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What Have the Donne Variorum Textual Editors Discovered, and Why Should Anyone Care?[1]

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I am not going to discuss all of the eighteen bibliographical and textual advances made by the Donne Variorum listed by Gary Stringer in the 2002 National Endowment for the Humanities grant application by the Donne Variorum;[2] instead, I want to consider some of these discoveries that raise important bibliographical and critical issues concerning the way we think about and read Donne verse.

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[1]This article was originally delivered in shorter form as a paper at the John Donne Society Session at the 2002 Modern Language Association Convention. The article will also appear in the forthcoming volume 16 of *TEXT: An Interdisciplinary Annual of Textual Studies*, and that article has been slightly revised for its appearance here.

[2]Stringer's list includes not only the kind of general advances like those that I am going to discuss, but also some more specific ones such as: printing Donne's epitaphs for Robert Drury and his wife Anne as two distinct poems; the first accurate graphic representation of Donne's "*Epitaph for Himself in St. Paul's Cathedral*"; first identification of the edition (1619) of Angelin Gazet's *Pia Hilaria Variaque Carmina* that Donne used as the basis for his "Translated out of *Gazaeus, Vota Amico facta*. Fol. 160"; first to print the "*Stationes*" from the *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* as hexametric verse; first to prove bibliographically that the elegy "The Expostulation" cannot be Ben Jonson's; etc.

So what have the Donne Variorum Textual Editors learned as they boldly ventured where no one with any sense had gone before? The first thing of interest to the Editors (and to cultural critics) was more practical than theoretical. Simply put, there was a lot more Donne primary material than anyone had suspected. In volume 1, part 1 of his *Index of English Literary Manuscripts* (London: Mansell, 1980), Peter Beal expanded the number of Donne manuscripts from the 159 recorded by John Shawcross in his *The Complete Poetry of John Donne* (Doubleday & Company: Garden City, NY, 1967, pp. 422-27) to 232, containing 3,997 texts.[3] Since the Donne Variorum only collates (and records) manuscript and printed works containing two or more consecutive lines of Donne verse and Beal includes some dubia and some manuscripts with only a single line or heading from a Donne poem, we thought we were actually looking at about 220 manuscripts and 3,900 manuscript texts. As we have wandered around transcribing or checking transcriptions of texts, we have added 36 manuscripts (for a total of 256) and 97 manuscript texts (for a total of 3,997). And in an article forthcoming in *The John Donne Journal*, I will catalogue another dozen manuscripts with an additional 30 or 40 texts. We were even less prepared in the print domain: we estimated 1,193 texts in the 7, seventeenth-century collected editions; plus previous Donne scholars like Wilhelm Bohm, E. K. Chambers, Charles Crawford, Rhodes Dunlap, Helen Gardner, M. Muriel Gray, Herbert Grierson, Geoffrey Keynes, Barabara Lewalski, L. C. Martin, Wesley Milgate, John

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[3]Herbert J. C. Grierson, ed., *The Poems of John Donne*, 2 v. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912); Helen Gardner, ed., *John Donne: The Divine Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952 and 1978) and *John Donne: The Elegies and the Songs and Sonnets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965); and Wesley Milgate, ed., *John Donne: The Satires, Epigrams, and Verse Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967) and *John Donne: The Epithalamions, Anniversaries, and Epicedes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) record only 37 manuscripts.

Shawcross, and A. J. Smith had identified an additional 46 volumes in 65 seventeenth-century editions containing 77 entire and 62 partial texts of Donne verse. After spending some time among seventeenth-century printed artifacts, we moved these numbers from 46 volumes to 83, the editions from 65 to 239, the number of complete texts from 77 to 207, and the partial texts from 62 to 653. These numbers include 6 Latin and 7 English verse fragments published by Donne during his lifetime but not included in Donne's verse canon previous to my *The Influence of John Donne: His Uncollected Seventeenth-Century Printed Verse* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1993), pp. 4-5. When we thought there were only 6 volumes in 7 editions printing 48 complete and 1 partial Donne verse translation, we decided to print transcriptions of all translations: now we are up to 7 volumes in 12 editions that print 59 entire and 24 partial translations. In short, our enterprise has pretty much proved the existence of an expanding universe, at least with regard to Donne.

