

## Elizabeth Drury in the United States

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John Donne's two long elegaic poems in memory of Elizabeth Drury—*An Anatomie of the World* ("The first Anniversary") and *Of the Progresse of the Soule* ("The second Anniversary")—have provoked philosophical speculation far beyond the occasion of the death of one young woman. The person, as all Donne readers know, was the nearly fifteen-year-old daughter of Sir Robert and Lady Anne Drury. Tradition claims that she was to have been married to Prince Henry, who died in 1612 (and for whom Donne wrote an elegy published in 1613). We do not know the exact date of her death, but it was probably two or three days before her burial, December 17, 1610, in Hawstead church, Suffolk. Donne admitted, "I never saw the gentlewoman."<sup>1</sup>

R. C. Bald in his biography of Donne dates the writing of the first anniversary poem sometime between July 1611, when Sir Robert with his wife and family received a license to travel out of the country, and November 1611, when they departed, with Donne in their retinue.<sup>2</sup> Incidentally, while Donne was in France, he had the "dreadful vision" (Donne's words) which Walton records of Donne's seeing his wife walking through his room carrying a dead child in her arms. Donne later discovered that his wife was delivered of a still-born child at the precise hour of his vision. During this period of travel with the Drurys, Donne wrote the second anniversary poem, which was published, like the first one, anonymously, along with a new edition of the previous poem, in early 1612. Whether in gratitude for Donne's poem (the usual interpretation, following Walton's biography, though not proved) or for other motives, Sir Robert allowed Donne and his family to take up lodgings in a portion of his London city house, Drury House in Drury Lane, in the autumn of 1612. There Donne and his family established their residence—and there probably Ann Donne died in 1617—until he moved into the deanery of St. Paul's in 1621. So far as existing documents reveal, Donne's intent proclaimed in the first poem to "yearely celebrate thy [Elizabeth's] second birth,/ That is, thy death" (ll. 450-1) did not last beyond one more year. The

poems were printed without Donne's name in 1612, 1621, and 1625 until they appeared in the posthumous collection of his poems (1633).

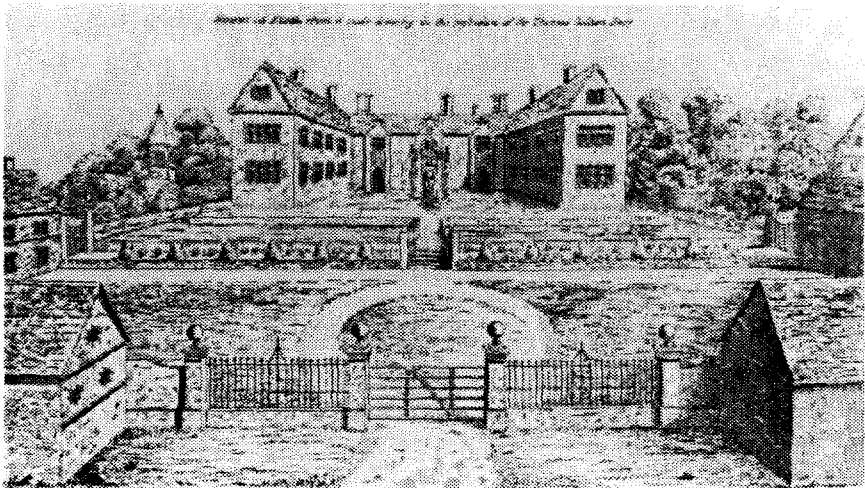
However, Sir Robert and Lady Drury, now childless, since their first daughter, Dorothy, had died at the age of four in 1597, had other means to remember Elizabeth. One was by ordering the erection of an ornate monument to her against the south side of the chancel near the altar in Hawstead church with a black marble tablet in the upper part giving a Latin epitaph in gold letters, which Bald believes "was almost certainly composed by Donne."<sup>3</sup> The eye-catching feature, though not revealing sophisticated craftsmanship, is the white alabaster statue of the recumbent girl holding her head up with her left arm, which is resting on pillows, and letting her right arm lie across her waist. The detail of her appearing to hold her ear produced what Gosse discounted as the "foolish legend," namely that her death was caused by her father's having boxed her ears.<sup>4</sup>

