

I am grateful to Professor Grace Ioppolo for inviting me to deliver this eulogy for her husband, my old friend Peter Beal, FBA, to be delivered at his funeral on 17 June 2024. I must preface it with the obvious disclaimer that it can in no way pretend to be an adequate summary of his achievements. It will take many years for the full significance of his contribution to scholarship to be recognized by all those who benefit from it.

Peter Beal, born 16 April 1944, was a major scholar in manuscript studies. But he would have been a major scholar in any of the humanities, for he had all the necessary abilities. He had the vision needed to formulate a large project, and the energy to carry it through. He had a sharp eye for detail and could collect large quantities of observation without subsuming them under generalized categories. In the Lyell Lectures, given at Oxford in 1995–6, published as a major monograph, *In Praise of Scribes*,<sup>1</sup> he confessed to ‘a natural suspicion of generalizations, especially theoretical ones.’ In Henry Woudhuysen’s judgment, Peter was ‘the master of physical and empirical evidence’, having ‘discovered and described thousands of manuscripts.’<sup>2</sup> Woudhuysen praised the book for ‘showing different ways of approaching what at first sight seems a disordered mass of heterogeneous materials.’ Among other topics, including ‘pioneering discussion of Donne’s *Biathanatos*, this book contains an account of ‘the most important copyist of the first part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the so-called Feathery Scribe. In an appendix he gave a catalogue of his productions, contained in well over a hundred

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<sup>1</sup> Beal, *In Praise of Scribes. Manuscripts and their Makers in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1998). Peter was evidently echoing a distinguished predecessor, the German polymath Johannes Trithemius (Abbot of Trittenheim), *In Praise of Scribes (De Laude Scriptorum)* written in 1492.

<sup>2</sup> H.R. Woudhuysen, *Review of English Studies* ... p. 472.

manuscripts'. How did Peter acquire the skill to identify handwriting? I don't know what innate gifts he may have had, but his occupation as a manuscript specialist employed by Sotheby's from 1980 to 2005, a post that allowed him to examine every important manuscript that was offered for sale in that period, was crucial in building up his first-hand experience.

Peter made the transition from academia to the commercial world without any difficulty. He was educated at Halifax Grammar School and read English literature at Leeds University, taking his BA in 1966 and his PhD in 1984. According to *Who's Who 2024*, his first job was as an editor at Bowker/Mansell Publishing, who issued the first volume of his *Index of Literary Manuscripts* in 1980.<sup>3</sup> These four volumes, extending to 2,505 pages, covered 123 authors of that period, as listed in the *Concise Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* (1967).

To give some idea of Peter's foundational work I have brought with me Volume 1 of the Index, which contains two authors in whom I have a special interest, Francis Bacon and John Donne. Each author is allotted an Introduction and a catalogue of works, using a short form of the name: Francis Bacon is BcF, numbering 322 items. At this juncture I must make the crucial point that Peter didn't list a writer's output as mere numbers; his approach was always through their literary and historical significance. For example, the eight-page introduction (double-column) to Bacon identifies the main repositories where his manuscripts are kept, whether authorial or scribal, and the various genres (letters, speeches, philosophical works), to which Beal added his own discoveries. In an autobiographical essay, 'Lost', discussing 'the destruction, dispersal

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<sup>3</sup> *Volume I 1450–1625*, was divided into two parts: *Part 1 Andrewes-Donne*, *Part 2 Douglass-Wyatt* respectively 568 and 636 pages (double columns). In 1987 they published *Volume II: 1625–1700*, also in two parts *Part 1 Behn-King*, *Part 2 Lee-Wycherley*, pp. 695 and 656 respectively.

and rediscovery of manuscripts,'<sup>4</sup> Beal described the indirect way by which he located an unknown work by Bacon. He illustrated the importance of following up readers' inscriptions, as catalogued:

It was precisely through checking a manuscript volume containing a pasted-in copy of Herbert's commendatory poem to Bacon in the library at Chatsworth in the 1970s that I discovered that the volume (MS Hardwick 72A) was, in fact, a working manuscript by Bacon himself, written in the hand of an amanuensis with Bacon's own extensive autograph revisions, of a completely unrecorded scientific work in Latin (BcF294). The complete text, *De vijs Mortis* ('Concerning the Ways of Death'), has now been edited by Graham Rees in volume VI (1996) of *The Oxford Francis Bacon*. (p. 9)

