

"When thou hast done, thou hast not done"*

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C. A. Patrides, ed., *The Complete English Poems of John Donne*, Everyman's Library (London: J. M. Dent, 1985). Pp. vi + 569. Biblio Distribution Centre, Totowa, New Jersey.

"No editor of Donne's poems can be confident that he is printing just what Donne wrote."

—A. J. Smith (1971)

"A Text of John Donne's Poems: Unsatisfactory Compromise."

—John T. Shawcross (1983)

"The text of Donne's poetry can vex an editor into nightmares."

—C. A. Patrides (1985)¹

Like the young officers in the Great War, they embark, full of optimism and confidence, only to return from the trenches shell-shocked, glassy-eyed, and embittered. Twenty years ago Shawcross wrote, "Where textual conclusions are in variance with those of others, the evidence will have to be weighed by time to end with, hopefully, a definitive text."² Most recently he conceded, "I suppose someone has to edit Donne's poems, and I suppose all we can do is hope that all the evidence will be examined and weighed objectively before decisions are made," while admonishing that "... whatever textual conclusion is made, it is going to be an unsatisfactory compromise for some readers" ("A Text," p. 16). Even Patrides has confessed, "I inclined toward optimism in all textual matters until I embarked on an edition of the poetry of

Donne. Nine years later, properly chastened, I have very few illusions left that Donne can ever be edited to one's satisfaction, not to mention the satisfaction of his discriminating readers."³ As Donne himself might have observed, "But this were light, did our lesse volume hold / All the old Text; or had we chang'd to gold / Their silver; or dispos'd into lesse glas, / Spirits of vertue, which then scattred was. / But 'tis not so" (FA 147-51).

Patrides therefore presents us with a text which he describes not as "definitive"—". . . that illusion . . . was the very first I was obliged to shed!" ("J. D. Methodized," p. 373)—but "reliable" (p. 1). By this he means something more than the laudable desire to establish, allowing the sometimes irresolvable complexities of the textual and manuscript traditions, as sound a text as is possible. Rather, as "John Donne Methodized" makes clear, he believes that his predecessors, from Grierson onward, have regularized Donne's verse through editorial prerogative—by their choice of variants, by emendation, by supplying elisions and punctuation to normalize meter. For Patrides, as for Ben Jonson, the essential characteristic of Donne's verse is its "rough[ness]," its "coarse[ness]": "the frequent harshness . . . , the intentionally *bent* sounds pierced realms no poet had yet ventured to explore" (p. 15). Thus, a primary aim of the edition is to present Donne's poetry warts and all. As a corollary to this objective, Patrides seeks to keep annotation and paraphrase to what he regards as a necessary minimum. How this distinguishes his edition from its competitors is a question that might best be reserved until we have surveyed its salient features.

Grierson's landmark edition of 1912 established the primary authority of the 1633 edition, an authority challenged only by Gardner (and, to a lesser extent, by her disciple Milgate) in her radical dependence on manuscripts. Given the mixed response to Gardner's 1965 edition of *The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets*, it is notable that all three editions of the complete poems that have been published subsequent to Gardner—Shawcross', Smith's, and now Patrides'—have reasserted the basic authority of 1633 as copy text. Patrides invokes the genii of Grierson and George Williamson in arguing for a text based on ". . . the *Poems* of 1633, as supplemented by the *Poems* of 1635 and such later editions . . . as appeared to be relevant" (p. 2).⁴ To a stronger degree than others, he insists that the 1669 edition (first printed source of "Love's Progress" and "Going to Bed," as well as a full text of "His Parting from Her") must be regarded as a bad and suspect text.

If, as even Gardner allowed, "The edition of 1633 remains the only possible base for a critical edition" (*Elegies*, p. xc), the 1635 *Poems*, with

its generic groupings—*Songs and Sonets*, epigrams, elegies, epithalamia, satires, verse letters, *Anniversaries*, epicedes and obsequies, *Metempsychosis*, *Divine Poems*—has provided what Smith describes as “the only practicable” arrangement (p. 14). Shawcross and Smith adjust the 1635 generic arrangement—in the one the satires and elegies precede the *Songs and Sonets* on the authority of manuscripts and in the other epigrams, satires, and *Metempsychosis* are placed in sequence—whereas Patrides determines to follow 1635 strictly, as he does again with the ordering of individual poems within the groupings.

