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John Donne's "Nocturnall Upon S. Lucies Day" Punctuation and the Editor

Emma L. Roth-Schwartz

Punctuation in the poems of John Donne has been remarked on by all his twentieth century editors, in comments ranging from deprecation of the excessive pointing of the Renaissance (Bennett xxii; Grierson I cxxiv) through reiterated concern for punctuating so as not to mislead the modern reader (Carey xxxix-xl; Redpath xlix; Smith 14-15). In fact, all the editors whose work is examined here,[1] whether or not they modernize spelling and whether or not they trust the authenticity of pointing in the 1633 edition, assume in practice that the 1633 punctuation cannot be entirely relied on as a guide for twentieth century readers and adjust their own punctuation practices accordingly.[2] There is considerable variation in fidelity to the 1633 even among the editors who profess it and also great variation in their scrupulosity in recording their emendations. Comment on the reasons informing their choices is almost entirely absent.

In their skepticism they are probably correct, although not for the reasons they state. Gardner believes that the manuscripts should be used to correct the 1633 (Gardner xc). Some editors base their alterations on aesthetic considerations, altering punctuation and verbals to produce a smoother line;[3] others use punctuation to create a more regular syntax or produce a more easily intelligible meaning.[4] Some are overtaken by the intentional fallacy in the midst of their efforts to restore Donne's actual meaning;[5] all assume that Donne's meaning can and should be unambiguously construed.

And here we find the root of the problem: the sentence in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was quite a different thing from the sentence in our own. Morris W. Croll pointed out long ago that the structure of the baroque sentence is not comparable to our own terse habits (Croll 1076-77). To treat a Donne sentence, in prose or poetry, like a modern sentence, to assume that "proper" punctuation (that is, punctuation intelligible by our own conventions) will render its meaning clear, is to commit both sophistication and trivialization at once.

Most recent commentators agree with Gardner and Shawcross that the 1633 edition cannot give evidence as to authorial punctuation practice (Gardner lxxxvi; Shawcross "Unsatisfactory Compromise" 7) and some agree among themselves that the manuscripts are equally unreliable in that regard (Shawcross, "Unsatisfactory Compromise" 5; Pebworth, "Manuscript Transmission" 9). Mrs. Evelyn Simpson, a colleague of Gardner, places great faith in the scribes' transmission of accidentals (Simpson 296), perhaps under the influence of our usual editorial habit of preserving accidentals and adjusting verbals (See Pebworth "Transmission of Manuscripts"). Dr. Ted-Larry Pebworth, on the other hand, argues for priority of verbals and acceptance of our lack of evidence as to the accidentals, since none of our Donne manuscripts except the holograph gives us any empirical data as to Donne's habits ("Manuscript Transmission" 5, 9, 22).

What should we do? Many of us retain an affection for the 1633 punctuation: it is graceful, unobtrusive, and systematic. But if we accept the fact that its system is that of seventeenth-century compositors (Gardner xc; Pebworth, "Manuscript Transmission" 5; Redpath l), more than one of whom may have been at work (Sullivan 21-22), that its grace and ease to our eyes is a consequence of our own preference for structural system in pointing, that its authority is nonexistent, since Donne cannot be decisively shown to have prepared any scribal copies for publication,[6] where can we go for guidance in punctuation of our own editions? Not to the manuscripts: analysis of the holograph shows no confirmation of either manuscript or 1633 punctuation; in fact, the holograph has so little support from other documents that we would have to reject its authority altogether if we did not know that it was in Donne's own hand (Patrides 5; Pebworth, "Manuscript Transmission" 5 ff.; Redpath xviii). Neither analysis of the first editions nor collation of manuscripts will get us any closer to the punctuation that John Donne actually used. Furthermore, since he appears to have circulated different versions of his poems at different times, and may have revised some poems but not others, it may very well be that there is no authorial version to restore (Pebworth, "Manuscript Poems," 1-7). He may have made changes in some versions of some poems but not other versions of the same poems; he may even have been no better a copyist of his own work than we are of ours, at least on those occasions when he was not creating copy text for a printer.[7] On the whole, the counsel of modesty in the face of ignorance seems well warranted (Pebworth, "Transmission of Manuscripts" 22).

We may not be at a dead end, however, at the mercy of editorial taste. An examination of the punctuation of one poem in its significant twentieth century recensions can show us something about the nature of the questions to be asked: as the editorial hand lies heavy or light on the poem, we can see the kinds of problems we face, we can outline the yet-to-be-undertaken empirical studies that may lighten our gloom, and we can survey the work that has already been done to bridge the gulf between Donne's punctuation and our own.

