

LITERATURE, SATIRE
AND THE EARLY
STUART STATE

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CHAPTER I

The culture of early Stuart libelling

The death in 1612 of the Lord Treasurer, Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, prompted a cultural phenomenon that few observers of state affairs could have failed to notice. As the days passed, libellous verses on Cecil began to proliferate and circulate in unprecedented numbers.¹ The anxiety surrounding this wave of textual production is evident in the letters of John Chamberlain, who wrote that ‘the memorie of the late Lord Treasurer growes dayly worse and worse and more libells come as yt were continually’.² Writing just three weeks later, however, John Donne provided a different view. He suggested, perhaps with a touch of irony, that many of the libels were so bad that they might have been written by Cecil’s friends:

It is not the first time that our age hath seen that art practised, That when there are witty and sharp libels made which not onely for liberty of speaking, but for the elegancie, and composition, would take deep root, and make durable impressions in the memory, no other way hath been thought so fit to suppress them, as to divulge some course, and railing one: for when the noise is risen, that libels are abroad, mens curiositie must be served with something: and it is better for the honour of the person traduced, that some blunt downright railings be vented, of which every body is soon weary, then other pieces, which entertain us long with a delight, and love to the things themselves.³

Alongside Chamberlain’s concern for biographical truth and political order, Donne shifts attention to the aesthetic qualities of libels. Adopting a Sidneian conception of the function of poetry – to teach and delight – he suggests that a libel will influence only to the extent that it ‘entertain[s]’ a reader.

¹ This phenomenon is documented in Pauline Croft, ‘The Reputation of Robert Cecil: Libels, Political Opinion and Popular Awareness in the Early Seventeenth Century’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 1 (1991), 43–69.

² *The Letters of John Chamberlain*, ed. Norman Egbert McClure (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1939), 1:364.

³ *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour* (London, 1651), pp. 89–90.

Donne's letter raises important questions about the functions of libels. A scurrilous poem circulated in news networks immediately after the death of a statesman has a clear strategic purpose; the Cecil libels certainly prompted Chamberlain to reassess his opinion of the man, as he wondered 'whether yt be that practises and juglings' were in truth coming 'more and more to light'.⁴ Its status might therefore appear to be close to that of graffiti, a form of invective as ephemeral as it is topical. Evidence supporting Donne's divergent appreciation of the libel, however, may be derived from manuscript sources in which the poetry is preserved. In numerous verse miscellanies libels were transcribed, often many years after their composition, alongside the work of the greatest poets of the age.⁵ The compiler of BL MS Egerton 2230, for example, transcribed a series of Cecil libels in a section of epigrams. Rosenbach MS 1083/16 is even more concerned to read libels in literary terms; titled by its compiler 'MISCELLANIES: OR A collection of Divers Witty and pleasant Epigrams, Adages, poems Epitaphes &c: for the recreation of the overtravelled Sences: 1630', it includes a selection of libels from across the previous thirty years, along with poems by Donne, Ben Jonson, Thomas Carew and Robert Herrick, and others. It is even possible to discern an application of literary judgement, along the lines suggested by Donne, among the men and women who kept miscellanies. The most sophisticated of the Cecil libels, a poem often attributed to Sir Walter Raleigh, survives in more sources than any other.⁶

These details of textual transmission and reception alert us to the importance of examining both literary and political contexts when considering early Stuart libels. To date, most scholarship on libels has been conducted by historians, concerned with issues of public opinion and political culture. Thomas Cogswell, for example, argues that the poems document 'the emergence of popular political awareness'; similarly, Pauline Croft interprets them as 'valuable evidence for a lively public opinion, emanating

⁴ *Letters of John Chamberlain*, 1.364.

⁵ On the manuscript verse miscellany, and its relation to the commonplace book, see Peter Beal, 'Notions in Garrison: The Seventeenth-Century Commonplace Book', in W. Speed Hill, ed., *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts: Papers of the Renaissance English Text Society, 1985–1991* (Binghamton, 1993), pp. 131–47 (esp. 142–4).

⁶ I will consider this poem, 'Here lyes old Hobinol, our shephard while heare', further below. Copies exist in: Bodleian MS Rawlinson poet. 26, fol. 78r; Bodleian MS Eng. poet. e.14, fol. 79v; Bodleian MS Eng. poet. f.10, fols. 97v–98r; Bodleian MS Tanner 299, fol. 12v; BL MS Egerton 2230, fol. 34r; BL MS Harley 1221, fol. 74r; BL MS Harley 6038, fol. 18r; BL MS Harley 6947, fol. 211r; Folger MS v.a.345, p. 110; and 'Poems from a Seventeenth-Century Manuscript', 41–3. It is attributed to Raleigh in Bodleian Rawlinson poet. 26 and Folger v.a.345; Croft discusses the matter of authorship in 'Reputation', 62.

from London but not confined to the capital'.⁷ Work by literary scholars on political poetry of the early seventeenth century has tended to avoid general questions about the mode, focusing rather on individual poems or groups of poems.⁸ At the outset of *Satire and the Early Stuart State*, therefore, I want to consider as broadly as possible the practices of libelling, and the qualities and functions of verse libels. For, as Donne's letter suggests, it would be wrong to approach libels as no more than strategic statements, directly reflecting popular opinion. Libels were also acknowledged as literary products, and it is important to appreciate the significance of literary codes and expectations in the culture of early Stuart libelling. In accordance with the governing intent of this book, such an approach promises also to illuminate the interaction between literary and political discourse in the pre-revolutionary decades: as the political situation stimulated a wealth of literature, and as literature helped to provide a language for emergent divisions in the state.

This chapter initially seeks to contextualize early Stuart libelling, considering the literary origins of the form, its growth in the seventeenth century, and its construction as a licensed mode. Subsequently, I analyse the major sources for the study of libels, and argue that the culture of the verse miscellany contributed at once to the proliferation and developing characteristics of the poems. The final section then considers the principal generic qualities of the libel, and thus works towards an appreciation of its literary and political functions. As becomes apparent, while the practice of libelling overlaps

⁷ Cogswell, 'Underground Political Verse and the Transformation of English Political Culture', in Susan D. Amussen and Mark A. Kishlansky, eds., *Political Culture and Cultural Politics in Early Modern England: Essays Presented to David Underdown* (Manchester, 1995), p. 278; Croft, 'Libels, Popular Literacy and Public Opinion in Early Modern England', *Historical Research*, 68 (1995), 280. Other work by historians on this material includes Alastair Bellany, *The Politics of Court Scandal in Early Modern England: News Culture and the Overbury Affair, 1603–1660* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 97–111; Bellany, "'Raylinge Rymes and Vaunting Verse": Libellous Politics in Early Stuart England, 1603–1628', in *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake (Basingstoke, 1994), pp. 285–310; Bellany, 'A Poem on the Archbishop's Hearse: Puritanism, Libel, and Sedition after the Hampton Court Conference', *Journal of British Studies*, 34 (1995), 137–64. Adam Fox considers a parallel tradition of libelling in localized disputes, in 'Ballads, Libels and Popular Ridicule in Jacobean England', *Past and Present*, 145 (1994), 47–83 (revised in *Oral and Literate Culture in England 1500–1700* [Oxford, 2000], pp. 299–34.).

