

Sir Philip Wodehouse's Pantheon of Renaissance Poets

In 1973 Leeds University Library purchased for the Brotherton Collection a manuscript of poetry composed by Sir Philip Wodehouse (1608–1681), third Baronet, of Kimberley in Norfolk, who was MP for Norfolk 1654–8 and for Thetford in the Restoration parliament.¹ Wodehouse's manuscript comprises around 365 pages, including about 178 pages in Sir Philip's hand, consisting of drafts and fair copies of his own poems and translations; and about 187 pages of verse by his son Edmund. Sir Philip's special interest was in translation, particularly from classical and neo-Latin poets and philosophers, from whom he selected a variety of moral reflections: his portion of the manuscript includes verse adaptations of Augustine, Claudian, Horace, Martial, Ovid, Petronius, Seneca, Tibullus, and Virgil, poems from the Greek Anthology, and versions of Francis Bacon. There is also a section (fols 104v–108v) of quotations and translations from the immensely popular Latin epigrams of John Owen (c.1560–1622). Generally, Latin quotations on the left-hand pages face Wodehouse's own English translations and associated reflections on the right. Appropriately, these poems are described on the title page (fol. 2r) as 'This forrest of gentiile philosophy', 'forrest' being an echo of Ben Jonson's collections 'The Forest' and 'The Underwood', and behind them Statius' *Silvae*. In addition, there are several original compositions, notably 'A Satirical Flash', a pungent, epigrammatic satire on contemporary mores written in 1670.² Wodehouse's characteristic verse form is the couplet, but although some at least of the pieces date from the Restoration, there is no sign of the smoothness pioneered by Denham and Waller, and perfected with such fine variation by Dryden. Rather, Wodehouse's couplets belong with the writing of an earlier generation, having the deliberate awkwardness – deemed appropriate for satire – found in the work of writers such as Marston or Hall. Nor does he share the unbuttoned ethos found in much Restoration verse: his is uniformly a serious stance towards the world. Several of his poems exhibit revisions, some of them quite extensive, and these often take the form of alternative readings inserted between the lines, or new versions

of lines and passages added in the margins; sometimes there is no way of telling which readings represent Wodehouse's preferred final thoughts.

Among his original compositions is an untitled poem in praise of poetry, which exists in both a Latin and an English version (fols 177v–179r and 179v–181r respectively). It is remarkable for several reasons. First, it presents a pantheon of English poets, including previously unrecorded allusions to Shakespeare and Jonson, and thus both adds to the literary record of such writers and indicates the relative standing of poets from the Elizabethan and Jacobean period in the eyes of a conservative man of letters in the early Restoration period. There are some notable omissions: there is no mention of the mid-century poets Cowley, Denham, Milton, and Waller, nor of the distinctive new voice of Restoration poetry, Dryden. It is a decidedly retrospective canon, and one wonders whether Wodehouse deliberately excluded living writers from his list. If he did, that was not for want of interest or respect, for on the following page (fol. 181v) we find these lines on Katherine Philips, dated December 1664:

Dec. 1664. An Epigram on M^{rs} Philips upon
occasion of Mr J Hubts expression of [teeming to Apollo].³

Chast Daphne now may justly ieaious grow⁴
Apollo doth, anothe^r Mistres owe,
[Our English Sappho] Philis is her name
so well by him belov'd, as she's his Dame,
She ha's by him conceiv'd, & brought him forth,
an offspring, worthy of its sacred birth.
so masculine, so noble, so divine
as do's our sexe, & all her own outshyne.
Then Daphne be refresh't, & think't no scorne
to yeild thy selfe, her laurell to adorne.

Another remarkable feature of the poem is that it begins its roll-call with neo-Latin humanists, Scaliger, Lipsius, Barclay, and Heinsius, along with the philosopher Bacon and the writer of Latin history of the reign of Elizabeth I, William Camden. John Owen's Latin epigrams (first printed in England as *Epigrammatum Libri Tres* (1607), and often expanded and reprinted at home and abroad) have now dropped out of sight, but were much admired in his day. Wodehouse's special interests as a translator also lead him to single out Chapman, the translator of Homer, and Sylvester, the translator of Du Bartas. Only then does Wodehouse turn to enumerate poets who wrote in the vernacular. This is a view of poetry as *poiesis*, as 'making', including literary prose works, and it seems that learning is the one quality most prized by Wodehouse in the writers whom he lists. In keeping with this serious view of poetry, Jonson is noted for being Camden's scholar, and for his own 'learned rage', while Shakespeare is recorded as one of Apollo's 'lighter servants', the genial

poet of love and laughter. ‘Genial’ here means not ‘cheerful, jovial, kindly’ (*OED* 5, first attested in 1746) but ‘Pertaining to “genius” or natural disposition; natural’ (*OED* 6, first attested 1646); Wodehouse is therefore part of the seventeenth-century tradition of seeing Shakespeare as the naturally gifted poet rather than the laborious or learned craftsman.⁵

