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ROBERT HAYMAN'S "QUODLIBETS"

Robin Endres

ROBERT HAYMAN'S *Quodlibets* — the first English poetry written in Canada — is part of a tiny but significant corpus of literature written in and about six colonial settlements which flourished and died in Newfoundland between 1610 and 1628. An understanding of the meaning and significance of Hayman's work can first be attempted through an examination of the history of these settlements.[1]

In the early 1600's, English colonial expansion in Virginia, New England and Newfoundland began in earnest. The era of the Renaissance courtier-adventurer, of explorers like Sir Francis Drake and Sir Walter Raleigh, was rapidly being superseded by the era of the bougeois-merchant, of the colonial "Company". The individual explorer, seeking adventure and discovery in unknown lands under Queen Elizabeth, gave way to the practical economics of groups of merchants seeking trade monopolies under James and Charles. One such group, consisting of 48 businessmen — 10 from Bristol and 24 from London — raised enough subscriptions to convince the Privy Council to grant its seal, and the Newfoundland Company was incorporated in 1610.

The aims of the Company members were twofold: personal profit and the furthering of England's imperialist power. Specifically, they wanted to secure a monopoly of the fishing trade, which had previously been controlled by individual ships from the West Country in England as well as French, Spanish and Portuguese fishermen who fished off the Grand Banks and returned annually. The Newfoundland Company hoped to achieve its goal by establishing permanent and self-sufficient settlements on the island.

Governor John Guy's arrival with 39 colonizers was carefully timed — late in the summer of 1610, just as the independent fishing vessels were leaving. Cupid's Cove, the sight chosen for the settlement, was the most fertile and best protected

spot on the island; the initial settlers were carefully selected artisans rather than unskilled gentlemen; friendly and tactful contacts with both natives and independent fishermen were strongly advised. The settlers were extremely industrious, and this, coupled with a mild first winter, enabled them to build houses, a warehouse, a forge, a mill and a palisade, as well as sowing crops and collecting ore specimens, cutting timber for export and of course, fishing.

But this prosperous beginning was soon marred by a host of insurmountable problems, some foreseen, others not. The independent fishermen, who had been assured, on paper at least, of their rights, grew increasingly hostile when it became apparent that the Company was in fact attempting to monopolize the trade. They retaliated by damaging the colonists' mills and other property. Any profits made from fishing were immediately swallowed up by the colonists' need for provisions; the hoped-for iron deposits never materialized; the fur trade was almost nonexistent; crops failed. Finally, squabbles and jealousies erupted among the members of the Company, both in Newfoundland and in England. John Guy went home in disgust in 1613, claiming that he had not received his promised grant of land from the Company, and that his men's wages had not been paid.

In 1615 Guy was succeeded as governor by Captain John Mason. Mason was responsible for one of the four works of literature produced during this period, *A Briefe Discourse of the New-found-land* (1620). The *Discourse* belongs to the genre of colonial pamphlets written to encourage settlement in the new world. It differs, however, from the standard works of this type (as do the works of two others of the four Newfoundland writers, Richard Whitbourne and Robert Hayman) in that it attempts to give a realistic picture of the advantages and disadvantages of life in the colonies, without the usual overly optimistic and sometimes fantastic claims made for the new world. With Mason's departure to New England in 1621, the Company remained in existence in name only, although the settlement continued in the hands of a small group of families.

In order to supplement its diminishing capital, the Newfoundland Company was forced to sell tracts of land, and between 1616 and 1621, five purchases were made, four by individuals, a fifth by another group of merchants. The four individuals who attempted settlement had ideological as well as economic motives. Henry Cary, later Lord Falkland, failed in his efforts to establish an Irish colony. Sir William Alexander purchased a large tract of land from the Company in 1621, intending to found New Scotland. However, the same year James gave him a grant of land between the Gaspé Peninsula and Maine, and New Scotland was thereby destined for the mainland. Sir George Calvert, later Lord Baltimore, had still another motive for settling in Newfoundland — he wanted to create a haven for his family and their fellow Catholics. Not to be outdone, William Vaughan, a gentleman scholar and poet, envisaged the area around Caplin Bay as a mythological "New Wales" — a new Cambriol, which would relieve Wales of her over-

populated poor and provide a golden world for all future generations of Welshmen.