⁸ Arthur F. Marotti provides a valuable survey of the extant material in *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca and London, 1995), pp. 75–133. See further Gerald Hammond, *Fleeting Things: English Poets and Poems 1616–1660* (Cambridge, MA, 1990), pp. 41–66; James Holstun, "'God Bless Thee, Little David!": John Felton and his Allies', *ELH*, 59 (1992), 513–52; and Holstun, *Ehud's Dagger: Class Struggle in the English Revolution* (London, 2000), pp. 158–64, 178–86. Kirk Combe considers a relatively small canon of poems as evidence of generic development from complaint to satire ('The New Voice of Political Dissent: The Transition from Complaint to Satire', in Kirk Combe and Brian A. Connery, eds., *Theorizing Satire: Essays in Literary Criticism* [Basingstoke and London, 1995], pp. 73–94).

with news culture, the libel demands specific strategies of interpretation. Whereas news claimed attention for its purported truth value, the libel was by nature excessive, proffering illicit truths but simultaneously stretching into satire's realm of manifest fiction.⁹ This ambiguity invited on the one hand the detached aesthetic appreciation signalled by Donne, and on the other hand facilitated achievements of satiric discrimination and stigmatization which resonated throughout political discourse in the period.

LIBELS IN LITERARY CULTURE

The verse libel is unique as a literary mode in owing its definition to the law. William Hudson's Jacobean 'Treatise of the Court of Star Chamber' identified a wide range of libellous practices:

Libels are of several kinds; either by scoffing at the person of another in rhyme or prose, or by personating him, thereby to make him ridiculous; or by setting up horns at his gate, or picturing or describing him; or by writing of some base or defamatory letter, and publishing the same to others, or some scurvy love-letter to himself, whereby it is not likely but he should be provoked to break the peace.¹⁰

Francis Bacon was more attuned to the poetic dimension of libelling, noting in 1592 that libels are 'sometimes contrived into pleasant pasquils and satires, to move sport'.¹¹ By the seventeenth century, the libel was more specifically understood to be an unauthorized and controversial text, generally in poetic form, on a person or topical issue. Hence a poem attacking George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham would clearly be classified as a libel, but so too would a piece eulogizing his assassin or defending the act of assassination.¹²

At the outset of the seventeenth century, practices of libelling were informed by both popular traditions and literary antecedents. Legal minds were principally concerned with cases in which libellous poems were employed in local disputes, often linked to traditional shaming rituals and riots. Details of such cases survive in the records of church courts and

⁹ I am adopting here Edward Rosenheim, Jr.'s definition of satire as an 'attack by means of a manifest fiction upon discernible historical particulars' (*Jonathan Swift and the Satirist's Art* [Chicago, 1963], p. 31).

¹⁰ In *Collectanea Juridica. Consisting of Tracts Relative to the Law and Constitution of England* (2 vols., London, 1791), II.100.

¹¹ 'Certain Observations made upon a Libel Published this Present Year, 1592', in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. J. Spedding *et al.* (14 vols., London, 1857-74), VIII.148.

¹² Cf. Bellany's suggestion that the category of libels should include 'all types of underground political verse, not solely those containing direct personal remarks' (*Politics of Court Scandal*, p. 97). For legal purposes, libellous epitaphs might not be actionable at common law, but fell within the Star Chamber's jurisdiction of controlling disorder (Hudson, 'Treatise', *Collectanea Juridica*, II.103).

the Star Chamber, to which cases were increasingly brought from the sixteenth century.¹³ In literary and courtly circles, libellous verse was informed by popular traditions, but further shaped and justified according to loose generic categories. Early in the sixteenth century, John Skelton supported his personal attacks by reference to the classical authority of ‘famous poetes saturicall’.¹⁴ Vague notions that satire originated in Greek satyr plays, and the appreciation that at least Lucilius among the Roman satirists attacked his targets by name, underpinned such statements.¹⁵ Satiric theory, especially before the concerted neoclassicism of the 1590s, commonly justified ‘taunting Darcklye certeyn men of state’.¹⁶ Related literary modes also contributed to the development of libelling. Celtic satire was intertwined with practices of incantation and cursing, and was believed to have tangible effects, even causing death.¹⁷ The flyting, in which Skelton excelled, was appreciated as a vitriolic poetic exchange, highly performative and competitive.¹⁸ And further support for libelling was derived from the sixteenth-century Roman practice of attaching anonymous topical verses to the statue of Pasquino.¹⁹ The ‘pasquil’, as Bacon recognized in 1592, became a fashionable term for witty and libellous verses, particularly when distributed surreptitiously around the city and court.

The outpouring of formal verse satire in the 1590s served to clarify the status of the verse libel, largely through means of negative definition. As I have suggested elsewhere, libel was encoded as satire’s other: a mode satirists regularly invoked against which to define their work, but which

¹³ The libel cases surviving in Jacobean Star Chamber records are analysed in Fox, ‘Ballads’. For a consideration of the relation between the poetry of the Star Chamber libels and Renaissance satire, see my ‘The Verse Libel: Popular Satire in Early Modern England’, in Dermot Cavanagh and Tim Kirk, eds., *Subversion and Scurrility: Popular Discourse in Europe from 1500 to the Present* (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 58–73.

¹⁴ Quoted in Douglas Gray, ‘Rough Music: Some Early Invectives and Flytings’, in Claude Rawson, ed., *English Satire and the Satiric Tradition* (London, 1984), p. 43.

¹⁵ Renaissance debates over the propriety of using real names in satire are covered at length in A. L. Soens, Jr., ‘Criticism of Formal Satire in the Renaissance’ (unpublished Ph.D dissertation, Princeton University, 1957), pp. 235–41, 308–12, 405–6.

¹⁶ Richard Stanyhurst, discussing the work of classical satirists, in the dedication to his translation, *The First Four Bookes of Virgil his Aeneis* (Leiden, 1582), sig. A2r.

¹⁷ Robert C. Elliott argues for the significance of Celtic satire on the English development of the genre in *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art* (Princeton, 1960), pp. 3–48.

¹⁸ See Gray, ‘Rough Music’, p. 21.

