

John Donne. *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne, vol. 5 The Verse Letters*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2019. cxi+ 1370 pp. \$120.00. Review by DENNIS FLYNN.

*The Verse Letters* is Volume 5 (sixth in order of appearance) of a projected eight volumes of the Variorum Edition of Donne's poems, preceded by Volumes 6 *The Anniversaries and the Epicedes and Obsequies* (1995), 8 *The Epigrams, Epithalamions, Epitaphs, Inscriptions, and Miscellaneous Poems* (1995), 2 *The Elegies* (2000), 7.1 *The Holy Sonnets* (2005), and 3 *The Satyres* (2016). Also published have been Volumes 4.1 *The Songs and Sonnets: Topical and General Commentary* (2017); and 1 *Digital Donne* (2010) <<http://donnevariorum.dh.tamu.edu>>, an online volume containing various scholarly tools and resources (e.g., concordances; electronic access to the four volumes of John R. Roberts's *John Donne: An Annotated Bibliography of Modern Criticism*; and Digital Facsimile Editions, an online selection of early print and major manuscript collections of Donne's poems as well as of the 1654 edition of his prose letters). Yet to appear in print are two volumes of *The Songs and Sonnets* (4.2 and 4.3) and *The Divine Poems* (7.2). Almost all this work had been designed by 1981 and was issued during decades under the leadership of Gary A. Stringer, General Editor.

*The Verse Letters* is the first Variorum volume edited by new leadership. Within the imposing but familiar red book-jacket, much of the architecture of Volume 5 is also familiar: the front matter includes a General Introduction (largely identical in all volumes); and, in three-section format, an Introduction to Volume 5 (composed of two parts, the General Textual Introduction and The Critical Tradition) plus the two standard sections of Texts and Apparatuses and of Commentary.

Except here to acknowledge the diligence and good judgment of the commentary editors, this review will say relatively little about The Critical Tradition (5: xcvi–cxi) or the Commentary it introduces (5: 516–1295); both these parts of Volume 5, brilliant and in accord with procedure established in past volumes, observe policies set forth in the General Introduction (5: liii–lvi) and are a pleasure to read and use. The remainder of this review will dwell briefly on certain textual achievements of Variorum volumes previously published and

will compare to these some of the textual work in *The Verse Letters*.

## I

Since 1995, the Variorum textual editors' study of the early manuscript transmission of Donne's poems has shown throughout all published volumes until now that two different kinds of circulation prevailed. In one of these, some genres of poems (Epigrams, Elegies, Satyres, and Holy Sonnets) circulated in authorial sequences, sequences later revised and reissued by Donne, also including revised versions of individual poems. In Volume 8 (1995), the editors showed that groups of from seven to twelve Epigrams circulated "from some fairly early point in their history, if not from the very beginning" as sequences arranged by Donne and copied by scribes into various manuscripts (H<sub>5</sub>, H<sub>8</sub>, and HH<sub>1</sub>). Later, LR<sub>1</sub> expanded the sequence to sixteen and NY<sub>3</sub> expanded it to twenty. A still later sequence of Epigrams was then reduced to sixteen in the final version of the sequence (WN<sub>1</sub>).

These distinct sequences were printed successively in Volume 8, followed by a General Textual Introduction to the Epigrams presenting "compelling evidence that Donne revised the texts of individual poems over the course of time and that each of the sequences in which the epigrams are arranged in various major artifacts reflects the author's controlling hand" (8: 14). More specifically, the hand of the author can be seen in both "the continuity in the ordering of poems observable at the points of major expansion or contraction of the work, but also the existence of distinct forms of individual poems at the three separate stages through which the larger whole evolved" (8: 16). This analysis has been recognized as a major development in the history of editing Donne's poems. It was followed by further such developments in Volumes 2 (2000), 7.1 (2005), and 3 (2016), where respectively the editors showed that Donne's Elegies and Holy Sonnets were also written, circulated, revised and issued again in authorial sequences, and that the sequence of Satyres was revised in its individual poems.

The Variorum textual editors have also shown, just as clearly though with less acclaim, that manuscript transmission of Donne's occasional poems reveals a second general pattern. While the Epigrams, Elegies, Satyres, and Holy Sonnets were circulated as authorially constructed sequences, some later revised and reissued, for the

most part Donne's occasional poems (Verse Letters, Anniversaries, Obsequies and Epicedes, Epithalamions, Epitaphs, Inscriptions, and miscellaneous poems) circulated not as prepared or revised sequences but as individual poems, prompted by successive events and written in chronological order to express those moments. In Volume 6 (also published in 1995) the editors showed that Donne's funeral poem for Elizabeth Drury and his two Anniversaries were a special case: "No manuscript transmission of the three poems independent of printed copies appears to have existed" (6: 39). Probably the manuscript tradition was short-circuited because these three poems all were written with the intention of sending them to the printer directly.