To this end, he wrote *The Golden Fleece* (using the pseudonym "Orpheus Junior"), a work in prose and verse heavily influenced in style by Sidney's *Arcadia.*

> *The Golden Fleece* opens with a dialogue on the question of how best to employ the muses in the service of Newfoundland . . . His fiction for the remainder of the book . . . is a court or assizes presided over by Apollos, . . . it is only in the last third of *The Golden Fleece* that Vaughan comes to the subject of the island itself. There he makes Apollo deliver a verdict in favour of its colonization, following the testimony of a number of explorers and colonizers.[2]

Vaughan's work was published in 1626, and some scholars — Anthony à Wood in the seventeenth century and D. L. Thomas in *The Dictionary of National Biography* — give him credit for the first original creative writing in English in North America. However, recent critics and historians, with the exception of Thomas, agree that Vaughan never saw Newfoundland, and that all his information derives from hearsay and written sources. The best proof of this perhaps is Hayman's own poem addressed to Vaughan:

> It joy'd my heart, when I did understand
> That your selfe would your Colonie command;
> It greev'd me much, when as I heard it told,
> Sicknes had layd on you an unkind hold.
> Beleeve me, Sir, your Colches Cambrioll
> Is a sweet, Pleasant, wholesome, gaineful soyle.
> (Book II, 86)

Vaughan sent colonizers to Renewse in 1617, and in 1618 appointed Richard Whitbourne, an experienced sea captain, as his governor. Whitbourne discovered on his arrival that the settlers had spent the previous winter in fishermen's summer shacks; he sent all but six home and apparently made a serious attempt to settle. However, he was back in England in 1620 where he published his *Discourse and Discovery of Newfoundland.* This prose work is similar in intent and design to Mason's, based as it is on personal experience in the colony, and dealing with practical matters (a list of the supplies necessary for outfitting a ship of colonists, for example), but without the literary design of the work of Vaughan and Hayman.

The fifth, and last, purchase of land from the Newfoundland Company was made by a group of merchants from Bristol, many of whom were probably initial investors of the Company who had become disillusioned with their fellow merchants in London. The land was on Conception Bay, and included Harbour Grace, the principal settlement (alternatively called Bristol's Hope). The colony

was one of the most successful, perhaps because the people involved had learned from their experiences with the Newfoundland Company, and were more practical than the idealists Vaughan, Falkland and Baltimore. It was here that Robert Hayman came as governor in 1618 and returned each summer for ten years, and it was here that he wrote Canada's first poetry.[3]

KNOWLEDGE of the life of Robert Hayman, especially that part of his life spent in Harbour Grace, is slim indeed. He was baptized in 1575, the son of Nicholas Hayman and Alice Gaverocke, both from prosperous landowning families. Nicholas Hayman was prominent in civic affairs in Totnes, where he was mayor in 1589, and later in Dartmouth, where he was a member of the parliament in 1592-3. He was a friend of Sir Francis Drake, and once contributed 25 pounds sterling to two of his vessels.

Robert Hayman was educated at Totnes Grammar School and Exeter College, Oxford. He studied law at Lincoln's Inn and later spent some time at the University of Poitiers. He was married in 1604 to Grace Spicer, the daughter of an Exeter merchant. Hayman was acquainted with numerous writers, divines, lawyers, physicians and merchants of the day. At Oxford, according to Anthony à Wood, he was "noted for his ingenuity and pregnant parts" and was "valued by several persons who were afterwards eminent". Later, at Lincoln's Inn, "his geny being well known to be poetical, (he) fell into acquaintance with, and received encouragement to proceed in his studies from Michael Drayton, Ben Johnson, John Owen . . . George Withers . . . John Vicars . . ."[4] These literary acquaintances are addressed at the end of Book IV. William Vaughan, George Withers and John Vicars all wrote commendatory verses for *Quodlibets*; apart from these, the only acknowledgement for Hayman and his work occurs in the dedication to *Cupid's Whirligig* (1607), a play by his Oxford contemporary Edward Sharpham:

> To his much honoured, beloved, respected, and judiciall friend, Master Robert Hayman. . . . since our travailes I have bene pregnant with desire to bring foorth something whereunto you may be witnesse . . .[5]

Of the time Hayman spent in Newfoundland — one fifteen month stretch and ten successive summers — there are no records. The information we have derives entirely from *Quodlibets*, and from a letter sent by Hayman to King Charles, in 1628. The letter is an almost desperate plea to the King to save the dying colonies of Newfoundland. It advances the usual arguments for colonization — securing of the fishing trade, enlarging of the empire, relieving of overpopulation, potential mineral resources, timber and furs, and gives a convincing justification for

supporting the lowly cod rather than the glamorous products of the West Indies and Africa:

> I confesse that the Commodities as yett brought from thence are in their particulers base, and meane: yet they honestly imploye many people, and make more seamen, then all our sea-trades eld, . . . and I dare averr and prove that this trade hath furnished England for these many yeares, with more money, then all our forraigne trades els, and it hath brought from Spaine, silver, and gold, more cheaply, and conveniently, then the Spaniards have had it, from their Indies.[6]

He also proposes that Charles establish a city, Carolinople, as a free market for fish, and that he rename the whole island Britaniola.