¹⁹ While it is clear that English writers were aware of the Roman practice, it is more difficult to find evidence of actual Italian texts circulating in English manuscript culture. The only example of this that I have found comes from north of the border, in the miscellaneous literary collections of William Drummond of Hawthornden (NLS, MS 2060, f. 9r). For a dramatic representation of libelling in Rome, see Barnabe Barnes, *The Devil’s Charter*, ed. Jim C. Pogue (New York and London, 1980), 1 ii–iii.

could never satisfactorily be separated from their neoclassical genre.²⁰ The libel was figured as a debased mode, nurtured by popular traditions rather than classical authority, employing indigenous forms rather than satire's iambic pentameter couplet, attacking individuals rather than generalized types of vice, steeped in ephemeral topical issues rather than enduring moral struggles, and concerned with undermining authority rather than purging evil in the interests of authority. These arguments were pursued right through to John Dryden's classic essay on satire, which carefully distinguishes between poets who adhere to classical models and standards of generic decorum, and the 'multitude of Scriblers, who daily pester the World with . . . Lampoons and Libels'.²¹ Although this process of discrimination was often tenuous, literary historians generally agree that it contributed to the construction of a native conception of satire. By extension, it also helped to establish the libel as an independent mode, requiring different strategies for writing, reading and circulation.

It is clear that writers appreciated these points of distinction, though equally clear that, even when the vogue for formal verse satire was at its height, many distinguished poets still chose to write libels. For example, the satirist Thomas Bastard was expelled from Oxford for his libels on university scandals, while Sir John Harington was both a collector and writer of scandalous verse.²² A note in Harington's *Diary* records his intention to 'write a damnable storie and put it in goodlie verse about Lord A. He hath done me some ill turnes'. (Remarkably, the following sentence recoils to the Renaissance poet's accustomed position of moral orthodoxy: 'God keepe us from lyinge and slander worke'.)²³ The rise of the satiric epigram around the turn of the century provided another vehicle for libellous writing. Harington's most successful poetic works were his epigrams and, like other epigrammatists of the period, many of his poems are unquestionably libellous in intent, though the use of nonce names avoided problems with the law.²⁴ At least one later poet was less careful; in 1615 William Goddard published two epigrams on the controversial marriage of Frances Howard and Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset, in which the latter is identified pointedly as 'the dunghill Carr'.²⁵ Such examples demonstrate that purported

²⁰ See 'The Verse Libel', p. 69.

²¹ 'Discourse concerning the Original and Progress of Satire', in *The Works of John Dryden, Volume IV: Poems 1693–1696*, ed. A. B. Chambers and William Frost (Berkeley, 1974), p. 8.

²² See Croft, 'Libels', 273.

²³ Quoted in C. J. Sisson, *Lost Plays of Shakespeare's Age* (Cambridge, 1936), pp. 187–8.

²⁴ See Harington, *Epigrams* (1618); facsimile edn (Menston, 1970).

²⁵ *A Neaste of Waspes* (Dort, 1615), sig. F4r.

disdain for libelling cannot necessarily be equated with a lack of interest in the mode; indeed even Dryden, in his *Discourse on Satire*, defends a poet's right to libel his enemies in self-defence.²⁶

The Bishops' Ban of 1599, which called for the public burning of the works of certain satirists, undoubtedly affected the development of English satire.²⁷ Yet it would be simplistic to claim that satire was at this point forced 'underground', where it took shape afresh in the form of libels.²⁸ In fact there is little evidence that the ban was enforced much beyond the initial clampdown, and numerous satiric works (including countless volumes of epigrams) were published in the early years of the seventeenth century.²⁹ It is evident, however, that formal verse satire at this time became at once less fashionable and less relevant. It gradually lost its earlier attachment to the universities and Inns of Court, and turned away from the aggressive neo-classicism of the 1590s, towards a more accessible style and more traditional themes. At the same time, however, changes in political culture were creating a vital new context for the libel. James's rapid expansion of royal bounty, a number of notorious court scandals, a series of troubled parliaments, and ongoing problems of corruption in the government, fuelled increasing anxieties about the nation. Moreover, the prominence of royal favourites, and the incessant struggles between rival factions, increased the significance of individuals in political discourse. Contemporaries were coming to terms with distinctly Jacobean forms of political interaction, and were exploring new ways of articulating dissent. The pre-existent mode of the libel, enriched by the achievements of Renaissance satire and intertwined with the contemporary rise of the epigram, was an obvious vehicle for their efforts.

A pamphlet which was almost certainly written in the 1620s reflects valuably on this milieu. *The Life of a Satyrical Puppy, Called Nim*, published under the initials T. M., narrates a period spent in London's satiric culture

²⁶ 'Discourse concerning the Original and Progress of Satire', p. 59.

²⁷ See Richard A. McCabe, 'Elizabethan Satire and the Bishops' Ban of 1599', *Yearbook of English Studies*, 11 (1981), 188–93.

²⁸ This claim is made in Cogswell, 'Underground Verse', pp. 279–80.

²⁹ See, for example, C. G., *The Minte of Deformatie* (1600); Samuel Rowlands, *The Letting of Humours Blood in the Head-Vaine* (1600), in *Complete Works* (3 vols., Hunterian Club, Glasgow, 1880), vol. 1; John Weever's translations of satires by Horace, Persius and Juvenal, published in *Faunus and Melliflora* (1600), ed. Arnold Davenport (Liverpool, 1948); and the debates over satire conducted in a series of pamphlets around the turn of the century, collectively known as *The Whipper Pamphlets* (ed. Arnold Davenport [Liverpool, 1951]). My argument here is supported by Cyndia Susan Clegg's research, which suggests that the Bishops' Ban was a reaction to certain topical references rather than a considered assault on a literary genre (*Press Censorship in Elizabethan England* [Cambridge, 1997], pp. 198–217).

by a young man of small but independent means.³⁰ The speaker decides 'to turn *Satyrist*' in part through a fascination with emergent processes of political preferment, as 'the State at that time felt alteration; and divers great ones (plac'd before as *high* as Fortune her self could *reach*) sate then on her foot-stool, *humbled* below vulgar respect' (p. 49). When he surveys the work of his fellow satirists, he notes in particular their 'Fame-murdering Libells' (p. 65), including several poems that can be identified in surviving verse miscellanies. This was a time in which writers might be observed to

murmure in obscure Corners: who are fearfull even of speaking softly; therefore proclaim to others a *dumb silence* in their own *prattle*: who whisper with their pens, and darkly bring their thoughts to light in *Hieroglyphicall* words, personating Men in the natures of Beasts, whose names (*literally* or *allegorically*) doth sympathize with theirs, whom they aime at. (p. 64)

For T. M., the context of corruption and government surveillance is the principal determinant of poetry produced in the period. Within such a context, he suggests, libel becomes the only pertinent type of satire.

