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Manuscript Poems and Print Assumptions: Donne and His Modern Editors

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Editing much of the poetry of Ben Jonson is a relatively straightforward task; editing any of the poetry of John Donne is an exceedingly problematic one. The difference lies in the two poets' differing attitudes toward poetry as text, as artifact. Although these two writers were almost exact contemporaries, Jonson's conception of text adumbrates that of the modern editor, while Donne's reflects an earlier, preprint attitude that survived into the late Renaissance in the form of an antiprint bias affected by many "gentleman" authors. A major problem with most twentieth-century editions of Donne's poetry is that modern editors have too frequently approached and carried out their tasks as if Donne's attitude toward his text were essentially that espoused by Jonson—and by themselves. Consciously or unconsciously, they have anachronistically reflected the assumptions of print culture when working with a body of poems that circulated throughout their author's lifetime only in manuscript.

The two collections of poetry published in Jonson's 1616 folio *Workes* as *Epigrammes* and *The Forrest* attest to the fact that their author wrote for as wide a public as he could find among the discerning and that he recognized, welcomed, and took full advantage of the control offered by the print medium. Carefully overseeing the commitment of his poems to the world at large in hundreds of identical copies, Jonson asserted his authorship of the 133 poems of the *Epigrammes* and the fifteen poems of *The Forrest*. He thereby established his canon and set the order and defined the texts of the individual poems making up that canon. Jonson in effect acted as his own editor, even to the point of paying close attention to spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.[1] As a consequence, the modern textual editor of *Epigrammes* and *The Forrest*

—if he or she is not modernizing spelling and punctuation—has only to collate several copies of the folio to catch any changes made while the book was in press, transcribe its texts, correct those few typographical errors not caught by Jonson in his own careful proofreading, and list the variant readings of those poems that had been printed earlier than 1616 and those that circulated in manuscript. And as a corollary consequence, anyone today wishing to read, study, or write about Jonson's well-known countryhouse poem "To Penshurst," for instance, can go to either of the two modern critical editions of Jonson's poetry—or indeed to the Penguin paperback selection of his poems made by Thom Gunn—and find virtually identical texts of the poem, differing only in minor matters of typography.

From the evidence of his letters, it is clear that John Donne's attitude toward print was considerably different, and that attitude affected the way in which he viewed his poetry as artifact. It is common in printed books of the late Renaissance for a gentleman author to protest that he had no thought of writing for a general audience and that he has somehow been forced into allowing publication. Most of these disclaimers are disingenuous, but Donne seems to have had a sincere dread of print publication, at least of poetry. Although he apparently had no problem with the idea of a gentleman's publishing prose works, he considered the printing of poetry—indeed, any manifestation of appearing to be a professional poet—both demeaning to his dignity and potentially offensive to his aristocratic patrons. Aside from a few commendatory and elegiac pieces, the only authorized printings of Donne's poems during his lifetime are the *Anniversaries* (1611, 1612). And in a letter to George Gerrard (or Garrard) dated 14 April 1612, Donne lamented those printings as lapses in gentlemanly conduct, characterizing his decision to allow his poems to be printed as a kind of fall from grace: "Of my Anniversaries, the fault that I acknowledge in my self, is to have *descended* to print anything in verse, which though it have excuse even in our times, by men who professe, and practice much gravitie; yet I confesse I wonder how I *declined* to it, and do not pardon my self."[2] Two years later, when he was pressured by the Earl of Somerset to print a collection of poems before entering holy orders, Donne expressed a fear that such a general publication might offend his longtime patroness, the Countess of Bedford, and vowed his determination to restrict the proposed book's distribution. Writing on 20 December 1614 to Henry Goodyer, who had introduced him to the countess and who

frequently acted as their go-between, Donne remarked, "One thing more I must tell you; but so softly, that I am loath to hear my self: and so softly, that if that good Lady were in the room, with you and this Letter, she might not hear. It is, that I am brought to a necessity of printing my Poems, and addressing them to my L. Chamberlain. This I mean to do forthwith; not for much publique view, but at mine own cost, a few Copies" (*Letters*, pp. 196-97). Although a collection of his poetry seemed fated to be set in type, Donne clearly intended to treat the distribution of its copies as one would that of manuscripts, not offering them in large numbers for sale to the vulgar, but giving them in limited numbers to members of an intimate circle of friends, patrons, and prospective patrons. Apparently Donne managed to avoid printing his poems altogether, for no publication from 1615 is known; and for the rest of his life, his poetry apparently continued to exist and circulate almost exclusively in manuscript.

A major feature of manuscript transmission is its lack of stability in canon, attribution, and text.[3] For an author, the fluidity of manuscript transmission has an immediate advantage in that he or she may easily redefine canon and text at will and as often as desired. But balanced against that advantage is the very real disadvantage that once a work leaves its author's hands, he or she is able to exert absolutely no control over it. On the one hand, manuscript transmission allows an author ongoing control of a work. He or she can, for example, tailor individual copies of the same piece to suit changing circumstances and specific recipients. He or she can add to, subtract from, and re-arrange canon as often as desired. And even after a work has begun to circulate, he or she can feel free to revise its text at will, experiencing none of the inhibition that a print author may feel toward changing a work once it has been set into type and distributed in hundreds of identical copies.