The letter had no effect, if in fact it ever reached Charles. At any rate the royal treasury did not have enough funds even for domestic expenses. Hayman must have finally abandoned his dreams of Britaniola, but not of colonization in general, for the following year (1629) he formed a small company with 26 shares for the purpose of setting up a colony in Guyana. In November of the year, he was overcome by a fever during an exploration of the Oyapock (then Wyapoko) River, and died in the canoe. A few Indian guides who had accompanied him buried him beside the river. He was 54 years old.

HAYMAN'S *Quodlibets* (or "what you will", "whatever you like") is a collection of satiric, didactic and commendatory verses in four books, prefaced with a dedication to King Charles, four poems by William Vaughan, Richard Spicer, George Wither and John Vicars, and an anagram by Hayman. At the end of the four books, Hayman includes his translations of John Owen's epigrams from the Latin, dedicated "To the far admired, admirably faire, vertuous, and witty Beauties of England" and prefaced by "A Praemonition to all kinds of readers". The Owen translations are followed by an anagram on Owen's Latin name Johannes Andoenus, "Severall Sententious Epigrams, and witty sayings out of sundry Authors both Ancient and Moderne Translated into English at Harbor-Grace . . . " and finally, translations of two letters by Rabelais.[7]

In the dedicatory letter to King Charles, Hayman compares his verses to some unripe ears of corn which he also brought back with him from Newfoundland. The analogy is used to stress that the major function of the poems is to encourage younger and better "wits" to settle in Newfoundland in order that better poetry might be produced.

> . . . [His verses are] hoping of the like successe, that some unripe eares of corne, brought by me from the cold Country of Newfound-land, received from some honest, well-minded lovers of that action when they saw them: who with much-

> affected joy often beholding them, tooke much comfort in what they saw: but more, when they suppos'd it might be better'd, by industry, care and honestie. These few bad unripe Rimes of mine (coming from thence) are in all humility presented with the like intendiment to your Majestie, to testifie that the Aire there is not so dull, or malevolent, but that if better wits were transplanted thither, neither the Summers heat would dilate them, nor the Winters cold benumme them, but that they might in full vigour flourish to good purpose. For if I now growne dull and aged, could doe somewhat, what will not sharper, younger, freer inventions performe there? They would not walke as I here doe, with short turnes, leaning sometimes on others inventions, skipping weakly from bough to bough; but with large walkes, with long, and strong flights.

The passage is interesting for several reasons. First, Hayman has clearly grasped the connection between a flourishing economy and the establishment of a literary culture which Wilfrid Eggleston discusses in *The Front and Canadian Letters.* Hayman's pleas for support for the dying colonies in his other letter to Charles takes on new significance when we realize that his optimistic vision of Britaniola includes a profound faith in the future of a new artistic culture. Second, his conception of this new culture which will be the product of the combination of youthful, energetic talent and the multifarious possibilities of the new world, places his work in the tradition of the "poetry of anticipation" which John Matthews discusses in relation to Australian poetry.[8]

This is the genre of new world poetry which does not look backward and base itself on the ancient myths of the mother culture (as William Vaughan's *Golden Fleece* does), but which rather looks forward to a new Eden of the future — symbolized by the potential of the unripe ears of corn. Hayman, who emphasizes elsewhere in the dedicatory letter that these poems are the first in English to be written in the colonies ("... some of them were borne, and the rest did first speake English, in that Land whereof your gracious Majestie is the ... King ... and being the first fruits of this kind, that ever visited this Land, out of that Dominion of yours ..."), seems to have profound awareness of his unique position in the literature of what was to become Canada. Finally, the tone of this passage is indicative of Hayman's attitude to himself and his work throughout *Quodlibets*; quick to praise others, with never a hint of envy of those who are superior to him; aware at all times of his own limitations; humble without false modesty or servility.

I have divided the main section of *Quodlibets*, Books I-IV, consisting of 351 verses, into six categories. First, there is a small group of epigrams (23) about the nature and purpose of epigrams. The largest group (102 verses) consists of didactic and satiric epigrams dealing with secular matters. The second largest is the group of 95 epigrams dealing with religious subjects, and of these, 46 are specifically anti-Catholic epigrams. There are 29 epigrams about women. At the

end of each book there are a number of poems about or addressed to specific individuals, and these total 81. Finally, there are 21 miscellaneous epigrams.

