetic form and the cycle of suffering, death, and salvation can be mapped onto the act of literary composition. Suffering is a liminal space, a transitory process. In the Passion narrative and indeed the Christian experience of selfhood, it is the necessary preparation for death, an experience of the flesh as it begins passage toward the divine.

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<sup>51</sup> For a discussion of shame see Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997). Also Ewan Fernie, *Shame in Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>52</sup> Susan C. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling*, 32.

The Passion is the story of mortality, the defining quality of the *human*. As Brian Cummings explains in his contemplation of the mortal self in Montaigne, '[f]ar from being a state of perfection, mortality is defined as imperfection...it is a state of flux, of in between, at best a coming into being'.<sup>53</sup> Affective meditation is also a 'coming into being', as I have been suggesting, through sensory and emotional devotion, and the mediation of such intimately and personally composed suffering through poetic form heightens the sense of liminality.<sup>54</sup> Reading the Passion incites a devotion that is based in 'the booke' of the self. It is in Christ's suffering that the reader comes face to face with mortality, though in the context of the Passion it is not a fixed finality but rather a creative and regenerative force—just as a written text is a meeting-place of the writer and the reader in creative suffering.

Although the trope of the suffering artist is a cliché, it is still useful as a map when treading the critical terrain linking literary form and Christology.<sup>55</sup> Inscribing the cycle of the Passion through artistic creation and readerly reception requires committing affect to form, putting the suffering of an individual's humanity onto the page. Michael Schoenfeldt describes the Passion poetry of Donne, Herbert, and Milton as poetry of self-sacrifice. The seventeenth-century devotional poets, in Schoenfeldt's reading, 'offer a way of engaging with the Passion that is not so much a poetry of meditation as it is a poetry of immolation'.<sup>56</sup> If, as Sontag proposes, the modern writer replaces the saint as exemplary sufferer, the early modern devotional poets occupy a space in between artistic and salvific suffering. Indeed in Passion poetry, these poets along with the writer of 'On the Passion' aim at a higher realm of suffering, not merely a saint-like aptitude but a Christological capacity. The form and the self are as one on the page, refined through suffering. The soteriologically potent vulnerability of human suffering and death, however, was framed by early modern thinkers as requiring a careful mastery. Cummings draws out Montaigne's opening statement in Essay I.xix 'That to study philosophy is to learn to die': 'This

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<sup>53</sup> Cummings, *Mortal Thoughts: Religion, Secularity, and Identity in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 23.

<sup>54</sup> Costica Bradatan, also writing on Montaigne, references Pico della Mirandola's retelling of Genesis in which man was left in an unfinished state: 'God has made man a rough draft, and it is the latter's job to finish it.' See 'From Draft to Infinite Writing. Death, Solitude and Self-creation in Early Modernity', *Culture, Theory and Critique* 54:2 (July 2013): 241-257 (at 250).

<sup>55</sup> Susan Sontag looms large. See 'The Artist as Exemplary Sufferer' in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London: Penguin Classics, 2009, first published 1966).

<sup>56</sup> Michael Schoenfeldt, 'The Poetics of Sacrifice', 562.

is because study and contemplation do in some sort withdraw from us our soul, and employ it separately from the body, which is a kind of apprenticeship and a resemblance of death'.<sup>57</sup>

This strain of Stoic philosophy in Montaigne and throughout the period rises to the fore when approaching early modern meditations on death, including the contemplation of death in the Passion.<sup>58</sup> The Neostoic idea of emptying of the body through contemplation is, however, seemingly at odds with the sensory process of affective imagination as seen in 'On the Passion of our Lord'. This contradiction presents a tension, but while meditative Passion poetry invokes the emotions, the merger of Stoicism and Christianity delineates the distinctions between acceptable religious feeling and improper, indulgent passions. The act of contemplating the Passion is an act of devotion that transcends carnal suffering, but only by offering the text of suffering to be read and refined. Moreover, the 'apprenticeship' of death is found in the act of composition, a consciousness of Christ's suffering as textual. Putting thoughts and experiences down onto the page is, as Cummings defines philosophizing, a 'reflective moment of considering ourselves outside of ourselves—is a form of escape from our own boundaries'.<sup>59</sup> In Passion poetry, the mortal self must make the page her mirror.

Just as Christ's suffering completes the Incarnation by realizing the full experience of humanity and of flesh through a mortal death, so the speaker in her contemplation of the Passion must take her body and her senses for 'the booke / [s]hee pray'd in' (13-4). Effecting the devotional experience in literary form is a process of writing the self: through embodied and affective suffering, the speaker can take part in the central Christian narrative. It is a kind of *imitatio Christi*. In Debora Shuger's terminology, the Christian self must suffer the duality of human sin and divine love. Thus, just as Christ completes the Incarnation through a mortal death in order to fulfil the world's salvation, so must the Christian make their human vulnerability into a creative force for accessing the divine. Writing (and reading) the

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<sup>57</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, trans. John Florio (London, 1613), 30; qtd in Cummings, *Mortal Thoughts*, 51.

<sup>58</sup> Susan Karant-Nunn makes a quick assessment: 'Those who are aware of the popularity of Neostoicism in early-modern intellectual circles may wonder whether such a philosophical program of impassivity was compatible with the ardor that preachers, among them highly educated intellectuals, enjoined upon the masses to whom they spoke. Indeed, it was not.' *The Reformation of Feeling*, 41.

<sup>59</sup> Cummings, *Mortal Thoughts*, 51.

Passion is a process of form: the Word is made flesh and given form, textual and poetic as well as human. Suffering is the *work* of form; it completes the process of salvation. In Montaigne, Cummings reads the duality of the textual cycle as that of life and death: writing (and here I extend this to reading as well) is a means ‘in effect, to escape his own mortality by giving him a life beyond the body. Yet in that escape he also rediscovers his limits. In his writing he realises his own death’.<sup>60</sup> The affective self becomes most clearly defined, its limits and its mortality, in the act of textual suffering, that is in making human frailty and sin into a text that can be read.

That moment of clarity, of fully embodying self and flesh and mortality, is found in the Passion story as Jesus despairs.<sup>61</sup> The moment is absent from ‘On the Passion of our Lord’, but the speaker experiences an intimate revelation of her own: ‘Now I behold, and see my selfe most cleere’ (179). The declaration is stark and despairing, a true moment of recognition and contrition. In a confession that calls to mind the Catholic sacrament, the speaker goes on to list her personal sins:

My costly clothinge made him naked goe  
 My easy lodginge forst his scourginge soe  
 My curious Diett Hungar to him brought  
 My follish Ioyes presented him sad thoughts  
 My pleasurs in vaine glory breed his scorns  
 My often curlinge weau'd his crown of Thorns:

181-6

The language is of the body and of the emotions. These lines give a distinctly personal and evocative glimpse into the lived, felt experience of the speaker as an early modern woman of faith. As Femke Molekamp highlights in her reading of this poem, ‘Hair-curling in “On the Passion of our Lord” expresses a participation in the crucifixion (albeit negative) that is intimate, physical, and distinctly feminine’.<sup>62</sup> The speaker's embodiment and daily life are manifested fully in her affective piety, her worldly comforts and pleasures depicting a brief sketch of her life within the community of aristocratic English Catholics. The sketch hints at a life of fashion and even frivolity, and it is this happy mundanity that gives a candid truthfulness to the lived experience of personal devotion. Faith was lived and felt not only in moments

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<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> KJV Mark 15:34: ‘And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?* which is, being interpreted, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*’

<sup>62</sup> Femke Molekamp, *Women and the Bible in Early Modern England: Religious Reading and Writing*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 201.

of time and space designated for devotion, but in everyday moments. Karant-Nunn clarifies this feature of affective devotion outside of the rituals of the mass and beyond Good Friday services: 'Emotional identification with Christ was now the basis and the evidence of commitment to the Catholic faith...the spirituality of imagined presence at the Savior's torment was now held out as the proper foundation of Catholicism the whole year around'.<sup>63</sup> The ordinary and the holy not only coexist in the individual communicant by means of participation in formal worship, but the everyday life of a believing woman is imbued with the feeling of faith, mingling the sacred and the mundane.

Throughout the poem, this feminine figuration of affective piety threads a subtle undercurrent. The Virgin Mary's grief is kept out of sight, present only in Jesus's imagination as an exemplar of constructive mourning. She is 'prepared with teares his funeral to keepe' (60), not only weeping in despair but composing devotion and commemoration through her emotional experience as well as fulfilling her duty for the death rituals.<sup>64</sup> The Daughters of Jerusalem are offered as similarly productive mourners. The women are singled out among the angry crowds along the walk to Calvary:

The tender hearted women did relent  
And for his sake their bitter teares present  
These did Inioy when coward mann did faile  
courage to follow; Pitty to bewaile:

197-200

These lines figure a particularly gendered rendering of affective piety through language of explicit tenderness. Their hearts are soft, and the action of their grief is one of relenting, a yielding to emotion and thereby a submission.<sup>65</sup> And yet their softening is marked as 'courage' and the Daughters of Jerusalem are singled out as true apostles, committed to Jesus until the very end. The women are enacting a

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<sup>63</sup> Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling*, 60.