On the other hand, however, manuscript transmission allows for none of the overall, permanent control that an author can find in print. In manuscript, even multiple copies of the same work personally prepared by the author can and nearly always do differ in details; and once a work leaves the physical possession of its author, it is open to virtually infinite nonauthorial variation at the hands of selective, inattentive, or officious copyists. A copyist may, for example, omit or change attribution, omit or rearrange individual pieces within a composite work, or augment one author's work with pieces drawn from another—all of these actions affecting

canon. In addition, a copyist inevitably tampers with the text being transmitted. If the original being copied is unclear or ambiguous, the copyist may misread and consequently mistranscribe words or punctuation marks. If the scribe does not understand the meaning of a difficult passage, he or she may rewrite it to make its meaning immediately evident, a practice termed "trivialization" by textual editors. And if the copyist considers himself or herself to be an author as well as a transmitter, he or she may decide to "improve" the text's wording, punctuation, or—if it is a poetical text—meter. Or a copyist may, simply through haste or carelessness, make any number of mistakes in transcription. And over all these deliberate or inadvertent changes in attribution, canon, ordering, and text, the author has absolutely no control. As a consequence, there is in manuscript transmission little of the sense of definitively establishing canon and text that one can experience in the medium of print.

Although I have not touched on everything that could happen to an author's canon and text while it exists only in manuscript, some of them authorial, others outside the author's control, one can readily see that the permutations are virtually infinite. It is safe to say that everything mentioned above—as well as some eventualities not touched upon there—happened to Donne's poetry by the time of his death or shortly thereafter. By 1633, several strands of manuscripts were in existence, differing in canon, ordering, and text. Moreover, and of crucial significance, the earliest printed editions of Donne's poetry were set not from authorial holographs but from various exempla of some of these strands. Unlike the 1616 printings of Jonson's *Epigrammes* and *The Forrest*, the posthumously issued *Poems, by J. D. with Elegies on the Authors Death* of 1633 reflects no authorial control, and it suffers from all of the consequences of that lack of control. In canon, it is both incomplete and inaccurate. For example, it prints only twelve *Holy Sonnets* and includes a translation of Psalm 137 that was probably written by Francis Davison and an epitaph on Shakespeare written by William Basse. Moreover, the ordering of the poems seems haphazard both as groups and as individual pieces within groups, a feature interpreted by Donne's modern editors as an indication that the book was compiled from more than one source as occasions presented themselves. And finally, its texts seem not to have been set from a single manuscript tradition, but from at least two—again as occasions presented themselves—with some emendations made on the authority of still other manuscript

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strands and other changes made on the sole authority of the book's compiler-editor or its compositor. To add to the confusion, the second edition of Donne's *Poems* (1635) both augments the canon by the addition of authentic poems and corrupts it further by the inclusion of still more spurious ones. It also rearranges the contents and selectively revises the texts according to yet another manuscript tradition. The subsequent seventeenth-century editions in general follow the ordering of 1635, but they progressively add further canonical and spurious items, and they progressively corrupt the text.

Unlike Jonson's editors, then, Donne's editors are faced with a bewildering array of artifacts, all—except for a very few isolated holographs--at least one remove from the authorial hand and most of them at several removes. And these editors have not reached consensus, but indeed have sorted out these artifacts in strikingly different ways. As a consequence, anyone wishing to read, study, or write about Donne's well-known "A Hymne to God the Father," for instance, can go to the modern critical old-spelling editions and find virtually as many different texts as there are editions themselves. Some of the more substantive differences are these:

Line 7:

Grierson	Wilt thou forgive that sinne **which I have** wonne Others to sinne? *etc.*
Hayward & Gardner 2	Wilt thou forgive that sinne **by which I'have** wonne
Gardner 1 & Shawcross	Wilt thou forgive that sinne **by which I** wonne

Lines 15-16:

Grierson	**But sweare** by thy selfe, that at my death thy **sonne** Shall shine as **he** shines now, and heretofore
Hayward	**Sweare** by thy selfe, that at my death thy **sonne** Shall shine as **he** shines now, and heretofore
Gardner 1&2 & Shawcross	**Sweare** by thy selfe, that at my death thy **Sunne** Shall shine as **it** shines now, and heretofore

Line 18:

Grierson & Hayward	I **feare** no more.
Gardner 1&2 & Shawcross	I **have** no more.[4]

As one can readily see, these differences in text are far more than typographical. They affect the meaning, the meter, and the shape of the poem.

The presence or absence of "by" in line 7, for example, can affect the relationship of the adjectival clause to the noun it modifies: "that sinne *which* I have wonne / Others to sinne" is not the same as "that sinne *by* which I wonne [*or* have wonne] / Others to sinne." Even more striking is the variation in line 15. "But sweare by thy selfe" is different from "Sweare by thy selfe" in tone as well as in meter and meaning. The "But" of the Grierson reading may be interpreted as conditional, that is, "If you will only swear." The naked "Sweare" of the other editions is an imperative. The variants in the pun in lines 15 and 16 represent differences of emphasis, since the stated element and the implied element of a pun are not equal. The "sonne" and "he" of the Grierson and Hayward editions pun from a different (and more unusual) direction than the more familiar "Sunne" and "it" of Gardner and Shawcross and thereby create a different kind of wit, at once more explicit yet finally more subtle. That is, the obvious equation of the "Sunne" with Christ in the Gardner and Shawcross versions reflects an easy pun ubiquitous in the period, whereas the explicit "sonne" of the Grierson and Hayward editions is transformed into a pun only by the word "shines" in the following line, thus reversing the usual approach. While the reference to Christ as "thy sonne" is more explicit than the reference to him as "thy Sunne," the delayed wit that results from line 16—"Shall shine as he shines now"—might be seen as more subtle and, indeed, more affecting.

