John Donne Journal
Vol. 35 (2016)

Book Reviews

"Well of Sence"

Theresa M. DiPasquale

The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne. Vol. 3. *The Satyres*. Gary A. Stringer, General Editor; Jeffrey S. Johnson, Principal Co-Volume Commentary Editor; Dennis Flynn and M. Thomas Hester, Co-Volume Commentary Editors; Brian Blackley, Anne James, Paul J. Stapleton, and Julie W. Yen, Contributing Commentary Editors; Donald R. Dickson, Textual Editor; Gary A. Stringer and Ted-Larry Pebworth, Senior Textual Editors; with the assistance of Ernest W. Sullivan, II, Senior Textual Editor, and Dennis Flynn and Tracy E. McLawhorn, Assistant Textual Editors; Indiana University Press, 2015. 1049 pages.

As many readers of this journal will know, Gary A. Stringer won, and accepted on behalf of the *Variorum* team, the 2015–16 Modern Language Association Prize for a Scholarly Edition. In honoring *The Satyres* volume, the MLA acknowledged the enormous achievement of Stringer and the entire *Variorum* cadre. They have not only revolutionized the study of John Donne's poetry but also have advanced the field of textual editing more broadly, and—through innovations in collation software and the creation of the DigitalDonne website—contributed greatly to the development of digital humanities.

Contemplating the sheer vastness of the *Variorum* undertaking is not for the faint of heart; but anyone who feels discouraged by the petty power politics of contemporary academe ought to read the final

pages of the "Introduction to Volume 3" for a sense of the long and heroic collaborative effort that has borne fruit in this particular 1049-page volume.[1] The poems included are Donne's five formal verse satires, the under-studied 520-line *Infinitati Sacrum . . . Metempsychosis Poema Satyricon*, and verses in English and Latin that Donne wrote for inclusion among the many satirical panegyrics in *Coryats Crudities* (1611). The volume ought to be consulted not only by students of Donne interested in the *Satyres* specifically, but by anyone pursuing scholarly and critical projects in early modern English literature. For it is not on the cutting edge of scholarship; it is that cutting edge.

In the "Introduction to Volume 3," Gary Stringer outlines the evolution the *Variorum* project, noting that, while "*The Satyres* is the fifth" volume of the *Donne Variorum* to be published, it is "the first to make a thoroughgoing use of the stemmatalogical method in its handling of the text."[2] This method involves a process that the editors "had not imagined at the beginning of the project": that is, the development of "full stemmas . . . illustrating the familial relationships discernable among the existing textual artifacts" and "tracing down a genealogical tree the step-by-step deterioration of the text from the lost holograph (or holographs, in cases involving revision) to its various embodiments in the extant manuscripts and prints."[3] Volume 3 includes stemmas for each of Donne's five formal verse satires and for *Metempsychosis*. In addition, the editors provide many helpful charts presenting such data as "Sequencing and Placement of Satyres in the 17th-Century Manuscripts" (Figure 2), "Placement of the Satyres in the Printed Editions" from 1633 through 1985 (Figure 3), "Significant Variants in the 17th-Century Prints of 'Satyre 3'" (Figure 10), and "Authorial Revisions and Significant Scribal Variants in the Manuscripts of 'Metempsychosis'" (Figure 19). The stemmas, charts, and historical collations put at readers' fingertips a wealth of information illustrating the process of manuscript transmission, the specific ways in which Donne's satirical writings circulated (first in manuscript and then in print), and the accuracy (or lack thereof) of previous scholarly editions.

---

[1] *Variorum* 3:CVI–CVIII.
[2] Ibid., LXII.
[3] Ibid., LXIV.