"A nocturnall upon S. Lucies day, Being the shortest day" recommends itself as an example here in several ways. First, it appears in the 1633, and its canonicity has never been questioned. Second, it appears in only nine manuscripts, all of which are closely related and show almost no verbal variation.[8] Third, it is accounted as one of Donne's most important, complex, and popular poems (Carey xxix; Duncan 280; Knights 114); close study of its punctuation may help us understand the problems of others in the canon. And last, it displays such a variety of punctuation possibilities that every possible accident can be discussed in relation to this poem, with the exceptions of stanza form and capitalization at the beginning of lines, which alone are uniform from 1633 to the present.

In the modern editions studied here, the editors can easily be divided into the old-spelling and the modernizing camps, but neither faction displays unanimity in punctuating "Nocturnall" (Old-spelling editions will be identified here by editor's name in bold type.) Of the forty-five lines of "Nocturnall," thirteen are agreed on by all editors as regards punctuation.[9] As might be expected, there is less disagreement among the old-spelling editors, who rely on 1633 and manuscripts, than among the modernizers, several of whom intended their work as popular rather than critical editions; the former dispute punctuation in only ten lines; the latter leave only fifteen lines undisputed.[10] One suspects that modernizing punctuation has not had the desired effect of rendering Donne's meaning unambiguously clear to the modern reader, especially when one considers that modernization seems to result in more punctuation, not less than the "excessive" seventeenth century editors provided.

Punctuation cruces can be identified in "Nocturnall" for the apostrophe, for capitalization, for commas, and for the longer stops. These cruces can be seen to affect both the sense of the poem and its rhetorical effect. The examples discussed below are not a complete list of such cruces, only a representative sample.

Capitalization should be examined first as a whole, since the 1633 edition's capitalization of nouns is comparatively sparse (See Appendix) and seems to represent a thematic understanding of the poem. All the capitalized words in the 1633 are key words in understanding the poem's meaning: "Epitaph," "Spring," "Alchimie," "Chaosses," "Elixir," "Yea," "None," "Goat," "Vigil" and "Sunne" (three times). Some editor or compositor chose these words for capitalization to point Donne's themes, and we may never be able to do better. But see what the twentieth century versions do in l. 34:

> And love, all, all some properties invest,
> (1633, Patrides,)
>
> And love; All, all some properties invest
> (Grierson and Gardner)
>
> And love; all, all some properties invest;
> (Shawcross, Smith, Carey and Bennett)
>
> And love; all, all, some properties invest;
> (Redpath)

There is no consistency in the practice of the old-spelling editors; some capitalize "all;" some do not. None of the new spelling editors capitalizes nouns at all; their editions deprive the reader of that thematic guidance entirely. Grierson and Gardner supply both the semicolon and the capitalized All, apparently on their own authority, since no other is given in the notes that record the changes. That capital adds nothing thematically; "all" has little place in "Nocturnal," where "nothing" dominates.

The other editors follow 1633 in capitalization, but change the comma to a semicolon without considering its rhythmic effect on the "all" that follows. That "all" needs no capitalization if it is read as the first beat of a spondee after a comma; it is difficult to read it so *without* Grierson and Gardner's capital after the longer pause of a semicolon. If "all, all" is a regular iamb preceded by a semicolon, the line loses its momentum and falls to philosophic musing in the Ciceronean manner.[11] To insert the semicolon but keep the lower case creates a rhetorical effect that is easier, but less characteristic of Donne's metrical practice, whose deliberate roughness has been remarked on from Jonson onward.

Or, consider line 44:

This houre her Vigill, and her eve, (1633, Patrides)

This houre her Vigill, and her Eve, (Grierson, Gardner, Shawcross)

This hour her Vigil, and her Eve, (Redpath)

This hour her vigil and her eve, (Bennett)

This hour her vigil, and her eve, (Smith, Carey)

To capitalize "Vigil" emphasizes the liturgical structure and significance of the poem;[12] to omit the capital is to obscure this hint as to Nocturnall's resolution: the Matins vigil is the service before dawn; it implies the dawn to come. But to capitalize both Vigil and Eve is to at once obscure the Matins vigil reference and to introduce in the poem's concluding moments an entirely new theme, unrelated to any of the others: Eve, the mother of mankind, the temptress of Adam. What place has she in this poem on the death of a beloved lady?[13] And most of all, did Donne capitalize thematically in other poems?

