
Quantitative Verse, Bookselling, and Thomas Campion's *Observations in the Art of English Poesie*

BARCLAY GREEN

NORTHERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

Perhaps best known as the work that provoked Samuel Daniel's *A Defence of Ryme* (1603), Thomas Campion's *Observations in the Art of English Poesie* (1602) critiques the use of rhyme and meter in English poetry¹ and develops the prosodic foundation for vernacular quantitative verse.² Although *Observations* has received less scholarly attention and praise than the *Defence*, Campion's treatise represents an important moment in what is called, anachronistically, the history of criticism. While scholars have begun to understand *Observations'* importance through several insightful studies, most of this scholarship, perhaps because of the relative neglect the treatise has suffered, falls within a fairly narrow range of critical perspectives or does not develop fully several significant ideas. Thus, despite some excellent critical work on Campion's essay, we do not entirely grasp its place in the discourse of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. *Observations* does more than offer an astute analysis of English prosody and suggest a variety of vernacular quantitative meters. It also responds to what Campion saw as the unfortunate conditions under which learned, serious poets had to labor. In noting these conditions, he echoes complaints typical of his predecessors in the quantitative movement, but alters these formulaic constructions to suit his particular concerns. The treatise, moreover, reacts to the rise of print and the business of bookselling, cultural phenomena that deeply affected Campion, an author who worked, at least during significant portions of his career, in the tradition of the courtly amateur. Through close attention to the early chapters of *Observations*, we appreciate more fully the serious motivations behind the quantitative movement, expand our knowledge of Campion's contributions to it, and raise questions about how Elizabethan critics responded to changes in their culture's literary systems.

Most critical studies evaluate Campion's place in and contribution to the movement to create English quantitative verse. *Observations* has often been considered the high point of the movement, even by those critics who deride the project and believe that Campion's arguments are unsuccessful. Such comments begin at the

outset of modern Campion scholarship. Vivian, while disparaging the movement, declares that *Observations*' "value for literary history consists in the fact that it was a final statement of the craze against rhyming formulated by one of its best equipped and sanest partisans" (lix). Vivian argues that Campion largely failed in the project because he did not fully understand "the difference between quantitative and accentual prosody" (lx) and comments that his poetry was better than his theory (lxv).³ Often, scholarly discussions assess Campion's metrical prescriptions. Kastendieck is largely concerned with evaluating Campion's metrical feet and often finds them faulty (71-88). Lowbury, Salter, and Young similarly but less skillfully come to regard Campion's prosody as lacking (80-89).⁴

Recent scholarship, while working along the same lines, has tended to be more appreciative. Davis, for example, carefully articulates what Campion finds unsatisfactory in English prosody and how he proposes to amend it (*Thomas Campion* 104-113).⁵ Davis accords Campion an important place in the quantitative movement, arguing that "Campion's uniqueness lay in his repudiation of the dream of classicism, his insistence on making classical meters English, giving his readers illustrative poems fitting to their tongues with familiar subject matter and names" (*Thomas Campion* 111).⁶ Attridge characteristically offers the most compelling and balanced statement on *Observations*' legacy: "The verse in the *Observations* marks the high point of the quantitative movement, but the victory, however impressive, was a pyrrhic one. By demonstrating that quantitative verse succeeds only when it is also accentual, Campion had undermined the whole enterprise, and his critics had only to point out the obvious" (228).

Such scholarly work has resulted in an increased emphasis on the importance of *Observations*. Ryding, for example, asserts correctly, "we should not dismiss this debate as mere pedantic quibbling; for the issues discussed by Campion and Daniel are in large part the central issues of the entire Renaissance, a period whose art is constantly marked by the juxtaposition of medieval and classical elements" (1-2).⁷ However, the focus on Campion's metrical prescriptions, even as it has led us to a deeper appreciation of his theoretical accomplishments, has sometimes, especially but not exclusively in older criticism, led us away from important motivations behind *Observations*. We have only a limited understanding of how Campion is addressing what he perceived to be the unfortunate cultural conditions under which serious poets labored.

Several scholars, among them those who have produced our best work on the quantitative movement, have noticed these motivations, and if they have not looked at their presence in Campion's work in detail, they have discussed how similar motivations characterize the movement as a whole. These attentive critical readings

observe that, throughout roughly the last three decades of the sixteenth century,⁸ the movement's adherents wanted to imitate classical prosody not only to classicize English but also to address what they saw as the debasement of poetry. These advocates lamented that learning had declined since antiquity and that poets were no longer regarded with the esteem they once enjoyed. This sorry state of affairs they linked to the use of rhyme and accentual meter. Helgerson suggests that

Harvey's and Spenser's fascination with classical prosody, a fascination inherited from Ascham and shared with Sidney, Dyer, Drant, and a good many others, is...best understood in terms of this persistent uncertainty about poetry. The decline of learning and the depreciation of the poet were associated in their minds with the barbarous habit of rime. If the poet was to be restored to his vatic eminence, his poems must rid themselves of that Gothic tinsel and wear instead the ennobling garb of ancient meter. (80)⁹

The quantitative movement was, then, indicative of a deeper, sustained desire to reverse poetry's perceived decline. Attempting to fulfill this desire, the movement's proponents regularly denounced poetry's lesser practitioners, derided their lack of technical skill, and sought to elevate the quality of vernacular poetry. Seth Weiner rightly contends,

We can appreciate the details of the quantitative movement only if we have a general sense of its goals. The impulse to classicize is, of course, obvious. Theorists from Ascham to Campion expressed the wish to rescue English poetry from the fiddlers and tailors who huddled up ale-house ballads, to strip it of its jingling rhymes, and to make it "artificial"—that is, sophisticated, orderly, and above all, learned. (4)¹⁰

Attridge, moreover, points out that in the late sixteenth century proponents of English quantitative verse had "The feeling that the general standard of vernacular poetry was abysmally low, and this was in part attributable to the ease with which anyone, no matter how ignorant or idle, could write a technically satisfactory line of rhyming verse, remained common" (102).¹¹

Observations demonstrates attitudes similar to those noted by Helgerson, Weiner, and Attridge and thus fits squarely in the traditions these scholars discuss in their various ways. Campion does not attempt to create vernacular quantitative meters simply for the sake of classicizing the language; his project engages what he considers to be the cultural conditions under which writers produce their work. His treatise, moreover, makes several comments that allow us to expand these scholarly characterizations of how Elizabethan writers argued in favor of English quantitative verse.