<sup>64</sup> The role of women in death rituals is reflected in the women attending to Jesus' body in the tomb. Robert Southwell also figures feminine funeral tears as potent, overly so, see *Mary Magdalen's funeral tears* (1591).

<sup>65</sup> The figuration of a tender or soft heart also calls to mind the metaphysical trope of the melting heart. The *OED* gives a literal definition of such usage of 'relent' as 'To melt under the influence of heat' and cites a literary usage in the late-medieval Digby Mary Magdalene play that enhances the connection with this type of affective piety which is specifically gendered as female: 'To haue seyn hir, a harte of stone, For ruthe wald haue relente', see *Christ's Burial & Resurrection* i. 153 in F. J. Furnivall Digby Plays (1896) 177, qtd in *OED*, 'relent, v.' I.1a.

constructive suffering. Their surrender is not a loss of self or an excess of feeling—recalling Southwell’s observation of Mary Magdalene’s tears that express ‘such a loue as could neuer exceede, because the thing loved was infinite perfection’.<sup>66</sup> Such passions, to use Southwell’s term, of this specifically female affective piety are ‘wrought to prosecute...vertuous indeauour’.<sup>67</sup> The emotional experience is a participation in Christ’s Passion, as I have been suggesting: it is ‘for his sake’, an offering as well as a reaction.

This celebration of the role of women in the Passion, as more faithful and courageous in their devotion even than the twelve apostles, draws ‘On the Passion of our Lord’ into conversation with Æmilia Lanyer’s *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (1611). Micheline White has written on Lanyer’s ‘provocative stance of a poet-priest’ and notes her unusual treatment of the Daughters of Jerusalem. Lanyer’s account lacks Christ’s admonishment as related in the Gospels to weep for themselves and not for him. Indeed, Lanyer dramatizes a tension between gendered forms of religious devotion as figured in the disciples and the Daughters. White reads in this divide a unique facet of feminine affective piety. In both of these examples of female-authored Passion poems, ‘the women succeed where the male disciples failed: they share Christ’s suffering rather than abandon him’.<sup>68</sup> Like Lanyer, the speaker of ‘On the Passion’ recognizes that the sympathy and comfort given by the women in attending Jesus to the very end of his life is more than a show of unintelligible grief; it is an apostolic commitment ‘to follow’. This devotional act of affective allegiance is composed succinctly in the balance of the final line in the brief scene as the bewailing of pity and the communal offering of grief is contained with care in poetic form. The meter is focused and purposeful, split perfectly in balanced halves at the caesura, weighting the faithful, apostolic conviction evenly with the affective piety: ‘courage to follow; Pitty to bewaile’ (200).<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Southwell, *Marie Magdalen’s funeral tears* (1591), A5v.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Micheline White, ‘A Woman with Saint Peter’s Keys?: Æmilia Lanyer’s *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (1611) and the Priestly Gifts of Women’, *Criticism* 45.3 (2003): 334.

<sup>69</sup> In Olivia Weisser’s work on the social history of the embodied and affective experience of ill health in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, pity is examined as a particularly potent aspect of health care, a felt experience shared between the patient and the caregiver. Weisser notes the specific productivity of the emotion within the devotional framework: ‘There was also a physical component to this devotional activity. Believers had to attain open, warm, broken hearts in order to receive God’s spirit. These characterizations

As I have argued throughout this chapter, the affective devotion enacted through the Passion poem's work of form is a constructive participation, much like that of the Daughters of Jerusalem at Jesus's 'Dying place' (202). Southwell's formal awareness of affective piety as 'wrought' is notable in light of the self-consciousness of the miscellany's textual devotion. 'On the Passion', like many of Aston Fowler's verses, is anxiously concerned with the processing of inward and outward sensation. The speaker's meditative visualization flows through the emotionally charged scenes of the Passion such as the encounter with the Daughters of Jerusalem, but the narrative cannot take hold as the speaker comes to an abrupt halt, confronting the difficulty of her project: 'O think but of the paine, for custome takes / Away the sence of sorrow' (207-8). As noted above, the anxiety here is over empty or hollow form. Interestingly, this self-reflexive moment of exposed formal anxiety is brought on through the poem's fluid current along the speaker's sensory and affective experience. The poem's form is an ebb and flow—between contemplation and feeling—as scenes come into focus with forceful detail and break like waves in a personal spill of intensely felt piety. As the scenes become more vivid so the waves surge higher, the scene of Christ's death on the Cross swelling to 50 lines of striking drama and turmoil, and the potential for salvific revelation comes near at hand. Ultimately, this form is set in motion through a reading experience that marries the human experience of embodied emotion to the transcendent action of divine love. Indeed, the verse strives to share even in the final, most holy act of the Passion: victory over death and the soul's redemption through the resurrection to eternal life.

'On the Passion', like its partner Passion poem 'O Lord direct my hart', involves the embodied encounter with text as material and poetic form in the experience of *lived* faith. Milner has described the work of sensory interaction with religious art and objects of devotion as creating 'a kind of "personal relationship" or "confrontation"...a "living relationship" between believers and the object of their faithful sensible desire'.<sup>70</sup> The tangible object, legible text, and feeling body do not merely *mediate* faith, but constitute the fluid process itself. Faith, as it is presented

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of the heart were not mere metaphors for inward sensations of piety. Visiting others evoked emotions such as pity and compassion, which were thought to assist devotion by physically opening, softening, and warming the heart.' See Olivia Weisser, *Ill Composed: Sickness, Gender, and Belief in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), qt 65.

<sup>70</sup> Milner, *The Senses and the English Reformation*, 74.

in Aston Fowler's miscellany, is not knowledge or an ascribed belief in doctrine, but it is an *act* not unlike reading—an interactive process between external form and subjective experience. In this way, the relationship between writer and form, reader and poem, reflects the interaction between the Christian self and the Passion. The 'living relationship' forged in this personal, intimate devotion is affirmed in the speaker's final emotional and physical communion with Christ. She cries out again with acute feeling: 'But O my Heart!' and the feeling engenders an explicitly devotional gesture, which enacts a bodily communion:

Thus humbly kneele I to that sacred signe,  
 My will and understandinge I resigne  
 vnto the crosse: and to his crowne of Thorns  
 And pierced head bequeath all that Adorns  
 My useles haire: to both those wounded hands  
 And feete I giue all Ioyes the Earth commands  
 Into his side whence loue and mercy flow'd  
 I place all Follies that my youth hath sowd  
 And for his loue contrition shall force roome  
 within my soule, and make my heart his tombe.

261-74

This language places the speaker's final embodied communion with Christ within the discourse on liturgical form and specifically a Catholic ritualized devotion. The act of kneeling before Jesus on the cross is a potent gesture and the presentation of the crucifix as a 'sacred signe' is telling. Yet the speaker goes further than mere contemplation of the sign of the crucifix. In her practice of affective contemplation, she transcends the realm of signs and symbols. She is able to merge with Christ's body on the cross. Just as her felt experience of a sinful life moved beyond her body and into Christ in the violence of suffering the Passion, so too the direction of the communion is first enacted through an offering of herself: her vanity as it is felt in the personally poignant emblem of her hair as well as the frivolity of her youth. Then, finally, the communion becomes an acceptance as well as an offering. The speaker physically takes Christ's body into her own, a eucharistic act. Yet by ending the process of her affective piety in this action of entombment, the speaker leaves open the final and most holy proceeding. Christ's tomb is a liminal space of its own. The poem's last image is of waiting, preparation: the resurrection still to come.

The miscellany presents the Passion as a work of form to be suffered, particularly through reading. Although the devotional effects of verse meditations



such as ‘O Lord direct my hart’ and ‘On the Passion’ are quite real, as I hope my thesis has shown to be true of the religious verse throughout the miscellany, it is the experience of faith that is composed through this particular work of form. By ending in Christ’s tomb of the heart, ‘On the Passion’ evokes an intimacy that relies on a *felt* faith and one that abides even in the uncertain moments and in the darkness, before the stone is rolled away. This deeply personal work of form fills the gaps and silences within Constance Aston Fowler’s miscellany. The Passion, like the miscellany itself, is an outline that the reader shades in with her own experience in order to fashion a whole text, a completed narrative, a transcendent communion of human and divine. Ironically, it is in their illegible and incomprehensible moments that these texts are most potent. This is born out in the mysteries and paradoxes of the Passion that are the key to the Christian theology of salvation. It is also effectively expressed in verses such as ‘On the Passion’. The verse presents the devotional potency of the dark of the tomb and the trials of mortal life: the believer has no light but her own faith. The Passion must be felt and experienced throughout the Christian life until death opens the tomb of the heart.