Apostrophe usage of the modern editors should also be considered both in specific example and in its effect on the whole poem. In the first stanza of "Nocturnall," 1633 gives only three apostrophes, all used to mark elisions for meter: "th'hydroptique," "enterr'd," and "compar'd." All three are easily justified by what we know of baroque pronunciation, although all make for smoother running lines, a thing to be wary of in punctuating Donne. The old-spelling editors follow 1633, except for Gardner, who adds apostrophes to the possessive "worlds" and indicates a subvocal pause with an apostrophe before the first word of the poem, "'Tis." She notes the latter change but does not explain it; the former is a silent emendation.[14]

The modern spelling editors use from seven to nine apostrophes in this one stanza, depending upon whether or not they mark the elisions as well, and which elisions they choose to mark.[15] The added apostrophes in this stanza do not clarify, for example, the difference between possessives and contractions; the syntax itself does that. They do dilute the effect of any elisions that appear and furthermore provide a set of speed bumps for the eye, retarding and roughening the stanza's sickened swoon from the burned out sun to the roots of the earth to the grave, the spiral of despair described and enacted in the first nine lines.[16]

The modern apostrophes contribute nothing to the poem's meaning; the 1633 elisions may or may not be defensible as Donne's. We need to know more of his elision habits, and more about how printing conventions with regard to apostrophes changed between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

It is plain so far that not only have all editors (including those in 1633) interpreted by punctuating, but that no consistent punctuation strategies can be discerned from their notes or comments. Furthermore, we can see that punctuation issues are difficult to isolate, since each instance of punctuation must be read as part of the whole, not just as an application of a rule.

Comma usage may be the most perplexing feature of Donne punctuation, both for editors who modernize and those who do not. Some of the 1633 commas are used exactly as ours are, while others are clearly rhetorical slight pauses rather than structural markers. It would seem that the 1633 punctuation is part of a very long transitional stage between the rhetorical pointing of the sixteenth century and the structural punctuation of our own.[17] Certainly the comma is the most frequent mark of punctuation, then as now, and is also the most disputed mark by the editors under consideration here. Line 20 is a case in point:

> Life, soule, forme, spirit, whence they beeing have,
> (1633, Patrides)
>
> Life, soule, forme, spirit, whence they beeing have;
> (Grierson, Gardner, Shawcross)
>
> Life, soul, form, spirit, whence they being have;
> (Bennett, Redpath, Smith and Carey)

It is possible that Grierson, Gardner, and Shawcross are correct in emending the end-line comma to a semicolon; the holograph evidence shows that Donne did tend to heavy stops and to semicolons at the ends of lines (Grierson cxxii; Pebworth "Transmission of Manuscripts," 7; Shawcross "Unsatisfactory Compromise," 16). But what should be done in this case? The comma is a very slight stop, perhaps a structural mark in the 1633, since the end of the line provides a rhetorical stop on its own. The modernizing editors seem to have taken the comma structurally, since they substitute the semicolon, our structural way of indicating separation between independent clauses. But the ruminative pause of a semicolon in baroque punctuation[18]

retards the stanza's shattered descent into l. 22, which has a more significant crux of its own.

Here in l. 22 we find a significant interpretive crux that hangs on a comma:

> Of all, that's nothing. (1633, Carey, Gardner, Grierson, Patrides, Shawcross, Smith,)
>
> Of all that's nothing. (Bennett, Redpath)

Is the speaker nothing, the grave of all, or is he the grave of all that is nothing? The former reading is straightforward Renaissance theology, and is found elsewhere in Donne's prose works where he speaks repeatedly of his horror of becoming nothing in death. The latter reading is more difficult, it being hard to conceive of nothingness finding a grave.[19] It is perhaps more consistent for the speaker to think of himself first as the dead world's epitaph, then as the grave of all, but we should not on that account discard the second reading. What is more troubling is the absence of provenance for deleting the comma: neither Bennett nor Redpath mentions this emendation in his notes.

Again we find that without further evidence of Donne's habits and more understanding of rhetorical punctuation conventions, we cannot resolve the difficulty. But the comma, oddly enough, allows both possible meanings, since it can be read either structurally, or rhetorically, as a characteristic baroque comma before a relative clause. We know from other poems that Donne was fond of such ambiguous syntactic practice. There is something to be said for historically defensible punctuation that preserves more meaning instead of settling for less.

The longer stops in "Nocturnall" present their own difficulties. Today we make very restricted use of the semicolon and colon. During the Renaissance, these marks seem to have been places on a continuum between no pause at all and the full stop at the end of a sentence.[20]

So, should we simply accept our loss and punctuate structurally, or should we challenge the reader to recapture some of that lost aural sensitivity? A false dilemma: for one thing, readers are probably more capable of coping with variant punctuation than we think. Their own experience with fiction, nonfiction and news writing in the various conventions of different genres and publishers is far from monolithic. For another, we can probably learn a good deal about baroque printing conventions for the speaking voice by examining

the printed plays of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. It has yet to be asked whether the punctuation of printed plays during the Renaissance differed in its conventions from the punctuation of prose.

