There is an automated response to any gathering of a minor poet's works: why not a selection? The complaint suggests a rigour of judgment on the part of the critic and forms a useful comment to fall back on when feeling somewhat blank about the text under review. Before a choice can be made, however, the canon should be available. In the case of John Gray, this requirement is forcibly augmented by the difficulty of finding actual evidence beyond the walls of a very few libraries; each of Gray's individual volumes appeared in severely limited numbers while some fifty odd poems remain either uncollected or unpublished. A few years back some clever-silly British critic compared Gray to a bream, a coarse fish that is barely edible. And in 1967 D. J. Gordon, in a trenchant review of the Beardsley exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, pronounced that Gray had neither the gifts nor the vocation of a man of letters, "granting a minimum of interest to his translations." Translations from Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud and Laforgue, the last two figures not precisely constituting a majority taste, were judiciously praised by Ruth Z. Temple three decades ago. Gray's reputation, indeed, has risen steadily over the past twenty years so that he makes a prominent appearance in Professor Christopher Ricks's *New Oxford Book of Victorian Verse*. The Latin church, determined to rectify their occasionally insensitive dealings with Hopkins, have materially assisted in this review. Gray's fantasy novel *Park* has been reprinted in two editions by Bernard Bergonzi and T. F. Healy, while a group of enthusiasts and scholars—the late "John Gawsworth," Professor Ruth Z. Temple, Fr. Brocard Sewell, Dr. Jerusha McCormack and Dr. Peter Vernon—have brought about a climate in which Gray could be taken seriously not merely as "a beautiful oddity" or an early and accomplished translator of some of the better French poets of the later nineteenth century, but as a poet who, like W. B. Yeats, survived the dangerous phase of the *fin de siècle* and those middle years, so often arid, of poets in the romantic or neo-romantic tradition, whose talent like that of Yeats ripened into a late and very individual maturity.

There is a further aspect of Gray's personality and work which is of an acute sociological interest: the boy from a skilled working-class family, who, after leaving school before his thirteenth birthday, taught himself French, German, Spanish and Latin, became the friend not the "renter" of Oscar Wilde; was appointed a librarian in the Foreign Office and concluded his career as a respected secular priest and a Canon of St. Mary's Latin Catholic Cathedral in Edinburgh.
The notes to Gray's poems have involved me in unexpected difficulties. In annotating my edition of Lionel Johnson’s poems (1982), I found that, though allusions were many and not veiled, they were confined mostly to the classics, English literature and history, and so were relatively public; the impersonality of the poems ensured that private happenings were not much recorded and intimate psychological states were generalised. Gray, however, habitually if obliquely refers to private happenings, direct autobiographical experiences and obscure points of geography. Several lines indeed have perfectly baffled me.

The bound volume of holograph versions, constituting a working space, of *Spiritual Poems* (National Library of Scotland) has called for editorial decisions. Drafts at several stages of evolution on discrete pages demanded a decision as to how much of that evolution should be recorded. Some versions of these poems are complex and a photographic illustration would be the best method of representing Gray’s revisions, but I decided that it was more practicable only to print the more interesting variants from the more interesting poems. Some poems are only represented in the bound holograph versions by a final draft; others are clearly only one remove from a rough literal version and in some the version is actually identical with the final text.

In my notation, I have tried to be reasonably ample. What the average person knows or does not know in these days of fragmented culture remains peculiarly difficult to determine. The Vulgate, let alone King James’s Bible, can no longer be assumed, resulting not from secularization merely, but recent fevered tamperings with liturgy and church furnishings by trendy priests. This is not the mere nostalgic expression of a reverent agnostic, but is highly relevant to the "sack" of Gray’s church at St. Peter’s, Edinburgh, choiceely furnished by André Raffalovich and Gray himself and a monument to an earlier taste: the altar cloth was said to be contrived out of Raffalovich’s drawing room curtains and either Gray or Raffalovich provided furnishings and works of art by Frank Brangwyn and John Duncan, one of the *Evergreen* circle of the 1890s. A collective and effervescent madness appears every century or so to inflame Churchmen in England of all denominations. After the acts of that chancred Tudor tyrant, a hundred years later the Puritans, who Christopher Hill tells us "loved art," made a desolation and called it "the rule of the Saints." The eighteenth century in its dry way resorted to neglect rather than iconoclasm and the nineteenth, with all the raw vigour of its character, burnt fine old furnishings and "restored" Churches, often without ecclesiological warrant. Not to be upstaged, one Fr. Glancy, a recent incumbent, sold, lost or destroyed the furnishings of St. Peter. Fortunately, under the sway of a liberal Polish Pope, these
excesses have now been muted. Aligned with such excesses are corrupters of scripture and liturgy; radically devoid as they often are of all literary sense, for who can forget the transformation, in one of those dismal "new" Bibles that are prominent on the one shilling shelves of second-hand booksellers or forlornly lurk in corners at Oxfam or Age Concern, of "a den of thieves," terse, pungent, colloquial into "a cave of robbers." Greek it may be, but suggesting Ali Baba rather than the forcible language of the master.

