

Gary A. Stringer, gen. ed. *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne: The Holy Sonnets*, Volume 7, Part 1. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005. cvii + 606 pp. \$59.95. Review by ALBERT C. LABRIOLA, DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY.

This volume, the fourth published in the projected eight-volume series, provides (1) new and authoritative texts of nineteen Holy Sonnets and (2) a synopsis of all commentary from the 1600s to the present era. On both counts, this volume, which the MLA has designated “An Approved Edition,” excels beyond our highest expectations.

First and foremost, the volume interrelates textual study and critical commentary in the most effective ways. The editors, in fact, organize their textual study to accord with many of the central critical issues surrounding the Holy Sonnets—dating, sequence, the relationship of “E. of D” to the Holy Sonnets, authorial arrangements of the poems, and their relationship to other works by Donne, such as “La Corona.” In doing so, they outline, compare and contrast, and comment on the editorial and critical work of numerous predecessors who have engaged these central issues. While developing this comprehensive and richly detailed historical point of view, the editors also provide their own judgments, which are supported by an unprecedented depth of research, meticulous evaluation of all available evidence, access to manuscripts previously unknown, and scholarly acumen. By “acumen” I mean that the editors astutely frame and employ an editorial philosophy that accommodates the circumstances that surround the composition of texts such as the Divine Poems, texts that were circulated in manuscript and revised during that process. Balancing the ideal aim of discerning authorial intention with the reality of social revisions in the texts, which were supplied by a reader, by a listener to a poem being recited, or by a coterie, the editors have chosen the most judicious readings while preserving others for examination by users of the volume. Informed by principles and criteria outlined by Gary A. Stringer in an Appendix, the editors provide arguments that are well-reasoned, clearly enunciated, and very effective in engaging and resolving textual challenges afforded by the Holy Sonnets.

Emphasized by the textual editors is a salient fact that distinguishes the transmissional history of the Holy Sonnets: “that none of the poems has a history of individual circulation” (lx). By assessing the various manuscripts in

which the Holy Sonnets appear, diagramming stemma of the seventeenth-century artifacts containing the Holy Sonnets, and charting major variants in the seventeenth-century artifacts, the textual editors, unlike most of their predecessors, value and validate the Group-III collection. While emphasizing distinctive readings that help to qualify these artifacts as a separate family, the editors identify the Group-III collection as Donne's own arrangement of a 12-poem set of the Holy Sonnets. If, therefore, the order and sequence are authorial, the Group-III collection assumes significance not fully acknowledged by most editorial predecessors. In elevating the status of the Group-III collection, the textual editors create an enlarged framework within which to choose the copy-text for their edition.

A most useful element of the textual history derives from the historical review of eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century editions of the Holy Sonnets. In doing so, the editors compare and contrast the various editorial practices, identify and test the assumptions of their numerous predecessors, challenge certain editorial judgments, contest many conclusions, and rectify erroneous decisions, large and small. Moreover, coverage of past work is sufficiently broad so that the editors identify six "bibliographically indefensible and interpretively questionable assertions" (xciii) propounded by numerous prior editors. After each assertion is presented, along with the supporting evidence that predecessors had adduced, the textual editors not only refute the previous findings but also engage anew the challenges that had bedeviled prior editors.

Interrelated with the textual history is the unfolding critical commentary in the volume. Presented chronologically, the commentary, however, is organized around major topics: dating and order, the poet/persona, genre and traditions, language and style, prosody, sacred and profane, themes, the Holy Sonnets and other works. In effect, the commentary editors composed a reception history concerning each of the foregoing topics. They do so by referring to textual history when it has affected the interpretive responses of commentators on the poems. More than other critical commentators, Louis Martz and Helen Gardner merit attention, for the idea of meditative structure in the Holy Sonnets, which are termed Divine Meditations in some 17<sup>th</sup> Century artifacts, becomes paramount for both of them. Most useful are the various indexes that enable a user to access the commentary in efficient ways: Index of Authors Cited in the Commentary, Index of Writers and Historical

Figures Cited in the Commentary, and Index of Other Poems and Works of Donne Cited in the Commentary.

Beyond the excellence of their scholarly achievement, the editors have distinguished themselves in other ways. Their textual history and critical commentary are clearly written and cogently presented. The textual history is less a narrative and more a drama, which unfolds as a scholarly adventure. It is a compelling account, not unlike a detective story at certain crucial moments when the editors recount the investigation of calligraphy, penstrokes, the physical makeup of gatherings, wrinkles in the paper of some artifacts, and the like. The critical commentary identifies, synopsisizes, synthesizes, and affords cross-referencing of interpretations so that users may perceive the chain of causation or association that bears on the engagement of particular topics. All things considered, the editors merit our utmost acclaim, and Indiana University Press has earned our deep gratitude and admiration for its commitment to this ongoing project.

Jan Ross, ed. *The Works of Thomas Traherne: Volume I*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer. 2005. xxiv + 571 pp. + 5 illus. \$145.00. Review by JACOB BLEVINS, MCNEESE STATE UNIVERSITY.

Jan Ross has edited the first volume of what promises to be a complete and definitive multivolume edition of the poetry and prose of Thomas Traherne. Since Bertram Dobell's initial discovery and publication of Traherne's poetry in 1903, followed by his publication of the *Centuries of Meditations* in 1908, critical interest in Traherne has gained momentum; this growing critical corpus was greatly facilitated by Gladys I. Wade's biography of Traherne (*Thomas Traherne* [Princeton, 1944]) and H. M. Margoliouth's two volume scholarly edition of Traherne's work (*Centuries, Poems and Thanksgivings*, 2 vols. [Oxford, 1958]). However, considering the subsequent discovery of a substantial body of new Traherne work, as well as new critical insights into the originally discovered texts, it is long past due for a new, comprehensive scholarly edition of Traherne to materialize.

To the credit of Ross and D. S. Brewer, this volume (the first of an eight-volume edition, scheduled to be completed in 2017) is comprised of the most recently discovered Traherne texts found at Lambeth Palace. Volume