Campion mentions several of his motivations in the prefatory material to and the first two chapters of *Observations*. These are the only chapters in the treatise

that are “not based on the grammar of Lily” (Fenyo 50) and so offer especial insight into Campion’s thoughts on issues other than metrical prescriptions.¹² Campion is almost immediately concerned with the decline of learning and, in “The first Chapter, intreating of numbers in generall,” states,

Learning first flourished in *Greece*, from thence it was derived unto the *Romaines*, both diligent observers of the number and quantity of sillables, not in their verses only but likewise in their prose. Learning, after the declining of the *Romaine* Empire and the pollution of their language through the conquest of the *Barbarians*, lay most pitifully deformed till the time of *Erasmus*, *Rewcline*, Sir *Thomas More*, and other learned men of that age, who brought the Latine toong againe to light, redeeming it with much labour out of the hands of the illiterate Monks and Friars.... In those lack-learning times, and in barbarized *Italy*, began that vulgar and easie kind of Poesie which is now in use throughout most parts of Christendome, which we abusively call Rime and Meeter.... (293)¹³

His argument in favor of creating vernacular quantitative verse is based on the dual premises that classical learning was superior to modern and that learning is associated with linguistic practice. It is not, however, immediately clear precisely what Campion is contending. Did the Greeks and Romans use quantitative verse because they were learned? Or did they become learned because they used language properly? His juxtaposition, though, of the flourishing of great learning in antiquity with classical writers’ attention to the number and quantity of syllables, suggests the latter. For Campion, quantitative verse is a *sine qua non* if poetry is to convey learning. He even evokes a causal relationship between the use of quantitative verse and intellectual accomplishment, for learning “first flourished” when quantity was adhered to in both verse and prose. This relationship is reinforced when he links the decline in learning to the desecration of language: it was not the fall of the Roman empire alone that brought about an age of ignorance, but also the corrupting of Latin. For Campion, the origins of learning in classical antiquity are not to be attributed simply to the favorable intellectual atmosphere created by a stable empire, nor to some innate ancient superiority. Rather, classical learning arose, at least in part, because of the use of quantitative meters. If Latin, Campion implies, had been left untouched, learning might have survived the barbarian invasions, despite the fall of the Roman empire. Thus, when he condemns rhyme and meter as having arisen in those “lack-learning times and in barbarized *Italy*,” he doubly repudiates poetry that employs them. Not only are rhyme and meter produced by a barbaric, unlearned age, but, because of the strong connection between linguistic practice and intellectual accomplishment, they bear some responsibility for producing the ignorance of the age. For Campion, the development of quantitative verse

is necessary if the vernacular is to be made a vehicle of learning comparable to the classical languages.

For Campion, then, the problem with vernacular poetry is that it relies too heavily on rhyme and meter and thus cannot express learning as well as Greek and Latin can. Because he argues for the connection between intellectual accomplishment and linguistic practice, though, Campion suggests that the decline of learning can be reversed through the resuscitation of language and a return to quantitative verse. His argument is a hopeful one, for the revival of learning, he contends, has already begun, as the humanists Erasmus, Reuchlin, and More, working to mend the polluted language of the dark ages, have brought "the Latine toong again to light." He contrasts the humanists' "labour" in this project of linguistic redemption with the suggested indolence of monks and friars during an age that saw the rise of an "easie kind of poetry." Campion's point in discussing the resuscitation of Latin, then, is that the creation of vernacular quantitative meters—a project that requires much labor and for which *Observations* lays the foundation—allows English to be ennobled in a manner similar to the way in which the humanists redeemed a corrupted Latin. The rhymed accentual verse of English poetry has perpetuated and even contributed to the decline of learning, and if learning is to be resurrected, not only must the Latin produced by the humanists be maintained, but the vernacular, too, must be mended through the development of quantitative verse.

In "The second Chapter, declaring the unaptnesse of Rime in Poesie," Campion moves from the decline in learning to the concomitant decline in poetry's status and the lack of technical skill in much vernacular verse:

Bring before me now any the most selfe-lov'd Rimer, and let me see if without blushing he be able to reade his lame halting rimes. Is there not a curse of Nature laid upon such rude Poesie, when the Writer is himself asham'd of it, and the hearers in contempt call it Riming and Ballating? What Devine in his Sermon, or grave Counsellor in his Oration, will alleage the testimonie of a rime? But the devinity of the *Romaines* and *Gretians* was all written in verse: and *Aristotle*, *Galene*, and the bookes of all the excellent Philosophers are full of the testimonies of the old Poets. By them was laid the foundation of all humane wisdome, and from them the knowledge of all antiquitie is derived. (296)

Campion offers a clear contrast: contemporary vernacular verse does not hold the elevated cultural position enjoyed by classical poetry. It is disregarded by the learned because it uses rhyme, which renders it unfit for serious purposes. Poetry has declined to the point that even those who produce such verse are embarrassed by it, while their audiences scorn it. In contrast, in classical antiquity when quantitative meters were used, poetry conveyed profound religious, philosophical, and scientific

ideas. Additionally, philosophers often cited ancient poets, whose verse contained the cornerstones of the classical thought so important to the Renaissance. Campion hints that this decline is linked to a lack of technical grace in rhymed accentual verse: "lame, halting rimes" probably refers not so much to incompetent rhymes as to dreadful meters that create displeasing rhythms because they do not take length of syllable into account and so cripple the verse. The derisive "Ballating" similarly suggests a dislike for the prosody as much as for the rhymes. Who could hear such flawed verse and not hold it in contempt? The development of quantitative meters, then, would allow the composition of competent poetry, elevate the quality of vernacular verse, and help to restore poetry to its proper cultural position. As Attridge argues generally, "Campion is...motivated by the same desire as all the quantitative poets from Watson onwards: to introduce into English verse the 'artificiality,' the attention to the properties of every syllable, the challenge posed by the task of employing a complex set of rules, that were characteristic of the Latin verse he knew and admired" (225).

