John Donne Journal
Vol. 26 (2007)

Revisiting John Donne

Robert Ellrodt

Achsah Guibbory, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to John Donne*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. xviii + 288 pp.

The appearance of this *Companion* is welcome and may even appear overdue. Donne, of course, had already had pride of place in the earlier *Cambridge Companion to English Poetry: Donne to Marvell,* and one is not surprised that the author of the dense and brilliant chapter devoted to him in 1993 should have been chosen as the general editor of the new volume. Achsah Guibbory modestly limited her contribution to the Preface and a chapter entitled "Erotic poetry," but readers and particularly students would be well advised to read also (or re-read) her earlier synthetic survey of Donne's poetry for it illuminated the "contrary impulses" at work in his life, imagination, sensibility, and artistic preferences. Alastair Fowler's chapter on "Genre and tradition" and Brian Vickers's on "Rhetoric" also supplied general information not so readily available in the new *Companion*, though the opening chapters bring "multiple contexts" to bear on Donne's writings in verse and prose. This reminder by no means detracts from the interest of the full-range study provided by sixteen interconnected chapters: each of them is an original essay which deserves the attention of scholars as well as students.

In "Donne's life: a sketch" Jonathan F. S. Post provides a clear outline of Donne's "family history of persecution" (p. 2) and the phases of his life, stressing a "pre-eminent" (p. 5) worldliness in his "frustrating search for employment" (p. 10), yet refraining from hypotheses about the date and cause of his conversion to Anglicanism and his final decision to enter the ministry. One may wonder whether worldly preoccupations were still uppermost when he arranged "the strangest match": the marriage of his twenty-year-old daughter with "the old player" Edward Alleyn.

Ted-Larry Pebworth stresses Donne's aversion to publication and sets forth its consequences for editors of his text. Donne's preference for the circulation of manuscripts did not only proceed from a fear of being known as a professional writer, nor from the objectionable character of some of his writings, but mainly from his preference for a restricted audience of friends and patrons. Since "no poetical manuscripts in his own hand survive" (p. 28), scribal transmission deprives us of a "definitively established canon" (p. 29). Pebworth offers an example of the debates on authorship, "Julia," and he shows cogently how a single verbal variant may affect the whole meaning of a poem in "Come, madam, come."

The next three chapters are meant to supply a context for Donne's writings, but Guibbory wisely insists that "text and context are interwoven and interdependent" (p. x). This seems to imply that the production of the text is not considered as determined by the social environment, but by the writer's personal response and reaction to it, which has always been my own position. A study of the background may give more prominence to the initiative and originality of the individual author. Arthur Marotti's chapter on "The social context and nature of Donne's writing," however, is deliberately focused on his "occasional verse and letters," leaving out other poems in which the influence of his London environment and the Inns of Court circles is no less evident:[1] the architecture of the volume probably required it. Donne's "humanist" (p. 36) interest in interpersonal communication tempers a prevailing egotism,[2] but the "dream of perfect communication" is best approached

---

[1]Relying on the same "context," I had attempted to trace the links between this environment and several characteristics of the poetry of Donne and other poets of his generation in the third volume of my *Poètes métaphysiques anglais* (Paris: Corti, 1960), "Les origines sociales, psychologiques et littéraires de la poésie métaphysique au tournant du siècle," somewhat misleadingly designated as "Ellrodt (1960b, 2)" in the *Donne Variorum* because it constituted the "Second Part" of a three-volume study. Unlike the First Part in two volumes ("Les structures fondamentales de l'inspiration personnelle"), it was not re-edited in 1973 (a distinction the Bibliography of the *The Cambridge Companion to John Donne* omits) and is out of print. In *Seven Metaphysical Poets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), I had to condense the contents of the third volume in a single chapter, "Change and the Donne generation."

