

Nancy Pollard Brown (1921–2015)

Alison Shell and Peter Davidson

Department of English, University College London, Gower Street, London WC1E
6BT, UK. Email: a.shell@ucl.ac.uk

Campion Hall, Brewer Street, Oxford OX1 1QS, UK.
Email: peter.davidson@campion.ox.ac.uk

Tudor and Stuart Catholics have always been considered historically important, but an appreciation of their considerable literary heritage has been slower to develop. Nancy Pollard Brown, who died last year, played a major role in demonstrating its quality, especially through her various editions of Robert Southwell's writings.

An Englishwoman who resided in the United States for most of her working life, Nancy Pollard Brown (née Grose) was born in Newton Abbot, Devon, and studied for her BA and MA degrees at Westfield College, University of London. Leanings towards recusant writing appeared early on; her MA thesis was on the life and work of the author and Catholic priest Richard Stanihurst, best known for translating the first four books of Virgil's *Aeneid* into English hexameters. Her first job after postgraduate study was in secondary school teaching at Cheltenham Ladies' College, after which she took up a post-doctoral fellowship at Yale University. There she made the acquaintance of Louis Martz, whose monograph *The Poetry of Meditation* pioneered recognition of Southwell's importance as an inspiration to John Donne, George Herbert and others. Martz encouraged her to pursue work on Southwell, though – as she wrote some years later – she found that her work was limited by the lack of sound texts.

On the death of James H. Macdonald, who had projected an edition of Southwell's writing, it fell to her to rectify the deficiency. Their joint edition of Southwell's verse was published by Oxford University Press in 1967, to be followed by *Two Letters and Short Rules of a Good Life* (1973), issued by the Folger Shakespeare Library. Her sensitivity to the particular problems posed by recusant writing was spectacularly demonstrated some years later in an article simply entitled 'Paperchase'; tracking the dissemination of Catholic texts via the paper that was used for them, this figured in the inaugural issue of *English Manuscript Studies* and was perhaps the most methodologically innovative work she ever did. Her final major article, on the importance of Mary Magdalen in Southwell's work, appeared in *Recusant History* in 2012.

Nancy Pollard Brown taught at Trinity College, Washington DC (now Trinity Washington University) from 1959 till 1986, receiving an honorary professorship on her retirement. An inspiring educator who received a national award for teaching from the Danforth Foundation in 1966, she was warmly remembered by her ex-students; a cluster of tributes to her teaching can be found on Trinity Washington University's website: <http://www.trinitydc.edu/president/2015/10/remembering-professor-nancy-brown/>.

After her retirement, she moved to the 'Catholic quarter' of Oxford near Campion Hall, where she was a neighbour of T.A. Birrell, another distinguished and recently deceased scholar of English recusancy. She was a fixture at the Catholic Record Society's annual conferences at Plater College, Oxford, and it was at one of these that I met her for the first time; I remember her elegance, her gentle voice, her erudition, and how courteously she listened to a raw doctoral student.

Nancy Pollard Brown lived at a time when university teachers were not expected to publish copiously. By today's standards her publications were modest in quantity, yet each one was beautifully written, reliable, original and pioneering. Most academics live to see their work superseded; she lived to see her work come into fashion.

Alison Shell

Considering the work of Nancy Pollard Brown from the standpoint of a fellow-editor of Southwell, I have nothing but gratitude for the ways in which she prepared the way for those who might follow. Her edition of the Southwell English verse is based on that substantial corpus of work undertaken by Fr. J.H. McDonald C.S.C., of Notre Dame, whose failing health did not permit him to complete his edition. Gathering up his notes and drafts, she grafted her own growing knowledge of the text of Southwell onto his work to produce the comprehensive and beautifully-annotated Clarendon which we have now. Perhaps the single greatest advance which she made with the text was the discriminating exclusion of spurious material from Southwell's canon, which she relegated to an appendix of dubia. Her textual notes are among the most observant made by any editor of early-modern texts; her expositions and paraphrases in the notes are models rarely surpassed. By the standards and conventions of the 1960s, this edition is a monument of scholarship, even if it inevitably hinges to some degree on the fiction of 'the text as it would have been could the poet have seen it through the press in ideal conditions.' The wonderful and ingenious detections of 'Paperchase' were to come later: at the time when the Clarendon edition was made the real paradox of Southwell sources (censored if well-presented printed copy as opposed to authentic texts in manuscript, most notably the Jesuit-corrected

Stonyhurst MS, roughly and hastily presented) was not declaring itself. It is a problem which we will perhaps never resolve: suffice it to say that for her time and decades to follow Nancy Pollard Brown made a brilliantly readable and superbly annotated Southwell.

Two Letters and Short Rules of a Good Life was issued for the Folger Shakespeare library by the University Press of Virginia in 1973 – it is an edition of three pieces by Southwell which have been through complex processes of transmission to arrive in the form in which they exist in Folger MS V.a.421 – copies belonging to a recusant Catholic layman. In making an edition of this manuscript as a historical witness in itself (while providing a very careful apparatus with which to place it in relation to more authoritative versions) Nancy Pollard Brown shows the degree to which her scholarship was looking ahead to the more cultural and contextual studies which were to come to prominence, as well as her sensitivity to the particular force which the copied word, treasured in private, held in the recusant Community.

Gentle courtesy was extended to me on the one occasion when I met her and protested the respect with which my own edition of Southwell's verse took a different direction from her own. She suggested that I might differ, but do so with her blessing. I felt that benediction to be very present on the autumn afternoon in Oxford when I went to choose books from her library for my own future work on Southwell, and for the library of Campion Hall, and it will sustain all my future work on Southwell's texts in prose.

Peter Davidson