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Critical Hybridity

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Judith H. Anderson and Jennifer C. Vaught, eds. *Shakespeare and Donne: Generic Hybrids and the Cultural Imaginary.* New York: Fordham University Press, 2013. 291 pp.

In *Shakespeare and Donne: Generic Hybrids and the Cultural Imaginary*, the editors present a fascinating array of comparative essays, each one soundly demonstrating the introduction's understated premise that "comparative exploration of the various writings of Shakespeare and Donne can be illuminating" (p. 1). The diverse methodologies on display in this collection and the essay authors' shared willingness to privilege questions about the effects of genre as they utilize these methodologies pull the eclectic approaches of the volume's nine essays together into its own genuinely illuminating example of the value of scholarly hybridity as well. *Shakespeare and Donne* provides multiple models for exacting intertextual comparison, at times demonstrating the benefits of privileging attention to language or performance, at others the worth of deep cultural contextualizing, and at still others the import of philosophies of thought and imagination.

The volume is remarkably communicative across essays and the four section divisions within it. These section titles—"Time, Love, Sex, and Death," "Moral, Public, and Spatial Imaginaries," "Names, Puns, and More," and "Realms of Privacy and Imagination"—are only limitedly valuable, largely because the 2–3 essays relegated to each section speak so well across these imposed thematic boundaries. For example, questions of language, particularly puns, are central to essays in every section, and considerations of performance likewise span nearly every category. Still, thematic comparisons become the

volume's guiding organizational principle, a structure that has both advantages and disadvantages. At times, the essays individually privilege their attention to one writer over the other, which seems to be a justifiable product of such a comparative frame, and never negatively detracts from the quality of the volume as a whole. The collection makes a number of demands upon its readers—primarily the parsing of its accomplished essay writers' frequently dense and challenging arguments—but those demands are amply rewarded.

Matthias Bauer and Angelika Zirker's "Sites of Death as Sites of Interaction in Donne and Shakespeare" examines "a characteristic connection" (p. 18) between the two writers, which is their enduring shared interest in the site of death as a complicated, liminal space that allows for interaction and possibility. Focusing on the grave or the monument as the site of the most "intense exchange between human actors" as well as the place of interaction "between the living and the dead" (p. 18), Bauer and Zirker demonstrate how the poetic epitaph and the dramatic epilogue are both literary locations that evoke death while fostering imaginative understandings of life in the grave as an "intermediate position between life on earth and eternal life" (p. 18). Their readings stem from clear associations between death and love and the tomb and the womb, but also from participatory language that invites readers and audiences to register and dwell in the paradoxes afforded by a life-giving death. They read "The Extasie," where Donne's lovers anticipate, in monumental fashion, a death that both liberates their souls and reunites them, alongside Romeo and Juliet's desires to find "a new life in death" that will fulfill their marriage (p. 24). Finding Puck's epilogue in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* "positioned on the very border between the two worlds" of the living and the dead (p. 33), they also turn to Donne's "Deaths Duell" for a similar rendering of life suspended within death and the poetic monumental mechanisms that mark it.

In "'Nothing like the Sun': Transcending Time and Change in Donne's Love Lyrics and Shakespeare's Plays," Catherine Gimelli Martin traces "Donne's and Shakespeare's vastly different masculine responses to the cultural figure of the fickle woman" (p. 6), seeing in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Othello*, and *The Winter's Tale* an interrogation of the problems of male jealousy rather than female betrayal. The "male desire for unchanging love" that is at the heart of

Donne's major love poetry is represented as "a deluded and potentially fatal quest" in Shakespeare's tragedies, most obviously in *Othello* (p. 38). The need for constancy in love idealized by Donne's later poems, including "The Good-Morrow" and "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning," is challenged by Shakespeare's dramatic portrayals of such sentimental attachments to constancy and fear of mutability as "an impossible dream" (p. 6) driven to fatal ends by Iago's misogynistic exploitation of Othello's similar hopes for absolute, timeless, and perfect union. Martin's feminist reading is a welcome approach within this collection, one that ably reveals the poets' contrastive attempts to resolve cultural fears of female betrayal through their equally incisive meditations on the constant that is emotional mutability. The value of the volume's comparative approach to Donne and Shakespeare is perhaps most visible here.

In "'None Do Slacken, None Can Die': *Die* Puns and Embodied Time in Donne and Shakespeare," Jennifer Pacenza turns her attention to Donne's *Songs and Sonnets* and Shakespeare's *Sonnets* to demonstrate how the erotic pun escapes both linear time and binary thinking and allows poetic speakers to linger in "embodied time," forever foreclosing death and sexual climax. Tracing the "masturbatory language" (p. 72) of Shakespeare's first fifteen sonnets to the Young Man, Pacenza finds there a desire for a perpetual, time-busting encounter of "asexual replication" (p. 73) that shares with Donne's poetry a longing to sidestep the mortality that is the bleak promise of linear time. Donne's lovers in "The Good-Morrow," according to Pacenza, live in a "perpetual, preorgasmic sexual embrace" initiated by the die pun of his poem, which "allows his lovers to escape the confines of time" (p. 61). This "imagery of suspended sexual animation," like the "perpetual sexual moments" (p. 61) of Shakespeare's sonnets, situates the lovers in "the excluded middle, the erotic, embodied experience of sex that linear time denies" (p. 63). Shakespeare and Donne, this essay asserts, share an interest in manipulating the polysemous erotic pun to challenge the meanings of time, sex, and death.

