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Reading Donne's *Songs and Sonnets* in the Nineteenth Century

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Early in the nineteenth century Wordsworth declared that Shakespeare had unlocked his heart in his sonnets. But it was not until the end of the century that readers expected to find hidden truths in Donne's love lyrics. For one thing, Donne's poetry was not much analyzed. For another, his life was assumed to be known and understood. Walton's biography had charted the emergence of a saintly figure whose public persona as Dean of St. Paul's was thought the proper object of interest. Walton explained that even the "most secret thoughts" of his subject could be known by reading the *Devotions*, where they were "paraphrased and made public."[1] *The Life of Dr. Donne* remained popular all through the nineteenth century. In 1846 a writer in *Lowe's Edinburgh Magazine* remarked that for every person who had read Donne's poetry there must have been a hundred who had read Walton; and he insisted that "Unprefaced by this 'Life,' no edition of Donne's poems ought ever to have appeared."[2]

Donne's poetry, despite faint praise from Pope and Johnson, was neither well known nor highly regarded in the first half of the nineteenth century. Pope perpetuated the notion that a metrically incompetent Donne had penned rugged verses; and Johnson's criticism of the metaphysical poets, summed up in the commonplace whereby they were said to have deserted the spontaneous feeling of the heart for the pedantry of the head, seemed to explain why Donne was unworthy of serious consideration. These notions were repeated, with minor variations, in anthologies and literary histories for over a hundred years.

As late as 1880 William Minto, the shrewdest reader of Donne since Coleridge, felt that Dr. Johnson's charges still required to be answered. In the years leading up to the publication of his article on Donne for *The Nineteenth Century* (see below, Part IV), Minto had been editing *The Examiner*, and Edmund Gosse was his protégé. In the year that his article

appeared, he was appointed to the chair of logic and English at the University of Aberdeen, where Herbert Grierson became in turn his assistant and his successor. By virtue of his decisive article on Donne and of his personal influence, Minto deserves a place with Coleridge as a fomenter of the Donne revival.[3]

The quality of interest in Donne found in the work of Minto, Gosse, and Grierson entailed a reversal of the ideas of the poet received from Walton and Pope and Johnson—ideas that had, for all their implicit praise of Donne, mostly retarded the development of a revival.[4] During much of the nineteenth century, as in the eighteenth, most of Donne's poetry went pretty much unread. It is true that it was available in the editions of British poets by Bell (1779), Anderson (1793), and Chalmers (1810). But by any sort of comparison with editions in the twentieth century, the poems were irregularly anthologized and not much written about.[5] The first periodical article on the poet appeared in 1823, and its author sought to counter the prevailing prejudices against Donne.[6] It is difficult to believe that the article had much effect, even though those interested in the vagaries of Donne's reputation have singled it out as a landmark in the history of Donne criticism.[7] Those who referred to it later in the nineteenth century did so chiefly to suggest the naiveté of its enthusiasm. Thomas Corser, writing in 1873 and anticipating the appearance of Grosart's edition, registered the opinion that, in the fifty years since the article had first appeared, it had done little "to revive a love of [Donne], or to remove the neglect which has so long attended his poetical works, in spite of the zealous efforts of a few respectable remonstrants."[8] Nonetheless, the self-appointed prophet who had predicted, in 1822, that by the end of the century probably no copy of Donne's poems would be extant was quite wrong.[9]

By the 1890s Donne was being more widely and enthusiastically discussed in print than at any time since the 1630s, and readers were attentive to the love poetry in particular. This was the era in which, as Michel Foucault and Peter Gay (in their different ways) have observed,[10] a new and powerful assumption took hold among many medical professionals and intellectuals: that a person's secret life, especially a person's secret sexual life, provides a privileged access to important truths. Several writers in the nineties registered a new fascination with Donne as a poet who had hidden and revealed himself all at once in his verses. George Saintsbury had the impression that the *Elegies* were Donne's best-known poems; and Gamaliel Bradford, making Donne the subject of one of his earliest "psychographies" (or psycho-biographies), thought the elegies and lyrics Donne's "most satisfactory productions."[11] But the growing body of commentary on the poetry was directed increasingly to

the *Songs and Sonnets*. About three quarters of what was written specifically about the *Songs and Sonnets* in the nineteenth century appeared after 1890, and more than half of it was published in the five years from 1895 to 1899.[12] Donne's love poetry came to be interpreted as confessional poetry, revealing hidden truths that Walton and other biographers had neglected or suppressed, truths that seemed to require the skills of the astute psychologist if they were to be ferreted out.

I

Although the love lyrics had been designated "Songs and Sonnets" in the 1635 edition of Donne's poems, for the next two and a half centuries this designation was largely ignored, and there was little commentary on most of the individual poems. Critics generally lumped these lyrics with the *Satires* and *Elegies* and other poems of Donne's early years under the general heading of "love poems," "amatory verses," or "youthful works."[13] As such most of them seemed to belong more to the category of poems which Walton dismissed as "loosely . . . scattered in his youth" than to the one of which Ben Jonson spoke when he said that Donne wrote "all his best pieces err he was 25 years old."[14] As if in a sort of tacit conspiracy with Walton, the more cynical and licentious of the lyrics (although they were available in the editions of Bell, Anderson, and Chalmers) were discreetly ignored.[15] Before the great proliferation of critical commentary in the nineties, the best known of Donne's love lyrics was undoubtedly "A Valediction: forbidding Mourning." Dr. Johnson had called attention to it when he remarked that "it may be doubted whether absurdity or ingenuity has the better claim" to its comparison of parting lovers to a pair of compasses.[16] Walton had quoted the poem in full and bestowed upon it high praise; and his biographical placement of it in 1611, when Donne was leaving his wife to journey to the continent, endeared the poem to many readers. Its popularity in the 1820s is well summed up by Mrs. Jameson: "Donne, once so celebrated as a writer, now so neglected, is more interesting for his matrimonial history, and for one little poem addressed to his wife, than for all his learned, metaphysical, and theological productions."[17] The song, "Sweetest love, I do not goe," was sometimes associated with the same biographical context and as such attracted some notice. "Loves Deitie" and "The Will" were, relative to other *Songs and Sonnets*, fairly well known. G. H. Lewes cited "The Good-morrow" in a journal article of 1838,[18] and George Eliot quoted from the poem in one of her chapter mottoes in *Middlemarch*. But there is not much evidence that the poem was well known before the nineties. Nor were "The Canonization," "The Sunne Rising," and "The Exstasie." Of the more cynical and licentious lyrics, only the song,

"Go and catche a falling starre," received any notable commentary before the last years of the century. In fact, with the important exception of Coleridge's marginalia (which will be considered below), "The Flea," "Womans Constancy," and "The Indifferent" attracted no particular notice; and poems like "Confined Love," "Communitie," and "Farewell to Love" seem to have been practically unknown. "The Flea" and "The Indifferent" did not square well with the portrait of the saintly Dean shown by Walton; and Donne's biographer had in any event provided means for explaining away such poems when he claimed that Donne himself had "wished they had been abortive, or so short-lived, that he had witnessed their funerals."[19] As late as 1905, when he brought out what might otherwise qualify as the first edition of the *Songs and Sonnets* as a volume in their own right, Charles Eliot Norton was quoting this passage to justify the suppression of more than ten of the lyrics from his collection of *The Love Poems of John Donne*.[20]

By rights Donne's more licentious lyrics should have been omitted from Chalmers's edition of 1810. Chalmers explained that "licentious language," although it was sometimes used even by "some of our most eminent poets," had been one of his criteria for omitting materials.[21] This declaration gave rise to an exchange, recorded in Leigh Hunt's *Reflector*, on the question, whether "it [is] justifiable to reprint the Pruriencies of our Old Poets." Hunt's interlocutor, Barron Field,[22] who at just about this time made a transcript of Coleridge's marginalia from Lamb's copy of Donne, objected to Chalmers's procedure on the grounds that an editor should "reprint his authors without mutilation or castration." Field argued that works by Skelton and Carew which Chalmers had omitted are part of the historical record, and that an editor has no more right to suppress them "than we have to shoot our neighbour's dog because it may do the public mischief." But Hunt took the more stringent position, that an editor has "a *sacred* duty" to omit prurient passages; and he gave himself the last word, approving of Chalmers's censorship, since editors ought not "to perpetuate the vices that we condemn."[23] Donne, whose poems are not "castrated" in Chalmers's edition, does not bear mention in the exchange. In fact, Chalmers may have managed to overlook the potentially offensive poems as readily as he invited his readers to overlook them. In the "Life" of Donne which he prefixed to the poems, he explained that Donne's youth, "although disgraced by no flagrant turpitude, [was] not exempt from folly and dissipation." He admitted that some of the poems bear the "sentiments of men whose morals are not very strict"; but he proposed that by his marriage Donne had redeemed himself for having toyed with such sentiments in his youth.[24] The issue remained a lively one for Field, however, who, when he sought to get an

edition of the *Songs and Sonnets* published in the 1840s, aptly identified what was troubling other readers of Donne at the time, the frank sensuality of many of the amatory verses. This proved to be the major issue in the interpretation of the *Songs and Sonnets* through the remainder of the nineteenth century.