But to return to "Nocturnall:" just such a problem of punctuation for the voice presents itself in l. 41:

> Enjoy your summer all, (1633, Patrides)
>
> Enjoy your summer all; (Grierson, Gardner, Shawcross, Smith, Carey)
>
> Enjoy your summer all: (Redpath)
>
> Enjoy your summer all. (Bennett)

This line is intensely dramatic, implying as it does both a speaker and his imaginary auditors; the speaker directly addresses the living world.

Every possible stop for the line's end has been proposed. Which is most likely to have been Donne's, if indeed he placed a stop at all? The fifth lines of stanzas 1, 2, and 3 run over into the sixth lines, but in stanza four, the fifth line is syntactically end stopped. So may the fifth line of stanza 5 be, since stanza six begins with a subordinating conjunction. We don't know how Renaissance printers characteristically punctuated the ends of end stopped lines which were syntactically stopped as well. Again is it good to remember that a long stop here emphasizes the middle of the line in what Croll calls the Ciceronean manner (Croll 1075).

If we find that a stop is justified, which should we choose? The holograph evidence suggests that a heavier punctuation than the comma would be Donne's choice; the comma, on the other hand, does not syntactically determine l. 42, but allows it to be read either as a continuation of l. 41, or as a lead-in to l. 43, or both, a syntactic ambiguity like that examined above in l. 22. Bennett, easily the most idiosyncratic of the editors here considered, supplies a full stop, both at the end of this line and at the end of l. 16. His emendations, both silent, reduce the average sentence length of the poem to 34 words, compared to all other editions' 42, a drastic rhetorical change that requires some justification before it can be considered.

Either the semicolon or the colon seems a more likely choice than the full stop. We have noted before Donne's predilection for the semicolon at the end of a line; the semicolon here, preferred by most editors but explained by none, is consistent with holograph evidence and provides a pause of appropriate

length between the halves of a comparison. We should also note that the colon supplied by Redpath (again, silently) has the connotation today of introducing explanation or example. That connotation is certainly not out of place at the end of l. 41, but we need to know whether the colon was habitually used that way in Donne's day. Work done on the deictic colon in the sixteenth century suggests that other usage is possible, (Nichols 2) but more study is needed to determine whether Donne used the colon deictically or structurally, and under what circumstances. The colon in l. 41 is distinctly valedictory to the modern eye, functioning rhetorically as a point of departure, while the semicolon is more a fulcrum, more indicative of Ciceronean balance; we must ask ourselves which tone is the more likely. Our answer to that question will depend on our interpretation of the rest of the poem.

Commentators are divided on whether "Nocturnall" ends in despair, hope, or stasis. A satisfactory answer requires consideration of its liturgical and alchemical references,[21] and upon a resolution of the poem's other cruces, both verbal and accidental, that rests on a more consistent and empirical theoretical basis than any analysis has shown to date.

As a final example of the effect of long stops on meaning, we can consider l. 16:

> From dull privations, and leane emptinesse (1633, Patrides)
>
> From dull privations, and leane emptinesse: (Grierson, Gardner, Shawcross)
>
> From dull privations, and lean emptiness (Smith, Carey)
>
> From dull privations and lean emptiness. (Bennett)
>
> From dull privations, and lean emptiness: (Redpath)

Bennett alone here is consistently "modern," deleting the comma between the elements of a simple compound. At the end of the line, we are offered three different punctuations, variously adopted by some old-spelling editors and some modernizers. The full stop precludes considering l. 17 as part of both l. 16 and l. 18. It also removes the alchemical reference of "ruin'd," (l. 18) which was a technical term in alchemy, referring to the breaking down of compound substances into simple ones by removing their accidental qualities (Peter 53). This technical use of the term is best preserved by not punctuating

after "emptiness" at all. Redpath places a colon there because he cannot accept what he sees as a "forced construction of 'From'" in its absence;[22] in this he reads with Grierson, Gardner, and Shawcross.[23] But is the "forced construction" to be rejected? It can also be seen as syllepsis, and as still another instance of the syntactic ambiguity discussed above in connection with ll. 22 and 41.

It can readily be seen from consideration of "Nocturnall" alone that we can ask more questions than we can answer about the punctuation of Donne's poetry. Absent the apocalyptic appearance of substantial new holograph evidence, we are unlikely ever to be deprived of the edifying pleasures of stately disputation. And it may be that the finer shades of Donne's meaning may be lost beyond recall (Simpson 299) like the lineaments of certain precious baroque era frescoes.

