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Replicar Editing of John Donne's Texts

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John Donne, as a prominent author of considerable complexity and subtlety whose prose and poetry survive in numerous manuscript and printed states, has received extensive editorial treatment.[1] But has this editorial labor been for the good? The answer, of course, depends on one's definition of "good." Modern bibliographical theory and methodology have produced Donne texts more aesthetically satisfactory than anything Donne probably wrote, thereby turning Donne literary materials into the textual equivalents of "replicars," automobiles which reproduce the external appearance of a classic original but which incorporate modern automotive technology to make them more driveable. Desire for replicars is certainly understandable: as Doug Nye (contributing editor of *Road & Track*) notes of the 1907, 6-cylinder, 40-50 horsepower, chassis 60551 Rolls Royce Silver Ghost, "Much more than 30 mph is inadvisable these days with only rear-wheel brakes";[2] thus, the original Rolls Royce Silver Ghost would not be satisfactory for modern motoring. It is also hard to fault the desire for better texts through modern editing, but I fear that editors, like the builders of replicars, have lost an appreciation for "the real thing" and come, like Henry James's painter, to prefer a fiction that better suits their needs.

Carrying my replicar analogy back to seventeenth-century editions of Donne's works would produce an anachronism, but the surviving transcription of Donne's *Biathanatos* (Bodleian Library, shelfmark MS. e Musaeo 131) and the two settings of sheet "S" in the 1647 first edition of *Biathanatos* show that the two compositors[3] who set the different S sheets deliberately produced Donne replicarriages. The holograph served as copy text for the transcription and both settings.[4] The main compositor, "A," set all of the sheets in the Library of Congress copy ND 0332947 and

all sheets except S in the other twenty-six copies I have seen. The other compositor, "B," set only the S sheet in all except the Library of Congress copy. During composition, compositor B took over from compositor A and set sheet S, several copies were printed, and then compositor A returned and reset sheet S after beginning, but before finishing, composing sheet T.[5] Such extraordinary effort on the part of compositor A to reset sheet S suggests that he had a very strong motive.

Interestingly, the only effect of the resetting is greater stylistic consistency with the remainder of the first edition; thus, compositor A evidently reset compositor B's sheet S simply to impose his own stylistic uniformity. The differences between the two settings (76 substantives and 292 accidentals in just eight pages) prove that any two compositors, even at the same time in the same printing shop, might have very different styles. And since the transcription very closely resembled the holograph,[6] it would appear that neither compositor had exact reproduction of copy as a high priority: compositor A has 81 substantive and 672 accidental differences from the transcription; compositor B, 56 and 618.[7] Neither modernization nor house styling can account for the differences between the two sheet S settings; nor will common sense or logic. For example, compositor A's handling of numbers is practically random: he changes compositor B's "5." to "fifth" (p. 183, l. 4), "9" to "nine" (p. 138, l. 8), "30" to "thirty" (p. 138, l. 14), and "40" to "forty" (p. 142, l. 8), but leaves "50" (p. 143, l. 22) and changes "three pownd" to "3 *l.*" (p. 138, l. 22). Apparently, both compositors restyled Donne's manuscript to suit themselves, and the urge to impose his own style was strong enough to make compositor A stop in the middle of composing sheet T, proofread compositor B's already printed setting of sheet S, construct a new skeleton-form of marginal rules, and reset sheet S from the holograph in the new form. Compositor A may or may not have thought he was producing a better literary vehicle for the reader, but, even with direct access to the holograph, he deliberately took Donne's readers for a ride.

When Donne's first acknowledged editor, his son, took over the task of editing what had been Donne, the ride became a detour. John Donne the younger's motives in editing his father's *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour* (London: J. Flesher for Richard