The evidence of T. M. might appear to support claims that libels were written by a 'literary species of . . . "pot poet"', a type situated 'somewhere between a court literati and a humble balladeer', ever prepared to pen a verse for cash or beer.³¹ Certainly this representation of libellers is endorsed by those who attempted to rebut attacks on controversial figures; in their writings, the authors of libels were routinely figured as emanations from the 'heady Monster, Brayneles Multitude', led by blind 'fury . . . to Intrude / on princes rights'.³² But it is always dangerous to accept a term of stigmatization at face value, and even more so when dealing with the febrile literary environment of early seventeenth-century London. In fact, an analysis of elite literary culture demonstrates that, for all its expressions of disgust, it consistently embraced many of the practices associated with libels. At a time when poets valorized qualities of wit, and seized on the epigram as a concise and memorable vehicle for praise or blame, the libel presented obvious attractions. As one moralist complained of court culture in 1629, 'malitious detraction' was then widely 'esteemed the quintessence of wit'.³³

³⁰ The text, which was published in 1657, is usually catalogued as the probable work of Thomas May; however, Leonie J. Gibson, who valuably dates it to the 1620s, suggests Thomas Middleton ('Formal Satire in the First Half of the Seventeenth Century, 1600–1650' [unpublished DPhil. dissertation, University of Oxford, 1952], p. 305).

³¹ Cogswell, 'Underground Verse', p. 281.

³² Transcribed from Bodleian MS Rawlinson poet. 166, in Ted-Larry Pebworth, 'Sir Henry Wotton's "Dazeld Thus, with Height of Place" and the Appropriation of Political Poetry in the Earlier Seventeenth Century', *Publications of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 71 (1977), 167.

³³ Nathanael Carpenter, *Achiophel, Or, The Picture of a Wicked Politician* (1629), p. 10.

Moreover, as Timothy Raylor has shown, within certain literary circles writers wilfully confused stylistic markers that might appear to separate high and low forms of poetry. Poetry 'that is designed to appear extempore and humorously shoddy', he writes, was 'a vital part of the courtly and would-be courtly culture of the age'.³⁴

Investigation into available evidence regarding the authorship of libels further undermines the 'pot poet' thesis.³⁵ Robert Devereux, Second Earl of Essex, appears to have libelled Raleigh in the late 1590s, while Raleigh himself (as noted above) probably wrote at least one libel after the death of Cecil.³⁶ John Marston, despite maintaining in the 1590s that satire avoids personal attacks, instead using 'fained private names, to note generall vices', most likely wrote at least one distinctly pointed piece on Buckingham in the late 1620s.³⁷ William Drummond of Hawthornden had 'a taste and facility for coarse satire', and may have written one of the most incisive libels on the relationship between James and Buckingham.³⁸ James Smith, a poet at the centre of one of London's most active literary clubs, did likewise.³⁹ And at the universities – especially Oxford – libelling was part of a lively culture of manuscript verse circulation. Elizabethan miscellanies from the universities often include libels on local figures, and in the following century these are more commonly combined with poems on national politics.⁴⁰ Among other identifiable libellers at the universities, the Oxford scholar Zouch Townley wrote a panegyric on John Felton, Buckingham's assassin, while Alexander Gill, who was arrested for libelling in Oxford in 1628, was known in the 1630s for his Latin and Greek lyrics.⁴¹ Finally, a case earlier in James's reign suggests that in some instances a considerable level of learning might even have been expected of a libeller. Edward Coke, Attorney-General in 1605, judged that a libellous epitaph pinned to the hearse of Archbishop Whitgift

³⁴ *Cavaliers, Clubs, and Literary Culture: Sir John Mennes, James Smith, and the Order of the Fancy* (Newark, 1994), p. 22.

³⁵ Cf. Bellany, *Politics of Court Scandal*, pp. 101–2.

³⁶ 'The Poems of Edward De Vere, Seventeenth Earl of Oxford and of Robert Devereux, Second Earl of Essex', ed. Steven W. May, *Studies in Philology*, 77 (1980), 'Texts and Studies' Supplement, 60.

³⁷ 'To him that hath perused me', in *Poems*, ed. Arnold Davenport (Liverpool, 1961), p. 176; R. E. Brettle, 'John Marston and the Duke of Buckingham', *Notes and Queries*, 212 (1967), 326–30.

³⁸ Robert H. MacDonald, 'Amendments to L. E. Kastner's Edition of Drummond's Poems', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 7 (1970), 107. On 'The Five Senses', see below, pp. 75–82.

³⁹ Raylor, *Cavaliers*, pp. 55–6.

⁴⁰ For a representative Elizabethan volume (of courtly origin) including university libels, see *The Arundel Harington Manuscript of Tudor Poetry*, ed. Ruth Hussey (2 vols., Columbus, OH, 1960).

⁴¹ Townley's poem, 'Enjoy thy bondage; make thy prison know', is printed in *Poems and Songs*, pp. 74–6. Gill is identified as an author of libels, and possibly of 'The Five Senses', in documents printed in *Original Papers Illustrative of the Life and Writings of John Milton*, ed. W. Douglas Hamilton (London, 1859), pp. 65–71.

could not have been written by the university graduate charged with the offence, 'for he is no scholar'.⁴²

It becomes clear from such cases that libelling was more prevalent and also more important a phenomenon than an attribution to 'pot poets' might suggest. Some, such as Gill, were apparently motivated by a conviction that corruption at court was endangering the nation. Gill was in fact as close to a revolutionary as the 1620s affords, having been known to drink a toast to Felton, and declare that 'We have a fine wise King. He has wit enough to be a shopkeeper, to ask "What do you lack?" and that is all.'⁴³ In contrast with this political fervour, other writers may rather have followed 'the sway of the multitude', which Chamberlain suspected was behind the plethora of Cecil libels.⁴⁴ Certain waves of libelling had an undeniably self-generating character, and some writers perhaps seized merely an opportunity to perform. For instance, at least one person appears to have taken the death of Buckingham as a topic for a rhetorical exercise, writing epitaphs against and in commendation of the Duke, both of which survive on the same page of a miscellany.⁴⁵ And while it would be impossible to deny that some wrote poetry in exchange for money, even in such cases a piece-work economy (as posited by the 'pot poet' argument) shades into patronage exchanges, which were a fact of life for most of the leading poets of the age. Thus George Wither assumed that 'A *Libeller* is impudently bold, / When he hath *Times*, or *Patrons* to uphold / His biting *Straines*'.⁴⁶

But while the libel had an identifiable status within patronage networks, it remained perforce an anonymous mode, and authors were rarely identified beyond a small coterie. The need for anonymity is evidenced by the experience of Townley, who was forced to flee the country when his authorship of the poem on Felton became known.⁴⁷ As well as being a practical restraint on a poet seeking recognition, however, anonymity should also be considered as a condition which contributed to the character of libellous verse. Most notably, it underset the rhetorically inflated, taunting voice

⁴² *HMC: Calendar of Manuscripts of the Most Honorable the Marquis of Salisbury Preserved at Hatfield House* (24 vols., Dublin and London, 1883–1976), xvii.114: quoted in Bellamy, 'Poem on the Archbishop's Hearse', 145.

