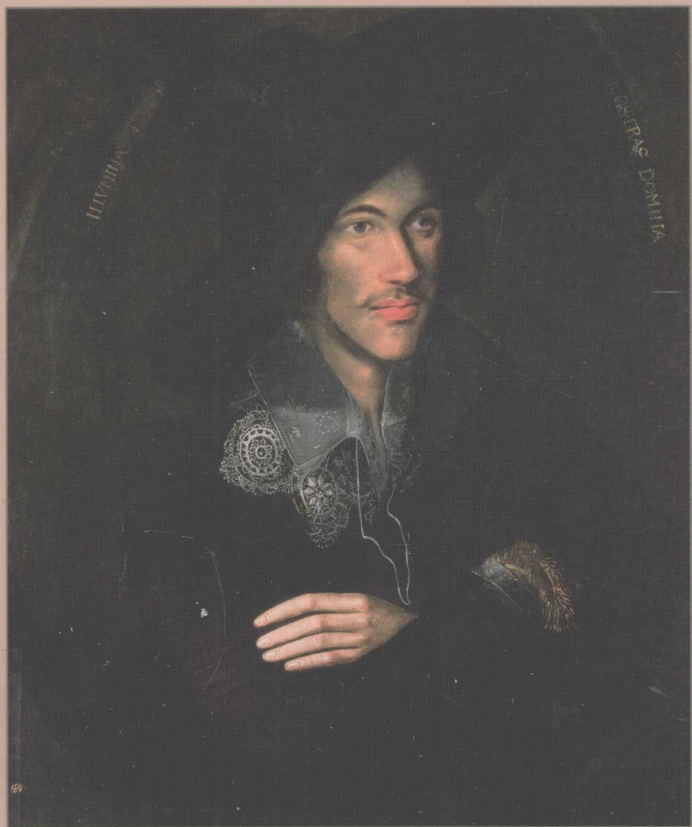


JOHN DONNE'S POETRY



EDITED BY DONALD R. DICKSON

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

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JOHN DONNE'S POETRY



AUTHORITATIVE TEXTS
CRITICISM

Edited by
DONALD R. DICKSON
TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

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Preface

John Donne (1572–1631) was born into a prominent Roman Catholic family at a time when religious allegiances mattered a great deal (as the essays by Dennis Flynn and John Carey included in this Norton Critical Edition discuss). He entered and left Oxford at an early age to avoid taking the oath acknowledging the queen's supremacy over the Church of England (which was required at age sixteen and which would have compromised his Catholic faith), then studied for a time at Cambridge before leaving for the Continent. When he returned to London in the early 1590s, he studied law in preparation for service as a courtier. Within a few years Donne was private secretary to one of the most influential men in England and well launched on a brilliant career, until he betrayed his employer's trust by secretly marrying a young woman under his supervision, thus placing in jeopardy his plans for service as a courtier. He had already begun entertaining his friends with manuscript copies of his satires, elegies, and lyrics. The literary scene at that time was dominated by sonnet writers who drew inspiration from the Italian poet Francis Petrarch (1304–1374). Like many young men seeking to make their mark, Donne found his own voice by overturning the conventional modes and attitudes of these Petrarchan sonneteers and by embracing those of the Roman poet Ovid (43 B.C.–17 A.D.), also an outsider who recorded the foibles of the court of Augustus Caesar in his irreverent love poems. Donne too was an astute observer of human nature in an exuberant city at an exciting moment in its history—when the threat of the Spanish Armada had been miraculously thwarted and when Shakespeare, Marlowe, and Jonson were writing for the theaters that were the glory of Elizabethan London. His early poems render the kinds of experience typical of young gallants on the prowl in striking detail. In time Donne turned to a career in the Anglican Church, though not without recording some of his own misgivings and fears in his verse. At the end of his life, he would be hailed as the “Monarch of Wit” for his dazzling and ingenious poetic comparisons and for establishing a powerful new style of his own (see Thomas Carew's “An Elegy upon the Death of the Dean of Paul's, Dr. John Donne,” below). After a period of comparative neglect, Donne was restored in the early twentieth century to his

rightful place among our greatest poets, especially for his love poems that, in some moments, celebrate the transcendent possibilities of sacred and earthly love or the anguish over its impermanence; at others, the enthrallment of desire or a repulsion from its sheer carnality. In short, the broad range of human experience is brought to life vividly and with dramatic intensity in his verse.

With the exceptions of the long commendatory poems on the deceased daughter of one of his patrons and a few shorter pieces, Donne's poems were only "published" in his lifetime in manuscripts that traveled within his circle of friends and prospective patrons. While over 5,000 separate transcriptions of his poems survive in some 240 manuscripts (a few in as many as fifty separate copies) only a single 63-line verse epistle survives in Donne's own hand. The problems of authenticating the reading of any single manuscript witness is, accordingly, formidable. As a result editors have relied heavily on the early printed texts. Once *Poems, by J. D. with Elegies on the Authors Death* appeared posthumously in 1633, it was accorded a great deal of authority by subsequent editors, despite the fact, as we now know, it was set from printers' copies of varying degrees of authority, none of which was in Donne's own hand. A comparison of the 1633 edition to the likely manuscripts sources reveals that the printer had "modernized" spelling and punctuation, or regularized it with some house style. Furthermore, this first edition was substantially revised in 1635, indicating that someone had developed serious reservations about the reliability of the manuscripts used in setting the prior edition. Nonetheless, the editions of 1633 and 1635 essentially determined what was accepted as Donne's text and canon up to the twentieth century. Indeed, most editions of his poems have been based on the 1633 *Poems*, and the manuscript sources, no matter how authoritative, were largely ignored until the twentieth century.