Marriot, 1651) were financial rather than aesthetic. The collection title is not exactly a model of truth in advertising: I. A. Shapiro has shown that the letter headings misidentify the recipients of at least six letters actually sent to Sir Henry Goodyer, Donne's close, but not socially prominent, friend.[8] In 1941, Roger E. Bennett proved that the younger Donne mislabelled at least thirty-one of the letters and arranged them out of chronological order to make them appear to have been written to more, and more important, persons than had actually received them. The contents of the letters may have been redone as well: "In particular, Sir Thomas Lucy's name was inserted in headings, and perhaps in the text, for the specific purpose of pleasing Lady Bridget Dunch and Lady Bridget Kingsmill, whose relative he was. Allusions to Lady Kingsmill in the text of certain letters must also be questioned."[9] Of the accuracy of the text in letters 21, 23, 25, 27, 30, 33, 36, and 38,[10] Bennett concludes: "we must remember that John Donne, Jr. . . . may have made one letter out of two or more, that he may have had the manuscript copies which had been sent to the press as well as the originals, that corrupt copies in a commonplace book are not entirely impossible, that George Garrard . . . may have furnished copies at one time and originals at another, and in short, that a variety of accidents, all bad from our point of view, may have happened to these letters, and even to others in connection with which we have not had so much cause to look for trouble" (pp. 128-29). Even as one gasps with horror at the younger Donne's retooling of his father's original texts, one should remember that his instincts were those of most editors: whether in the possession of the original texts or their remains, editors have attempted to improve rather than to reproduce or restore Donne's texts.

Sir Edmund Gosse's *The Life and Letters of John Donne*,[11] "the only authoritative collection of Donne's letters that has yet been made,"[12] complains at length about the younger Donne's edition of the *Letters* and then commits the very same errors: "They are printed with complete disregard to chronology; only twenty-two of the whole number are fully dated, and of these several are found to be dated wrongly; even the names of the persons to whom the letters are addressed are not always supplied, nor always correctly. . . . In the few occasions where the

originals of these letters have been preserved, the discrepancies between MS. and printed text are rather startling" (I, xiii-xiv).[13]

In addition to his historical and biographical errors, Gosse's textual theory and practice produce a highly unsatisfactory form of replicar—a modernized version of the text with the true extent of the modernization misrepresented. Gosse's claim that he only modernized spelling and expanded contractions is misleading: "In printing Donne's letters, I have modernised the spelling, which has no philological value, and is often so eccentric as to annoy and repel the general reader. I do not think that 'to join with you to move his Lordship to withdraw it' is made more luminous by printing it, 'to joyne wth yo^{w} to moue hys Lp to wthdrawe ytt'" (I, xv). Gosse's replication of Donne's previously unpublished letter "*To the Most Honorable and my most Honored L: The Marquis of Buckingham*" (Bodleian Library, shelfmark MS. Tanner 73/2*)[14] literally redesigns the original: Gosse initiates changes involving 179 words or marks of punctuation, only 112 of which are covered by his statement of editorial practice. In addition to changing spelling and punctuation, Gosse fails to mention that the salutation does not appear above the text of the letter but on the other outer half of the folded leaf, changes and adds words (line 18, "to" to "and"; line 32, "thanks" to "thanks of"), punctuates some of Donne's words to Buckingham as dialog (complete with quotation marks), introduces paragraphing, runs the close of the letter into its body, and not only omits the partially preserved postscript (which dates the letter), but even fails to note its existence. Gosse's text has the same weaknesses as has an inadequate replicar: it does not recapture the appearance of the original as accurately as it should, and its extensive, hidden modernizations prevent the text from satisfactorily recreating the sense of the original.

Herbert J. C. Grierson's *The Poems of John Donne* originated out of pedagogical, rather than aesthetic needs: "The present edition of Donne's poems grew out of my work as a teacher. . . . They [a class of honors students] found Donne difficult alike to understand and to appreciate, and accordingly I undertook to read with them a selection from his poems with a view to elucidating difficult passages. . . . there were several passages in the poems, as printed in Mr. Chambers' edition, of which I could give no satisfactory explanation to my class. . . . an examination of the older

editions [especially *1633*] brought out another fact,—that by modernizing the punctuation, while preserving no record of the changes made, the editor had corrupted some passages in such a manner as to make it impossible for a student, unprovided with all the old editions, to recover the original and sometimes quite correct reading."[15]

Despite his bias for an intelligible text, Grierson's principles, had he kept to them, would have produced a restoration, rather than a replication, of Donne's text: "These [the mss. collated by Grierson] being the materials at our command, the question is, how are we to use them to secure as accurate a text as possible of Donne's poems, to get back as close as may be to what the poet wrote himself" (II, cxii). Unfortunately, Grierson turned from restoring to replicating in the punctuation, and his statement of principles serves as an ironic warning against his procedure: "As regards punctuation, it was my intention from the outset to preserve the original, altering it only (*a*) when, judged by its own standards, it was to my mind wrong—stops were displaced or dropped, or the editor had misunderstood the poet; (*b*) when even though defensible the punctuation was misleading, tested frequently by the fact that it had misled editors. In doing this I frequently made unnecessary changes because it was only by degrees that I came to understand all the subtleties of older punctuation and to appreciate some of its nuances. A good deal of my work in the final revision has consisted in restoring the original punctuation" (II, cxxi-cxxii).