‘On the Passion’ is one of the most mysterious verses in Aston Fowler’s miscellany. The text bears marks of historically distant acts of personal engagement: the marginal note on fol. 12r and the ciphered initials. Yet if we are to come close to understanding the miscellany as evidence of the integration of art and life, we can only do so by facing the text head-on. Jenijoy La Belle described Aston Fowler’s miscellany as a kind of ‘personal journal’.<sup>71</sup> Although we cannot reclaim the experience of any particular one of the miscellany’s previous readers, the text holds the tools for understanding *how* it was read by its users. The mysteries of HM904 include the coherence of the sacred and the secular, the personal and the religious, the human and divine. The affective self-fashioning presented in the miscellany’s Passion poems suggests that this duality is born of a *lived* faith. The personal, subjective experience cannot be extricated from this faith and the dual nature of the miscellany reminds us that the same is true of the literary text. This does not mean reading literature for autobiographical information. Rather, the text is revealed in this light as a meeting place for life and art, a liminal space where the text is made

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<sup>71</sup> Jenijoy La Belle, ‘The Huntington Aston Manuscript’, *The Book Collector* 29 (1980): 545.

and remade according to each self-inflected reading moment. Reading sets the form in motion, by way of the self.

## Conclusion

### **Reading the Collection: the work of form and early modern manuscript culture**

I have argued throughout my thesis for the need to *read* Constance Aston Fowler's verse miscellany. These chapters offer, I hope, a model of how we can read manuscript collections of poetry for more than material evidence of textual transmission throughout seventeenth-century literary culture. The miscellany, like the book of charades compiled by Harriet Smith in *Emma*, is a text born of a complex reading practice. It is, of course, impossible to fully reclaim the earlier acts of reading that are inscribed in the manuscript. Despite the manuscript page's palimpsestic status as 'untimely matter', the scenes of Aston Fowler's reading remain in the past.<sup>1</sup> Yet, I have been arguing, the miscellany's form offers valuable evidence that helps us go some way towards recovering those lost scenes and for understanding how poetry was read in the seventeenth century for a variety of purposes. Form instantiates reading: the particularities of the poetic form guided and enabled Aston Fowler's reading as much as it does our own. Ellen Rooney's statement has been a touchstone of this thesis: 'Form is both the enabling condition and the product of reading'.<sup>2</sup> Questions of poetic form, such as those taken up by New Formalism, are thus questions about reading. Although this methodology must also grapple with broader theoretical questions about literature and aesthetics, Rooney reminds us that form 'can never be known in advance'.<sup>3</sup> Viewing writing or print arranged in lines and stanzas on the page is an encounter with textual form that provides a mass of information on its own, but it is in reading that the text can realize poetic effects. The effects of poetic form, I have argued, can then instigate social, political, devotional, and emotional effects as well (some more legible than others). In reading the 'work' of form in Aston Fowler's miscellany, I have proposed that poetry *does* things, but it must be set in motion by reading. This methodology, then, opens an access point for considering the social and cultural process of literature through the act of reading that connects art and life.

I have found this methodology to be particularly valuable in reading HM904 as

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Ellen Rooney, 'Form and Contentment', *Modern Language Quarterly* 61.1 (March 2000): 37.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, 36-37.

it presents a notably diverse reading life, one that brings together a vibrant literary life with an ardent religious perspective. The multifaceted nature of the text, as I've noted throughout, does not equate to a rigid divide between the devotional and the social verses in the miscellany. Rather, the practice of collecting comprises an expansive reading practice, one that brings faith into conversation with the broader cultural experience of recusant life. While much of the scholarship on the Tixall group has traced the interpersonal relationships of the group,<sup>4</sup> my work argues that we should expand this awareness of dialogic form to the miscellany as a composite text.

In reading the miscellany text as a whole, I have traced its religious and social contexts alongside its literary engagements and poetics in order to uncover a uniquely expansive work of form. In this light, we can see that the multiple connections the miscellany's poems and writers make both on and off the page imbue the miscellany with a particular kind of politics, a distinction drawn out by Robert Matz: 'not the politics that is conducted *through* literature, but the politics *of* literature as a form'.<sup>5</sup> Such politics is not the external connections themselves, but rather the underlying structures of the relationships that are refracted and refined through the work of form. By making her book of poetry, Aston Fowler affirms a multifaceted view of culture and a belief in the value of art. Moreover, this awareness of form as politically and culturally expedient is not solely defined by the Tixall group's religio-political allegiances, although they are important. The inclusion of the elegy for the Duke of Buckingham (fols. 49r-52r) is a particularly potent political moment and the verse directly attests the power of poetry within broader social and cultural politics: 'By a sweet muse may silence slanders tongue'

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<sup>4</sup> See Hackett, 'Women and Catholic Manuscript Networks' (2012) and 'The Aston-Thimelby Circle at Home and Abroad' (2013). Arnold Hunt has also explored the literary patronage of the Astons' aunt Anne Sadleir who engaged closely in political and religious controversy, including through correspondence with her Catholic nephew Herbert Aston. See Hunt, 'The Books, Manuscripts and Literary Patronage of Mrs. Anne Sadleir (1585-1670)', in Victoria E. Burke & Jonathan Gibson (eds.), *Early modern Women's Manuscript Writing: Selected Papers from the Trinity/Trent Colloquium*, 205-36 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004). Recently Jane Stevenson has traced the Aston network to the musical life of the English convent at Louvain, also through Herbert Aston's correspondence in this instance with Winnifred Thimelby, prioress: 'The Tixall circle and the musical life of St Monica's, Louvain', *British Catholic History* 33.4 (2017): 583-602.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Matz, *Defending Literature in Early Modern England: Renaissance Literary Theory in Social Context* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000): 8.

(‘On the Death of the Duke of Bucchingham’, 138).<sup>6</sup> I do not mean to equate ‘politics’ with the social efficacy of the verses, however. Indeed, my discussions of the material life of the miscellany as well as its poetic form have drawn out nuances in the categories of the social and the religious. The ‘political’ strands are, I posit, more usefully read in terms of influence and self-conscious dialogue with structures of culture. The work of form can shape this kind of political network in a variety of ways: the choice of verses and genres, recurrent themes and images, stylistic preferences and formal allusions. My argument for the miscellany’s expansive work of form attends to these numerous influences that unspool from its verses and how the connections on and off the page come together to enshrine a reverence for reading as a vital practice for a virtuous life.

How verses are read is closely tied to how texts pass through social and cultural lives. Thus, the verses can be cast in a variety of shades through the uniquely fluid nature of the miscellany form, by that I mean the nature of miscellany as a text that foregrounds its intertextuality and presents the reader with an interactive reading canvas. The self-consciousness of form that I have traced throughout the miscellany suggests that the *real*—historical, political, and, most notably, religious—effects of poetry are made possible by reading texts actively, even those overlooked within the annals of the literary canon. Indeed, what the miscellany collects is not simply a variety of singular texts, but an appreciation for the dynamic effects of texts when read together as an intertextual or woven form. This reading is never an isolated act upon a stable text, but rather a dialogic interaction with a text that is always in process. Collected works such as Aston Fowler’s miscellany are texts born of reading, recording a particular reader’s taste while also facilitating interactive engagement. My thesis proposes that these features of miscellanies can better help us to understand early modern literary culture. After all, the resources of such expansive and conversant work of form are not a unique feature of Aston Fowler’s reading life. In fact, the practice of collecting poetry thrived at Tixall. Constance was not the only editor working to immortalize Tixall poetry nor was she the only member of her family to create a book of verse as a testament to a varied reading life.