Already in the 1830s and 1840s there were signs that Walton's casual dismissal of the "loosely . . . scattered" pieces would no longer be countenanced. G. H. Lewes defended the use of conceits in the *Songs and Sonnets* and suggested new grounds for thinking the poems to be sincere: "there is a law in Nature," he argued, "and consequently it becomes a canon in criticism, that the *language of passion is ever extravagant.*"[25] Similarly, the article in *Lowe's Edinburgh Magazine* offered something of a defense of the extravagance and licentiousness of many of the amatory verses. Its author is now thought to have been Coventry Patmore, a man who developed a lively interest in writing sensual love poetry himself. Long before his conversion to Catholicism, Patmore was at pains in this article to argue that it had been one of the principal benefits of the Reformation to have freed writers from the "false shame which Romanism had attached to the contemplation of the sexual relations."[26] Donne's licentious verses, in his view, though they were not good poems, were not to be ignored or suppressed on the grounds that they were unworthy of the man who became Dean of St. Paul's. Similarly, Evert Duyckinck, in a piece published in America in 1841, instead of accepting the idea that Jack Donne the rake needed to be reconciled with Dr. Donne the Dean, remarked on the basic compatibility of Walton's two Donnes: "We like to read the theology of Donne," he wrote (and there is no sign that his tone should be thought an anticipation of some delicious Shavian perversity), "by the light of his early love poems. The sincerity of his affection, is remarkable in both." Moreover, Duyckinck insisted that "Donne was never a profligate, or a libertine" and that "[t]o hold his life up to the vulgar sot or rake, as an illustration of the converting power of religion, is to misunderstand not only Donne, but the spirit of Christianity itself."[27] There were, in short, several readers of Donne's poetry at this time who objected to using Walton's quasi-Augustinian portrait for the purposes of Victorian moralizing. But the need to object implied that others were reading the love poems as transcripts of Donne's own experiences, and perhaps that they had begun to use them to chart a youthful rake's progress.

II

Duyckinck became the owner of *The Literary World*, and in 1853 his periodical brought out, in three installments, most of Coleridge's marginalia on Donne's poetry. The marginalia had before this date only a

narrow currency, having been written for Lamb, who showed them to a few others. Lamb allowed William Hone to quote from one of Coleridge's notes, in *The Every-day Book* first published in 1829.[28] And he permitted Field to make a transcript of the annotations on the *Songs and Sonnets*. Field then reproduced them, some thirty years later, for the Percy Society,[29] which had been publishing volumes of poetry by Lydgate, by Deloney, and by Sir Henry Wotton, as well as miscellaneous lyrics from the Elizabethan and Jacobean era. Field prepared an edition of the *Songs and Sonnets*, including in his manuscript both Donne's poems and Coleridge's marginalia. He appended to the transcription five pages of his own "Explanatory Notes," some of the earliest glosses on the *Songs and Sonnets* that we have. In his Preface Field acknowledged that the poems were in print in older editions, but complained that these were "full of errors."

For whatever reasons, Field's aim was not realized. He died in 1846, and the Percy Society, though it kept bringing out volumes of older literature, published nothing by Donne before it was dissolved in February, 1852. Field's manuscript is still extant, in the Houghton Library at Harvard; and in his "Critical Heritage" volume on Donne, A. J. Smith quotes from it briefly with a view to illustrating that Donne's poems were little read in the 1840s. But Field's revisions in the manuscript show that he thought better of supposing that the members of the Percy Society were ignorant of Donne. He had first proposed to afford them "another opportunity of becoming acquainted with this learned and fanciful poet," but he changed this to "an opportunity of refreshing their acquaintance. . . ."[30]

Field's manuscript is better known through R. F. Brinkley's book of 1955, *Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century*, where the author reproduces Coleridge's marginalia on the *Songs and Sonnets* as they appeared in *The Literary World* for 1853.[31] In her notes Brinkley prints the variants from Field's manuscript; and she includes some of Field's prefatory remarks. Two things that neither Smith nor Brinkley mentions, however, are that Field opened up the question whether Donne's licentious verses ought to be printed and that he made two of Coleridge's most extensive annotations into a general introduction to Donne's poetry.

When in the course of his preface Field referred to the indecencies of many of Donne's poems, he took up an issue in which he had a longstanding interest, and he began to define one of the primary issues for interpreters of Donne's poetry for the remainder of the nineteenth century and beyond. For his part, Field admits that he suppressed from

his transcript one of the *Songs and Sonnets* (he omitted "Farewell to Love" without naming it) on the grounds of "indelicate obscurity." But he included many other poems that were later deemed offensively licentious by others, including such devotees as Grosart, Dowden, and Norton.[32]

Moreover, although Smith and Brinkley do not mention it, Field isolated the annotations that Coleridge had written next to "Womans Constancy" and "The Indifferent" in Lamb's volume; and he displaced them into a general introduction to Donne's poetry. His doing so might suggest that Field failed to recognize the intimate connections between these comments and the poems that seem to have occasioned them. Neither "Womans Constancy" nor "The Indifferent" was the object of much detailed commentary at any time in the nineteenth century; and one advantage of noting that Coleridge wrote the annotations next to these particular poems is that it shows how differently he was reading them from the way in which the biography-hunters were reading them in the latter part of the century.[33] Field's rearrangement does, however, show that the object of Coleridge's attention was the poetry, and not the secret life of the writer.

Long before T. S. Eliot had the honor of formulating for a new age a positive revaluation of Donne, Coleridge had begun to point out positive values in the qualities in Donne's verse that had long been deplored. Above all, Coleridge understood that Donne's poetry is metrically sophisticated: the first point that Coleridge makes, in the initial annotation inside the front cover of the volume, is that reading Donne's lines requires a sense of Time that has nothing to do with counting syllables.[34] Moreover, Coleridge intuited that Dr. Johnson had recognized Donne's remarkable talent without fully appreciating it; Johnson had seen in Donne the *discordia concors* and had spoken disapprovingly. For his part, Coleridge understood the "combination of dissimilar images," indeed the "discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike,"[35] to be a mark of imaginative power. From Coleridge's perspective, there were basic similarities between metaphysical wit and the secondary Imagination, which "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify."[36]

What Coleridge most valued in Donne was a vital capacity for creation, a teeming energy that could not be accounted for by the detached scrutiny that Dr. Johnson had applied to the poems. Coleridge believed that Donne was a poet of Imagination, but he qualified his praise in view of the poet's willfulness, which, according to Coleridge, compromised Donne's ability to discover truth in his poetry.[37] His comments, both his

praise of Donne and his reservations, were written specifically for Lamb, and some of them presuppose a common understanding of the nature of Shakespeare's greatness as the poet who came closest to expressing truth completely and as such provided the norm against which all other poets were to be judged.

As George Whalley has suggested, it is no accident that Coleridge should have come to appreciate Donne in the context of his own "most joyous and abiding friendship," with Lamb.[38] The "dominant tone" of the annotations "is set by Coleridge's sense of Lamb's imaginative presence. His perceptions are heightened by affection and by the certainty of sympathetic response." Some of the annotations are astonishingly candid; and these include ones that suggest that it was "through certain of Donne's poems [that] the encouraging and restoring virtue of love seems to have come to him."[39] It might further be speculated then that it is no accident that poems of vital sexual energy occasioned Coleridge's most exalted appreciations of Donne. What especially characterizes the annotations on "Womans Constancy," "The Indifferent," and "The Canonization" is the fact that they transcend the moralizing concerns that nearly all other commentators voiced in the face of such poems through the rest of the century. In his note on "The Indifferent," for instance, Coleridge contrasts Cowley with Donne on the grounds that Donne far surpasses his imitator not in the "populousness" or "activity" that appears in their poems but precisely in "*vigor.*" Donne's characteristic quality was an exuberant creativity that would "squander . . . golden Hecatombs on a Fetisch, on the first stick or straw met with at rising!" Coleridge admired "this pride of doing what he likes with his own," and remarked that Donne was "fearless of an immense surplus to pay all lawful Debts to self-subsisting Themes, that rule, while they create, the moral will."[40] "[T]his," says Coleridge, "is Donne," the poet who acted on the basis of a "purse-proud Opulence, of innate power."[41]

The annotation then rounds out the contrast between Donne and Cowley by concluding with a provocative analogy that profoundly associates Donne's willful, unpredictable, and inexplicable power of creativity with a similar power in nature:

> In the sluggish Pond the Waves roll this or that way: for such is the wind's direction/ but in the brisk Spring or Lake boiling with Bottom-winds—this way, that way, all ways—most irregular in the calm, yet inexplicable by the most violent ab extra Tempest.