Donne's remaining funeral or commemorative poems, the seven Epicedes and Obsequies, "as occasional poems, were written one at a time over a period of years, making it unlikely, if not impossible, that they should have come into the hands of the earliest scribes and copyists as a distinct group" (6: lii). Accordingly, they circulated less often as a sequence than as individual items: "most of the manuscripts, for whatever reasons, do not contain full, coherent groups" (6: liii). The Anniversaries and commemorative poems (unlike the Epigrams, Elegies, Satyres, and Holy Sonnets) were not written as authorially-sequenced, generic groups, issued for manuscript transmission, and revised for reissue as new groups. Instead they "were written one at a time," having as occasional poems been prompted by historical events and then published or circulated individually soon after each was written.

The editors of Volume 8 (1995) also showed that, like the funeral poems, Donne's Epithalamions were a group of poems deriving "from widely different periods of his career" (8: lxi). These poems tended not to be grouped in manuscripts, and "relatively few artifacts contain all three," suggesting that their transmission too was individual rather than as arranged units. Rounding out Volume 8 with Donne's Epitaphs, Inscriptions, and miscellaneous poems, the editors concluded that generally Donne's occasional poems (unlike most of the Epigrams, the Elegies, the Satyres, and the Holy Sonnets) "can be dated with considerable precision; we have thus grouped them here generically and, within generic groups, chronologically" (8: lxii). Donne's poems in these genres were not grouped or sequenced in manuscript circula-

tion but have the character of all occasional poems, having entered the stream of transmission at certain points in time as individual items rather than as sequences.

This brings us to Volume 5 and the greatest number of Donne's occasional poems, his forty-two Verse Letters. Like his Anniversaries, Epicedes and Obsequies, Epithalamions, Epitaphs, Incriptions, and miscellaneous poems, the Verse Letters seem all to have been written by Donne one at a time and sent to their addressees not for the most part in any order other than their original order. The one exception is a group of five Verse Letters that appear originally to have been sent as single poems to three different addressees: Thomas Woodward (*TWPreg* and *TWHence*), Rowland Woodward (*RWZeal* and *RWMind*), and Christopher Brooke (*CB*). At some point following the dates of origin of all five poems, a sixth headed "To L. of D." (at first assigned *Variorum* short-title *ED*, because of the heading common in several early manuscript and print artifacts, "To E. of D. with six holy Sonnets") was sent to another addressee, "L. of D." This sixth poem mentions enclosing the other five poems, those first sent individually to their addressees, then re-entered into the stream of transmission as a sequence of poems. The Volume 5 editors make much of this sequence, which had first been discussed by the textual editors of *Variorum* Volume 7.1 as an important factor refuting Helen Gardner's theory dating the Holy Sonnets. In part 3 below, this review will return to the six-poem sequence and to what the Volume 5 textual editors have made of it.

## 2

Representative of their genre, Donne's Verse Letters manifest one, original, authorial sequence, all of them connected in chronological order as a chain of events in time. The individual dates of origin of the Verse Letters, like those of the commemorative poems, span all the decades of Donne's poetic career. These are poems addressed in the course of events to individual readers at, and for observance of, moments in time throughout Donne's life, not mainly written for circulation in authorial sequences. Some manuscript revision of these poems may have taken place, but their transmissional histories do not show much evidence of lost revised holographs, and variant readings

classifiable as authorial are rare. Nor is there evidence that any except the sequence of five already mentioned were ever reissued by Donne for further transmission. The Verse Letters are distinctly occasional poems.

The General Textual Introduction to the Verse Letters begins with some reflections on “the capaciousness or porousness of the generic label.” At a minimal starting point, the editors admit, verse letters may be defined by two characteristics: “they must be set in verse and have implied addressees” (5: lxxi). That verse letters must be in verse may seem mere tautology; but that they have *implied* addressees is a challenging thought. As they are occasional poems, Donne’s Verse Letters do have, and must have had, addressees; but why these persons should be called *implied* is not clear. Among the manuscript or early print artifacts, all but one of Donne’s Verse Letters have headings that denote not implied but *real* persons; the single exception is *Calm* (“A Calme”) which as is implied in its first line circulated as a companion poem for *Storm* (“The Storme to Mr. Christopher Brooke”). The great majority of these headings denote persons most of whom we can identify if only by their initials and by internal or external evidence substantiating their relations with Donne. These identifications and pieces of evidence are important contextual components of the text’s meaning and should not be set aside or ignored.

