



Richard Tottel: Miscellany

(1557)

Matthias Bauer (Eberhard-Karls Universitat Tubingen); Sarah Briest (Eberhard-Karls Universitat Tubingen); [Sara Rogalski \(Eberhard-Karls Universitat Tubingen\)](#); [Angelika Zirker \(Eberhard-Karls Universitat Tubingen\)](#)

Genre: Poem collection, Sonnet. Country: England.

Richard Tottel's *Miscellany* is an early and extremely influential English poetry anthology, first published in 1557 under the title *Songes and Sonnets*. By 1585 it had gone into seven editions; the imprint then passed from Tottel to John Windet (in 1585), and to Robert Robinson for the ninth and final edition in 1587.

The *Miscellany* was mainly targeted, as Holton and MacFaul suggest, at “Inns of Court students, who seem to have been as much in need of the flowers of courtly rhetoric and verse embodied therein as they were of legal textbooks” (Holton and MacFaul ix). Tottel supposedly also used the miscellany to “test [...] the waters for a larger trade market”, attempting to find out whether or not poetry “would [...] sell” (Holton and MacFaul xi-x). In particular, he wanted to find a larger public for a poetry collection in the vernacular, an issue addressed by Tottel himself in his Preface “To the reder”: “It resteth now (gentle reder) that thou thinke it not evil don, to publishe, to the honor of the english tong, and for profit of the studious of Englishe eloquence, those workes which the ungentle horders up of such tresure have heretofore envied the[e]” (Holton and McFaul 3). This last statement offers the appealing promise that readers will be shown things previously kept from them (see Holton and MacFaul x; and Warner 1-26).

The collection turned out to be a major publishing success: it is, for example, mentioned by Abraham Slender, a character in Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1602): “I had rather than forty shillings I had my Book of Songs and Sonnets here” (1.1.183-84). The second edition appeared a mere few weeks after the first, albeit with some major changes (Marquis's edition provides extensive lists of these in the appendix). The first edition, published in June 1557, contained altogether 271 poems, with a first section of 40 poems attributed to Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, followed by 97 attributed to Thomas Wyatt (with #58 potentially not written by him, see Holton and McFaul, 399n; the numbering of the poems follows their edition), a third section with 40 poems by Nicholas Grimald, and ending with a section of 94 poems titled “Uncertain Authors” (see <http://versemiscellaniesonline.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/texts/tottels-miscellany/>). The effect of the publication was to give prominence to Wyatt and Surrey, even though the editor of the miscellany has offended subsequent generations of readers by botching Wyatt's metre and turning it into regular iambic pentameter. See in particular the famous lyric “They flee from me, that sometime did me seke” (#57).

The second edition (which would be the basis for the ensuing editions during the Elizabethan period) contained 280 poems that were, however, arranged differently. While the section with Surrey's poems remained largely unchanged, with #27 moved from the section by “uncertain aucthors”, one poem fewer was attributed to Wyatt

than previously, and the poems by “Uncertain Auctours” now came third, with an increased number of 133. This left Grimald last, with the number of poems reduced to ten, and the attribution abridged to a mere “Songes written by N. G.”. Holton and McFaul suggest that the minimizing of his contribution, with only his poems on “moral and/or on classical subjects” remaining and his “more personal poems, such as the poem to his mother, [...] omitted after the first edition” (see their Introduction xxi), was either Grimald’s own decision, “perhaps out of modesty” (xxi), or, they note, “Tottel may have decided that it was prudent to downplay Grimald’s presence in the collection on the grounds of his apostasy” (xxi). They also link his earlier imprisonment to the reduction of his share of poems (see Introduction xx), but this is rather unlikely: it was as early as 1555, i.e. two years prior to the publication of the first edition of the anthology in which he loomed large with as many poems as Surrey, that he “fell under the suspicion of Mary’s government and was sent to the Marshalsea”, where he “abandoned protestantism” and was subsequently pardoned (“Grimald, Nicholas”, *DNB* 8: 692). The reasons for the changes to the second edition remain obscure, and in the *ODNB* his imprisonment is no longer explicitly dated at 1555 – Brennan refers to “a letter of January 1558” where “Ridley noted that Grimald had been in the Bocardo and mentioned that he had even been under threat of being ‘hanged, drawn and quartered’ before being removed to the Marshalsea and ultimately freed.” Merrill suggests that, after his conversion, Grimald generally counted as a “questionable character” (Merrill 271) and “was nothing more than a time-server, shifting from the Roman Catholic faith, and then back again, recanting secretly and betraying his friends as was necessary to save his life” (218).

A closer look at the arrangement within the individual sections shows that the order of the poems selected for the miscellany was anything but arbitrary: some of the poems show varying degrees of interaction with each other. The section on Surrey (in the second edition) makes for an apt test case of this claim. #26 on “A carelesse man, scorning and describing, the subtle usage of women towarde their lovers” and #27, “An answer in the behalfe of a woman of an uncertain aucthor”, enter into a dialogue, with the second poem being “an answer” to the first – a structure also to be found in other early modern miscellanies, e.g. *England’s Helicon* (first published in 1600, with a second edition in 1614). The poem now titled “An answer” was included, in the first edition, in the “Uncertain Authors section”, then titled “Of the dissembling lover” (see Holton and McFaul 376-77). The interaction instigated by the revised arrangement – reflecting the new attribution of the poem to Surrey (see also Sessions 197n) – takes place on various levels. With regard to form, both are written in Poulter’s measure, and the first two lines show conspicuous correspondences concerning rhyme and lexical choices: “Wrapt in my careless cloke, as I walk to and fro / I se [...]” (#26, ed. Holton and McFaul 35) and “Girt in my giltles gowne as I sit here and sow / I see [...]” (#27, ed. Holton and McFaul 36). As to the content, the first poem is “A condemnation of women” (Holton and McFaul 376), whereas its answer has been characterized as “A defence of women” (377). They accordingly provide two contrary views on the same subject, with the second presumably providing direct replies and reactions, e.g. when referring to the fact “that thinges are not in ded as to the outward show” (#27: l.2), which can be read as a direct and explicit counter to #26. The compiler of the second edition apparently saw the potential for the two poems to enter into such dialogue and debate, which had not been possible in the earlier arrangement. Moreover, he cut the ending of the original version of #27; the complete version, as pointed out by Holton and McFaul (see 377), can be found in the Arundel Harington MS and ends on verses recounting the biblical story of Daniel. This removal has implications as to the loss of “a redemptive ending for the poem, leaving us to think of those, like Surrey perhaps, who are unjustly condemned to death. Removing the story may, however, simply be “a signal of Protestant sensibilities on the part of the editor or of the scribe who transmitted the poem” (Holton and McFaul 377). The arrangement hence shows both the extent of alterations made to individual texts by the compiler(s) of the miscellany as well as their interpretative impact on a contemporary readership.

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