Finally, there is the question of closure. In all the modern editions of the hymn, it is divided into three stanzas, the first two listing various kinds of sin in the interrogative form of "Wilt thou forgive . . ." and concluding "When thou hast done, thou hast not done, / For I have more." And in all versions, the final stanza begins "I have a sinne of feare. . . ." In the Gardner and Shawcross editions, the poem recapitulates much of the wording of the conclusions to the first two stanzas in the conclusion to the third—

that is, "When thou has done, thou hast not done, / For I *have* more" turns into "And, having done that, Thou hast[e] done, / I *have* no more." In the Grierson text, however, the poem's final line recapitulates not the "have" of stanzas one and two, but the "feare" of the opening line of stanza three itself—that is, the final stanza opens with "I have a sinne of *feare*" and closes with "I *feare* no more"—revealing another design altogether, one whose principle of closure is considerably more restrictive.

Where does the authorial text of "A Hymne to God the Father" lie among all these options? Grierson determined that it lies with the 1633 *Poems* and followed that earliest printing exactly, though he did print on the following page another version of the poem from a manuscript. Hayward, Gardner, and Shawcross variously determined that the authorial text lies in one or other of the manuscript traditions. Interestingly, between her first and second editions of the *Divine Poems*, Gardner even changed her mind as to which manuscript strand to follow in line 7. My own answer to the question of where the authorial text lies is that we do not yet have enough evidence to tell, and that any claim that one or another text is authorial is premature, based on a pyramid of assumptions and inferences that are themselves based on the study of far too few artifacts.

In addition to the early printings, at least eighteen early manuscript copies of "A Hymne to God the Father" survive, but most of Donne's editors—and this is particularly the case with the Oxford editors—have studied only a handful of them and have apparently done so with print assumptions in the backs of their minds. In other words, they have expected to find the authorial text in a single artifact or group of related artifacts, discernible primarily by its aesthetically superior readings. They have expected therefore to be able to discount all other artifacts as preserving nonauthorial corruptions. But with a manuscript poet, such an attitude is anachronistic. No single artifact containing "A Hymne to God the Father"—however aesthetically superior, inferior, or indifferent its readings—bears an authorial imprimatur analogous to that borne by the 1616 printing of Jonson's "To Penshurst." What an editor needs to do with such poems as Donne's hymn is to study carefully all of the artifacts known to survive, to construct from them a textual history that accounts for all of their permutations, and then to subject all of the progressive changes in text to established bibliographical tests, stripping away scribal slips and nonauthorial "improvements" and trivializations. What is left after this rigorous

study and winnowing is the closest one can get to an authorial text or—if multiple readings survive all the tests for authenticity—a *series* of authorial texts.

Despite what one might infer from the textual introductions and apparatuses in the putatively authoritative Oxford editions of Donne, no such comprehensive, objective study of the artifacts lies behind their texts. Indeed, all of Donne's Oxford editors have anachronistically treated their subject as if he shared with Jonson a print mentality. They have worked from the assumption that somewhere or other among the early printed editions and the manuscripts there exists a cache of texts stabilized by the poet himself, and that one has only to discover that cache and then every other artifact can be safely demoted to the status of curiosity, its variants dismissed as corruptions that may justifiably be reported incompletely and at whim. And as a result of their demotion of some artifacts in favor of others, Donne's Oxford editors have failed to give their readers full bibliographical descriptions of them, even those that they consider superior. Indeed, only a few manuscripts are discussed at any length in their various textual introductions, and those few are described so generally and superficially that one cannot test the editors' assertions regarding their value in the textual histories of the poems that they preserve.

To Herbert Grierson rightfully belongs credit for being the first scholarly editor of Donne, but his monumental 1912 edition is seriously marred by unfounded assumptions and by incomplete and inaccurate representations of the primary materials that he consulted. Grierson worked not from an objective study of available artifacts, but to a large extent from a preconceived notion of where the authorial texts lay, and his determination of authenticity was based on aesthetic judgments rather than bibliographical evidence. Reacting against the uncritical, eclectic use of manuscript materials by Alexander B. Grosart and E. K. Chambers in their respective late nineteenth-century editions of Donne, Grierson set out to substantiate his predetermination that the early printed texts, particularly that of 1633, were aesthetically superior to those found in any of the manuscripts (I, iii-vi). This preconception colored all of his work with the text and with the textual history. Grierson proceeded, in other words, as if the earliest printed text of each poem were authorial (albeit sophisticated and somewhat corrupted by the book's compiler or compositor and therefore in need of selective emendation), and he accordingly judged and categorized all other artifacts, both in print and in manuscript,

according to their respective relationships to the text of 1633. Of the thirty-seven manuscripts known to him, he gave primacy of position and authority to those three that were closest to 1633 in their texts (i.e., the initial members of what came to be called the Group I manuscripts) and secondary importance to those four that provided poems contained in 1633 but not present in the manuscripts of the first group (i.e., what are now known as the Group II manuscripts), relegating all other manuscripts (i.e., those of his Group III) to the largely undifferentiated limbo of "comparatively little value and no authority for the textual critic" (II, cvii). Thus he laid the rudiments of both a classification system of the manuscripts and a hierarchical attitude toward them that have, with refinements and augmentation, persisted throughout the twentieth century.

