

Shakespeare Association of America

Seminar 03

Anne Southwell and Early Modernisms

ABSTRACTS

Stoic Themes in the Poetry of Lady Anne Southwell

Diana G. Barnes, University of New England, Australia

In this paper I will investigate the cluster of poems on stoic and Christian themes in the Folger Miscellany of Lady Anne Southwell (1574-1636). At first look the cluster seems to be following the ordering of the Justice Lipsius edition of Seneca which was translated into English by Thomas Lodge and first published 1614. I will begin by examining “A Paraphrase upon Lucius Annaeus Seneca on his Book of Providence”, “Anger” and “In this Frail World” with reference to Seneca, Lipsius’s commentary and Lodge’s translation in order to understand how Southwell is using stoic philosophical ideas. Then I will consider those most obviously stoic poems within the miscellany as a whole collection, and look for other correlations and oblique adaptations. This work fits into my current research project on early modern women’s engagement with stoic and neostoic philosophy.

Number as Metaphor in Lady Anne Southwell’s Poetry: Music, Mathematics and Divine Harmony

Danielle Clarke, University College Dublin

This paper draws upon Lady Anne Southwell’s poetry and prose to outline how she uses the language of accounting and mathematics in her poetry. I suggest that for Southwell, accounting represents a specifically arithmetical understanding of mankind’s indebtedness to God, and to Christ, which must be repaid at judgement day, and which shapes the form that worship and piety should take. In relation to mathematics, Southwell views this part of the quadrivium in the context of music in particular, to develop an idea of divine poetry which aims to use order, pattern and harmony to assert poetry as a valid form of recompense for sin.

“To know as far as finite dust may know”: Divine Transcendence and Natural Theology in the Poetry of Anne Southwell

Wesley Garey, Charleston Southern University

Following Jean Klene's foundational scholarly edition, recent studies of Anne Southwell have shown how this fascinating Puritan poet theorizes and practices a distinctive mode of devotional poetics. Building on work by Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, Cassandra Gorman, Christina Luckyj, and Kevin Killeen, among others, this essay explores how Southwell's scriptural poetry relates to early modern natural theology: the attempt to discern theological truth through the study of the natural world. As Katherine Calloway (2023) has shown, the work of Donne, Herbert, and later seventeenth-century poets was permeated with questions about the boundaries of human reason and whether the book of nature could be read for spiritual wisdom alongside scripture.

This essay will consider how Southwell locates her Decalogue poems within a specifically Reformed version of natural theology in which God is unknowable by human reason unaided by scriptural revelation, yet the natural world nonetheless acts as a "theater" of divine glory (Calvin 1559). While Southwell emphasizes the inadequacy of human reason to understand divine mystery, she also frequently uses analogies from the natural world to explicate scripture in her Decalogue poems, and she presents the human being as an image of both God and the cosmos. Southwell's meditative poetics thus offers a striking example of how some early modern Calvinist poets navigated the tension between the belief in divine transcendence and the belief that the material universe points to theological truth, using poetry to explore the limits and capabilities of both human reason and language itself.

Anne Southwell and Walter Raleigh

Jonathan Gibson, Open University

One of the most intriguing items in Anne Southwell's rich and stimulating manuscript collection of texts by herself and others (MS Folger V.b.198) is a version of Walter Raleigh's 'The Lie' (fol. 2r). Southwell's text of the poem includes interesting unique variants and, intriguingly, carries Southwell's own signature. How did Southwell come across Raleigh's work, and what was her attitude to it? In this essay, I will begin to sketch an answer to this question by considering 'The Lie' alongside various other points of connection between the two writers. Such links include Raleigh's dealings with Southwell's father the Serjeant at law Sir Thomas Harris and with her friend the clergyman Daniel Featley; Southwell's reworking of a poem by Raleigh's closest literary associate Arthur Gorges, 'Like to a lampe wherein the light is dead' (fol. 9v); family ties between Gorges and Southwell; Raleigh's and Southwell's Irish connections; and the inclusion of Raleigh's *Prerogative of Parliaments* in a booklist in the manuscript. I focus in particular on the alterations made by Southwell to poems by Raleigh and Gorges.

Balls of Mercury and Wax: Throwing Spherical Objects in Southwell's verse

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Southwell's writing is preoccupied with spheres, from the celestial bodies to the 'admired ball' of the Earth itself ('Thou Should Keep Holy the Sabbath Day', FM4). In this paper, I follow up prior work on the astronomical concerns of her poetry with a more particular focus: a recurring trope in the Folger manuscript of the physics of volatile, thrown spherical objects. From tennis balls to footballs ('Sin's camping-ball', CM3); 'quicksilver balls' (F9) to the flung 'waxen ball' of F13, Southwell returns to images of throwing and unpredictable movement to highlight the inconsistencies of mankind. In an important article, Victoria Burke has shown how football was 'often seen as physically dangerous and subject to divine displeasure', highlighting the association of its appearance in texts by Southwell and other seventeenth-century women with an astonishing cosmic freedom ('Playing Football with the Stars', 2020). This extends, I suggest, to other 'balls' and volatile objects in Southwell's poems, the movements of which she juxtaposes with other, cosmic references to circularity and endurance that bear her moral messages. This paper will explore the tropes of throwing, careless flight and inconsistency associated with such objects in Southwell's work, and in turn how these images interact with the formal variations of her verse.