The account of Katherine Thimelby collecting her husband’s poetry discussed

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<sup>6</sup> Printed in Aldrich-Watson (ed.), *The Verse Miscellany*, poem 38: 97-103.

briefly in my Introduction is worth returning to as valuable example of this coterie literary practice. This editorial project, like Aston Fowler's creation of her verse miscellany, reveals the nature of literary production within the circle of family and friends centered at Tixall to be markedly copious. These texts, as well as Herbert Aston's miscellany and Catherine Gage Aston's collection,<sup>7</sup> suggest that Tixall's poetic practice was structured by sociable and critical reading as much as writing. It is striking that Herbert Aston did not keep copies of his own poetry, but composed and sent off his verses with little regard for safeguarding his poetic output or formalizing his literary reputation. He trusted his friends and it is possible to imagine that part of that trust rested in his knowledge of his sister's ongoing project of producing a book of poetry. Clifford gives an account of Herbert Aston's request for copies but fails to give a date.<sup>8</sup> It must, however, have been after Herbert and Katherine's marriage in 1638 and the only poems in his list of titles with specific dates belong to the 1630s.<sup>9</sup> Given Aston Fowler's evident preference for her brother's verse, the fact that her miscellany does not include so many of the poems on Herbert's list also suggests that some of these compositions likely post-date her collection. It is likely that the project of creating a collected edition of Herbert's poetry was conceived after the period of Aston Fowler's active collecting and compilation had come to an end. Given that Aston Fowler's miscellany remains intriguingly incomplete, we can read her manuscript as a work-in-progress, cut short perhaps upon her removal from the immediate family life at Tixall. Meanwhile Katherine Thimelby's project suggests that poetic activity continued to flourish at Bellamour and Tixall.

The textual life of the literary community at Tixall offers a view of a coterie that was conscious of how it was presented and how its members' texts could benefit from being read together. Yet I hope my thesis has succeeded in situating this

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<sup>7</sup> Herbert Aston's miscellany is held at the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Beinecke Osborn MS b.4. Catherine Gage Aston's collection of poetry was included in *Tixall Poetry*, see Arthur Clifford (ed.), *Tixall Poetry: With Notes and Illustrations* (Edinburgh: James Ballantyne & Co., 1813), 109-205.

<sup>8</sup> Clifford (ed.), *Tixall Poetry*, xxii.

<sup>9</sup> 'To my Lady Brett on her Marriage' commemorates the marriage of Mary White and Sir Robert Brett which took place in 1632. Mary was the daughter of Richard White of Hutton, Essex and her stepmother was Katherine Weston, sister of Mary Weston who married the second Lord Walter Aston. 'On my Lady St Albons Death' elegizes Lady Dorothy Shirley's mother, Frances Walsingham (d. 1633), whose third husband, Ulick Burke, Earl of Clanricarde (Irish peerage) and Earl of St Albans (English peerage).

practice in the context of the broader literary culture. Collecting poetry into privileged gatherings does not close off texts into exclusive categories, but rather provides a framework for reading the expansive work of form. The collection, even if it is of a single author's work, is a wide-ranging text that encourages a reader to trace the work of form beyond the bounds of a single poem or text. In the various collected works of Tixall, we can see the act of collecting as especially meaningful beyond communal commemoration. Indeed collecting poetry can be a self-conscious work of form in itself, as HM904's design as a 'booke' illustrates. It is true, however, that Herbert Aston frames his wife's editorial work in the realm of leisure: 'My Mrs havinge nothinge els to doe this winter, hath made a slight collection of all my workes'.<sup>10</sup> Gender dynamics are clearly at play in this account. Whereas Katherine's project is couched in the language of recreation and described as 'a slight collection', Herbert still describes his own literary output as 'all my workes'. Trolander and Tenger note that, despite Aston's semblance of humility, the posturing of the request denotes an act of vouching as it sends a 'signal to family and friends [of] Mrs Aston's belief in the value of her husband's poetry'.<sup>11</sup> Yet, the concept of vouching also highlights the abilities of 'well-read and cultured individuals who had good editorial and social skills to smooth the way for their work's reception'.<sup>12</sup> Puttenham's dedication to artistic gentlewomen in 'Of Ornament' is relevant here as a reminder that even the 'ditties of pleasure' and literary 'recreation' could be formally inventive and undertaken as a rigorous act of literary engagement.<sup>13</sup> The role of the 'well-read' woman is thus a creative and engaging act of formal awareness. It was in the management of texts and relationships that women such as Thimelby and Aston Fowler could traverse an expanse of literary contacts and contexts.

In assuming the role of editor, Thimelby's venture validates Herbert's oeuvre by aligning not only with elite coterie practice but also with the public conventions of literary culture. Arthur Marotti has argued that the tradition of 'comprehensive, monumentalizing edition that celebrated [a poet's] total achievements' can be traced back directly to Sir Philip Sidney. Though Katherine Thimelby's edition of her

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<sup>10</sup> Clifford (ed.), *Tixall Poetry*, xxii.

<sup>11</sup> Trolander and Tenger, *Sociable Criticism in England, 1625-1725* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2007), 35.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, 32.

<sup>13</sup> George Puttenham, *The arte of English poesie* (London, 1589), S4v.

husband's poetry is professed as a casual undertaking and there survives no evidence of Herbert Aston's poetry reaching a public audience, the work of collecting his poetry bears the marks of public literary culture: the creation of a complete 'workes' recalls printed editions of major poets brought out in the seventeenth century and even his sister's manuscript shows evidence of composition as a formal 'booke' that mimics the convention of print.

By collecting the poems from dispersed, communal copies into an authorized and professionalized form, this coterie practice co-opts the structures of the public literary sphere in order to enliven the texts' connections to the broader literary culture. If Thimelby modelled her text on printed formats such as collected folio editions, she could have visited the Tixall library to view several prominent examples. Marotti traces the authorization of the English canon through such folio editions, stretching back to Sidney and on through the seventeenth century. It is a trajectory that can likewise be found in the library at Tixall, which held early editions of Spenser (*Collected Works*, 1611 & 1613), Shakespeare (1632 folio), Drayton (*Polyolbion*, 1613), and Jonson, alongside Sidney, discussed in Chapter Two.<sup>14</sup> Such definitive editions, Marotti notes, 'both memorialized this author and helped establish the authority of printed literature, especially of collected editions in the prestigious folio format'.<sup>15</sup> Though the collected 'workes' of Herbert Aston does not survive, the letter transcribed by Clifford provides at least one hint of the book's format: the list of titles is itself an index of the verses to be included. He also indicates an extended series of verses that could likely be arranged as a set, which he describes separately from the preceding list of titles, 'All of the Third of May we have but the first yeare'.<sup>16</sup> Given the number of verses—44, mentioned in the letter, and if he applied also to his sister for the verses collected in her miscellany, as many as 52—the 'workes' would have made quite a sizable volume. Yet, like the 80 blank leaves in the middle of Aston Fowler's book, the missing texts reinforce the fact that the archives of our literary history only tell one part of the story of literary history.

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<sup>14</sup> As one of Drayton's patrons, it is certainly feasible that Aston also owned further editions, including the collected works, which was dedicated to him. See Sotheby's, *The Tixall Library: Catalogue of Valuable Books and Manuscripts*, sale catalogue, London, 1899: lots 610, 592, 208, 366, and 367.

<sup>15</sup> Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 236.

<sup>16</sup> Clifford (ed.), *Tixall Poetry*, xxii-xxiii.



I have attempted throughout this thesis to look into the shadowy corners of Tixall, a process that has placed me in league with Arthur Clifford when he first began opening the trunks that had survived for several generations hidden away in the attic of the manor house. It has been my view that situating the group within their elite literary culture will help to complete the story of Tixall, not as an curiosity for antiquarians as Clifford viewed his project, but in order to better understand the many versions of literary lives that have been lost in the imperfect traditions of the academy. This work follows that of Deborah Aldrich-Watson, who has excavated the Astons' debts to and celebration of John Donne, a connection that proves especially potent given Donne's own Catholic heritage.<sup>17</sup> My analysis of the miscellany's particular interest in literary culture has shown that these references and allusions are not accidental similarities or superficial posturing. The Tixall poets show an active engagement with the poetic culture of the age.

In addition to Herbert Aston's praise of his sister Gertrude's poetry 'as high, / as strong lin'd donne', he directly cites 'his progresse; and Anatomy' ('To My Honer'd sister 5-6) and several of his poems echo lines of Donne directly.<sup>18</sup> Aston lays claim more directly to his literary heritage in 'To the Lady Mary Aston' (fols. 150r-152v), canvassing the highest echelons of lyric poetry including Petrarch and specifically celebrating the Sidney circle. Aston praises his sister-in-law directly in this history:

And times before us to perfection grew  
By reading prophesyes long writt of you  
As that by petrarck so deuinely writt

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<sup>17</sup> Deborah Aldrich-Watson (née Larson), 'John Donne and the Astons', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 55.4 (1992): 635-41. She claims a very tenuous claim of connection through Walter Fowler to the associate of Donne's also named Fowler, but there has been no evidence to support a relation between the two Fowlers other than a shared (and common) surname. She also suggests that Walter Aston's first, illegal and annulled marriage to Anne Barnes connects Walter and Donne, who made a similarly illegal marriage. The evidence she cites for a personal acquaintance between Aston and Donne leaves something to be desired (the presence of a 'Tho Aston' in the funeral procession for Sir Thomas Egerton's son), but the literary allusions are indeed striking.