The editors next continue discussing the amorphousness of verse letters, noting that “verse letters prove rather difficult to define in practice” and “can easily overlap with” several other genres Donne also practiced. Among these, they suggest, are “epigrams, inscriptions, verse satires, Ovidian elegies, funeral elegies, and commendatory verse” (5: lxxi). Notably absent from the descriptions in this list is the word *occasional*, though Donne’s Verse Letters are no doubt occasional, while most of his Epigrams with his Satyres (as well as his Elegies and Holy Sonnets) surely are not. A related line of thought may surface later in the General Textual Introduction, where the editors observe that “verse letters purport to be occasional” (5: lxxviii), as if they need not be but may merely claim or seem to be so. This tendency to regard Donne’s Verse Letters as somehow unconnected to specific occasions or not entirely occasional poems is never explained in *The Verse Letters* but is related to a further disinclination of the Volume 5 textual editors.

Whereas their own version of the Variorum General Introduction continues to urge the policy of all Volumes that “The introduction to each poem briefly locates the poem in the context of Donne’s life or poetic development (where possible)” (5: lxxv), the Volume 5 textual editors, in their own introductory materials, clearly though silently depart from the policy stated. These editors for the most part do not try to establish the dates of poems and often never even estimate or mention them. Throughout the Volume they have chosen not to assign *any date at all* to most of Donne’s Verse Letters. Instead they usually introduce the poems they edit without estimating or referring to their dates of origin. The Volume 5 editors simply avoid dealing with such matters. This departure is a defect that makes *The Verse Letters* much less useful than Milgate’s 1967 Oxford edition of these poems.

The editors’ General Textual Introduction acknowledges that Donne’s Verse Letters were written over a “span of years” (5: lxxi), but goes on to omit all mention of dates of origin for any Verse Letters except two of the forty-two poems it introduces: *HWHiber*, 1599 and *HWWenice*, 1604 (5: xcvi). Slackening of interest in dating poems is most apparent in the forty-two individual Textual Introductions, which mention dates of origin for only five more poems: *Storm*, late summer 1597; *HWNewes*, 20 July 1598; *HWHiber*, April–September 1599, *GHerb*, January 1615; and *Tilman*, March 1620 (5: 7, 57, 215, 424, and 435). Apart from the seven poems listed here, little or no effort is made in the individual introductions or anywhere in Volume 5 to date or contextualize the occasions of the remaining thirty-six Verse Letters, nor does there appear any appetite to discuss or practice the kinds of dating that the editors of all earlier Variorum volumes scientifically pursued and repeatedly mentioned with admiration in discussing the work of Grierson and others—e.g. “Dating the Elegies” (2: lxi–lxxvii); “Dating” (3: lxxvii–lxxviii); and “The Dates of the Holy Sonnets and their Relationships to Other Poems” (7.1: lxxxviii–ci). Such work is absent in *The Verse Letters*, though in a few places the textual editors helpfully refer the reader to the commentary editors’ useful summaries of work by others.

A kind of explanation for this failure to date the Verse Letters is offered in a final subsection of the General Textual Introduction, headed “Ordering and Canon of Verse Letters in this Volume”:

There is no wholly satisfactory way of ordering the 41 authentic Verse Letters printed in this volume. Ideally, we could reproduce an authorial sequence or grouping like those identified for Donne's Epigrams, Elegies, Holy Sonnets, and Satyres. But the manuscript tradition does not reveal any such sequence or grouping for the Verse Letters, save for the *Storm-Calm* pair and the six-poem *LD* collection. Although a dozen of the Verse Letters can be confidently dated and clusters of Verse Letters can be safely assumed to be early (e.g., the shorter poems to male friends) and others assumed to be late (e.g., the longer poems to female patrons), any attempt to place all the Verse Letters in a precise chronological order would simply require an unwarranted amount of pure conjecture (5: xciv).

These four sentences, expressing wistful frustration and confessed inability to deal with the task of editing the Verse Letters, call for careful parsing.

The first of them singles out one poem, *HuntUn* ("To the Countess of Huntingdon"), which the editors have twice "designated as a poem of disputed canonicity" (5: lxxi) and "classified as a poem of disputed canonicity" (lxxxvi), without presenting evidence or argument, and which they here for a third time simply subtract as somehow less canonical than the rest of the Verse Letters. Throughout the rest of the volume, in both the General Textual Introduction and in the Textual Introduction to *HuntUn*, they keep trying to remove it from the Donne corpus as somehow inauthentic, despite stubborn evidence to the contrary. It becomes something of a white whale for them, an objective earnestly and relentlessly pursued, the object of an obsession. On this puzzling impeachment, see part 5 of this review.