Each poem in the volume also has its own textual introduction detailing the process by which the copy-text for that poem was selected. For *Sat1*, *Sat4*, the "Original" versions of *Sat2* and *Sat3*, and the "First Revised Version" of *Sat5*, the copy-text is NY3, the Westmoreland manuscript. For the "Revised" versions of *Sat2* and *Sat3*, as well as the "Final Version" of *Sat5*, DT1 (Trinity College Library, Dublin ms 877) serves as the copy-text. Folger Shakespeare Library ms V.a.241 (F10) is the copy-text for *Metempsychosis*; and the copy-text for "*Vpon Mr. Thomas Coryats* Crudities" and "*In eundum Macaronicon*"—neither of which survives in manuscripts not derived from print—is the 1611 edition of *Coryats Crudities*. The general introduction to the volume and the particular introductions to individual poems also explain the editors' rationales for printing both original and revised versions of *Sat2* and *Sat3*, and for printing both a "First Revised Version" and a "Final Version" of *Sat5*.

Critical readers will find that the text and the textual apparatus reveal information ripe for critical exploration. As someone who has published on *Sat4*, for example, I was fascinated by a very small but very significant punctuation detail clarified by the *Variorum* text and the accompanying collations and charts. In a memorable scene near the end of *Sat4*, the persona, on his way out through "the great Chamber" after his second visit to court, trembles with terror as he passes the guards, men so large that they resemble the giant Ascapart in the medieval romance *Bevis of Hampton*:

> . . . beeing among
> Those Ascaparts, men bigg inough to throw
> Charing Crosse for a barr, men which do know
> No token of worth, but Queenes man, and Fine,
> Liuing barrells of beefe, flagons of wine,
> I shooke Like a Spyed Spy. (232–37)

The *Variorum* text restores the comma found at the end of line 235 (following "Fine") in NY3 (and in six other manuscripts) but omitted from A (the 1633 edition of Donne's *Poems*) and from all subsequent seventeenth-century printings of the poem. It also corrects G (the 1669 edition), in which the punctuation—and, with it, the sense—is further muddled by the addition of a comma after "Liuing" in line 236.

In the "Textual Introduction" to *Sat4*, the editors explain the cumulative effect of these punctuation errors:

> G repunctuates lines 235–36 to yield "No token of worth, but Queene's man, and fine / Living, barrels of beefe," thus nonsensically establishing "fine / Living" as a parallel to "Queenes man" among the "token[s] of worth" recognized by the "Askaparts" who inhabit the "great chamber" (ll. 231–36).[4]

The editors further note that Herbert J. C. Grierson, despite his decision to use the 1633 edition (A) as the copy-text for *Sat4* in his landmark 1912 edition, imported from the 1669 edition (G) the additional erroneous comma following "Liuing" in line 236. Manuscript evidence, the editors demonstrate, points to a very different punctuation in the Lost Original Holograph: "Donne . . . ends the clause—and line 235—with 'Fine'; 'Liuing' then joins with the remainder of line 236 to create an appositive for the 'Askaparts'—'Liuing barrells of beefe, flagons of wine.'" The editors conclude on a note of triumph, "We are pleased to be able to restore this and other authorial readings in the present text."[5] The restoration is long due; for, as one learns from "Figure 14: Variants in the Modern Prints of 'Satyre 4,'" every 18th-, 19th-, and 20th-century edition that includes the *Satyres*—from Jacob Tonson's *Poems* . . . Written by the Revered John Donne, D. D. (1719) through C. A. Patrides' 1985 *Compete English Poems of John Donne*—has retained G's erroneous punctuation of lines 235–36.

By restoring the punctuation found in the Westmoreland manuscript, the *Variorum* not only makes line 236 more intelligible but also creates a critical opportunity to rethink the meaning of "Fine" in line 235: it is not, one must conclude, an adjective, but a noun that helps convey the guards' materialism and possible susceptibility to

---

[4]*Variorum* 3:163. The process leading to the textual corruption discussed by the editors is made even clearer in "Figure 13: Significant Variants in the 17th-Century Prints of 'Satyre 4'" (150): the comma after "Fine" is first omitted in A; the next five editions (B through F) also omit that comma, and G introduces a comma after "Living" in line 236.

