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Cupid's Grand Polititian (1657)

The English Short Title Catalogue and Early English Books Online both miscatalogue the miscellany, printed in 1657, in which the closet drama Cupid's Grand Polititian appears. Unsurprisingly, given this mislabelling, Cupid's Grand Polititian has passed virtually unnoticed by scholars of the early modern English theatre. Only two critics appear to have been aware of the play's existence, neither of whom offers substantial commentary on it. This note aims to stimulate interest in the play (and the verse miscellany in which it is found) by expounding some of its key features.

The closet drama *Cupid's Grand Polititian*, printed in 1657 as part of a miscellany, has passed virtually unnoticed by scholars of the early modern English theatre. In part, this neglect is because the English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC) has catalogued the miscellany (citation number R226176) as 'Humorous poetry, English — Early works to 1800', rather than noting that its contents include 'drama'. The miscellany — *Ovids Ghost: Or, Venus Overthrown by the Nasonian Polititian: With a Remedy for Love-sick Gallants, in a Poem: On the Dispraise of All Sorts of Wives: Severall Other Occasionall Verses and Characters* — exists as a unique extant copy held by the Folger Shakespeare Library and is also available in digitized form through *Early English Books Online* (EEBO).¹ As with the ESTC record, the EEBO entry designates the publication only as humorous poetry, and contains no reference to the dramatic content.

Unsurprisingly, given this mislabelling, only two critics appear to have been aware of the play's existence: W. Carew Hazlitt and Dale B.J. Randall. Neither offers substantial commentary on the play. The Folger possesses Hazlitt's own copy of his *Manual for the Collector and Amateur of Old English Plays*.² It contains Hazlitt's extensive marginalia, suggesting an intention to revise the *Manual* at some later date (the updated edition was

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apparently never printed, and the annotations remain unpublished). The pertinent manuscript note simply reads: ‘This [ie the miscellany] introduces a series of poems and prose pieces printed for the author under the apparent pseudonym of Edwardus Fuscus with the title of Ovid’s Ghost: Or, Venus Overthrown by the Nasonian Polititian. “Cupid’s Grand Politician” is a sort of dramatic sketch’.³ Although this note helpfully informs us that *Cupid’s Grand Polititian* is preserved in *Ovids Ghost* (a point that no previous scholars had made), it offers no further details. Randall’s commentary is equally brief and slightly misleading, oddly referring (in passing) to *Ovids Ghost* in its entirety as a ‘demi-drama’,⁴ even though *Cupid’s Grand Polititian* is the miscellany’s only dramatic content. Clearly then, *Cupid’s Grand Polititian* requires further study. This note aims to stimulate interest in the play (and the verse miscellany in which it is found) by expounding some of its key features.

The Play

The play occupies forty-one of *Ovids Ghost’s* duodecimo pages, from [A3^v]-[C7^r] (pagination begins at [A5]), and is divided into a prologue, four acts of unequal length, and an epilogue. Its dramatis personae consists of Venus, Cupid, a Soldier, a Tradesman, a Courtier, Cupids Cryer, Three Country Fellowes, and Ovids Ghost.⁵ The drama itself ostensibly takes its cue from Ovid’s *De Arte Amandi*, but is for the most part bawdy undergraduate humour in the form of instructions to the reader on how to bed his lady (the prologue, for example, advises the reader that ‘Each line will prove a Clue, to lead / You through a lab’rinth to her bed’).⁶

In the first act, Cupid talks to his mother Venus, who is dismayed because even the fairest of ladies is ‘[e]xposed to the scorn’ of ‘ev’ry clownish Countrey lout’ who values money over love.⁷ Venus instructs Cupid to set about making men fall in love with beauty again.⁸ Act 2 features the lament of a transformed lovesick soldier ‘who but now did scorne their sex’ but has now forsaken his military duties to pursue ladies: ‘I who did use the open field to keep, / Into my Ladies hole would gladly creep’.⁹ A Tradesman enters; he similarly suffers from Cupid’s handiwork and yearns to ‘perhaps be free / from the friend Love, which ha[u]nteth me’.¹⁰ The Soldier reveals himself to the Tradesman, and the Courtier addresses them both as another who has ‘scorn’d as much as one could do, / A whining Lover’ and has ‘become one now’.¹¹ In act 3, Cupids Cryer interrupts these three characters, encouraging

them to follow him and win their ladies. Three countrymen who overhear the exchange discuss what they've heard and, using much bawdy talk, declare their love for various women (a dairy maid, a chamber maid, etc.). To quote 2. Countryman, for example: 'Oh that I might once with my *Molly* churm [sic], / In troth I'd jumble'r till the butter come'.¹²