But frescoes are restored, using insofar as possible the materials and techniques of the original artists. Sometimes in the restoration, gaps are left because the damage done is irreparable; sometimes it is discovered that much of the original is in reality the work of pupils of the master; in no case can a reconstruction, however expensively photographed and reproduced, (modernized?) substitute for the original in the studies of a scholar. Literary scholars, of course, must study fragments much as archaeologists do, but in the case of a major poet, they have also the responsibility to transmit the work. If much has been lost in the transmission so far, perhaps we can increase our knowledge and improve our editions by forming what Mark Roberts calls "a philosophy of the text" ("Problems in Editing" 23), based on empirical study not only of verbals, but also of Donne's punctuation and its Renaissance context.[24]

How might study of Donne's punctuation proceed? To begin with, we need the best verbal text that can presently be assembled by empirical study. Not all editors, of course, will agree on which is best. At the very least we will need a verbal text based on careful collation with a minimum of editorial emendation and a maximum of explanation of editorial choices and even editorial uncertainties.[25] It does not help the scholar or the casual reader to give a "clear" reading of the meaning of a poem if that clear reading comes from the poesis of the editor, not the author. Strict empiricism alone may encourage editors to develop a consistent approach to the verbal text.

Second, since no edition or manuscript except the holograph can be shown to have any authority as "original," we will have to consider all punctuation provisional (Pebworth, "Transmission of Manuscripts" 22). We

should ask ourselves what punctuation choices can be supposed to be available to Donne, and what his characteristic style may have been in dealing with these choices.

Now we are truly in *terra incognita*, lacking empirical foundations for our work. At this point we either give up, or ask ourselves what evidence other than the holographic might help us in our task. We have the holograph letter to Lady Carey; we also have the few poems Donne himself prepared for publication. Alone they are a slender prop, but analysis of the holograph has already provided useful evidence against the authenticity of the 1633 edition (Pebworth, "Transmission of Manuscripts" 5); further analysis of the authorial punctuation we have may serve as a standard for evaluating other evidence.

Since most commentators agree that Donne's plain style of versification approximates the speaking voice and heightens the rhythms of prose conversation, we might go back to Croll's definitive essay on the baroque sentence. He has much to say about sentence patterns and baroque punctuation conventions, and his remarks may help us understand the punctuation choices of the seventeenth century Donne editors; they were less whimsical than our structurally biased eyes can see,[26] and Croll's analysis of selected examples of baroque sentences might serve as a model for other such studies.

We might also look at work done on sixteenth century printed texts,[27] to see how punctuation habits changed from the Elizabethan to the baroque. Since there may have been no definitive authorial copies of many of Donne's poems, perhaps good historically justifiable punctuation will be the best we can do in many cases.

But we may be able to get a little closer to what Donne's actual habits may have been, even if we cannot restore authorial punctuation that may not have been definitive in the first place. We have a substantial body of authorially punctuated Donne prose. The sermons were prepared for publication by the author; so was *Biathanatos*. We have some evidence that Donne took care with punctuation in these prose works (Grierson cxxii; Simpson 296), and we have no reason to suppose that he was any less aware than we are of the importance of punctuation to meaning in poetry. We might legitimately assume that his punctuation style was formed by the time he published *Biathanatos*, and remained consistent between prose and poetry, allowing for the difference between punctuating the longer sentences of prose and shorter, more intense sentences of poetry, and perhaps looking for changes in his style over time.

The sermons might be of special help in discovering Donne's own preferences among his available choices, since they were prepared for publication later in his life, and were written explicitly for the speaking voice. The holograph evidence shows, as mentioned above, that Donne tended to heavier punctuation than the 1633 edition gives. The heavier punctuation and the shorter sentences of the holograph should be compared to the punctuation and sentence structure of the sermons to determine what patterns there may be.

Now we come to the most speculative proposal of a long list of speculations. Can we use the evidence of printed plays to determine what Renaissance printers' conventions may have been at work in the printing of verse for the speaking voice?[28] Perhaps we could study the punctuation found in printed editions of plays, always taking care to distinguish between the Elizabethan and the baroque. When we see better what the standards of punctuation were during the time before 1600 when Donne was learning his punctuation habits (presumably from the best printed sources available) and during the time just after his death when his pòems were prepared for publication, we may be better able to assess the range of punctuation choices available to him during the time he wrote.

Clearly an enormous task lies ahead, lifetimes of work for several new Griersons. And how should the knowledge so produced be used?

The usefulness of modern-spelling editions is, of course, unquestionable; few casual readers will much lament the absence of the long s, even though the occasional graphological pun may depend on it.[29] Those scholars who want the long s can produce it by customizing their keyboards, and those journals that appeal to scholars can do likewise, but the many students and casual readers who are sufficiently challenged by Donne's syntax and vocabulary can probably wait to savor such subtleties; the same may be said for eye-rhyme spelling and other similar features of the baroque.