⁴³ *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reign of Charles I*, ed. J. Bruce (23 vols., London, 1858–97), item 116.56.

⁴⁴ *Letters*, 1.364.

⁴⁵ See the poems attributed to John Heape in Bodleian MS Ashmole 38, p. 14. Cf. a poem on Frances Howard, which is constructed as a rhetorical exercise and divided into equal sections headed 'Petitio' and 'Responctio' (BL MS Add. 25707, fol. 46r).

⁴⁶ *Britain's Remembrancer* (1628); facsimile edn (Spenser Society, New York, 1967), fol. 285v.

⁴⁷ See *The Court and Times of Charles I*, ed. Thomas Birch (2 vols., London, 1848), 1.427–8.

adopted by many of the writers. In one poem attacking Buckingham for his leadership of the failed Isle of Rhé military expedition in 1627, the author mocks the Duke, as he admits that he was himself injured in the expedition and hence may almost be identifiable, but nonetheless exploits his namelessness:

Now I have said enough to thee, great George,
 If I were knowne, 'twould make thy radge disgorge
 Its venome on me; yet for all this hate
 Lett's on this distance expostulate.⁴⁸

The 'distance' of anonymity is empowering. The 'expostulation' is thus by nature evasive: inevitably more a protest or remonstrance than a debate.⁴⁹

Anonymity was reinforced by the libel's status as a manuscript mode. A few libellous poems were printed, but the vast majority derived both an audience and a reputation through means of manuscript publication.⁵⁰ This characteristic further distinguishes the libel from formal verse satire, which was emphatically a product of print culture. Apart from Donne, no writer of satires chose to circulate work in manuscript; nor did collectors transcribe such work, even after the Bishops' Ban removed many texts from the marketplace.⁵¹ Hence the claim that in commonplace books and verse miscellanies the 'abstract satire of the literary world met and merged with the popular verse libel' unjustly diminishes the significance of the libel.⁵² As I have already argued, the distinction between 'literary' satire and 'popular' libel breaks down under analysis. Moreover, of the two modes only the libel was prized by the men and women of high degree who were the most common compilers of manuscript miscellanies. This would not only have encouraged poets moving in literary circles at court, the universities or the Inns of Court to compose libels; it would at the same time have

⁴⁸ 'And art return'd againe with all thy faults' (*Poems and Songs*, p. 22).

⁴⁹ Cf. *OED*, *sub* 'expostulate', meanings 2 and 3.

⁵⁰ For examples of libellous poems in print, see Goddard's poems cited above (*A Neaste of Wasps*, sig. F4r); and for evidence of the punishment of men who printed a ballad celebrating the violent death of Buckingham's physician, John Lambe, see *The Court and Times of Charles I*, 1.367–8. On the notion of publication through means of manuscript distribution, see Harold Love, *The Culture and Commerce of Texts: Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Amherst, 1998).

⁵¹ This contradicts the entirely undocumented claims of John Wilcox ('Informal Publication of Late Sixteenth-Century Verse Satire', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 13 [1949–50], 191–200). My argument is confirmed by a survey of prominent 1590s satirists in Peter Beal's *Index of English Literary Manuscripts. Vol. 1. 1450–1625* (2 parts, London, 1980). There are no listings of surviving manuscript versions of the satires of major writers such as John Marston and Thomas Lodge, while the only listing for Joseph Hall's satires is a reference to a volume of material on heraldry, in which the compiler has transcribed twenty-seven lines on the topic from the beginning of *Virgidemiarum* (1599), iv.3 (BL MS Add. 26705, fol. 130r).

⁵² Croft, 'Libels', 273.

discouraged 'popular' writers whose projects of self-promotion were bound to the medium of print.

The libel should therefore be situated in a peculiarly licensed discursive space. As we shall see in Chapter 3, some early Stuart poets struggled to reconcile satire with prevailing constraints on speech. Manuscript poetry, however, always offered greater scope. As David Colclough argues in his analysis of John Hoskyns, Jacobean parliamentarian and manuscript poet, authors and texts within this context

provide a way of exploring the area in which the shift occurs between liberality and excess of language; a liminal space whose instability is evinced in the dual implications of the words 'liberty' and 'licence/license' in the period. Frankness, or candid speech, is considered as a rhetorical figure in many classical and Renaissance handbooks and its name, *licentia*, carries a similar potential for slippage into licentiousness.⁵³

Hence the undeniable political charge carried by the mode. Although neither the writers nor their poems were necessarily 'oppositional' in any organized sense, and although much manuscript poetry in fact favours courtiers and government policy, the practice itself wilfully exceeds the acknowledged bounds of authorized political discourse. It replaces orthodox values of consensus with a contrary perception of discord, and exchanges a voice of loyal counsel for that of fugitive dissent. James I had some appreciation of this, and wrote a poem attacking those 'That Kings designs darr thus deryde / By railing rymes and vaunting verse'. He warned such people rather to 'Hold . . . the publike beaten way / Wounder at Kings, and them obey'.⁵⁴ Ironically, James's poem was distributed through the same medium as libels, and is copied in several contemporary miscellanies along with libellous pieces.⁵⁵

James also perceived that the inherent excess of libellous verse involved a slippage from illicit truths to malicious fictions. While 'God and Kings doe pace together', he argued, the 'Vulgar wander light as feather'.⁵⁶ Indeed the medium created an expectation of scurrility; as Harold Love suggests, it 'would have been hard' for a writer of manuscript verse on political topics

⁵³ "Of the alleadging of authors": The Construction and Reception of Textual Authority in English Prose, c.1600–1630. With special reference to the writings of Francis Bacon, John Hoskyns, and John Donne' (unpublished DPhil. dissertation, University of Oxford, 1996), p. 107. See further Colclough's *Freedom of Speech in Early Stuart England* (forthcoming).

⁵⁴ *The Poems of King James VI of Scotland*, ed. James Craigie (2 vols., Scottish Text Society, Edinburgh and London, 1955–8), II.182.

⁵⁵ See, for example, BL MS Egerton 923 (James's poem at fols. 37r–38r); and Bodleian MS Malone 23 (James's poem at pp. 49–56).

⁵⁶ *Poems*, II.182.