The two versions, English and Latin, follow each other fairly closely, though there are occasionally differences of emphasis. Writing of Sidney, Wodehouse puns doubly on *Sidneius* / *sidus* / *Stella*:

. . . *Sydneius*, nobile Sydus
 Lucidior nobis, quam sua Stella sibj: (fol. 178v)
 (Sidney, that noble star, brighter to us than his Stella was to him)

whereas in English the pun is necessarily handled differently:

SYDNEY, who shyenes in his Arcadia farr
 more bright then STELLA, though a wandring starr. (lines 69–70)

And the pun on ‘Shakespeare’ in English,

Yea SHAKE-SPEARE shall thy geniall muse be heard
 so long, as love or laughter shake’s a beard. (lines 81–2)

is also attempted in Latin, *quatit-hastam* being a literal translation of ‘Shakespeare’:

Comicus Aoniam festivis qui quatit-hastam
 viribus, huic hederæ tempora festa ligant. (fol. 179r)
 (The comic [writer] who shakes a Boeotian spear
 with witty strength, for him ivy will bind his witty brow.)

Comedy is, for Wodehouse, a decidedly secondary talent, and this, apparently, is what Shakespeare exclusively represents for him.

Here is a transcript of the English version, which is untitled. Both the Latin and the English texts are written in Sir Philip’s hand, and the Latin version is endorsed ‘*Patris mei*’ (fol. 117v) in the hand of his son Edmund. It is not always possible to distinguish upper from lower case letters in Wodehouse’s hand. Wodehouse’s occasional revisions are recorded in the notes.

Hee that Apolloe’s learned priests disdayn’s [fol. 179v]
 Shew’s how unlearned, he himselfe remayn’s
 Who them neglects to love, or to advaunce,
 is some ignoble child of ignorance.
 Gods sacred offspring Poetts bee, & They 5
 Are sent down hither, to keep Holy-day—
 And not to worke, their witts, to purchase mould
 or to profane them for ungodly gould.
 No pelfe, no pompe, or state do^s touch their thought

no styles of honour, now w th money bought	10
No fame, by buff-coat Mars, or duelling W ^{ch} . are but feats of valiaunt murdering—	
No lawyers lordshipp gott by brawling loud for fees, to make their upstart issue proud.	
This bubbles they contemne; and covett this	15
in easye cares to eate the bread of peace— To live in leysure, & in harmless rest For safe repose a Poetts soule do th feast.	
Such did y ^e great Achaeus once enjoye when he eternized twice ruin'd Troye—	20
Such also had Ausonian Maro , when his lofty Muse did sing of Armes & Men	
Such old Ascraeus , fruitfully hadst Thou when first y ^e peasants rude th ^u taught'st to plow.	
Sweet Sulmo's Poet had y ^e same, when hee those fables sung that sweet'n poesye	25
Peers of Parnassus! O how are you blest to you, the God of peace ha's giv'n this rest.	
Who likewise to yo ^r learned words did give	[fol. 180r]
so strong a Genius, as do's make y ^m live.	30
On others he such Powr's do's not bestow but lett's them like to Vegetables grow—	
Which spend their duller sapp, in earths dry lust & wither'd fall into forgotten dust.	
But you! whose brayns are water'd w th y ^e spring	35
whence Pegasus up to y ^e heav'n took wing The laurell of yo ^r learned brows shall flourish so long as fertile soyle a plant shall nourish.	
O how absurd it is to think the fame of Pyles or Sepulchers will keep our name—	40
Wher be thos Pyramids of Persian stone? Great Alexanders golden roofs are gone.	
Tarentum's mighty Coloss is deface't The Mother-killing King's proud towr's are race't	
So are y ^e sev'n vast wonders of y ^e world	45
Tyme ha's those structures into ruine hurl'd So low as Nothing now of them remayne but what y ^e Muses in strong lynes retayne—	