And his desires run deeper still. Campion addresses the depreciation not only of poetry, but also of the poet. In doing so, he does not aspire—at least not overtly—to see the poet "restored to his vatic eminence," as did several of his near contemporaries. When his entire body of work is considered, he rarely, if ever, demonstrates the laureate ambitions that Helgerson details in authors such as Sidney and Spenser. (Campion is not mentioned in *Self-Crowned Laureates*, and rightly so.) While this attitude is perhaps best attributed to Campion's personality, he also had less need to entertain such aspirations.¹⁴ *Observations* was written after the ascension of Sidney and Spenser if not to vatic eminence then at least to vernacular prominence, so there was not a pressing need to reiterate the desires of those poets. However, although Campion may not have shared the aspirations of some of the more prominent poets who experimented with quantitative meters, he was still concerned with the decline of the poet's status. This concern manifests itself in a manner different from that of earlier proponents of quantitative verse, for he desires not only "to rescue English poetry from the fiddlers and tailors who huddled up ale-house ballads" but also to address a more elite group. In *Observations'* dedication to Lord Buckhurst—the treatise's prefatory material has been slighted by critics, as we will see—Campion comments that "the vulgar and unarteficiall custome of riming hath, I know, deter'd many excellent wits from the exercise of English Poesy" (291). He may not desire vatic eminence, but he does want to attract the learned and talented to English poetry and to the project of creating quantitative meters, thereby raising the quality of both. *Observations*, then, does not present itself as the fulfillment of the quantitative movement. In the treatise's concluding paragraph, Campion, himself, acknowledges

that he has not finished the task: "In the meane season, as the Grammarians leave many sillables to the authority of Poets, so do I likewise leave many to their judgments; and withall thus conclude, that there is no Art begun and perfected at one enterprise" (317). Rather, *Observations* lays the foundation for quantitative verse in part to show the learned that they should take the vernacular seriously. It is a recruiting treatise, the title page of which advertises that the reader will find that "it is demonstratively prooved, and by example confirmed, that the English toong will receive eight severall kinds of numbers, proper to it selfe (287). Contemporary vernacular verse, with its rhyme and accentual meters, certainly lacks the art of classical verse, but *Observations* will demonstrate to the doubtful that this is an accidental rather than inherent characteristic of the language: English can sustain quantitative meters and so aspire to the perfection of classical Greek and Latin.

Moreover, in the attempt to introduce "artificiality" into English poetry, Campion refuses to condone the inaction of "excellent wits" simply because he understands why they dislike vernacular verse. He criticizes them for failing even to try to make English poetry more like that of Greek and Latin. In "The Writer to his Booke," a short poem that prefaces *Observations*, Campion asks, "Will not our English *Athens* arte defend? / Perhaps. Will lofty court wits not ayme / Still at perfection?" (292). The very preface to the treatise states the centrality of its author's desire to make English more artful, but here he blames the lack of quantitative verse not on the technical incompetence of bad poets but on the wits' unwillingness to aim at perfection and try to create quantitative meters. Although "court wits" may not refer to precisely the same group as "excellent wits"—the use of "court" rather than "excellent" may suggest an attention to fashion rather than to substance—he still rebukes a socially privileged group rather than those "fiddlers and tailors who huddled up ale-house ballads." Campion returns to this theme in the essay's second chapter. He observes, when questioning why the classical "custom" of quantitative verse has not been imported into English, "But the unaptnes of our toongs and the difficultie of imitation dishartens us; againe, the facilitie and popularitie of Rime creates as many Poets as a hot sommer flies" (294). Campion blames the lack of artful vernacular verse not only on bad poets but also on those who have failed to tackle the difficult task of creating quantitative meters for a language that seems unsuited to them. It is unlikely that Campion is rebuking fiddlers and tailors for not engaging in proper *imitatio*; the task of imitating Greek and Roman work falls to those with a deeper classical education. Campion emphasizes the refusal of wits, poets, and the learned in general to do the hard work it would take to create artful, vernacular poetry. If one chooses to compose vernacular verse, it is easier to experience the success of rhyming than to struggle with the difficulty of *imitatio*. The reluctance of contemporary

wits to do this work is implicitly contrasted with the scholarly projects of Erasmus, Reuchlin, and More, who "redeem[ed Latin] with much labour out of the hands of the illiterate Monks and Friars." Vernacular poetry may be redeemed out of the hands of illiterate versifiers, but creating quantitative meters will require much effort on the part of those who are competent in classical languages.¹⁵

Nevertheless, Campion also echoes the complaint of other proponents of quantitative verse: the above quotation targets not only the wits who will not imitate classical meters, but, in addition, the bad poets who are producing rhymed accentual verse. Campion, too, wishes to rescue poetry from shoddy versifiers. He believes that vernacular poetry is being written by the unlearned and technically incompetent: poets compared to the flies of a hot summer hardly belong to the same social circle as excellent wits, and they certainly do not sound accomplished. It is, then, not simply the decline of learning and the need to create quantitative verse that concern him; it is also the increasing amount of poetry produced by those who, in his estimation, are unwilling—or unable—to perform rigorous intellectual labor.