The ideal to which the editors appeal in their second and third sentences, something they wish "we could reproduce," suggests their unawareness of the simplest reason why there might be no trace of any such generic "sequence or grouping for the Verse Letters": because Donne wrote and circulated his Verse Letters one at a time as occasional poems, not as poems he himself arranged for circulation.

In their fourth sentence, the textual editors next state in passing that a dozen of the Verse Letters "can be confidently dated." This as-

surance, however, is countermined by a casual failure here or anywhere else in Volume 5 to specify these twelve letters or their dates. Though confident, the textual editors don't seem to care about dating and thus fall short of due diligence, not even attempting to date most of the poems edited in their volume, even when they claim to know the dates.

As for their further claim in this sentence that "any attempt to place all the Verse Letters in a precise chronological order would simply require an unwarranted amount of pure conjecture" (5: xciv), this raises a question: what is "an unwarranted amount of pure conjecture"? The phrase as used in this context expresses unwillingness to embrace the difficulty of discovering the dates of occasional poems, a form of risk management foreign to the work of earlier *Variorum* volumes and, indeed, of most scholarly editions of letters, including the forthcoming Oxford edition of Donne's Prose Letters. The Volume 5 editors evidently think such dating *cannot* be done and wish to work not with these poems but instead with some generic sequences or groups of poems arranged to circulate in various orders that are not chronological. Such a position amounts to a kind of denial, in effect declining to allow that occasional poems can or should be dated.

On the other hand, the Volume 5 editors themselves develop, but do not use for the purpose, some common-sense approaches for dating three Verse Letters that Donne mentioned in three datable Prose Letters. For each quotation from these Prose Letters in the General Textual Introduction (5: lxvii–lxviii), the editors cite the page numbers on which they first appeared in seventeenth-century printings. Doing little more than this, they lose an opportunity to discover the dates of the three Verse Letters mentioned by Donne. Instead they divert attention from the dating problem, stating only that the value of these Prose Letters is to show how Donne's Verse Letters "were written, shared, and collected" (5: lxvii) and that, "whatever they tell us about his intimate friendships or relationships with patrons, potential and actual, Donne's Verse Letters were part of an irregular trade among him, his addressees, and other readers" (5: lxxviii). Fascinated with manuscript commerce, the editors of Volume 5 turn away from the three Prose Letters themselves and from the friendships they could tell us about if studied with patience. Instead the editors ignore what may easily be learned about the dates of the three poems the Prose



Letters mention.

One of the Prose Letters (quoted on 5: lxxvii) is addressed to Magdalen Herbert, published on pages 24–25 of Izaak Walton's *Life of George Herbert* (1670). This letter mentions enclosing certain "Holy Hymns and Sonnets" that are "ushered" by an additional enclosed sonnet about St. Mary Magdalen. This ushering poem is the Verse Letter *MHMary* ("To the Lady Magdalen Herbert, of St. Mary Magdalen"), which describes its addressee as the saint's namesake. The Volume 5 textual editors do, in their Textual Introduction to *MHMary*, cite Walton's dating of the Prose Letter (i.e. 11 July 1607), as having been disputed by other editors and scholars (5: 261). They do not themselves pause to dispute or otherwise investigate this date or the date of the Verse Letter enclosed.

Walton's date for this first Prose Letter must be at least partly wrong and has indeed been disputed. In any case, even if Walton was quite wrong, both internal and external evidence indicates that the date of the Prose Letter cannot have been later than March 1609. Simply as a matter of logic, the date of origin of *MHMary*, although the textual editors make no effort to date it anywhere in their volume, cannot be later than the date of the Prose Letter that refers to enclosing it. Neither in the General Textual Introduction of *The Verse Letters* nor in the Textual Introduction to *MHMary* is there any mention of its date of origin; it would have cost little effort to state what one knew if one at all took an interest in the matter. Instead the Volume 5 editors not only do not date this occasional poem; they also order it meaninglessly between two other Verse Letters, *EdHerb* ("To Sir Edward Herbert"), addressed to Herbert during military service at Juliers in 1610, and *MHPaper* ("To Mrs. M. H."), addressed to Magdalen Herbert shortly before her wedding to Sir John Danvers in March 1609), neither of which they date but both of which are surely datable later than *MHMary*.