<sup>18</sup> Also in 'To My Honer'd sister': 'what disputation, wonder, and what feare; / The trepidation of the starry sphære / Hath Caus'd moungst men, yet none hath had the witt / To reach the reason' (59-62). Compare with Donne's 'A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning': 'Moving of th' earth brings harms and fears / Men reckon what it did, and meant; / But trepidation of the spheres, / Though greater far, is innocent' (9-12). Herbert also alludes to 'A Valediction' in his own exploration of lovers' fidelity in absence, 'whilst here eclipsed'; for a complete discussion see Chapter Two. Jenijoy La Belle also makes note of Herbert Aston's Donneian verses, see 'A True Love's Knot: The Letters of Constance Fowler and the Poems of Herbert Aston', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 79.1 (1980): 22-23.

Title'd his Laura, so admired yet,  
 Draytons Idæa, and the lousesick lines  
 Of daniells delia, hee too who refines  
 Our language sedney, whilst hee stella prayseth  
 Her glory, and his fame together rayseth  
 With Cællica most elegantly writt  
 In æmulation of braue Sedney's witt  
 All theese were shaddowes and meere prophesy  
 Of some true sun, that after should arise.  
 Immagin then if such be sidney's starr  
 What the sune, you that by't prefigur'd are

33-46

This passage shows Herbert Aston layering his verse with the poetic voices of Michael Drayton, Samuel Daniel, Fulke Greville, and Philip Sidney himself.<sup>19</sup> The choice of these Sidneian poets, taken with the Tixall edition of the Sidney Psalter suggests that the literary heritage of Tixall leads directly back to the Sidneys—or rather, Aston pointedly chooses to present it as such. Like his praise of Gertrude, Aston's verse to Lady Mary not only collects such elite intertexts in naming his poetic influences but he also initiates an active collaboration in the poetic form itself. In 'To My Honer'd sister', he adapts Donne's lines into his own verse, and here in 'To the Lady Mary' he situates his verse of praise within the oeuvre of illustrious poets, elevating it as an attempt to perform what their works 'prefigur'd'. Aston goes on to recognize his expansive form: 'my zeale / Drawes mee beyond my self' (97-98). This is a collaborative work of form composed through collecting voices and influences together, thus expanding beyond the writing (and reading) self. The expansiveness of the form of *collected* texts exposes the complexity of the reading practice that is inscribed in Aston Fowler's miscellany, commemorating a community of readers as well as a coterie of writers.

In a poem unique to Tixall—though not belonging to the group of writers

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<sup>19</sup> Drayton's 'idæa' refers to his collection of eclogues, *Idea: the Shepherds Garland* (1593), modelled after Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*. Samuel Daniel and Fulke Greville were both closely associated with the Sidney circle: Greville was Sidney's close friend and Daniel was supported by Mary Sidney Herbert. Daniel's *Delia* (1592) was dedicated to Mary Sidney Herbert and Greville's *Caelica* was composed in close tandem with Philip Sidney's *Astrophel & Stella*. That Aston describes 'Cællica' as 'most elegantly writt / In æmulation of braue Sedney's witt' suggests that he had knowledge of this scribal history. On Fulke Greville and Philip Sidney see David Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), chapter 7, and Tom W. N. Parker, *Proportional Form in the Sonnets of the Sidney Circle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), chapter 3.

associated with the Astons and the miscellany—Mary Sidney Herbert prefaces the Tixall manuscript of the Sidney Psalter by dedicating the work ‘To the Angel Spirit of the Most Excellent Sir Philip Sidney’. The Psalter is presented as ‘This coupled work’ and the collaboration underscores the devotional effect: ‘So dared my Muse with thine itself combine, / As mortal stuff with that which is divine’ (8-9).<sup>20</sup> Poetic devotion is a combination of earthly with divine substance, and the form reflects this transcendent compound. Thus in ‘Even Now That Care’, the collaborative effort Mary Sidney Herbert proclaims proudly as ‘our worke’ is one that transcends Philip Sidney’s death and all of history in order to include King David. The line reads as a mirror that pairs ‘the stuffe’ of true faith, with ‘curious thing’: the holy is contrasted with the ‘curious’, but they can also be seen as similar, two sides of the same coin, mirror images of each other. This Sidneian poetics balances heavenly and profane art that is made meaningful through the ‘worke’ of form in true devotion.

Although Mary Sidney Herbert is describing a collaborative writing process, her poem is an evocative testament to the incarnational effect of form, imagined as a combination of ‘Muses’ or perhaps of ‘poetique fire’ to recall Herbert Aston’s telling phrase. In the choice of textile imagery, Mary Sidney Herbert reveals the poetic potential of intertextuality to transform even the most internal and personal genres of verse and devotion, namely the psalm and, in Sidney’s formulation, its close-cousin (or near twin) the lyric. Heather Dubrow has recently taken the concept of gathering as a rich site for exploring how even such forms of subjectivity are related to poetics, and her account is resonant for reading the subjectivity of the prototypical devotional speaker, the psalmist. Dubrow poses the question: ‘Since gathering often results in bringing into conjunction the speaker, listeners, and material objects, how might it challenge commonplaces about internalized and solitary meditation [?]’. By framing the Sidney Psalms as a collaborative act—a gathering of creative effort that threads together the agency of brother, sister, and biblical figure—the Tixall Psalter not only inscribes a multi-voiced and intricate devotion, but also encourages a similarly multifaceted reading act. Gavin Alexander suggests that there is ‘a Sidneian model of reading’ defined ‘as a loving and mutually transformative

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<sup>20</sup> *The Sidney Psalter: The Psalms of Sir Philip and Mary Sidney*, ed. by Hannibal Hamlin, Michael G. Brennan, Margaret P. Hannay, & Noel J. Kinnamon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

process, whereby text and reader both idealize and reshape one another'.<sup>21</sup>

Collaboration reaches beyond the page and invites an interactive reading practice, one that is particularly potent for personal devotion. The Psalter is after all an interwoven text, like the miscellany, and one that shows great skill and intricacy, in yet another kind of gathering.

The Catholic mystical poet Helen More, an English Benedictine nun who worked with Augustine Baker OSB and wrote religious devotions and poetry in the 1620s, imagined her literary devotion as a similarly complex process: she refers to herself as a 'writer gatherer' and describes the devotional exercise as one that merges reading and writing in a dialogic process. Describing her solitary practice, she explains, 'I read what I write of thee' and thus her gathering of devotional exercises—writing her exercises in a processual exercise and then reading her gathered text—initiates deeper mystical collaboration with God.<sup>22</sup> Yet, as Mary Sidney Herbert's verse makes clear, the act of devotion can reach fuller realization through textual acts of communion wherein a reader can 'try on' 'These holy garments'; in Sidney Herbert's words: 'These holy garments each good soule asaies' (63).<sup>23</sup> Ultimately Sidney Herbert specifies an expansive work of form that invites 'each good soule' into the process, a reminder of the centrality of individual experience in devotion and in reading. As the imagery of weaving makes clear, collaboration is a fruitful means to enliven new meaning from multiple perspectives, to fashion a cloth that is intricately embroidered, 'A liverie robe'. Yet, the process of poetry does not end with the production of the text: 'And I the Cloth in both our names present, / A liverie robe to bee bestowed by thee' (33-34).

The Tixall Psalter is evidence of Mary Sidney Herbert's preparations for hosting the Queen on progress, a visit which never occurred but, as Michael Brennan and Bent Juel-Jensen have described, the presentation manuscript is ingrained with the politics of formal gift-exchange.<sup>24</sup> The fact that the manuscript ended up, not with

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<sup>21</sup> Gavin Alexander, 'Loving and Reading in Sidney', *Studies in Philology* 114.1 (Winter 2017): 41.

<sup>22</sup> Helen More, *Spiritual Exercises*, sig. aix; discussed in Heather Wolfe, 'Reading Bells and Loose Papers: Reading and Writing Practices of the English Benedictine Nuns of Cambrai and Paris', in *Early Modern Women's Manuscript Writing: Selected Papers from the Trinity/Trent Colloquium*, eds. Victoria E. Burke and Jonathan Gibson, 135-55 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), at 143. See also Dorothy L. Latz, 'The Mystical Poetry of Dame Gertrude More', *Mystics Quarterly* 16.2 (1990): 66-82.

<sup>23</sup> *OED*, 'assay, v.', 7: 'To try, try on (clothes), *obsolete*.'

