

On Some Early References to John Donne

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While the cliché that John Donne was little known before the nineteenth century has, compared to certain other writers, some validity, A. J. Smith's *Critical Heritage of John Donne* (1975) has provided evidence to question the implications of that belief, and we have been discovering additional allusions or discussions and imitations not included in that compendium. I call attention to six more items here. In the first of a series of biographical collections Clement Barksdale printed two significant excerpts relating to Donne. The volume--*Memorials of Worthy Persons: Two Decads. By Cl. Barksdale. The Memory of the Just is blessed.* London: Printed by I. R. 1661--included "Dr. John Donne, Dean of St. Paul's" and "Sir William Cokain, Alderman of London." The biographical statement about Donne is printed on pp. 5-22, and was taken "*Out of his Life, written by Jerem. Walton,*" an uninformed expansion of "I. Walton." That about Cokayne appears on pp. 23-31 and was taken "*Out of his Funeral Sermon by Dr. Donne, Decemb. 23 1626.*" The excerpts from Walton's *Life* and Donne's sermon come from the 1640 *LXXX Sermons*, but there the date of the sermon is December 12, 1626. Evelyn M. Simpson called attention to this volume in Volume X (1962) of *The Sermons of John Donne*, p. 425, in an addendum to Volume I (1953), p. 31. Here in 1953 the editors (George Potter and Simpson) had reported the excerpt found in John Wilford's *Memorials and Characters*, which they erroneously dated as "MDCCXLI." They proceeded, Wilford "evidently . . . found the material in the recently published *LXXX Sermons*, in which this sermon appears as No. 80, but took great liberty and little care in transcribing from his source." Simpson silently corrected the date to "1741" in Volume X but did not retract the previous false conclusion just cited. She indicated that Wilford followed Barksdale "in its alterations and omissions, but he introduces an occasional minor variant of his own"; he also silently corrected the date of the sermon. Neither the Barksdale volume nor the Wilford is cited by Smith,

but both are included by Sir Geoffrey Keynes in his bibliography of Donne. Keynes's second (1932), third (1958), and fourth (1973) editions cite Barksdale (though Potter and Simpson did not mention this work in 1953). Keynes cites Wilford only in the fourth edition. I recall these items here for two reasons: they, among others, seem to have been overlooked by critics still reciting the cliché of Donne's early reputation; and they suggest that a new bibliography of Donne prior to 1912 (the beginning date of John R. Roberts's bibliographic volumes) is needed to pull together in a more readily useable form all the materials that appear in Keynes and that have been turned up by recent scholarship.

Another instance is Mrs. Simpson's citation of John Adams's *An Essay Concerning Self-Murder* (London: Printed for T. Bennet, 1700) in *A Study of the Prose Works of John Donne*, pp. 165-66. She points out that a new edition of *Biathanatos* appeared that year, and that Adams, afterward Provost of King's College, attempted to refute it, as in Chapter V: "Who they are Chiefly that maintain this Act, to be Lawful: The Stoicks: the Author of *Biathanatos*." What is important besides awareness of this prose work, apparently written specifically because of the recent publication of Donne's tract, is the misreading of its intent, a misreading which has apparently always hovered about it. Keynes cited it in Editions 2, 3, and 4, and Ernest W. Sullivan includes excerpts and discussion in his recent editions of *Biathanatos*. But important as it is as example of early criticism of this prose work, it is not mentioned by Smith.

The other three references are in a realm that suggest a continuing awareness of Donne in the eighteenth century but an unscholarly knowledge of him and his poetry. The first is an epigraph that appears in *The Prompter*, no. CLXVI, 8 June 1736, Printed for T. Cooper, ascribed to "John Donne": "The Muses morn, for this Calamity, / That they have Ballads, but no Poetry." The lines, of course, are not Donne's, but the ascription attests to awareness of his name and the kind of thought associated with his work. They are drawn from lines 11-14 of Henry Valentine's "An Elegie upon the incomparable Dr Donne," first printed in 1633: "... See how the *Muses* mourne / Upon their oaten Reeds, and from his *Vrne* / Threaten the World with this *Calamity*, / They shall have *Ballads*, but no *Poetry*."

Another comes from *The Virginia Almanack for the Year of Our Lord, 1770*. Williamsburg: Printed and Sold by William Rind (Evans 11514). On page [3], under "Select Aphorisms: Extracted from different Authors" we read: "Doctor Donne, a Person of great Parts and Learning, being

upon his Death-bed, and taking his solemn Farewel of his Friends, left this with them: 'I repent of all my Life, but That Part of it I spent in Communion with God, and doing Good.'" It sounds like "Deaths Duell" or Walton, but it does not appear in that sermon or in the Life.

Finally, we should remark the reprinting of six epigrams, with texts indicating their source as the printed editions, in William Oldys's *A Collection of Epigrams. To which is Prefix'd, A Critical Dissertation on this Species of Poetry* (London: Printed for J. Walthoe, M.DCC.XXVII). These printings have not previously been recorded in Donne scholarship. Included are "A Self-Accuser," No. CLI, on H4; "Phryne," No. CLII, on H4v; "A licentious Person," No. CLIII, on H4v; "A lame Beggar," No. CCCXI, on Plv; "The Antiquary," No. CCCXIII, on P2v; and "Disinherited," No. CCCXIV, on P2v.

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