

SUMMARY: The document below is a transcript of verses to Ben Jonson mentioning Shakespeare. The verses are generally attributed to Francis Beaumont (1584/5 - 6 March 1616), although none of the four extant manuscripts is autograph, and only one bears a 'signature' at the end, the initials 'FB', which could have been added in that instance by the person who copied the verses. Another manuscript, BL Add MS 30982, f. 75v, has the initials 'TB' in the first line. See the facsimile on the Shakespeare Documented website at:

<https://shakespearedocumented.folger.edu/exhibition/document/letter-beaumont-jonson-refers-shakespeare-name>

As Chambers notes:

In view of the variant initials, one cannot be quite sure of the author.

For Chambers' discussion of the two manuscripts known to him, see Chambers, E.K., *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), Vol. II, pp. 222-4:

<https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.80390/page/n255>

I give the poem, which has not been printed in full before, from two copies, both in 17th-century manuscript anthologies and not autograph.

(a) Holgate MS., f. 110. This is now in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York. . . . It was described in T.L.S. (1921, Sept. 15) by a former owner W.G.P., who printed a bit on Shakespeare, but stopped at l.18. I had an opportunity of examining it carefully in 1925. W.G.P. took the poems to be of 1603-26. I doubt whether the collection can have been completed quite so soon. It contains much by Donne, Corbet, and other Jacobean writers, but the latter part also has much by William Strode (c. 1601-45). The manuscript was found at Colne Priory, Essex, and is believed to have come from some member of the Holgate family of Saffron Walden, Essex, to whom the priory passed by marriage in the 16th century. . . .

(b) Addl. MS. 30982, f. 75v. This is of similar type, in date and contents, to the Holgate MS., and on f. 1v is written 'Daniel Daye his Booke witnessse William Strode'.

The Holgate MS. is a good text; the Addl. MS. much less good, but identical errors in ll. 17, 30 suggest a common origin. In view of the variant initials, one cannot be quite sure of the author. I see no reason why it should not be Francis Beaumont, who wrote another well-known verse epistle to Jonson, and to whom the theatrical allusions in ll. 28, 30 would be natural. There are some indications of date. Marston's Fawn was played c. 1604-6 and printed in 1606, Sharpham's Fleir played in 1606 and printed in 1607 (Eliz. Stage, iii. 434, 490). Beaumont died on 6 Mar. 1616. . . . There is no book by Nicholas Breton called Common Talke, although the description might serve for many of

his compilations, including the Wits Private Wealth, of which a new edition appeared in 1613. . . . If one may take 1613-16 as the limits, there were two Garter installations at Windsor (l. 27) during this period. . . . I do not know whose the white and orange tawny liveries were. . . . On the whole, I think that 1615 is likely to have been the occasion which Beaumont had in mind.

Bland identifies two other manuscripts unknown to Chambers, HM198 part 2 and Folger V.a.96. Bland considers HM198 part 2 to be the best of the four texts of the poem, and Folger V.a.96 to be the second best. See Bland, Mark B., 'Francis Beaumont's Verse Letters to Ben Jonson and "The Mermaid Club"', in Beal, P. et al, eds., *English Manuscript Studies 1100-1700*, (London: British Library, 2005), pp. 139-179 at p. 155, available online at:

http://www.academia.edu/4064513/Francis_Beaumonts_Verse_Letters_to_Ben_Jonson_and_The_Mermaid_Club

Although Chambers tentatively dates Beaumont's verses to 1615, according to Bland they can be dated via theatrical allusions to 'late May or June 1606'. See Bland, *supra*, p. 165. Bland states that Beaumont was 'poking fun at Marston and Sharpham (whom Jonson called 'rogues'), as well as the ways in which plays were commissioned on serial themes'. See Bland, *supra*, p. 156.