The general aim has been to gloss anything of which I am myself ignorant. This doubtless accounts for the amplitude of the notes. On occasion, information appears that is readily available in major books of reference. The reader will hardly wish to enjoy Gray’s poems behind a palisade of Who’s Who, the Catholic Directory, the Dictionary of National Bibliography, to say nothing of such foreign works as the Almanach de Gotha.

As to the canon: in one instance I have included a poem that Gray did not recall having written in his wicked lustrous youth, "Passing the Love of Women." The point of view there, one might well say, is wrong. Much of Gray’s earlier work, though, is candidly experimental and on very slender evidence—a copy from a holograph manuscript that I have not myself seen—the attribution of the lyric stands. The author’s profile from the allusions to the Uranian and the popular Venus suggest a middle-aged homosexual schoolmaster, a cleric perhaps, and his poem is rather above that of other Uranian poets of the 1890s, such as Charles Sayle, John Gambril Nicholson or George Ives.

I omit the extensive translations from Goethe and Nietzsche, the latter of mild literary historical importance but of wan merit. The same description, of course, could be applied to a number of Gray’s pastoral and homiletic pieces. A more difficult editorial decision led also to the omission of Gray’s translations of the rhapsodic Hymns of Saint Gertrude. The frontiers between prose and verse are now so fluid that the very free verse forms pose no problem; the problem originates rather in the sense that the prayers required their contexts in Gertrude and Mechtilde’s exalted catalogue of "spiritual favours." The Kiss, a translation from Theodore de Banville, has been published elsewhere, and as a one act play is not appropriate to this volume and on the same ground "The Winning of the Duchess" is excluded.

There are references to a poem with the title of "Dance in the Gardens" though I have not been able to trace that and I make no doubt that Gray’s letters, a number of which are in private hands, may well contain other texts.
I should like to record my gratitude for the help of others, without whom making this edition, which has been sporadically in process for more than a decade, might never have been concluded. First, Fr. Ian Hislop, the Prior Provincial of the Dominican Order in England, in whom the copyright of Gray’s unpublished writings is vested; to Fr. Allan White, present superior of the Catholic University Chaplaincy at St. George’s Square, Edinburgh. Succeeding as he did to an unjust steward who randomly dispersed rare items by Gray, Fr. White has been active in searching out unpublished manuscripts and has generously given me access to them. My thanks are due also to the officials of the National Library of Scotland where the holographs of Spiritual Poems, along with other poems rejected by Gray from that volume, are now located.

I am grateful also to Mrs. Donald Hyde (Lady Eccles) for permission to read and photocopy Gray’s holograph version of Silverpoints (made originally for Pierre Louÿs), to the Rare Book division of Princeton University Library for allowing me to study their manuscript of Silverpoints at one time in the collection of John Harlin O’Connell; to Fr. Bede Bailey, O. P. of St. Dominic’s Priory, Carisbrooke, for permission to use the papers of the late Dr. Helen Trudgian.

Mr. Alan Campbell, LL.B., of Edinburgh has been an untiring font of information and suggestion. With his, I should like to join the name of Mr. Alan Anderson, who has done so much to keep the figures of the 1890s in presence by the numerous publications of his Tregara Press, choice covers, hand-set with a quiet elegance that prolongs the best traditions of the private presses that flowered round the turn of the century: Vale, Eragny, Doves. Mr. Eric Stevens enabled me to publish a garland of Gray’s unpublished poems, admirably bound and printed in delicious but readable italic. Mr. Johnathan Tutor allowed me a sight of his (as yet unpublished) essay on Gray. I had profitable discussions with my ex-colleagues at the University of Reading. Professor A. Menhennet, Professor John Scott and Mr. G. S. Strickland assisted me in gauging the accuracy and felicity of Gray’s translations from the German, Italian and French. In the last resort, there was always Professor J. B. Trapp, Director of the Warburg Institute, University of London, and his colleagues, to cast light on the strange, baroque places to which Gray’s literary taste led. Others for whose assistance and encouragement I am grateful include Professor Bernard Bergonzi, Professor Karl Beckson and Dr. Kelsey Thornton. My errors are my errors.