There are several serious problems with Grierson's attitude and methodology, all of them stemming from the inapplicability of print assumptions to a manuscript poet. First and foremost, of course, is his trust in 1633 as a reflection of authorial intent. As noted earlier, 1633 gives evidence of having been compiled from more than one source. At this point, we can only speculate as to what most of those sources were. But there is one group of poems for which we know the compiler's source, namely, the *Anniversaries*; and it is revealing that 1633's source for those poems is demonstrably faulty. Based upon an extensive study of the surviving artifacts, Frank Manley has argued that the 1611 publication of *The First Anniversary* "is undoubtedly an accurate reproduction of the original manuscript and furnishes the only authoritative text" of the poem, and that the errata sheet for the 1612 printing of both *Anniversaries* indicates authorial intervention in their publication, since it corrects verbal errors that could not have been apparent to a printing house proofreader.[5] In other words, if any artifacts in the Donne canon other than a few scattered holographs can be said to come close to bearing their author's imprimatur, they are the 1611 and 1612 printings of the *Anniversaries*. Yet 1633 follows not the "good" octavos of 1611 and 1612 for these important poems, but the textually corrupt edition of 1625. The logical question to ask, then, is what valid reason—given 1633's demonstrably poor source of copy texts for the *Anniversaries*—does one have to assume that its sources for any of the other poems that it includes are superior ones? Surely John Shawcross is correct in recently concluding that "At best, 1633 is another version of text, not only with no real authority, but in certain ways with less

authority" than some of the manuscripts compiled during Donne's lifetime.[6]

A corollary to Grierson's virtual canonization of the posthumous print tradition of Donne's poetry is his undervaluing of its manuscript transmission. In effect, he treated the manuscript tradition as if it were virtually of a single thread, its individual parts differentiated only by what he perceived to be progressive corruptions. Moreover, he was much more interested in those manuscripts that agreed with each other and with 1633 against the later printings than he was in those that preserved unique readings. As a consequence, he characteristically reported manuscript variants only at points of crux and then only if a given variant was preserved in two or more manuscripts. Although he gave lip service to the probability that some of Donne's poems "existed in more or less revised forms" (II, cxx), in practice he failed to give complete sets of variants for presumably early states of poems that may have been revised, making it impossible for users of his edition to reconstruct completely the alternate versions. And since he ignored unique readings, he failed altogether to record what may have been early versions that, owing to the vicissitudes of manuscript transmission, survived in single copies only.

A good example of this latter shortcoming in Grierson's edition is to be found in its treatment of the Bridgewater manuscript's copy of Donne's verse letter to Henry Wotton beginning, "Sir, more then kisses, letters mingle soules." As artifact, the Bridgewater volume (now Huntington Library MS EL 6893) probably dates from the early 1620s, compiled either for John Egerton (created first Earl of Bridgewater in 1617), Donne's friend since their days together at Lincoln's Inn in the early 1590s, or for his wife Frances, who had known Donne since 1600. Grierson examined the Bridgewater manuscript, then still in the Ellesmere library at Bridgewater House, and of it he wrote: "I had hoped that it might prove, being made for those who had known Donne all his life, an exceptionally good manuscript, but can hardly say that my expectations were fulfilled. . . . On the whole *B* cannot be accepted in any degree as an independent authority for the text. It is important only for its agreements with other manuscripts, as helping to establish what I may call the manuscript tradition, in various passages, as against the text of the editions" (II, xcix-c). Grierson then proceeded to report some, though not all, of the variants in "Sir, more then kisses" that agree with other manuscript sources against the printed texts of 1633 and 1635. But he failed to report an intriguing

variant that was unique among the manuscript sources that he consulted. In the 1633 text, lines 39-42 of the verse letter read:

> For in best understandings, sinne beganne,
> Angels sinn'd first, then Devills, and then man.
> Only perchance beasts sinne not; wretched wee
> Are beasts in all, but white integritie.

Three lines earlier in the poem, Donne has dismissed as wishful thinking the idea that man can "know all" vice yet "do none" (36). Man's "best understandings" (39) are indeed his intellectual faculties, which he shares with angels; but those faculties, which ought to have been used by both angels and man to preserve their innate innocence, were instead misused in disobedience and rebellion. "Angels sinn'd first" in their proud rebellion against God, whereupon they became "Devills," who sinned again in tempting man, who himself sinned in yielding to that temptation (40) and thereby became bestial. The only creatures excluded from this progress of sin may be "beasts," which do not share the higher faculties of intellect with angels and man and so "perchance . . . sinne not" (41). Fallen mankind deviates from the lower order of creatures only in not having preserved what may be their "white integritie" (42).

Whereas the 1633 text equivocates on whether or not beasts sin, the Bridgewater reading is quite definite on that point:

> for in best vnderstanding synne began:
> Anngells synd first, then Divells; & then man
> onely peccantes; beasts syñ not, wretched wee,
> are beasts in all, but white integritye. (fol. 75v)

In this reading, "Anngells," "Divells," and "man" are summed up as the "onely peccantes" or sinners among created beings; and the unqualified declaration is made that "beasts syñ not." Is the Bridgewater reading of this passage authorial? Although a definitive statement concerning its authenticity must await a complete collation and thorough study of all surviving artifacts of the poem, it is at least probable—given the standard bibliographical tests for authenticity—that the Bridgewater recension is both authorial and early, perhaps preserving a version of the poem earlier than the one presented in 1633 and the manuscripts so far reported.

