

Manuscript Miscellanies in Early Modern England. Joshua Eckhardt and Daniel Starza Smith, eds.

Material Readings in Early Modern Culture. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014. xviii + 252 pp. \$119.95.

For many years, when English manuscript miscellanies from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were studied, they tended to be considered less as objects of interest in themselves than as unreliable witnesses to poems by major writers. With the flowering of manuscript studies over the past few decades, however, has come both a less dismissive view of their textual significance for editors of canonical verse and a hearty,

sleeves-rolled-up willingness to engage with the fascinating ins and outs of these frequently very complex artifacts. The essays in this lucid and engaging collection valuably advance this work. Edited by two of the most brilliant of the younger generation of early modern manuscript scholars, it contains essays on a wide range of prose and verse miscellanies, each essay embodying the rationale of *Material Readings in Early Modern Culture* (the series in which the book appears) as “a forum for studies that consider the material forms of texts as part of an investigation into early modern culture.” In common with much recent work, each piece in the collection is acutely sensitive to the materiality of the manuscripts on which it focuses. Two extra elements, however, make *Manuscript Miscellanies in Early Modern England* exceptional: the flexible and undogmatic way — often provisional, never woolly — in which these material features are analyzed, and the readiness with which the relationship between these features and wider questions — of manuscript or text genre, of scholarly and editorial methodology, of cultural function and literary interpretation — are probed. Equally impressive is the lucidity with which most essays present and analyze complex bibliographical phenomena: potentially indigestible paleographical and codicological arguments are laid out with exemplary thoroughness and perspicuity, the result, presumably, of a great deal of conscientious editorial work.

The essays deal with a wide range of important issues elegantly woven into detailed and intriguing case studies. Joshua Eckhardt and Joel Swann confront the often bewildering indeterminacy of the order in which the constituent parts of many miscellanies were copied, the former looking at the relationship between Camden’s *Remaines* and the work of an unknown scribe on Folger MS V.a.103 and Nottingham University MS Portland PwV 37, the latter at epigrams in the Dr. Farmer Chetham’s Manuscript and Rosenbach MS 1083/15. Eckhardt has important things to say about the influence of printed texts on manuscript compilation and the grouping of thematic blocks in miscellanies, topics also addressed in Victoria E. Burke’s essay on the sources of Katherine Butler’s commonplace book (St. Paul’s Cathedral MS 52 D.14). Early modern terms for manuscript collections are surveyed by the editors in their introduction — on the word *miscellany* — and by Piers Brown on Donne’s use of the term *rhapsody*. In a particularly lovely piece of reconstructive scholarship, on Donne’s satires in the Conway Papers, Daniel Starza Smith reminds us of the importance of bearing in mind the dependence of miscellanies on preexistent minicollections or “separates.” The variety of different ways in which manuscript miscellany texts were read is vividly evoked by James Daybell, writing on the rationales for early modern letter books (a reprint of a chapter from his recent *The Material Letter in Early Modern England* [2012]), and by Noah Millstone, whose essay focuses on the popular genre of political prophecies. Lara M. Crowley uses the telling example of the attributions in British Library MS Stowe 962 to propose a second look at the *dubia* of canonical authors. At the heart of the book are two linked essays by Helen Hackett and Cedric C. Brown, identifying as one of the scribes of Constance Aston Fowler’s well-known verse miscellany the Jesuit missionary William Southerne (known as Smith), and investigating the biographical, religious,

literary, paleographical, and codicological parameters of his work in the Aston Fowler miscellany and elsewhere. Broader questions about the influence of manuscript culture on the development of English literature — in particular, the question of whether or not “entrepreneurial” manuscript publication really did begin in the early seventeenth century or existed earlier in the early modern period — are raised in a stimulating foreword by H. R. Woudhuysen. The book is nicely produced and its usefulness is significantly augmented by the inclusion of a manuscript index.

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