But Campion's concern does not stem only from a belief that vernacular verse is technically unaccomplished. The anxiety that seeps out in *Observations* also arises from the sheer number of bad poets—there are as many as there are flies in a hot summer—and the popularity that rhyme enjoys. Campion demonstrates a similar anxiety in another passage, as well:

I am not ignorant that whosoever shall by way of reprehension examine the imperfections of Rime must encounter with many glorious enemies, and those very expert and ready at their weapon, that can, if neede be, extempore (as they say) rime a man to death. Besides there is growne a prescription in the use of Rime, to forestall the right of true numbers, as also the consent of many nations, against all which it may seeme a thing almost impossible and vaine to contend. (293-294)

Campion again draws attention to the large number of bad poets, as anyone who criticizes rhyme will encounter many enemies, but he is also disturbed by the proliferation of rhyme in other nations. It enjoys a widespread use that threatens the very attempt to create vernacular quantitative meters. Because composing rhymed accentual verse is easier than imitating classical models, poets embrace the former. The resulting popularity of rhyme creates a "prescription," the attitude that poetry should employ these elements. There are so many poor versifiers that the project to create quantitative meters almost seems a fruitless struggle. The two passages, moreover, hint at an anxiety over the growing audience for shoddy verse. The large number of versifiers could not maintain itself if there were not consumers of its work. These audiences exist in many nations, enticing poets into writing in accen-

tual rather than quantitative verse. Campion is as concerned with the reception of rhyme as he is with its production.

In complaining not only about the incompetence of much vernacular verse but also about the overwhelming number of bad poets and the popularity they enjoy, Campion was not out of step with other writers on quantitative meters, yet these characteristic complaints of the movement have often gone unnoticed by scholars. In the "Dedication" to his 1582 translation of the *Aeneid*—a translation into English quantitative meters—Richard Stanyhurst erupts,

Good God, what a frye of such *wooden rythmours* dooth swarme in stacioners shops, who neauer enstructed in any grammar schoole, not atayning too thee paringes of thee Latin or Greeke tongue, yeet lyke blynd bayards rush on forward, fostering theyre vayne conceites wyth such ouerweening silly follyes, as they reck not too bee condemned of thee learned for ignorant, so they bee commended of the ignorant for learned. (141)

In *A Discourse of English Poesie*, William Webbe offers a similar diatribe: "If I let passe the vncountable rabble of ryming Ballet makers and compylers of sencelesse sonets, who be most busy to stuffe euery stall full of grosse deuises and vnlearned Pamphlets, I trust I shall with the best sort be held excused" (246).¹⁶ Both of these passages are quoted by Attridge (102, 103), who is largely concerned with demonstrating that proponents of the quantitative movement were made anxious because even the unlearned could write rhymed accentual verse, but his approach also leads to additional conclusions. Stanyhurst's and Webbe's comments reveal that they were anxious not only because anyone could write this easy kind of poetry but also because they were threatened by the sheer number of writers composing such verse. The writers are "a frye" that "dooth swarme" and an "vncountable rabble." For Stanyhurst, moreover, this horde enjoys great popularity and worries only about the opinion of its audience. So long as the bad poets are "commended of the ignorant for learned," they do not care that those with deeper education find them incompetent. Thus, those who complained about the lack of poetic quality not only derided incompetent versifiers, they also rued the sheer number of them and the popularity they enjoyed. Feeling overwhelmed by an explosion of poets and threatened by an audience that appreciated their work, proponents of quantitative verse blamed the debasement of poetry and the ease of rhyme. Campion was no exception.

Scholarly views on whether England truly was inundated with incompetent poets have changed. Kastendieck, writing in the late 1930s and astutely noting the arguments Campion makes to justify his project, states that "Swarms of ballad-mongers, 'the rude multitude of rusticall Rymers' turned out endless riff-raff called verse, which had little to commend it. Most of this versifying is not extant" (73).

Writing almost half a century later, Helgerson offers a more complex assessment of sixteenth-century culture and discourse. After quoting Spenser, Drayton, Daniel, and Jonson on how poetry had “fallen into the hands of dilettantes and hacks” (21), Helgerson observes, “We have learned to disregard such statements. ‘Conventional’ or ‘formulaic’ we call them. And so they are. They are the formulae of literary self-presentation” (22). The comments of Stanyhurst, Webbe, Campion, and others about the horde of bad poets fall into the same category. These authors rely on a formula, or at least a stock complaint, to argue in favor of prosodic reform.

Helgerson’s argument, then, raises interesting questions about *Observations*. Campion is not among the “aspiring laureates” (21) Helgerson quotes; he rarely uses their self-presentational gestures during his career. How and why does he employ stock complaints in his treatise? What concerns does he share with proponents of the quantitative movement that make such a formula useful to him? Helgerson, in discussing the cultural position of such rhetorical strategies, provides the foundation for an answer:

Rather than being a settled and stable structure, perpetuated by education and the rules of society, the system of authorial roles was only emerging in late sixteenth-century England. Though literary and cultural theory were committed to imitation and revival, a sudden increase in the production of poetry was bringing into existence an essentially new configuration of what Michel Foucault has called “author-functions.” (2-3)

While *Observations* may not demonstrate the new configurations of author-functions as clearly as some of the works of Spenser and Jonson do, it is influenced by Campion’s anxiety over changes in authorial roles and the reconfiguring of the literary culture as a whole. While Campion offers formulaic comments about bad poets and typical complaints about the large number of poor versifiers, he deploys these remarks in part to address anxieties about such transformations. Scholars have not yet fully explored how the quantitative movement in general and *Observations* in particular were responding to alterations in the literary system, but for Campion—and other proponents of quantitative meters—concerns about the debasement of poetry are connected to broader cultural issues.

