

Introduction

I Early Modern Commonplacing

As a printed commonplace book, *Bel-vedere or the Garden of the Muses* (1600) belongs to a ubiquitous Renaissance genre with a lively history in the sixteenth century. In *De copia verborum* (1513), Desiderius Erasmus encouraged students to improve their eloquence by means of suitably structured notebooks. By copying noteworthy excerpts from authoritative sources into sections under various headings, the student built up a stock of verbal material that could be easily retrieved and deployed in writing or speech. The commonplace book thus served a crucial educational purpose by asking students to store and later use the best of what they read. The practice became so widespread that Peter Beal has called commonplace books ‘the primary intellectual tool for organizing knowledge and thought among the intelligentsia of the seventeenth and probably also the sixteenth centuries’.¹

The idea of the commonplace goes back to classical rhetoric. Building on Aristotle, Cicero defined a ‘topic’ as ‘the place [or *locus*] of an argument’, and wrote that “‘Those arguments which can be transferred to many cases, we call common places’ [*loci communes*]’.² It is that transfer ‘to many cases’ which the copying into notebooks enabled. By encouraging that transfer, the humanist educational practice of commonplacing also had a profound impact on the practice of reading. Reading in a culture of commonplacing meant being on the lookout for passages that could be extracted and adapted for a different context. The practice of commonplacing made reading a goal-orientated activity and made books into resources to be studied to provide opportunities for one’s improvement

¹ Peter Beal, ‘Notions in Garrison: The Seventeenth-Century Commonplace Book’, in *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts: Papers of the Renaissance English Text Society, 1985–1991*, ed. W. Speed Hill (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1993), pp. 131–47, 134. See also Ann Blair, ‘Reading Strategies for Coping with Information Overload ca. 1500–1700’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 64.1 (2003), 11–28.

² Beal, ‘Notions in Garrison’, 135. Beal quotes from Cicero’s *De Inventione*, II.xv.48. See also Rhodes, *Origins*, 152.

and eloquence.³ In addition to habits of reading which primarily sought a consecutively constructed argument or plot, the rise of Renaissance commonplacing encouraged a move towards reading for locally extractable *sententiae* or *flores*, moral or rhetorical nuggets. Copying passages into a notebook and choosing headings under which to record them came with the added bonus of fixing the passages in one's mind.

In its origins, commonplacing was thus chiefly a scholarly pursuit. Excerpts were copied from authoritative sources expressing opinions that were considered commendable. Erasmus encouraged his students to build up their commonplace books with suitable passages from the whole corpus of classical literature.⁴ The notebooks amounted to personal reference works, summaries of things worth knowing, often succinctly formulated in *sententiae*, aphorisms or apophthegms. Yet commonplacing also had a literary purpose by providing rhetorical and stylistic samples that could be adapted in production. By observing Seneca's famous injunction in Epistle 84 in his *Epistulae morales*, one could visit the garden of literature and, in analogy to the industrious bee, extract nectar from its beautiful flowers, store it in the honeycomb (the commonplace book), with its various compartments (the headings), and convert it into honey. The metaphor of the bee, which was central to the Renaissance poetic practice of imitation, reminds us that the genre of the commonplace book is related to that of the anthology, a term that derives from the Greek word for *flower*, *anthos*.⁵ The flower and the garden are much deployed metaphors on title pages of literary commonplace books in the early modern period, all the more so as their use could also build on the medieval *florilegia* (collections of extracts, though not usually organized under headings), from the Latin *flos*, flower, and *legere*, to gather. Examples range from Nanus Mirabellius' *Polyanthea* ('many flowers') and Octavianus Mirandula's *Illustrium Poetarum Flores* ('flowers of illustrious poets'), of which the original title was in fact *Viridarium illustrium poetarum* ('pleasure-garden of illustrious poets'), to the subtitles of *Bel-vedere*, '*the Garden of the Muses*', and *England's Parnassus* (1600): '*The choyssest Flowers of our Moderne Poets*'.⁶ Printed commonplace books could thus give access not only to wisdom distilled by a reader's sound judgement, but

³ See also Peter Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), esp. p. 44.

⁴ Beal, 'Notions in Garrison', 137.

⁵ See Rhodes, *Origins*, p. 155.

⁶ *Ibid.*

also to the beautiful and the witty, matter which could be appropriated for literary ends.