As Whalley's note suggests, Coleridge seems here to have in mind a lake such as Windermere, which is subject to unpredictable winds that "produce effects difficult to explain in terms even of 'the most violent Tempest from outside.'" But the more useful gloss may be a remark from one of Coleridge's own letters later in 1811:

> There are two kinds of Heads in the world of literature. The one I would call, SPRINGS: the other, TANKS. The latter class, habituated to receiving only, full or low, according to the state of it's [sic] Feeders, attach[es] no distinct notion of living productions contradistinguished from mechanical formation.[42]

Donne, in short, had within him the secret springs of free creation; and he took great delight in demonstrating his freedom to exercise his creativity as he wished.

What Coleridge praised in Donne is closely akin to what Hazlitt had already begun to praise in Shakespeare, a "natural" power of creativity that was not to be chastened by the deadening conceptions of ordinary morality. Such a power, which Hazlitt (but not Coleridge) would find in *Measure for Measure*,[43] showed that Shakespeare was not a copier of Nature, but "a co-worker with nature, a collaborator with her rich treasures and abundant variety."[44] The power that celebrated the "teeming foison" of the natural world was as "indifferent" to merely conventional morality as the speaker in Donne's poem. It enabled the poet to see various sides of a question, and to adopt opposing viewpoints. Its complexity and variety insured that it would transcend ordinary rules and categories, even the faculties of perception.[45] From this perspective, Hazlitt judged Shakespeare, who seemed on the surface the least moral of writers, to be the writer *par excellence* to be read by the Society for the Suppression of Vice.[46] He would deliver readers from that narrow didacticism that indulges the tendency to glean moral lessons from literary texts.

Hazlitt himself, however, was one of the great resisters of the Donne revival. As late as 1818 he did not know Donne's poems; and when he finally read them, he seems not to have appreciated them.[47] But the annotations that Coleridge made on "The Indifferent" and "Womans Constancy" are reminiscent of Hazlitt's 1805 "Essay on the Principles of Human Action: Being an Argument in favour of the Natural Disinterestedness of the Human Mind." They seem, moreover, to anticipate Hazlitt's well-known remarks on Shakespeare's wealth of imaginative

power in the Lecture of 1818 on Shakespeare and Milton. Some of Coleridge's insight into the dramatic power of Donne's imagination may be owing to Hazlitt. The comment on "Womans Constancy," though written nearer the front of Lamb's copy, seems to presuppose the ideas about "profound . . . Thinking," "Will-worship," and "pride" expressed a few pages later in the comment on "The Indifferent":

> After all, there is but one Donne! & now tell me yet, wherein, *in his own kind*, he differs from the *similar* power in Shakespeare? Sh. was all men potentially except Milton—& they differ from him by negation, or privation, or both. This power of dissolving orient pearls, worth a kingdom! in a health to a Whore! this absolute Right of Dominion over all thoughts, that dukes are bid to clean his Shoes, and are yet honored by it! —But, I say, in this Lordliness of opulence, in which *the* Positive of Donne agrees with *a* Positive of Shakespeare, what is it that makes them *homoi*ousian, indeed; yet not homoousian?[48]

In Coleridge's eyes Shakespeare was the closest of all writers to being the perfect poet, to expressing the synthesis of truth that would reflect all the "self-subsisting Themes that rule, while they create, the moral will."[49] He could do virtually anything that any other writer, save Milton, could do. Donne could equal Shakespeare in one respect and was therefore "of *like essence*" with the Supreme Poet but not of one essence with him.

The term *homoousian* had been used in the Nicene Creed to express the relations of the Father and Son in the Godhead; and it was originally meant to exclude relegating the Son to the dubious status that He was given by the Arians. Many Origenists preferred the term *homoiousian*, in order to allow for sharper distinctions within the Godhead. Thus, Coleridge was suggesting that Donne was the real thing, but nonetheless not wholly identifiable with Shakespeare. This Donne was "of like essence with" the Shakespeare whom Hazlitt would later describe as being "all that others were, or that they could become," who "had in himself the germs of every faculty and feeling, . . . [and] could follow them by anticipation, intuitively, into all their conceivable ramifications, through every change of fortune or conflict of passion, or turn of thought."[50] Donne, whose "Positive" thus agreed with "*a* Positive of Shakespeare," lacked of course the extraordinary range of the Bard who "was all men potentially except Milton." But the Donne of the amatory lyrics was like

the Shakespeare of whom Hazlitt said, "When he conceived of a character, whether real or imaginary, he . . . entered into all its thoughts and feelings."[51] In love with life, as Shakespeare was, Donne might be said to have taken as much delight in conceiving the speaker of "The Apparition" as the speaker of "The Anniversarie."[52]

When Coleridge remarked that "The Canonization" was "one of [his] favorite poems," he was in part acknowledging Donne's ability to create a character like Antony, who lost the world for love. He was also noticing, as he says, that Donne's poems can be read as wholes; and he was aware that such well-wrought urns were created by the poet, that this was the remarkable accomplishment. But for the rest of the nineteenth century Coleridge's insight into Donne's achievement went largely unappreciated. Increasingly, readers seemed to be unable to imagine a distance between a creating mind and the particular roles in which a self is suggested, defined, and revealed. Instead they indulged an urge to collapse "Donne" into the roles taken on by his speakers. For some, this had the short-term benefit of making Donne more fascinating than he would otherwise have seemed. For others, it provided grounds for dismissing him.

III

Those who have traced the views of nineteenth-century precursors of Sir Herbert Grierson and T. S. Eliot have generally neglected to report on the less approving estimates of Donne and his poetry from the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s. In these years Donne's poetry was coming to be more widely read; and there were many who had misgivings. Troubled by the licentiousness of much of Donne's amatory poetry, several critics sought to enlist Coleridge's remarks about Donne's vigor and energy in an attempt to make the man and his work the ground for a new cautionary tale.

In the years after Coleridge's marginalia were published, several writers placed a negative estimate upon some of the qualities that Coleridge had admired in Donne. H. H. Milman contrasted the "control and discipline" evident in Donne's prose with the extravagance of his unruly verse: "what in those days was esteemed wit . . . ran wild in his poetry, and suffocated the graceful and passionate thoughts."[53] The views that G. L. Craik had first expressed in the 1840s were given broader circulation. Craik admitted that there is "abundance and originality" in Donne's verse, a "vein of the most exuberant wit" pouring forth from the sort of lunatic imagination that Shakespeare was exploring in the same period. Donne's "seething . . . brain" strove "to expend itself in all sorts of novel and wayward combinations, just as Shakespeare had

made it do in his Romeo and Juliet." In this view, Shakespeare's young lovers shared with many of Donne's poetical speakers the propensity to "exhaust all the eccentricities of language in their struggle to give expression to that inexpressible passion which had taken captive the[ir] whole heart and being." Still, Craik identified Donne's speakers with the poet himself when he judged that Donne's "wildness and extravagance" was "excusable" chiefly because he wrote his erotic verses in his youth.[54]

Others, less filled with admiration, repeated Dr. Johnson's charges, or amplified them with a variation on Coleridge's note on "The Indifferent." These critics claimed that Donne had been a child prodigy but squandered his considerable talents on useless book learning and trivial, dissolute poetic exercises.[55] Foremost here were George Gilfillan, Hippolyte Taine, and the American, Edwin Whipple.[56] According to Gilfillan, Donne was "a great genius ruined by a false system," whose poetry is a mixture of "spilt treasure" and "ingenious nonsense"; "even the worst passages," he says, "discover a great, though trammelled and tasteless mind."[57] In his *Histoire de la Littérature anglaise*, Taine depicted Donne as "a powerful poet, of a precise and intense imagination" who "deliberately abuse[d his] gifts" when he wrote mere trifles like "A Feaver" and "The Flea."[58] In Taine's view, metaphysical poetry represented a falling off from the noble accomplishments of the grand Elizabethan era.