'not to be obscene and not to traduce the great'.⁵⁷ Later in the century, the Earl of Rochester would claim that 'the lies in . . . Libels came often as Ornaments that could not be spared without spoiling the beauty of the *Poem*'.⁵⁸ Yet to equate early Stuart libelling with mere lies, or 'politically motivated falsehood', as Debora Shuger has done, diminishes their artful confusion of the categories of fact and fiction.⁵⁹ As becomes apparent in the best known of the Cecil libels, the poems operate most commonly in the shadowy discursive territory of rumour:

Heere lyes old Hobinol, our shephard while heare
 That very duly, our fleeces did sheere.
 To please us he tyde up his Cur in a clog
 And was to us both shephard and dog.
 for his oblations to pan his manners were thus
 Him selfe give a trifle, and offered up us,
 And thus by his wisdom the providant swaine
 Kept himselfe on the mountaine and us on the plaine
 where many a Hornepipe he tun'd to his Phyllis
 And sweetly sung Walsingham to Amaryllis
 The whilst neither Tyger nor wolfe feard wee
 for he never let worse thing come near us then hee
 Till Atropos payd him (a pox on the Drab)
 for in spite of his tarbox hee dy'de of the scab.⁶⁰

The poem is rather suggestive than forthright, shaped in part by numerous more outspoken libels. It moves through claims of financial exploitation, conventionally figured as an abuse of the minister's pastoral role, to the unsubstantiated sexual intrigue which linked Cecil with Catherine Countess of Suffolk and Lady Walsingham. The shepherd's concern with the treatment of 'scab' alludes to the allegation that Cecil died of venereal disease, despite the ministrations of one of the foremost physicians of the time.⁶¹ Ultimately, the poem's success might be judged as much in literary as in political terms: as a text read and appreciated over succeeding decades as much as a text which swayed contemporary opinion of Cecil. It succeeds as a sophisticated piece of poetry; and, as I will argue in the following section,

⁵⁷ *Culture and Commerce of Texts*, p. 189.

⁵⁸ David Farley-Hills, ed., *Earl of Rochester: The Critical Heritage* (London, 1972), p. 54.

⁵⁹ 'Civility and Censorship in Early Modern England', in *Censorship and Silencing: Practices of Cultural Regulation*, ed. Robert C. Post (Los Angeles, 1998), pp. 91–4.

⁶⁰ *The Poems of Sir Walter Raleigh: A Historical Edition*, ed. Michael Rudick (Tempe, Arizona, 1999), pp. 120–1.

⁶¹ Croft, 'Reputation', 58–9, 60–2; see further below, pp. 61–2.

it circulated among men and women who exhibited a comparable level of sophistication in their reading practices.

DISSEMINATORS AND COLLECTORS

The circulation of libels in early modern England has been well documented.⁶² Some were strategically scattered or posted when first written, in order to gain a suitable impact; however, it is likely that all surviving works were subsequently transmitted in manuscript form, to varying degrees, around the court, city and country. Some may have been scribally reproduced for sale, but the majority circulated through less formal channels.⁶³ Much evidence of libelling in fact survives from the period's emergent manuscript networks for the spread of news.⁶⁴ But much more evidence survives in verse miscellanies, which drew upon a thriving news culture, yet laid claim to a less ephemeral and more literary status than that accorded to mere newsletters. An analysis of these sources offers a greater appreciation of the situation of libelling within literary culture. Such an approach also illuminates the textual practices of libellers, who commonly exploited the interaction between their work and the circulation of news. A libel was always less than and more than news: unreliable in its facts but intriguing in its fictions.

The news culture of early Stuart England had established oral and written dimensions. Its heart was St Paul's Cathedral, the acknowledged metropolitan centre for seekers and gatherers of news, and an obvious site at which libels might be passed into circulation.⁶⁵ The rapid transmission of libels into the provinces is documented by sources such as the regular newsletters written by the Cambridge academic Joseph Mead to a more isolated associate, and the news-diary maintained by the Suffolk clergyman John Rous: texts which have been central in studies of news and political awareness, and which are now familiar to historians.⁶⁶ Such sources also underline the danger libels posed to the reader according to contemporary law. In the opinion of the Star Chamber, 'it seemethe to be a perylouse thinge to keepe

⁶² The best account is in Bellany, *Politics of Court Scandal*, pp. 102–11.

⁶³ Bellany raises this possibility in *Politics of Court Scandal*, pp. 108–9.

⁶⁴ On the importance of news, see Richard Cust, 'News and Politics in Early Seventeenth-Century England', *Past and Present*, 112 (1986), 60–90.

⁶⁵ Cogswell, 'Underground Verse', p. 281.

⁶⁶ Mead, 'A Critical Edition of the Letters of the Reverend Joseph Mead, 1626–1627, Contained in British Library Harleian MS 390', ed. David Anthony John Cockburn (unpublished Ph.D dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1994); *Diary of John Rous, Incumbent of Santon Downham, Suffolk, From 1625 to 1642*, ed. Mary Anne Everett Green (reprint edn, New York, 1968).

a libelle, especiallye if it touche the state'. It was held instead to be imperative that libels be brought immediately to the attention of a magistrate, and ultimately be put before the Privy Council.⁶⁷ Mead was well aware of the dangers: when sending his correspondent one libel on Buckingham he commented, 'I know you will not think it fitt to be shouen, though I send it you. If you do, at your owne perill. Ile deny it.'⁶⁸

Consumers of news were also well aware that libels required different reading practices from those applied to prose reports.⁶⁹ News was assessed in terms of its truth value. As David Cockburn has shown, Mead was rigorous in his analysis, categorizing reports in terms ranging from 'information' or 'intelligence' for news considered to be reliable, down to the more suspect categories of 'report', 'relation', 'tale' or mere 'talk'.⁷⁰ By comparison, while the libel was tantalizing in its offering of truths beyond the public record, it remained an unquestionably suspect textual mode, valued for reasons other than newsworthiness. Rous, for example, transcribed a long poem about the Isle of Rhé expedition, but commented that, 'whether any more be sette downe then vulgar rumor, which is often lying, I knowe not'.⁷¹ Though generally scornful of 'light scoffing wittes' who 'rime upon any the most vulgar surmises', however, Rous nonetheless recorded a significant number of libels. The 'scorne of witte' clearly held a certain appeal, despite the patrician rhetoric.⁷² Sir Simonds D'Ewes, with the benefit of hindsight and greater capacities of literary analysis, was more appreciative when he discussed libels in his *Autobiography*.⁷³ The murder of Sir Thomas Overbury in 1613, he wrote, 'gave many satirical wits occasion to vent themselves in stingy libels'. Similar qualities were assumed in the readers: two libellous anagrams on the names of Frances Howard and Thomas Overbury at this time 'came . . . to my hands, not unworthy to be owned by the rarest wits of this age'.⁷⁴

⁶⁷ *Les Reportes del Cases in Camera Stellata 1593 to 1609, From the Original MS. of John Hawarde* (London, 1894), p. 373.

⁶⁸ 'Critical Edition of the Letters of the Reverend Joseph Mead', p. 615.