Mirabellius' *Polyanthea* and Mirandula's *Illustrium Poetarum Flores* were hugely influential. Originally published in Savona in northern Italy in 1503, the *Polyanthea* went through dozens of editions.⁷ As Rhodes points out, it first appeared as a 'grammar textbook and aid for preachers' but was gradually augmented and eventually took the form of a general encyclopaedia containing a 'huge list of topics ... arranged alphabetically, each beginning with a definition and an etymology, and followed by streams of soundbites from poetry and philosophy'.⁸ Mirandula's *Illustrium Poetarum Flores* was first published in Venice in 1507 and became the most popular Latin commonplace book of the sixteenth century.⁹ The *Universal Short Title Catalogue* (<https://ustc.ac.uk>) records forty-eight editions for the sixteenth century alone, including many published in Lyon, Paris, Strasbourg and Antwerp. Both the *Polyanthea* and the *Illustrium Poetarum Flores* were originally *florilegia* but came to be restructured along the lines of commonplace books, with their material arranged under topical headings.¹⁰

Apart from the *Polyanthea* and the *Illustrium Poetarum Flores*, many other printed commonplace books in Latin were available.¹¹ Most of them were published on the Continent, although the *Illustrium Poetarum Flores* also appeared in London in 1598 in an edition by Thomas Creed (STC 17954), who happened to publish (and print) *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* (STC 13072) in the same year. With the spread of commonplacing in the course of the sixteenth century and the translation into English of Erasmus' *Apophthegmes* (1542, STC 1542) came the advent of vernacular printed commonplace books in England. For instance, the second of the four books of William Baldwin's *Treatise of morall philosophie* (1547, STC 1253) consists of sentences assigned in the margins to ancient philosophers (e.g. 'Hermes', 'Socrates', 'Plato', sig. I3r) arranged under topical headings, beginning with 'God' (sig. I3r) and followed by 'the soule' (sig. I5v), 'the worlde' (sig. I8r), 'Death' (sig. K1r) and so on. Baldwin's tremendously successful treatise kept growing and went through at least sixteen more editions up to the end of the century (STC

⁷ See Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books*, pp. 93–7.

⁸ Rhodes, *Origins*, p. 154.

⁹ See Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books*, pp. 189–90.

¹⁰ See Quentin Skinner, *Forensic Shakespeare* (Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 296–7.

¹¹ See Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books*, pp. 186–214.

1254–65).¹² Thomas Blague's *A Schole of wise Conceytes ... set forth in common places by order of the alphabet* (1569, STC 3114) was translated 'out of diuers Greke and Latine wryters' (sig. A1r). John Parincheffe's *An extracte of examples, apothegmes, and histories* (1572, STC 19196) contains material from the Alsatian humanist Conrad Lycosthenes (1518–61) and others, translated into English and 'reduced into an alphabeticall order of common places', from 'Abstinencie' (sig. A5r) all the way to 'worldly wealth' (sig. P6v). Other printed commonplace books focused on religious material. John Marbeck's *Booke of Notes and Common places, with their expositions, collected and gathered out of the workes of diuers singular writers, and brought alphabetically into order* (1581, STC 17299) is a vast compendium of about 1,200 quarto pages on scriptural topics. Thomas Cogan's *Well of Wisdom* (1577, STC 5485) consists of 'sayings whiche may leade all men to perfect and true wisdom ... Gathered out of ... the olde testament', organized 'in usuall common places in order of A. B. C.' (sig. A1r). Intriguingly, as individual manuscript commonplace books had led to printed ones, so a textual framework in print could induce commonplacing in manuscript, as in John Foxe's *Pandectae locorum communium* (1572, STC 11239): it provides printed preliminaries, an index and Latin headings at the very top of the recto pages but is otherwise blank, inviting readers to fill the leaves with appropriate material.¹³

For Erasmus, Foxe and many of their peers, commonplacing was primarily utilitarian, fulfilling purposes that could be scholarly, religious or practical, such as providing help with letter writing. Yet with the spread of the practice to a greater variety of readers, English manuscript commonplace books could be the result not just of goal-orientated but also of recreational reading, and could include material from popular genres such as prose romances or plays.¹⁴ For instance, the notebook of Edward Pudsey (1573–1613), arranged under commonplace headings, 'combines extracts from classical and modern European historians and moralists in English translation with passages from contemporary English essays and plays', including *Othello*, which was not published until after Pudsey's

¹² For Baldwin's *Treatise*, see Jennifer Richards, 'Commonplacing and Prose Writing: William Baldwin and Robert Burton', in *The Oxford Handbook of English Prose 1500–1640*, ed. Andrew Hadfield (Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 43–58. See also Andrew Hadfield, *Lying in Early Modern English Culture: From the Oath of Supremacy to the Oath of Allegiance* (Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 169–70.