Among those who proposed that Donne was decadent, Whipple proved especially merciless. In his view Donne's "insatiable intellectual curiosity" was his besetting sin from youth well into middle age. Donne had foolishly wasted a whole year of his life making "an elaborate examination of the points in dispute between the Romanists and the Reformers."[59] His lamentable "habits of intellectual self-indulgence" lasted long after his marriage; and for thirty years his "incessant study" masked a constitutional "indisposition to practical labor." Walton naively mistook this moral indolence for "humility." Donne had the "misfortune," wrote Whipple, "to know thoroughly the works of fourteen hundred writers, most of them necessarily worthless." All this "thought-suffocating learning" made his sermons a bore, just as it had ruined his attempts at poetry. The "amatory poems" are "characterized by a cold, hard, labored, intellectualized sensuality" that had "no excuse of passion for its violations of decency." It is no wonder therefore that at last Donne experienced "that worst of intellectual diseases, mental disgust," from which he spent most of his final years trying to recover.[60]

If Taine used the *Songs and Sonnets* to illustrate the prodigious waste of Donne's talents, Whipple instanced the amatory lyrics wherein Donne "found he could wittily justify what was vicious . . . [and]

unnatural."[61] Such judgments were not atypical. In these years there was a good bit of resistance to reviving Donne, on the grounds that the love poetry was indecent and evinced his one-time libertinism. Even as he claimed that he was looking forward to Grosart's new edition of Donne's poetry, Corser explained his own antipathy to Donne by complaining about the more salacious aspects of the verse. It is understandable, he suggested, that Donne, who "lived at a period when great licentiousness was tolerated" should have written some licentious poems, especially since he would surely have suppressed such verses had he lived into more enlightened times.[62] In Corser's view, civilized society had already progressed to a degree of refinement by the early eighteenth century that made Tonson's printing such poetry in 1719 an error of judgment. It is in light of this set of conceptions about the progress of civilization towards greater delicacy, refinement, and "health" that Grosart's preface to his two-volume edition of 1872-73 can be read.

In the Preface to the first volume, Grosart remarked that he had decided to defer his essay on the Life and Writings of Donne until the second volume. He had first, he explained, to devote his principal energies to justifying printing Donne's poems at all. His Preface began the whole enterprise as follows:

> I do not hide from myself that it needs courage (though I do not claim praise for its exercise) to edit and print the Poetry of Dr. JOHN DONNE in our day. Nor would I call it literary prudery that shrinks from giving publicity to such sensuous things (to say the least) as indubitably are found therein. Contrariwise the susceptibility that makes one so shrink is healthy and true, and its sharp though unvociferous warning may not safely be stifled. I deplore that Poetry, in every way almost so memorable and potential [sic], should be stained even to uncleanliness in sorrowfully too many places.[63]

Grosart then proceeded to list seven reasons for including Donne among the poets whose works he edited. Among them are the following: the fact that the edition is intended only for "fellow-booklovers and fellow-students" and will be available only by a "private circulation"; an acknowledgement that the problem derives at least in part because it is difficult to put together Donne's "afterlife," which was "so white and beautiful," with the licentious poetry of his youth, and a concomitant sense of obligation to be true to the facts of the historical record; and an awareness that "only through his Poetry" is Donne known "in the

fulness of his faculties."[64] In this way Grosart, although only a hundred-odd copies of his edition were printed, contributed to the revival not only by bringing out a new edition but by touching off a peculiar sort of interest in Donne's verses. He could scarcely have called more attention to the licentious verses than by beginning his whole enterprise by defending their publication.[65]

To the widespread notion which Grosart felt obliged to answer, that Donne's licentious poetry ought to be suppressed, there was added a second, more damning and more interesting notion, which Grosart helped to disseminate: that Donne himself, so far from being a true poet, had been a libertine. That Donne's youth had been unchaste was, by the 1870s, now being taken regularly for granted. Contrasting Donne with Herrick of the "jocond" muse, Grosart expressed a futile wish that the life of his present subject had also been "chast[e]." Grosart was convinced that Donne had "plunged into the immoralities" of his time and "sinned to the uttermost," and that his poems prove that "his youth was—not in theory or imagination merely, or phrase—profligate and 'gay' in the saddest meaning of the words."[66] More than Walton had ever intimated, Donne's biography was grace abounding to the chief of sinners. J. B. Lightfoot would make the comparison with Bunyan explicit.[67]

With Lightfoot the identification of Donne with the speakers of the "sensuous" poems became virtually complete. Seeking to praise the Jacobean preacher, he explained that, however "painful" it was to do so, he felt obliged to acknowledge that "at one time [Donne] had led an immoral life." Donne's "shame," he says, "is written across his extant poems in letters of fire. In some of these there are profligacies which it were vain to excuse as purely imaginative efforts of the poet." Nor could he excuse Donne's "prostituting the highest gifts of genius to a propaganda of vice and shame," for Donne's irresponsible action had deleterious effects on "generations yet unborn."[68] Attempting as he did to shore up Walton's myth of Donne's Augustinian conversion and to turn Coleridge's praise for the poet's creative powers into the basis for a moral lesson, Lightfoot epitomizes the resistance to a revival of Donne's poetry in these years. It was doomed to fail, but it was doomed, as well, to have its effects. In the latter years of the nineteenth century it was widely assumed that the love poems contained secret truths that had not yet been fully brought to light. To the general tendency to reduce the poems to so many data for the biographer seeking lurid and hidden truths, there is one notable exception.

IV

Among nineteenth-century estimates of Donne's poetry that contributed to the revival none has been more undeservedly neglected than William Minto's article, "John Donne," which appeared in *The Nineteenth Century* for 1880. Grierson acknowledged, in a letter to Joseph Duncan in 1951, that this article had stimulated his interest in Donne.[69] But Duncan himself, in his valuable account of the forty years following Grosart's edition, misrepresented Minto's argument. Minto had developed habits of close attention to language and style while writing *A Manual of English Prose Literature, Biographical and Critical* (1872) and *Characteristics of English Poets from Chaucer to Shirley* (1874). When he wrote the latter work, in which he provided chapters on Sidney, Daniel, Drayton, and many other Elizabethan and Jacobean writers, Minto showed no sign that he knew Donne's poetry. But by 1880, clearly, he had read Donne with close scrutiny. An unparalleled critical independence shines through in the article, even as Minto demonstrates that he had a wider and deeper knowledge of previous writing on Donne than anyone else who wrote before the 1890s.

Having read the major interpreters of Donne before him—Jonson and Carew and the writers of commendatory verses in the 1630s, Walton and Dr. Johnson, De Quincey and Coleridge, and Taine; having thought through, with an independence of mind virtually unprecedented by critics before him, the issues that these writers raised; and having read Donne's poetry with close attention to its historical context—Minto began his treatment of Donne with a consideration of readers' responses to the poetry. He based his defense of Donne against the charges of Taine (that metaphysical poetry represented a decadent degeneration of the glories of Elizabethan dramatic literature) on an argument that discriminates between poetry of the court and poetry of the stage; and drawing on what Ben Jonson had said about the dating of Donne's best verses, he pointed out that Donne began writing well before Shakespeare was in mid-career and that he wrote for a small coterie in the court, where "more veiled and intricate forms of utterance" were required than on the stage.[70] This contributed to the notion, common in the nineties, that there were secret dimensions in Donne's verse for the astute critic to discover.

Beyond pointing out that Donne had his own agenda as a court poet and was not simply a decadent follower of the Bard, Minto developed the Coleridgean notion that Donne was "of like essence" with Shakespeare. Arguing that the poetry of the court and the poetry of the stage cross-fertilized one another, Minto quoted from "The Indifferent" and

"Womans Constancy," the two poems on which Coleridge had written his most wide-ranging commentary, and more extensively from "The Funerall," to illustrate Donne's ability to shift "between jest and earnest" in the same poem.[71] Dr. Johnson missed this quality in Donne's verse, because he was unsympathetic to "impassioned mysticism and the subtle fancies born of it." Coleridge had for a long time missed it too. As he explained in his note on "The Canonization," as long as he persisted in looking for "grand lines and fine stanzas," he failed to see the relation of the part to the whole. Minto and Coleridge recognized, however, long before the New Critics made it a doctrine, that "there is no poet whose images are more closely interwoven with some central thought." Unable or unwilling to see this, Johnson had quoted "fragments torn from their context," with the result that Donne's poetry, known in bits and not by wholes, seemed "grossly absurd and unnatural" to critics who have no sympathy for Donne and, "like travellers, too often see only what they look for."[72]

Minto was convinced that, since "Literature must always be conditioned by its readers," a sympathetic understanding of Donne was necessary for just criticism. He therefore sought to offer an account of Donne's life that would make sense of the poetry. Although he drew upon Walton, he did so to raise new questions about the adequacy of the hallowed picture known through the popular *Life of Dr. Donne*. Aware that Walton had suppressed almost all mention of the erotic verses, Minto proposed an interpretation of that early poetry that recognized, as Gosse and others did not,[73] its profound relation to classical poetry, and implicitly to Ovid and Tibullus, whose poems stand behind the *Elegies*. Minto maintained that the real anomaly in Donne's life is that the "ardent bookworm . . . should have entered the lists with the erotic poets of the Court, and by the ascendancy of his wit have founded a new school." The paradox is not, said Minto, "that in the evening of his life he should have become or rather been made one of the pillars of the English Church."[74]