In fact, Peter's entry was a milestone in the history of Bacon scholarship, for he identified several previously unknown works. It was with a measured sense of the importance of his discoveries, that he added this unusual note at the end of the introduction: 'Unless otherwise stated, the MSS recorded in the *Index* have not been previously noted by editors. P.B.' (vol. 1, p. 20). Peter had discovered that work in the library of the Duke of Devonshire, Chatsworth House, Hardwick, where he also found the unpublished *Aphorismi de dissolutione rerum*' (BcF 287). On a visit to the Bibliothèque Nationale, he found the complete text of Bacon's *Abecedarium novum naturae* (BcF 286). Having worked for several years in the direction of *The Oxford Francis Bacon* I witnessed at first hand the importance of these discoveries to the new formation of Bacon's work in natural philosophy by Graham Rees.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Robin Myers, Michael Harris and Giles Mandelbrote (eds.), *Books on the Move – Tracking Copies, through Collections and the Book Trade* (London: The British Library, 2007), pp. 1–15.

<sup>5</sup> See Graham Rees (ed.) *The Oxford Francis Bacon*, vol. VI: *Philosophical Studies c.1611-c.1619* (Oxford, 1996), p. xvii on *De vijs mortis*, 'unknown to Bacon scholarship before 1980 when Dr Beal announced that he had discovered it among the manuscripts lodged at Chatsworth House.'

An even more striking example of the effect of Peter's manuscript discoveries on the canon of a major English writer was his account of John Donne, which runs to 322 pages. Some previous lists of Donne's works had been selective and partial: Peter aimed at completeness. He began by identifying the main MS collection of poems by Donne that he had used in the *Index*, which ran to 63 manuscripts (volume 1, pp. 250–8), new information in many cases. For each manuscript he provided information resulting from personal inspection of collections of Donne's poems in their respective libraries. These included six at Harvard, two at the New York Public Library, three at the Huntington Library, two at Yale, one at the Pierpoint Morgan Library, three at the Folger Library and one at the South African Library, Cape Town. This wide dissemination of collections of Donne's poetry (mostly compiled in the 1620s and 30s) reflected their original popularity, for

probably more transcripts of Donne's poems were made than of the verse of any other British poet of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The large number of extant transcripts (which must be only a fraction of the number once in existence) indicates the extraordinary popularity of Donne's verse in the 17<sup>th</sup> century; they have obvious editorial importance as witnesses to Donne's text, and they are also a reminder that his verse belonged essentially to a manuscript culture. Donne only saw three of his poems published in his lifetime (the Anniversaries, *Elegie upon ... Prince Henry*, and *Upon Mr Thomas Coryats Crudities*). The rest were read, copied, and circulated in manuscript, within limited social groups, perhaps sharing some of Donne's values and assumptions.

Peter identified 3,997 copies of Donne's poems, an astonishing achievement.

Fortunately, just as the *Oxford Francis Bacon* could draw on Peter's scholarly research, a major Donne edition shortly appeared.<sup>6</sup> Every editor involved in this

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<sup>6</sup> See *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*, General Editor: Gary Stringer (Indiana University Press, 1995 --).

definitive edition felt compelled to thank Peter. Volume 3, containing the *Satyres*, listed him among the three consultants who ‘contributed immeasurably to our work by providing specialized assistance and expertise. We should like to thank Peter Beal, whose bibliographical contributions to this volume and to Donne studies in general are manifold’ (p. xvii).

