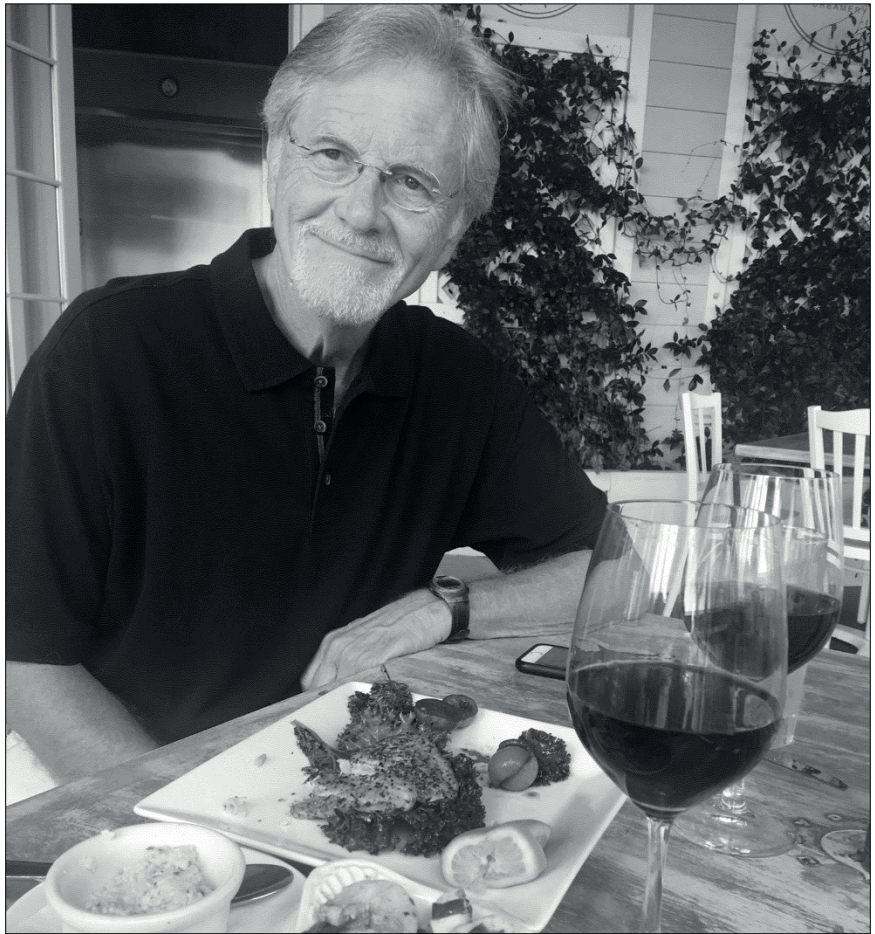


Paul to the Donneans

Ernest W. Sullivan, II, and Jeffrey Johnson

Obviously, anyone named Paul Austin Parrish is fated to become an apostle in Texas, and the Fates delivered. Although anyone who knew Paul would never believe that he was not a native-born Texan, Paul was actually born in Wichita, KS on October 26, 1944, making him the youth of the Donne Variorum and John Donne Society founders. Despite Paul's initial resistance to Texas (he attended Friends University and the University of Kansas instead), he was eventually lured to Rice University and Texas by a night of honeymooning at the Stagecoach Inn in Salado, Texas, with his Texan wife, Linda. As Paul became fonder of Texas, he taught briefly at Texas Southern University before settling into his university home, Texas A&M University, in 1974 where he became Regents Professor of English until he retired in 2011 and moved to Driftwood in 2015 where he died on October 29, 2021. By that time, Paul had become so much a Texan that he would eat no food not grown in Texas, so he grew all his own fruits and vegetables.