What should probably be avoided is an eclectic jumble of modern and baroque punctuation techniques that sometimes preserve the worst features of both, such as the rhetorical comma in l. 23 of "Nocturnall," (all editions) which divides the subject of the sentence from the second half of its compound verb; in modern spelling editions this looks like a comma fault. Or remember the added apostrophe in Gardner's "world's" (1.5); it is an unnecessary distraction for the reader who can cope with old spelling. On the whole, I think, old punctuation will be less confusing to the casual reader than most editors seem to think, certainly less confusing than old spelling is.[30]

We might hope for an eventual edition of Donne's poetry that bases its punctuation on a careful study of his habits insofar as we can know them, and those of editors during his lifetime; that eliminates egregious modernisms; and that subdues the urge to clarify meaning once and for all. As we speak of Donne's "plain" style only by tutored wrenching of our natural vocabulary, so editors and copyists of his time could miss the art that wrought like nature, with nature's pains, to make the living moment before it fixed in balanced contemplation. Who will wonder at the urge, deep rooted in Donne's first editors as in the latest, to fix that moment, to discover in his poetry what he *meant*, distinct from what he *said*? But try we must, against our natural inclinations, to refrain from meddling in what he left unsaid and to attempt to transmit, even in an imperfect state, the *most* meanings, not just the clearest, that can be justified on empirical grounds.[31]

Winona, Minnesota

Notes

[1]Ten editions have been examined for this study: the 1633, Grierson's (1912), Hayward's (1929), Bennett's (1942), Redpath's (1956), Gardner's (1965), Shawcross' (1967), Smith's (1971), Patrides' (1985), and Carey's (1990). Of this group, Hayward follows Grierson exactly in "Nocturnall," and so does not appear by name in this discussion. Patrides reads with the 1633 more often than any of the other editors do, restoring some 1633 punctuation that does not appear in other recensions. Grierson and Gardner read together in most cases on "Nocturnall," against Patrides and the 1633. Shawcross' punctuation reads now with the other old-spelling editors (1633, Grierson, Gardner, and Patrides), and now with the modernizers, among whom much variety and invention may be discerned, as we shall soon see.

[2]Among the more recent editors, for example, Carey, a modernizer, states on p. xxxix his intention to retain the seventeenth-century punctuation, "modified where it might mislead," and to follow Gardner's text, two sometimes mutually exclusive aims. And Patrides, an old-speller, opines on p. 3 that "the old punctuation is the better guide," although on p. 4 he reserves the right to emends silently "when obviously required." Such editorial escape clauses are ubiquitous, and it is not always possible to distinguish where necessity shades into taste and preference.

[3]See Mark Robert's review of Gardner's edition, "If It Were Donne When 'Tis Done," and Alan MacColl's rejoinder for a discussion of editing on aesthetic principles. Also see Shawcross "Text of John Donne's Poems: Unsatisfactory Compromise," p. 8, for a discussion of his own practice in that regard.

[4]Bennett is especially explicit about repointing for meaning, and for favoring modern punctuation as more capable of making distinctions in meaning than what he calls the "plethoric" punctuation of the seventeenth century; see p. xxii. Redpath's comments on p. xlix-l about clarifying by modernizing punctuation are also worthy of note, as are Shawcross' remarks on p. xxi about the absence of punctuation standards in the seventeenth century.

[5]See for example Gardner 210 n. to ll. 19-20 and elsewhere.

[6]MacColl's and Roberts' exchange of views on the Gardner edition is an especially enlightening discussion of the controversy over whether or not Grierson's Group II manuscripts represent authorial revisions done around 1625. See Roberts "If It Were Donne" and MacColl and Roberts. Gardner, who has more faith in the manuscripts authorial authenticity than most other editors, maintains the affirmative; MacColl defends her judgment, while Roberts demurs. Gardner and Roberts agree that Grierson's Group I represents authorial revisions dating from 1614. But others, as we have seen, place no faith at all in accidents, at least, of the manuscripts of any group.

[7]Those occasions predominate in the Donne cannon, as Pebworth explains in "Manuscript Poems and Print Assumptions."

[8]The manuscripts are Grierson's Group II (TCC, TCD, N, A18), Luttrell, O'Flaherty, and Dolau Cothi,and Dal (1) and (2). Three verbal variations among these manuscripts have been recorded in Shawcross' notes; he is the only editor studied here to record all three manuscript variations: l. 4 "no" (1633): "not" O'F; l. 12 "every" (1633): "a very" O'F; l.34 second "all" omitted in Luttrell. Luttrell, Dolau Cothi, and the Dal manuscripts were not available to Grierson in 1912.