¹³ See Skinner, *Forensic Shakespeare*, pp. 297–8; and Walter J. Ong, SJ, *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology: Studies in the Interaction of Expression and Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971), pp. 60, 76–9.

¹⁴ See Heidi Brayman Hackel, *Reading Material in Early Modern England: Print, Gender, Literacy* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), esp. pp. 175–95.

death and seems to have been commonplacéd during performance.¹⁵ While vernacular literature was thus finding its way into private manuscript commonplace books, it took a further step in the development of the genre for it to become the staple of printed commonplace books, as it did in a series of publications in the closing years of the sixteenth century: the ‘Bodenham miscellanies’.

2 The Bodenham Miscellanies

Bel-vedère belongs to a series of titles from the turn of the seventeenth century that marked a new stage in the publication of commonplace books in England. What holds these titles together is the person who initiated them, John Bodenham, and the project that informed them. Sometimes called the ‘Bodenham miscellanies’, they gave unprecedented importance to English vernacular writings, including poetry and drama, as material worthy of inclusion in printed commonplace books. The publications are *Politeuphuia: Wit’s Commonwealth* (1597); *Palladis Tamia: Wit’s Treasury* (1598), famous for its Shakespeare allusions; *Wit’s Theatre of the Little World* (1599); *Bel-vedère* (1600); and, later in the same year, *England’s Helicon*. *Bel-vedère* is closely connected to these other volumes and should be understood within the context of their genesis and publication.¹⁶

John Bodenham (c.1559–1610) was born in London and, like Edmund Spenser and Thomas Kyd, he attended Merchant Taylors’ School. He did not matriculate in either university but followed his father and paternal grandfather in becoming a member of the Grocers’ Company, his father having served as the Company’s senior warden in 1570. John was left a substantial inheritance, including property that produced a steady income. He does not seem to have been very active in the Grocers’

¹⁵ Fred Schurink, ‘Manuscript Commonplace Books, Literature and Reading in Early Modern England’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 73 (2010), 465. Pudsey’s commonplace book is now at the Bodleian Library (MS Eng. poet.d.3), although four leaves are preserved at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Record Office in Stratford-upon-Avon (ER 82/1/21). See also Juliet Mary Gowan, ed., *An Edition of Edward Pudsey’s Commonwealth Book (c.1600-1615) from the Manuscript in the Bodleian Library*, Unpublished MPhil thesis, University of London, 1967, and Laura Estill, *Dramatic Extracts in Seventeenth-Century English Manuscripts: Watching, Reading, Changing Plays* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2015), pp. 16–18.

¹⁶ It is under the title ‘*Wit’s Commonwealth*’ that the first Bodenham miscellany was chiefly known (including in its sequels), so we follow other scholars in referring to it as such below, although it should be noted that the original main title was ‘*Politeuphuia*’. For the Bodenham miscellanies, see also William G. Crane, *Wit and Rhetoric in the Renaissance: The Formal Basis of Elizabethan Prose Style* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), pp. 40–6, and Ong, SJ, *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology*, pp. 48–103, esp. 79–80.

Company, and had the necessary time to pursue his literary interests and the necessary wealth to act as a literary patron. He remained unmarried and childless, and at his death, left his estate and fortune to his sister Mary.¹⁷

The first publication associated with Bodenham, *Wit's Commonwealth*, was entered in the Stationers' Register on 14 October 1597 and published in the same year (STC 15685). It is a prose commonplace book that arranges *sententiae* and aphorisms under topical headings. For instance, under the first heading, 'Of God', we read: 'God by iustice bringeth downe what pryde buildeth vp' (sig. B2r); according to a sentence under 'Of Office', 'The office of a Monarke is continuallie to looke vpon the Law of God, to engraue it in his soule, and to meditate vpon his words' (sig. O1r); under 'Of Treason', we read that 'Many men loue the treason, though they hate the traytor' (sig. 2K8r). These and other pithy remarks follow one another for more than 500 octavo pages. The book is described in a prefatory address as 'a methodicall collection of the most choice and select admonitions and sentences, compendiously drawne from infinite varietie, diuine, historicall, poeticall, politique, morrall, and humane' (sigs. A2r–v). Published by Nicholas Ling, it contains a dedicatory epistle by Ling addressed to Bodenham which begins as follows:

Sir, what you seriously began long since, and haue alwaies bene very careful for the full perfection of, at length thus finished, although perhaps not so well to your expectation, I present you with, as one before all most worthy of the same, both in respect of your earnest trauell therein, & the great desire you haue continually had for the generall profit. (sig. A2r)

The epistle suggests that Bodenham had been compiling material for a long time before handing it over to Ling for the final editing and publishing. Ling, in turn, dedicated the book to Bodenham, acknowledging him as originator and patron.

The address 'To the Reader' prefacing *Wit's Commonwealth* (1597) spells out its purpose:

Courteous Reader, seeing euery continued speech is of more force & effecacie to perswade or dissuade, being adorned & strengthened with graue sentences, then rude heapes of idle wordes, and that wee ought to haue an especiall regard, not howe much we speake, but howe well, I haue thus boldly aduentured, to make thee pertaker of my trauailes, which I haue

¹⁷ This paragraph is indebted to Arthur F. Marotti, 'Bodenham [Bodnam], John (c. 1559–1610), literary patron and grocer', *ODNB*. See also Franklin B. Williams, 'John Bodenham, "Art's lover, learning's friend"', *Studies in Philology*, 31 (1934), 198–214.

employed in gathering of certaine heades or places, that with the more ease thou maist discourse of any subiect tending to vertue or vice. (sig. A3r)

The ambition to speak – and no doubt write – well, and to adorn one’s ‘discourse’ with ‘graue sentences’ (also in the sense of apophthegms, of pithy or pointed sayings; see *OED*, sentence, *n.4.a*) seems to have been shared by many. The publication sold out in little time and received at least two more editions in the following year (STC 15686, 15686.3).¹⁸ In the first of these, Ling wrote in the address ‘To the Reader’ that ‘encouraged by thy kind acceptance of these first labours, I haue boldly aduentured to present thee with this second edition ... Some new heads I haue inserted, corrected many where I found it necessary, and almost euery one in some sort augmented’ (sig. A3r). Many more editions followed in the course of the seventeenth and the early eighteenth century.¹⁹

In the same year that *Wit’s Commonwealth* received its second and third editions, the second of the Bodenham miscellanies appeared. *Palladis Tamia* (1598, STC 17834), by Francis Meres and published by Cuthbert Burby, is best known for the Shakespeare allusions written in the ‘Comparatiue *Discourse* of our English Poets with the Greeke, Latine, and Italian Poets’ (sigs. 2N7r–2O7r). But when it was first published, its title – *Palladis Tamia. Wits Treasury, being the second part of Wits Commonwealth* – acknowledged its status as a sequel. In a prefatory epistle, Meres points out that the second part follows in the wake of the first, hoping to emulate its success:

The first part being published a yeare agoe, hath had the worlds fauour and furtherance, which hath made him so crank, yong & fresh, that thrice in one yeere hee hath renewed his age, a spring more then is in fruitfull *Saba* ... I shall willingly sende this second with the first, to take what fortune Wit will sende him. (sig. A3v)²⁰

¹⁸ A very fragmentary copy at the Bodleian Library (shelfmark J-J Drayton g.6) with the date 1598 in the colophon suggests that there was another edition (STC 15685.5) in that year.

¹⁹ Hyder Edward Rollins mentions “a fourth edition” of 1608 (?), “a tenth Edition” of 1620 (?), “the twelfth edition” of 1630 (?), “the thirteenth Edition” of 1641, “the fifteenth Edition” of 1650, the “sixteenth Edition” of 1655, “this new Edition” of 1663, 1669, 1671, 1674, 1678, 1684, 1687, 1688 and 1698, a “Newly Revised” edition of 1699, and a “Newly Corrected and Enlarged” edition of 1706, 1707 and 1722. The last four are designated “For the Use of Schools” (Rollins, ed., *England’s Helicon*, vol. 2, p. 46).