The latter decision has perhaps the more significant consequences for the reader. The impulse to rearrange the *Songs and Sonets* has been even more epidemic among Donne’s editors than has the analogous impulse in editors of Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*. Gardner, for instance, advances a division into two sets that she distinguishes chronologically: “those written before Donne became attracted by Neoplatonic conceptions, and those which show the influence of Neoplatonism or are written in forms that he appears to have developed to express these subtleties” (p. lviii). Theodore Redpath, after initially accepting Grierson’s basically 1635 ordering, substituted an order “corresponding to the moods of the poems.”⁵ Smith, in the most striking (and certainly the least helpful) editorial capitulation, simply places the *Songs and Sonets* in alphabetical order by title. 1635 begins with “The Flea,” apparently a particular favorite at that time, to preview the attractions of the lyrics, following with “The Good Morrow.” Grierson began with “The Good Morrow,” clarifying the 1635 alpha and omega scheme, if necessarily blurring omega by following “Farewell to Love” and “A Lecture upon the Shadow” with “Sonnet. The Token” (1649) and “Selfe Love” (1650). Restoring “The Flea” to its 1635 pride of place, Patrides presents the reader with the dilemma of making sense of this ordering.

Undoubtedly more controversial, given the wide acceptance of Gardner’s reordering as a meditational sequence, is the treatment of the *Holy Sonnets*. Shawcross, constantly at odds with Gardner over the secular poetry, here accepts her arrangement completely, as do, e. g., Clements, Warnke, and Lewalski.⁶ Smith had been a lone holdout, rejecting Gardner’s argument for the integrity of the 1633 order with the four 1635 additions as a related set and the three from the Westmoreland Manuscript as another set. Smith believes that “. . . the groupings Professor Gardner finds do not seem sufficiently differentiated in the poems themselves . . .” and therefore offers the “neutral ordering” of 1635 (p. 625). Patrides’ decision to link arms with Smith and, in effect, revert to the arrangement presented by Grierson should provide further

impetus for reassessing the cogency of Gardner's thesis. The challenge to her authority in this area is most evident in the fact that, unlike Smith, Patrides neither summarizes Gardner's thesis nor lists her ordering.

It should surprise no one that attribution remains one of the thornier corners of Donne scholarship. Once upon a time, and a very innocent time it was, we believed that the Donne canon included twenty elegies. Gardner's surgery reduced Grierson's twenty to thirteen, relegating five to the purgatory of *dubia*, shifting two, "The Autumnal" and "The Dream" to different categories, and making one addition, "Elegie on the L. C." Further, she removed three other poems, "Sonnet. The Token," "Selfe Love," and "Sappho to Philaenis," from the canon. The notorious subjectivity of Gardner's edition is well-exemplified by her rationale for the last exclusion: "... I find it difficult to imagine him wishing to assume the love-sickness of Lesbian Sappho. Like his master Ovid . . . Donne appears wholly uninterested in homosexual love" (p. xlvi). For many readers such an interest would seem entirely of a piece with Donne's desire to project himself imaginatively into virtually every facet of human love; and recently John Carey has hailed him for writing "the first female homosexual love poem in English."⁷

Gardner's great defenestration has met with limited approval. Shawcross, too, purges Grierson XIII ("Julia") and XIV ("A Tale of a Citizen and his Wife") as "spurious" and "inferior"; but he restores the other six to the canon. While approving the reclassification of Grierson X ("The Dream") among the *Songs and Sonets*, Shawcross differs in the handling of "Elegie on the L. C.," placing it with the epicedes and obsequies and moving "The Autumnal" into the *Songs and Sonets*. Redpath sides with Gardner in excluding "Sonnet. The Token" and "Selfe Love" as *dubia*, while also accepting Elegy X as one of the *Songs and Sonets*. Both Smith and Patrides, however, revert to the traditional canon, arguing that unless the case for denying authenticity is fully proven it is better to make the poem available. Thus, for both, the elegies are twenty and the *Songs and Sonets* fifty-five. Neither accepts Shawcross' several additions to the canon. Patrides does print "The Jughler," first accepted among the epigrams by Bennett; Smith does not. Since decisions about canon and order are frequently predicated on theories and speculations concerning chronology, Smith and Patrides are consistent with their agnosticism in this respect, neither believing that enough poems can be dated with confidence to erect theses upon them.