Ultimately, Grierson's desire for a "correct" punctuation that would conform to his own understanding of the poems rather than for Donne's original punctuation makes his text a replicar rather than a restored original: "Another effect of this finely-shaded punctuation is that the question is constantly forced upon an editor, is it correct? Has the printer understood the subtler connexion of Donne's thought, or has he placed the semicolon where the full stop should be, the comma where the semicolon? . . . I have corrected the punctuation where it seemed to me, on its own principles, definitely wrong; and I have, but more sparingly, amended the pointing where it seemed to me to disguise the subtler connexions of Donne's thought or to disturb the rhetoric and

rhythm of his verse paragraphs. . . . With all its refinements, Elizabethan punctuation erred by excess. A reader who gives thought and sympathy to a poem does not need all these commands to pause, and they frequently irritate and mislead" (II, cxxiii-cxxiv). Grierson's insistence on a system of punctuation based on his own understanding and aesthetic produced a replicar text, but at least Grierson listed the changes made in the original.

In her 1978 edition of *The Divine Poems*,[16] Dame Helen Gardner uses the holograph of Donne's poem to Lady Carey[17] to justify imposing her own ideas about metrics, punctuation, and spelling on Donne's poems: "The holograph of the poem to Lady Carey shows that Donne, as we might have assumed from the *Anniversaries*, used a heavier punctuation than we find in *1633* and used it to bring out the syntax. This justifies an editor in strengthening, as Grierson did, the punctuation of the edition. Such emendations are made on my own judgement; but when the sense is affected, the evidence of the manuscripts is discussed in the commentary. The holograph also shows that Donne used fewer elision marks than his modern editor, Milgate, but more than we find in *1633*. When I first edited the *Divine Poems*, influenced by Grierson's conservatism here, I supplied such marks only when I thought the reader would find the line unmetrical without them. In the Love Poems I attempted to make the practice of *1633* consistent, thinking it confusing if on one occasion where suppression of a syllable is necessary it is marked, and on another, where it is equally necessary, it is left unmarked. . . . in revising the *Divine Poems* I have followed the same policy. As there is no means of deciding when Donne thought an elision mark necessary and when he thought it was not, it seems better to err in supplying too many than too few" (pp. xciii-xciv).

Gardner's description of her theory of metrics is worth quoting at length to see the extraordinary range of opportunities for editorial intervention it offers: "Donne's metrical base in the 'Holy Sonnets' is a decasyllabic line of five feet, each foot consisting of an unstressed and a stressed syllable, x /. He varies from this base with a boldness unprecedented in non-dramatic verse before Milton. Like Milton he makes great use of elisions and contractions to preserve an equal number of metrical syllables, although he allows himself an extra weak final syllable. . . . Elided syllables are not suppressed in reading, but are metrically worthless like grace-notes in

music, giving a ripple without disturbing the time. Unlike Milton, however, Donne appears to have allowed himself the license of occasional defective lines to achieve a particular rhythmical effect. This is not the Chaucerian license of a syllable missing at the beginning of the line, but the license of a defective medial foot. . . . I believe that the secret of reading the verse of poets who do not 'keep accent,' such as Donne and Milton, is to be continually aware of the metrical stress supporting the rhythm of the line. In many lines, in which the speech stress seems at first sight to overwhelm the metrical stress, we need to give the metrical stress some value, in order to bring out not only the music but the full meaning of the line. In others, in which there are few speech stresses, it is our sense of the 'foot' as a metrical reality that enables us to accept the rhythmic variations as not inconsistent with the metrical norm. To read Donne we need a very keen sense of time, and the power to make use of *rubato* [music with some notes arbitrarily lengthened or shortened in performance] without destroying that sense" (pp. 54-55). Current lack of certainty about metrics and pronunciation in the seventeenth century; Donne's metrical irregularity; the competing claims of speech and metrical stress, sense and music; and *rubato* provide Gardner with the equivalent of every auto mechanic's fantasy, an unrestricted license to repair.