⁶⁹ Andrew Mousley considers news as 'a problematic form of knowledge', in 'Self, State, and Seventeenth-Century News', *The Seventeenth-Century*, 6 (1991), 149–68.

⁷⁰ 'Critical Edition of the Letters of the Reverend Joseph Mead', pp. 94–104. As Mousley argues, the concern with the sources of news evident in the news-diaries of John Rous and Walter Yonge demonstrates similarly discriminating reading practices ('Self, State, and Seventeenth-Century News', 162–5).

⁷¹ *Diary of John Rous*, p. 22.

⁷² *Diary of John Rous*, p. 30.

⁷³ On Rous's capacity as a literary critic, see below, p. 181.

⁷⁴ The anagrams, which were circulated widely, were: 'Francis Howarde. Car finds a whore' and 'Thomas Overburie. O! O! a busie murther' (*The Autobiography of Sir Simonds D'Ewes*, ed. James Orchard Halliwell [2 vols., London, 1845], 1.87).

Some libels explored and exploited the implications of this ambiguous relation to news. One poem which enjoyed a distinct currency in news networks was intended, in the words of D'Ewes, 'to show the meanness of [Buckingham's client] Sir Nicholas Hyde, and to deliver the four preceding Chief Justices to be remembered by posterity'. Until the final line it functions almost as a memory-aid:

Learned Coke, Court Montague,
The aged Lea, and honest Crew;
Two preferred, two set aside,
And then starts up Sir Nicholas Hyde!⁷⁵

Rous in fact transcribed this piece in such a way as to reduce it to news: instead of including the barbed 'starts up' (or 'upstart' in other sources), his final line reads 'There's *now in place* sir Nicholas Hide'.⁷⁶ D'Ewes, however, considered the 'significant tetrastich' to be another product of 'wit', and recalled hearing it recited 'at the Bury Lent assizes in Suffolk, in 1627, upon the bench, the same Hyde then sitting in his robes there'; the reading 'so loud as I feared he would have overheard'.⁷⁷ And since Randolph Crew was 'set aside' for refusing to affirm the legality of forced loans, there are here undertones, at the very least, of more pointed political satire.⁷⁸

Another poem of the early 1620s, titled variously 'A Proclamation' or 'The Cryer', adapts the conventions of official news distribution, in the public voice of a town-crier, to attack Sir Giles Mompesson, Sir Francis Michell and Sir Francis Bacon:⁷⁹

Oyes,⁸⁰
Can any tell true tideinges
of a Monopolist

⁷⁵ *Autobiography*, II.48. The diarist William Whiteway noted the libel's occasion, though not the poem itself, in a note of November 1626: 'In this moneth, the Subsidy Roiall went about, which all the Judges refused to subscribe unto, and som of them were thereupon put from their places, as Sir Randall Crew, from being Lord cheife Justice to the kings Bench . . . In steed of Sir Randall Crew, Sir Nicholas Hide was made Lord chiefe Justice kings bench' (*His Diary 1618 to 1635* [Dorset Record Society, 1991], p. 85).

⁷⁶ *Diary of John Rous*, p. 8 (Rous's italics). The single word 'upstart' is used in *The Letters of John Holles 1587–1637*, ed. P. R. Seddon (3 vols., Nottingham, 1975–86), II.346; and *Diary of Walter Yonge, Esq.*, ed. George Roberts (Camden Society, London, 1848), p. 100. On the transmission of this poem, see further Bellany, *Politics of Court Scandal*, p. 103.

⁷⁷ *Autobiography*, II.48.

⁷⁸ *DNB*, *sub.* Crew.

⁷⁹ A fourth stanza, omitted here, concerns Sir Robert Floud. The four men are identified in marginal notes to a version of the poem in BL Add. MS 33998, fols. 65v–66r.

⁸⁰ "Hear, hear ye"; a call by the public crier or by a court officer . . . to command silence and attention when a proclamation, etc., is about to be made' (*OED*).

Knight of the Post for rideing
 'cause he wist,
It argued no small cunning
To make his leggs the instruments
To save his necke by running.⁸¹

Come forth

Thou bawdy house Protector
Pattentee of froth
Of signe posts the Erector⁸²
 Our true worth,
Thy Quorum shall not checke,
For thou shalt unto Newgate ryde,
With Canns about thy necke.

...

Sitt sure,

Thou quaking quivering Keeper,
A tent⁸³ thou must endure,
Least thy wounds grow deeper,
 and past the cure,
For if thy faults prove comon
Thou soone shalt feele a Nimble Coke
Slice collops from thy Gammon.⁸⁴

Whereas a crier is employed to disseminate a strictly authorized discourse, this poem translates news of political scandals into the idiom of popular balladry, setting the 'true worth' of the people against the misdeeds of courtiers. The endemic corruption in the Jacobean government's use of monopolies and patents as a means of regulating economic practice was one of the major issues of the 1621 Parliament, which brought about the impeachment of Mompesson and Bacon.⁸⁵ Within this context, the libel does not aim to simplify, but in fact assumes an informed reader, erecting around a series of witty allusions a carnivalesque mode of satire, aligned with popular shaming rituals. Hence the attack on Bacon plays predictably on his name, from his political wounds 'past the cure', to the attentions of the most zealous of his enemies in the Commons, Sir Edward Coke

⁸¹ Mompesson fled the country when charges against him were laid.

⁸² Michell was one of the patentees for alehouses, which explains the references to 'froth', 'signe posts', and possibly also to 'bawdy house(s)', since alehouses were often depicted as sites of sexual depravity.

⁸³ (Surgical) probe.

⁸⁴ BL MS Harley 4955, fol. 86r.

⁸⁵ Conrad Russell details the proceedings against monopolists and patentees, including the three attacked in this libel, in *Parliaments and English Politics 1621–1629* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 98–113.