The epigrams written on the subject of epigrams provide some insights as to Hayman's purpose in choosing this form. For Hayman, the didactic or moral aspect of the epigram is more important than its style. As always, he is modest about his abilities, but in these verses he usually infers that there is something more to the epigram than the dainty turn of words he is unable to achieve:

> Though my best lines no dainty thing affords,
> My worst have in them some thing else then words.
> (Book I, 1)

The true job of the epigrammatist is not only to descry evil where it appears but also to praise whatever is commendable. In fact, the function of the epigram is more that of sermon than satire:

> Sermons and Epigrams have a like end,
> To improve, to reprove, and to amend;
> Some passed without this use, 'cause they are witty'
> And so doe many Sermons, more's the pitty.
> (Book IV, 1)

The large group of epigrams on secular subjects range freely over a wide variety of topics — the meaning of the various virtues and vices — pride, lechery, miserliness, charity, generosity, kindness; satires on the legal and medical professions; messages to anonymous friends; the proper and improper gain and use of money; brief homilies of one kind or another.

Closely related to these secular epigrams are the 95 verses which deal with religious themes. This group includes satires on preachers, meditations on the nature of man and God, concern with the afterlife and salvation, faith and good works. Some of the best of these poems are Hayman's simple, sincere prayers:

> *A Meditation for such simple innocent people as I am.*
>
> Since thou All-wise hast made me not so wise,
> With subtle Serpents for to Subtilize;
> Accept my plainenesse, and my good intent,
> That with thy Dove I may be Innocent;
> From subtle guard my simplicitie,
> And make me simple in subtility.
> (Book II, 19)

Almost one seventh of the total number of epigrams rail against Papists, idolatry, Latin services and Catholic holidays. The level of vitriol is consistent:

Papisticall cruelty.

Were there no other argument but this,
It proves our faith, then yours the better is.
We are not cruell, bloody, envious.
(Though your late-lying Legends slander us)
We meekely seeke but your Conversion,
Weepe at your fought for Execution:
You bloody, slanderous, and inexorable
At all times, every where, where you are able;
Witness Maries short Raigne, French Massacre,
Which in red letters, your lewd minds declare.
Our God, though Just, his mercy's over all,
A blood-sucker, Satan was from his fall.
(Book III, 26)

In his satirical epigrams concerning women, Hayman expresses the conventional attitudes of the day. His first object of scorn (and alarm) is the type of the nagging shrew:

To all the Shrewd Wives that are, or shall be planted in Newfound-land.

If mad-men, Drunkards, Children, or a Foole,
Wrong sober, discreet men with tongue or toole,
We say, Such things are to be borne withall.
We say so too, if Women fight or brawle.
(Book II, 74)

Other poems satirize feminine vanity and castigate unchasteness. If women in general are seen negatively, individual women are praised in Hayman's series of commendatory verses to the wives and daughters of his friends, at the end of Book III. In these commendatory verses, Hayman reveals himself as a rather kindly paternal gentleman, fond of mildly flattering young ladies.

The connecting links in an otherwise more or less miscellaneous compendium of epigrams are the poems addressed to specific individuals which appear at the end of each book. At the end of the first book, Hayman devotes his encomia to his former friends and acquaintances of Oxford, London and Bristol, all of whom have led highly successful lives in the old world as physicians, lawyers, reverends and merchants. Hayman offers all of them sincere and generous praise, yet a note of melancholy underlies these verses. Perhaps he felt somewhat alienated from the centres of culture and economics where these men were most active, if only because of his frequent absences. Perhaps too, there is a feeling that he was not quite as successful as his compatriots and peers. This feeling gains expression at the very end of the book:

A little of my unworthy Selfe.

Many of these were my familiars,
Much good, and goods hath fal'n unto their shares,
They have gone fairely on in their affaires:
Good God, why have I not so much good lent!
It is thy will, I am obedient!
What thou hast, what thou wilt, I am content,
Only this breeds in me much heavines,
My love to this Land I cannot expresse,
Lord grant me power unto my willingnesse.
(Book I, 116)

At the end of the second book, Hayman turns from his friends in the old world to acknowledge those in the new. Almost all of the men who were involved in the six Newfoundland colonies are addressed — Captain John Mason and Mrs. Mason, John Slany (the treasurer of the Newfoundland Company), Richard Whitbourne, William Vaughan and Anne Vaughan, Lord Falkland, Lord Buckingham, Sir William Alexander, and various lesser-known planters. He praises those who have persevered, and encourages those who have failed to try again. It is here that Hayman indicates the selflessness of his interest in the Newfoundland colonies — he even transcends his religious prejudices in praising Lord Baltimore. For one who has tried unsuccessfully to obtain aid from the King, there is not a shade of envy when he commends the enormous grant given to Sir William Alexander.