That the Bridgewater scribe could have omitted the full stop at the end of line 40 on his own accord is possible, but that he misread his copy text's "perchance" as "peccantes" and then added a semicolon to separate the word from "beasts syñ not" in line 41 is

quite unlikely. And just as unlikely is the supposition that the scribe deliberately changed "perchance" to "peccantes" and added the semicolon on his own accord. Almost always when a copyist knowingly alters a text, it is to substitute a common, easily understood expression for an unusual, difficult one; and exactly the opposite is the case here. Especially when used as a noun, "peccantes" is a highly unusual word and was so even in Donne's day. It is virtually inconceivable, then, that a copyist would have changed "perchance" to "peccantes" on his own initiative. On the other hand, it is quite conceivable that Donne first wrote "peccantes"; and then later, during a process of revision, decided to be more tentative on the question of whether or not beasts sin, thereupon altering the reading himself to that reflected in 1633 and the reported manuscripts. Tellingly, the Bridgewater text of this passage is the more internally consistent of the two readings, since beasts can have "white integritye" only if they—without question—"syñ not." If Bridgewater's readings are indeed authorial, then the subsequent revision is quite telling in that it was obviously dictated not by artistic considerations, but by theological ones. In hedging on the question of whether beasts sin, Donne skirts full participation in the theological debate over the status of beasts in the postlapsarian world. Unfortunately, in large part because of Grierson's denigration of the Bridgewater manuscript, its unique readings in this particular poem have never been recorded in an edition of Donne's poetry.

The final and most culpable fault in Grierson's edition is its inaccuracy in the reporting of manuscript variants. No doubt in part because of his assumption of the superiority of print transmission, Grierson did not exercise the same degree of care with manuscript texts that he took with printed ones. The notebooks for his 1912 edition, on deposit at the National Library of Scotland, show that Grierson relied heavily on collations and transcriptions of manuscripts made by others without checking them himself; and the lists of variant readings in his edition are riddled with errors.

The more recent Oxford editors of Donne, Helen Gardner and Wesley Milgate, have been somewhat more accurate than Grierson, but they have shared and even built upon their predecessor's anachronistic assumption of an authorially stabilized text, and they have been equally incomplete in the study and reporting of manuscript variants. It is interesting that, like Grierson, Gardner was not entirely objective in approaching her editorial tasks. Indeed, she

confesses that she began the 1952 edition of the *Divine Poems* in order "to print the 'Holy Sonnets' in what I believe to be their right order" and "to annotate the poems, particularly 'A Litany'" (p. v). And of her reasons for editing *The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets* (1965), she writes: "I wished to re-examine the canon, to establish if not precise dates at least rather narrower limits than had so far been proposed, to provide a fuller commentary, and to revise the text."[7] Tellingly, neither set of reasons includes an objective approach to the surviving artifacts. Indeed, Gardner's predetermination of the "right order" of the *Holy Sonnets* was based on aesthetic considerations for which she then sought textual evidence. Likewise, her determination "to revise" the text of the elegies and the *Songs and Sonets* also implies a preconception rather than an open-minded investigation, since one cannot in fact know whether the texts need revising until a thorough study of the manuscript and the early printed copies has already been carried out.

In the prefaces to his two volumes in the Oxford series, on the other hand, Milgate does lay claim to what appears to be an objective, comprehensive study of textual artifacts, but it is a claim belied by his practice. He states that his purposes in his edition of *The Satires, Epigrams and Verse Letters* (1967) were "to examine the text in the light of manuscripts not available to Sir Herbert for his great edition of 1912, to test the evidence for the existence of different versions and possible authentic revisions of the poems, to provide a fuller commentary, and generally to gather together the results of half a century of scholarly and critical work on the poems since Grierson's edition appeared." In his edition of *The Epithalamions, Anniversaries and Epicedes* (1978), Milgate repeats essentially unchanged the first, third, and fourth purposes from his earlier preface; but rewords his earlier determination to test for "possible authentic revisions" to read thus: "to isolate any variant readings in the poems which might have stood in Donne's own copies."[8] In fact, however, Milgate follows Gardner's lead in almost all textual matters, accepting her theories of transmission virtually without question or modification; and both editors investigate and report far fewer manuscripts than were known to exist when they prepared their respective editions.

Gardner, followed by Milgate, augments Grierson's lists of Group I and II manuscripts by the successive additions of further volumes to each category; and ultimately subdivides his third group,

with augmentations, into Groups III, IV, and V (*Elegies*, pp. xcvii-xcviii). But this refinement does not question Grierson's basic assumption that there exists somewhere an authorially set text, it only quibbles as to where that text is to be found, and it persists in ordering the manuscripts hierarchically according to their general agreements with the printed texts. By the time that she prepared her 1965 edition of *The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets*, however, Gardner had come to distrust her predecessor's reverence for print transmission, concluding that when 1633 "has no manuscript support, or only random support, the reading of the manuscripts (if they agree against the edition) should be adopted. Since so many of the unsupported readings of *1633* can be shown to be sophistications, it can be given no weight against a consensus of the manuscripts" (pp. xc-xci). But by manuscripts, Gardner means only those of Groups I and II, with a few readings adopted from the Group III tradition on the basis of personal preference (p. xci). She does not mean the whole body of manuscripts known to her. Indeed, she merely substitutes the Groups I and II manuscripts for the 1633 edition as preserving between them authorially set texts. And lending support to this contention, she draws upon two of her own theories already posited in her 1952 edition of the *Divine Poems*: (1) that the protocopy of the Group I manuscripts, which she labels X, derives from the compilation of poems made by Donne himself in 1614, mentioned in the letter to Goodyer quoted earlier; and (2) that the scribe who produced the protocopy of the Group II manuscripts, Υ, "had access to Donne's own papers, and that some time after 1625 Donne must have allowed a copy of the poems in his possession to be taken" (pp. lxiv, lxvii). Then, to account for the differences in the individual members of the groups of manuscripts, she constructs elaborate stemmata supposing the existence of an α and three βs prior to X, Υ, and the Group III manuscripts, as well as intermediate steps between X and some members of Group I (*Elegies*, pp. lxxviii, lxiv).