One of the hallmarks of the modern editing of Donne has been the recovery of the manuscript sources, with a number of editors producing scholarly editions based on a partial census of these manuscripts: notably, Alexander Grosart (1872), Herbert Grierson (1912), Helen Gardner (1952, 1965), John Shawcross (1967), and Wesley Milgate (1967, 1978). Since the early 1980s an international team of editors and scholars has been at work on an authoritative text based on a comprehensive study of all the textual artifacts. Several volumes of the *Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne* have already been published; these efforts, moreover, have clarified the relationship of the various families of manuscripts. The rationale for my methodology is discussed more fully in the Note on the Texts of Donne's Poems below. I have used the Westmoreland manuscript as copy text where possible, though I have collated it against the best

Syd Conner, M. Thomas Hester, John R. Roberts, Paul Parrish, Dennis Flynn, Achsah Guibbory, Raymond-Jean Frontain, and Ernest W. Sullivan, II. With more than four thousand books and articles on Donne in the twentieth century, the enthusiasm for this remarkable man and wondrous poet has not flagged in the past four hundred years. I hope that my edition of *John Donne's Poetry* keeps that flame alight for the next generation of students of his poetry.

College Station, Texas

Donald R. Dickson

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The Texts of
JOHN DONNE'S POETRY



Satires

Satire 1.¹

- Away thou changling motley humorist,²
Leave me, and in this standing wooden chest,³
Consorted with these few books, let me lie
In prison, and here be coffin'd, when I die.
5 Here are God's conduits, grave divines;⁴ and here
Nature's secretary, the philosopher;
And jolly statesmen, which teach how to tie
The sinews of a city's mystic body;
Here gathering chroniclers,⁵ and by them stand
10 Giddy fantastic poets of each land.
Shall I leave all this constant company,
And follow headlong, wild uncertain thee?
First, swear by thy best love in earnest
(If thou which lov'st all, canst love any best)
15 Thou wilt not leave me in the middle street,
Though some more spruce companion thou dost meet,
Not though a captain do come in thy way
Bright parcel gilt, with forty dead men's pay,⁶
Nor though a brisk perfum'd pert courtier
20 Deign with a nod, thy courtesy to answer.
Nor come a velvet justice with a long
Great train of blue coats,⁷ twelve, or fourteen strong,
Wilt thou grin or fawn on him, or prepare
A speech to court his beauteous son and heir.
25 For better or worse take me, or leave me:

1. The poetic model for a walk through city streets with a foolish companion was established by Horace (*Satire* 1.9). It probably dates from the early Inns of Court period, c. 1593; in one ms. it is titled "Satire: On the Humorist."
2. One afflicted by a surplus of a bodily humor: black bile, which leads to melancholy or depression; phlegm, to indifference or sluggishness; blood, to foolish optimism; and yellow bile, to choler or anger.
3. His study, described much like the small cells in Lincoln's Inn that had room for only a stool, a table, and some bookshelves.
4. Ministers, the *conduits* of God's word.
5. Historians gathering information.
6. The names of the dead were kept on rosters to pad the income of unscrupulous captains.
7. The livery of servants.

To take, and leave me is adultery.
 O monstrous, superstitious Puritan,
 Of refin'd manners, yet ceremonial man,⁸
 That when thou meet'st one, with inquiring eyes
 30 Dost search, and like a needy broker prize⁹
 The silk, and gold he wears, and to that rate
 So high or low, dost raise thy formal hat:
 That wilt consort none, until thou have known
 What lands he hath in hope, or of his own.
 35 As though all thy companions should make thee
 Jointures,¹ and marry thy dear company.
 Why should'st thou (that dost not only approve,
 But in rank itchy lust, desire, and love
 The nakedness and barrenness to enjoy,
 40 Of thy plump muddy whore, or prostitute boy)
 Hate virtue, though she be naked, and bare?
 At birth, and death, our bodies naked are;
 And till our souls be unappareled
 Of bodies, they from bliss are banished.
 45 Man's first blest state was naked, when by sin
 He lost that, yet he was cloth'd but in beast's skin,
 And in this coarse attire, which I now wear,
 With God, and with the Muses I confer.
 But since thou like a contrite penitent,
 50 Charitably warn'd of thy sins, dost repent
 These vanities, and giddinesses, lo
 I shut my chamber door, and "Come, let's go."
 But sooner may a cheap whore, that hath been
 Worn by as many several men in sin,
 55 As are black feathers, or musk-colored hose,
 Name her child's right true father, 'mongst all those:
 Sooner may one guess, who shall bear away
 Th'Infant of London,² heir to an India:
 And sooner may a gulling weather-spy
 60 By drawing forth heaven's scheme³ tell certainly
 What fashion'd hats, or ruffs, or suits next year
 Our supple-witted antic youths will wear;
 Then thou, when thou depart'st from hence, canst show
 Whither, why, when, or with whom thou wouldst go.