The critique of Walton's saintly Dr. Donne continues in Minto's contrast of the effect that a writer has on his contemporaries with that which he has on aftertimes: "the judgment of [a writer's] contemporaries is insensibly influenced by what they believe him to be capable of doing," but "posterity judges him by what he has done, what he has finished and left behind him." Whatever the power of the impression that Donne made on his contemporaries, the facts that he left behind for posterity to work with might suggest that he was more of an opportunist like Talleyrand than a convert like Augustine. But this is owing to the fact that Donne "was a man of many sides and many moods," that he played

roles like those defined by the speakers of his poems ("the sprightly 'indifferent'" as opposed to "John Donne the married man"), roles that included "Jack" Donne and "Doctor" Donne. Walton, like Dr. Johnson after him, had failed to see that what defined Donne was the ability to shift playfully, in a moment, and to shift back again. Still, Minto judged that this very flexibility was the real source of Donne's undoing, the reason that he "belongs to the class of failures in literature," who do not make an enduring mark. "No one mood had sufficient strength," Minto wrote, "to overbear all others, and compel all his powers into its service." Out of the mainstream in his own time, writing for only a small audience, rebelling against the "commonplaces" of Elizabethan poetry, Donne, for all the "superabundance" of his imaginative power and his unmistakable "genius," doomed himself to "a limited popularity."[75] There is an elegaic quality to Minto's conclusion, as he suggests that in aftertimes as well Donne's fit audience would be at best decidedly few in number.

A year after Minto had raised criticism of the poet to unprecedented heights the vulgarization of Donne's life and work culminated in Alice King's piece in *The Argosy*. Rewriting Walton for unfit readers, King sought to make Donne popular at the expense of all canons of accuracy. She asserted, for instance, that Donne made a "deep . . . mark" for himself at both Oxford and Cambridge; that he published a volume of poems in his teens; that he married privately because of "Family circumstances," and that from the day of the wedding "forward Donne's home life was one long floating down a sunny river."[76]

But the attempt to simplify Donne for the larger reading public failed. In 1882 a reviewer proclaimed, as if he were making the case for the first time, "As we read the works of Donne, we are amazed at the waste of learning expended on such frigid conceits"; and he announced that he felt "wholly indisposed to take the mental trouble of unravelling their meaning."[77] By the 1890s, it was Donne's "difficulty" that was attracting an unprecedented scholarly interest in the man and his work. George Saintsbury, who had known Minto since the 1860s when they were in Oxford, bestowed upon Donne a new respectability and made his work seem worthy of careful study. His remark, in his *History of Elizabethan Literature* (1887), that Donne "should be regarded with a respect only 'this side idolatry'"[78] provided a starting point for Edward Dowden's address before the Elizabethan Society in May, 1890.

V

The history of interpreting Donne's poetry took a decisive turn when Dowden compared Donne to the writer of the "dark lady" sonnets.[79] For if Shakespeare had unlocked his heart in his sonnets, his younger

contemporary was now thought to have done likewise in his amatory verses. Dowden took the notion that Donne had squandered his powers and made it a basis for comparing him with the Shakespeare who provided a poetic definition of lust in Sonnet 129. "There is indeed a large expense of spirit in the poems of Donne," he remarked, "an expense of spirit not always judicious or profitable, and the reader who comes with reasonable expectations will get a sufficient reward."[80]

At this point readers were invited to assume that the more licentious verses hold dark secrets about the poet, secrets that were of their nature elusive and to be extracted only with great difficulty by professionally trained interpreters. The criticism initiated by Dowden is filled with the language of difficulty and elusiveness. The reader, like a prospector for gold, said Dowden, must take up a difficult but promising task. Donne's poems were to be understood not by placing them in literary history or by supposing that Donne was the founder of a school; they had to be understood with reference to the poet's own life. Dowden placed many of the verses, and not only the poems of parting, in biographical contexts. He seemed to caution against too ready an assumption that all Donne's poems are to be read biographically: "it were rash to take all his poems of intrigue as passages of autobiography. He sometimes wrote best, or thought he wrote best, when his themes were wholly of the imagination." But Dowden could not resist the biographical questions to which Donne's poems give rise. As soon as he cited "The Perfume" as a poem evidently not written to Ann More, he held out the possibility that it may have been "connected with some earlier passion."[81]

By the 1890s it was widely understood that Donne's "difficulty" had a good deal to do with the longstanding neglect of his poetry, a plight that was increasingly blamed upon Walton's "deliberate" neglect of Donne's poetic career. Vernon Blackburn, introducing an edition of the *Lives* for the English Classics series, observed that "as a critic of poetry" Walton was "exceeding defective." The criticism of Walton, in fact, helps to define the climate in which Edmund Gosse brought out his biography in 1899: "The first very curious and interesting matter to note in connexion with [Walton's] artless composition," Blackburn wrote,

> is the deliberate—I had almost written the sinful—suppression of Donne's secular career. Donne, the literary artist, the poet of high-sounding phrase, scarcely exists in these prattling pages. . . . The early years of poetic inspiration are to this unscrupulous biographer a matter for gloomy silence. . . . The reader, therefore, is prepared to find a 'penitential' rather than a poetic Donne.[82]

That Donne's "difficulty" was intimately connected with fascinating biographical questions at once attracted biographers and proved a source of discouragement. It is well known that Augustus Jessopp, who had been collecting materials on Donne since the 1850s, despaired of writing about Donne's poetry and in the 1890s finally turned his materials over to Gosse.

Gosse himself had written on Donne as early as the mid 1870s (for the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*), when he was working with Minto. Around the time Minto's article appeared, Gosse announced his intention to undertake "what was perhaps the most imposing task left to the student of Elizabethan and Jacobean literature," a biography of Donne.[83] By 1886, when John Churton Collins published in *The Quarterly Review* his humiliating criticism of Gosse's *Life of Gray*, Gosse felt that he had something to prove; and the challenge of writing Donne's biography seemed especially attractive.[84] But, as Gosse's most recent biographer has reported, the difficulties he encountered with the misprints and chronology of Donne's letters were compounded "under the intense irritation caused by some features of Donne's character."[85] It was chiefly his enduring admiration for Donne's poetry that separated him from Jessopp and motivated him to persevere. Even the poetry caused Gosse great problems, however. He criticized it severely for the very characteristics which had long been deplored in metaphysical poetry; and less than two years before his biography appeared he announced, "No one has injured English writing more than Donne."[86]

Everywhere in the 1890s writers were speaking of Donne's "difficulty" and "obscurity." In 1896, Clyde Furst gave wider circulation to a remark that had recently appeared in *The Dial* (Chicago): "Donne is the most baffling of the minor poets. . . . A number of men have tried their hands, and yet no lover of Donne feels that anything adequate has been said."[87] The guiding assumption in Arthur Symons's article of 1899 is that Donne's life needs to be interpreted, for he was "a difficult poet" and "a very ambiguous human being."[88] Donne, said Richard Garnett, paraphrasing Goethe, "will remain perpetually an object of interest, inasmuch as . . . he is not merely a problematic but a daemonic man."[89]

The increasing interest in Donne was partly a function of the appearance of two new editions of his poems in 1895, the Muses' Library edition produced in England and the Grolier Club edition issued in America.[90] As the poetry came to be more widely read, interest in the possibility of altering Walton's portrait and revising Dr. Johnson's criticisms seems almost to have necessitated believing that the love lyrics could and should be read biographically. The tendency to suppose that love-poems, in particular, provide a privileged access to a secret life

came increasingly to be indulged as a means of establishing that Donne's personality was fascinating and that his poetry was sincere.