[2]As I argued in *Poètes métaphysiques*, 2:126–135.

in the prose letters (p. 40). Yet in the very insistence on "one soul in two bodies" (*Letters to Severall Persons of Honour* [1651], p. 11), that soul seems to be essentially Donne's; an interest in otherness is not obvious. The "dearth of topical allusions," usually prevalent in the letters of his contemporaries, also illustrates his particular emphasis on interiority. In the early verse letters to male friends the "shared interest in writing poetry" (p. 37) points to an appreciation of verse writing which confers on this activity more importance than the rejection of publication would suggest. When the preacher later praised the poetic style of the Bible, he justified at least the writing of his divine poems, if not his "love-song weeds and Satyrique thornes" ("To Mr. Rowland Woodward," 5; quoted, p. 38). Marotti calls attention to Donne's favorite word "nothing" (p. 40) in the prose letters: its significance might have been extended (see *Poètes métaphysiques*, 1:123–125). He subtly analyzes how Donne managed to be "both encomiastic and critical" in his praise of Lady Bedford and combined compliment and comic indecorum in the poems to the Countess of Huntingdon (pp. 42–45), omitting however the self-revealing suggestions on the nature of love "that found a want but knew not what would please."

In his learned survey of "Literary contexts: predecessors and contemporaries" Andrew Hadfield concentrates on Donne's debt to, or affinities with, the poets of imperial Rome, and on his reaction to the Petrarchism and Neoplatonism prevailing in earlier Elizabethan poetry.[3] He offers interesting parallels with Juvenal and Ovid, but Propertius might have been at least mentioned.[4] Like Barbara Everett and myself, he presents Donne as a London poet. For "a great frequenter of Plays" who later "acted" his sermons so convincingly, the influence of the London theatres might also have been considered despite the contempt for actors professed in his satires. Donne's use of a dramatic style is

[3]Donne's reaction to Petrarchism and Neoplatonism was more complex than he suggests: see *Poètes métaphysiques*, 3:71–93.

[4]Stella Revard rightly insisted on Donne's affinities with Propertius in her essays, "Donne and Propertius: Love and Death in London and Rome," in *The Eagle and the Dove: Reassessing John Donne*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), pp. 70–79, and "Donne's 'The Bracelet': Trafficking in Gold and Love," *John Donne Journal* 18 (1999): 13–23.

occasionally pointed out in the *Companion*; the origin of this preference might have been sought both in Roman satire and elegy and in the attendance of plays.[5] Space, of course, was limited, but the three pages of comment on "The Extasie," however interesting, might have been condensed to make room for a wider exploration of Donne's originality when compared with the "Giddie fantastique Poëts of each land" (*Satyre I*, 10).[6] Incidentally, one wonders whether the terms "mannerist" or "baroque" have been purposely excluded throughout the volume. One may have doubts about their pertinence,[7] yet students should be prepared to meet them in their reading of other studies.

Alison Shell and Arnold Hunt give a precise picture of "Donne's religious world," stressing the persistent influence of his Catholic inheritance and his belief in the "fundamental unity of the Catholic and Protestant churches" (p. 76). On the second point, his boldest statement would have deserved quotation: "Synagogue and Church is the same thing, and of the Church, *Roman* and *Reformed*, and all other distinctions of place, Discipline, or Person, but one Church, journying to one *Hierusalem*, and directed by one guide, Christ Jesus" (*Essayes in Divinity*, ed. Simpson, p. 51). The remarks on Donne's "fascination with names and naming" (p. 74), and on his insistent linking of religion and woman are illuminating. We are told there is still some doubt about "his place on the spectrum of religious opinions" (p. 68) but his opposition to the "high Calvinist position" (p. 78) on predestination and the doctrine of "limited atonement" (p. 78) is acknowledged. To my mind it mainly proceeded from his humanist stance: God cannot be cruel, and therefore must wish all men to be saved,[8] including those who have not known

---

[5]See *Poètes métaphysiques*, 3:185–192, 300–310.

[6]In a full survey I came to the conclusion that Donne probably owed almost nothing to the Continental poets, but comparisons are a means of bringing out his originality: see *Poètes métaphysiques*, 3:193–271, condensed in *John Donne: Poésie*, ed. Robert Ellrodt (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1993), pp. 28–38.