[5]*Variorum* 3:163.

bribes. Specifically, "Fine" must here mean "Pure gold or silver" as opposed to the alloys found in English currency minted during the "Great Debasement."[6] Line 235 thus links the palace guards to the coin imagery featured earlier in *Sat4*, when the speaker escapes the tedious and alarming company of a court hanger-on only when this insufferable person gives him the opportunity "to pay'a fine to scape his torturing" (l. 142). When the man explicitly asks, "Sir, can you spare me a crowne?" (l. 144), the speaker grants it to him freely "as ransome" for his freedom (l. 145) and is at last able to break away, "thanks to . . . / . . . the Prerogatiue of my Crowne" (ll. 149–50).[7] Without the aid of the *Variorum* text, the metallurgical and numismatic meaning of the noun "Fine"—and thus its connection both with the earlier passage in *Sat4*, as well as with *Sat5*'s outcry against a corrupt system in which men must gain access to justice "By means of Angells" (l. 59), would be very difficult to discern.[8] Even recent scholarly editions that, like the *Variorum*, choose the Westmoreland manuscript as copy-text for *Sat4* (that is, Dickson [Norton, 2007], Robbins [Longman, 2008], and Mueller [Oxford, 2015]) silently emend the manuscript's punctuation by following 1633 in omitting the comma after "Fine" (Dickson, Mueller, and Robbins) or by omitting that comma *and* following 1669 and its successors in adding the comma after "Living" (Dickson and Mueller). The reader is thus erroneously encouraged to conflate what are in fact three

[6]See the *OED* entry for "fine, adj., adv., and n.[2]," def. C1. For images of sovereigns struck in "fine gold" and those minted during the period of the Great Debasement (1542–1551), see "Tudor Sovereign" on the website of The Royal Mint Museum, http://www.royalmintmuseum.org.uk/coins/british-coinage/old-denominations/tudor-sovereign/index.html.

[7]For an image of a silver crown minted during the reign of Edward VI and worth five shillings, see "Crown" on the website of The Royal Mint Museum, http://www.royalmintmuseum.org.uk/coins/british-coinage/old-denominations/crown/index.html; for additional images of Elizabethan coins, including a "Fine" gold sovereign dating from 1584–86, see the numismatics website WildWinds.com, particularly "Browsing British Coinage of Elizabeth I," http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/brit/elizabeth_I/t.html.

[8]As the *Variorum* Commentary explains, quoting Milgate's gloss on *Sat5*, line 59, an "angel" is "a gold coin, so called from the device of the archangel Michael killing the dragon" (*Variorum* 3:908, quoting Wesley Milgate, ed., *The Satires, Epigrams, and Verse Letters* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1967], 168).

distinct things evoked in lines 232–237: the hearty diet that the "Ascaparts" enjoy as members of the palace guard, their resulting massive bulk (that is, their "resembl[ing] the viands they consume in vast quantities"[9]), and what they consider to be a "token of worth"—that is, negotiable currency—in any transaction involving access to the royal premises by visitors.

What critic would not salivate at the rich banquet of interpretive opportunities provided by the *Variorum* textual apparatus? Yet the Commentary provides additional savory fare. During a 2008 MLA panel discussion on "Using the Donne *Variorum*," I noted a few of the ways in which the commentary sections of earlier volumes (the two published in 1995) had inspired me. I recalled that Volume 6 (*The Anniversaries and the Epicedes and Obsequies*) had jump-started my work on the *Anniversaries* and enabled me to write what eventually became the Donne chapter in my 2008 book on the sacred feminine in seventeenth-century poetry. Reading the Volume 6 commentary had given me the courage to write on these much-debated poems, from which I had shied away earlier in my career partly because the works themselves are so intimidating and partly because so many scholars had already weighed in on the elusive question of their meaning. I had despaired of sorting through the existing critical material, but the *Variorum*'s focused excerpts from books and articles gave me a sense of where my analysis would overlap with others' approaches to the works and where I would be breaking new ground. Of course, reading an excerpt in a *Variorum* commentary is no replacement for reading a book or article in its entirety, but the overview provided by the commentary is an invaluable point of departure; one can use it judiciously in order to position oneself as an informed participant in an ongoing critical conversation. More recently, reading the commentary in Volume 8 (*The Epigrams, Epithalamions, Epitaphs, Inscriptions, and Miscellaneous Poems*) has supported my work on the epigrams and on Donne's epitaph in St. Paul's cathedral, allowing me to fill gaps in the analysis of these relatively neglected texts.