In the fourth and final act, the three countrymen join the Soldier, Tradesman, and Courtier in following Cupids Cryer. Ovid's Ghost appears to them and delivers a series of love lectures loosely based on *De Arte Amandi*.¹³ To those who are not yet in love but would like to be, the ghost recommends that, aided by wine, they seek ladies at a play, a ball, or the baths.¹⁴ To those newly in love, the ghost offers a second lecture,¹⁵ followed by a third lecture 'To those who are more deeply engaged',¹⁶ all of which essentially boil down to advice on self-serving flattery:

Thus mitigate the faults which you espie,
Either in bodie, lip, or cheek, or eie:
Observe these rules, and brand me for a liar,
If you main't deal with them, as you desire.¹⁷

In other words, Ovid's Ghost pointedly gears its advice towards conducting these characters, and by extension, the play's reader, 'to their Ladies bed' where, as the epilogue tells us, 'when the Curtain's drawn, each active part, / Will move without instructions from thine art'.¹⁸

Authorship

Further work is needed to establish what more, if anything, can be discovered about the author 'Edvardus Fuscus'¹⁹ — a pseudonym which calls attention to its deliberate obfuscation of identity. This pseudonymity is in keeping with Adam Smyth's observations in his *Profit and Delight: Printed Miscellanies in England, 1640–1682* that miscellanies 'resist authorcentric scholarship' and 'generally declare little interest in authorship: poems are titled with loose or noncommittal descriptions, they are almost always anonymous', and 'On those very rare occasions when ascriptions are offered, they are usually incorrect'.²⁰ In 'A Farewell to Oxford'²¹ the author appears to refer to himself as 'Edvardus Turvus' rather than 'Fuscus', and implies that he has been at Oxford for over two years ('Farewell my Gown, which I thy poor / Master have kept two yeers and more').²² Unsurprisingly, Anthony à Wood makes no mention of either pseudonym, 'Fuscus' or 'Turvus', in his

biographical volumes on Oxonians.²³ The author's poem 'To a Friend Accusing Me because He Saw Not My Name among the Late Oxford Poets, Who Wrote in Praise of the Peace, betwixt England and Holland',²⁴ anticipates attempts to identify him via another Oxonian publication — presumably the verse anthology, *Musarum Oxoniensium elaiophoria* (1654):²⁵ 'I've no intent / Yet to be taken for a fool in print'.²⁶

The other writings included in the miscellany offer limited assistance in the identification of the author, but they may be worth noting in case further information comes to light. A prefatory poem by 'A.W. Armig.' and the author's dedication to 'the most ingenuous Brothers' known as 'Mr {R. and A.} G.' are not especially helpful. Of the miscellany's various poetic works, two related texts — 'Prælegenda to the Succeeding Poem, viz. The Wife-hater'²⁷ and 'Poem. Vituperium Uxoris: Or, The Wife-Hater'²⁸ — were subsequently attributed to the poet John Cleveland (1613–58) when they were posthumously reprinted.²⁹ The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (*ODNB*) entry for Cleveland describes his education and fellowship respectively at Christ's College and St John's College, Cambridge, and notes that 'Anthony Wood's claim that John proceeded MA from Oxford as well as from Cambridge remains unsubstantiated'.³⁰ The possible association between Cleveland and 'Edvardus Fuscus', who was apparently an Oxonian, might strengthen Wood's claim for Cleveland's Oxford education — but Wood offers a 1637 date for Cleveland's supposed award of the Oxford MA, and the 1655 reference by 'Fuscus' to the 'two yeers' since being in Oxford would put almost twenty years between them.³¹ Being a royalist, Cleveland did leave Cambridge in 1642 to take up residence in Oxford, which housed the king's court during the civil war. Again, 1642 seems too early to meet 'Fuscus' there, but Cleveland's whereabouts after the war are uncertain: around 1654–5 he appears to have lived in London, but cannot be traced again until he reappeared at Gray's Inn later in 1657.³² A gap in Cleveland's known activities would be conveniently filled if he were indeed in Oxford (and known to 'Fuscus') during 1655–7. The fact that the poems did not appear with an attribution to Cleveland until much later than the *Ovids Ghost* miscellany might even suggest a close relationship between 'Fuscus' and Cleveland, if the former had access to previously unpublished work and was able to print it in 1657.³³

