

***Satyre III* Colloquium:
Stringer, Sellin, Slights, Hester**

Gary A. Stringer

A number of years ago, the John Donne Society decided to institutionalize as a regular feature of the program at each annual meeting a session focusing on a single poem. Chosen for its appeal in pedagogical, historical, or theoretical terms—or for some combination of these—the poem for a given year is selected by the Society's Executive Committee, and the session organized by its President. Previous programs have featured particularly lively sessions on "Goodfriday 1613. Riding Westward" and "Air and Angels" (the latter leading to a collection of essays edited by Achsah Guibbory that entirely occupied Vol. 9, No. 1, of this journal); thus I was very pleased to be asked by President Diana Benet to chair the 1992 session on "Satire III," especially when I learned that Paul Sellin, Camille Slights, and Tom Hester had been enlisted as panelists. The response of the conference participants seemed to confirm my own perception that this panel's efforts were worthy of a wider audience, so I proposed that the papers be printed as a cluster in a future issue of the *JDJ*. Here they are.

All three panelists, of course, have published on "Satire III" before. Donneans will know Paul Sellin's 1980 *HLQ* article, which argues for dating the poem about 1620; Camille Slights' discussion, in her 1981 book on the casuistical tradition, of the poem as a "case of conscience"; and Tom Hester's location of the poem within the meditative and satirical traditions in the book he published on Donne's satires in 1982. None of these panelists, I think, wishes to repudiate his or her previous remarks on the poem, but all have, in various ways, modified their thinking on the poem over the past ten years, and they don't all agree with one another. In particular, Sellin's questioning of the very genre of the poem and its relation to the other canonical Donne satires directly gnaws at positions upon which Slights and Hester build major parts of their arguments. Hester and Slights, moreover, might agree that the poem does not fully spell out Donne's personal religious beliefs, but I think they differ fundamentally on the extent to which Donne's biography, his identity and manner of being in the world in the waning years of Elizabeth's reign, informs the tone and doctrinal content of the poem. To Slights, Donne's Romist heritage is merely one of the elements that conditions the poem's championing of individual liberty of conscience; to Hester, that heritage is precisely what is at stake.

Hester's stress on the poem as a manuscript satire is particularly well taken. The more I work on Donne's texts, the more conscious I become of how tenuous our criticism can be if it is not grounded in a familiarity with the material artifacts containing those texts and in an appreciation of the evolving personal and historical circumstances under which those texts were composed and disseminated to their various publics. Many of us—and I certainly include myself in this number—have mistakenly assumed, because we have not previously had the physical tools and the appropriate critical climate within which to ply them, that the text of a Donne poem was a clearly defined, linguistically unitary verbal monolith and that the business of interpretation was simply a matter of developing appropriate frames of reference within which "the text" could be made to yield up its meanings.

Recently, however, textual critics like *JDJ* contributors Ted-Larry Pebworth, Ernest Sullivan, and John Shawcross have begun to show us that that which Donne's interpreters take as the object of analysis is always radically contingent, frequently contaminated, and sometimes authentically multimodal. Without in the least wishing to impugn the very real value of what Paul Sellin, Camille Slight, and Tom Hester here add to the discourse on "Satire III," I would like to suggest a couple of ways in which further attention to Donne's status as a manuscript poet could modify or refine the arguments they make.

One point of contention—the appearance and location of "Satire III" in the surviving seventeenth-century manuscripts—can be solved simply by examining the artifacts. The poem appears in twenty-nine manuscripts and in all seven seventeenth-century editions/issues of Donne's collected poems, as represented in Figure 1 below. In this chart the manuscripts are identified by their Donne Variorum sigla (column 1), their traditional sigla (column 2), and also by their historical names or library shelfmarks (column 3). Columns four and five show the location of the poem and the poem's ordinal position among satires within each artifact; the chart also reminds us that some artifacts contain and attribute to Donne as many as six or seven satires. How these assembled facts are to be construed, of course, is another matter, requiring some determination of the relative authority of the various sources and of the authority of the texts and of the ordering of the satires within those sources. No reliable judgment can be reached, however, until the data are all assembled.

Another point, raised by Sellin, concerns the alleged regularity of the meter of "Satire III" in comparison to that of the other satires. The fact is, however, that no one up to now has collected the data that would justify any but the most cautious of pronouncements about the meter of any of the satires. A quick look at how Grierson (Q), Milgate (Y), and Shawcross (Z) treat a few representative lines will show just how unsettled this whole matter is. For purposes of comparison, I will collate these modern editions and the edition of 1633 (A) against Westmoreland (NY3):

1. 7 As vertu was to the first **blind** Age?] blinded A Q Y Z.
1. 13 Of strict Life **maybe'imputed** fayth, and heare] may be imputed
A Q; may be'imputed Y Z.
1. 33 Know thy foes; the foule **Deuill**, whom thou] devill h'is A Z.
1. 34 **Striu'st** to please, for hate not loue would allow] Strivest A Q Z.
1. 80 **Ragged** and steepe Truthe dwells; and he y' will] Cragg'd A;
Cragged Q Y Z.
1. 82 And what **th'hills** sodainnes resists, win so.] the hills A Q;
the'hills Z.

Virtually chosen at random, these few examples not only suggest something of the metrical diversity preserved within the seventeenth-century textual tradition, but also show the rhythmical variety extant in three of the principal texts of "Satire III" to which twentieth-century readers have had access. Jonson may have been right that Donne, for not keeping of accent, deserved hanging, but such examples as those above really ought to make us think twice about his comment, as well as those of any twentieth-century critic who thinks that "Satire III" justifies loosening the noose.