As an example of the sort of text produced by Gardner's metrical system, consider her treatment of line eight in the Holy Sonnet "O might those sighes and teares returne againe." In her 1952 edition of the *Divine Poems*,[18] Gardner prints the line as "Because I did suffer I must suffer paine" (p. 13) with the note: "l. 8. *Because. 1635*, again following *Lut, O'F*, reads 'Cause'. There is no other example in the *Concordance* of Donne's using this abbreviation. I have no doubt that 'Because' is right, and that this is an example of *Lut*'s being edited for publication. Since the final syllable of 'suffer' can be elided, there is no irregularity in the line, which should be read with the stress on the contrasted auxiliaries:

x / x / / x / / x /
Because | I did | suffer I | must suff | er paine." (pp. 76-77)

In his "Index of Textual Differences from Gardner's Text," John Shawcross discusses Gardner's use of metrics to make her textual decisions for this line: "'Cause [Shawcross reading] / Because

[Gardner reading] (Not only is the line hypermetric with 'Because' [despite Gardner's unacceptable comment that the first 'suffer' can be elided] [bracketed material Shawcross's], but it also creates metrical awkwardness and misplacement of stresses.)."[19] In her second edition of the *Divine Poems*, Gardner prints the same line differently—"Because I did suffer'I must suffer paine"[20]—and provides the same note except for the addition of "as pronounced" and a radically different scansion (despite no changes in her announced metrical principles): "Since the final syllable of 'suffer', as pronounced, can be elided, there is no irregularity in the line, which should be read with the stress on the contrasted auxiliaries:

x / x / / / / / x /
Because | I did | suffer'I | must suff | er paine." (p. 77)

Gardner does not mention Shawcross's note on this line or his "Index"; evidently between 1952 and 1978 she developed a new sense of the seventeenth-century pronunciation of "suffer" and/or made use of *rubato*. The result is a text with an elision mark between "suffer" and "I" with no precedent in any known manuscript or printed version of the poem—in short, a replicar.

The previous examples have shown that 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. Admittedly, the current and immediately foreseeable state of bibliographical knowledge of Donne texts may make their perfect restoration impossible, but surely restoration, with all its inadvertent errors of ignorance, is a more worthy goal than is replicar editing with all its deliberate alterations. After all, there is something to be said for originals —the Silver Ghost is still rolling along with at least 662,182 miles on the original engine.

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NOTES

1 An abbreviated version of this paper was delivered in the Renaissance English Text Society session at the 1982 Modern Language Association Convention.

2 "Salon: Rolls Royce: The Silver Ghost: The Car that Built the Reputation," *Road & Track* (September 1979), p. 87.

3 For further discussion of the two compositors and their settings of sheet S, see my "The Genesis and Transmission of Donne's *Biathanatos*," *The Library*, 5th series, 31 (1976), 64-68; "Marginal Rules as Evidence," *Studies in Bibliography*, 30 (1977), 173-75; and *Biathanatos by John Donne* (forthcoming from the Univ. of Delaware Press).

4 See my "Manuscript Materials in the First Edition of Donne's *Biathanatos*," *Studies in Bibliography*, 31 (1978), 217-21, for proof that the holograph served as copy for the transcription and first edition; then see my "Genesis" (pp. 67-68) for proof that both compositors set sheet S from the same manuscript.

5 Sullivan, "Marginal," pp. 174-75.

6 Sullivan, "Genesis," pp. 58-60.

7 Sullivan, *Biathanatos by John Donne*, Appendix B (forthcoming—copy available from the author upon request).

8 "The Text of Donne's *Letters to Severall Persons*," *Review of English Studies*, 7 (1931), 291-301.

9 "Donne's *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour*," *PMLA*, 56 (1941), 139.

10 Letters are numbered as in Geoffrey Keynes, *A Bibliography of Dr. John Donne: Dean of Saint Paul's*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973).

11 2 vols. (1899; rpt. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1959).

12 Keynes, p. 133.

13 For a fuller discussion of the errors in Gosse's text, see my "The Problem of Text in Familiar Letters," *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 75 (1981), 120-23.

14 For a transcription of this letter to Buckingham, see my "Letters," pp. 125-26.

15 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1912), I, iii-iv.

16 *John Donne: The Divine Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978).

17 See Helen Gardner, *John Donne's holograph of 'A Letter to the Lady Carey and Mrs Essex Riche'* (Oxford: Scolar Mansel *in conjunction with* The Bodleian Library, 1972).

18 Rpt. "from corrected sheets of the first edition" (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966.

19 In *The Complete Poetry of John Donne* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967), p. 497.

20 P. 13.