Anne Southwell and Early Modern Networks of Verse Transmission

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The ERC-funded project "STEMMA: Systems of Transmitting Early Modern Manuscript Verse, 1475–1700" (2023–2028) at the University of Galway is currently building the first large-scale computational model of the transmission of early modern verse in manuscript. This paper applies foundational methods for the project to locate Anne Southwell and her poems in a pilot dataset. Although Southwell's poems are only known to survive in two manuscripts, these manuscripts are connected to a much larger network other manuscripts and agents—and these connections, in turn, allow us to reevaluate Southwell's work in new quantitative and qualitative ways.

Scholars have already shown that Southwell's work is collaborative and community-oriented, but the advances of the STEMMA project show that early modern manuscript circulation functions as what network scientists describe as a "small world," with nearly half of the pilot network within two degrees of the manuscripts containing Southwell's works. Such insights allow us to ask new questions about the nature of manuscript circulation and reframe known evidence. At the same time, quantitative approaches raise important textual theoretical questions about the nature of material evidence. These questions often require a return to literary historical research even as computational methods both give us new purchase on them and allow us to work on an unprecedented scale. Ultimately, network methods reveal the emerging audience for English poetry to be more varied and more geographically dispersed, and yet also more interconnected, than traditional methods of literary historical research have yet allowed us to see.

Anne Southwell's "Abstract"

Paula McQuade, DePaul University—Chicago

I argue in this paper that Anne Southwell deliberately revised her poem, "I am thy Lord," in order to direct her readers' attention to the rhetorical forms of the abstract and the epitome. Thematically, the references convey Southwell's sense that earthly forms provide a way of reading and expressing Divine majesty and human glory as God's image, a belief that she shared with Du Bartas and others (Clarke, 2023). But I want to suggest that these references serve an additional function. Clarke has suggested that Southwell's Decalogue poems are perhaps best understood as verse mediations or "the dilation of a Biblical text familiar from sermon culture" (2023). By alluding to forms of textual compression in a lyric poem that amplifies a Scriptural text, Southwell showcases her familiarity with early modern rhetorical theory, which held that a "great part of eloquence consisteth in increasing and diminishing" (Peacham). At the same time, she directs her reader's attention to her own "Abstract" (which appears on f 30v, two pages before "I am thy God" in the manuscript miscellany) and thus flaunts her ability to compose in a variety of rhetorical forms. Her use of the synonyms "abstract" and "epitome" provides a further example of dilation and thus simultaneously emphasize her rhetorical awareness and her ability to dilate further. Although they are no longer held in high esteem by literary scholars, forms like the abstract and epitome were well-regarded in early modern England; as we will see, they provided writers like Southwell with the opportunity to demonstrate their creativity, judgement, and textual skill.

"being thus poetically composed": Medicine and Poetry in Anne Southwell's Letter to Cicely MacWilliam Ridgeway

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Medicine could be an important component of early modern women's intellectual lives. Lady Anne Southwell's letter to Cicely MacWilliam Ridgeway is unique in engaging with medical discourses – about the humoral body, its place in the natural world, its maladies and remedies for them – to develop a theory of poetry. Southwell makes the proportion and harmony essential to health attributes of poetry, from its origins in God's divine poetry – all of the natural world – to the human body, and she positions herself as the physician who, understanding this continuity, can offer a remedy for Ridgeway's distaste for verse.

Anne Southwell and the Politics of Epic Form

Mihoko Suzuki, University of Miami

This paper suggests that in the Decalogue Southwell engaged with epic, the most prestigious literary form, considered a male preserve, by deploying epic conventions such as the invocation and catalogue. Mobilizing the epic form answered to her ambition to proffer admonitory precepts to the monarch and to demonstrate her ability to compete with James I, who was known for his learning. At the same time, she acknowledged the danger of overstepping limits in doing so. Southwell also takes up the matter of epic in her elegies commemorating the public political figures Frederick of Bohemia and Gustavus Adolphus, king of Sweden, as Protestant heroes. In the untitled Creation poem, she includes both an invocation and an elegy in which she addresses Adam to register his responsibility for the consequences of the Fall.

I conclude with a discussion of the affinities of Southwell's works with women writing during the Civil War and into the Restoration: Cavendish, Poole, Philips, Hutchinson, Clifford. Acknowledging these connections counters the kind of commentary reminiscent of revisionist historiography of the English Civil Wars (e.g., J.P. Kenyon, J.C.D. Clarke, Kevin Sharpe,) that works to minimize the implications—and importance—of Southwell's political views. Such a recognition can also lead to a reassessment of the generally accepted periodization of seventeenth-century literature and history into the three distinct periods of Stuart, Civil War/Commonwealth, and Restoration.

Making Sense of Southwell: Notes on Reading Folger V.b.198

Suzanne Trill, University of Edinburgh

As I was working on my previously proposed paper for this seminar, I found myself instead grappling with endless questions about how to read this material and what format to read it in. Our seminar leaders are working on a new edition and the materials they shared with us are exemplary; understandably, however, when I downloaded them, they became arranged alphabetically which made it difficult to ascertain the order in which the poems were written. Several of the articles recommended for advance reading, noted the importance of the positioning of the poems within the miscellany and, after being directed to the digitised version of Folger V.b.198, I gained a valuable sense of the manuscript's material form. However, it also raised more questions about the process by which Southwell's 'Workes' were composed, and the difficulties of reading materials that are incomplete or 'in process'. In this paper, I reflect on the process by which I tried to make sense of this material and what this might suggest would be helpful for other first-time readers of Southwell.