<sup>24</sup> Michael G. Brennan, 'The Queen's Proposed Visit to Wilton House in 1599 and the

Queen Elizabeth or at Wilton House, but with Lord Walter Aston at Tixall, is an intriguing quirk of literary history. It has been noted that Lord Aston was friends with Sidney Herbert's son William Herbert and this is most likely the relationship that brought the Psalter to Tixall. This connection draws Tixall, however tangentially, into the literary community of the Sidneys, a relation Herbert Aston celebrates directly in his verse. Though the Psalter did not realize its courtly aspirations, it came to forge a literary connection in a less illustrious and more personal manner, through the sharing of poetry between friends—an example of social verse-exchange not unlike the social life of the coterie poetry among the younger generation of Astons. The connections between Tixall and Penshurst are tied most firmly through Lady Dorothy Shirley née Devereaux, who was the daughter of Robert, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Essex and Frances Walsingham, Philip Sidney's widow. The Devereaux family is most famous in literary history in relation to the Sidney circle, with Essex's sisters Penelope and Dorothy appearing in Sidney's *Arcadia*, and Penelope Devereaux Rich purportedly the inspiration for Stella in *Astrophel & Stella*.<sup>25</sup> Helen Hackett has noted that Lady Dorothy in particular 'may well have fascinated the Aston women because of her connection with court culture...and to the neo-platonic courtly fashion for idealised love and friendship that was cultivated by Henrietta Maria'.<sup>26</sup> Even without these personal connections, the Tixall Psalter presents an intriguing intertext for Aston Fowler's miscellany. The verses collected in the two collaboratively-composed manuscripts bear few similarities, and yet as gathered texts they come to life when read for the weave of

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"Sidney Psalms", *Sidney Journal* 20.1 (2002): 27-53; Bent Juel-Jensen, 'The Tixall Manuscript of Sir Philip Sidney's and the Countess of Pembroke's Paraphrase of the Psalms', *Book Collector* 18 (1969): 222-3.

<sup>25</sup> The association between the Tixall and Sidney circles is also supported through the close proximity of the Earl of Essex's estate Chartley Castle, home to the Devereaux family, to Tixall in Staffordshire. The social ties between the families are mentioned in Constance Aston Fowler's letters. C.f. Constance Aston Fowler to Herbert Aston, Letter, 11 August 1636, in *Tixall Letters*, ed. Arthur Clifford, 91; likely referring to the 3<sup>rd</sup> earl. The family also appeared to have stayed acquainted through the later generations as *Tixall Poetry* records a poem found on the back of a letter directed to Constance Aston (Herbert Aston's daughter) 'at the Lady Marchioness of Clanricard's dowager': the Lord de Burgh, Marquess of Clanricard was Lady Dorothy Shirley's half-brother by her mother's third marriage. Tangentially related, Constance's miscellany includes an elegy for Lady Jane Paulet, Marchioness of Winchester, who was distantly related to the Thimelby's and was the first wife of John Paulet, a Catholic and who married as his second wife Lady Dorothy Shirley's half-sister Honora de Burgh.

<sup>26</sup> Hackett, 'The Aston-Thimelby Circle at Home and Abroad', 142.

form.

This conclusion posits the collection of poetry into manuscript volumes as an act of expansive composition: poetic lineage and the agency of a variety of poets and readers come together not in an eclectic amalgamation but rather a synthesizing process, one that creates intricate, collaborative texts. Thus the literary life of the Tixall circle is a woven tapestry of genres and influences, knit together in the exchange of poetry between friends. Just as Mary Sidney Herbert's text is composed 'in both our names' and cannot be read if we extract either brother or sister, so too is Constance Aston Fowler's miscellany composed in personal, devotional, and literary relationships wrought on the page. The miscellany text is a work of form that invites reading of the 'Sidneian' kind, an act of idealization and transformation. We must read in a collaboration that Herbert Aston defines as part of Tixall poetry's work of form. The form is offered to the reader who is an acknowledged participant: 'By your poetique fire they are refin'd'. My examination of the miscellany, in search of the complex reading practices that structure early modern literary culture, has prompted an awareness of its intertextual processes and expansive work of form. As I hope this work has shown, this expansiveness sets in motion the miscellany's unique readerly engagement, ushering the reader into an intricately laced web of evolving texts.

In reading the miscellany as an expansive and interactive text, I have proposed a method of reading early modern manuscript miscellanies as woven texts, intertextually intricate and often intriguingly open-ended, but in some sense also unified in their own right. Joshua Eckhardt and Daniel Starza Smith have called attention to the critical challenge of miscellanies such as HM904, recognizing the gap in our scholarship of these unique texts: 'While early modernists have perfected methods for reading many of the individual texts and genres that one finds in miscellanies (poems and plays, sermons and speeches, letters and lyrics), only a few of them have begun to determine how to read a miscellany as a whole'.<sup>27</sup> I hope that my study has helped to fill this void and I offer one way of reading the miscellany text as a whole, not only to gain a greater appreciation for the workings of manuscript networks and literary engagements but also to uncover how early

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<sup>27</sup> Joshua Eckhardt and Daniel Starza Smith, editors' Introduction to *Manuscript Miscellanies in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 2.

modern men and women read poetry as a work of form.

To return, then, to my opening question: how did Constance Aston Fowler read poetry? Not exactly as we do, nor like Emma Woodhouse and Harriet Smith, and yet in much the same way. As Michel de Certeau's contemplation of walking in the city describes such everyday practices, 'Their story begins on ground level, with footsteps'.<sup>28</sup> Form might be straightforward or it could be steps in the dark, but it is in reading that it comes alive. Much like climbing to the top of the Empire State Building and looking at the city streets below, a text can be read at a distance. But we can also read closely, tread in others' footsteps, hold Aston Fowler's miscellany in our hands and read as she might have done. For as Robert Lehman notes, when we read closely, 'we feel ourselves moving nearer to...something'.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Randall (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 97.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Lehman, 'Formalism, Mere Form, and Judgment', *New Literary History* 48.2 (Spring 2017): 259.

## Appendix 1- List of Verses

	<b>FIRST LINE(S)</b>	<b>HEADING/TITLE</b>	<b>AUTHOR</b>
1.	Except earth's saint this beautious image shee	Verses presented with a beauteous picture to celestinae	Unsigned, possibly William Pershall
2.	O Iesu, thou my glory Art	None	William Hunnis
3.	Version 1: Iust as the sunn beames,—In midst of day I; Version 2: Iust as the sunn beames—In the midst of Dai	Off the Blessed name, of Iesus,	Unsigned, possibly William Smith
4.	When that æternall word, with sacred loue	On the Passion of our Lord and sauieur Iesus:	Ciphered signature
5.	Dote not on that which may but cause thy woe	None	Unsigned, possibly Robert Herrick
6.	goe hence a way and at thy pertaing know	None	Robert Herrick (tentative attribution)
7.	O Lord direct my hart, direct my soule	None	signed M.W.S., likely William Smith
8.	Amount my soule from earth Awhile	the soulse meditation of heauenly thinges	Unsigned
9.	O god of thy great might	None	Unsigned
10.	Disankered from A blissfull shore	The prodigall childs soule wracke	Robert Southwell
11.	O pleasant port O place of rest	Man to the wound In christis syde	Robert Southwell
12.	Hee canot worthelie be styl'd a louer,	The perfect Louer	Herbert Aston
13.	whilest I here absente languish out my time	None	Herbert Aston
14.	Chast Flames of sacred virgins purely bright	The first Alter:	William Pershall
15.	weepe the Heauens? and not wee	On Celestinaes goinge a Iorney in wett-weather:	Unsigned, possibly William Pershall
16.	see how the little stars in Azure nights	on castaraes sittinge on Primrose banks	Unsigned, doubtfully William Habington
17.	To dye and to dye younge; and to dye full	An Elegy on the death of The Lady Frances Draicott	William Pershall