The General Textual Introduction also quotes (5: lxxvii) from a second Prose Letter, to Sir Henry Goodere, published on pages 116–17 of Donne's *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour* (1651), mentioning an enclosed Verse Letter addressed to Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford, probably *BedfRef* (one of Donne's nine Verse Letters to the Countess). By internal and external evidence this second Prose Letter can

be dated in August 1608, although the editors quote it without any effort to date it, and again we can logically date *BedfRef* as an enclosed Verse Letter whose date of origin cannot be later than August 1608. Not only do the editors not date this occasional poem; they also order it meaninglessly between two other Verse Letters they do not date, *BedfHon* (not dated by Milgate in his Oxford edition of the Verse Letters) and *BedfWrit* (dated in the latter part of 1609 by Milgate on p. 262). The editors also fail to mention that Milgate (on his p. 256) ventured to date *BedfRef*, on the evidence of the second Prose Letter, as written earlier than August 1608.

The General Textual Introduction also quotes (5: lxxvii–lxxviii) from a third Prose Letter, again to Goodere, published on pages 194–98 of the 1651 *Letters*, in which Donne asks Goodere to return one of his Verse Letters. The Volume 5 textual editors confidently though unusually date this Prose Letter as Donne’s “famous 1614 letter from just prior to his ordination.” In the letter Donne asks Goodere to lend him “that old book,” which evidently contained Donne’s “letter in verse, *A nostre Countesse chez vous*” (*Letters*, p. 197). The textual editors identify this poem as a Verse Letter “thought to be *HuntMan*” (5: lxvii), without supplying any reference, argument, or evidence for the identification. In neither the General Textual Introduction nor the Textual Introduction to *HuntMan* (“To the Countess of Huntingdon”) do they say anything about the date of *HuntMan*. Nor do they ask any of several obvious questions that might be asked in order to discover the date of the Verse Letter Donne asks for. When was it given or sent to Goodere? Who was “*nostre Countesse chez vous*”? By asking these questions about Donne’s Prose Letter the editors might have contextualized the original transaction and thus helped to date the Verse Letter Donne requests be returned in the 1614 Prose Letter they quote.

Ongoing work on the Oxford edition of Donne’s Prose Letters has shown that *HuntMan* is indeed the Verse Letter Donne requested in his 1614 letter to Goodere. Donne had written this poem in response to a request from Goodere mentioned in Donne’s letter of 3 July 1610, published on pages 100–105 of the 1651 *Letters*:

I have obeyed you thus far, as to write: but intreat you by your friendship, that by this occasion of versifying, I be not

traduced, nor esteemed light in that Tribe, and that house where I have lived. If those reasons which moved you to bid me write be not constant in you still, or if you meant not that I should write verses; or if these verses be too bad, or too good, over or under her understanding, and not fit; I pray receive them, as a companion and supplement of this Letter to you; and as such a token as I use to send, which use, because I wish rather they should serve (except you wish otherwise) I send no other; but after I have told you, that here at a Christening at Peckam, you are remembered by divers of ours, and I commanded to tell you so, I kisse your hands, and so seal to you my pure love, which I would not refuse to do by any labour or danger (*Letters*, pp. 103–105).

This letter has been accurately discussed by Daniel Starza Smith in *John Donne and the Conway Papers* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), p. 207; as he points out, in the passage quoted above, Donne's words "these verses" refer to a holograph of *HuntMan*, written (in response to Goodere's request in a letter not extant) and enclosed by Donne in his letter dated by I. A. Shapiro (in unpublished draft commentary for his OUP edition) as sent from Peckham to Goodere at London on 3 July 1610, the Tuesday following the 28 June baptism at Camberwell of Donne's nephew Thomas Grymes. On this evidence, *HuntMan* may be dated in late June or early July 1610.

Not only do the Volume 5 editors not date *HuntMan*; they also order it meaninglessly between two other Verse Letters they do not date, *BedfCab* (not dated by Milgate) and *Carey*, dated by Donne from "Amyens" and on this basis by Milgate (p. 274) between the end of November 1611 and the beginning of March 1612.

## 3

Before conclusion of this review, there remain two thorny matters for brief comment. The first of them (broached above) is the Verse Letter *LD* with the five others it enclosed as a sequence. The existence of the *LD* sequence was first discovered by the Variorum textual editors of *The Holy Sonnets*, who noticed that *LD*, in two early manuscripts (H6 and WN1) and invariably in all editions since 1633, had been given versions of a misleading heading, "To E. of D. with six holy

Sonnets.” (For the same reasons, *LD* had been given the Variorum short-title *ED* in all previous Variorum volumes.) The 7.1 editors also noted, however, that two other manuscripts (NY<sub>3</sub> and B11) headed this poem as addressed simply to “L. of D.” and that “in both these manuscripts [*LD*] appears at the head of the same six-item sequence of verse letters ... of which [it] is the introductory first member” (7.1: xcv–xcvi).