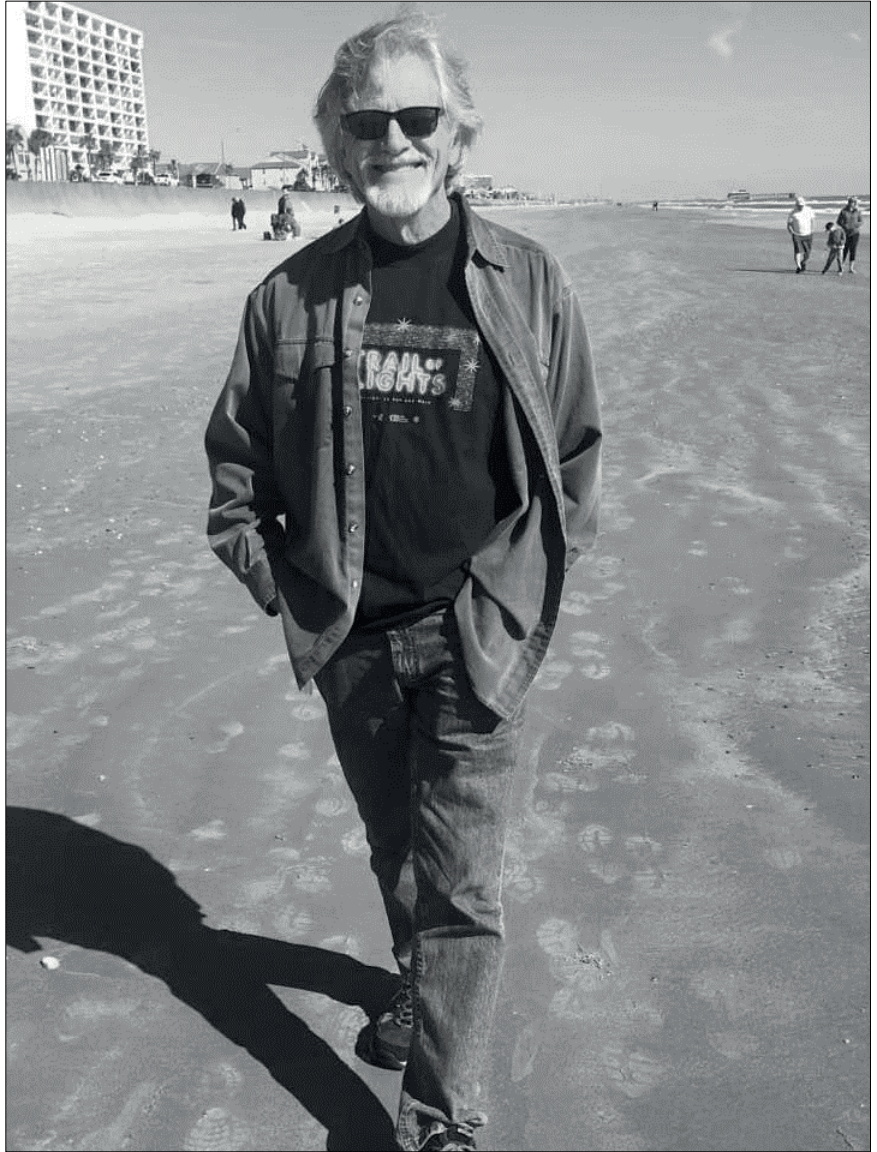
I (EWS) first met Paul at a South Central Modern Language Association meeting where I was trying to find some Donne friends and get a few easy lines on my cv by starting up a bibliography session. I immediately identified Paul as the Hollywood stereotype of a Texan: Stetson, blue eyes, square jaw, corduroy jacket, belt buckle, jeans, and boots. But I figured who better than he to have an influence on the locals (SCMLA was 99% Texan), so I chatted him up about Donne (interest and expertise there) and bibliography (no personal interest but willing to help). Sure enough (but not surprising as I got to know Paul), he steered me through the SCMLA bureaucracy to founding a



permanent session. Our next consequential meeting was at Gary Stringer's 1980 gathering in Gulfport to explore the possibility of a variorum edition of Donne's poems. Donneans can easily imagine problems in a room occupied by Tom Hester, Ernie Sullivan, John Shawcross, Ted-Larry Pebworth, Bill Hunter, and Al Labriola. Fortunately Gary Stringer, John Roberts, and Paul Parrish were on hand to temper the debates over whether we were going to make new texts and the infamous "Hunter box"—scholarly works deemed worthy would go in the box; the unworthy would not. Even as the junior member, Paul calmly commanded consideration of his logical and sensitive views.

Paul's sensitivity surfaced again at a Gulfport meeting of the recently formed John Donne Society (which met in conjunction with the Advisory Board of the Donne Variorum). In the early 1990s, nary a volume of the Donne Variorum had appeared after more than a decade of work; and, understandably, a certain amount of rumbling and impatience surfaced among the Society's membership. Paul helped calm the roiling waters by composing a humorous song, "The Donne Variorum Blues," which has subsequently become the John Donne Society anthem and to which Paul added verses and sang every year (with the Donne Variorum taking forty-two years to complete, the impatience pretty much continued). No one who was there will ever forget the moment Paul picked up a guitar, and looking for all the world like Johnny Cash, belted out those first few verses with all of us singing along, then as now, to close out the annual conference. Certification of Paul's creation will live forever in the attribution of his photographs of the Drury monuments in the Donne Variorum (vol. 8, pp. 179-80): "Paul A. Parrish, A. A. G. G., B. B." translates to "Paul A. Parrish, All Around Good Guy, Blues Brother."

Paul's ability to remain calm and sensible amidst academic squabbling made everyone eager to put him in charge of academic enterprises: Head of the A&M English department, Associate Dean of Liberal Arts, Interim Dean of Faculties, Executive Director and President of SCMLA, chair of the MLA Academic Freedom Committee, President of the South Central Renaissance Conference, Founding Member of the Donne Variorum Advisory Board, and President of the John Donne Society. His name also fated him to participate in many social organizations: the ACLU, Democratic Party precinct chair, NAACP, and Planned Parenthood. For those of us who were fortunate enough to know Paul, he served as a model of the highly accomplished, yet humble, scholar, a person who was always more eager to invite others to discuss their work than to go on about his own. To sit and talk with him during a Donne Society conference was its own reward in learning to be a thoughtful academic, one with the intelligence and wit to recognize that how we treat our colleagues and students is more important than what we publish. With that said, his scholarship on the poetry of Richard Crashaw and, of course, the writings of Donne contributes significantly to our understanding of those authors. And Paul's work on the Donne Variorum is monumental.



For half of the total ten print volumes of the *Donne Variorum*, he served as Chief Editor of the Commentary, and he was a commentary editor for an additional three volumes in the series. As importantly, Paul mentored the ranks of commentary editors who contributed to the *Variorum*, and the project is a testament to his own efforts and the

generosity he extended to his fellow workers in the vineyard. Paul's practical and sage advice also benefitted those scholar/teachers who were willing to try their hands as academic administrators.

Throughout his incredibly rich life, Paul was more than the epitome of the Renaissance humanist. Paul's deeds exemplified those "Trunks" that God gave us to better see the perfection of the next world: "Yet ar the Trunks, which doe to vs deriue / Things in proportion fit by perspectiue, / Deeds of good men. For by theyr being here / Vertues, indeed remote, seeme to bee neere." (*Har*, ll. 37-40). In his final months, Paul faced his battle with ALS with the same grace and courage as he lived his life. Even as Paul's physical presence fades from our sight, all of us who knew him will never forget his boyish, Cheshire grin.

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