²⁰ Leaves A2–A4 with Meres’ dedicatory epistle and a Latin preface are cancelled in most of the extant copies of the 1598 duodecimo because in the ‘insulting Latin preface, “Candido Lectori,” ... Meres attacks his publisher, Cuthbert Burby, for stinginess in refusing to print the whole work and in keeping back part for a second edition’ (Rollins, ed., *England’s Helicon*, vol. 2, p. 45, n3). See F. S. Ferguson, ‘Meres’s *Palladis Tamia*’, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 7 June 1928, 430. The ESTC links to three copies of the first edition of *Palladis Tamia*, a copy available through the Folger Digital Image Collection and two copies from the Huntington Library available via EEB0,

Like *Wit's Commonwealth*, *Palladis Tamia* is arranged under topical headings, but unlike *Wit's Commonwealth*, it consists exclusively of similitudes: 'As God is vnknowne vnto us according to his essence: so is he immeasurable according to his maiesty' (sig. B2v); 'As the sunne doth glad and cheare all creatures: so liberalitie maketh all men merrie' (sig. P2v); 'As God made heauen for good men: so he made hell for wicked men' (sig. 2V5r); and so on, for more than 650 ducodecimo pages.²¹

Meres' dedicatory epistle addressed to Thomas Eliot is dated 19 October 1598, at which time plans for the third part of the Bodenham miscellanies must have been far advanced. Meres writes:

I exceedingly reioyce, and am glad at my heart, that the first part of *Wits Commonwealth*, contayning Sentences, hath like a braue Champion gloriouslie marched and got such renowned fame by swifte running, equiualent with *Philips* Chariottes, that thrice within one yeare it hath runne thorowe the Presse. If this seconde part of mine, called *Wittes Tresurie* contayning Similitudes, beeing a stalke of the same stemme, shall haue the like foot-manship, and finde the same successe, then with *Parmenio* I shall bee the second in *Philips* ioy. And then *Philips* ioy will eftsoones bee full, for his *Alexander*, whom not *Olympia*, but a worthie scholler is conceyuing, who will fill the third part of *Wits Commonwealth* with moe glorious Examples, then great *Alexander* did the world with valiant and heroicall exploits. (sigs. A2r–v)

The 'worthie scholler' who was preparing what Meres calls 'the third part of *Wits Commonwealth*' is Robert Allott, whose *Wits Theater of the Little World* was published by Nicholas Ling in 1599 (STC 381).²² It contains a

none of which contains leaves A2–A4. Rollins writes that 'Dr. Rosenbach has two perfect copies of the first edition' (Rollins, ed., *England's Helicon*, vol. 2, p. 45, n3), but they have since changed hands. The only perfect copy we have been able to locate is now at the Carl H. Pforzheimer Library, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin. The second edition of 1634 omits the Latin address but includes Meres' epistle – now simply an address 'To the Reader' (sigs. A2r–A4r) – with slight changes. Our quotations from Meres' prefatory epistle are from Don Cameron Allen, ed., *Palladis Tamia (1598) by Francis Meres* (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1938).

²¹ A second edition of *Palladis Tamia*, now simply titled *Wits Commonwealth. The Second Part*, was published in 1634 (STC 17835). It was reissued in 1636 as *Witts academy* (STC 17836). Given the importance accorded to similitudes in *Palladis Tamia*, it may be relevant to recall Michel Foucault's affirmation that 'Up to the end of the sixteenth century, resemblance played a constructive role in the knowledge of Western culture. It was resemblance that largely guided exegesis and the interpretation of texts; it was resemblance that organized the play of symbols, made possible knowledge of things visible and invisible, and controlled the art of representing them' (*The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1973), p. 17).

²² Note that Robert Allott may well be the 'R. A.' who contributed a Latin commendatory sonnet to *Wit's Commonwealth* in 1597 (sig. A4r).

dedicatory address to Bodenham,²³ in which Allott writes that *Wit's Theatre* 'might haue been written with more maturitie, & deliberation, but in respect of my promise I haue made this hast, how happy I know not, yet good enough I hope, if you vouchsafe your kinde approbation: which with your iudgement I holde ominous, and as vnder which, *Politeuphuia* was so gracious' (sig. A2r). As in Meres' address in *Palladis Tamia*, *Wit's Commonwealth* (here referred to as '*Politeuphuia*') is acknowledged as a model, and Bodenham as an initiator and patron, who, as Allott writes, 'hath begot in me this labor' (sig. A2v).