The textual editors of *The Verse Letters* accept all their colleagues’ findings and order the six-item sequence in accord with its order in NY<sub>3</sub>. They proceed to make this their basis for adopting what they call “a hybrid approach” to ordering all the Verse Letters:

on the belief that NY<sub>3</sub> and WN<sub>1</sub> are the two superior manuscript collections of Donne’s Verse Letters, in terms of both the quantity of poems and quality of their texts, we have adopted NY<sub>3</sub>’s ordering of Verse Letters and followed it with WN<sub>1</sub>’s (minus, of course, the poems from NY<sub>3</sub>). Although other than the *LD* collection, there is no discernible organizational principle for NY<sub>3</sub>’s ordering of its Verse Letters, there is also little justification for rearranging its ordering” (5: xcv).

In this off-hand choice, i.e. to follow the NY<sub>3</sub> and WN<sub>1</sub> orderings for all the Verse Letters they contain, the Volume 5 editors again depart from Variorum policy and implicitly admit that they have “no discernible organizational principle” for their choice of these orderings, not merely for the *LD* sequence but for all the Verse Letters inscribed either in NY<sub>3</sub> or in WN<sub>1</sub>. They do not seem to recognize the ordering principle used in other Variorum volumes containing occasional poems, an organizational principle that *is* discernible, though not considered by these editors: i.e. to use the order in which the poems were written, their chronological order, something the textual editors of *The Verse Letters* have declined to attempt. The “superior” status of a manuscript is not in itself dispositive for ordering a set of occasional poems.

At this point it seems worthwhile to compare, to the explanation offered by the Variorum editors of *The Verse Letters*, Milgate’s stated rationale for ordering these poems: “I have printed the poems in an order which will, I hope, seem more logical than that in former edi-

tions, ... for which there was no particular authority." All previous editions of more than two centuries had "no particular authority" for their ordering of the Verse Letters, with one exception noticed by Milgate: *The Complete Poems of John Donne* (1942), edited by R. E. Bennett, the first editor to attempt ordering the Verse Letters (along with all Donne's other poems) chronologically. Milgate decided that the order of the Verse Letters in his edition should follow the form of Bennett's edition, according "except in a few obvious places" to "the order of their composition" (p. lxxiv). Milgate published thirty-eight Verse Letters, dating twenty-six of them; of the twelve he did not date, for five he devoted considerable attention to evidence that he found inconclusive but that he thought nevertheless warranted mention.

By choosing the order of NY<sub>3</sub> (and for that matter of WN<sub>1</sub> for those Verse Letters not included in NY<sub>3</sub>), the Variorum textual editors of Volume 5 have chosen an order without much logic, without particular authority, and with far too much dislocation of the chronological order that is natural to occasional poems. It is also an ordering that departs from earlier Variorum policy and practice.

## 4

On a more positive note, a welcome development in *The Verse Letters* is the appearance in the General Introduction of two transplanted subsections, "The Evolution of Methodology Within the Edition" (5: lxi–lxiv) and "On Stemmas and Revision" (5: lxiv–lxv). These first appeared in the 2016 Volume Introduction to *The Satyres* (3: lxii–lxv), explaining that volume's "thoroughgoing use of the stemmatological method," a result of evolution through four previous volumes. The textual editors of *The Verse Letters* claim that their work "adheres to the same editorial procedures as *The Satyres*" (5: lxi) and warrants placement of the two methodological subsections into the General Introduction, implying assurance that these dynamic editorial policies are to continue in volumes yet to be published.

However, another subsection has been omitted from *The Verse Letters*, having appeared in all the General Introductions of previous volumes: "Procedures for Choosing and Emending Copy-text" (6: xlvi–xlvi; 8: lii–liii; 2: liii–liv; 7.1: liv; and 3: lv–lvi). According to the editors, this is omitted from Volume 5 because the two new sub-

sections both “replace and supersede” it (5: lxi). But comparison of the three subsections shows that this claim is mistaken. One omitted paragraph analyzed principal procedures in each previous volume as having examined “every surviving seventeenth-century manuscript and multiple copies of seventeenth-century printings,” entering “the texts of all manuscript and early print copies into computer files,” and comparing them, “by means of the Donne Variorum Collation Program.” Oddly, the volume here under review is the first Variorum volume not to mention the Collation Program, which (especially if truly replaced and superseded) should not in this way have gone unreferenced anywhere in *The Verse Letters*.