8. "Precise in observance of forms of politeness" (OED 2).

9. Pawnbroker's appraisal.

1. Property held for the joint use of a husband and wife (OED 4).

2. A wealthy heiress who was still a ward. Donne may also intend the Infanta of Spain whose claim to the English throne had been advanced at the time of the Armada.

3. "A diagram showing the relative positions, either real or apparent, of the heavenly bodies" (OED 2), here used to make fraudulent forecasts.

- 65 But how shall I be pardon'd my offence
That thus have sinn'd against my conscience?
Now we are in the street; He first of all
Improvidently proud, creeps to the wall,⁴
And so imprison'd, and hem'd in by me
70 Sells for a little state⁵ his liberty;
Yet though he cannot skip forth now to greet
Every fine silken painted fool we meet,
He them to him with amorous smiles allures,
And grins, smacks, shrugs, and such an itch endures,
75 As prentices, or schoolboys which do know
Of some gay sport abroad, yet dare not go.
And as fiddlers stop lowest, at highest sound,
So to the most brave, stoops he nigh'st the ground.
But to a grave man, he doth move no more
80 Than the wise politic horse would heretofore,
Or thou O elephant or ape wilt do,⁶
When any names the king of Spain to you.
Now leaps he upright, jogs me, and cries, "Do'you see
Yonder well favor'd youth?" "Which?" "Oh, 'tis he
85 That dances so divinely." "Oh," said I,
"Stand still, must you dance here for company?"
He droop'd, we went, till one (which did excel
Th'Indians, in drinking his tobacco⁷ well)
Met us; they talk'd; I whisper'd, "Let us go;
90 Maybe you smell him not, truly I do."
He hears not me, but, on the other side
A many-color'd peacock having spied,
Leaves him and me; I for my lost sheep stay;
He follows, overtakes, goes on the way,
95 Saying, "Him whom I last left, all repute
For his device, in handsoming a suit,⁸
To judge of lace, pink, panes,⁹ cut, print, or pleat,
Of all the court, to have the best conceit."¹
"Our dull comedians want him, let him go;
100 But oh, God strengthen thee, why stoop'st thou so?"
"Why? he hath travail'd." "Long?" "No, but to me

4. The outside position on a city street was more hazardous due to the refuse thrown from above; thus, the inside position was given to a superior as a courtesy.

5. Dignity or status.

6. In the 1590s a performing horse named Morocco, who answered certain questions from the audience, was exhibited in London along with a trained elephant and ape.

7. Tobacco had been newly introduced; originally, it was consumed as a liquid.

8. Line 96: For his ingenuity in adorning himself fashionably.

9. Decorative slashes (OED 7.2); *pink*: a "hole or eyelet punched in a garment for decorative purposes" (OED 3).

1. To have the best judgment.

(Which understand none), he doth seem to be
 Perfect French, and Italian." I replied,
 "So is the pox."² He answer'd not, but spied
 105 More men of sort, of parts, and qualities;
 At last his love he in a window spies,
 And like light dew exhal'd, he flings from me
 Violently ravish'd to his lechery.
 Many were there, he could command no more;
 110 He quarrel'd, fought, bled; and turn'd out of door
 Directly came to me hanging the head,
 And constantly a while must keep his bed.

Satire 2.³

Sir, though (I thank God for it) I do hate
 Perfectly all this town, yet there's one state⁴
 In all ill things so excellently best,
 That hate, toward them, breeds pity towards the rest.
 5 Though poetry indeed be such a sin
 As I think that brings dearths,⁵ and Spaniards in,
 Though like the pestilence or old fashion'd love,⁶
 It riddlingly catch men; and doth remove
 Never, till it be starv'd out; yet their state
 10 Is poor, disarm'd, like Papists,⁷ not worth hate:
 One, (like a wretch, which at bar judg'd as dead,⁸
 Yet prompts him which stands next, and could not read,
 And saves his life) gives idiot actors means⁹
 (Starving himself) to live by his labor'd scenes.
 15 As in some organ, puppets dance above¹
 And bellows pant below, which them do move.
 One would move love by rhymes; but witchcraft's charms
 Bring not now their old fears, nor their old harms:²
 Rams, and slings now are silly battery,

2. Syphilis was thought to originate in France or Italy.

3. In some mss. this is titled "Satire I: Against Poets and Lawyers" or "Law Satire."

4. Courts of law are preeminently bad.

5. Famines.

6. True or sincere love.

7. Roman Catholics suffered so much under the law that they weren't worth persecuting.

8. Sentenced to death.

9. Those who could translate a Latin "neck-verse" (usually Psalm 51) could plead benefit of clergy to escape the gallows (as Ben Jonson did); those who were ignorant could not.

1. Puppets activated by air from the bellows of the organ were common.

2. Lines 17-18: Charming someone with poetry is as ineffective as magic spells.