

***Quodlibets* - Robert Hayman and the Poetry of Arrival**

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“The Aire in Newfound-land is wholesome, good;
The Fire, as sweet as any made of wood;
The Waters, very rich, both salt and fresh;
The Earth more rich, you know it is no lesse.
Where all are good, *Fire, Water, Earth and Aire*,
What man made of these four would not live there?”¹

An epigram by Robert Hayman, in praise of Newfoundland, from his book, *Quodlibets* – “Lately Come Over from New Britaniola, Old Newfoundland.” The title page continues at some length:

“Epigrams and other small parcels, both *Morall and Divine*. The first four books being the author’s owne; the rest translated out of that excellent epigrammatist, Mr John Owen and other rare authors. With two epistles of that excellently witty Doctor, Francis Rablais: translated out of the French at large. All of them composed and done at Harbour-Grace in Britaniola, anciently called Newfound-land, by Robert Hayman, sometimes Governor of the plantation there.”

The book was published in 1628, a year before Hayman’s death, “By Elizabeth Allde, for Roger Michell” at Paul’s Churchyard “at the sign of the Bulls-head.” The word “Quodlibets” is taken from the Latin, and may be literally translated as “what pleases”; in music a quodlibet is a piece encompassing a selection of related – often light-hearted - tunes, frequently using popular melodies.

I would like to take some time in this paper to revisit and examine some of Hayman’s writings, explore the motives behind it and try to place him and his work within the context the writing of the early 17th century. I want at the outset to thank William Gilbert, with whom I sat on a hot July afternoon amidst the activity of the shipyard at Harbour Grace, reading some of Hayman’s verse, probably very close to the spot where some of them were composed. I should stress here that in discussing Hayman’s writings, I am not seeking to place him high in the pantheon of 17th poetry; he is an epigrammatist, a writer of occasional verse, not an Andrew Marvell or John Donne. He was notwithstanding this caveat, almost certainly the first writer of verse in English to come out of Canada – North America – and his passion for Newfoundland, and his desire to celebrate it, and encourage his countrymen to populate it and develop it shines through much of his work, and it’s this aspect I think that makes him so interesting – the blend of the colonizer and the poet.

Firstly let us establish something about Hayman himself. We know he was baptized at Wolborough, near Newton Abbot in Devon on 14 August 1575. He was one of nine children, the son of Nicholas Hayman and Alice Gaverocke. Nicholas Hayman was a prosperous citizen of the West Country, and in his time served as both Mayor and MP of both Totnes and Dartmouth. When Robert was four years old, the family moved to Totnes, and it was here that the “little-little” boy met Sir Francis Drake, and ever after

¹ *Quodlibets*, Book 2, number 79

remembered being given “a fair red Orange” and a kiss by Drake. Indeed, he commemorated the event many years later in a poem:

The dragon, that our seas did raise his crest,
And brought back heapes of gold unto his nest,
Unto his foes more terrible than thunder,
Glory of his age, After-ages wonder,
Excelling all those that excell'd before;
It's fear'd we shall have none such any more;
Effecting all, he sole did undertake,
Valiant, just, wise, mild, honest, godly Drake.
This man when I was little, I did meet,
As he was walking up Totnes long Street,
He ask'd me who I was? I answer'd him.
He ask'd me if his good friend were within?
A fair red Orange in his hand he had,
He gave it me, wherof I was right glad,
Takes and kissed me, and prays, *God Bless my boy:*
Which I record with comfort to this day.²

In 1590, Hayman matriculated at Exeter College, Oxford, in July 1596 he commenced his BA, and became a law student at Lincoln's Inn. While at Oxford he became known for his poetry, and was friends with another poet, William Vaughan, who was to be the founder of the colony of Trepassey Bay, Newfoundland. Between gaining his degree and the end of the century, he studied in Poitiers, France, and his father sought advancement for his son in a letter to Sir Robert Cecil. We do not know if this was successful; indeed we have shadowy information about his life and career from this point, other than his marriage to Grace Spicer, the daughter of a merchant, in Exeter in 1604, until he became governor of Bristol's Hope, on Conception Bay, Newfoundland, probably around 1618. The only other known fact is the dedication to him of a play by Edward Sharpham in 1607. The play was called *Cupid's Whirligig*, but the dedication by Sharpham to his friend gives no further information. How he came to his Newfoundland appointment is also not entirely clear, but we can at least make some informed deduction; there is a family connection with Bristol, insofar as one of Hayman's sisters married John Barker of that city, who in 1617-18 was master of the Society of Merchant Venturers. Bristolian John Guy's falling out with the London merchants after the establishment of the Cupers Cove plantation took the Bristol merchants up the coast to the new site of Harbour Grace to establish a colony there, which they names Bristol's Hope. There would seem within that set of circumstances a route which probably led Hayman to his Newfoundland experience.