Once we began work on the manuscripts and printed artifacts themselves, we discovered that they violated the theoretical paradigms established not only by previous Donne bibliographers, but also those subscribed to by bibliographers in general. All previous Donne textual scholars have treated his manuscripts as "monoscripts": that is, as though each had been copied by one person within a very short period of time from an individual source embodying a single textual line of transmission. Indeed this conception forms the basis for the now traditional categorizing begun by Grierson of Donne manuscripts into Groups—all texts in all members of any Donne manuscript Group will have the same readings and will be in approximately the same order, much like identical atoms in an element. The Dalhousie I and Dalhousie II manuscripts (TT1and TT2),[4] both classified by Peter Beal as

[4]All manuscript and print artifact sigla and all short forms for poem titles in this article are those of the Donne Variorum. Similarly, all

Group II manuscripts (p. 251), were the first that we discovered to violate the "monoscript" paradigm: even though major sections of TT2 were copied directly from TT1,[5] lines 14-16 in "The Curse" in TT1 read "Or maye he, for her vertue reuerence / Her y^{t} hates him, only for impotence / And equall traytors be she; and his senc" (f. 17), and the same lines in TT2 read "in earely scarcenesse, and longe may he rott / for land, w^{ch} had been his, if he had not / himselfe incestuouslie an heire begott" (f. 11). In this case, the text of "The Curse" in TT1 has the traditional Group II readings, while TT2 has traditional Group I readings; thus, TT2 is not a Group II "monoscript" and must have gotten its text for "The Curse" from a manuscript outside the textual tradition to which its other 28 Donne poems belong. Our present most problematic manuscript with regard to Group textual identification is the National Library of Wales Dolau Cothi manuscript (WN1), categorized as a Group II manuscript by Gardner, Milgate, Shawcross, and Beal, but which frequently shows up with Group I readings. Actually we were delighted that the "monoscripts" had turned out to be compounds rather than elements because this result validated our decision to sort out the textual history of each individual poem in all its artifacts rather than by treating all poem texts in any given manuscript as having an identical textual genesis.

Just as they had inappropriately treated the manuscripts as "monoscripts," so, too, had the Oxford editors treated the seventeenth-century collected editions as elements, rather than compounds. Almost immediately we realized that, contrary to Grierson, the texts in the 1633 first collected edition (A) did not generally derive from a Group I manuscript ("A special interest

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quotations of the texts of Donne's poems are from the Donne Variorum unless otherwise indicated.

[5]In a paper "The Manuscripts of Sir John Roe" given at the 2003 John Donne Society Conference, Mark Bland argued, on the basis of readings in poems by Sir John Roe in TT1 and TT2, that another, now missing, manuscript must come between TT1 and TT2.

attaches to this collection, apart from the relative excellence of its text and the soundness of its canon, from the probability that a manuscript of this kind was used for a large, and that textually the best, part of the edition of 1633" [II:lxxxiv] and that, indeed, several texts in A derived from the Group II and III traditions: for example, the texts of *The Comparison* and *The Expostulation* in A derive from a Group II manuscript much like DT1; shared unique readings in *Sapho to Philaenis* and *The Autumnall* prove their derivation from WN1, generally a Group II manuscript; and among the Epicedes and Obsequies in A, *Elegia* ("Sorrow, who to this house, scarse knew the way") derives from a Group III manuscript.

The discovery that the collected editions (particularly A) were compounds and not elements not only further validated our decision to analyze the textual history of each poem individually, but also obviated theorizing by various Oxford editors beginning with Grierson that Donne's letter of 1614 to Goodyer asking for that "old book" of his poems for the purpose of gathering them for publication[6] implies that a relatively complete manuscript of poems collected by Donne lay behind the 1633 edition: "the principal manuscript used by the printer [of A] was an 'old book' which had belonged to Sir Henry Goodyere and in which his secretaries had transcribed poems and letters by Donne" (Grierson, II:xci). The compound nature of A and the fact that no Donne holograph lay behind it greatly reduced the authority of A, the principal copy-text for every edition of Donne's poetry in the twentieth century other than the Donne Variorum.

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[6]In his letter to Goodyer, Donne states that he is collecting his poems for publication: "I am brought to a necessity of printing my Poems, and addressing them to my L. Chamberlain.... By this occasion I am made a Rhapsoder of mine own rags, and that cost me more diligence, to seek them, then it did to make them. This made me aske to borrow that old book of you..." (*Letters to Severall Persons of Honour* [London, 1651], pp. 196-97).