The apparatus of Patrides' edition can be described quickly enough. There is a chronological outline of events in Donne's life and a thirty-page introduction. The textual and explanatory notes are combined and

placed at the bottom of the page, a helpful procedure in an age when students seem increasingly unable to find notes in the back, let alone recognize two sets. Each generic section is preceded by a sensible, brief introduction. There are four appendices: the first outlining the order of the poems in 1633; the second perhaps too briefly commenting on the problem of poems attributed to Donne; the third a short account of poems on Donne, followed by the Henry King and the Thomas Carew elegies and the two Jonson epigrams; and the fourth reprints Pope's versions of *Satires* II and IV. The full, analytical bibliography of secondary studies has become an identifying feature of Patrides editions, and expectations will be well satisfied here with a bibliography of forty-some pages, substantially through 1982 with a few significant items after that date. The volume concludes with indices of titles and first lines.

Every editor of Donne will construe his task a bit differently, just as every reader or teacher will have a slightly different set of needs. Smith provides a note on meter and Shawcross prints musical settings to eight poems. Patrides offers neither. The exclusion of metrics doubtless extends from his conviction that the metrical theories of some editors have led to distortion; moreover, his ample introduction supplies some flexible guidance in this area. The lack of attention to music presumably indicates his own interests are elsewhere; and the omission will be regretted by some readers. A couple of minor points: the Table of Contents unhelpfully lists only the generic subdivisions, not individual titles; and, given the emphasis on early printed editions, Patrides might have included prefatory materials from those editions, as well as a fuller representation of seventeenth-century poems on Donne.

Editions of Donne, it seems safe to assert, are of an age, not for all time; and examining editions tells us something about the ages that produced them. Patrides has criticized the "adventurous" and "varied" annotation of Shawcross, seemingly regarding it as excessive to the point of editorial meddling. But Shawcross' edition was done in the heyday of Donne explication, when every issue of *ELH* and *SEL* contained in-depth readings of single poems and each *Explicator* offered a new harvest of minute analyses. Surely the editorial procedure reflects something of this atmosphere, just as Patrides' leaner notes reflect something of current preference for broader-focused readings, not to mention Derridean-inspired mistrust of binding the Protean text to a single reading.

Since—despite Smith's decision to modernize spelling and Patrides' provision of an old-spelling text that can verge on pedantry (e. g., in the

title "*Metempsychosis*")—the comparison above has linked their editions in several significant ways, it is worth remarking that they share a perspective opened by an historical milestone—the discovery of a unique holograph manuscript, the only English poem written in Donne's own hand. To recount a now-familiar story: in June 1970 this manuscript of "A Letter to the Lady Carey, and Mrs Essex Riche, From Amyens" turned up among papers of the Duke of Manchester that had come to Sotheby's for auction. The discovery was announced by Smith in the *TLS* (7 January 1972); published the same year in facsimile with a faulty transcription by Helen Gardner, which was promptly criticized and corrected by Nicholas Barker.⁸ Disconcertingly, the punctuation of the holograph poem differs from 1633 on over forty points; yet, more alarmingly, not one of the early manuscripts provides the same text as Donne's and some of the manuscripts at greatest variance with the holograph are precisely those that had been held in highest repute.

Smith, in the first edition able to take account of this find, provides a thoughtful and eloquent analysis of its implications:

The real value of our possessing Donne's autograph text of the poem is that we can now see in this one instance exactly how Donne set out his verse, and what relation his own copy bears to the MSS and early editions we have. Neither the 1633 edition nor any of the early MSS give the poem just as Donne wrote it. His text challenges our accepted grouping of the early versions, for they all have a seemingly unpredictable scatter of incorrect and correct readings. The verbal differences between the original copy and the version in 1633 are slight. . . . But the striking difference between Donne's copy and any other version is in the punctuation. Donne pointed the poem far more meticulously and subtly than his scribes and editors convey, so as to control its movement and intonation. . . . Pause and elision, so delicately placed, become part of the dramatic syntax of the poem, sensitively articulating the argument for the speaking voice. Donne seems to have sought his own way, too, of conveying the sense of the onward sweep of the argument in a tight dialectical progression; for he sets out the poem in stanzas which are marked off by oblique strokes in the margin rather than by a wide gap between them. (p. 560)