All in all, it is a very impressive performance and it has dazzled many students of Donne. But in fact, what Gardner has done may be likened to building penthouses onto castles in air. As anyone who has studied even the most elementary principles of logic knows, one may base an inference upon a fact but never upon another inference. That Donne *completed* a manuscript volume of his poems in 1614-15 is only an inference. His letter to Goodyer in December of 1614, the sole documentary evidence in the matter, indicates that he began such a task, but it also clearly indicates

that as of the time of the writing of the letter he had not completed it. Apparently he had not even kept copies of many of his poems, since he complains that it has "cost me more diligence, to seek them, then it did to make them." And as of the date of the letter he still did not have copies of some poems, since he asks the recipient if he may "borrow that old book of you"—presumably a collection of some of his poems made by or for Goodyer—"which it will be too late to see, for that use, when I see you" (*Letters*, p. 197). As noted earlier, Donne undertook this preparation of his poems for the press only as the result of extreme pressure from Somerset. His heart was not in the task, and since neither the manuscript itself nor any published edition based on it nor any subsequent documentary reference to it survive, it is pure inference that the compilation of poems was ever completed. And it is an inference based upon an inference that the ur-copy text of the Group I manuscript was this holograph compilation of 1614-15. Moreover, given Donne's apparent nonchalance about preserving copies of his poems for himself—an attitude certainly reflected in his letter to Goodyer—as well as his negative attitude toward his secular poems after his ordination, that Donne even had in his possession an essentially complete transcription of his poetical canon in the 1620s, much less that he lent it out for someone to transcribe Gardner's ϒ from it, is pure speculation, founded on no documentary evidence whatsoever. Indeed, Gardner's elaborate stemmata, supposing the existence of numerous unverified compilations, are constructed in order to account for the fact that the existing evidence does not support her conclusions. Rather than allowing the documentary evidence to dictate her theories of transmission, Gardner allows her preconceived theory of transmission to dictate the supposition of nonexistent documents.

To give Gardner her due, all of her theories of textual transmission are posited merely as suppositions. But she and Milgate nevertheless work from the assumption that her theories are facts. Consequently, those suppositions—set forth as they are between the awesome gold-stamped covers of "authoritative" Oxford editions—have virtually rigidified into fact in the minds of Donne scholars, quibble though they do at Gardner's or Milgate's applications of them to the texts of specific poems. In truth, however, these theories have been based on the less than totally objective examination of far too few artifacts in far too little detail. And in the reporting of variants to be found in even those few artifacts,

Gardner and Milgate have been far too selective to allow for a testing of those theories of transmission by users of their editions. Because Gardner, followed by Milgate, determined that the authorial text of Donne's poems lies between the Groups I and II manuscripts, with selective emendations drawn from Gardner's other three groups essentially on the basis of aesthetic preference, both editors have confined themselves to a study of far fewer manuscript artifacts than were known to exist when they prepared their editions. Gardner, for example, consulted only forty-three in preparing her edition of *The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets* (1965), at a time when over one hundred were known to exist; and Milgate consulted the same number as Gardner, forty-three, for his edition of *The Epithalamions, Anniversaries and Epicedes* (1978), at a time when 159 were known to exist. Moreover, Gardner and Milgate, like Grierson, print only selected variants from those relatively few manuscripts consulted; and those that they do report are presented in such a cryptic, often misleading fashion that it is virtually impossible to reconstruct from them the readings of any given manuscript.

There are some major problems with such a selective study of manuscript sources when working with a manuscript poet. Gardner's rigidifying of Grierson's theory of groups has led to a monolithic view of each group, blurring what may be very important distinctions among the individual members of a group. It has fostered the mistaken tendency to see manuscripts compiled over a long period of time by several hands as deriving from single sources. And it has denigrated the contribution that the unclassified manuscripts—many of them miscellanies containing only a few Donne poems each—may well make in the investigation of textual histories. Moreover, their self-restrictions in the study of artifacts have caused both Gardner and Milgate to make unsupported pronouncements concerning which poems Donne may have revised.

Gardner expounds a monolithic approach to the manuscript groups in the Textual Introduction to her edition of *The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets*, where she declares that the collation of twenty-eight manuscripts "has convinced me . . . that the manuscripts in the groups must be treated as members of a group," and then concludes: "Thus, no editor should cite as valuable the readings of a single manuscript . . . without taking into account whether it is reading with its group" (p. lxxxi). Gardner to the contrary, however, such an approach, in discounting distinctions between members of a group, unwarrantedly assumes too great a similarity