[7]I have only explored the interart analogies in lectures and essays, e.g., "L'esthétique de John Donne" in *Le Continent européen et le monde anglo-américain aux XVII^e^ et XVIII^e^ siècles* (Reims: Presses Universitaires de Reims, 1987).

[8]*The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. by George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson, 10 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953–1962), 5:53.

Christ, yet acted according to the light of nature like the sages of Antiquity (*Sermons*, 4:78), as well as unbaptized children (*Sermons*, 5:162). To discountenance the Calvinist interpretation of the "narrow gate" (Matthew 7:13), the preacher quotes another verse, "Many shall come. . ." (Matthew 8:11), and verges on sophistry when he argues that "Christ call[s] it a *straite gate*. . . . Not that it is strait in it self, but that we think it so, and, indeed, we make it so. *Christ is the gate*, and every wound of his admits the whole world" (*Sermons*, 6:163–164).[9] The *Sermons* are chiefly known through extracts which emphasize the tragic aspects of Christianity, but one should be aware that the preacher mentions the "mercy" of God far more frequently than his "power" or the existence of Hell,[10] though he himself had a fear of damnation before he received a modest assurance of God's grace. In the contemporary religious context the complexity of Donne's attitude to miracles would also have rewarded investigation.[11]

In the "political world" Donne undoubtedly moved away from the bold criticism of the Court and even kings (including the Queen), earlier prominent in his satires and verse letters, but throughout his life he was "much less of a time-server than some have averred, less of a subtle dissident than others would like him to have been" (p. 83), as Tom Cain points out, rightly considering his politics "in the light of events which had shaped his England" (p. 85). This "contextualization" allows an interpretation of *Pseudo-Martyr* and the *Sermons* focused on Donne's concern with "*Peaceable* and *religious* Tranquillity" anticipating the views of Hobbes (p. 91). Cain's assertion that "Donne was closer to the Calvinist Archbishop Abbott than has been usually thought" (p. 96) is

---

Future references to Donne's *Sermons* will be to this edition and cited parenthetically in the text.

[9]Donne's rejection of an eternal decree of reprobation appeared in his early sermons, e.g., on 19 April 1618 (*Sermons*, 1:302), *anticipating* the later expression of Arminian views by the Laudians and in Richard Montague's pamphlet, *Appello Caesarem* (1625).

[10]See Troy Reeves, *An Annotated Index to the Sermons of John Donne*, 3 vols. (Salzburg: Salzburg University Press, 1979–1981).

[11]See my article, "Miracle et nature de saint Augustin à la poésie métaphysique anglaise," in *Réseaux: Revue interdisciplinaire de philosophie morale et politique* 24–25 (1975): 3–36.

justified so long as it is confined to the sphere of politics; his distrust of "the Arminians' almost mystic advocacy of the king's absolute power" (p. 97) implied a "return to the critical stance towards the monarchy that he had held in the 1590s" (p. 98). This is an illustration of the contrast I have always noted between the poet's attraction to "things Extreme" ("Aire and Angels," 21–22)—though he is always aware of the dangers of excess—and the man's assertion "I hate extreames" ("The Autumnall," 45), his Horatian conviction that "meanes blesse" (*Satyre II*, 107).[12] Again his humanism is illustrated by his readiness (comparable to, if not inspired by Montaigne's) to see in a "Virginian" (a Native American) his "Neighbor, as well as a Londoner" (*Sermons*, 4:110; quoted, p. 87).

In "Reading and rereading Donne's poetry" Judith Scherer Herz offers an engagingly personal and impressionistic account of her experience. She focuses her attention on the *Songs and Sonets*, with a glance at the two *Anniversary* poems, leaving the Divine Poems to Helen Wilcox. She rightly defines "the essential ingredients of metaphysical wit" (p. 105), but some of her illustrations of it ("The Flea," "The Dissolution") are not among the best. Even when admiring the "tart particularity" (to recall Post's terms) of Donne's language, one may be reluctant to agree that his poems "direct our attention to the words, their figuration, shape and patterns, often more than to the ideas" (p. 106). The words, no doubt, are striking, but I still think that the superiority of Donne's conceits over Cowley's is due not only to his command of style and rhythm, but to the fact that his words convey truths—psychological, moral, philosophical—which are not mere "ideas," but the experiences lived by the poet.[13] It is true that the poet "tries out a series of poses," yet since they are "all spoken by a voice that is instantly recognizable, 'irremediably Donne,'" it does not mean we need to say he "performs

---

[12]Cf. Paradox V, "Extreames are equally removed from the meane" (*John Donne: Paradoxes and Problems*, ed. Helen Peters [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980], p. 9). These statements may seem dictated by the context, but they are in keeping with the essential rationality of Donne's mind.

