Bel-vedére (1600) and the Dates of Thomas Combe's Theater of Fine Devices and Dunstan Gale's Pyramus and Thisbe

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Abstract
The presence of passages from Thomas Combe’s Theater of Fine Devices in the commonplace book Bel-vedére (1600) makes it reasonable to conclude that a pre-1600 edition of The Theater of Fine Devices existed. Similarly, a passage from Pyramus and Thisbe in Bel-vedére corroborates the case for a pre-1600 date for Gale’s poem.

Reference

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BEL-VEDÈRE (1600) AND THE DATES OF THOMAS COMBE’S

THEATER OF FINE DEVICES AND DUNSTAN GALE’S PYRAMUS AND THISBE

Bel-vedère or The Garden of the Muses (1600, STC 3189) is a printed commonplace book, in octavo, consisting of 4,482 decasyllabic one or two-line passages excerpted or adapted from contemporary or recent authors, including William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, and Christopher Marlowe. The quotations are arranged under topical headings—for example, ‘Of God’, ‘Of Heauen’, ‘Of Loue’ and ‘Of Death’. Its main compiler was almost certainly John Bodenham, and Anthony Munday is likely to have lent an editorial hand.¹ The first edition was printed by Felix Kingston for Hugh Astley. A second edition (1610, STC 3190), also in octavo and titled The Garden of the Muses, was printed by Edward Allde for John Tap.

Contrary to *England’s Parnassus* (STC 378), another commonplace book that appeared in the same year, *Bel-vedère* consists of passages that are unattributed to their authors. In the early twentieth century, when preparing a scholarly edition for Oxford University Press that he did not live to complete, Charles Crawford identified the origins of 2,380 passages, more than half the total.\(^2\) We are currently in the final stages of preparing an edition of *Bel-vedère* for Cambridge University Press, and a comprehensive analysis of the book’s make-up has allowed us to add over 1,150 identifications to Crawford’s. More than 900 passages remain untraced, but even so, we now have a better sense of *Bel-vedère*’s composition than ever before.

Commenting on the importance of identifying the origins of the passages quoted and adapted in *Bel-vedère*, Crawford affirmed that ‘Any book of quotations issued in the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James must of necessity be of some value, if only for the bare fact that the quotations in a book of fixed date help to date approximately works of the period about which little or nothing is known. For, of course, one cannot quote from a work before the work has an existence.’\(^3\) He exemplified his point by drawing attention to four passages in *Bel-vedère* from Ben Jonson’s *The Case is Altered*, a play whose first edition dates to 1609. As Crawford concludes, ‘This evidence confirms the testimony of Thomas Nashe that *The

\(^2\) See Charles Crawford, ‘*Belvedere, or, The garden of the muses*,’ *Englische Studien*, 43 (1910-11), 198-228. Crawford’s article mentions totals by authors and certain texts. He did not publish the details of his identifications, but they have survived in manuscript, on interleaved sheets inserted into an 1875 facsimile of *Bel-vedère*, now preserved at the British Library (shelfmark: C.116.e.14). Crawford mentioned his planned edition of *Bel-vedère* in a letter to A. H. Bullen (PRO, DR 709 / 49, 31 October 1913).

\(^3\) Crawford, ‘*Belvedere*’, 201.
Case is Altered was in existence as early as the latter end of the autumn of 1598, when Nashe wrote, and that, consequently, it is an older play than either version of Every Man in his Humour. Work towards our edition has led us to two source texts which Crawford did not identify but which provide similar evidence about dating: The Theater of Fine Deuices, Thomas Combe’s translation of Guillaume de la Perrière’s emblem book, Le Theatre des bons engins (first published in Lyon in 1536), and Dunstan Gale’s Ovidian narrative poem, Pyramus and Thisbe.

Of The Theater of Fine Deuices, we have identified twenty-eight passages in Bel-vedère.5 A couple of examples will suffice to illustrate the presence of passages from Combe’s emblem book in Bel-vedère. In The Theater of Fine Deuices, Emblem XXII is about the chief gifts a prince must possess. The eight-line poem concludes: ‘He like these two must frame his manners fit, / For strength a Lion, and a Foxe for wit.’ (sig. C1r). In Bel-vedère, under the heading ‘Of Kings and Princes’, the passage is adapted as follows: ‘In Princes, these two qualities well fit: / For strength a Lyon, and a Foxe for wit’ (sig. E7r, QN 1252). Emblem

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5 They appear on sigs. C3v (2x), E7r, E8r, F4r, G3v (3x), G8v (2x), H1r, K1v, L4v (4x), M8r, O2v, P3v (4x), P6v (5x), and P8r. Our forthcoming edition assigns consecutive quotation numbers (QNs) to the 4,482 passages; those based on Combe’s translation are: 411-12, 1252, 1285, 1449, 1706, 1708, 1710, 1909, 1918, 1926, 2507, 2965-66, 2968, 2978, 3405, 3808, 4114, 4118-19, 4123, 4232-35, 4237, and 4299.
XI concludes with the following couplet: ‘For he that makes a friend of euery stranger, / Discards him not againe without some danger’ (sig. B3v). Bel-vedére includes a slightly adapted version under the topical heading ‘Of Friendship’: The man that makes a friend of euery straunger, / Discards him not againe without some danger’ (sig. G8v, QN 1909). Combe’s translation of de la Perrière’s emblem book is in fact full of such sententious passages that offered themselves for inclusion in Bel-vedére.