But as we began to break down our compound manuscripts and print artifacts into the atoms of individual texts, we discovered an apparent violation of the general theory of bibliography both in the manuscript and print artifacts. Gary Stringer, in running collations for Donne's Elegy 8 *To his Mistress going to bed*, noticed that traditional Group III manuscripts B46, C9, H5, and H6 shared a unique reading, "shoes you weare" (for the normative "shoes & then") in line 17. Nothing unusual here. But then he announced to Ted-Larry Pebworth and me that a host of readings (most tellingly, "much less innocence" in line 46) put B46 and H5 in the early line of transmission for the poem while another set of readings (most tellingly, "due to innocence" in line 46) put C9 and H6 in the second line of transmission. This discovery meant that each of these four manuscripts existed simultaneously in two separate lines of transmission. Worse yet, an identical phenomenon appeared in that holy of holies of Donne relics, A. Two readings in the text of *The Comparison*, "lawless law" (instead of Group II's "needlesse law") in line 9 and "fearefull" (which Group II manuscripts omit) in line 45 could not come from the Group II source for the text of the poem in A; instead, these substituted readings had to have come from a Group III manuscript (the Group I manuscripts lack the poem), very likely the O'Flahertie manuscript, H6. This discovery of readings from two unrelated manuscript lines of transmission in individual poems in both manuscript and print artifacts is the equivalent of breaking an element down to its last atom, only to discover two different elements in the final atom. Had we been physicists, we would have declared a mapping anomaly in the fourth dimension of the space-time continuum and nominated ourselves for a Nobel Prize. Instead, we went into the Donne Variorum Textual Editors problem-solving mode, and after a couple bottles of conversation we came up with the following: "Amongst various explanations for this anomaly, the possibility of contamination of one strain of transmission by another seems as plausible as any other" (Gary Stringer, gen. ed. *et al*, *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John*

Donne, v. 2, *The Elegies* [Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 2000], p. 174). Einstein and all previous bibliographers to the contrary, two manuscript transmissions can occupy the same manuscript or print text at the same time. This discovery that a copyist or a compositor might compare (and select according to his own aesthetic) readings from more than one text (and indeed from genetically unrelated texts) obviates the universal assumption that a scribe or compositor copied one text from another.

And now for the discoveries most likely to affect critical readings of Donne's verse. For those who are interested in what we have discovered about the reading texts of the poems, the most fun is likely to be had in a section entitled "Verbal Variants in Selected Modern Editions" near the end of the Textual Apparatus for each poem in the Donne Variorum. This section catalogs the differences in words between our text and the texts in all major editions of Donne from the Eighteenth-century to the present. One of the most interesting examples occurs in "The Bracelet" (first published in B, the 1635 collected edition of Donne's *Poems*). The particular reading of interest appears in line 11 where the Donne Variorum text reads "taint"; Alexander B. Grosart, ed., *The Complete Poems of John Donne, D. D.* (London: Robson and Sons, 1872-73) reads "faults"; Gardner (*Elegies*) and Shawcross read "fault"; and all other editors since 1719 read "way." Looking at the Donne Variorum Textual Apparatus for line 11 (Stringer, *Elegies*, p. 24), one discovers that Grosart mistakenly recorded the "faults" reading, Gardner and Shawcross got "fault" from a Group I or Group II manuscript, and everyone else got "way" (which does not appear in any manuscript) from B or a later seventeenth-century edition.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about these three variants is that bibliographical evidence proves that Donne first wrote "taint" and later revised "taint" to "fault" (Stringer, *Elegies*, p. 8), and then the compositor of B, working from a manuscript reading "fault," invented the "way" reading. Donne apparently had second

thoughts about a line that might in its original form have seemed to lay responsibility for the first angels' fall to the Creator: "Oh shall twelve righteous Angels which as yet / No leauen of vile sodder did admitt; / Nor yet by any *taint/fault* [italics mine] haue stray'd or gone / From the first State of their Creation" (ll. 9-12). Thus, "way," the reading of virtually all twentieth-century editions, has no authority whatsoever; the versions of "fault" that appear in Grosart, Gardner (*Elegies*), and Shawcross do not represent Donne's original intention; and the Donne Variorum is the first edition to present Donne's original version of the poem. In fact, the demonstration by the Textual Editors of the Donne Variorum of authorial revision (including as many as three rounds of revision) in several genres of Donne poems (the Epithalamia, the Epigrams, the Elegies, and the Holy Sonnets) will force revision of the traditional view of Donne as a poet who composed his works on specific occasions for a specific audience and who, once he composed the poems, took no further interest in them. It is now clear that he must have kept copies and revisited, rethought, and revised the poems—the work of a deliberately conscious artist concerned about the body of his work.