(pronounced 'Cook'). Further, in its attention to Michell the poem ignores the elaborate shaming rituals to which he was subjected at court, in favour of his subsequent procession through the London streets. According to a contemporary report, Michell 'was sent unto finsbury Jaile . . . and made to ride on a leane jade backward through london, holding the tail in his hand having a Paper upon his forehead, wherein was written his offence'.⁸⁶

Despite this poem's obvious interaction with news culture, the sources in which it survives suggest overlapping spheres of readership, shading into an identifiably literary milieu.⁸⁷ In BL MS Harley 4955 it is transcribed in a collection of poetry largely composed of the work of Jonson and Donne; in BL MS Add. 33998, a carefully prepared verse miscellany dating from the reign of Charles I, including all the major poets of the period and a contemporary first-line index, it is one of only a handful of poems which could be considered politically sensitive. This appropriation of a topical poem into literary anthologies may be explained by examining the practices and interests of contemporary readers.⁸⁸ As demonstrated above, manuscript verse was highly prized in these years, with sites of greatest activity including the universities, the court and the Inns of Court. Oxford and Cambridge remained the principal training grounds for writers and readers throughout the period, while in London numerous informal social and cultural associations proliferated in the city and at the fringes of the court. One group, centred on John Hoskyns, which met at the Mitre in Fleet Street early in James's reign, was responsible for pieces including 'The Parliament Fart', a widely read series of witty observations on members of the House of Commons.⁸⁹ From the latter 1620s, further groups of poets, playwrights and patrons formed into clubs in which political discourse could be volatile, if not directly oppositional.⁹⁰ One man

⁸⁶ Whiteway, *Diary*, p. 36. On such rituals, see Martin Ingram, 'Ridings, Rough Music and Mocking Rhymes in Early Modern England', in Barry Reay, ed., *Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century England* (London and Sydney, 1985), pp. 166–97. For a ballad on his treatment at court, see 'The Deserved Downfall of a Corrupted Conscience', in *A Pepysian Garland: Black-letter Broadside Ballads of the Years 1595 to 1639*, ed. Hyder E. Rollins (Cambridge, 1922), pp. 147–8.

⁸⁷ My research has revealed only two contemporary sources; however, the final stanza on Bacon forms the first eight lines of another eighteen-line poem, which survives in BL MS Add. 22118, fol. 38b; and Beinecke MS Osborn b.197, pp. 182–3.

⁸⁸ On the manuscript miscellany, see esp. H. R. Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 153–73.

⁸⁹ See Baird W. Whitlock, *John Hoskyns, Serjeant-at-Law* (Washington, DC, 1982), pp. 392–3, 283–8, and his annotated text of 'The Parliament Fart', pp. 288–92. On the manuscript circulation of Hoskyns's poems, see David Colclough, "'The Muses Recreation': John Hoskyns and the Manuscript Culture of the Seventeenth Century", *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 61 (2000), 369–400.

⁹⁰ See Raylor, *Cavaliers*, pp. 84–110.

active in these circles was Robert Herrick, who is best known to literary historians as a committed royalist, but who was the probable compiler of a miscellany which is now one of our best sources of early Stuart political poetry.⁹¹

An interest in topical and libellous poetry thus informed literary tastes in the great period of English verse miscellany compilation, which lasted from around 1620 to the 1640s.⁹² Miscellanies – private collections of poetry, often mixed with prose documents or notes – became the principal vehicles for the preservation and circulation of poetry among the elite. The vogue for the miscellany was a phenomenon centred on, though not restricted to, the universities. It helped to shape a canon of significant writers, and in turn informed the poetry of those seeking recognition and reward. Not surprisingly, apart from Donne no writer is more consistently represented in miscellanies than Richard Corbett, whose poetry is fundamental in the many surviving volumes associated with Christ Church, and also circulated widely beyond Oxford.⁹³ Other important poets in this context include William Strode, Henry King, Carew, Herrick and Jonson. Apart from the latter, these were poets who eschewed printed publication, and relied on the miscellany as a medium for establishing personal reputation and textual survival. It should not be forgotten, therefore, that libellous verse, though sometimes described as an ‘underground’ form, thrived in a literary context in which manuscript circulation was valorized by most major writers.

The cultural work of contemporary collectors of poetry helped to establish literary standards and generic conventions. Miscellanies, in which compilers variously selected, organized and annotated their material, are therefore best approached as active interventions in literary culture rather than documentary reflections of poetic activity. The majority of extant manuscripts which include political poetry simply mix such pieces with conventional collections of elegies, love poetry and occasional verse. Even this act is significant, however, as it situates libellous verse unproblematically within an established literary culture, inviting a reader to move from a Donne love lyric to an unattributed political libel. Other compilers attempted more actively to make sense of poems. BL Sloane MS 826 is perhaps the most notable collection on a single topic, gathering together prose

⁹¹ Raylor, *Cavaliers*, pp. 87–90; ‘Poems from a Seventeenth-Century Manuscript’.

⁹² Marotti, *Manuscript*, p. 32; Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney*, p. 158.

⁹³ Mary Hobbs, *Early Seventeenth-Century Verse Miscellany Manuscripts* (Aldershot, 1992), p. 3. On Corbett, see below, Chapter 5.

documents and poetry relating to the life and death of Buckingham.⁹⁴ A number of other manuscripts contain sections devoted to particular topics, such as that in Bodleian MS Rawlinson D 1048, fol. 64r–v, headed ‘Carres Ignomynye’, and containing six libels on the scandal surrounding the marriage of Robert Carr and Frances Howard. Few such instances clearly indicate that the compiler wished to promote a particular political position. Rather, they suggest a certain detachment, often reinforced by a temporal distance from the controversy which produced a particular piece.

Many compilers also felt that libels required situating in generic terms. The compiler of Folger MS v.a.345 placed a collection of libels in a section devoted to epigrams, while Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington, set a number of libellous epitaphs in a section otherwise devoted to laudatory elegies and epitaphs.⁹⁵ (Folger MS v.a.103 is more discriminating, as it separates a section of ‘Laudatory Epitaphs’ from a subsequent section of ‘Epitaphs Merry & Satyricall’.) Bodleian Rawlinson Poet. 26, which has sectional headings for ‘Verses. Poems. Sonnets. Moral and Divine’, and ‘Songs. Ballads. Libels’, ranges across a period from the later sixteenth century to the early 1640s, but the ordering of material is by genre and topic rather than date. A similar sense of a compiler approaching libels with a view to establishing a canon of the best pieces from the early Stuart period is evident in the volume maintained by John Holles, Second Earl of Clare (BL MS Harley 6383). Much of this book consists of prose, including an account of the 1624 Parliament.⁹⁶ The poetry section is carefully compiled, with numbered pages and an index. Its collection of political poetry, much of which Holles identifies in headnotes as ‘libels’, might fairly be called discerning on literary grounds. The volume also has three poems concerned with the squabble between Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones (fols. 73r–76r), a fact which further suggests an identifiably literary interest in poetry of invective.

The process of canon formation is most clearly apparent in Bodleian MS Malone 23, which is composed almost entirely of early Stuart political poetry.⁹⁷ The consistent hand and the predominance of poems on Buckingham suggest that the volume was composed at one time, probably around

⁹⁴ This manuscript was by far the most important source for *Poems and Songs*.

⁹⁵ Folger MS v.a.125, fols. 1–19; the volume was compiled around 1630.

⁹⁶ This has been published as *The Holles Account of Proceedings in the House of Commons in 1624*, ed. Christopher Thompson (Orsett, Essex, 1985).

⁹⁷ Apart from the poetry, it includes a letter and prose notes, in Latin and English, concerning the rationale and morality of Felton’s murder of Buckingham.