The Theater of Fine Deuices was entered in the Stationers’ Register to Richard Field on 9 May 1593. Yet the title page of the only surviving dated copy, an octavo printed by Field, now at the Huntington Library (shelfmark: 62125), bears the date 1614 (STC 15230). Another surviving copy, at the Glasgow University Library (shelfmark: Sp Coll S.M. 688), is incomplete, lacks the title page, and contains no information about its date of publication. As Peter M. Daly reported in 1986, a ‘comparison established beyond doubt that the Glasgow and Huntington copies are from different editions’. Even though Daly thought it likely that the Glasgow copy belongs to an edition that was produced soon after the title’s entrance in the Stationers’ Register in 1593, the online catalogue of the Glasgow University Library continues to date its copy ‘1614’. The evidence from Bel-vedére adds further evidence to


8 See Daly, ‘The Case’, 255-56.

9 See http://encore.lib.gla.ac.uk/iii/encore/record/C__Rb1653690.
Daly’s case and makes it reasonable to conclude that a pre-1600 edition of *The Theater of Fine Deuices* existed.\textsuperscript{10}

Of Gale’s *Pyramus and Thisbe*, we have found only one passage in *Bel-vedére*, but its distinctiveness makes it unlikely that the compilers of *Bel-vedére* found it elsewhere. Gale’s poem reads, ‘For sudden bleeding argues ill ensuing, / But sudden leauing, is fell feares renewing’ (sig. C3r), which, in lightly adapted form, reappears in *Bel-vedére* under the topical heading ‘Of Feare’: ‘As suddaine bleeding, argues ill ensuing, / So suddaine ceasing is fell feares renewing’ (sig. L2r, QN 2879). The range of sources from which the material for *Bel-vedére* was assembled is wide, and it was not unusual for a single passage to be taken from a text, as is the case here.\textsuperscript{11}

*Pyramus and Thisbe* was not entered into the Stationers’ Register until 22 July 1616.\textsuperscript{12} It was published in the following year by Roger Jackson. The 1617 printing served both as an appendix to Robert Greene’s *The history of Arbasto King of Denmarke*, reprinted that year, also for Jackson (STC 12221), and as a stand-alone title (STC 11527).\textsuperscript{13} That it was used as an add-on to Greene’s prose romance is demonstrated by the title page of *Arbasto*, which announces after the main title: ‘Wherevnto is added a louely poem of *Pyramus* and *Thisbe*’ (sig. A1r). As the STC points out, in one of the three extant copies of the 1617 *Arbasto*, at the Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Göttingen (shelfmark: 8 FAB IX, 415),

\textsuperscript{10} We have traced a few passages in *Bel-vedére* to texts that were not in print by 1600, but the vast majority of the sources we have identified had been published.

\textsuperscript{11} See the ‘Index of Authors and Titles’ appended to our forthcoming edition.

\textsuperscript{12} Arber, *Transcript*, 3.593.

\textsuperscript{13} Earlier extant editions of *Arbasto* are dated 1584, 1589, and 1594; none of them mentions Gale’s poem.
the prose romance is indeed bound together with Gale’s poem, whereas in the other two, at the Bodleian Library, Oxford (shelfmark: Mal. 574 (5)), and at the Huntington Library (shelfmark: 51734), it is not. What suggests that Pyramus and Thisbe was also marketed separately is that it is bibliographically independent (signatures A-C⁴) and was published with a separate title page and imprint: ‘LONDON, Printed for Roger Jackson, and are to be sold at his shop neere Fleet Conduit, 1617’. In 1626, Arbasto (STC 12222) and Pyramus and Thisbe (STC 11528) each received a new edition.¹⁴ The Arbasto title page again mentions the ‘lovely Poem of Pyramus and Thisbe’, but the only extant copy of the 1626 Arbasto, at the British Library (shelfmark: 95.b.20.(7.)), is not followed by Gale’s poem. Meanwhile, the only extant copy of the 1626 Pyramus and Thisbe, at the Bodleian Library (shelfmark: Mal. 295 (3)), also collates A-C⁴ and survives alone, not as an appendix to Arbasto.¹⁵

The dedicatory epistle to Gale’s poem suggests that it was written considerably earlier than 1617. It is addressed ‘TO THE WORSHIPFVLL his verie friend, D. B. H.’, and concludes as

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¹⁴ Matthew Steggle has written that they were ‘reissued’, so it may bear insisting that the 1626 are new editions, not new issues (Steggle, ‘Gale, Dunstan (fl. 1596), poet’, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/10290).

¹⁵ Sarah Annes Brown and Andrew Taylor write that Pyramus and Thisbe was printed ‘three times in the seventeenth century, twice in conjunction with Robert Greene’s History of Arbasto King of Denmark’ (‘Dunstan Gale: Pyramus and Thisbe (1617)’, in Ovid in English, 1480-1625, ed. Brown and Taylor (London, 2013), 177-91, 178), but given that there was only one edition of the poem in 1617, ‘three times’ should be corrected to ‘twice’. We are grateful to Silke Findorf at the Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Göttingen, for comparing their copy of the 1617 Pyramus and Thisbe against the Bodleian’s and for confirming that they belong to the same edition.
follows: ‘I humbly take my leaue this 25. of Noouember, 1596’ (sig. A2r). Matthew Steggle has written that this ‘suggests that the poem may have been written twenty years earlier’. The presence of a passage from Pyramus and Thisbe in Bel-vedère corroborates the case for a pre-1600 date for Gale’s poem. In all likelihood, a since-lost first edition of Gale’s poem appeared in late 1596 or in 1597, and the text of the 1617 edition is a verbatim reprint, including of the dedicatory epistle.

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16 We quote from the earliest extant edition of 1617. Brown and Taylor have confusingly written that ‘Although the earliest surviving edition [of Pyramus and Thisbe] dates from 1617, the title page is dated November 1596’ (‘Dunstan Gale’, 177). The date on the title page is ‘1617’; the year 1596 is mentioned only in the dedicatory epistle.

17 Steggle, ‘Gale’.