[13]*Poètes métaphysiques*, 1:1.8–9; "Poésie et vérité chez John Donne," *Études Anglaises* 40 (1987): 1–14. Donne belonged to a generation of poets whom Jonson advised to "let your *Matter* run before your *Words*" (*Poetaster*, act 5), which, however, did not mean an indifference to words (*Poètes métaphysiques*, 3:392).

many selves all vying to be the single self" (p. 110). It is nowadays the usual mode of expression, but one may prefer to speak of a single "constant inconstant" self exhibiting various facets like Montaigne's. The distinction may appear tenuous, but it has philosophical implications.[14] The conclusion that the poet speaks to all aspects of our humanity, "both the high and the low" (p. 113), is, of course, pertinent, and it accounts for his modernity.

The lower aspects are dominant in the five "Satyres" to which Annabel Patterson devotes a whole chapter, with a glance at *Ignatius His Conclave*. A study of "Satirical writing" might have been extended to *Metempsychosis*, an interesting poem which receives little attention in the *Companion*. Patterson's close analysis is rewarding and the changes of tone from one poem to another are well set off. The Dean's later allusions to satire are recorded and throw light on his "self-guiltiness" (*Sermons*, 7:408; quoted, p. 130).

"Satire intrudes into elegy" (p. 135), Achsah Guibbory observes in a chapter on "Erotic poetry," a title probably chosen to emphasize the presence of desire in Donne's love poetry even when he seems willing to "forget the Hee and Shee" ("The Undertaking"; cf. "The Relique"). Her attention is here focused on the display of libertine and misogynous wit, thus leaving out three of the best elegies, "His Picture" (so self-revealing), "On his Mistris," and "The Autumnall." In her comment on the *Songs and Sonets* a fine progression leads from the poet's awareness of "the relation between the private experience of love and the public, outer world" (p. 138) to his celebration of "the autonomous private world" (p. 140) and the transcendence of love in defiance of death and of "the Christian association of sexuality with sin" (p. 145) Even in the poems exalting love, however, she detects a suggestion that "erotic experience is self-destructive" (p. 145).[15]

In a dense and perceptive essay on Donne's "word-centred, fear-focused devotional writing" (p. 164) Helen Wilcox stresses the constant

---

[14]See my "Unchanging forms of identity in literary expression," *European Review* 7 (1999): 113–126, and the introduction to *Seven Metaphysical Poets*.

[15]My own concern had also been to detect a "continuity" (related to his self-consciousness) in Donne's attitudes to love, death, and religion: *Seven Metaphysical Poets*, pp. 38–46; *Poètes métaphysiques*, 1:36–64.

"partnership of deep devotion and intense anxiety" (p. 151). The "Holy Sonnets" with their "grief-ridden drama and dynamic debates" (p. 154) make us aware of "the centrality of paradoxes in Donne's religious language and thought" (p. 151).[16] In the longer poems, composed "in the protestant tradition of meditation on specific occasions" (p. 155), the "conjunctions of history and oppositions of geography" (p. 156) are indeed "dazzling" (p. 156). Taking the prose *Devotions* in her stride, Wilcox shows excellently how "Words, both literal and metaphorical, are at the heart of Donne's encounter with the divine" (p. 161). A discriminating analysis of the "Hymns" discloses how the poet's "distinctly individual voice" (p. 162) emerges from the historical and religious context. The "Incarnation" is mentioned in both Guibbory's and Wilcox's essays: Donne's "incarnational" sensibility is, indeed, a unifying factor in his poetry.[17]