See also Bland, *supra*, pp. 165-6:

*Second, the date [i.e. Chambers' dating of the poem to 1615] cannot be reconciled with the reference to Marston's *The Fawne* and Sharpham's *The Fleire*, the latter of which was performed in 1606. One of Beaumont's jokes is that someone will be required to write a sequel called *The Grinne*: that comment makes no sense if the sequel has not been written within the previous nine years. There was, however, a very important installation of the Garter in May 1606, in which (as the records indicate) 'the obsolete custom of a procession of a number of attendants before the new knights was revived; and accordingly, those who were installed arrived at Windsor "with an almost innumerable train".'*

Bland also notes that this Garter installation was the subject of controversy. A letter from the Venetian Ambassador indicates that the Kings of France and Denmark had declared their intention to resign from the Order of the Garter unless 'it was kept pure by the election of those only whose nobility of blood and rank are eminent'.

According to Bland:

The problem was that James had proposed Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, for the knighthood, and although Salisbury was the most powerful man at Court, he was newly elevated to the peerage. Clearly, however, the issue was resolved as neither Christian IV or Henri IV resigned the order, and Salisbury was installed.

It appears Bland considers that the individual with ‘white and orange-tawny on his back/At Windsor’ who is jestingly described by Beaumont as being in ‘misery’ and in a ‘wretched’ state was Sir Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury. Bland notes that:

‘Neither to follow fashion . . .’ is a poem that appears to have had a very limited circulation, perhaps because of its attack on the Earl of Salisbury.

See Bland, *supra*, p. 157.

The dating of the verses to 1606 appears to be solidly based on the theatrical allusions mentioned by Bland. In contrast, Bland’s suggestion that the verses constituted an attack of the Earl of Salisbury in connection with the 1606 Garter installation appears somewhat strained.

However if the 1606 Garter ceremony is significant in terms of the dating of the verses, it should be noted that white and orange (albeit tangerine, rather than orange-tawny) were the heraldic colours of the Earls of Essex. See Lacey, Robert, *Robert, Earl of Essex; An Elizabethan Icarus*, p. 83:

. . . despite the £14,000 the Earl of Essex spent equipping and dressing them in his tangerine and white liveries.

See also McCoy, Richard C., *The Rites of Knighthood*, p. 79:

<http://books.google.ca/books?id=tjSk0bSDHOgC&pg=PA79>

. . . in 1588 at Tilbury where Essex commanded a force of cavalry arrayed in the Devereux colours of white and tangerine.

See also Hammer, Paul E.J., *The Polarization of Elizabethan Politics: The Political Career of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, 1585-1597*, (Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 200:

<http://books.google.ca/books?id=VbKM-1eXuBkC&pg=PA200>

A rather more martial impression was intended when [Essex] arrayed his troop of soldiers before Elizabeth after the defeat of the Spanish armada, in late August 1588. . . . His two hundred light horsemen, sixty musketeers and sixty mounted harquebusiers all appeared in the Devereux colours of orange and white, some in velvet and silk.

It thus may be that the individual alluded to in Beaumont’s verses had taken service with the young Robert Devereux (1591-1646), 3rd Earl of Essex, who was at court in 1606.

According to the *ODNB*:

Devereux's fortunes were transformed by the accession of James VI of Scotland to the English throne. James immediately showed that he remembered fondly the loyalty to his reversionary right shown by the second earl of Essex. The young Robert Devereux was invited to bear James's sword before him as he entered London at the end of April 1603 and at his coronation on 25 July. James proceeded to restore him to his titles—Baron Bouchier, Viscount Hereford, and earl of Essex—and to his estates and made him a page to Prince Henry. A succession of token honours (such as an Oxford MA honoris causa conferred simultaneously on Robert Cecil's son and heir and on Essex in August 1605) marked him out as a man of promise, and the Howards, earls of Suffolk and Nottingham, insecure in their dominant position at court, were keen to take advantage of this. They persuaded the king to sponsor a marriage between the Devereux and Howard families. On 5 January 1606 Robert, not yet fifteen, was married to Frances Howard (1590–1632), Suffolk's daughter, herself only eight months his elder.