But this effigy was related to an existing portrait, for the same reclining figure appears in a nearly life-sized depiction of Elizabeth attributed to Paul van Somer (1576?-1621), a native of Antwerp, later a resident of Holland, finally a resident of London, where he is buried. He is known as a miniaturist as well as a painter of life-sized portraits.<sup>5</sup> He counted King James among his patrons; portraits by van Somer of James and Queen Anne hang in Hampton Court as well as in the National Portrait Gallery. Among other persons whom he painted are Prince Henry and Lucy Countess of Bedford; with the latter, whom he met through the introduction of Ben Jonson, Donne maintained a sophisticated intellectual correspondence and for whom he composed, among other poems, his verse letter "To the Countess of Bedford." In the list of persons painted by van Somer given in standard authorities like the *Allgemeines Lexikon der Bildenden Künstler* and *Bryan's Dictionary of Painters and Engravers*,<sup>7</sup> Drury's name is not given. However, the fact that her name is not mentioned does not exclude van Somer's connection; usually only the persons of highest rank have records preserved, and, as Bald showed through his studies of the wealth of Sir Robert and his wife, the Drurys, though enjoying a comfortable income, were not, in contrast to Sir Edmund Gosse's belief, among the richest families of England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

Gosse in his two-volume edition of the life and letters of Donne (1899) reproduced, so he claimed, "for the first time,"<sup>8</sup> this painting [Figure One], then in the possession of Mr. G. Milner-Gibson-Cullum (*sic*). How the portrait descended to a Cullum is connected with the disposition of Sir



**Figure One: The Milner-Gibson-Cullum Painting**



**Figure Two: Hawstead Place**

Robert's property. The ancestral home of the Drurys was Hawstead Place [Figure Two]. In 1610, according to Arthur Campling's *The History of the Family Drury in the Counties of Suffolk and Norfolk from the Conquest*, Sir Robert purchased another piece of property at a cost of £1100, Herdwick (or

Hardwick), Bury St. Edmunds, also in the county of Suffolk. After the death of Elizabeth, Sir Robert left Hawstead and moved to Hardwick. In the inventory of property in Hawstead at the death of Sir Robert in 1615, nothing specifically identified as Elizabeth's portrait is found.<sup>9</sup> The listing for the great chamber of "certaine ould pictures (portraits) and two ould lanskirs (landscapes)" valued at 20s. could not have included the one of Elizabeth because she died just five years before her father, so the painting would not be described as old, and the value should have been much higher. The inventory mentions a picture in the parlor with other items—worth 28s. 4d.—and three pictures (valued at 6s.) in the drawing chamber. Possibly Lady Drury had kept the portrait with her at Hardwick.

In 1656 both Hawstead and Hardwick were sold to Thomas Cullum (1587?-1664), according to the *DNB*,<sup>10</sup> a royalist partisan, a native of the County of Suffolk who had made his fortune in London but who retired during the Interregnum to his ancestral region. Cullum was created baronet in the year of the return of Charles II but seems to have fallen out of favor with the government and was fined a large sum for undiscovered reasons shortly before he died in 1664. He, like Elizabeth, is buried at Hawstead. The *DNB* entry refers to the family papers in the possession of F. Milner (no hyphen) Gibson-Cullum. Gosse's securing access to the Elizabeth Drury portrait would have come through the information provided by Gibson-Cullum at about the same time as to the compilers of the *DNB* entry.