Peter McCullough's presentation of "Donne as preacher" is lucid and precise. He does indeed "provide students with a crucial first step for understanding a now unfamiliar genre" when describing "the five stages in the composition of an oration" (p. 169). He rightly points out that Donne in the sermons "works a large, sweeping scale quite unlike his most famous poetry" (p. 171), sets forth his "animated theatricality" (p. 172) in their delivery, and shows how he illustrated—as Thomas Crosfield at the time observed—"his powerful kinde of preaching by his gestur and Rhetoriquall expression" (quoted, pp. 174–175). However, when he claims that "Donne may never have been *less* himself than when preaching" (p. 175) and that the "I's" of his sermons "are often hypothetical, fictional creations" (p. 176), he seems to be only partly right, for the voice we hear is Donne's individual voice, not the voice of Everyman or of a *persona* when he repeatedly says: "I see," "I hear"; "I find," "I consider." The preacher does invite every man to "dissect and cut up himself" (*Sermons*, 1:273), but this is the kind of dissection he had practiced on himself long before entering holy orders. When he exclaims "Poor, intricated soule! Riddling, perplexed, labyrinthicall soule" (*Sermons*, 8:232), he reminds us of the description of his soul in the first

[16]Donne's *distinctive* use of paradox was fully explored in *Poètes métaphysiques*, 1:1.8 and 3:330–351.

[17]See *Seven Metaphysical Poets*, chap. 11, "John Donne and Bifold Natures."

lines of his epistle to the Countess of Bedford, "This twilight of two years." *Deaths Duell* opens with objective considerations, ends on a collective exhortation, but through his habit of thinking and feeling as in a dramatic situation (a characteristic feature of his poetry) the preacher is led to substitute a personal experience for a universal one:

> But for **us** that dye now and sleepe in the state of the dead, **we** must al passe this *posthume* death, this *death* after *death*. . . . When those bodies that have beene the *children* of *royal parents*, and the *parents* of *royal children*, must say with *Job*, *to corruption, thou art* ***my*** *father,* and *to the Worme, thou art* ***my*** *mother and* ***my*** *sister. Miserable riddle,* when the same *worme* must bee ***my*** *mother*, and ***my*** *sister* and ***my selfe***. *Miserable incest*, when **I** must bee *maried* to **my** *mother* and **my** *sister*, . . . when **my** *mouth* shall be *filled* with dust, and the *worme* shall *feed*, and *feed sweetely* upon **me**. . . .
>
> (*Sermons*, 10:238; the boldface type is mine.)

The biblical quotation invited the preacher to slip from **we** to **I**, but he hardly needed this invitation, as his insistent repetition of the singular shows. In another sermon he had betrayed his most earnest wish when longing for "the day that shall show me to my selfe; here I never saw my selfe, but in disguises: There, Then, I shall see my selfe, and see God too" (*Sermons*, 9:129). Though he goes on to extol the contemplation of God, one is bound to notice that his first wish had been to see his self, "the hardest object of the sight" ("Obsequies to the Lord Harrington," 30).

In the chapter on "Donne's language: the conditions of communication," Lynne Magnuson chooses to ignore the "tradition of criticism" which focused on poetic devices "such as 'the metaphysical conceit,' metaphors, paradox, wordplay, and other forms of ambiguity," and "build an argument about how Donne used his gift with language as equipment for poetry and as equipment for living" (p. 184). The starting-point is a parallel between a pattern for Protestant prayer worked out in a sermon and "a Jacobean courtly suitor's request-making" (p. 185); it is followed by a contrast in the rhetorical strategy of the two successive letters sent by Donne to beseech his father-in-law. In his poetry "the importance of small words" (p. 191), of grammatical operators, and the

"concrete 'thingness' given even to abstractions" (p. 192)[18] is rightly emphasized. An analysis of "Lovers infiniteness" supplies a final illustration of "the knowledge/power or intellectual/courtly opposition so evident in Donne's sermons and letters" (p. 194). This is an interesting and original approach. Students, however, might also have derived a benefit from a "traditional" analysis of Donne's poetic style, contrasted with the ornate diction and more leisurely pace of the Spenserians, or even with the swifter, yet tight-packed metaphorical language of Shakespeare.