Bland draws attention on pp. 164-5 to an article by Kelliher (see H. Kelliher, 'Francis Beaumont and Nathan Field: New Records of their Early Years', *English Manuscript Studies*, 8 (2000), 1–42) which sheds new light on Beaumont's activities just prior to the writing of these verses:

Hilton Kelliher's important article has established that Beaumont was in Cambridge during the latter half of 1604 and the first months of 1605, from mid-November on resident at the Tolbooth prison on Market Hill. The point, for present purposes, is not so much Beaumont's skill as a gambler, or the nature of his problems, but his meeting with John Cowell, the Vice Chancellor on 15 March 1605. As Kelliher has commented, 'no record of the final decision survives'. It is reasonable to infer, however, that the judgment does survive in Beaumont's poem, and that he was 'Banish'd vnto my home'. There, his elder brother died three months later, and so the restraint on Beaumont came to an end.

See also:

<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Some+recent+dramatic+manuscript+studies.-a093135729>

In English Manuscript Studies 8 (2000) Hilton Kelliher, in a tour-de-force of archival investigation, offers important new manuscript evidence from the Cambridge University Archives (housed in the University Library) about the early lives of Francis Beaumont and Nathan Field, which confirms that these authors were in residence in Cambridge in 1604. Kelliher, a Western manuscripts curator at the British Library, closely examines documents, including a copy of Beaumont's baptismal record, from a series of Cambridge court cases to which Beaumont was a party, echoes of which may appear in Beaumont's plays. Kelliher also finds allusions in Field's plays to his life in Cambridge, and further suggests that Field and Beaumont first encountered John Fletcher at Cambridge. The records that Kelliher handles so superbly in this essay show us that Beaumont indulged in slander, dicing, gaming, and other unsavory adventures. They offer exciting new information about the nature of Beaumont's character and work, records of which were previously scant, and of his collaborators and friends.

The modern spelling transcript below was prepared from the original spelling version in Bland, *supra*, pp. 174-5.

To Mr: Ben: Jonson

Neither to follow fashion, nor to show
 My wit against the state, nor that I know
 Anything new with which I am with child
 Till I have told, nor hoping to be styled
 A good epistler through the town (with which
 I might be famous), nor with any itch
 Like these wrote I this letter, but to show
 The love I carry and methinks I owe
 To you above the number, which will best,
 In something which I use not, be expressed.
 To write this I invoke none but the post
 Of Dover or some carrier's pistling ghost,
 For if this equal but that style which men
 Send cheese to town with, and thanks down again,
 'Tis all I seek for. Here I would let slip
 (If I had any in me) scholarship,
 And from all learning leave these lines as clear
 As Shakespeare's best are, which our heirs shall hear
 Preachers cite to their auditors to show
 How far sometimes a mortal man may go
 By the dim light of nature. 'Tis to me
 An help to write of nothing, and as free
 As he whose text was *God made all that is*
 I mean to speak. What do you think of his
 State who hath now the last that he could make
 In white and orange-tawny on his back
 At Windsor? Is not his misery more
 Than a fallen sharer's that now keeps a door?
 Hath not his state almost as wretched been
 As his that is ordained to write *The Grin*
 After *The Fawn* and *Fleer* shall be (as sure
 Some one there is allotted to endure
 That cross!). There are some I could wish to know,
 To love and keep with if they would not show
 Their studies to me, or I wish to see
 Their works to laugh at if they suffer me
 Not to know them, and thus I would commerce
 With honest poets that make scurvy verse.

By this time you perceive you did amiss
To leave your worthier studies to see this,
Which is more tedious to you than to walk
In a Jew's church, or Breton's *Common Talk*.
But know I write not these lines to th' end
To please Ben: Jonson, but to please my friend.