In *Observations*, Campion reveals particular anxiety over the rise of print and the business of bookselling. To demonstrate how these cultural phenomena manifest themselves in the treatise, I would like to consider briefly how they influenced Campion’s career in general and the quantitative movement as a whole. Print and bookselling affected authors such as Campion who worked in a literary system characterized by courtly and aristocratic patronage.¹⁷ This system was being challenged by an economy of production, dissemination, and consumption existing outside

of the traditional circles of literary power, as the rise of print was making texts of many kinds available to a growing number of consumers. Aside from occasional general references, scholars have not paid much attention to how these changes affected Campion, though they have considered how they influenced other authors, especially his slightly younger and more ambitious contemporary, Ben Jonson. Richard Dutton has observed,

The "older system of polite or courtly letters" ... was *not* "swept away" during Jonson's lifetime; his practice as an author was very largely shaped by the dominance of the court, as the principal source of both patronage and authority. But it *was* paralleled, and to a degree challenged, "by a new print based, market centred...literary system." (2)

This new system posed a potential threat to authors working in the tradition of courtly letters. Also writing about Jonson, Sara van den Berg notes that in the period only shortly after Campion's,

Print revealed a writer to every reader and gave every writer an equal claim. The royal appropriation of the new medium of print was more than matched by the accessibility print afforded to dangerous or subversive ideas of the aristocratic opposition and, even more, to those of newly literate citizens from culturally marginal groups. King and poet might use print to confirm their political and aesthetic power, but the medium confers equal authority on every writer and every text. Print, therefore, because it enables a cacophony of texts, highlights the crisis in values, in class identity, and the distribution of authority in Jacobean England. (117)

During much of his career, Campion grappled with the new print-based, market-centered system. He at times demonstrated a gentlemanly disregard for print, while at others he openly availed himself of its potential. Davis, for example, attributes Campion's failure to place his name on the title page of *A Booke of Ayres* (published in 1601, a year before *Observations*), to "both diffidence and aristocratic disdain" for having his lesser works published (*Thomas Campion* 11). Moreover, in the book's dedication to Thomas Mounson, Philip Rosseter, Campion's co-author and friend, offers customary reasons as to why a writer such as Campion would have his work published:

the first ranke of songs are of his owne composition, made at his vacant houres, and privately emparked to his friends, whereby they grew both publicke, and (as coine crackt in exchange) corrupted: some of them, both words and notes unrespectively, challenged by others. In regard of which wronges, though his selfe neglects these light fruits as superfluous blossomes of his deeper Studies, yet hath it pleased him, upon my entreaty, to grant me the impression of part of them.... (*Works* 14)

Lindley remarks that Rosseter here portrays his friend as having the “careless *sprezzatura* of the courtier.” Although his works have been “corrupted,” Campion does not himself demonstrate the vulgar desire to see them in print; he has published them only because Rosseter has urged him to do so. The book’s buyer is, moreover, “privileged to have access to these offshoots from the deep studies of a learned writer” (64). Rosseter, then, not only creates an image of his co-author, but also constructs an attitude toward the book’s audience. Campion, by proxy, maintains an appropriate distance from this audience for lighter works. He does not engage them directly, but rather bestows upon them the ayres that he does not regard as worthy of print. He is willing to have them published so that the audience for light printed matter may enjoy them, but an audience with such tastes must be kept at arm’s length, at least in the fictional attitudes of a gentleman.

Campion did not, however, doubt that the print marketplace was appropriate for his and others’ more serious poems. Davis notes that in having his Latin epigrams published in 1595, Campion preceded Jonson, no slouch in taking advantage of the print marketplace, by more than twenty years, as the latter’s were not published until his folio of 1616 (*Thomas Campion* 47). Later in his career, in the Latin epigram “To Charles Fitzgeffrey” in *Epigrammatum Liber Secundus* (1619), Campion urges Fitzgeffrey to publish: “Charles, if you have something which finally becomes sweet when ripened as fruit in the rays of the sun, publish it” (Davis, *Works* 430–431). Yet even here, as he argues that print is appropriate in such a case, Campion has reservations about audience. Ryding points out that Campion demonstrates “Horatian disdain for the multitude” (93n), for the poem continues, “and do not abandon these excellent attempts such as the common mob will not know, but good reputation knows” (Davis, *Works* 430–431). In the latter part of his career, Campion also shows less reluctance to publish those “superfluous blossomes of his deeper Studies,” his ayres. “To the Reader,” which prefaces *Two Books of Ayres* (c.1613), notably lacks the justifications for publishing that characterize the dedication of *A Book of Ayres*. It may, however, humorously suggest a mild scorn for its audience, as it looks askance at the volume’s buyers. Explaining the book’s division into what the title page calls “Divine and Morall Songs” and “Light Conceits of Lovers,” Campion writes, “For hee that in publishing any worke, hath a desire to content all palates, must cater for them accordingly” (*Works* 55). The concluding Latin quotation echoes this sentiment: “Omnia nec nostris bona sunt, sed nec mala libris; / Si placet hac cantes, hac quoque lege legas” (*Works* 56).¹⁸ Publishing entails either writing off many readers or dishing up one’s poems to those with neither taste nor talent.

Campion’s attitude toward print, then, was complex, though perhaps not atypically so for an author who was in many ways a courtly amateur. He did not present

his ayres as part of his serious work, at least not early in his career, and regarded their publication as an act that required the gentleman's customary excuses. However, he regarded the publication of Latin verse as acceptable and even desirable. Most importantly, as he was seeing these texts into print, Campion conveyed, at best, an ambivalent attitude toward those who buy books. The market-centered system was a difficult thing for the courtly amateur to negotiate.

As he grappled with the rise of print culture and the desire to publish, Campion was especially concerned with the business of bookselling—and he was not alone. It has not been sufficiently explored how proponents of quantitative verse demonstrated anxiety over the conjunction of bookselling and what they considered the large amount of shoddy verse in circulation. The above quotations from Stanyhurst and Webbe offer good examples. Both express, as Attridge argues, dismay that even the unlearned could write rhymed accentual verse, and both manifest an anxiety over the sheer number of poets. But what is also remarkable about the quotations is that both writers complain that this multitude of unlearned poets is influencing the business of bookselling, as it floods the market with incompetent verse. Stanyhurst's "frye of such *wooden rythmours*...swarme in stacioners shops," even though they "neauer enstructed in any grammar schoole" (141). Webbe's "vncountable rabble of ryming Ballet makers and compylers of sencelesse sonnets" are "busy to stuffe euery stall full of grosse deuises" (246). These two writers present a dire picture; England is inundated with bad poetry that has practically cornered the print market. How can writers who have "enstructed" in a "grammar schoole" do anything about all this shoddy verse? Stanyhurst exhorts, "Thee reddyest way therefore too flap these droanes from thee sweete senting hiues of *Poëtrye* is for thee learned to applye theyme selves wholye (yf they be delighted wyth that veyne) too thee true making of verses in such wise as thee *Greekes* and *Latins*...haue done" (141). Like some of Campion's remarks in *Observations*, Stanyhurst's assessment employs the rhetoric of recruitment. His comments rally the quantitative movement's troops, providing perhaps the most compelling reason to create artful poetry: it is important to classicize, but it is even more important to classicize when doing so will clean out the bookstalls. Yet Stanyhurst's remark, however commonplace, however formulaic, betrays further anxious questions that would probably be considered by his readers. With bookstalls full of poor verse, is there really a market for works in quantitative meters? If so, to what vulgar depths of publishing must the learned sink if they are to create one? Print and bookselling were the means by which much of the technically incompetent verse was disseminated; the rising literary system—and the tastes of its audience—could not be ignored.