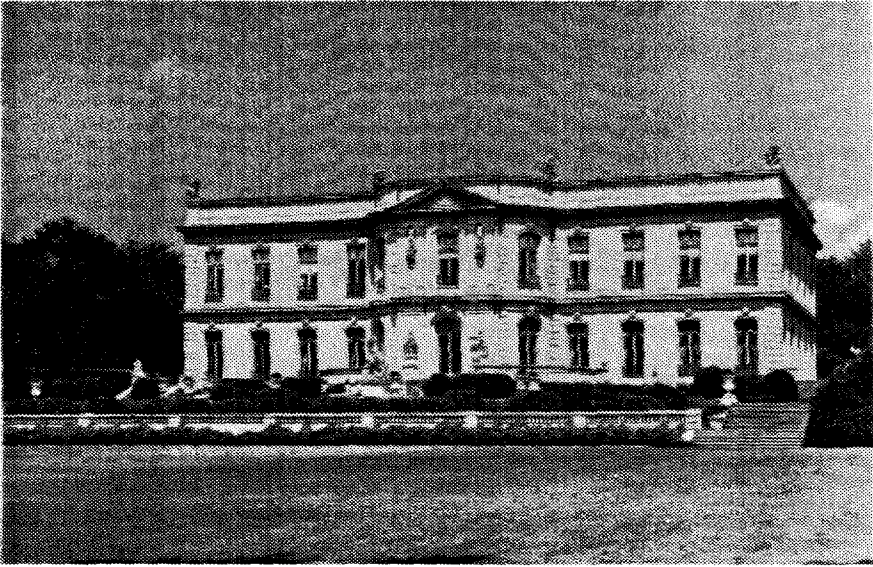
Somehow after Gosse found it, the Drury family again secured the portrait, for Bald in his 1959 book, *Donne & the Drurys*, reproduced the same portrait as presented by Gosse and claimed it was in the possession of Vyvyan Drury<sup>11</sup>; as will be revealed below, the painting had become Drury property several years earlier. It is at this point that information provided by the daughter of Vyvyan Drue Drury (the Vyvyan Drury of Bald's book), which is on file with The Preservation Society of Newport County, Rhode Island, in the United States, becomes useful.<sup>12</sup> Soon we shall trace Elizabeth Drury to the United States—the title of this article. Vyvyan Drury's daughter is Romaine Giorgini; at last report, that is, in a letter dated 1989, she is residing in Florence, Italy. My attempt in 1992 to correspond with her produced no response. Mrs. Giorgini claimed to recall having seen Elizabeth's portrait hanging in the house called The House in the Wood, near Beaulieu, Hampshire, of her grandfather, Francis Saxham Elwes Drury. In 1925 the grandfather, then a widower, married Mabel Gerry of Newport, Rhode Island. According to Mrs. Giorgini, Mr. Drury added a large picture gallery

to the house he obtained as a dowry from Mabel Gerry, and the Drury portrait was hung either there in Newport or in another residence which they maintained in New York. Possibly, however, the portrait remained in Beaulieu.

After the death, c. 1942, of Grandfather Drury and after the war, the son, Mrs. Giorgini's father, Vyvyan, sold Beaulieu and moved his possessions, which appear to have included artwork from Grandfather Drury's collection, to Nassau, The Bahamas, where he served as an aide to the Duke of Windsor.<sup>13</sup> Around 1951 he moved again, this time to Castle Kevin in County Wicklow, Ireland, taking Drury with him. Mrs. Giorgini recalls seeing it for the last time when she visited there in 1967. Vyvyan's marriage broke up soon thereafter, he left Ireland, and his possessions, including the paintings, were disposed of. The daughter received some of the paintings, but not that of Elizabeth, her father owned at her new residence in Italy, where she had gone after she married in 1952.

Mrs. Giorgini described what she called "a series of strange coincidences." Around 1983 she met Martin Drury (no relative), the secretary for Historic Buildings of the National Trust of Great Britain. He said that by chance in about 1968 he had passed the window of an art dealer in Elystan Place, Chelsea, London, Christopher Gibbs, who currently resides near Oxford. There hung a portrait of a young girl. It was identified as "Elizabeth Drury," and, since his wife's given name was Elizabeth, he glanced more closely at it. However, he noticed that there was "something not right about the head" (to use Mrs. Giorgini's words). Mr. Gibbs informed him that the portrait had been damaged in bringing it from Ireland; Mr. Gibbs had bought it at a sale at Sotheby's. But it had been poorly restored. Martin Drury simply informed Mrs. Giorgini of this discovery, but neither he nor she purchased it.

