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## Under the Sign of Donne

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J U D I T H   S C H E R E R   H E R Z

## Under the Sign of Donne

IN THE FITZWILLIAM MUSEUM in Cambridge, there is a painting by Stanley Spencer, “John Donne Arriving in Heaven” (Fig. 1). It is almost his earliest, done in 1911 when Spencer was an eighteen-year-old student at the Slade School of Art. It was exhibited the following year at the Grafton Gallery’s Second Post Impressionist exhibition, although not particularly noticed in the hubbub and horror caused by the Cézannes or even by the paintings of the British group—Roger Fry, Duncan Grant, Vanessa Bell, and their soon to be nemesis, Wyndham Lewis. There is certainly something of a Cézannesque proto-geometry to the painting’s spaces, but in its subject and the generating idea for that subject it was quite unlike the others on those gallery walls. The figures are both their own tombstones and their resurrected bodies. They are at once stationary and in motion, here and there, in prayer and expectation—John Donne just happening by. The painting was prompted by Spencer’s receiving a copy of Donne’s *Sermons* from his fellow Slade students, Gwen and Jacques Raverat, and in particular by the phrase, to “Go to Heaven by Heaven,” which Spencer interpreted as going past Heaven, alongside it, heaven here being Widbrook Common, a place near Cookham, where Spencer spent most of his life, receiving and painting heavenly visitors.<sup>1</sup>

Suddenly coming upon that painting prompted a series of questions that resulted in this partial inventory of twentieth century Donne signs and sightings. Among them—where was Donne in the literary/artistic imagination at the start of the century during the years immediately before the 1912 Grierson edition and in the decades that followed? Who read him, painted him, thought about him? What have been the terms of the engagement? And behind those questions—why Donne? This investigation is more exploratory than polemical. The cast of characters is so varied, the Donnes invoked so multiple (love poet, dandy, satirist, religious poet, polemicist, priest), and the responses so various, that gathering the materials and making them speak to each other is in itself a useful enterprise. For it is remarkable that a writer so word specific as Donne, so much a figure (even as a composite of many figures) of a time, of

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Fig. 1. Stanley Spencer, "John Donne Arriving in Heaven." Private collection © 2001 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/DACS, London.

a space, of readily identifiable ways of being and seeing, can inhabit so many different times and spaces and not only enter, but grain-of-sand-like, disturb the imaginations of so many and so diverse readers. Of course, even in the seventeenth century, Donne was there and elsewhere, both in London and at and through the firmament, space travel in the not so very distant future.

Donne turns up surprisingly frequently, although certainly not as often as Shakespeare, who is far more thoroughly embedded in subsequent literature as a data bank of allusions,<sup>2</sup> as a set of texts to remake, which, of course, happens with every production on stage or film (and in other media, as well, in opera or musical, from Verdi's *Macbeth* or Thomas' *Hamlet*, to *Kiss me Kate*, or *Play On*, the recent jazz version of *Twelfth Night*) and, most important, as an inescapable cultural presence. As a synecdoche for the literary imagination, for creativity itself, and as the source for iconic representations of the human condition, his figures at once mythical and recognizable, Shakespeare seems to demand response. There has rarely been, for example, so profound an engagement by one writer of another as by Joyce of Shakespeare, not only in *Ulysses* but also in *Finnegans Wake*.<sup>3</sup> Joyce certainly admired Donne, too, especially the Donne who "is Shakespearian in his richness," as Arthur Power records Joyce remarking in an account of his conversations with Joyce,<sup>4</sup> but unlike the case of the

Shakespeare encounter there was little at stake there and few traces in the writing.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, it is usually Shakespeare's Hamlet or his Rosalind one talks about, less often "Shakespeare himself" (a phrase that is as much trope as historical identity); the biographical Shakespeare remains, for the most part, monumentally anonymous.<sup>6</sup> But it is Donne *in* his texts, this strange yet still somehow contemporary figure from the past, whom the later writer greets, trying on his language and looking inside his imagination. It is an audacious language, certainly, and it inscribes a vision no less so, but it is oddly transportable over the centuries, its time and place specificities notwithstanding. Donne's syntax of desire, which allows, too, for loss—of love, of God, of self—is somehow renewable in its own terms. The encounter happens less in the manner of a Bloomean agon or an overreaching than simply as a willingness to listen, to re-imagine, to make over as one's own. In many of the encounters recorded here, it is not Donne as the name for high art whom we meet, but Donne as a writer who has to be *read*. There is a psychology to map and a linguistic system to parse that remain ongoing provocations, resources, and recourses.