In *Observations*, Campion expresses similar misgivings about bookselling, though he offers both a more personal take on the issue and a comparatively more extensive treatment of it than Stanyhurst and Webbe do. These misgivings surface in the prefatory material that dedicates the treatise to Lord Buckhurst, who was, of course, Thomas Sackville, author of *Gorboduc*. Davis comments appropriately that “Campion’s appeal to [Sackville]...would hold good on at least two grounds: classicism and the cultivation of unrimed verse” (*Works* 291). Still, Campion’s comments address more than the need to alter prosodic practices. As discussed above, the dedication and the poem, “The Writer to his Booke,” that follows it, mention the effect that “the vulgar and unarteficiall custome of riming” has had on “excellent wits” and note the complicity of “courtly wits” in the failure to produce English quantitative meters. But Campion raises some other related issues in this poem, now quoted in full:

Whether thus hasts my little booke so fast?
To Paules Chuchyard. What? in those cels to stand,
With one leafe like a riders cloke put up
To catch a termier? or lye mustie there
With rimes a terme set out, or two before?
Some will redeeme me. Fewe. Yes, reade me too.
Fewer. Nay love me. Now thou dot’st, I see.
Will not our English *Athens* arte defend?
Perhaps. Will lofty courtly wits not ayme
Still at perfection? If I graunt? I flye.
Whether? To Pawles. Alas, poore Booke, I rue
Thy rash selfe-love; goe, spread thy pap’ry wings:
Thy lightnes can not helpe, or hurt my fame. (292)

Scholars have slighted these lines. Lowbury, Salter, and Young characterize the poem as “an odd, *staccato* expostulation, seemingly as far from the strict numbers which he [Campion] advocates—and from *Gorboduc*—as a racy dialogue in a Ben Jonson comedy” (78). While these critics overstate the oddity of the poem, their remark does raise a significant question: what was Campion trying to accomplish with these verses? Answers have been limited. Kastendieck, referring to the poem’s final line, implies that Campion regarded *Observations*, like his ayres, as “products of his lighter moments” (82). Probably considering the same line, Lowbury, Salter, and Young proclaim, “Obviously he [Campion] did not rank the *Observations* with his important work, and may perhaps have devised it largely as a debating proposition, or legalistic argument (which later received its proper reply in Daniel’s *Defence of Ryme*)” (78). These conclusions are, at best, problematic. The comments do not consider fully that *Observations*, though published in 1602, was written perhaps as

early as 1591.¹⁹ Campion was thus probably writing his treatise before his ayres first saw print and closer to the time in which Stanyhurst and Webbe were making their remarks, in other words, closer to the time when the quantitative movement was in full swing. Given the seriousness of the movement—thoroughly documented by scholars such as Attridge—and the systemic, albeit incomplete, treatment Campion gives his prosodic prescriptions in *Observations* proper, it seems unlikely that he genuinely regarded the treatise as the product of “lighter moments.” Lindley provides a more fruitful way to understand these prefatory verses. Presumably discussing the same line, he notes that the dedication of *Observations* employs a “self-deprecating formula” similar to that used in *A Booke of Ayres* (64n), which had been published only the year before. That Campion employs a formulaic expression suggests that the poem allows him to publish while keeping his gentlemanly persona intact. Campion probably did not consider *Observations* an unimportant work, though he describes it that way in a self-presentational gesture. A gentlemen’s references to the lightness of his work and to his indifference to fame may not express a true disregard for what he has had published.

“The Writer to his Booke,” then, conveys Campion’s appropriate attitude toward the publication of his treatise. However, it also comments on the literary system in which Campion worked, for as Davis puts it, though without elaboration, the prefatory verses are “very much about the business of bookselling rather than ideals” (*Thomas Campion* 13). “The Writer to his Booke” states one of the treatise’s themes and sets the stage for discussions that follow in *Observations* proper. In the poem, Campion imagines his book in the stalls of Saint Paul’s Churchyard. He has good reason to discuss this setting, for it offered perhaps the most obvious example in England of the effects of the new market-centered literary system.²⁰ It provided a forum in which preachers and orators could address the crowds, but also, of course, the location of Stationer’s Hall, printing houses, and, perhaps most importantly, bookstalls. The booksellers’ dynamic, varied trade included the selling not only of books but also of pamphlets, tracts, sermons, and other printed materials.²¹ The Churchyard was thus a socially and economically charged site in which older literary systems were threatened, newer textual appetites were expressed and created, and the literary marketplace exerted its power. This marketplace threatened traditional social and textual authorities, for, as Alexandra Halasz notes,

Print permanently altered the discursive field not by bringing books to the marketplace (medieval *scriptoria* did that) but by enabling the marketplace to develop as a means of producing, disseminating, and mediating discourse independently of the sites and practices associated with and sanctioned by university, Crown, and Church. (4)

What was at stake for Campion in critiquing such a site, then, was nothing less than how to respond to contemporary poetic practices and the tastes of the consumers spawned by the rise of the print marketplace.