In the chapter "Gender matters: the women in Donne's poems," Ilona Bell reviews the various presentations of women and sexual relationships in the epigrams, the elegies, and the *Songs and Sonets*. She highlights the licentious and misogynous wit of the elegies (partly at least dictated by a "literary" desire of reaction against his predecessors), again omitting the poems written in a different mood or strain. In the *Songs and Sonets*, however, erotic love becomes a transcendent experience and its intensity (hinting even at self-destruction) is acknowledged. Yet more space is devoted to "Sapho and Philaenis," "the first female homosexual love poem in English" (p. 212)—as John Carey earlier noted—though Donne's authorship (which I personally think highly probable) had been denied by Helen Gardner. It certainly supports the general claim that Donne in his love poetry seeks "to shock the reader into a more open, inquiring, unconventional point of view" (p. 213); but one need not accept the hypothesis that the words "my more" and "oh, no more" hint at the poet's love for Anne More. Donne was fond of punning on his own name, but his puns were always meaningful *in context* when reading at once "done" and "Donne," which is not the case here with "more," nor in another instance suggested by Magnusson.[19] The title chosen for this chapter excluded the *Sermons*, which can shed some light on Donne's general views about women. His insistence on the indissolubility of marriage, rejecting openly papal dissolutions (*Sermons*, 3:243), and implicitly perhaps the more daring Protestant opinions, may stem from his genuine lifelong attachment to his wife. His conception of the role of

[18]This "thingness" had been early noted by George Rylands in "English Poets and the Abstract Word," *Essays and Studies* 16 (1931): 53–84. See also *Poètes métaphysiques*, 1:245ff.

[19]In "Lovers infiniteness" (*Companion*, p. 198).

women was bound to be still patriarchal, but a sermon preached at a marriage, though it would not meet feminist expectations nowadays, sheds an interesting light on his sincere search for the Aristotelian mean, in keeping with his final acceptance of the Anglican *via media*:

> Between the denying of them souls, which S. *Ambrose* is charged to have done, and giving them such souls as they may be Priests, as the *Peputian* hereticks did, is a faire way for a moderate man to walk in. To make them Gods is ungodly, and to make them Devils is devillish ; to male them Mistresses is unmanly, and to make them servants is unnoble; To make them as God made them, wives, is godly and manly too.
>
> (*Sermons*, 3:242)

"Donne spent much of his life anticipating death" (p. 217) is the opening sentence of the next essay, in which Ramie Targoff carefully traces first his lifelong expression of a desire for the next life, then his obsession with the processes of dissolution of the body, and his insistent craving for its resurrection. How a longing for death and a bold apology for suicide in *Biathanatos* can coexist with a vivid awareness and fear of putrefaction in the grave is not precisely explained. I have offered an interpretation, which, I admit, is hypothetical: Donne was not longing for repose as in the temptation of Guyon in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*,[20] nor for the unconsciousness of a sleep without dreams, as in Hamlet's famous soliloquy; like Montaigne he sought "the utmost intensity of being in the experience of dying, death as a climax of self-awareness."[21] The profane lover expected from death a "canonization" which would confer on him the unchanging reality his divided mind could never grasp in his self-analysis. The fear of decomposition in the grave is never prominent in the poems and it is everywhere counterbalanced by a hope in the resurrection of the body. Donne insists that "the union of the body and soule makes the man; he whose soule and body are separated by death as long as that state lasts is properly no man" (*Sermons*, 10:236). Mention

[20]See pp. 5–6 of my article, "Fundamental Modes of Thought, Imagination, and Sensibility in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser," *Spenser Studies: A Renaissance Poetry Annual* 20 (2005): 1-21.