[9]Lines 3, 4, 10, 12, 14, 15, 23, 26, 32, 35, 39, 42, and 43. Two of these lines are unpunctuated by all (14 and 39); eleven of them can be read by modern punctuation conventions; only in line 23 has a distinctly rhetorical comma been unanimously allowed to flourish after "wept.")

[10]The old-spelling editors dispute lines 1, 5, 16, 20, 22, 31, 34, 36, 41, and 44. The modernizers *agree* on lines 1, 3, 4, 10, 12, 14, 15, 20, 23, 31, 32, 35, 39, 42, and 43.

[11]"A Ciceronian period closes in at the end; it reaches its height of expansion and emphasis at the middle or just beyond, and ends composedly. Brown's sentence on the contrary, opens constantly outward; its motions become more animated and vigorous as it proceeds; and it ends, as his sentences are likely to do, in a vision of vast space or time, losing itself in an *altitudo*, a hint of infinity." Thus Croll, p. 1075, explains and demonstrates the baroque sentence.

[12]See Miller's extended discussion of alchemical references in "Nocturnall." Redpath, in his note to l. 44 on p. 74, appears to confuse a vigil with a wake.

[13]Hayes makes this identification on p. 58 in the course of his discussion of alchemy in "Nocturnall."

This seems a propitious moment to weigh in with my contribution to the

unfailing recreation of commentators on "Nocturnall": speculation as to its date and subject. Lucy Countess of Bedford died in 1627, too late a date for poem whose manuscripts Gardner and Roberts date at about 1625. She was seriously ill in 1612, according to Grierson. Ann More died in 1617; Donne was troubled by a premonition of her death while he was abroad in 1611. Efforts have been made to connect "Nocturnall" with all three of the last-mentioned dates. Although Grierson writes with urbane understanding of the emotional possibilities of Platonic love, to connect the poem with the Countess seems a long stretch; its explicit images of carnal love ring true, much truer that his often remarked on artificial passion in the "First Anniversarie." The Countess was, by all accounts, sophisticated enough to recognize poetic hyperbole when she saw it, and react appropriately, but there is no whiff of suspicion of such artificiality in any commentator's valuation of the poem. In l. 25 the "two Chaosses" speak eloquently of direct experience of those times when forgetfulness of mutual love undoes the created world of conjugal happiness; few would suppose John Donne capable of unblemished felicity in any relationship. But what of Lucy's name in the poem? Grierson and Carey suggest that she and Ann More in some way merged in the poet's mind, perfectly possible in such a powerfully synthetic imagination. And why might not either be dominant at a given moment? And why must we date the poem anywhere near the death or illness of either, since those dates can only be the earliest inspirations, not *termina ad quem*?

But there is some evidence, both internal and biographical, to support the opinion that Ann More was uppermost in Donne's mind here. Others have remarked on the date of Donne's ordination in 1616 as the point beyond which he lost interest in secular love poetry. However, "Nocturnall" does not appear in Group I manuscripts which date from about 1614, according to Gardner and Roberts. Since its canonicity has never been disputed, it seems reasonable to think that it was written after 1614, thus missing the immediate calendar vicinity of both the Countess' illness and that of Ann More. Further, the confluence of liturgical and carnal imagery in "Nocturnal" suggests that both were important to Donne at the time of composition, and moreover suggests a time of transition between the two concerns. 1617 may not be too late.

[14]No one to my knowledge has examined the rhetorical effect of Gardner's added apostrophe to the deictic "Tis," although all the modern spelling editors show it, and Bennett used it before Gardner did. What is its provenance? What effect does it have on the *in medias res* opening of the poem?)

[15]A curious situation arises with regard to apostrophes in l. 7 "Whither, as to the beds-feet life is shrunk." Smith explains "beds-feet" as meaning the four feet of a bed. Gardner interprets "beds-feet" as the *foot* of the bed, as do Carey, Patrides, Redpath, and Shawcross. (Bennett, Grierson, and Smith do not gloss this line.) But if each bed can have but one *foot*, as in the second reading, it does seem odd that no editor espousing this view has placed an apostrophe after the "s": "beds'-feet.

A most sensible suggestion has been put forward by Peter on p. 51 that the "beds-feet" are in fact the feet of flower beds. Such an interpretation would fit admirably into the scheme of the stanza, proceeding as it does from the top to the bottom of the natural world, and would not deprive us of a punning reference to deathbeds, if indeed the various folk beliefs cited by most editors have any provenance beyond conjecture. In any case, there seems to be little reason for anyone but Smith to make the possessive singular.

[16]See Gardner xxx for a discussion of the manner-matter correspondence in "Songs and Sonets."