The commentary section of the *Satyres* volume provides critical readers with a similar array of opportunities. As Jeffrey Johnson explains in the "Introduction to Volume 3," the Commentary

[9]A. J. Smith's gloss on line 236; qtd. in *Variorum* 3:861.

demonstrates "a great diversity of opinions and critical approaches to Donne's satirical poems" from the period of Donne's own lifetime through 2001.[10] A critic who has learned from the *Variorum* text of *Sat4* that "Fine" functions as a noun in line 235 might well wish to know how earlier interpreters of that line, limited by their dependence on texts in which lines 235–236 read either "fine / Living, barrels of beef" or (at best) "Fine / Living barrels of beef" have attempted to make sense of the passage. Volume 3's broad overview of commentary on the *Satyres* is a good starting point; this section[11] is divided into ten sub-sections covering such topics as "DATES AND CIRCUMSTANCES," "PERSONAE," "GENRE," and "RELIGION." Relevant material found in the overview includes (in the "DONNE AS SATIRIST" sub-section) an account of a 1944 essay in which Arnold Stein stresses that "many of Donne's thrusts are aimed, 'not at private morals or at safe objects like gluttony, avarice, and lust,' but rather 'at wealth, at officers, at court, even at the legal religion.'"[12] The critic might also want to check multiple sources summarized in the "UNITY AND STRUCTURE" sub-section for discussions of the ways in which Donne's five formal verse satires are interconnected. She might further consult the overview of "COMMENTARY" on *Sat4*[13] and the "NOTES AND GLOSSES" on individual lines of that poem.[14] In the latter section, she will find summaries of and quotations from analyses dealing with the "complicated grammar" of lines 229–37[15] as well as historical and literary glosses explaining "the great Chamber," the epithet "Ascaparts," and the image of "throw[ing] / Charing Crosse for a barr."[16] Also included are two discussions of Donne's hard-to-scan meter in these lines, both quoted from monographs that the

[10]*Variorum* 3:CV.

[11]*Variorum* 3:416–513.

[12]Arnold Stein, "Donne and the Satiric Spirit," *ELH* 11 (1944): 269; qtd. in *Variorum* 3:445.

[13]*Variorum* 3:777–810; the section is divided—as is the general commentary on the *Satyres* as a group—into thematically-focused sections.

[14]*Variorum* 3:810–64.

[15]Heather Dubrow, "'No man is an island': Donne's Satires and Satiric Traditions," *SEL* 19 (1979): 79; qtd. in *Variorum* 3:859.

[16]See the quotations from various 20th-century editors' glosses of these words and images, *Variorum* 3:860.

contemporary critic might otherwise not know to consult—one published in 1906, the other in 1953.[17] In short, the *Variorum* commentary section is full of material that can establish a point of departure for new thinking about particular words or lines of poetry, helping the critical reader avoid reinventing the wheel or working at cross-purposes to earlier commentary.

I will conclude my discussion of the Commentary with an observation that should not be interpreted as negative critique, but that scholarly readers should nevertheless keep in mind when using the *Variorum*: the cut-off date for inclusion of critical materials covered by any given *Variorum* volume will necessarily exclude the most recent critical work on the Donne texts covered by that volume, which means that it will exclude not only recent journal articles and edited collections in which work on those texts appears, but even monographs focusing on the particular poems featured in the volume. For example, Volume 3, which had a cut-off date of 2001, could include in the Commentary section neither the first book-length study of *Metempsychosis* ever published (Siobhán Collins' *Bodies, Politics and Transformations: John Donne's* Metempsychosis [Routledge, 2013]) nor Gregory Kneidel's award-winning monograph *John Donne and Early Modern Legal Culture: The End of Equity in the Satyres* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 2015). Such is the nature of any print variorum commentary, of course; lag-time is unavoidable, but it is important to recognize that this limitation exists precisely because the *Variorum* project has so steadily fed the fires of Donne criticism in recent years. Some of the most exciting critical work published in the period following the cut-off date for Volume 3—including the two monographs mentioned above—was fostered by the John Donne Society. Collins and Kneidel are two of the many literary scholars—myself included—who have presented at the annual conference of the Donne Society early versions of material later expanded into monographs, essays for edited collections, and journal articles. Participation in the conference has, in turn, led to our deeper