	FIRST LINE(S)	HEADING/TITLE	AUTHOR
18.	The Heauens knowinge that the tedious way	upon castaries and her sitters goinge A foote in the snow	Unsigned, doubtfully William Habington
19.	Tell me Amyntas why you looke,	An Eglogne between Melibeus and Amyntas:	Unsigned
20.	sleepe the best ease of the most troubled mind,	A discourse of A dreame.	Katherine Thimelby
21.	strange Alterations in my soule	Loue's Meritt	Unsigned
22.	My Lord / When from Th' Antipodes Apollo brings	A congratalation For the happy Retorne of T L:A: From spaine	William Pershall
23.	Ill busied man, why dost thou take such care	None	Henry King
24.	Iust (Seraphina) as a priest doth doubt,	To his M <sup>rs</sup> on her outward Beauty	Herbert Aston
25.	Let folly praise y <sup>t</sup> fancy loues	A Child my Choyse	Robert Southwell
26.	Who liues in loue, loues best to liue	Lifes Death, lous life	Robert Southwell
27.	In meditation where I sate	None	Unsigned
28.	O Blessed God O sauour sweete	None	Unsigned
29.	When Abraham was An old man	None	Unsigned
30.	A certaine king married A sonne	None	Unsigned
31.	My wretched soule with sinne opprest	None	Unsigned
32.	O Christ that Art the highest	None	Unsigned
33.	whilst here eclipsed From those hapy beames	None	Herbert Aston
34.	Cupid did crye his mother chidd him so	The Complement	Unsigned, doubtfully William Habington
35.	I striue to loue with out reward in vaine	None	Herbert Aston
36.	Eyes gaze no more; as yet you may	None	Unsigned
37.	Death come thy selfe and let thy Image sleepe	on the Death of the Duke of Bucchingham	Signed Mr A T
38.	To weepe were poore, thy most unhappy fate	None	Unsigned
39.	Why did you fayne both sight's and teares to gayne	of uncontancy	Signed The L: D: S: for Dorothy Shirley

	FIRST LINE(S)	HEADING/TITLE	AUTHOR
40.	If you would know the reason why	None	Unsigned
41.	what goodly ghost besprinckt with Aprill dew	An Elegie on the Lady Iane Paulet marchionesse of Winchester.	Signed B I for Ben Jonson
42.	Tell me (Lucinda) since my fate	None	Signed M <sup>r</sup> T C, likely Thomas Carey
43.	why should I hide my sorrow & why these feares	on the Departure of two Louers in Teares:	Signed M <sup>r</sup> G B
44.	canne Teares meete with affections flame	on Louers Teares	Signed S. W. P., likely William Pershall
45.	I know your hart cannot so guilty bee,	on black paches	Signed M <sup>r</sup> H T, possibly Henry Thimelby
46.	Mistres godmorow, tell you please to Rise	None	Unsigned
47.	A louer if beloue'd, is such a state	None	Unsigned
48.	Accept thou shrine of my dead saint	D K on the Death of his Wife	Henry King
49.	Euer most Honour'd Sister tis' to you,	To the Lady Mary Aston.	Herbert Aston
50.	Lett not thy grones force echo from her caue,	To the honourable G T	Signed M WH for William Habington
51.	s <sup>f</sup> since you are profest to dwell	The ansure to these uerses Made by M <sup>rs</sup> K T	Katherine Thimelby
52.	Infuse in to me all your choicest straines,	To My Honer'd sister G A	Herbert Aston
53.	Madem you say I am sad I ansure noe	upon the L D saying K T could be sad in her company	Signed M K T for Katherine Thimelby
54.	cosen pardon me if I mistowke	The L. D. ansure	Signed The L. D. S. for Dorothy Shirley
55.	with bowed thoughts lowe as this hollow cell	An elegie on his Mrs death	Unsigned, possibly Philip King
56.	O loue whose power and might could neuer be w <sup>th</sup> stood	None	Unsigned
57.	The muses fairest light, in no darke time	A Epitaph on ben Iohnson	Signed M. S. C.
58.	I saw two swans come proudly downe the streame	A dreame	Signed M <sup>r</sup> R F for Richard Fanshawe

	<b>FIRST LINE(S)</b>	<b>HEADING/TITLE</b>	<b>AUTHOR</b>
59.	make mee thy fancy and if I proue not	A true loues knott that was giuen As a fancy for a newyears gift.,	Herbert Aston (but signed H T)
60.	Celia hath for a brothers absence sworne	None	Signed M <sup>r</sup> R F for Richard Fanshaw
61.	sometimes by Aprill arrogantly deckt	A stranslation	Signed L W A for Walter Aston
62.	When by sad fate from hence I summon'd am	None	Owen Feltham
63.	With such variety and dainty skill	The nightingall	Richard Fanshawe
64.	The halfe staru'd lambe warm'd in her mothers wooll	The Constant Louers A pastorall Eglogue	Signed T. R. for Thomas Randolph
65.	But tell mee Dorus since no Obiecte here	A Pastorall Egloune on the death of Lawra	Signed SWP for William Pershall

## Appendix 2 - Collation at the time of binding

Note: all transcriptions in Aston Fowler's hand except those marked (\*)

GATHERING	FOLIO(S)	VERSES	NOTES
<b>A</b>	endpaper/paste-down + fols. 1-3		
<b>B</b>	fols. 4-7	*2 'O Iesu'; 3 'Off the Blessed name'*	Fols.4-6 cast-on blank; fol.7v Smith's hand, 'Off the Blessed Name' copied twice.*See Ch. 1.
<b>C</b>	fols. 8-11	4 'On the Passion'	
<b>D</b>	fol. 12 + 3	4 'On the Passion' cont'd	Fol.12r-v 'On the Passion'; 3 leaves removed.
<b>E</b>	3 + fols. 13	missing	3 leaves removed; fol. 13r blank.
<b>F</b>	4 fols.	missing	4 missing leaves.
<b>G</b>	4 fols.	missing	4 missing leaves.
<b>H</b>	1 + fols. 14-16	7/8 'O Lord direct my hart'	Missing leaf contained original transcription of 'O Lord direct my hart' lines 1-21; fol.16 cast-off blank.

GATHERING	FOLIO(S)	VERSES	NOTES
<b>I</b>	fols. 17-20		
<b>J</b>	fols. 21-22 + 1 + fol. 23		1 leaf removed between fols. 22 and 23.
<b>K</b>	fols. 24-27	13 'The Perfect Louer'; 14 'Whilest I here absente'; 15 'The first Alter'; 16 'On Celesteinae's goinge'; 17 'On Castaraes sittinge'	Fol. 24r cast-on blank.
<b>L</b>	fols. 28-31	18 'An Elegy'; 19 'Upon castaraes and her sisters'; 20 'An Eglogne'; 21 'A discourse of A dreame'; 22 'Loue's Meritt'	Fol. 31v: change of ink for 'A discourse of a dreame' and again for 'Loue's Meritt', lines 1- 11.
<b>M</b>	fols. 32-35	22 'Loue's Meritt' cont'd; 23 'A congratation'; 25 'To his Mrs'	Fol. 33r: blank space left; fol. 34v: change of ink; fol. 35 cast- off blank.
<b>N</b>	fols. 36-39		
<b>O</b>	fols. 40-43		
<b>P</b>	fols. 44-47	34 'Whilst here eclipsed'	Fols. 44-45 cast- on blank; fol. 46r blank, 47v blank.
<b>Q</b>	fols. 48-51	36 'I striue to loue'; 37 'Eyes gaze no more'; 38 'On the Death of the Duke'	Fol. 48v: change of ink, script cramped to fit page. Fol. 49r: change of ink, excessive bleed through.

GATHERING	FOLIO(S)	VERSES	NOTES
<b>R</b>	fols. 52-55	38 'On the Death of the Duke' cont'd; 39 'To weepe were poore'	Fols. 53-55 cast-off blank.
<b>S</b>	fols. 56-59		
<b>T</b>	fols. 60-63		
<b>U</b>	fols. 64-67		
<b>V</b>	fols. 68-71		
<b>W</b>	fols. 72-75		
<b>X</b>	fols. 76-79		
<b>Y</b>	fols. 80-83		
<b>Z</b>	fols. 84-87		
<b>AA</b>	fols. 88-91		
<b>BB</b>	fols. 92-95		
<b>CC</b>	fols. 96-99		
<b>DD</b>	fols. 100-103		
<b>EE</b>	fols. 104-107		
<b>FF</b>	fols. 108-11		
<b>GG</b>	fols. 112-15		
<b>HH</b>	fols. 116-19		
<b>II</b>	fols. 120-23		
<b>JJ</b>	fols. 124-27		
<b>KK</b>	fols. 128-31		
<b>LL</b>	fols. 132-34 + 1		
<b>MM</b>	fols. 135-37 + 1	40 'Of unconstancy'; 41 'If you would know'; 42 'An Elegie on the Lady Iane Paulet'	Fol. 135 blank; fol. 137r: change of ink for 'An Elegie'. 1 leaf removed.
<b>NN</b>	fols. 138-41	42 'An Elegie', cont'd	Fols. 139v, 140-41 cast-off blank.
<b>OO</b>	fols. 142-45	43 'Tell me (Lucinda)'; 44 'On the Departure'; 45 'On Louers Teares'; 46 'On black paches'	Fols. 142, 143r cast-on blank