This image of Donne as a conscious artist is reinforced by what I think is the most important discovery the Donne Variorum Textual Editors have made about Donne's texts to date: that he created his poems and intended that they be read as sequences rather than as individual poems. To begin with the simplest case, Stringer has argued (*Elegies*, pp. Lxviii-Lxxvi) that the sequence of 12 Elegies in the Westmoreland manuscript (NY3) and essentially present in the Group III manuscripts C9 and H6 and major manuscripts associated with Group III (B13, NY1, and VA2) is authorial and that the orders found in the major Group I (B32, C2, C8, O20, and SP1) and Group II (B7, CT1, DT1, H4) manuscripts are not (see Figure 3: "Major Sequences of Elegies in Seventeenth-Century Manuscripts" in Stringer, *Elegies*, p. Lxix). The Epigrams present a more complicated, yet a more interesting case, because they show that Donne changed his mind about the

texts of the component poems[7] as well as the order of the sequences. The case of the Epigrams was our first involving sequences, and initially the evidence perplexed us: there seemed to be three different sequences that appeared within three different families of manuscripts (see Figure 2: "Sequences of Epigrams in Seventeenth-Century Artifacts" on page 17 of Gary Stringer, gen. ed. *et al*, *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*, v. 8, *The Epigrams, Epithalamions, Epitaphs, Inscriptions and Miscellaneous Poems* [Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 1995]). The Group III manuscripts (H5, H8, and HH1) have the earliest sequence which includes 7 epigrams (most clearly realized in H8 and HH1); the Group IV manuscript (NY3) plus the ungrouped LR1 have an intermediate sequence of 20 epigrams (most clearly realized in NY3); and the Group II manuscripts (B7, CT1, DT1, H4, SA1, and WN1) as well as the collected editions A-G have a late sequence of 16 epigrams (most fully and clearly realized in WN1). No epigrams appear in the Group I manuscripts. Within the Groups, the sequences were consistent enough to cause us to

[7]Actually, M. Thomas Hester in his essay "DONNE'S EPIGRAMS: A Little World Made Cunningly" (Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth, eds., *The Eagle and the Dove: Reassessing John Donne* [Columbia: U of Missouri Press, 1986]) recognized before the Textual Editors of the Donne Variorum that Donne revised the texts of the epigrams. Writing about the "Hammon/he" variant readings in line one of "Antiquary," Hester observes, "The poem, then, seems to have survived in two different versions of equal textual authority. I would speculate that 'he' is the later version, written after John Hammond's son had become the physician of James I and Prince Henry, whom he attended in his last illness (an association that would suggest why Donne might have rewritten the poem, removing the satirical thrust at the civilist); or that Donne changed 'Hammon' to 'he' in a later version in order to replace the dated, topical reference..."(83). Indeed, bibliographical evidence confirms Hester's insight: some form of "Hammon" appears in the early and intermediate sequences of Donne's three epigram sequences, with the final sequence reading "he."

suspect that they were authorial, but who would have thought that the Epigrams, of all Donne's poems, would be in any sort of sequence. Once we collated the texts, however, the evidence was clear: the texts in the manuscripts of each sequence were essentially identical, but varied dramatically from the texts of the same epigrams in the manuscripts of other sequences. Thus, the macro evidence (consistent sequences) of authorial intent was confirmed by the micro evidence of substantial textual revision each time the sequence was changed. In fact the texts (even including the headings) are so different that we decided to print all three versions of the texts and sequences so that readers could experience reading the Epigrams as Donne intended at various times in his life.

In our forthcoming volume on the Holy Sonnets, we think that we have sorted out the Holy Grail of Donne poetic sequences: the two authorial sequences of the Holy Sonnets. A remarkable feature of the manuscript transmission of the Holy Sonnets is that none has a history of individual circulation. However variously ordered, these sonnets invariably traveled in groups, a fact suggesting that the concept of sequence was integral to Donne's understanding of the genre and poetic intention from the beginning. Even though Grierson failed to "find a definite significance in any order" (II:231), Gardner created an order based on her thematic reading of the Sonnets, elaborating a theory that the 4 sonnets particular to Group III (though they also occur in the same order but with other sonnets interspersed in the Group IV NY3 manuscript)—*HSMade*, *HSSighs*, *HSLittle*, and *HSSouls*—originated as a discrete, thematically unified set and were "in error ...interpolated into" the 6-item group (on the "Last Things") with which the collections in Groups I and II and A begin (*Divine*, p. xlii). Accordingly, Gardner prints the sonnets in three, separately numbered sections: the 12-item sequence of A, the 4-poem set of "penitential" (*Divine*, p. xli) sonnets made up of those she thinks were mistakenly inserted into Group III and whose texts she gets from B, and the 3 Holy Sonnets unique to NY3 (*HSShe*, *HSShow*, and *HSVex*). However, the bibliographical evidence of variants and