We know he spent a number of summers at Bristol's Hope as governor, and one 15 month period at the start of his tenure, which lasted until 1628, the year of publication of *Quodlibets*. In November of that year, he set off with Robert Harcourt on an expedition to Guiana, reaching Wiapoko (now Oyapock) in February 1629. In November 1629, he died of a fever, and is buried in Guiana. He was 54.

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So much for the life, such as we know of it. While Hayman was governor of Bristol's Hope, seems to have had plenty of leisure time to absorb the pleasures and charms of his corner of Newfoundland, and to write and translate. Judging by Richard Whitbourne's view, written in 1622, it does indeed sound an attractive and inviting community:

Divers worshipful citizens of the City of Bristol have undertaken to plant a large circuit of that country, and they have maintained a colony of his majesty's subjects there any time these five years who have builded there fair houses, and done many good services, who live there very pleasantly, and they are well pleased to entertain upon fit conditions such as will be adventurers with them.³

His epigrams are a clear advocacy of the place, he becomes through them, one might almost claim, not only Newfoundland's first poet, but its first promoter of settlement. Take this, dedicated "to all those worthy women, who have any desire to live in Newfoundland, especially to the modest and discreet Mistress Mason, wife to Captain Mason, who lived there divers years".

Sweet creatures, did you truly understand
The pleasant life you'd live in Newfoundland,
You would with tears desire to be brought thither:
I wish you when you go, fair wind, fair weather:
For if you with the passage can dispense,
When you are there, I know you'll ne'er come thence.⁴

He was writing at a time of great ambition overseas for Britain, as we've seen he worshipped Raleigh, he knew Vaughan, and Drake's poetry as well as his exploits were part of the fabric which informed the *zeitgeist* of the time. In the late 16th century there was much writing that the young Robert would have been exposed to, such as this by Sir Richard Grenville:

Who seeks the way to win renown,
Or flies with wings of high desire,
Who seeks to wear the laurel crown,
Or hath the mind that would aspire,
Let him his native soil eschew,
Let me go range, and seek a new...⁵

As the poet Kevin Crossley-Holland has written of the early colonizers of the New World, these were the new heroes, to be extolled in every form of literature:

Edmund Spenser lauded their enterprise in laying open new reions, 'Indian Peru' and the 'huge Amazon river' and 'fruitfullest Virginia'; in *Tamburlaine*, Christopher Marlowe thrillingly celebrated the growing awareness of

³ Whitbourne, Richard, *A Discourse of Newfoundland*, 1622, quoted in Moore Smith, G.C, *Robert Hayman and the Plantation of Newfoundland*, 1918, p. 26.

⁴ *Quodlibets* Book 2, Number 80

⁵ Grenville, Sir Richard, in Crossley-Holland, Kevin, *Oxford Dictionary of Travel Verse*, p.1, OUP, Oxford, 1986

geography and new colonial ambition; while George Chapman [in 1596, in his ‘De Guiana carmen Epicum’] emphasized the travellers’ sense of patriotism and the recurring quest for gold:

Guiana, whose rich feet are mines of gold,
Whose forehead knocks against the roof of stars,
Stands on her tip-toe at fair England looking,
Kissing her hand, bowing her mighty breast,
And every sign of all submission making
To be her sister, and the daughter both
Of our most sacred maid.⁶

The 21 year-old Robert may have known that poem, and perhaps thought of it years later as he set off on what would be his final adventure. The literature of the late 16th and 17th centuries was full of the glorification of exploration, sometimes referring to the act of colonization directly, sometimes using it as metaphor. Robert Hayman was exposed to the work – and sometimes the persons – of some of the great writers and poets of his time. It seems doubtful that he knew Ben Jonson, but he was a friend of Michael Drayton, who wrote his “Ode. To the Virginian Voyage” in 1606, prior to the departure of the Jamestown expedition. It is written in the classical style:

Britons, you stay too long;
Quickly aboard bestow you,
And with a merry gale
Swell your stretched sail,
With vows as strong
As the winds that blow you.

Your course securely steer,
West and by south forth keep,
Rocks, lee shores, nor shoals,
Where Aeolus scowls,
You need not fear,
So absolute the deep.

And cheerfully at sea,
Success you still entice,
To get the pearl and gold,
And ours to hold,
Virginia,
Earth’s only paradise.

When he was admitted as a law student to Lincoln’s Inn, one of Hayman’s contemporaries was John Donne. Indeed the two men were almost *exact* contemporaries – Donne was born in 1672 – three years before Hayman, and died in 1631 – two years after Robert’s death. Between 1596 and 1605, Donne took part in a number of expeditions – to Cadiz, the Azores, France and possibly Italy. There is certainly much travel metaphor in Donne’s poetry, by no means least in his erotic writings. Take this from his “Elegies”, ‘To His Mistress, Going to Bed’:

⁶ Ibid. pp xxviii-xxiv

Licence my roving hands, and let them go,
Before, behind, between, above, below.
O my America! My new-found-land,
My kingdom, safest when with one man man'd
My mine of precious stones: my Emperie,
How blest am I in this discovering thee!

