

Appendix: Ted's Contributions to the Variorum

Gary A. Stringer

In memorializing his friend and longtime collaborator, Gary A. Stringer, founding General Editor of The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne, has supplied a narrative of Ted's role as one of the textual editors. Because his remembrance provides an important history of the early days of the Variorum project, we print it here in full.

Ted was an extraordinarily gifted bibliographer and textual critic. He taught me an enormous amount in the beginning, when I knew almost nothing, and remained a patient and faithful mentor. He had had solid bibliographical training at Louisiana State University under Thomas Kirby and E. L. Marilla. And he was already an experienced editor, having done the Feltham *Resolves*, and had an edition of the poems of Sir Henry Wotton in the mill which, sadly, I don't think he ever finished. This kind of work, with its attention to detail and logical method, perfectly suited Ted's cast of mind, and—this is fundamental—was carried out in the service of what he took as an axiom of faith: that a reliable text is the beginning of interpretive wisdom. In addition to his excellent analytical powers, moreover, Ted possessed a steel-trap memory and seemingly never lost track of a single iota of the vast lore he had accumulated over the years and was always able to call up even the most arcane information when needed. This ability was indispensable to the *Variorum* work as we moved forward, as he accumulated a similar storehouse of knowledge about the Donne bibliographical scene.

In the original organization of the textual work for the *Variorum*, John Shawcross had assumed the role of head of the "textual committee" (as we called it then), and proved enormously helpful

during the first years of the project, including producing the rationale for the textual work that we included in our first grant application to the NEH, developing a comprehensive outline of the contents of each proposed volume (which we followed pretty faithfully up until the final volumes), proposing the initial editorial procedures to be followed, hosting an early work session for the textual editors at his home in Lexington, participating in similar sessions in Hattiesburg when I began to host them, and actually carrying out quite a lot of the nitty gritty work necessary to produce the first volume (vol. 6). But John became disenchanted with the enterprise, and eventually withdrew. His reasons, I think, were several. For one thing, in the beginning his familiarity with the materials was so far beyond what any of the rest of us knew (he'd already produced his *Complete Poetry* for Doubleday under their Anchor imprint) that he grew impatient with our relative lack of knowledge, especially when he saw the committee's approach to the textual work (primarily under Ted's and Ernie's influence) beginning to diverge from the Griersonian principles he had followed in producing his own edition. Eventually, I think, he came to see this as wrongheaded and an undermining of his own prior achievement and just couldn't stomach it. Another factor tied up in his withdrawal was that he just could never get on board with computers, which we started using in major ways fairly early on.

After John left—and it must be said that, for all the eventual divergence of points of view, he left us vastly better off than we would have been had he not so generously shared his knowledge and himself with us in the beginning—the major textual work was left up to Ted, Ernie Sullivan, and me. (John's name appears as a textual editor in only vol. 6, although his fingerprints are visible all over every aspect of the later textual work, for those who know how to see them.) Ernie had for several years already been driving the backroads of England in search of “uncollected” printings of Donne verse and enjoyed doing so. For this reason, in accordance with our determination to examine and transcribe every textual artifact *in situ*, he assumed the task of transcribing the Donne manuscript verse in those remote places, in addition to working in Oxford, Cambridge, and London. Ted took on responsibility for “American owned” manuscripts and the seventeenth-century prints. In this capacity, Ted made research trips to the Huntington, Harvard, Yale, New York, Bloomington, Washington, D. C., and elsewhere—

including a trip to Aberystwyth to see the DolauCothi manuscript—to proofread our microfilm-based transcriptions against the originals housed in those places and examine copies of the printed *Poems* other than those available in the library at the University of Michigan. In addition to the transcriptions, he also prepared and perfected first-line indexes of many of the manuscripts and volumes he examined—certainly of all the major ones—and meticulous formal bibliographical descriptions of them—all written out in his elegant, always-legible, idiosyncratic handwriting.

In preparing these, Ted was an inveterate innovator of method. For example, in order to assess the various levels of scribal change in cases where a manuscript's original writing had been overwritten by one or more later scribes or owners, Ted contrived a forensic procedure involving angles of light refraction and degrees of magnification that helped solve some otherwise impenetrable problems. His technique was crucial, for instance, in deciphering the riddle of the Gosse manuscript of *Metempsychosis* (now in the Folger), which had been subjected to multiple layers of scribal revision and tinkering over the years. Most of these documents Ted prepared not with the intention of publishing them independently, but solely for use in the *Donne Variorum* textual work, and you can get an idea of how indispensable they were by examining the online descriptions of the Westmoreland (NY3) and the DolauCothi (WN1) on *DigitalDonne*, where Ted is credited with providing much of the precise, detailed information I made use of in writing the descriptions. (Many of Ted's original documents, by the way, are in the *Donne Variorum* archives being assembled in McCain Library at the University of Southern Mississippi).

Ted was also an early enthusiast for the use of the computer in the *Variorum* work. Ted became adroit in its use for all sorts of tasks, including not just the preparation of the various bits of expository writing for which he was responsible (textual introductions, etc.), but also for the preparation of the textual apparatuses and the running of collations, for which we developed our specialized program *DVColl*. Throughout the evolution of the personal computer industry from early examples like the Osborne (of which Ted was a proud owner) and various early Apples to, eventually, the later iOS and DOS-based machines, Ted kept up his chops, and was running the latest iteration

of our software on whatever computer he owned when he eventually withdrew from active involvement in the Donne Variorum a few years ago. [*The Satyres* is the last volume in which Ted is formally accredited as a Textual Editor.] I was always grateful for his adaptability in this regard, and admired him for being willing and able to change with the times. Not everyone was so adaptable.

Finally, I want to mention—which is just so consistent with his character—his unfailing reliability in completing assignments and preparing for work sessions, of which he and I and Ernie held many in Hattiesburg over the years. The usual procedure we followed for these was for individuals to assume responsibility for a given chunk of work—most commonly, a poem or series of poems that each editor was to work up at home and have ready to present to the next in-person meeting of the group—and Ted could always be counted on to have done his homework and be ready to present. Dilatoriness and irresponsibility were completely foreign to him, but when necessary he tolerated them in others for the good of the project. Strange as it may seem to normal human beings, we all had some very good times sitting around tables in my office in Hattiesburg with Syd Conner, paired off for reading textual apparatuses aloud against the raw collations (this included calling out marks of punctuation and strange seventeenth-century spellings). In this work—as well as at similar work sessions we held at his home in Dearborn—Ted was indefatigable, always ready to “do another line” as he liked to joke, making a snorting sound as he bent toward an imaginary line of coke on the table.

In conclusion, I'll just observe that like John's and Ernie's, Ted's influence and work are everywhere to be seen in the published volumes of the *Variorum*. I hope this will be recognized for the lasting contribution I know it to be.