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Heffernan, Megan. Making the Miscellany: Poetry, Print, and the History of the Book in Early Modern England

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“soft,” Harrison’s textured close readings animate *Coming To*’s history of ideas. As just one example, the careful reading of Eve’s language during the temptation scene illuminates the larger claims made about how *Paradise Lost* positions experience in the formation of the self and knowledge. Harrison’s book will be of interest to scholars of Renaissance literature, religion, and philosophy, particularly in the areas of experiential spirituality, devotional writing, and embodiment. Additionally, *Coming To* contributes to our understanding of the entwined early modern discourses of subjectivity, consciousness, and identity.

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Heffernan, Megan.

Making the Miscellany: Poetry, Print, and the History of the Book in Early Modern England.

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021. Pp. 336 + 33 ill. ISBN 978-0-8122-5280-4 (hardcover) US\$65.

In *Making the Miscellany*, Megan Heffernan makes a significant contribution to the study of the poetic design of early modern printed books, how volumes of compiled poems responded to changes in media, the material organization of printed poetry, the contribution of conventions and innovations of arrangement to vernacular poetic craft, and the consolidation of individual authorship. Heffernan argues “that the design of printed compilations contains a largely unstudied and undertheorized archive of poetic form” (4). She maintains that compilers experimented with individual poems in larger volumes, exploring the relation between poems and their organization and between imaginative writing and the material text. Moreover, Heffernan studies this history of textual design in connection with bibliography, book history, and literary studies, which have “obscured—the formal qualities of early modern poetry compilations and the practices that produced them” (4). Heffernan’s book revisits these editorial and critical approaches and “recovers a moment when compilers, poets, and readers were alert to a poetics of organization that exceeded the limits of the individual poem” (4). She examines “the influence of poetic form, style, and genre on

textual design” to “recover older ways of reading that have been obscured by our presumptions of miscellaneity” (9)—employing theoretical and historical imaginations to measure the distance and closeness of the past in the making and reading of poetry and books. For poetic variety, disorder was beneficial as it allowed multiple perspectives when approaching a book (9).

The volume examines canonical and less-known books of poems from publishers (Richard Jones, John Marriot), poets who collaborated with stationers (George Gascoigne, Henry Lok), and authors who did not gather most of their secular poetry for print (Philip Sidney, John Donne, William Shakespeare). Heffernan produces case studies to provide poetry books with a context of practices of textual production and reception, such as the history of reading devotional texts and manuscript poetry. She demonstrates how the design of compiled volumes responded to changing fashions of writing and publishing. Her study provides an account of English vernacular poetry through a “perspective that treats disorder as the limit of meaning” (12) and this change involved the poetry miscellany and authorial collections, which “the habits, actions, and desires of compilers, not the poets who wrote the poems” constituted (12).

Chapter 1 discusses Richard Tottel shaping a new kind of collection by using innovative textual features to organize poems. The second chapter, concerned with resisting the literary history of authorship in the last half of the sixteenth century, presents an alternative history of the poetry books published. This history concentrates on the influence of the printed book—as opposed to authorship—on the genres, modes, and styles of poems in the compilation. In the third chapter, Heffernan uses two editions of George Gascoigne’s poetry to analyze the relation between poems and textual arrangement in order to reconsider the material foundation of authorship. The fourth chapter explores the division of labour between poets and compiling publishers, and the role of books of sonnets in the 1590s and what they tell about the earlier and later collections. In chapter 5, Heffernan interprets the new types of authorial collections that dissolved the poetics of compilation and that occurred along with the miscellany. The coda looks at the debate—between 1709 and 1711—over whether editors should follow Benson’s *Poems* or Thorpe’s *Sonnets* in arrangement. Thus, Heffernan seeks to demonstrate that the compilation of poetry both reflects and fuels this dynamic and historicizing poetic form, thereby remaking Shakespeare’s books for later readers.

Heffernan provides some helpful perspectives. She says, “[b]oth the vocabulary and the genre of the volume of compiled poetry were still evolving in early modern England” (22), and she explores this evolution effectively. Compilations tended to have an active response to poetic form and content so “that each book was a local response to the work it contained” (53). For Heffernan, from the late sixteenth century, professional stationers were increasingly attuned “to the forms and fictions created by their poetry compilations” (54). She focuses on poetic styles and forms of poetry compilations in the late sixteenth century to “illuminate both the aesthetic priorities of early modern print and the corresponding impact of these books on the flourishing of Elizabethan poetry” (88). In the context of Gasgoigne’s invention and poetry, Heffernan considers “this experimental culture of compiling,” in which poets make their own books, building on the ways stationers arrange “to redirect the collaborative energies of the print trade toward a new kind of textual agency” (89). Plainness of style is something, as Heffernan notes, that Yvor Winters sees in Gasgoigne (98). She reminds us that books of sonnets focused on a single type of lyric poetry (125), but books of narrative poems by Christopher Marlowe and Shakespeare were also unmixed with other kinds of poems. Philip Sidney is a key to the printing of poetry (165). Heffernan shows that after the fashion for books of sonnets declined in the 1590s, “poetry compilations from the early seventeenth century returned to a greater variety of lyric forms and genres” (168). She discusses the variety and leave-taking in John Donne (171). How does a mixed compilation impact the book of an individual poet? (184). Compilations affected authorship and form even retrospectively (211). Heffernan moves between literary analysis and material culture (217). She peers “at the past through the tangled web” between poems and compilations—a disordering that enables us to see the influence of poetic craft and form on “textual formations” (217). Heffernan has untangled the tangled tale of book matter, design, printing, culture, and history in relation to the making and reading of poetry then and now.

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