<b>GATHERING</b>	<b>FOLIO(S)</b>	<b>VERSES</b>	<b>NOTES</b>
<b>PP</b>	fols. 146-49	46 'On black paches' cont'd; 47 'Mistres godmorrow'; 48 'A louer if beloue'd'; 49 'D K on the Death of his Wife'	
<b>QQ</b>	fols. 150-53	50 'To the Lady Mary Aston'; 51 'To the honourable G T'; 52 'The ansure to these'	
<b>RR</b>	fols. 154-57	52 'The ansure to these' cont'd; 53 'To My Honer'd sister G A'	Fol. 155r: change of ink for 'To My Honer'd sister'
<b>SS</b>	fols. 158-62	53 'To My Honer'd sister G A' cont'd; 54 'Upon the L D saying'; 55 'The L D ansure'	Change of ink in 'Upon the L D saying, in the middle of the final line on fol. 158r. Fols. 159v, 160-62 cast-off blank.
<b>TT</b>	fols. 162-65		
<b>UU</b>	fols. 166-69		
<b>VV</b>	fols. 170-73		
<b>WW</b>	fols. 174-77		
<b>XX</b>	fols. 178-81		
<b>YY</b>	fols. 182-85	56 'An elegie on his Mrs'; 58 'An Epitaph on ben Iohnson'; 59 'A dreame'	Fol. 182r blank. Fol. 185r: top of page blank, change of ink for 'An Epitaph'

GATHERING	FOLIO(S)	VERSES	NOTES
<b>ZZ</b>	fols. 186-89	59 'A dreame'; 60 'A true loues knott'; 61 'Celia hath for a brothers absence sworne'; 62 'A translation'; 63 'When by sad fate'; 64 'The nightingall'; 65 'The Constant Louers'	
<b>AAA</b>	fols. 190-93	65 'The Constant Louers' cont'd	
<b>BBB</b>	fols. 194-97	65 'The Constant Louers' cont'd	Fols. 196-97 cast-off blank
<b>CCC</b>	fols. 198-200 + endpaper		



## Appendix 3 – Current collation

Note: post-binding transcriptions in *italics* for Aston Fowler's hand, **bold** for William Smith's hand, and underlined for William Pershall's hand. Transcriptions marked (\*) are inconclusive.

GATHERING	FOLIO(S)	VERSES	NOTES
<b>A</b>	endpaper/paste-down + fols. 1-3		
<b>B</b>	fols. 4-7	<i>1 'Verses presented'; *2 'O Iesu'; 3 'Off the Blessed name'*</i>	Fol. 6r: 'Verses presented messily copied in Aston Fowler's hand. Fol. 6v blank. Fol. 7r-v: Smith's first transcriptions. 'Off the Blessend Name copied twice. *See Chapter 1.
<b>C</b>	fols. 8-11	4 'On the Passion	
<b>D</b>	fol. 12 + 3	4 'On the Passion' cont'd;	Fol. 12r-v 'On the Passion'; 3 leaves removed.
<b>E</b>	3 + fols. 13	<i>5 'Dote note'; 6 'Goe hence a way'; 7/8 'O Lord direct my hart</i>	3 leaves removed; fol. 13r 'Dote note' and 'Goe hence' copied in Aston Fowler's hand. Fol. 13v: lines 1-21 'O Lord direct my hart recopied by Aston Fowler.
<b>F</b>	4 fols.		4 leaves removed.
<b>G</b>	4 fols.		4 leaves removed.

GATHERING	FOLIO(S)	VERSES	NOTES
<b>H</b>	1 + fols. 14-16	7/8 'O Lord direct my hart'; <b>9 'The soulse meditation'</b>	1 leaf removed. Fols. 14-15 'O Lord direct my hart'; fol. 16 'The soulse meditation'.
<b>I</b>	fols. 17-20	<b>9 'The soulse meditation' cont'd; 10 'O God of thy great might'</b>	
<b>J</b>	fols. 21-22 + 1 + fol. 23	<b>10 'O God of thy great might' cont'd; 11 'The prodigall childs soule wracke'; 12 'Man to the wound'</b>	1 leaf removed in the middle of 'The prodigall childs soule wracke.
<b>K</b>	fols. 24-27	<b>12 'Man to the wound' cont'd; 13 'The Perfect Louer'; 14 'Whilest I here absente'; 15 'The first Alter'; 16 'On Celesteinae's goinge'; 17 'On Castaraes sittinge'</b>	
<b>L</b>	fols. 28-31	18 'An Elegy'; 19 'Upon castaraes and her sisters'; 20 'An Eglogne'; 21 'A discourse of A dreame'; 22 'Loue's Meritt'	Fol. 31v: change of ink for 'A discourse of a dreame' and again for 'Loue's Meritt', lines 1-11.

GATHERING	FOLIO(S)	VERSES	NOTES
<b>M</b>	fols. 32-35	22 'Loue's Meritt' cont'd; 23 'A congratulation'; 24 <i>'Ill busied man'</i> ; 25 'To his Mrs'; 26 'A Child my Choyce'; 27 'Lifes Death, lous life'	Fol. 33r: blank space left; fol. 34v: change of ink; fol. 35 cast-off blank.
<b>N</b>	fols. 36-39	27 'Lifes Death, lous life' cont'd; 28 'In meditation where I sate'; 29 'O Blessed God O sauieur sweete'; 30 'When Abrahan was An old man'	
<b>O</b>	fols. 40-43	30 'When Abraham was An old man' cont'd; 31 'A certaine king'	
<b>P</b>	fols. 44-47	31 'A certaine king' cont'd; 32 'My wretched soule'; 33 'O Christ that Art the highest; 34 'Whilst here eclipsed'	Fols. 44-46r Smith's poems; fol. 46v: 'Whilst here eclipsed', change of ink for 'The Complement', 47v blank.
<b>Q</b>	fols. 48-51	36 'I striue to loue'; 37 'Eyes gaze no more'; 38 'On the Death of the Duke'	Fol. 48v: change of ink, script cramped to fit page. Fol. 49r: change of ink, excessive bleed through.
<b>R</b>	fols. 52-55	38 'On the Death of the Duke' cont'd; 39 'To weepe were poore'	Fols. 53-55 cast-off blank. End of first section.

GATHERING	FOLIO(S)	VERSES	NOTES
<b>MM</b>	fols. 135-37 + 1	40 'Of unconstancy'; 41 'If you would know'; 42 'An Elegie on the Lady Iane Paulet'	Fol. 135 blank; fol. 137r: change of ink for 'An Elegie'. 1 leaf removed.
<b>NN</b>	fols. 138-41	42 'An Elegie', cont'd	Fols. 139v, 140-41 cast-off blank.
<b>OO</b>	fols. 142-45	43 'Tell me (Lucinda)'; 44 'On the Departure'; 45 'On Louers Teares'; 46 'On black paches'	Fols. 142, 143r cast-on blank
<b>PP</b>	fols. 146-49	46 'On black paches' cont'd; 47 'Mistres godmorrow'; 48 'A louer if beloue'd'; 49 'D K on the Death of his Wife'	
<b>QQ</b>	fols. 150-53	50 'To the Lady Mary Aston'; 51 'To the honourable G T'; 52 'The ansure to these'	
<b>RR</b>	fols. 154-57	52 'The ansure to these' cont'd; 53 'To My Honer'd sister G A'	Fol. 155r: change of ink for 'To My Honer'd sister'

GATHERING	FOLIO(S)	VERSES	NOTES
SS	fols. 158-62	53 'To My Honer'd sister G A' cont'd; 54 'Upon the L D saying'; 55 'The L D ansure'	Change of ink in 'Upon the L D saying, in the middle of the final line on fol. 158r. Fols. 159v, 160-62 cast-off blank.
TT	fols. 162-65		
UU	fols. 166-69		
VV	fols. 170-73		
WW	fols. 174-77		
XX	fols. 178-81		
YY	fols. 182-85	56 'An elegie on his Mrs'; 57 ' <i>O loue whose power and might</i> '; 58 'An Epitaph on ben Iohnson'; 59 'A dreame'	Fol. 182r blank. Fol. 185r: 'O loue whose power and might' added by Aston Fowler into blank space at top of page; change of ink for 'An Epitaph'
ZZ	fols. 186-89	59 'A dreame'; 60 'A true loues knott'; 61 'Celia hath for a brothers absence sworne'; 62 'A translation'; 63 'When by sad fate'; 64 'The nightingall'; 65 'The Constant Louers'	

GATHERING	FOLIO(S)	VERSES	NOTES
AAA	fols. 190-93	65 'The Constant Louers' cont'd	
BBB	fols. 194-97	65 'The Constant Louers' cont'd; <u>66 'A Pastorall Egloune on the death of Lawra</u>	'A Pastorall Egloune' copied in William Pershall's hand.
CCC	fols. 198-200 + endpaper	<u>66 'A Pastorall Egloune on the death of Lawra'</u> cont'd	

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