"Donne, Shakespeare, and the Interrogative Conscience" helpfully looks to the performative processes and the positionalities of audiences and listeners shared by both writers. Jeanne Shami and Mary Blackstone consider *Henry V* and two of Donne's sermons in their

examination of Shakespeare's and Donne's thoughtful engagements with their audiences as constitutive performers on the stage and in the pulpit. Writerly attention to the ways that the relative nearness and distance of the audience and the evocation of presentness can affect both the individual and the collective conscience produces the similarly effective appeals made to the disparate audiences of the Chorus in *Henry V* and the sermons Donne preached at Whitehall. Donne, the authors show, used performative methods, including "shifting perspectives associated with diverse voices or characters," as part of his preaching repertoire (p. 8). Shami and Blackstone conclude that Shakespeare and Donne "created performative venues that attracted and engaged similar audiences using some of the same rhetorical, dramaturgical, and performative mechanisms" (p. 108). This astute essay is perhaps more revelatory in its account of Donne's polyvocal sermons than in its account of Shakespeare's interrogative dramatic moments, but it does vividly illuminate how "the impulses behind attending sermons and plays were not that far apart" (p. 109). More importantly, it situates both writers' metaperformative engagements as processes that keenly solicited "a questioning conscience" in their similar audiences (p. 105).

Douglas Trevor's excellent essay, "Mapping the Celestial in Shakespeare's *Tempest* and the Writings of John Donne," provides a fresh reading of Shakespeare's famous work by proposing "that we take seriously the characterization of Caliban in the play as otherworldly" (p. 116). Finding Caliban and his dam "saturated with lunar associations," Trevor reads their otherness as not just or only within the context of New World colonization but as produced by the play's persistent evocation of their connections to the moon (p. 117). While Caliban's "otherness begs a lunar reading" (p. 118), consideration of these associations also reveals his "fantasies both of inclusion and liberation" (p. 114) whereby the heavens become the site of his "energetically imagined, celestially empowered escape from Prospero's earthly dominion" (p. 118). Thus challenging "the two-dimensional scholarship" (p. 119) on *The Tempest* that reads Shakespeare as either evoking the new world "by looking west" or "trading and cultural relations by looking east," Trevor reveals that, perhaps, Shakespeare also looked upwards (p. 120). Grounding his reading of the play in a careful but surprising historical account of how

early moderns imagined other inhabited planets, conceived of the possibility of space travel, and attempted to chart the celestial through cartography, Trevor identifies these perspectives as both more widespread and compatible with the Christian beliefs of European writers than previously thought. Trevor then turns to Donne's poems and prose—including "The Good-Morrow" and "Hymne to God my God, in my Sicknesse"—to demonstrate that the writer's investments in cartographic imagery mingle with Montaignian skepticism to "powerfully embolde[n] an appreciation of the universe's expansive, interpretive possibilities" (p. 114). Thus, Donne "reads maps not as purveyors of unquestionable authority" (p. 125) but as reminders of the world's propensity to change. The "stubbornly provisional" state of knowledge prompted by contemplation of the cartographic is not an "invitation to collapse into nihilistic speculation" but "an opportunity to reimagine the self as renewed and remade" through attention to cosmologies that include the celestial as well as the terrestrial (p. 128).

The late Marshall Grossman's unfinished "Inserting *Me*: Some Instances of Predication and the Privation of the Private Self in Shakespeare and Donne" is advanced by David Lee Miller's "Improper Nouns: A Response to Marshall Grossman" in Part III of the volume, "Names, Puns, and More." Grossman discusses the language play between Hamlet and Claudius, calling Hamlet's "strategic linguistic resistance"—as he tries to wrench the word "father" from "linguistic placeholder, designating not a person but a position in respect to other persons" into the particular man that is the late king Hamlet—an "act at once personal and political" (p. 134). Considering how the "struggle over the need to let words float between the rigid designations of proper nouns and the floating designations of common nouns plays out within the lyric voice" (p. 136), Grossman—drawing on Joel Fineman—turns to Donne, where he finds a parallel "struggle to retain and signify the self" in the "more specific anxiety" of the Holy Sonnets' "need to surrender the self to the Holy Spirit without also surrendering one's subjective voice" (p. 137). Miller builds upon Grossman's observations by asking "what difference it makes when we turn from the intensely carnal and secular context of Shakespeare's sonnets to the sacred context of Donne's," a difference he illuminates for readers through his

introduction of Luther's "'new theological grammar,' a system in which words lose their accepted senses in favor of meanings derived from their relation to faith" (p. 142). Miller reads Donne's poetic pronouns "as markers for the kind of struggle Luther describes," a struggle to "relinquish first-person agency" in favor of a passivity that allows the self to be "acted upon by a force that arrives from elsewhere" (p. 143).