Use of the DV Collation Program has been and will have been (one assumes and hopes, despite puzzling omission of its mention from Volume 5) a continuing and essential procedure used by Variorum editors throughout all volumes of the edition. It is still available for online readers of Volume 1, at *Digital Donne* <<http://donnevariorum.dh.tamu.edu>>, “Collation and Transcription Software for Windows 95, 98, 2000, XP, Vista, 7, and DOS.” The software was created and modified by Stringer and a series of consultants at the University of Southern Mississippi and Texas A&M Universities, later copyrighted by the then General Editor, now Professor of English, Emeritus, of the University of Southern Mississippi. Although not referenced anywhere in *The Verse Letters*, the Donne Variorum Collation and Transcription software is surely an indispensable aid to developing Variorum stemmas as a means for realizing a key goal still aspired to in Volume 5: to illustrate “the familial relationships discernible among the existing textual artifacts” (5: lxii). Stemmas further constitute “integral parts of the analysis itself, tracing down a genealogical tree the step-by-step deterioration of the text from the lost holograph (or holographs, in cases involving revision) to its various embodiments in the extant manuscripts and prints” (5: lxii). As is acknowledged in *The Verse Letters*, in *The Satyres* Donne’s poems were edited for the first time through “a policy of emendation that is commensurate with the stemmatological approach, emending as necessary the copy-text of each poem—whether of an original or a revised version—up the genealogical line toward the readings of the lost holograph” (5: lxiv). This stemmatological approach to editing the poems, including use

of the Collation Program, has been the main achievement of the Variorum; the resulting text and apparatus for the poems, as one reviewer has stated, “will be the basis of all future Donne scholarship” dealing with the poetry.

## 5

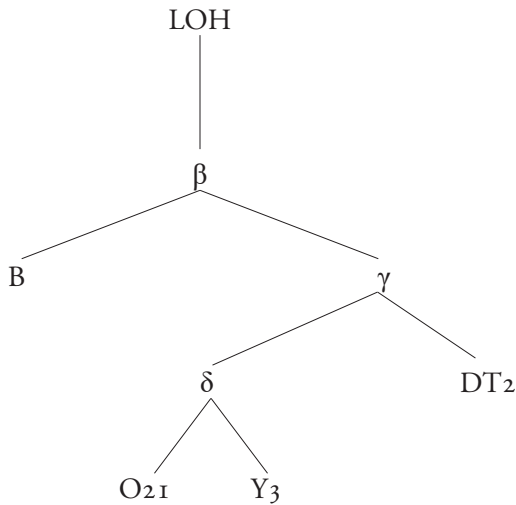
A second thorny matter is the canonicity of *HuntUn*. The Volume 5 textual editors in their General Textual Introduction repeatedly claim that this “is a poem of disputed canonicity” (5: lxxi and lxxxvi), adding the claim that it is “now considered dubious or spurious,” having been “attributed in manuscript to Sir Walter Aston” (5: lxxxvi). On the same page, the editors also claim that Grierson “vacillated” about having excluded *HuntUn* from the canon in 1912 but restored it “in his 1929 edition.” After reviewing the general acceptance by later editors (Hayward, Bennett, Milgate, Shawcross, and Patrides; 5: xcii–xciii) of Grierson’s self-correction in 1929, the Volume 5 textual editors inform us again that “*HuntUn*, as a poem of disputed canonicity, has been placed after the canonical poems” (5: xciv). In other words, they do not quite remove it from the canon to a dustbin of Dubia, although they seem to wish they could. In their General Textual Introduction, the textual editors do not cite any dispute or doubt of canonicity apart from Grierson’s momentary reservations and their own consideration of manuscript attribution to Aston.

Given their unsupported contention that *HuntUn* is “now considered dubious or spurious” having been “attributed in manuscript to Sir Walter Aston” (5: lxxxvi), the editors might have chosen to mention the edition of *HuntUn* by Robin Robbins, who published a modernized version of the poem headed “Sir Walter Aston to the Countess of Huntingdon” and *did* consign it to a section of “Dubia” (in *The Complete Poems of John Donne* [London: Longman, 2008], pp. 956–64). But the editors make no mention of this feature in Robbins’ edition, which elsewhere they characterize as “an important edition” that “deserves mention” (5: xciv).

In their Textual Introduction to *HuntUn*, the Volume 5 editors seem to adopt an altered tone. Having ordered the poem last among the verse letters in the volume, rather than creating a section for Dubia, in effect they do include *HuntUn* among poems by Donne, although they order it last, stating that “Donne’s authorship of *HuntUn* is not

certain" (5: 454). They state also a tentative conclusion that, given "the absence of further bibliographical evidence, determination of the authenticity of *HuntUn* ... comes to rest in a judgment about style" (5: 454).