As his work stands in the stalls, it is in poor company and participates in the disturbing and rather depressing practices of bookselling. Campion envisions two alternatives, neither of which is attractive. Either his book engages in the ungentlemanly task of advertising itself, trying to catch the attention of a *termer*, or it remains unsold, occupying the shelves for multiple terms, lodging with books of rhyme so poor that no one wants them. A “*termer*,” who is, as Davis reminds us, “a man who comes up from the country to London for the legal term” (*Works* 292n) hardly seems like a worthy audience. Perhaps he seeks only to be fashionable as he tries to establish his reputation in the city; perhaps he simply does not have the intellectual means to appreciate Campion’s argument. Having to advertise to such an audience demeans the book and its author. A failure in advertising, though, leads to an even more distasteful situation. Rhyme enjoys some popularity, as *Observations* goes on to lament, and yet Campion’s book sits among verse so shoddy that it cannot sell. The treatise that seeks to elevate vernacular poetry lies debased among the worst offenders. In “The Writer to his Booke,” Campion thus attends to both production and consumption; in effect, the entire process of bookselling is tainted. Authors who participate in the print market situate their books in the company of unaccomplished works, while offering them to those who cannot appreciate their merits. The business of bookselling brings the wrong kind of work to the wrong kind of people, proclaim these prefatory verses, and their assessment establishes the cultural milieu in which their author’s metrical experiments take place.

Campion demonstrates concern about the audience for his treatise in another way, as well. “The Writer to his Booke” develops his belief, discussed above, that the appropriate audience for work on quantitative meters is ignoring it. In line ten, he poses the question, “If I graunt?”—but it is not entirely clear what he is asking. Davis suggests that he means “say then that I grant that one point?” (292). If this reading is correct, and I think it is, Campion is perhaps granting that court wits will not try to perfect English poetry by creating classical meters. The failure on the part of the work’s proper audience has unfortunate consequences. Because wits will not defend Athens’ art, Campion’s book must fly to Saint Paul’s Churchyard. In other words, the rightful audience ignores the treatise, as those who should foster poetic perfection do not do so; *Observations* must find other readers. Campion, then, rashly sends the book out among the less worthy audience of the print marketplace, hoping, through advertising, to find a few consumers who will buy, read, and love it. “The Writer to his Booke” helps to establish the treatise’s anxiety

over the audience for poetry, restates its concern that those who should be fostering vernacular quantitative verse are not doing so, and demonstrates great hesitation about the business of bookselling.

This dismal view of the print marketplace, however, is made more palatable in the second chapter of *Observations*. In a passage often overlooked by scholars, Campion refers again to Saint Paul's Churchyard, returning to it in the context of rhetorical theory. After concluding that the ease of rhyme spawns as many poets as a hot summer does flies, he turns to "examine the nature of...Rime" (294). He argues that it creates "a continual repetition of that Rhetoricall figure we tearme *similiter desinentia*," and citing "Tully and all other Rhetoritians" in support, states that the figure "ought...sparingly to be us'd, least it should offend the eare with tedious affectation" (294). Campion then immediately discusses the tastes of those in the Churchyard:

Such was that absurd following of the letter amongst our English so much of late affected, but now hist out of Paules Church-yard: which foolish figurative repetition crept also into the Latine toong, as it is manifest in the booke of P^r called *proelia porcorum*, and another pamphlet all of F^r which I have seen imprinted; but I will leave these follies to their own ruine.... (294)

Campion claims that the crowd in Saint Paul's Churchyard, which once had a taste for excessive alliteration, has come to reject its misuse. Davis notes that "Alliteration...so fashionable in the work of poets like Gascoigne in the 1570s, had been laughed off the bookstalls by Sidney" (294n). Yet Campion here has a larger purpose than simply to offer a tangential reminder of recent poetic tastes. He is suggesting that rhyme will meet with the same fate, for rhyme, like alliteration, is a rhetorical figure that relies on repetition. The crowd that has come to scorn excessive alliteration will eventually reject rhymed accentual verse, and a desire for a different kind of poetry will emerge. Just as Sidney, the hero of and mentor to many in the quantitative movement, provided a new kind of poetry in the 1580s that mended the errors of Gascoigne's verse, those who perfect quantitative meters may offer a resuscitated poetry to a broad audience hungry for competent prosody.

This audience, moreover, serves as a microcosm of the consumers of print. Although its members hiss at alliteration like the auditors of a play would hiss at a poor production, they gather in the Churchyard, that site closely associated with the print marketplace, reacting to books and pamphlets and influencing poetic fashions with an often misguided, fickle taste. Campion's concern is not only with the popularity of rhymed accentual verse among bad poets, but also with its popularity among these consumers. The business of bookselling cannot be ignored, but to engage in it is to send one's poetry out among insipid, mercurial readers. Yet the business, Campion

suggests, may not offer only despair for the learned, accomplished author. The readers wandering among the bookstalls of Saint Paul's—the audience into which Campion has sent his treatise, as he has told us in "The Writer to his Booke"—now scorn alliteration. The rejection of rhyme cannot be far behind.

Through sociological analysis that amounts to little more than anecdotal evidence with a flourish of confident prognostication, Campion develops a more positive view of the print marketplace and the business of bookselling than he expresses in the prefatory verses.²² This attitude, though, requires that he address anxieties about audiences and their relationship to the rising literary system. The rhetorical effects of the passage thus seem twofold. First, *Observations* again functions as a recruiting device, speaking to those who have the skill to produce quantitative verse: the marketplace, while it may be beneath you, will soon provide an audience for a more artful poetry, so get to work on imitating classical meters. Second, the treatise speaks to the consumers of print, for it does not offer an argument that tastes will change so much as a suggestion that they should change: if you like verse that employs rhyme and accentual meter, your taste is no better than the taste of those who enjoyed excessive alliteration; alter your preferences quickly or your insipid desires will be revealed. Campion addresses the business of bookselling, just as some of his predecessors in the quantitative movement had, but he does so differently. He cannot write his treatise only for a coterie audience consisting at least in part of other poets who may want to produce quantitative meters, but neither can he simply lament that poor versifiers are having pernicious effects on bookselling. Campion imagines the relationship he must have with the audience for print and tries, albeit briefly and obliquely, to influence the taste of this audience. One might be ambivalent about sending one's work out into the print marketplace, but the rising literary system opens up new possibilities and requires new strategies for authors trying to transform poetry. The business of bookselling cannot be ignored.