It is clear that the melancholic tone of Book I is absent. As the last poem of this book indicates, Hayman has begun to resolve the problem of looking backward to the old centres of culture by focussing his attention and praise on the new:

I knew the Court well in the old Queenes dayes;
I then knew Worthies worthy of great praise:
But now I am there such a stranger growne,
That none doe know me there, there I know none.
Those few I here observe with commendation,
Are Famous Starres in our New Constellation.
(Book II, 106)

The development which Hayman undergoes from Book I to Book II is the first step which any individual immigrant to the new world must take, and in fact the first step which the culture as a whole must take if it is to create a new, indigenous literature.

The verses at the end of Book III, all addressed to female relatives and wives and daughters of friends, have already been discussed. The verses at the end of

Book IV are, generally, addressed to those men who have had the greatest influence on Hayman. He begins with a tribute to Sir Francis Drake, whom he met as a child:

> This man when I was little, I did meete,
> As he was walking up Totnes long Street,
> He asked me whose I was? I answer'd him.
> He ask'd me if his good friend were within?
> A faire red Orange in his hand he had,
> He gave it me, whereof I was right glad,
> Takes and kist me, and prayes, God blesse my boy:
> Which I record with comfort to this day. . . .
> (Book IV, 7)

Six of the remaining twelve poems are addressed to writers, all of whom (except John Donne) Hayman knew personally. Once again, his praise is generous and sincere, and his modesty reflects the knowledge of his own limitations as a writer.

> *To Master Benjamin Johnson, Witty Epigrammatist,*
> *and most excellent poet.*
>
> My epigrams come after yours in time;
> So doe they in conceipt, in forme, in Ryme;
> My wit's in fault, the fault is none of mine:
> For if my will could have inspir'd my wit,
> There never had beene better Verses writ,
> As good as yours, could I have ruled it.
> (Book IV, 18)

As his praise of others' works increases, so does his own sense of shortcoming, until it is almost obsessive:

> *To a Friend, who asked me why I doe not compose*
> *some particular Epigrams to our most gracious King . . .*
>
> Thou ask'st, Why I doe not spinne out my wit,
> In silken threads, and fine, smooth, neat lines fit,
> In speciall epigrams to our wise King?
> All these my selfe I dedicate to him.
> Its all too coorse, what my wit can weave forth,
> To wrap the little finger of his worth.
> (Book IV, 27)

Hayman ends this book, and *Quodlibets*, with a note to the reader:

> If these faile in worth, blame me, but consider
> from whence they came; from a place of no helps.

NOTES

[1] The source for most of the information in this section is Gillian T. Cell, *English Enterprise in Newfoundland, 1577-1660*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1969.

[2] Allan Pritchard, "From These Uncouth Shores: Seventeenth Century Literature of Newfoundland", *Canadian Literature*, XIV (1962), pp. 10-11.

[3] Galloway, David, "Robert Hayman (1575-1629): Some Materials for the Life of a Colonial Governor and First 'Canadian' Author", *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, XXIV (1967). Galloway hints at the possibility that Hayman was not in fact governor of the settlement, since the only indication of this is on the title page of *Quodlibets*.

[4] Quoted in Galloway, "Robert Hayman (1575-1629): Some Materials ...", pp. 79 and 83.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 83.

[6] G. C. Moore Smith, "Robert Hayman and the Plantation of Newfoundland", *English Historical Review*, XXXIII (1918), p. 32.

[7] "Sixteen quarto copies of *Quodlibets* are known to be extant. There are two in the British Museum ..., two in the Bodleian ..., and two in the New York Public Library. The following libraries have one copy each: Folger Shakespeare Library; Huntington Library; Watkinson Library, Hartford, Conn.; Library of Congress; Houghton Library, Harvard University; Garrett Library, Johns Hopkins University; William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan; John Carter Brown Library, Brown University; Boston Athenaeum; Free Library of Philadelphia". Source: Galloway, *op. cit.* There is a photocopy in the Massey College Library, University of Toronto.

[8] John Pengwerne Matthews, *Tradition in Exile*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1962.

NEPHEW

Cyril Dabydeen

Alone in the street
his five-year old
wanders, his belly
hanging out like a placard.
The village women
do not notice his slogan;
they merely laugh.
Watching him now
I'm convinced
he's nothing more
than a fanatic.