Like the earlier Bodenham miscellanies, *Wit's Theatre* arranges its material under topical headings, but, unlike the other two, it consists of what Allott calls 'Examples' (sig. A2v), by which he means deeds or actions of usually well-known historical or legendary figures. For instance, under 'Of God': 'Orpheus who did write of the pluralitie of gods in his time to Musaeus, made recantation, saying, There is but one God' (sigs. B1v–B2r); under 'Of Apparell': 'Aristotle delighted to goe braue, & in gorgeous apparell, with chaines and rings, and tooke therein great felicity' (sig. N6r); and under 'Of Fame': 'Lysimachus, was famed all ouer the world, for that he being but a young Souldier vnder King Alexander, killed a Lyon' (sig. 2F6v). In analogous fashion, countless sentences illustrate over more than 550 octavo pages what Allot calls 'the inward and outward parts of man, liuely figured in hys actions and behaiour' (sig. A3r).

Although *Wit's Commonwealth*, *Palladis Tamia* and *Wit's Theatre* are all topically arranged prose commonplace books, they are thus also complementary, covering different components of a rhetorical toolbox for the upwardly mobile middle classes. *Wit's Commonwealth* provides aphoristic wisdom in pithy sentences, *Palladis Tamia* ingenious connections by means of similitudes and *Wit's Theatre* authoritative precedents presented as examples. Meres' preface comments in some detail on this three-part design:

all the source of wit ... may flowe within three chanel, and be contriued into three heads; into a Sentence, a Similitude, & an Example ... Wit is nourished with Sentences, Similitudes, and Examples ... I holde that Sentences, Similitudes, and Examples, are as necessarie to vpholde a Witte ... hee that woulde write or speake pithilye, perspicuously, and persuasiuely must vse to haue at hande in readinesse, three kinde of ornamentes and effectuall motiues, Sentences, Similitudes, and Examples ... And in truth

²³ In a variant (STC 382), the dedication is unsigned.

what can I desire more, then to see the naked Truth arrayed in Sentences, fitting the tast of Philosophers; inuested in Similitudes, loued of Oratours; and approued by Examples, the rule and leuell of the vnstayed and raging multitude? ... so haue I long desired to see three thinges; Truthes soundnesse in Sentences, her elegancie in Similitudes, and approbation by Examples. (sigs. A2r–A3r)

The year after the publication of Meres' 'Similitudes' in *Palladis Tamia*, Allot's 'Examples' in *Wit's Theatre* completed Bodenham's 'Wit' triptych. In his dedicatory epistle to Bodenham, Allott comments on this completion by using the same words as Meres: 'Very fitly is man compared to a tree, whose rootes are his thoughts, whose branches and leaues his wordes (which are sufficiently set forth in choicest *Sentences & Similitudes*) the fruits whereof are his workes, now shewed in *Examples*' (sigs. A2r–v, our emphasis). With all three books in print, Allott's conceit implies, Bodenham's project had come to fruition.

As became clear in the following year, however, Bodenham was not content with the publication of commonplace books that drew only on prose. *Bel-vedère or The Garden of the Muses* (1600, STC 3189), published by Hugh Astley, with a prefatory poem by 'A. M.' addressed to Bodenham, in fact constitutes the verse equivalent to what *Wit's Commonwealth*, *Palladis Tamia* and *Wit's Theatre* had provided in prose. Like the prose commonplace books, *Bel-vedère* arranges its material under topical headings, although it does so in decasyllabic verse. Moreover, under each topical heading, following an initial couplet in slightly larger type, it has three kinds of passages: first, sentences consisting of decasyllabic single lines or rhyming couplets, followed, second, by a series of two-line 'Similes on the same subject' and, third, two-line 'Examples likewise on the same'. The address 'To the Reader' comments on this structure as follows:

Concerning the nature and qualitie of these excellent flowres, thou seest that they are most learned, graue, and wittie sentences; each line being a seuerall sentence, and none exceeding two lines at the vttermost. All which, being subiected vnder apt and proper heads, as arguments what is then dilated and spoken of: euen so each head hath first his definition in a couplet sentence; then the single and double sentences by variation of letter do follow: and lastly, Similies and Examples in the same nature likewise, to conclude euery Head or Argument handled. (sigs. A3v–A4r)

The word 'Similes' clearly designates what Meres and Allott called 'Similitudes'.²⁴ *Bel-vedère* thus provides 'sentences' like *Wit's Commonwealth*,

²⁴ See the *OED*, *similitude*, n., 3b: 'A comparison drawn between two things or facts; the expression of such comparison; †a simile.'