[17]Wightman Fletcher Melton, *The Rhetoric of John Donne's Verse* (Baltimore, J. H. Furst, 1906), 48; and David Morris, *The Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins and T. S. Eliot in the Light of the Donne Tradition: A Comparative Study* (Bern: Francke, 1953), 44; both qtd. in *Variorum* 3:861.

understanding of textual issues, as the *Variorum* has been the subject of many presentations, papers, and sessions over the years. Indeed, though the John Donne Society was originally founded to facilitate the work of the *Variorum* editors, the Conference has brought "the textuals" (as they are called—with a mixture of awe and affection—by their Donne Society colleagues) into ongoing dialogue with literary critics of widely varying theoretical and methodological persuasions.

Volume 3 is as nearly flawless as such a massive edition can be. I have found one typo introduced into the volume's rendering of the General Introduction also found in earlier volumes; it has already been corrected in the recently-issued Volume 4.1, but a reader new to using the *Variorum* and using Volume 3 to learn how to read it should to note the error and correct it in her own copy: the explanatory illustration of an Historical Collation on page LIX concludes with a G but ought to conclude with a Σ.

While it admittedly takes some work for a scholar to learn how to read the critical apparatus in the *Variorum*, with its Greek letters, its multi-page charts, its ~s and ^s and *om*s, both the commentary section and the textual apparatus are not just arcane documents useful in the specialized pursuits of academic professionals; they are pedagogical gold mines. Most of us, when teaching Donne's satires to undergraduates, must confine ourselves (due to limited time available) to teaching only one of the formal verse satires; and most of us choose the justifiably famous *Sat3*. It is the only one of the five included in the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, and it is a good choice for that anthology because contemporary undergraduates often respond with great energy to Donne's third satire. It touches on many of their own concerns about personal integrity and freedom, the demands of conscience, individual identity versus group-identity, and the coercive power of secular and religious authority. But how much more deeply might they engage with it, with Donne's ambiguous language, and with the poem's commentary on early modern religion and politics, if one were to follow up an initial discussion of the text as it appears in the *NAEL* with an assignment in which students were required to read, on library reserve, both the "Original Version" and the "Revised Version"? What might be the effect if one were to assign as well Table 3.1 ("Differences between the original and the revised versions of *Sat3*")? How might students better understand the nature

of manuscript culture in light of a lecture based upon the "Materials and Theory" portion of the "General Introduction"[18] along with selections from the "Textual Introduction"[19] and "Textual Apparatus"[20] for *Sat3*? What might happen if they were assigned (individually or in groups) to report on portions of the line-by-line "NOTES AND GLOSSES"[21] for *Sat3*? I'll be happy to report back on my answers to at least some of these questions after I teach the poem, and use Volume 3 of the *Variorum*, in a 300-level spring 2019 course.

For Donne scholars, both in our role as teachers and in our critical endeavors, the *Variorum* is what *Metempsychosis* calls "the Well of Sence"—the "feeling braine, from whence" come the essential impulses needed to direct our work.[22] It is a scholarly nerve center; through the signals it sends to the ever-evolving body of Donne criticism and pedagogy, that *corpus* lives, moves, reads, writes, speaks, teaches, and reinanimates[23] poetry first collected in print nearly 400 years ago. Indeed, through the *Variorum* project, Donne's poetry continues to find not only readers, but—as the printer Miles Fletcher put it in 1633—"UNDERSTANDERS."

Whitman College

[18]*Variorum* 3:LI–LV.
[19]Ibid., 97–113.
[20]Ibid., 114–34.
[21]Ibid., 695–776.
[22]*Metem*, 501–02; *Variorum* 3:268.
[23]See *OED*, "reinanimate, v." for the Donnean provenance of this rare verb, which we owe to Donne's prose rather than to his poetry.