The 'Epitaph on that Pattern of Vertue, Thomas Beal, Esq; Lievetenant of Whittlewood Forrest Norton, in Imitation of Doct. Alabaster his Latine on one Ed. Spencer'³⁴ is, like William Alabaster's epigram on Spenser, a brief

and amusing elegy, but the choice of subject sheds little light on the author's identity.³⁵ Thomas Beale appears to have been one of the deputy lieutenants to Spencer Compton, second earl of Northampton (1601–43). Beale was evidently responsible for the administration of Whittlewood Forest in the 1630s, and the Calendar of State Papers, 3 December 1640, preserves his complaint in this capacity about deer poaching.³⁶ Why 'Fuscus' would elegize him, in however witty a manner, is unclear.

Date of Composition and Broader Significance

We can assign with a greater degree of certainty the date of *Cupid's Grand Polititian*. The references in the 'Epistle Dedicatory' to the text having been 'both begun and finished at such times, when a Countrey life had abstracted me from a more profitable study'³⁷ plus the note that the miscellany as a whole was printed for the author in 1657 make it clear that this is an Interregnum piece (rather than a newly printed Renaissance piece). Similarly, the prologue's injunction, 'Neat Gallant turn but up these sheets',³⁸ implies that the play was intended to be read as a closet drama. The elegy 'On the Death of Mr Bodicote, Vintner in Oxon'³⁹ may assist in narrowing the collection's composition date further still. The likely subject is 'Humfrey or Humphrey Boddicott or Boddycott, Vintner of Oxford, Oxfordshire' whose will was proved 27 June 1655.⁴⁰ From the death of the Oxonian vintner in 1655, we can narrow the date of composition for the *Ovids Ghost* miscellany to 1655–7.

This dating, taken in conjunction with the potential symbolism of the drama, may shed light on the ostensible purpose of *Cupid's Grand Polititian*. The late 1650s date sits well with Smyth's argument that printed miscellanies tend to align with royalist values, and that 'the kind of pleasure these texts suggest — a pleasure full of drink, mirth, ribald humor, disengagement — was in some ways a powerful attack on Commonwealth and particularly Puritan ideology'.⁴¹ The form of *Cupid's Grand Polititian* accords with such a motive too, since as Lois Potter and others have noted, drama (in this case closet) was specifically royalist.⁴² Finally, Randall notes that the prominent motif of conflict between Venus and Mars (like 'love and honor, passion and precept') contributed to the topical parallel between military strife and dramatic strife in Interregnum drama. Venus's call for a return to beauty and a triumph over Mars in *Cupid's Grand Polititian* may represent a similar response to English politics, especially given the context of the exiled Soldier,

Tradesman, Courtier, and Three Country Fellowes.⁴³ These factors seem, then, to give us grounds for considering the play in light of royalist concerns; further work on the identity of the author and of his addressees (the ‘ingenious brothers’, the ‘Neat Gallant’) may help to explain the apparent association with the Cleveland circle.

Notes

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- 1 *Ovids Ghost, or, Venus Overthrown by the Nasonian Polititian: With a Remedy for Love-sick Gallants, in a Poem: On the Dispraise of All Sorts of Wives: Severall Other Occasionall Verses and Characters* (London, 1657; ESTC R226176). Pagination begins on sig. [A5] (= p 1) and continues consistently throughout the miscellany. All subsequent quotations from *Ovids Ghost* are referenced in the notes, listing inferred or actual signatures prior to [A5] and page numbers thereafter. The miscellany does not appear in Adam Smyth’s excellent *‘Profit and Delight’: Printed Miscellanies in England, 1640–1682* (Detroit, 2004), nor in his online ‘Index of Poetry in Printed Miscellanies, 1640–1682’, which (due to changing URLs) is best accessed via Adam Smyth’s article for *EMLS*, ‘An Online Index of Poetry in Printed Miscellanies, 1640–1682’, *Early Modern Literary Studies* 8.1 (2002): 5.1–9 (<http://purl.oclc.org/elems/08-1/smyth.htm>).
- 2 W. Carew Hazlitt, *A Manual for the Collector and Amateur of Old English Plays* (London, 1892).
- 3 Hazlitt, *Manual*, 55n.
- 4 Dale B.J. Randall, *Winter Fruit: English Drama, 1642–1660* (Lexington, 1995), 276.
- 5 *Ovids Ghost*, [A3^v].
- 6 *Ibid*, [A4^v].
- 7 *Ibid*, 1.
- 8 *Ibid*, 2.
- 9 *Ibid*, 3.
- 10 *Ibid*, 5.
- 11 *Ibid*.
- 12 *Ibid*, 8.