By the late nineteenth century, as Duncan has reported,[91] it was common to compare Donne with Hamlet and to present him as a modern, rebelling against the strict patterns of conformity that had afflicted even a pre-Victorian era. Donne was said to be "ambiguous" and "elusive," his poetry "difficult"; and, even as more and more biographical data became available, his life was thought to have involved many secrets and his character was said to remain "impenetrable." A biographer, trying "to penetrate the inner life," would of necessity, said Leslie Stephen, have to perform "a great deal of guesswork," since Donne's whole life had been "one long problem in casuistry for Donne himself."[92] As a "psychologist," said Garnett of Donne's modern biographer, Gosse "has set—or rather reset—the world a puzzle which will last it forever."[93]

Some years before he finally went to work on *The Life and Letters*, Gosse himself had presented the essential task in similar terms: "Donne is himself the paradox of which he sings," and "there is no writer [of the Jacobean age] who demands more careful study than this enigmatical and subterranean master, this veiled Isis." Gosse proposed that Donne's failure to publish his work was fraught with meaning that it would take a master psychologist to discover: "For the secresy with which the poems of Donne were produced no adequate reason is forthcoming."[94] But the way forward, Gosse was already suggesting, lies in the secrets of the *Songs and Sonnets*, "the most interesting" of Donne's poems, because they "are extremely personal, confidential, and vivid; the stamp of life is on them." In these poems Donne "confess[es] with extraordinary frankness and clearness [his] passion." Yet "they are so reserved in detail, so immersed and engulfed in secresy, that no definite conjecture can be hazarded as to the person, or persons, or the class of persons, to whom they were addressed."[95]

The temptation to construe the poems as the bearers of a secret history proved very great. As Furst put it, Donne "seems to have been, as became every good courtier of his day, an ardent lover, and the somewhat unsafe practice of constructing from a poet's work cycles of poems illustrative of his life, may be indulged in, in the case of Donne's love lyrics, with comparative safety."[96]

Gosse, too, claimed that his biographical researches, based not only on painstaking work with the letters but also with the poetry, had surmounted "dangers." In presenting his reconstruction of Donne's life, he acknowledged that there were perils involved in "conjectural reconstruction," only to dismiss them by insistence upon his quasi-scientific

method. The amatory verses of Spenser and Drayton were said to be beyond the capacities of the "most ingenious reader" because they provide too "shadowy and nebulous [a] basis [for] any superstructure of conjectural biography." But the fact that the licentious verses were not published in Donne's lifetime was now taken as evidence that this poet, whose works are full of "curious alternations of cautious reserve and bold confession," provides a special case: there was something (an illicit liaison) "which could not be confessed." There are "few cases in literary history," Gosse alleged, where the "method [of 'conjectural reconstruction' is] more legitimate than here." Although Donne's life between 1592 and 1602 "is shrouded in a mist" and his movements are "tantalisingly concealed" "behind . . . smoke and twilight," his poems have "so convincing" an "accent . . . that it is impossible not to believe [they contain] the accurate record of a genuine emotional event."[97] What the biographer needs, he explained at the outset of his enterprise, is "some intrepidity and a great deal of patience," "to make [the letters] tell a consecutive and intelligible tale."[98] By the time he reached chapter III, Gosse had added to the letters the lyric poems: "It will be our business in the present biography," he remarked, "to break up this inchoate mass of verses, and to redistribute it as carefully as possible, so as to let it illustrate the life of its author."

Seeking to "reveal" Donne's darkest secrets and "to show the value of what is hidden," Gosse revealed more about his own methods and assumptions than he did about Donne. While he did perform a good bit of archival research, research that could yield genuine understanding of biographical contexts, Gosse proceeded rather like an alchemist, trying to make his repeated readings of the letters and poems a sufficient means for extracting biographical discoveries. Gosse charged all other biographers since Walton with "attempting to conceal those tenebrous and fiery evidences" of Donne's youth, when "a magnificent rebel," "one of the most headstrong and ingenious intellects of the century [was] . . . concentrating itself on the evolution of its own *vita sexualis*." In the hands of a trained biographer, Gosse insisted, "there is hardly a piece of [Donne's] genuine verse which, cryptic though it may seem, cannot be prevailed upon to deliver up some secret of his life and character."

Describing the scientific methodology that he was using to reveal for "the first time . . . [the] full life of Donne," Gosse, lest he be mistaken for a betrayer of professional secrets, presented his work as a sort of joint enterprise also engaged in by a guilty reader: "careful study" of Donne's case, "after twenty readings" has led to a breaking of "the first obscure crust" and the revelation of "a condition of mind and even a sequence of events so personal, that we hardly dare to take our legitimate advantage

from it." But inasmuch as it was Donne's own "want of common prudence" in writing and in leaving behind "powerful verses" that reveal "the adventures of the soul," it is allowable "to reconstruct the story," as there is "almost [no] danger of a mistake" that might misrepresent the truth.[99] It was thought justifiable to seek secret truths, moreover, because they were likely to contain healthy moral lessons that would silently justify what might otherwise seem a merely prurient interest.

To the language of difficulty and obscurity, then, was added a language of secrecy and discovery. "One reason why Donne's love poems were so full of feeling," wrote Furst, "was discovered when it was learned, shortly after Christmas of the year 1600, that he had secretly married the daughter of Sir George Moore."[100] This was not mere detective's language—it had the ring of a scientific enterprise. The reviewer of Chambers's edition for *The Quarterly Review* confidently pronounced that "The workings of [Donne's] own heart and soul are indeed his only theme. . . . he is the mere diarist of his own feelings." And he sought to uncover the secret that links Donne to Keats in their common "method": "the method of sensuous suggestion, the method of the true impressionist."[101] Garnett praised Gosse's biography as being "both entirely sympathetic and entirely scientific," so that it "commands our full assent."[102]

As Leslie Stephen's review attests, Gosse did not convince everyone that Donne had had an affair with a married woman in 1596.[103] But the effects of Gosse's approach were far reaching.[104] Thirty years later T. S. Eliot claimed that no one credited Gosse any longer. But it took a good deal of work to discredit him; and long after 1931 critics continued to feel that it was necessary to insist again and again that the "persona" in Donne's poems be distinguished from the poet.

The history of how Donne's poetry was read in the nineteenth century, and its implications for understanding the change in the prevailing idea of what one meant by the word "Donne," are in some measure a story of resistance to reading Donne's amatory verses as performances of the sort that Coleridge and Minto admired. Once dissatisfaction with Walton's neglect of Donne's poetry became intense, it became increasingly tempting to suppose that a shortcut to knowledge about Donne could be found by reading the love poems as confessions about the poet's secret life. The pressure to identify "Donne" with the roles taken by the speakers in his poems became overwhelming by the time that Gosse wrote; and there is reason to wonder whether the revival could have taken place under circumstances different from the intensely biographical concerns that readers of the late nineteenth century brought to the texts. Still, Coleridge's marginalia on the *Songs and*

Sonnets and Minto's delineation of a playful Donne attest that another path was sometimes taken. They provide evidence that a radically different, and more appreciative, reading of Donne's poetry was possible; and it is an index of the narrowness of the later nineteenth century's "synecdochical understanding" of Donne that even those who were attending to a larger portion of the poetry than their predecessors had were sometimes inclined to reduce it to a few of its moral themes, or to make of it so much pulp with which to feed vulgar curiosity about the sex life of the man who had become Dean of St. Paul's.[105]

* * *

By way of appendix, I should like to add a final word about shifting conceptions of the relations between Donne's poetry and his biography. If "difficulty" and "elusiveness" were the keynote in much of the best writing about Donne in the last years of the century, the way to Gosse's biography of 1899 was paved by a reduction of three kinds of obscurity about Donne and by an enhancing of a fourth. One sort of obscurity had to do with aspects of Donne's life. Many important details were now thought, not despite Walton but because of him, to be largely unknown. But the details of Donne's earlier life were assumed to be nonetheless knowable; and Jessopp and others had been doing painstaking work to bring them to light. Second, Donne had seemed obscure because the texts of his poems were uncertain, and Grosart's bungling edition had exacerbated the problem. But E. K. Chambers's edition was such a dramatic improvement that its first reviewers assumed that it would be definitive.[106] And third, Donne seemed obscure because of his "own tendency to subtlety of thought and fondness for conceits," as Charles Eliot Norton called them. But shrewd readers, said Norton, thinking of his friend, James Russell Lowell, had recognized that these obscurities only tease us for a time, before yielding up happy solutions to delight us. The interpretive pleasures to be got from reading Donne's poems were well known to readers and especially to poets, from Lowell and Emerson to Browning and Yeats.

Interestingly, it was Norton, the textual critic, in his article on "The Text of Donne's Poems," who defined the fourth and most fascinating kind of obscurity connected with Donne, the perpetual puzzle. In doing so he isolated the basic question about Donne at the end of the nineteenth century. It was not a question, as we might suppose (knowing that Grierson's monumental work was yet to come), about the state of the text. "The main perplexity in the reading of Donne arises, indeed," wrote Norton, "from no difficulty of the text, but from uncertainty how far the poems are the expression of genuine feeling, or dramatic utterances of feigned emotion and fictitious sentiment."[107] It is a question that might

once again engage Donne studies in the late twentieth century, after a period of intense reaction against the excesses of the likes of Gosse. As important as *The Life and Letters* was for stimulating interest in Donne, it now appears more like a late nineteenth-century novel than a biography designed to enhance a reader's pleasures with Donne's poetry.[108]

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Notes

[1] See *The Lives of Donne, Wotton, Hooker, Herbert & Sanderson* (London: Macmillan, 1925), p. 219.