Observations offers more than a prescriptive treatise for poets who might want to develop vernacular quantitative meters. It not only attempts to influence the production of poetry but also responds to the dissemination and consumption of it. By the time the quantitative movement culminated in Campion's treatise—reaching its peak at the moment it effectively came to an end as a movement—the range of cultural issues it had to confront had expanded. It is tempting to see Campion at the brink of the transformation of what we often call today "literary criticism," as during the seventeenth century and into the beginning of the eighteenth, critics moved broadly from offering prescriptive treatises for poets to trying to influence the tastes of the new readers created by the ever-expanding print marketplace. *Observations* may suggest that incipient stages in this process were occurring in the quantitative movement at

about the time Campion was writing. It is also tempting to see *Observations* trying to construct an optimistic view of the print marketplace, as authors would need to do in the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth. In discussing eighteenth-century canon formation, Jonathan Brody Kramnick argues that

As critics began to rethink the consequences of widespread reading and the commodification of books, an affirmative relation to the cultural market became increasingly difficult to sustain. The print relations and forms of literacy that, in the early years of the eighteenth century, bespoke the refinement of national taste were now regarded with some dismay. (1090)

Perhaps we see this “affirmative relation to the cultural market,” which would become problematic in the eighteenth century, beginning to be created in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth by writers such as Campion, who, despite his ambivalence about the print marketplace, portrays its consumers as eventually rejecting shoddy verse and desiring artful poetry.

Regardless of whether *Observations* demonstrates the incipient stages of major transformations in literary criticism, the treatise offers more than the metrical prescriptions that have occupied the attentions of so many critics. It demonstrates the same anxieties about literary culture that provided the motivation for the quantitative movement as a whole. But it also shows that Campion expands and adapts commonplace complaints to suit his needs, linking these concerns to even deeper anxieties about the rise of print and the business of bookselling. The treatise thus highlights the effect of these cultural phenomena on the quantitative movement. *Observations in the Art of English Poesie* reveals much about the motivations behind Campion’s poetics, the evolution of the quantitative movement, and the deep cultural anxieties that the rise of print created in Elizabethan culture.

Notes

¹The debate over whether Campion objects to rhyme altogether or whether he objects to the misuse of rhyme and meter is almost as old as modern Campion criticism itself. Vivian states, “Campion seeks to set aside rhyme altogether as unworthy of serious notice” (lx). However, Kastendieck argues that the poet was not opposed to rhyme itself, but to its “abuse” (78). Short contends that Campion was not so much against rhyme as the misuse of rhythm (1004-1005). Contemporary Campion criticism tends to follow Kastendieck and Short. Davis, for example, asserts, “Campion felt the same way about the tyranny of a single way of organizing sound in verse, but for him it was rhymed iambic pentameter, and his emphasis fell on the rhyme because he felt it was responsible for slovenly metrics” (*Thomas Campion* 104). Critical debates over Campion’s views on rhyme may, however, misidentify the thrust of *Observations*. Fenyo suggests aptly that “Campion’s insistence against rhyme has focused much critical attention...away from the balance of

the *Observations*; yet, Campion, although he consistently adheres to writing his examples without rhyme, devotes only one of his ten chapters to a discussion of it" (51). As I think that Fenyo's remark offers an important corrective, that *Observations* itself is ambiguous on rhyme, and that at this stage in Campion criticism we should be more concerned with the social forces that engendered Campion's treatise, I happily will not take a stand on this issue at this time.

²The best study of the quantitative verse movement is Attridge; see also Weiner's often helpful article. Other important studies include Hendrickson, Willcock, Osmond, and McKerrow. For brief but effective summaries of the movement, see Davis, *Works* 288; Lewis 364-365; and Vivian lix-lx.

³See also Smith, who states that Campion and Ben Jonson solved "the problem of quantity in English verse" (272) and disagrees with Vivian that Campion did not understand the difference between quantity and accent; Short, who, in an appreciative analysis, argues that *Observations* is based on Campion's poetic practice; Atkins, who finds it "contains also positive and original suggestions concerning English versifying" (195), and Lewis, who calls Campion "the seraphic doctor of English prosody" and comments that Campion makes the best case for English quantitative verse, but that "when all is said his theory has very little to do with English practice, even his own" (365).

⁴Lowbury, Salter, and Young's analysis lacks the subtlety of Kastendieck's. These authors see *Observations* as an unsurprising addition to Elizabethan attempts to create vernacular quantitative verse (76-77), and, in general, seem to misunderstand the basic arguments of the treatise and the fundamental characteristics of Campion's poetry: they reach the problematic conclusion that "Campion's unconditional surrender [in the rhyme wars] is surmised from the consistent use of rhyme in all his later poetry" (88n).

⁵See also Davis (*Works* 288-290), though in this earlier book he has not developed his thoughts on *Observations* as fully as in his later *Thomas Campion*. He describes *Observations* as "the last and most persuasive of the arguments for classical meters...in English" (*Works* 288). For other recent assessments of *Observations*, both appreciative and astute, see Weiner, who argues that Campion completed what Spenser and Harvey had begun (4), and Lindley, who, though he devotes less space to *Observations* than Davis does, concludes, "On the evidence of this treatise [*Observations*]...it can be demonstrated that Campion was peculiarly alert to the complex interaction of linguistic phenomena that makes up a reader's experience of poetic rhythm" (162).

⁶Perhaps qualifying this remark, Davis does, however, mention Campion's indebtedness to Sidney: "The true importance of his *Observations* is for his own career. It is a youthful work;...it represents the final point of his apprenticeship to Sidney" (*Thomas Campion* 112).

⁷Ryding, who eventually characterizes the Campion of the *Observations* "as an enemy of the Middle Ages" (147) attends to sources and influences. He suggests that *Observations* is indebted to continental humanism and continental musical theory (esp. 83-88), arguing that the "treatise...with its carefully worked out rules and examples, resembles the