- 13 The suggestion of Ovid's Ghost to seek women 'at the acting of a Play' (10) recalls the advice in *De Arte Amandi* to accost the 'Mistress crossing to the Theater' (22); Ovid's advice to follow Bacchus's lead cautiously — 'Pray to the god of grapes that in thy bed, / The quaffing healths do not offend thy head' (25) — is echoed by Ovid's Ghost's suggestion to '[d]rink wine, but not too much, for then you'll find, / It dulleth, not exhilarates the mind' (11). Quotations are from Publii Ovidii Nasonis, *De Arte Amandi, or, The Art of Love, Englished* (London, 1650; ESTC R41651).
- 14 *Ovids Ghost*, 10–12.
- 15 *Ibid*, 12–29.
- 16 *Ibid*, 29–37.
- 17 *Ibid*, 37.
- 18 *Ibid*, 38.
- 19 *Ibid*, [A3].
- 20 Smyth, '*Profit and Delight*', 5.2.
- 21 *Ovids Ghost*, 51–2.
- 22 *Ibid*, 52. Other pieces within the miscellany reveal an interest in Oxford consonant with the author's claim of having been educated there: 'A Dialogue Betwixt a Gentleman and His OXFORD Laundress' (60–1); 'The Character of a Collector of St Johns Colledge Oxon' (78–80); and the various elegies on Oxonians including the 'Clerke of Cairfaux' (93) and 'Mr Lightfoot, Cooke of Wad. Col. Oxon' (94).
- 23 Anthony à Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, 2 vols (London, 1691–2; ESTC R12834 and R200957).
- 24 *Ovids Ghost*, 69–70.
- 25 Anon., *Musarum Oxoniensium elaiophoria. Sive, Ob faedera, auspiciis serenissimi Oliveri Reipub. Ang. Scot. & Hiber. Domini Protectoris, inter Rempub. Britannicam & ordines faederatos Belgii faeliciter stabilita, gentis togatae ad vada Isidis celeusma metricum* (Oxoniae, 1654; ESTC R203114). I owe the identification of this volume to Matthew Steggle (personal correspondence).
- 26 *Ovids Ghost*, 69.
- 27 *Ibid*, 39–40.
- 28 *Ibid*, 41–6.
- 29 *The Works of Mr. John Cleveland, Containing his Poems, Orations, Epistles, Collected into One Volume, with the Life of the Author* (London, 1687; ESTC R43102), 265–71.
- 30 A.D. Cousins, 'Cleveland, John (bap. 1613, d. 1658)', *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004). DOI: 10.1093/ref:odnb/5635.
- 31 See Wood's *Fasti Oxonienses* (in *Athenae Oxonienses*, vol. 1, 1691), 891 for the 1637 date.
- 32 See Cousins, 'Cleveland, John'.

- 33 Against this suggestion, though, note that Cleveland ‘paid little or no attention to the publication of his work’ according to Lee A. Jacobus: moreover, ‘Once Cleveland’s authorship was publicly noticed (first in 1651), numerous uncertain poems swelled the canon’ (*John Cleveland* [Boston, 1975], 28–9). Accordingly, even if ‘Fuscus’ had met Cleveland at Oxford, his publishing of Cleveland’s work is no guarantee of *friendship* between the two.
- 34 *Ovids Ghost*, 92.
- 35 See William Alabaster, *Epigrammatica* (1600), Bodleian ms Rawlinson D.293, f 19^v, cited in R.M. Cummings (ed.), *The Critical Heritage: Edmund Spenser* (London, RPT 1995), 97.
- 36 Martyn Bennett, ‘Compton, Spencer, second earl of Northampton (1601–1643)’, *ODNB* (Oxford, 2004). DOI: 10.1093/ref:0/6035; William Douglas Hamilton (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, Charles I: 1640–41* (London, 1882), 296.
- 37 *Ovids Ghost*, [A2^v].
- 38 *Ibid*, [A4^v].
- 39 *Ibid*, 95.
- 40 National Archives, PROB 11/248.
- 41 Smyth, ‘*Profit and Delight*’, 21.
- 42 Lois Potter, *Secret Rites and Secret Writing: Royalist Literature, 1641–1660* (Cambridge, 1989), 74.
- 43 Randall, *Winter Fruit*, 93.