At this point, before concluding their Textual Introduction to *HuntUn*, they interpose a stemma (5: 454), repeat that "All three manuscript witnesses of *HuntUn* attribute the poem to Sir Walter Aston" (5: 455), and assert that "the three manuscripts can be shown to derive their attribution—along with a dozen other verbal variants that distinguish their shared texts from the text of B [i.e. the printed text of 1635]—from a single source  $\gamma$ " (5: 455). They then interpose three tables of variant agreements and disagreements between B and the three manuscripts that attribute the poem to Aston, as if these attributions with these variants could challenge the authority of B.



However, this stemma, interposed by the textual editors, renders the three tables of variants irrelevant, because it clearly shows B to be closer to the lost original holograph than are the three manuscripts containing the ascriptions to Aston (DT2, O21, and Y3).

In a concluding subsection headed "The Canonicity of *HuntUn*," the editors go on to one more review (5: 458–59) of the publication



history of the poem, treating Grierson's part with a few further second thoughts. They note that Grierson "was the first to open the question of *HuntUn*'s canonicity" but that "already in the introductory material to his 1912 edition, Grierson expressed some regret" about having thought *HuntUn* was not a poem by Donne. They quote the explanation in his introduction (1912, 1: cxliii) that "had I realized in time the weakness of the positive external evidence," i.e., the three manuscript attributions, "I should not have moved the poem" out of the canon; and they add that in his 1929 Oxford Standard Edition (p. li) Grierson explained further that he had wanted to readmit *HuntUn* even before he had sent the proofs for the 1912 edition to OUP but had not had "the heart to ask [his] long-suffering publishers to permit a last reconstruction" (5: 459). Next the editors again acknowledge the acceptance by Hayward and Bennett of *HuntUn*'s canonicity, but they attack Milgate's rejection of the three manuscript attributions to Aston (5: 459–61). Once more they make no mention of Robbins.

All things considered, the case put by the Volume 5 editors cannot rest on the stemma they offer, which they claim "provides limited information about the canonicity of *HuntUn*" (5: 461). In the stemma, the postulated existence of  $\beta$

moves both B and  $\gamma$  one more generation away from the LOH. The stemma cannot show conclusively that the Aston heading was added in  $\gamma$ , only that it was present there (and handed down to DT2 and  $\delta$ ). Similarly, the stemma cannot show conclusively that an attribution to Donne was *added* in B, only that it is present there (and handed down in the print tradition) (5: 461–62).

It is not persuasive to challenge the authority of an extant artifact such as B by adducing the authority of an artifact symbolized by  $\gamma$  but not extant. The editors claim that while one cannot say the Aston heading was introduced in  $\gamma$ , one can say that it was present there. In fact, all one can say is that the Aston heading had to be introduced by a scribe somewhere in the line of transmission, in a line that is distinct from the one that produced the text in B. We do *not* know that the Aston attribution was present in  $\gamma$ , only that it is present in DT2, O21, and Y3. The claim that "we have one third-generation witness, B, testifying against three manuscript witnesses derived from another

third-generation source  $\gamma$ " (5: 462), is an exaggerated one, asserting something that the editors do not know. Here if anywhere we have "an unwarranted amount of pure conjecture" (5: xciv).

In the end, the textual editors conclude that *HuntUn*'s canonicity "must be considered uncertain" (5: 464), rather than "dubious or spurious" (5: lxxi) or "not certain" (5: 454). Without mention of Robbins, the editors have not cited any dispute or doubt apart from Grierson's momentary suspicion and their own choice to disregard the comparative authority of B, although it is illustrated in their own stemma. Instead they still seem to favor the testimony of three manuscript attributions descended not only from the postulated but missing witness  $\beta$  but from the second and third missing witnesses  $\gamma$  and  $\delta$ .

## 6

The editors of *Variorum* Volume 5 have departed from their predecessors in three main ways. First they avoid dating the Verse Letters, then they fail to order them in accord with any logical organizing principle, and third they posit a valid stemma for *HuntUn* and then proceed to argue *against* the conclusion that their own stemma logically implies, undermining their whole procedure and presenting a deeply incoherent argument about the canonicity of this poem. These policy departures by the current textual editors seem to warp the course of remaining *Variorum* volumes in a direction inconsistent with the stemmatological achievements of earlier leadership.

David V. Urban. *Milton and the Parables of Jesus: Self-Representation and the Bible in Milton's Writings*. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2018. xii + 316 pp. \$89.95. Review by JASON A. KERR, BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY.

The centrality of the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14–30) to Milton's practices of self-representation has been long familiar, owing especially to Dayton Haskin's *Milton's Burden of Interpretation* (Pennsylvania, 1994). David V. Urban's recent book aims to build on Haskin's work in two ways: by connecting it to Stephen M. Fallon's study of Milton's self-representation in *Milton's Peculiar Grace*