One final (and, I think, highly important) point is suggested by the variants "Cragg'd/Cragged" for Westmoreland's "Ragged" in line 80 above. In his edition of the satires (1978), Milgate takes as simple fact that Donne revised at least four of the satires, "Satire III" among them. I haven't studied all the satires yet, but at least with respect to "Satire III" I am absolutely sure Milgate is right; and this "Ragged" / "Cragged" variant is merely one datum in a pattern of authorial revision that can be incontrovertibly demonstrated. Another part of the pattern, which figures significantly in Tom Hester's argument below, appears in line 31, where eight manuscripts, all the seventeenth-century prints, and Q, Y, and Z read "Sentinell" for the "Soldier" given in NY3 and nineteen other manuscripts. If Hester is right that "Sentinell" was a politically and theologically charged word in Donne's vocabulary, then we may well suspect that Donne's change was prompted by the evolving climate of religious tension, rather than by pure aesthetics (indeed, "Sentinell," the later choice, renders the line hypermetric). What this all means, I think, is that we will eventually come to see "Satire III"—and many other Donne poems as well—as a progressing "work" constituted over the course of time by several participating "versions"; and along with all else that they must do, the interpretations we construct will necessarily take into account the structural and thematic implications of the poem's evolutionary nature.

Figure 1

DV & Trad. Sigla		Shelfmark/Name	Position in Artifact	Ordinal Position
B13	A25	Add. 25707 (Skipwith ms.)	ff. 52v-53v	4th of 5 satires
B32	H49	Harley 4955 (Newcastle ms.)	ff. 90v-91v	3rd of 4 satires
B33	H51	Harley 5110	ff. 99-100v	3rd of 3 satires
B40	L74	Lansdowne 740	ff. 58-59	1st of 4 satires
B47	S962	Stowe 962	ff. 99-100v	3rd of 5 satires
C2	C57	Add. 5778(c) (Cambridge Balam ms.)	ff. 18-19	3rd of 5 satires
C8	Lec	Add. 8467 (Leconfield ms.)	ff. 6v-9	3rd of 5 satires
C9	Lut	Add. 8468 (Luttrell ms.)	ff. 14-15v	3rd of 6 satires
DT1	TCD	ms. 877 (formerly G.2.21) (Trinity College Dublin ms.)	ff. 14v-16	2nd of 6 satires
H3	Cy	Eng. 966.1 (Norton 4502/ Carnaby ms.)	pp. 23-26	4th of 4 satires
H4	N	Eng. 966.3 (Norton 4503/ Norton ms.)	ff. 2v-4	2nd of 6 satires
H5	Dob	Eng. 966.4 (Norton 4506/ Dobell ms.)	pp. 259-62	6th of 6 satires
H6	O'F	Eng. 966.5 (Norton 4505/ O'Flahertie ms.)	pp. 65-68	3rd of 6 satires
H7	S	Eng. 966.6 (Norton 4500/ Stephens ms.)	ff. 46-48v	3rd of 6 satires
H8	Hd	Eng. 966.7 (Norton 4620/ Utterson ms.)	ff. 71-72v	3rd of 7 satires
HH1	B	EL 6893 (Bridgewater ms.)	ff. 65-67	3rd of 5 satires
NY1	JC	Arents coll. 191 (John Cave ms.)	pp. 9-12	3rd of 5 satires
NY3	W	Berg coll. (Westmoreland ms.)	ff. [5-6]	3rd of 5 satires
O20	D	Eng. poet. e.99 (Dowden ms.)	ff. 4v-6v	3rd of 5 satires
O21	P	Eng. poet. f.9 (Phillipps ms.)	pp. 177-81	2nd of 4 satires
OQ1	Q	ms. 216 (Queen's Coll., Oxf.)	ff. 201-02v	3rd of 5 satires
OJ1	none	(St. John's Coll., Oxf.; ms. emendations in a copy of A)	pp. 333-36	3rd of 5 satires
P3	none	Heneage ms. (privately owned)	ff. 7-8	3rd of 5 satires
SP1	SP	ms. 49.B.43 (St. Paul's ms.)	ff. 12-13v	3rd of 5 satires
TT1	none	PR 1171 D14 (Dalhousie I ms.)	ff. 21-22	1st of 4 satires
VA1	D16	Cat. No. 17, ms. 25.F.16 (Neve ms.)	ff. 5-6v	3rd of 5 satires

Figure 1, continued

DV & Trad. Sigla		Shelfmark/Name	Position in Artifact	Ordinal Position
VA2	D17	Cat. No. 18, ms. 25.F.17 (Nedham ms.)	ff. 8-9	3rd of 5 satires
Y2	K	b114 (Raphael King ms.)	pp. 17-25	3rd of 7 satires
Y3	J	b148 (Osborn ms.)	pp. 12-15	2nd of 4 satires
A	1633	1633 POEMS	pp. 333-36	3rd of 5 satires
B	1635	1635 POEMS	pp. 131-34	3rd of 6 satires
C	1639	1639 POEMS	pp. 131-34	3rd of 6 satires
D	1649	1649 POEMS	pp. 125-28	3rd of 6 satires
E	1650	1650 POEMS	pp. 125-28	3rd of 6 satires
F	1654	1654 POEMS	pp. 125-28	3rd of 6 satires
G	1669	1669 POEMS	pp. 125-28	3rd of 7 satires