ordering shows that Donne, not accident as Gardner had argued, was responsible for the arrangement of the Group III sequence and for that of the other groups as well. In every sequence, the textual revisions occur as the sequence changes, implying Donne's conscious decision either to maintain or to modify the organization of the sequence at given points in time. The fact that he retains the Group III order in revising the text (and adding units of 4 and 3 sonnets) for Group IV authenticates the Group III arrangement, while his maintenance of the Group I order as he effects the Group II revisions both confirms his continued endorsement of that arrangement and shows that the structural changes introduced in the transition from the Group IV sequence to that in Group I are deliberate. Thus, Donne gives us two distinct sequences of the Holy Sonnets and four distinct states of the texts of the sequences: the first authorial sequence is the 12-sonnet, Group III sequence (*HSMade*, *HSDue*, *HSSighs*, *HSPart*, *HSBlack*, *HSScene*, *HSLittle*, *HSRound*, *HSMin*, *HSSouls*, *HSDeath*, *HSWilt*); the second authorial sequence is the 12-sonnet Groups I and II sequence (*HSDue*, *HSBlack*, *HSScene*, *HSRound*, *HSMin*, *HSDeath*, *HSSpit*, *HSWhy*, *HSWhat*, *HSBatter*, *HSWilt*, *HSPart*). NY3 contains a total of 19 sonnets; however, the NY3 sequence beyond the 12 sonnets taken from the Group III sequence is not authorial: the scribe, Rowland Woodward, obtained the 13-16 (*HSSpit*, *HSWhy*, *HSWhat*, *HSBatter*) group and the 17-19 group unique to NY3 (*HSShe*, *HSShow*, *HSVex*) separately and later than the 1-12 sonnet unit. The first of the four states of the texts occurs in the 12-sonnet Group III sequence; for the second state of the texts, these 12 texts are revised in NY3 but with the arrangement intact; the third state of the texts occurs when the NY3 texts of the poems are revised again for the new 12-sonnet sequence found in the Group I manuscripts; and the fourth state of the texts appears when the Group I manuscript texts are revised for the final time by Donne (though the Group I sequence is not rearranged) for the 12-sonnet sequence in Group II. A picks up the order and texts of Group I, giving us Donne's final sequence but his penultimate

state of the texts. The editor of B had access to a Group III manuscript like H6 (if not actually H6); and he took the sequence and texts from A, added the four additional sonnets (*HSMade*, *HSSighs*, *HSLittle*, *HSSouls*) from the Group III manuscript, and tried to reconcile these sequences from A and the Group III manuscript into a nonauthorial, 16-sonnet sequence (*HSMade*, *HSDue*, *HSSighs*, *HSBlack*, *HSLittle*, *HSScene*, *HSRound*, *HSSouls*, *HSMin*, *HSDeath*, *HSSpit*, *HSWhy*, *HSWhat*, *HSBatter*, *HSWilt*, *HSPart*), while also incorporating a few readings from the Group III manuscript and making his own corrections. Until Gardner in her 1952 first edition of *Divine*, all twentieth-century editions (including Grierson) used the 16-sonnet hodgepodge created by B plus the 17-19 sonnet unit from NY3; Gardner adopts the Group I 12-sonnet order and texts plus the 4-sonnet sequence (*HSMade*, *HSSighs*, *HSLittle*, *HSSouls*) and their texts from B plus the 17-19 sonnet unit and their texts from NY3. Shawcross follows Gardner, but A. J. Smith (*John Donne: The Complete English Poems* [Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1971]) and C. A. Patrides (*The Complete English Poems of John Donne* [Dent: London and Melbourne, 1985]) go back to Grierson. The Donne Variorum will print the texts in three sequences: the initial Group III 12-sonnet sequence, the NY3 19-sonnet sequence (a nonauthorial sequence, but the only seventeenth-century artifact containing all the Holy Sonnets), and the final 12-sonnet Group I and II sequence with the final state of the texts as in the Group II manuscripts. Since most twentieth-century criticism of the Holy Sonnets has been based on the nonauthorial order and eclectic texts of B, the Donne Variorum will also print the sequence and text of B in an Appendix.

So what do we know now that we did not know before? First, that the Donne verse universe is expanding. Second, that the artifacts and poems in the Donne manuscript and print textual tree are far more genetically diverse than hitherto assumed. Third, the fact that Donne composed the Elegies, Epigrams, and Holy Sonnets as sequences and modified their texts when he rearranged the sequences means that they can no longer be treated simply as

stand alone units; instead these poems must be read horizontally across time in the larger context of each sequence and vertically through time with an awareness of their textual genesis. Some remapping of the John Donne verse space-time continuum seems inevitable.

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