Mr. Gibbs sold the portrait to Klaus von Bulow, a resident of Newport, Rhode Island. The Preservation Society of Newport County encourages persons in that area who own interesting and/or valuable art objects to place them on display in some of the mansions at Newport. These mansions are, of course, architectural phenomena that sprang up during what Mark Twain called the "Gilded Age." Klaus von Bulow donated the portrait to The Preservation Society of Newport; in October 1974 the portrait of Elizabeth Drury was hung where it still is, in The Elms [Figure Three]. The Elms was built in 1899-1902 by Edward J. Berwind, at one time the owner of the most extensive coal properties in the United States. Though he maintained business in Philadelphia and New York, he and his wife used The Elms as their "cottage." The cottage cost one-and-a-half million dollars and is an



**Figure Three: The Elms**

interpretation of the Château d' Agnès at Asnières, France. If one enters the foyer and before ascending the Carrara marble stairs, he or she should turn to the left to go into a small sitting room. On the wall is the portrait of Elizabeth Drury.

Even a casual glance at the painting [Figure Four] will reveal to a person who recalls seeing the illustration in Bald's *Donne & The Drurys* or in volume one of Gosse's *Life and Letters* the difference between the portrait as it existed before the mutilation and in its present "restored" condition. This odd appearance had struck Martin Drury, as he informed Ms. Giorgini. The head and the right hand are different. The workman, without a copy or a photograph of the portrait in its original condition and probably thinking of the portraits of aristocratic women of the Tudor and Stuart period, made a face and ruff not rounded and soft as was van Somer's but angular as in some portraits of Mary Queen of Scots. The closed cartwheel ruff of the original has been replaced by what is called the Mary Stuart hood. Instead of the halo-like appearance, the front border is wired to form a curve with a dip above the center of the forehead. The face looks like a mask. The hand has lost its cuff and the fingers are close together. Most noticeable is what appears to be the nearly-white color on the face and the hand like the Elizabethan cerule (a compound of lead and vinegar) actually used by female contemporaries of the



**Figure Four: The Painting of Elizabeth Drury**

young Elizabeth Drury but never by a girl of her age. That the portrait has survived the vicissitude of time may not spring from the poems Donne wrote about the girl. Chance and respect the Drury family held for ancestors may explain the presence of the portrait.

Even in an imperfect condition, the girl whom Donne never knew but whom he celebrated looks at us from her place here in the United States. Lodged incongruously amidst the diversity of furnishings at The Elms, it is preserved by those who serve as the aristocracy of America. After nearly four centuries, it has come to rest within the equivalent of its original social group. Though in altered state, it shows the origin of the "cunning pencil and the comely face" that Donne memorialized in words.

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#### Notes

My major indebtedness for information presented in this article rests with Mr. Paul F. Miller, Associate Curator of The Preservation Society of Newport County, Newport, Rhode Island. Assistance and advice came from personnel in the Redwood Public Library, Newport, and from Ms. Anne Kroese of London.

<sup>1</sup> In a letter dated April 14, 1612, written from Paris to George Gerrard (?); in Edmund Gosse, *The Life and Letters of John Donne* (New York: Doff, Mead, 1899), I, p. 302.

<sup>2</sup> *John Donne: A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 241-44.

<sup>3</sup> *Donne & the Drurys* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), p. 68.

<sup>4</sup> Gosse, I, pp. 274-75.

<sup>5</sup> A. J. van der Aa, *Biographisch Woordenboek der Nederlanden*, edited and reprinted, K. J. R. van Harderwijk and C. D. J. Schotel (Amsterdam: B. M. Israel, 1969), VI, p. 261.

<sup>6</sup> H. Vollmer et al. (Leipzig: E. A. Seemann, 1937), 13, p. 264.

<sup>7</sup> Ed. George C. Williamson (London: G. Bell, 1921), 5, p. 102.

<sup>8</sup> Gosse, I, p. 271.

<sup>9</sup> London: Mitchell Hughes and Clarke, 1927, pp. 67-72.

<sup>10</sup> "Cullum, Sir Thomas," *DNB*, 5, pp. 283-84.

<sup>11</sup> *Donne & the Drurys*, p. vii.

<sup>12</sup> The three-page, single-spaced document from Romaine Giorgini is accompanied by a letter dated August 31, 1989, and is addressed to a Mr. John G. Winslow, president of The Preservation Society of Newport County. Through the generosity of Mr. Paul F. Miller, I was able to secure a copy of Mrs. Giorgini's history of the portrait.

<sup>13</sup> J. Bryan III and Charles J. V. Murphy, *The Windsor Story* (New York: William Morrow, 1979), pp. 470-71.