[17]I am grateful to Pebworth for pointing out to me in conversation that, while in the past the change from mostly rhetorical to mostly structural punctuation was thought to have been made around 1633, modern opinion now places the shift closer to 1622. The 1633 editors, then, would have been well accustomed to punctuating structurally at least some of the time, and the publishing houses would, of course, have followed the most up-to-date methods in editing manuscripts for publication.

[18]Once again we must think of Croll's description of the baroque sentence quoted at length in n. 11 above.

[19]It is easier to think of love's limbeck producing the quintessence of nothingness which is then decanted through the limbeck's long neck into a smaller vessel; the grave. But what goes into that grave would be, according to the logic of the poem, the speaker, not all the other nothings.

[20]We are all familiar with the immensely long sentences that could be produced with perfect clarity by this system. Only a few Victorians have produced anything like them since, and that on rare occasions. As we have moved to purely structural punctuation in this century, the 300-700 word sentence has become extinct as a discursive structure.

Renaissance poetry in the plain style does not usually display the extravagantly long sentences of the high style or of some "plain" prose. Its approximation of the speaking voice precluded the flights of elaborate syntax permitted elsewhere. In punctuating Donne's strong lines we might usefully think of the only genre still extant that permits, even encourages, rhetorical punctuation: the drama. Jonson mentions that Donne was "a great frequenter of plays" in his youth; he may well have learned something there about writing for the speaking voice.

It is now customary for playwrights to use commas in ways frowned upon by the composers of grammar handbooks. One has only to think of the comma splices one hears in everyday conversation to see why. And playwrights today use colons and semicolons infrequently; now they are for the eye only, not the ear. Not so four hundred years ago: the reader accustomed to rhetorical punctuation could hear the difference between comma, semicolon, colon, and full stop in the mind's ear.

[21]For alchemical references, see Sleight, Hayes, Duncan, and Peter.

[22]See his note to l. 16 on p. 73.

[23]Grierson in his note to l. 16 on p. 44 accepts the punctuation of the 1719 edition and anticipates Gardner and Shawcross, although none of the latter three explain their choice.

[24]Nothing in the following is to be construed as an endorsement of what Sullivan calls "replicar" editing. As he justly remarks on p. 28, "editing Donne's texts to make them more stylistically consistent, commercial, intelligible, or aesthetic ultimately makes them something other than what we really want, Donne's texts."

[25]See, for example, the Roberts-MacColl exchange and Pebworth's "Manuscript Poems" for long discussions of problems created by incomplete recording of manuscript variants and editorial choices.

[26]Others have commented here and there on the possibility that rhetorical punctuation had conventions whose logic has escaped us.

See for example, Grierson's remarks on the carelessness of pointing in the renaissance (xciv), and his strictures on Elizabethan punctuation (cxxiv), Gardner's remarks on the accidentals of the 1633 (xc), Bennett's assumption of the superiority of structural punctuation in conveying meaning (xxii), Redpath's dismissal of seventeenth century pointing (xix), and Shawcross' assumption that there were no standards of punctuation in the 17th century (xxi). On the other hand, Grierson also remarks that Donne's sermons appear to have been carefully prepared for printing (cxxii); Smith (33) believes that the speech rhythms of Donne's poems were notated by the author and preserved by scribes.

Simpson (296) also believes in a fidelity of scribes that could only be attributed to an understood system of rhetorical notation, or at least an understanding of its importance. Her work on *Biathanatos* and on Hooker, and that of her husband Percy, "Proofreading by English Authors of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries" (cited in Simpson "A Note on Donne's Punctuation,") along with Ann Nichols' work on the deictic colon in Hooker, suggests that we may still learn much about the practice of pointing for publication during the Renaissance.

[27]See Nichols and Simpson, note on p. 295.

[28]Several commentators have remarked on the "dramatic" and conversational quality of Donne's poetry, beginning with Grierson (xiv). Gardner agrees (xxi-xxii), as do Redpath (40), Shawcross (xx), Carey (xxv), and most notably Smith, who bases his punctuation on the rhythms of the speaking voice (33-37).

[29]See the Roberts-MacColl exchange, Roberts "If It Were Donne," n. 9 p. 328, and MacColl p. 259.

[30]Many undergraduates punctuate rhetorically as a matter of course until taught to do otherwise, and explain their native punctuation rhetorically. Think, for instance, of how frequently freshman follow a period with a nonrestrictive relative clause.

[31]My thanks are due to Prof. Ann Nichols, Prof. Ted-Larry Pebworth, and Prof. John Roberts, whose generosity of spirit and expert advice expedited my search for

materials. I am particularly grateful to Prof. Nichols and Prof. Pebworth for allowing me access to their manuscripts before publication, and for their helpful comments on mine.

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