19. Achaeus] Greek, i.e. Homer

21. Ausonian Maro] Italian Virgil

23. Ascraeus] from Ascra, i.e. Hesiod

25. Sulmo's Poet] Ovid

So thus y ^e firmest works of hand decay when those w ^{ch} learned heads compose, doe stay.	50
Stay, & w th stand the most impartiall pow'r of age & Death, w ^{ch} all things else devowr.	
What more than humane skill high Poetts had for mortall men immortall tombs w ^{ch} made—	
Such did Maeonius for Achilles buyld Such for Æneas Virgill has compyl'd	[fol. 180v] 55
Theis two stupendious wonders thou mayst call O Fame sound thes two then in stead of all.	
Yett mayst thou not omitt theis of our age who have been Actours on y ^e Muses stage.	60
Great Scaliger who tymes old style correct's Just' Lipsius , who quick & terse phrase affect's.	
Barclay below'd for liquid Poesyes and Heynsius happy in smooth Elegyes.	
Thes forraine witts their age w th note renowne Nor do's our Brittain want her laureat crown.	65
Full SPENCER , who w th flowing vers invite's Heroick harts to vertue w th delights	
SYDNEY , who shynes in his Arcadia farr more bright then STELLA , though a wandring starr.	70
The happy works of RALEIGH'S hapless head tell's storyes of y ^e world though he be dead.	
BACON is honor'd for his able parts In learnings lore advauncing learned Arts	
The Latine Annalls of ELIZAE'S days give's th' authour CAMBDEN universall prayse.	75
His scholler JOHNSTON ha's adorn'd o ^r stage w th style Dramatic steep't in learned rage.	
Of Phoebus lighter servants wee have choyce w ^{ch} sing sweet notes although in lower voyce.	80
Yea SHAKE-SPEARE shall thy geniall muse be heard so long, as love or laughter shake's a beard.	[fol. 181r]
Drayton thy dittyes tuneless will not lye untill y ^t Albions springs & streams be drye—	
Owens soft Epigramms some prayse will lend unto himself, our Nation, & his friend.	85
Chapmans translation grace w th us will find To whom Greek Homers grace before was blind.	

55. **Maeonius**] Homer

62. terse] written above 'cute' (i.e. acute, sharp-witted; *OED*'s first example is from 1731).

So Sylvester for his converting paynes of BARTAS weeks an age of creditt gayn's DANIEL & MARLO'S love-lays will be readd by amo'rous youth, till it be married.	90
Yet many laurell boughs I might bring forth W ^{ch} have grown up in o ^r cold British North Such as if hotter Italy or Fraunce cou'd shew for theirs: O how would they advaunce? The glory of their soyle? and how reward them w th rich crowns of eminent regard. For whylom Poetts were Auspicious things the gracious care of Captains & of Kings Whose Vertue w th out Verse they knew had gone to sleep for ever in oblivion —	95
But those, whos worth a learned Muse enframe's shall flourish till that All things fade in flames And therefore All must hono ^r Poetts Art W ^{ch} give's aeternall honour to desert.	100 105

University of Leeds

PAUL HAMMOND

Notes

- 1 The manuscript was purchased at a Sotheby's sale on 20 November 1973, and is now Leeds University Library Brotherton Collection MS Lt 40. For various facts about Wodehouse and his manuscript I am indebted to the account in the catalogue which accompanied the sale. Details of the contents of the manuscript will shortly be provided on the BCMSV database, accessible from the web pages of the department of Special Collections, Leeds University Library. The manuscript is quoted by kind permission of the Librarian, Leeds University Library.
- 2 A modernized text of 'A Satirical Flash' is printed in *Restoration Literature: An Anthology*, ed. Paul Hammond (Oxford, 2002), pp. 109–10; and 'A Kind of Translation', a philosophical meditation based on Claudian's *In Rufinum*, appears on pp. 370–1 of the same volume.
- 3 I have been unable to trace this allusion. The square brackets in the title and in line 3 are in the MS, and serve as quotation marks.
- 4 'Green' has been written above 'Chast', and 'yellow' above 'iealous'.
- 5 For this view of Shakespeare see T. W. Baldwin, *William Shakspeare's Small Latine & Lesse Greeke*, 2 vols (Urbana, 1944), I, 1–52, and Paul Hammond, 'The Janus Poet: Dryden's Critique of Shakespeare', forthcoming in the proceedings of the Yale Tercentenary Conference on Dryden, edited by Claude Rawson, Delaware University Press, 2003.

90. an age] written above 'some wealth'.

PAUL HAMMOND

Address for Correspondence

Professor Paul Hammond, School of English, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT, UK,
e-mail: p.f.hammond@leeds.ac.uk