In the more geographical sense of exploration, the age was informed by the high romance and heroism of its travellers and pioneers. We have heard Hayman's hymn to Drake; he may well have heard or read this anonymous epigram to the great man, dating from the late 16th or early 17th century:

Sir Drake, whom well the world's end knew,
Which thou didst compass round,
And whom both poles of heaven once saw,
Which north and south do bound,
The stars above would make thee known,
If men here silent were;
The sun himself cannot forget
His fellow traveller.

What the climate of discovery also gave poets and dramatists was the exotic sound of strange names: Christopher Marlowe was one of the first writers of the time to explore this: In *Tamburlaine* he writes:

We here do crown thee monarch of the East,
Emperor of Asia and of Persia,
Great lord of Media and Armenia,
Duke of Africa and Albania,
Mesopotamia and of Parthia...

Shakespeare too of course. *The Tempest* springs immediately to mind as a play in which the strangeness of other worlds – in many forms – is informed by the zeitgeist of the times. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, he takes Marlowe's 'poetry of naming' to an extreme:

He hath assembled
Bocchus, the king of Lybia; Archelaus
Of Cappadocia; Philadelphos, king
Of Paphlagonia; the Tracian king, Adallas;
King Mauchus of Arabia; King of Pont;
Herod of Jewry; Mithridates, king
Of Comagene; Polemon and Amyntas,
The kings of Mede and Lycaonia, with a
More larger list of sceptres.

In 1667, Milton's *Paradise Lost* the poet again plays with the pure sound of geographical names:

...and what resounds
In Fable or Romance of Uther's Son
Begirt with British and Armoric Knights;
And all who since, Baptiz'd or Infidel,
Jousted in Aspromont or Montalban,
Damasco, or Marocco, or Trebisond...
When Charlemain with all is Peerage fell
By Fontarabbia.

The passion for place and discovery in poetry and literature was to continue throughout the 17th century. Andrew Marvell was to write a prayerful poem, "Bermudas" :

What should we do but sing his praise
That led us through the watery maze...

...in which the coming to new lands was indeed akin to finding a paradise on earth:

He gave us this eternal spring
Which here enamels everything,
And sends the fowls to us in care
On daily visits through the air.
He hangs in shades the orange bright
Like golden lamps in a green night,
And does in the pomegranates close
Jewels more rich than Ormus shows...

George Berkeley, in his "Verses on the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America", gives us a sense of a desire to turn the back on a corrupt and despoiled old world, to as it were, start afresh in a place virgin and unsullied:

Not such as Europe breeds in her decay;
Such as she bred when fresh and young,
When heav'nly flame did animate her clay,
By future poets shall be sung.

It is in the context of this spirit of opportunity that Robert Hayman's writings should be placed. "Hayman's verses were a deliberate attempt to woo colonists to join him in Newfoundland" as Kevin Crossley Holland has said.⁷

In Hayman's dedication of *Quodlibets* to King Charles 1, he states his desire that his poems of Newfoundland "make known unto your Majesty, the inestimable riches of the seas circling that Island: the hopeful improvements of the mainland thereof: the more than probable, invaluable hidden treasures therein: the infinite abundance of combustible fiery materials fit for such employment..."⁸

Of his poems he goes on:

⁷ Ibid. xxix

⁸ *Quodlibets*, Dedication page

“Mean and unworthy though they are, yet because some of them were borne, and the rest did first speak English in that Land...and being the first fruits of this kind, that ever visited this Land out of that Dominion of yours: I thought it my duty, to present and prostrate these with my self at your Royal feet... unfeinedly beseeching God to bless your Majesty with abundance of all Earthly and Heavenly blessings. And that you may see an happy success of all your Foreign Plantations, especially of that of Newfound-land. ⁹

Here is he celebrates in what he calls “A Skeltonical [after the poet John Skelton, active in the first part of the 16th century] continued rhym, in praise of my New-found-land”:

Although in cloths, company, buildings fair,
With England, New-found-land cannot compare:
Did some know what contentment I found there,
Always enough, most times somewhat to spare,
With little paines, less toyle, and lesser care,
Exempt from taxings, ill newes, lawing, feare,
If cleane, and warme, no matter what you weare,
Healthy and wealthy, if men carefull are,
With much much more, then I will now declare,
(I say) if some wise men knew what this were,
(I doe believe) they’d live no other where. ¹⁰