No wonder editors throw up their hands! Unless one is fatuous enough to believe that a holograph of the entire collection may be mouldering in some viscount's lumber room, quiescent in the assurance that a Sotheby's scout will soon appear, the lesson of "A Letter" is the counsel of despair. Smith's decision to modernize 1633 and Patrides' decision to present 1633 as exactly as possible are two sides of the same coin; both are aware that, whatever they do, their editions will be an unbridgeable remove from Donne's own intentions.

Shawcross, too, has underscored the complexity of the editorial situation, pointing out that ". . . varying versions of a poem could represent authorial recensions of that poem" and articulating specific questions raised by the Carey and Riche holograph:

Should *schisme* be *Scisme* as Donne wrote it? Do we print *is* and *it* consistently as *ys* and *yt* in this poem? Donne gives *yt* three times and *ytt* once. Do we change the latter to *yt*? and what do we do in other texts that may have *it*, *itt*, *ytt*? He uses *ys* consistently here except that the seemingly like *Tis* occurs twice. Did he spell these forms differently? or do the spellings that we have here come by way of offhand practice at that specific point in time? Do we really want to print *Thay?* and *Doe-bakd?* Helen Gardner is quite correct in noting that Donne's punctuation in this holograph is heavy, but do we really want to print the indefensible semicolon after *you* in line 13— "That *ys*, of *yow*; who are a firmament / Of vertues"—or the meaningless capital of *Harmelesnes* in line 10—"In *Doe-bakd* men, some *Harmelesnes* wee see"? And there is that big question: how much extrapolation do we engage in on the basis of this our only holograph English poem? ("A Text," pp. 15-16)

The answers are yes or no, depending on whom you ask. Smith's modernization eliminates the *ys*, *yt*, *ytt* problem; *Doe-bakd* becomes *dough-baked*; capitals, excepting line-beginnings and the pronoun *I*, are changed to lower-case. Presumably Smith concluded that the vagaries of the spelling are sheerly accidental; Patrides, of course, retains it all. But the "indefensible semicolon" of line 13 is another matter. Smith's perception of the meticulous pointing of the punctuation ". . . so as to control [the poem's] movement and intonation" causes him to retain not only the semicolon; throughout this poem his punctuation is identical to

Patrides'. As for the "big question" of how much should an editor extrapolate from the holograph, in each instance the editorial strategy obviates it, Smith by modernizing and Patrides by refusing to modernize.

Shawcross might argue that both strategies are an evasion of editorial responsibility, changing everything and changing nothing having the identical consequences of eliminating individual textual decisions. Besides, does not the modernization simply introduce a gloss of sham accessibility?⁹ The random *yts* and *ytts* a meaningless, chaotic archaism? Smith could reply that he had modernized the spelling, "never the words themselves" (p. 14); and, while Patrides might concede the meaninglessness of *these* spelling variations, presumably he would maintain their value in excluding the "once started, where to stop?" dilemma of regularization.

My sometime colleague, G. T. Tanselle, used to inform his bibliography students that, given the tremendous advances in the quality of facsimile reproduction, old-spelling and diplomatic texts were no longer valid options for an editor.¹⁰ The choice really is between the facsimile and the modernized text. In his sense, all three of these editors are modernizers, the only differences being matters of degree. Patrides' textual principles state ". . . unwarranted editorial emendations have been *generally* avoided" (p. 3; italics added). "The wording and the punctuation have been emended whenever an emendation was obviously required" (p. 4). The headnotes to the satires and the epithalamia warn us that erratic and uncertain punctuation has been "emended discreetly."