between manuscripts that have been classified on the basis of general agreement. In addition, it blurs what may represent steps in authorial revision. For example, Cambridge Additional MS 5778 (hereafter cited as C57), given by Gardner and Milgate as the first member of Group I, deviates from all other members of that group in the first line of Donne's verse letter to Wotton discussed above. Whereas the other Group I manuscripts (as well as 1633) read the opening line of the poem as "Sir, more then kisses, letters mingle soules," C57 reads it "S[r], letters, more then kisses, mingle soules" (fol. 35). According to Gardner's view of the manuscript groups, C57's aberrant reading of the line carries no weight, and indeed Milgate does not even report it in his volume containing the verse letters. But this is exactly the reading of the line in the Bridgewater manuscript (also unreported by Milgate), in a "Group V" copy of the poem—to use Gardner's designation—that otherwise differs greatly from the Group I/1633 text. If, as suggested earlier, the Bridgewater recension of this verse letter may perserve an early version, then C57's retention of the earlier reading of line 1 in an otherwise revised text may represent an intermediate step between the Bridgewater text of the poem and the text of it presented in the bulk of the Group I manuscripts. In treating the groups as monoliths, and in most cases not even reporting individual readings that deviate from the majority, Gardner and Milgate obscure what may well be telling steps in the textual histories of individual poems.

Moreover, though Gardner admits that some of the "larger collections" of Donne's poems in manuscript "appear to be composite in origin, deriving one portion of their text from one tradition and in the remainder following others" (*Elegies*, p. lxiii), her weddedness to the monolithic view of the groups causes her in practice to treat manuscripts of composite origins as if they had single origins. Thus both Gardner and Milgate treat British Library MS Lansdowne 740, for example, as a member of Group II. But in a recent detailed examination of the artifact itself, Ernest W. Sullivan II found that the volume contains paper having eleven different watermarks and that its contents were entered by at least twelve people over a period of more than a century. Specifically, its fifty Donne poems were copied in at least two hands on paper with four different watermarks. In Sullivan's words, "it would seem very unlikely that the Lansdowne 740 texts all came from the same manuscript."[9] In placing Landsdowne 740 among the Group II manuscripts with no qualifications, then, Gardner and Milgate

have obscured the fact that its several parts—no doubt deriving from a number of sources—may well represent various different steps in the textual histories of the Donne poems that it contains.

Also stemming from the rigidifying of the groups of manuscripts by Gardner and Milgate is their unwarranted attitude toward the copies of Donne's poems to be found in the miscellanies of the period. In her edition of *The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets*, Gardner disparages these manuscript anthologies, remarking, "For an editor they are, in my experience, worthless. The texts they preserve are more or less corrupt examples of one or other of the traditions represented in the manuscript collections." She then uses this generalization to justify her self-restriction in the study of sources: "I began with the intention of collating all extant manuscript copies; but I abandoned the enterprise as wholly unrewarding, and have contented myself with collating the text in the manuscript collections" of the classified groups (p. lxiv). Such a generalization about miscellanies is short-sighted; and such an editorial practice, also followed by Milgate, is anachronistic when working with a manuscript poet. Peter Beal has recently argued that editors should pay more attention to miscellanies than they presently do, for such study can "throw extensive light on the process of textual transmission, on the general practices and assumptions involved in the collecting of verse in this period, on the way contemporaries interpreted texts, and on the nature and provenance of sources."[10] Beal's first and last points are especially important in the editing of manuscript poets. The peculiarities or manifest errors in miscellany copies of poems can sometimes provide useful clues as to changes or mistakes made in more authoritative lines of transmission, and the establishment of the nature and provenance of the miscellanies' sources can often aid in the construction of defensible textual histories for individual poems. While an editor should refrain from making eclectic emendations of a copy text on the basis of miscellany copies, such copies can be of considerable indirect value, and their texts should certainly be collected, collated, and studied.

Finally, working from the assumption that there is an authorially set text for Donne's poetry and therefore deliberately restricting the number and nature of the artifacts that they chose to study, Gardner and Milgate may well have misrepresented the extent of Donne's revisions. Offering essentially biographical rather than bibliographical proof for her pronouncements, Gardner is willing to admit revision in the satires, the poems that apparently made

Donne's reputation, and in the divine poems—to assure their orthodoxy on the eve of his ordination—but not in the elegies and "the great majority of the *Songs and Sonnets*." "There is no particular reason why Donne should have wished to revise them," she declares (*Elegies*, p. lxxxii). And with no proof and little argument beyond the assertion that differences in texts represent only errors and sophistications, Milgate writes, "I believe that in the verse letters we are dealing with good and less good copies of the same original text, and not, as Grierson suggested . . . , with copies of an original and of a revised authentic version" (*Satires*, p. lxvii, n. 1). Perhaps both Gardner and Milgate are correct, but again one may justly protest that all the evidence is not in and it is therefore premature to draw such unsupported conclusions.

The Oxford volumes are not, of course, the only old-spelling editions of Donne's poetry to be issued during the twentieth century. Frank Manley's excellent edition of the *Anniversaries* has already been noted; and there are two editions of the entire poetic canon: John Hayward's *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose*, originally published by the Nonesuch Press in 1929; and John T. Shawcross's *Complete Poetry*, published by the Anchor Books division of Doubleday in 1967 as a part of the Anchor Seventeenth-Century Series. Hayward collated twenty-six manuscripts in the preparation for his edition (all but two of them already reflected in Grierson's edition) and he made a few more emendations from manuscripts than did his predecessor, but his texts and his attitude that the manuscripts "must be regarded as tributaries to the chief source—the edition of 1633" (p. xxi) in large measure duplicate Grierson's. His textual notes, on the other hand, are even more selective and less helpful than Grierson's, since he typically uses such terms as "the MSS," "the best MSS," and "most of the MSS" to designate the sources of his emendations and the few variants that he records. The only importance that the Hayward text has is an historical one: it was reprinted by Modern Library in 1952, without Hayward's notes but with a new introduction by Charles M. Coffin, and as a consequence was for many years the chief text in which students were introduced to Donne's poetry.