As far as the climate goes, he gives this advice “To a worthy friend, who often objects to the coldness of the winter in Newfound-land, and may serve for all those that have the like conceit:

You say that you would live in Newfound-land,
Did not this one thing your conceit withstand;
You fear the winters cold, sharp piercing aire.
They love it best, that have once wintered there.
Winter is there, short, wholesome, constant, cleare,
Not thicke, unwholesome, shuffling, as ‘tis here. ¹¹

In other words, ‘Newfoundland is bracing’! We learn of food too: He writes this epigram *To my very loving and discreet friend, Master Peter Miller of Bristol:*

You asked me once, what here was our chief dish:
In winter, fowl; in summer, choice of fish.
But we should need good stomachs, you may think,
To eat such kind of things which with you stink,
As ravens, crows, kites, otters, foxes, bears,
Dogs, cats, and soiles, eaglets, hawks, hounds, and hares.
Yet we have partridges, and store of deer,
And that (I think) with you is pretty cheer.
Yet let me tell you, sir, what I love best:

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid. Book 1, Number 117

¹¹ Ibid. book 1, number 117

It's a poor-John that's clean and neatly dressed;
There's not a meat found in the land, or seas,
Can stomachs better please, or less displease.
It is a fish of profit, and of pleasure,
I'll write more of it, when I have more leisure.
These and much more are here the ancient store;
Since we came hither, we have added more.

Hayman adds as a footnote this explanation of Poor-John: "Called in French, *Pour Gens*, in English, corruptly *Poore John*, being the principal fish brought out of this country.

Elsewhere he makes it clear that this opportunity for colonisation should be tempered with some sort of quality control: the start of a venture is a point of responsibility for the future. Thus we writes a pithy couplet dedicated "To the famous, wise and learned sisters, the two universities of England, Oxford and Cambridge":

Send forth your sons unto our new Plantation;
Yet send such as are *Holy, Wise and Able*.¹²

He fires this salvo down the coast to the London merchants, with whom the Bristol Venturers had fallen out:

What aim you at in your Plantation?
Sought you the honour of our nation?
Or did you hope to raise your own renown?
Or else to add a kingdom to a crown?
Or Christ's true doctrine for to propagate?
Or draw salvages to a blessed state?
Or our o'er peopled kingdom to relieve?
Or show poor men where they may richly live?
Or poor men's children godly to maintain?
Or aimed you at your own sweet private gain?
All these you had achieved before this day,
And all these you have balk't by your delay.¹³

There is in the British Museum, evidence that Hayman made a final attempt to 'sell' the idea of Newfoundland to the British crown, through a letter to King Charles under the title, *A Proposition of Profit and Honour proposed to my dread, and gracious sovereign Lord, King Charles, by his humble subject Robert Hayman*. Hayman used the Duke of Buckingham as an intermediary for his appeal, and wrote a covering letter. This was to prove an unfortunate choice; on 23 August, 1628 Buckingham was assassinated in the house of that same Captain Robert Mason whose role in Newfoundland Hayman had openly praised. That apart, Charles was at odds with parliament and the country was in a financial mess, with little in the way of funds for current developments of the kind Robert had in mind. Yet his passion for Newfoundland is total, and, as he writes to Buckingham, "I have an humble desire, an holy hunger to acquaint his majesty with it." His letter to the king is long and well

¹² Ibid. book 2, number 104

¹³ Ibid. book 2, number 105

argued. He writes of the possibilities of trade using the salting of Newfoundland fish, he alludes often to the importance of establishing a major presence to deter French investment and settlement, and he asks for investment to build on what has already been achieved:

I should entreat that your Majesty would build, or begin at least a city in that part of the island where I have placed your *Carolinople*, and to privilege that town, with that fishing: your Majesty might likewise make it a *Mart*, or free *Market* for fish...

It was all to no avail. Hayman came to see that the time was not right, and he turned to his next – and last adventure – the colonization of Guiana. He formed a small company, and made preparations for a colonization party to establish an English presence in South America. Before he left, he made his will, which is dated 17 November, 1628. What actually happened to him thereafter, we can only guess.

We may feel that Robert Hayman – for what remained of his life after his time in Newfoundland, smarted at what he saw was an opportunity which, for the time being at least, had not been seized as wholeheartedly as he himself believed it could have been. His shall be the last word, in a late Quodlibet:

Divers well-minded men, wise, rich, and able,
Did undertake a plot inestimable,
The hopefull'st, easiest, healthi'st, just plantation,
That ere was undertaken by our Nation.
When they had wisely, worthily begun,
For a few errors that athwart did run,
(As every action first is full of errors)
They fell off flat, retir'd at the first terrors.
As it is lamentably strange to me:
In the next age *incredible* 't will be.¹⁴

end

¹⁴ Ibid. Book 2, number 83