[21]*Seven Metaphysical Poets*, p. 42.

might have been made of his leaning to the mortalist heresy, suggested by the "I know not" of Holy Sonnet VI in its first version.[22]

Chapter 16, "Feeling thought: Donne and the embodied mind," might have followed upon "Facing death" since it places the same emphasis on physicality, but an essay by an internationally known writer provides a witty and thought-provoking conclusion. A. S. Byatt finds "T. S. Eliot's dictum about the dissociation of sensibility since the metaphysical poets" (p. 247) misleading, and shows how Tennyson did fuse sensation and thought. Donne, too, may be said to "feel his thought" (Eliot; quoted, p. 247), but "what he feels . . . is the peculiar excitement and pleasure of mental activity itself. It isn't smelling roses. It's being aware of, and delighting in, the electrical and chemical impulses that connect and reconnect the neurones in our brain" (p. 248). I am not competent to follow her in her use of the neuroscientific theories of Changeux. I found her comment on "the *intellectual-bodily* imagination" (p. 251) at work in poems such as "Aire and Angels," "Loves growth," and "The Crosse" penetrating and judicious. I agree that "Donne's games with grammar (and complicated rhythms)" provide "the feeling of thought" (p. 256). Yet I am not convinced that neuroscience opens new ways for the enjoyment of poetry. Byatt suggests (as a "hypothesis") that Donne's lines "Licence my roving hands and let them go / Before, behind, between, above, below" in "Come, Madam, come," might be "an appeal to mirror neurones," neurones which are not, she says, "picture-making," but "the more powerful, because the more purely *brief* firings in the mind of a deep habit of imagining motion in the body" (p. 257). This is what a neuroscientist might discover. But is this the *experience of the reader*? The succession of adverbs makes him sense the motion of the hands slipping over the body and exploring all its parts, with the bold suggestiveness of "between"—between the breasts or thighs. The commas mark slight pauses that intensify the continuity of the erotic impression. Why should the reader or the critic bother about the firing of the neurones since, as John Searle observed, we still have no clear idea of the way in which anything in the brain might cause conscious states, for experiences only exist when consciousness is experienced as such.[23] This

[22] *Seven Metaphysical Poets*, pp. 191–193; *Poètes métaphysiques*, 1:223–227.

[23] See the conclusion of *The Mystery of Consciousness* (New York: Granta Books, 1997).

is, of course, a personal reaction to theory which does not affect Byatt's keen perception of the *literary* impact of Donne's poetry.

Returning to Chapter 15, "Donne's afterlife," one may congratulate Dayton Haskin for his skillful synthetic survey of the publications of Donne's writings, the successive critical pronouncements (with an inevitable emphasis on the poetry) and their power of fecundation, extending to modern poets, composers and writers of fiction, from Borges and Updike to Edward Dock's novel of 2003, *The Calligrapher*, which builds its plot on lavish quotations from the *Songs and Sonets.*[24] The "Select Bibliography" of L. E. Semler fills eighteen pages, and its many subdivisions according to theme will prove immensely helpful. One may only wonder why the same section includes "Gender, sexuality, and subjectivity": I hope women are not assumed to be more subjective than men. . . . This mention of "subjectivity" leads to my final remark on the volume as a whole. Donne's self-consciousness is no doubt recognized and even subtly analyzed on several occasions in various essays. Yet a chapter, or part of a chapter, might have been devoted to its originality and its significance in the early modern period. Shakespeareans nowadays often claim that Hamlet's famous "that within" and his soliloquies were the starting-point of modern subjectivity. A similar claim can be made for Donne on even better grounds, as I tried to show repeatedly when comparing him with Montaigne.[25]

Université Paris III–Sorbonne Nouvelle

[24]In the French version of the novel (Paris: Plon, 2004), the translations of Donne's poems were taken from my edition, *John Donne: Poésie.*

[25]"The Search for Identity: from Montaigne to Donne," *Confluences* 11 (1995); *Seven Metaphysical Poets*, *passim* (see Index) and chap. 16; cf. "Self-consistency in Montaigne and Shakespeare" in *Shakespeare and the Mediterranean: The Selected Proceedings of the International Shakespeare Association World Congress Valencia, 2001*, ed. Thomas Clayton, Susan Brock, and Vincente Forés (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), pp. 135-155.