The whole aim of Peter’s professional career was to further the appreciation of manuscripts as transmitters of individual personalities and their creations, forming an autonomous literary world independent of – and in many cases alongside -- printed books. As Michael Brennan observed, reviewing *In Praise of Scribes*, the book

places particular emphasis upon defining the essential literary and social contrasts between manuscripts and printed books: the former being both private and personalized in their physical manifestation and circulation, the latter being essentially public statements of their own identity and commercial purpose.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the four-volume *Index* and that monograph, Peter provided a most helpful *Dictionary of English Manuscript Terminology 1450–2000* (Oxford, 2008). That might seem a niche subject, of limited scope, but in Peter’s hands it covered more than 450 pages. As Carlo Majetta commented, it is not merely a ‘dictionary’ but ‘rather a vade mecum of the stamp of John Carter’s *ABC for Book Collectors*, including many discursive entries, which sometimes take the form of short but very informative essays’ on such complex topics as ‘heraldic, ecclesiastical, military, and maritime documents.’

<sup>8</sup> As he put it, ‘Peter Beal’s expertise and vast knowledge provides a most useful selection of terms.’ The reviewer singled out for special praise the ‘terminology of legal manuscripts’ as having received ‘very good coverage, with an average of about 8–9

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<sup>7</sup> Review, *Notes and Queries*, .... (2000), p. 127.

<sup>8</sup> Review, *Notes and Queries*, ... (2009), p. 667.

entries per letter of the alphabet', over 200 in all. Where else can one find such information? A few years later, in 1989, Peter was co-founder of a journal, *English Manuscript Studies, 1100–1700*, which reached volume 18 (2003), with a distinguished bevy of scholars co-operating.

In 2002 he was appointed a Senior Research Fellow of the Institute of English Studies in recognition of his scholarly reputation, having been headhunted by its Director, Professor Warwick Gould.<sup>9</sup> Thanks to the Institute's status as the only research body for English Literature in the UK, it was able to help Peter to achieve a salaried position with the Arts and Humanities Research Council for five years, which allowed him to resign from Sotheby's and, as Professor Gould put it, 'to get on with that at which he was *non-pareil*.'<sup>10</sup> This appointment provided Peter with the opportunity -- wholeheartedly welcomed -- to produce a digital edition of the *Index*, now known as the *Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts 1450–1700 (CELM)*. He began work on it in 2005, with the digitization being led by Professor John Lavagnino at King's College London. (It has recently been taken over by the Folger Library in Washington DC: see As Peter himself described it:

*The Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts 1450–1700* provides a complete catalogue of literary manuscripts by 237 British authors of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. It offers descriptions of more than 37,000 manuscript texts of poems, plays, discourses, translations, etc., as well as notebooks, annotated printed books, corrected proofs, promptbooks, letters, documents and other related manuscript materials, many hitherto unrecorded, found in several hundred public and private collections worldwide. It will provide a new and productive research tool not only for those interested in particular authors and works, but for anyone interested in the literary culture of the early modern period, in

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<sup>10</sup> Warwick Gould, email 27.6.24.

manuscript production and dissemination as a social phenomenon, and in the history of literacy and readership...

Peter recalled how in his 1979 preface to the 'first two volumes of the *Index of English Literary Manuscripts*, he declared that

“one of the main aims of this *Index* is to point the way towards further investigation, as well as to take stock of that which is known.” I added to this an expression of hope that in “the foreseeable future”, as new information came to light, there would be an “eventual supplementary volume”. I could not then predict the revolutionary impact of the new electronic media or imagine that the *Index* would expand not just to a “supplementary volume” but to an extensive catalogue that would be freely accessible online throughout the world. Neither could I predict that in ensuing decades there would be such an upsurge of scholarly interest in manuscripts – in the textual importance of manuscripts, in the sociology of manuscripts, and in their makers and their readers, among other aspects.

Peter himself was one of the chief causes of that ‘upsurge’ of scholarly interest in so many aspects of manuscripts, and it was with a sense of pride and achievement that he described the final metamorphosis of his researches. The only fitting comment on his Herculean achievement is the proud statement of Horace concluding his third book of *Odes*: ‘*Exegi monumentem aere perennius*’:

I have completed a memorial more lasting than bronze  
and higher than the royal grave of the pyramids,  
that neither biting rain nor the north wind in its fury  
can destroy, nor the unnumbered series of years and  
the flight of ages. I shall not all die and a great part  
of me shall escape the Goddess of Funerals: I shall  
grow ever renewed in the praise of posterity.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Gordon Williams (ed.), *The Third Book of Horace's Odes* (Oxford, 1969), p. 150.