Julian Lamb's "Aspects, Physiognomy, and the Pun: A Reading of Sonnet 135 and 'A Valediction: Of Weeping'" follows Grossman's and Miller's (as well as Pacenza's) analyses by homing in on the puns on proper names employed by both Shakespeare and Donne. Proper name puns amplify the power of the pun and extend beyond its conventional ability to evoke multiple meanings, becoming "the inert and unchanging homophone from which meanings emerge but which is not itself meaningful" (p. 151). Lamb draws primarily on Wittgenstein's account of the physiognomy of words, whereby words "seem to absorb their meanings such that they acquire a certain texture" (p. 153), a physiognomy that can be undone or challenged by the work of the pun. Using the tennis ball scene's repeated volleying of the word "mock" in *Henry V* as an illuminating example, Lamb notes that "repetition sometimes has the effect of draining a word of its physiognomy such that it becomes a mere object of hearing" (p. 154). The proper name pun on Will in Sonnet 135 "makes use of the pun not as a producer of meaning but as a mechanism that absorbs meanings into a single verbal object" that can never be understood (p. 159), while Donne's punning on More in "A Valediction: Of Weeping" produces an "ambiguity of use" that "leaves us entertaining the possibility of the pun and restlessly striving to make it more than a possibility" (p. 163).

In "Fantasies of Private Language in 'The Phoenix and Turtle' and 'The Ecstasy,'" Anita Gilman Sherman compares Shakespeare's poem, which "attests to the impossibility of accessing private language" with Donne's, which "experiments with the thing itself, paradoxically 'inventing' a private language only to turn in the end to the body" (p. 170). "The Phoenix and Turtle's" "deliberate poetic obscurity" (p. 173) relies upon genre to craft its commentary on the opacity of intimacy and the impossibility of access to perfect knowledge. This multivocal poem presents a "chorus of voices" looking in upon a set of

silent lovers who deny access to an internal experience of love and language (p. 173). Donne's "The Ecstasy," as it responds to Shakespeare's poem, does more to represent private language, staging "a fantasy of transparent intimacy" through its first-person plural speaker (p. 178). Presenting themselves as "a text to be read" (p. 180) that will stave off skepticism and reveal intimacy as mutually knowable, Donne's lovers ultimately evoke the corporeal rather than the linguistic to present themselves as "a celebration of embodied, human love" (p. 182). Both poets convey a sense of "private experience" and both make use of an "embedded audience" that "limits knowledge" through its vantage points (p. 183), but Sherman accounts for their very different approaches to fantasies of perfect knowledge and skepticism through their "discrepant stances toward language" (p. 184).

Judith H. Anderson's concluding essay, "Working Imagination in the Early Modern Period: Donne's Secular and Religious Lyrics and Shakespeare's Hamlet, Macbeth, and Leontes," positions "the Aristotelian tradition of faculty psychology" (p. 13) as the key early modern context for both writers' engagements with sense and imagination in their writings, turning first to Hamlet's "O, what a rogue and peasant slave" soliloquy and last to Donne's poems on dreams to establish their divergent approaches to a subject that was clearly compelling to them both: how the mind works. Usefully, she also defines comparison—as "a sharpening of definition within a cultural resemblance rather than sameness or influence" (p. 185)—in a way that helps readers more fully understand the volume as whole as well as her own lengthy contribution. Anderson finds that the soliloquies assigned to Shakespeare's tragic heroes Hamlet and Macbeth show us how each character "uses a psychic model and relates it to action in his real world" (p. 195). Hamlet's working mind, according to Anderson, is positive in his "imaginative self-construction" (p. 196); Macbeth's conjured dagger, on the other hand, demonstrates "imagination triumphant over rational distinction and moral consciousness" (p. 195). Leontes' imaginative creation in his "virtual soliloquy" (p. 204) is of a slightly different kind, revealing "a *confusion* of what is seen by the mind's eye and what by the body's" (p. 196), a confusion Anderson describes as "blurring intramental with extramental reality" (p. 196). Anderson's analysis of the workings of

imagination extends to the "interiorized landscapes" of Donne's lyric poetry, where his speakers surprisingly never fall into such confusions even as their erotic and romantic desires lean in such a direction (p. 212). Ultimately she concludes that Shakespeare brought to the stage fantasies that "Donne engaged in a more intimate medium," while "Donne might be said to have brought speaking fictions into contemporary life" (p. 219). Anderson's consideration of Aristotelian faculty psychology as a crucial cultural resemblance, her attention to details of language, and her flagging of genre's differing effects on Shakespeare's and Donne's writing about the mind make her essay a consummate example of the critical hybridity and rigorous intertextuality that runs throughout the assembled volume, and a fitting ending to it.

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