Recently Shawcross gave us a dense, five-page analysis of the problems involved in editing "The Flea," making that a particularly apt choice for a test case. As he points out, substantive cruxes occur with lines 3, 5, and 21, each of which gives the editor the choice of following the early editions or substituting a variant from certain of the manuscripts. Both sets of alternatives make sense and provide a defensible reading:

- Line 3: It suck'd me first, and now sucks thee (1633)
Me it suckt first, and now sucks thee (MSS)
- Line 5: Thou know'st that this cannot be said (1633)
Confess it, this cannot be said (MSS)
- Line 21: Wherein could this flea guilty bee (1633)
In what could this flea guilty bee (MSS)

Grierson and Gardner, of course, give us 1633 and the manuscript variants, respectively. In 1967 Shawcross printed 1633 exactly, with the

single exception of following Grierson's lead in adding a comma after *shame* in line six. Smith here agrees with Gardner, making the three major emendations, as well as printing the MSS or . . . or for 1633's *nor . . . nor* in line 6 and *nay* for *yea* in line 11.¹¹ He does revert to the 1633 indentation pattern rather than using the eccentric one in Gardner. Interestingly, Patrides gives us a text that is identical with Grierson and Shawcross, although the added comma is a silent emendation ("I wanted to reduce pedantry to an absolute minimum," p. 4).

For annotation, both Smith and Patrides comment on the position of the poem in the sequence and on the tradition of erotic flea-poems. Shawcross does not. Smith has notes on the five emended lines, without identifying the specific manuscript provenance. He also considers and discounts the possibility of a play in line 3 on the visual similarity of the long *s* and *f*. (Shawcross mentions this in "A Text," but not his edition.) Smith gives no interpretative or linguistic notes. He provides one historical note on the idea of coition as a mingling of bloods. Shawcross' textual notes are far and away the most complete, providing a collation of manuscripts. He supplies five explanatory-interpretative notes, drawing out the element of religious parody. Patrides provides the variant readings for lines 3, 5, 21, as well as the minor variants to 6, 9, 11. He notes the possibility that the beginning of the poem may parody a preacher's rhetoric and supplies the same medical lore as does Smith. He provides three linguistic notes.¹²

How do they score? To my mind, Shawcross and Patrides give us the preferable text. All three provide, at least, a necessary *minimum* of information regarding the textual options for this poem. In annotation, my own preference is for the literary and historical information favored by Patrides and Smith. One has to be aware, in making a comparison, of differences in the levels of intended audiences. Shawcross' is most uncompromisingly a scholarly text; hence, the fullness of the textual notes and apparatus which exceed the needs of even most graduate students. Smith and Patrides, appearing under the aegis of Penguin and Everyman, aim at the territory awkwardly encompassing the intelligent, general reader and several levels of student readers. One is most aware of this difficult range with Patrides' linguistic notes (e.g., "*then*: than"), which sometimes would seem superfluous for anyone intrepid enough to venture an old-spelling text. Given this audience range, Patrides unquestionably has the superior format. Smith, too, conflates his textual and explanatory notes, but they are hidden in the back. It is a great convenience to any reader to have this information on the same page with the text.

What Donne text do you make your students buy? I tried to use Smith once and never will again. His rearrangement of the *Songs and Sonets* frustrates any possibility of studying them as a sequence or even as a group. For anyone who wishes to speculate that the 1635 order preserves some vestigial traces of Donne's own design or, even, that the 1635 editor perceives a parodic relationship to Tottel's *Songes and Sonettes*, that is too much to give up. Clements' Norton edition does not enter the competition because it is a selection. The continued availability in paperback of Bennett, Coffin, and Grierson's single-volume edition strikes me as having only archaeological interest. I must not fail to put in a word for the utility of Warnke's Modern Library College Edition. A derivative text, under-annotated, printed on repellently cheap paper, it nonetheless provides the poems and 140 pages of prose—three sermons, plus selections from the *Paradoxes and Problemes* and the *Devotions*. Good value for \$5. (And when will we have a representative selection of Donne's prose in a decently edited, paperbound volume?) For advanced undergraduates and graduate students, it looks to me as if Patrides and Shawcross now have the market between them; and the choice may come down to a matter of individual preference. Were I teaching a Donne seminar and giving attention to textual matters, I might well choose the Shawcross. For a survey of seventeenth-century poetry, the currency of the excellent bibliography and the general accessibility of this edition would incline me to Patrides.