[2] [Coventry Patmore], "Gallery of Poets. No. 1.—John Donne," *Lowe's* 1 (1846), 228.

[3] I am currently at work on a study of Minto's role in the Donne revival.

[4] See the important work of Raoul Granqvist, *The Reputation of John Donne 1779-1873* (Uppsala, dissertation, 1975), chs. I-III.

[5] But cf. Kathleen Tillotson, "Donne's Poetry in the Nineteenth Century (1800-1872)," in *Elizabethan and Jacobean Studies Presented to Frank Percy Wilson in honour of his seventieth birthday* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959), p. 312. See also Granqvist, pp. 124-37.

[6] [J. Spence], "Donne's Poems," *Retrospective Review* 8 (1823), 31-55.

[7] See Tillotson, p. 313. Cf. Roland B. Botting, "The Reputation of John Donne During the Nineteenth Century," *Research Studies of the State College of Washington* 9 (1941), 145, 151, 154. Cf. also Jane Campbell, *The Retrospective Review (1820-1828) and the Revival of Seventeenth-Century Poetry*, Waterloo Lutheran Univ. Monograph Series (Waterloo, Ontario: Waterloo Lutheran Univ., 1972), pp. 16, 53-56. In the 1840s when Barron Field sent his transcript of the *Songs and Sonnets* and of Coleridge's marginalia to the Percy Society (see below), he referred to the article approvingly (p. viii).

[8] *Collectanea Anglo-Poetica: or, a Bibliographical and Descriptive Catalogue of a Portion of a Collection of Early English Poetry*, Part V, published by the Chetham Society, 91 (1873), 226. See also Charles D[exter] Cleveland, *A Compendium of English Literature* (1847; Philadelphia: Biddle, 1854), p. 166n.

[9] See M. M. D., "Essay on the Genius of Cowley, Donne, and Clieveland," *European Magazine* 82 (1822), 111-12.

[10] See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), esp. pp. 51-73. Cf. Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience, Victoria to Freud; Vol. I: Education of the Senses; Vol. II: The Tender Passion* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1984-86).

[11] *Poems of John Donne*, ed. E. K. Chambers, with an introduction by George Saintsbury, 2 vols. (London: G. Routledge; New York: Dutton [1895]), p. xxv. Bradford's article, "The Poetry of Donne," originally appeared in the *Andover Review* 18 (1892), 350-67. The reference here is from p. 365. Bradford later incorporated his article into *A Naturalist of Souls. Studies in Psychography* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1917), pp. 25-59.

[12] These figures are based on my work annotating all that was written on the *Songs and Sonnets* in the nineteenth century, which has been carried out in connection with the Donne Variorum project.

[13] See Robert Fallon, "The Reputation of *The Songs and Sonets* in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," unpublished paper, p. 1.

[14] Walton, p. 220; *Ben Jonson. Vol. I: The Man and His Work*, ed. C. H. Hereford and Percy Simpson, 11 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1925-52), p. 135.

[15] In America they were omitted in the edition of Ezekiel Sanford, *The Works of the British Poets* (Philadelphia: Mitchell, Ames, and White, 1819).

[16] "Cowley," in *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1905), I, 34.

[17] [Anna Brownell Murphy Jameson], *Memoirs of the Loves of the Poets. Biographical Sketches of Women Celebrated in Ancient and Modern Poetry* (1829; New York: Harper, 1833), p. 76.

[18] Lewes is generally thought to be the author of an unsigned article titled "Donne's Poetical Works" published in *The National Magazine and Monthly Critic* 9, no. 9 (April 1838), 373-78; see A. J. Smith, *John Donne: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 367, 370.

[19] Walton, p. 220.

[20] (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1905). Norton's Preface began by noting that he had omitted a number of poems on the grounds that they "offend by a license of speech more pardonable at the time when they were written than it is to-day" (p. v). Norton's omissions included "The Apparition," "The Sunne Rising," "The Indifferent," "Loves Usury," "Breake of Day," "Communitie," "Confined Love," "The Flea," "The Curse," "Farewell to Love," and several other poems.

[21] Alexander Chalmers, ed., *The Works of the English Poets from Chaucer to Cowper*, 21 vols. (London: J. Johnson et al., 1810), I, vii.

[22] *The Reflector* 1, no. 2 (1812), 365-74. In the article Hunt's interlocutor is designated as "A." But in the copy now in the British Library, the authors of various articles (including this one) are identified, in pencil, in the Table of Contents. Field contributed a number of other articles to *The Reflector* in 1812, including one on Shakespeare and several on legal subjects.

[23] *Reflector*, I, 365, 370, 374, 373, respectively.

[24] *Works of the English Poets*, V, 123.

[25] Smith, ed., *Critical Heritage*, p. 369.

[26] "Gallery of Poets," p. 229.

[27] "Dr. Donne," *Arcturus* 2 (1841), 26.

[28] *The Every-day Book and Table Book; or, Everlasting Calendar of Popular Amusements*, 3 vols. (1829; London: Tegg and Son, 1835), II, 353-54; entry for March 9.

[29] In the intervening years Field had written the principal part of the obituary of "Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Esq." for *The Annual Biography and Obituary: 1835*, vol. 19 (London: Longman et al., 1835), pp. 320-61. (For identification of the author, see *NUC*, Pre-1956 Imprints, 171:531.) He had also written a literary life of Wordsworth, "Memoirs of the Life and Poetry of William Wordsworth, with extracts of his letters to the Author," 3 vols., Brit. Mus. Add. Mss. 41325, 41326, 41327.

[30] Quotations from Field's manuscript appear by permission of the Houghton Library.

[31] The complete marginalia are now available in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 12: Marginalia II*, ed. George Whalley (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 213-43. Whalley provides a history of their publication, pp. 213-15. My quotations of the Donne marginalia are from this edition. I consulted the originals in the relevant copy of the 1669 edition of Donne's *Poems* (now in the Beinecke Library at Yale) to ascertain their positions on each page.

[32] For Norton's views, see the Preface to his 1905 edition of *The Love Poems of John Donne*, p. v.

[33] The two annotations appear alongside "Womans Constancy" and "The Indifferent" in the volume; and despite their general nature, they do not appear any different from the annotations that appear next to many other poems.

[34] In an unpublished thesis of 1954, Helen Kathryn Sterling concluded that Coleridge's most unqualified praise for Donne's poetry had to do with its rhythm; Coleridge, she explained, assumed that if there were a difficulty in ascertaining the rhythm either the printer or the reader was at fault. See "Unpublished Marginalia by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in a Volume of John Donne's Poetry," M.A. thesis, University of Nevada 1954, p. 34. (There is a copy of this thesis in the Beinecke Library at Yale.)

[35] See Johnson, "Cowley," *Lives*, I, 20.

[36] *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1983), chap. 13; I, 304.

[37] See Sterling, p. 6.

[38] Whalley, "The Harvest on the Ground: Coleridge's *Marginalia*," *UTQ* 38 (1968-69), 273-74.

[39] Whalley, pp. 265-67.

[40] The publication of this annotation in *The Literary World* (1853) added the word "cannot" between "they" and "create"; and this error was reproduced in other transcriptions but has been corrected in Whalley's new edition.

[41] *Marginalia II*, pp. 219-20.

[42] *Unpublished Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Including Certain Letters Republished from Original Sources*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 2 vols. (London: Constable, 1932), II, 61; quoted by Sterling, p. 42.

[43] Note esp. I.iv. 39-44, in the Arden edition of *Measure for Measure*, ed. J. W. Lever (London: Methuen, 1965). For Hazlitt's views on the play, see *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols. (London: Dent, 1930-34), IV, 345-49; for Coleridge's, see *Lectures and Notes on Shakespere and Other English Poets*, collected by T. Ashe (1884; rpt. Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1972), pp. 299, 409, 531-32. What Coleridge found "hateful" about the play was chiefly the travesty of justice entailed in Angelo's finally escaping punishment. (All my quotations from Hazlitt are from Howe's edition.)

[44] See the account given by John L. Mahoney, in *The Logic of Passion: The Literary Criticism of William Hazlitt* (1973; rpt. New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 1981), pp. 48-59; the quotation here is from p. 48.

[45] Cf. Herschel Baker, *William Hazlitt* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1962), p. 278; cited in Mahoney, pp. 51-52.

[46] See *Works*, V, 283.

[47] Hazlitt, "On Dryden and Pope," *Works*, V, 83; "On Cowley, Butler, Suckling, etc.," *Works*, VI, 51-53.