John Shawcross's Anchor Books edition, on the other hand, reflects a sensitivity to the manuscript transmission of Donne's poetry not found in Hayward and the Oxford editors. Although Shawcross uses the first printing of each poem as copy text and admits that his emendations are eclectic and "somewhat subjectively based" (p. xxi), lying behind his edition is the careful

study of 159 seventeenth-century manuscript sources, four times as many manuscript collections as the number cited by Grierson, and three times the number consulted by either Gardner or Milgate. And though the Anchor format precluded the printing of every variant present in those 159 manuscripts, Shawcross nevertheless includes more variant readings in his apparatus than do Grierson, Gardner, or Milgate; and those variants are more clearly labeled than they are in the Oxford editions, allowing the reader to reconstruct alternate versions of poems more easily and exactly. As a consequence, whether or not one agrees with Shawcross's emendations, he or she is provided with the raw materials on which the choices were made, a service not so thoroughly performed by Donne's Oxford editors.

But Shawcross does not record all manuscript variants, and in the years since he prepared his edition, previously unknown manuscripts have surfaced, and at a rapid rate, as the collections in public repositories are at last thoroughly examined and catalogued and as more and more private libraries go on the auction block. To date, a total of 246 are known to exist, their contents totaling well over 4000 copies of individual poems. Some of these newly surfaced items are miscellanies containing only one or a few poems each, but some are substantial collections of Donne's poetry compiled during the poet's lifetime.

Because most of Donne's modern editors have approached their task with the assumptions of print rather than manuscript culture, a definitive edition of Donne's poetry has yet to be published. Such an edition must begin with a sensitivity to assumptions regarding text and transmission that are not our own. It must proceed through a thorough and open-minded study of all surviving artifacts. And it must present to its users not only a text but also, in an easily comprehensible form, all of the raw material that underlie that text. The textual editors of *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*, now underway, have these as their goals. The Variorum will carry the study of Donne's texts as far as known resources permit, and it should bring us closer to what Donne actually wrote than any previous edition. Its texts and textual histories will be based on a fuller collation and a more thorough analysis of far more material than those of any previous edition, and its apparatus will significantly expand the range of materials available for informed critical interpretation of Donne's poetry.[11]

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Notes

1 On Jonson's concern with his canon and text, see Richard C. Newton, "Jonson and the (Re-) Invention of the Book," in *Classic and Cavalier: Essays on Jonson and the Sons of Ben*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1982), pp. 31-55. Jonson of course did not oversee the publication of his third collection of poems, *The Under-wood* (1640-41), and there are significant problems of canon and text in that collection.

2 John Donne, *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour (1651): A Facsimile Reproduction*, intro. M. Thomas Hester (Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1977), p. 238, emphasis supplied. Hereafter this collection is cited parenthetically in the text as *Letters*.

3 Many of my distinctions between manuscript and print culture set forth in this and the following paragraph have been stimulated by the study of Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1979).

4 *The Poems of John Donne*, ed. Herbert J. C. Grierson, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1912), I, 369; *John Donne Dean of St. Paul's: Complete Poetry and Selected Prose*, ed. John Hayward (London: Nonesuch, 1929), pp. 321-22; *John Donne: The Divine Poems*, ed. Helen Gardner (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952), p. 51 (cited in the list of variants as Gardner 1); *The Complete Poetry of John Donne*, ed. John T. Shawcross (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), p. 392; and *John Donne: The Divine Poems*, ed. Helen Gardner, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), p. 51 (cited in the list of variants as Gardner 2). Hereafter all references to these editions are cited parenthetically in the text. The version of the hymn in *John Donne: The Complete English Poems*, ed. A. J. Smith (New York: St. Martin's, 1971), pp. 348-49, modernizes the text of the 1633 edition. My list of variants ignores all modernized spelling editions and all reprintings of the poem in anthologies, where differences in text—and therefore in meaning and meter—have multiplied alarmingly.

5 *John Donne: The Anniversaries*, ed. Frank Manley (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 51, 54.

6 John T. Shawcross, "A Text of John Donne's Poems: Unsatisfactory Compromise," *John Donne Journal*, 2 (1983), 7.

7 *John Donne: The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets*, ed. Helen Gardner (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), p. v. Hereafter this edition is cited parenthetically in the text as *Elegies*.

8 *John Donne: The Satires, Epigrams and Verse Letters*, ed. W. Milgate (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), p. v; and *John Donne: The Epithalamions, Anniversaries and Epicedes*, ed. W. Milgate (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), p. v. Hereafter the former is cited parenthetically in the text as *Satires*.

9 Ernest W. Sullivan II, "New and Previously Unreported Materials for Donne's Text," unpublished paper read at the Donne Variorum special session of the Modern Language Association's annual meeting, December 1983, p. 8.

10 Peter Beal, comp., *Index of English Literary Manuscripts*, Vol. I (London: Mansell, 1980), Pt. 1, 248.

11 I wish to thank John Shawcross, who read and commented on an earlier draft of this study; Ernest Sullivan, who provided me with a copy of his MLA paper and the information on Grierson's notebooks; and Claude J. Summers, my colleague and frequent collaborator, who encouraged and advised me throughout my work on this project.