Having begun this review with the anguished *cris de coeur* of Donne's melancholy, modern editors, I would like to conclude by saluting the sanity and balance of Donne's first known editor who—doubtless because he lived before McKerrow and Bowers—was able to take a longer view. In 1633 Miles Fletcher wrote "to the Understanders":

I could adde hereto, a promise of more correctnesse, or enlargement in the next Edition, if you shall in the meane time content you with this. But these things are so common, as that I should profane this Peece by applying them to it; A Peece which who so takes not as he findes it, in what manner soever, he is unworthy of it, sith a scattered limbe of this Author, hath more amiableness in it, in the eye of a discerner, than a whole body of some other; Or (to expresse him best by himselfe),

—A hand, or eye,

By Hilyard drawne, is worth a history

By a worse Painter made—

If any man (thinking I speake this to enflame him for the vent of the Impression) be of another opinion, I shall as willingly spare his money as his judgment. (A^v)

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* This review was written two months before Dean Patrides' sudden death in September, 1986. I wrote it as one necessarily writes reviews, with all the professional objectivity one can muster, shutting out awareness that the author was both a sometime collaborator and a good friend. The latter circumstance was a consequence of the former. In 1974, making conversation over a cup of coffee in the Madison, Wisconsin Airport, I mentioned an idea that I had for a book; and Dean responded, "Let's do it." That led to five years of work—far more than we ever anticipated—before *The Age of Milton* was done. We were a perhaps unexpectedly good editorial team, his Mediterranean *sprezzatura* complemented by my Anglo-Saxon prudence and vice versa. Everyone who ever encountered Dean responded to his charm and volatility, his elegance of style. When one got to know him better, other qualities came out: the wry, self-deprecating humor, loyalty and generosity, a fundamental warmth and decency. He will be much missed.—RBW

Notes

¹ The quotations are from, respectively, *John Donne: The Complete English Poems*, ed. A. J. Smith (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 13; the title of Shawcross' article in *John Donne Journal* 2 (1983), 1-19; Patrides' edition, p. 1.

² *The Complete Poetry of John Donne*, ed. John T. Shawcross, Anchor Books (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), p. xxii.

³ Patrides, "John Donne Methodized; or, How to Improve Donne's Impossible Text with the Assistance of His Several Editors," *MP* 82 (1985), 365.

⁴ See Herbert J. C. Grierson, ed., *Poetical Works of John Donne*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1912) and George Williamson, "Textual Difficulties in the Interpretation of Donne's Poetry," *MP* 38 (1940), 37-72.

⁵ *The Songs and Sonets of John Donne*, ed. Theodore Redpath, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1983), p. xix.

⁶ See A. L. Clements, ed., *John Donne's Poetry*, Norton Critical Edition (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), p. xi; Frank J. Warnke, ed., *John Donne: Poetry and Prose*, Modern Library College Editions (New York: Modern Library, 1967), p. xxxix; Barbara K. Lewalski and Andrew Sabol, eds., *Major Poets of the Earlier Seventeenth Century* (New York: Odyssey, 1973), p. 151. For a full exposition of Gardner's thesis, see her edition of John Donne, *The Divine Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952), pp. xxxvii-lv.

⁷ John Carey, *John Donne: Life, Mind, and Art* (London: Faber & Faber, 1981), p. 270.

⁸ See A. J. Smith, "A John Donne Poem in Holograph," *TLS*, 7 January 1972, p. 19; Gardner's response, *TLS*, 21 January 1972, p. 69; *John Donne's Holograph of "A Letter to the Lady Carey and Mrs. Essex Riche"*, ed. Gardner (London, 1972); and Nicholas Barker, "Donne's 'Letter to the Lady Carey and Mrs. Essex Riche': Text and Facsimile," *Book Collector* 22 (1973), 487-93. The holograph is now in the Bodleian Library.

⁹ For an eloquent statement of this view, see Thomas M. Greene, "Anti-hermeneutics: The Case of Shakespeare's Sonnet 129," in *Poetic Traditions of the English Renaissance*, ed. Maynard Mack and George deForest Lord (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1982), pp. 143-61.

¹⁰ This is not to imply, of course, that facsimiles may be accepted uncritically. See, for instance, Ernest W. Sullivan II, "Bibliography and Facsimile Editions," *PBSA* 72 (1978), 327-29.

¹¹ Smith's note on line 6 erroneously transcribes 1633 as: "nor shame, nor loss. . ."

¹² The note "use: habit" should refer to line 16, not 15.