[48] *Marginalia II*, pp. 218-19.

[49] Cf. Sterling, pp. 48-49.

[50] Hazlitt, *Works*, V, 47.

[51] William Hazlitt, "On Shakespeare and Milton," *Works*, V, 47-48.

[52] I should like to thank John L. Mahoney and J. Robert Barth, S.J., for generously sharing their knowledge of Coleridge with me in discussions of the marginalia.

[53] *Annals of S. Paul's Cathedral* (London: John Murray, 1868), p. 329.

[54] *A Compendious History of English Literature*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner, 1863), I, 579-80. Cf. Craik's *Sketches of the History of Literature and Learning in England*, 4 vols. (London: Charles Knight, 1845), III, 168-70. A similar view can be found in J. C. M. Bellew's *Poet's Corner* (London: Routledge & Sons, 1868), pp. 188-89.

[55] See John W. Hales, "John Donne," in *The English Poets: Selections* with Critical Introductions by Various Writers and a general introduction by Matthew Arnold, ed. Thomas Humphry Ward, 4 vols. (1880; rpt. New York: Macmillan, 1924), I, 558-60. For an account of similar charges against Donne from the earlier part of the century, see Botting, pp. 158-59.

[56] Whipple's criticism of Donne seems not to have been generally known in England. Saintsbury, in his *History of Criticism and Literary Taste*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1904), III, 642-43, says that he had read Whipple's early works from 1849; but he makes no mention of Whipple's later work on Donne or the Elizabethans.

[57] *Specimens with Memoirs of the Less-Known British Poets*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1860), I, 203.

[58] My quotations are from H. van Laun's translation, *History of English Literature* (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1871), I, 203-04.

[59] Edwin P. Whipple, *The Literature of the Age of Elizabeth* (Boston: Fields, Osgood, 1869), p. 230.

[60] Whipple, pp. 230-38, passim. Similar views were put to more conspicuously didactic purposes by Esther J. Trimble in *A Hand-book of English and American Literature* (Philadelphia: Eldredge & Brother, 1883), p. 76, a book designed "For the Use of Schools and Academies."

[61] Whipple, p. 232.

[62] See Corser, p. 227.

[63] Grosart, I, ix.

[64] Grosart, I, x-xi.

[65] This is likewise true of Norton's Preface to *The Love Poems of John Donne*, published thirty-three years later.

[66] "Essay on the Life and Writings of Donne," II, xvii.

[67] "Donne, the Poet-Preacher" (1877), reprinted in *Historical Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1895), p. 225.

[68] Lightfoot, pp. 227-28.

[69] See *The Revival of Metaphysical Poetry, The History of a Style, 1800 to the Present* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1959), p. 217.

[70] Minto, "John Donne," *The Nineteenth Century* 7 (1880), 845-63.

[71] Minto, p. 856. Duncan misread the argument here, supposing that Minto had thought Donne's wit "unconscious and sincere rather than . . . deliberate and playful." But in fact, Minto had argued just the opposite: that Donne's poetry evinces a deliberate playfulness that constituted a "new departure in the trifling style."

[72] Minto, passim.

[73] Gosse in fact had recognized the Ovidian inspiration of Donne's elegies in "The Poetry of John Donne," *Littell's's Living Age*, 5th series, 84 (1893), 431. This article was reprinted from *The New Review* and was incorporated into *The Jacobean Poets* (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1894). But by the time he propounded his theory, in the *Life and Letters* (1899), that Donne had an affair with a married woman in 1596, Gosse seems to have forgotten what he once knew about Donne's affair with Ovid and Tibullus.

[74] Minto, pp. 847, 853.

[75] Minto, passim.

[76] "John Donne," *The Argosy* 32 (1881), 299-301.

[77] In a review of Thomas H. Ward's *English Poets*, *Quarterly Review* 153 (1882), 443.

[78] (London: Macmillan, 1887), p. 150.

[79] In the 1890s it became fairly common to compare Donne to the Shakespeare of the sonnets. See Frederic Ives Carpenter, Introduction, *English Lyric Poetry 1500-1700* (London: Blackie, 1897), pp. lx, lxiii; Gosse, *A Short History of Modern English Literature* (1897; New York: D. Appleton, 1898), p. 123. John White Chadwick (in "John Donne, Poet and Preacher," *The New World* 9 [1900], 38) claimed that hate-poems like "The Curse," "The Message," and "The Prohibition" were "such an amplification of Shakespere's One Hundred and Twenty-ninth Sonnet as literature does not afford elsewhere." Cf. Charles Kains Jackson's view that Donne was "the true successor of the Elizabethan Marlowe" (p. 106), in "John Donne: An Appreciation," *The Artist and Journal of Home Culture* 15 (1894), 105-07.

[80] "The Poetry of John Donne," *The Fortnightly Review* n.s. 47 (1890), 791.

[81] Dowden, p. 801.

[82] Introduction to Walton's *Lives of Doctor John Donne*, etc., English Classics, ed. W. E. Henley (London: Methuen, 1895), pp. xv, xiii, respectively. Cf. also Charles Hill Dick, Introduction to Walton's *Lives*, the Scott Library (London: Walter Scott, [1899]), pp. vii-xi.

[83] Quoted from Evan Charteris, *The Life and Letters of Sir Edmund Gosse* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1931), p. 255.

[84] See Clement H. Wyke, "Edmund Gosse as Biographer and Critic of Donne: His Fallible Role in the Poet's Rediscovery," *TSLL* 17 (1975-76), 805-19.

[85] Anne Thwaite, citing Gosse's *Books on the Table* in *Edmund Gosse: a Literary Landscape, 1849-1928* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press; London: Secker & Warburg, 1984), pp. 397-99.

[86] *A Short History of Modern English Literature*, p. 123.

[87] Furst, "The Life and Poetry of Dr. John Donne, Dean of St. Paul's," *The Citizen* 2 (1896), 229.

[88] Symons, "John Donne," *The Fortnightly Review n.s. 66* (1899), 734.

[89] Garnett, "Mr. Gosse's Life of Donne," *The Bookman* 10 (1899-1900), 583.

[90] The two-volume Grolier Club edition (New York) was prepared by James Russell Lowell and included a preface, introduction, and notes by Charles Eliot Norton. The Muses' Library edition (cf. note 11 above) was announced by Lawrence and Bullen in August, 1893; and Charles Kains Jackson complained in the following year (*The Artist and Journal of Home Culture*, p. 105) that it had "never appeared." It seems first to have been published in London by G. Routledge and in America by E. P. Dutton, in 1895. In 1896, it was issued in London by Lawrence and Bullen and in New York by Charles Scribner's & Sons. On the independent appearance of the Grolier Club and Muses' Library editions, see Norton, "The Text of Donne's Poems," *Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature. Vol V: Child Memorial Volume* (Boston: Ginn, 1896), p. 4.

[91] *The Revival of Metaphysical Poetry*, p. 117.

[92] Stephen, *Studies of a Biographer*, 2nd series, vol. 3 (New York: G. P. Putnam's; London: Duckworth, 1902), pp. 39-40. This work incorporated a revised version of Stephen's essay from *The National Review* 34, no. 202 (December, 1899).

[93] Garnett, p. 582.

[94] Gosse, Preface, *Seventeenth-Century Studies. A Contribution to the History of English Poetry* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, 1883), p. ix; *Littell's*, p. 430.

[95] Gosse, *Littell's*, p. 433.

[96] Furst, p. 232.

[97] *The Life and Letters of John Donne*, 2 vols. (London: Heinemann, 1899), I, ch. III, passim.

[98] *Life and Letters*, I, viii.

[99] *Life and Letters*, ch. III, passim.

[100] Furst, p. 233.

[101] Anonymous, *Quarterly Review* 185 (1897), 179, 178, respectively.

[102] Garnett, p. 583.

[103] For another criticism of this "pure chimera," see the anonymous review (it was the work of C. E. Norton) in *The Nation* 70 (1900), 111-13, 133-35. For a more sanguine appraisal, which singles out the chapter "on the lyric poems" for praise, see the anonymous review in *Book Reviews* 7 (1899), 482-83.

[104] For an evaluation of Gosse's biography and its influence, see Wyke, pp. 805-19.

[105] The phrase "synecdochical understanding" derives from John R. Roberts, "John Donne's Poetry: An Assessment of Modern Criticism," *John Donne Journal* 1 (1982), 62-63.

[106] See Norton, "The Text of Donne's Poems," pp. 1-19.

[107] "The Text of Donne's Poems," p. 18.

[108] For their criticisms of an earlier draft of this article, I should like to thank Rosemarie Bodenheimer and Dennis Flynn.