There is an apt and very recent example of just such imaginative listening by the Canadian poets Doug Beardsley and Al Purdy, in their *The Man Who Outlived Himself: An Appreciation of John Donne*. Indeed, one could believe that the book's publication had been staged by Donne, for its title briefly stood in for the obituary of one of its authors. Al Purdy died on Friday, April 21, 2000, but his death had not yet been announced when the newspaper review appeared on April 22. This not quite posthumous book (who has outlived whom?) consists of an ongoing conversation about Donne, "the strangest poet in the English language,"<sup>7</sup> and of twelve of his poems, followed by a rewriting of five of Donne's elegies in which Donne's language merges through translation, adaptation, and explanation with Purdy's and Beardsley's ("blood transfusions from Donne to us" 63), and this is followed by a poem from each to Ann More. "I vision her as a girl so tender / and heartbreaking in the way she was / you couldn't look at her without tears / and I can't write about her / without a peculiar kind of love," Purdy wrote, concluding

How far do the elements of lovers go  
 slingshot as far as the new millennium?  
 Her body trembling among the outer planets  
 when he touched her  
 remained on earth among her dying children.  
 But that isn't it either;  
     you say her name—Ann More  
 and both of them  
     Ann and her lover  
     John Donne

flash quicksilver in the mind mirror  
 —her madman, her iconoclast her ‘genius’  
 with microscope brain  
 and the girl who might have suspected all this  
 but knew it didn’t matter much  
 beside the tenderness and laughter  
 a kind of formula we humans have  
 for making whole our broken lives

(109)

Joining those who attempt to imagine Ann into being, Purdy writes to her both as and through Donne and he does get something of the Donne quicksilver and the interplanetary spaces. In the book’s conversations, however, the emphasis is mostly on Donne the soliloquist, who is something of an attitude taker, nearly all intellect, someone who has “difficulty taking his eyes off himself” (53), but who is also capable of being carried away in ecstasy, even if, as Purdy suspects, he may be only performing ecstasy. Purdy and Beardsley are attentive to that ecstasy, but entirely in the realm of the secular. They do not hear or see what Stanley Spencer did.

What Spencer saw, of course, was heaven and he saw it with Donne’s eyes. He certainly had read more of the second prebend sermon on Psalm 63 (preached at St. Paul’s Jan. 29, 1626) than the one line he alluded to in the painting’s title. The sermon’s soaring operatic conclusion has heaven in nearly every line (in one patch 20 times in 14 lines); indeed the whole passage is behind the painting: “for all the way to heaven is heaven. And as those angels, which come from Heaven hither bring heaven with them and are in heaven here. So that soule that goes to heaven, meets heaven here.”<sup>8</sup> Spencer also read the poems as well as the sermons and many of his paintings suggest an ongoing meditation on Donne and, more to the point, a Donnean meditation on eros, God, and the wondrous materiality of our life on earth. This is his only painting with Donne as subject, but an implicit Donne, the apostle of eroticized divine love and of sex made holy is a presence in nearly all he painted and in many of his writings (sermons he called some of them) on art, life, religion, and love.<sup>9</sup>

In a series of paintings called “Beatitudes of Love,” Spencer described “the twinned and unified souls of two persons [the two figures in each painting]. The composition turns the two into one person and becomes a single organism. . . . They are more genuine than any religious paintings I have ever done. . . . The religious quality I had been looking for and had never found in my work hitherto, now in my sex pictures showed itself for the first time. . . . In all my sex experience I notice the same degree of emotion as in religious experience.”<sup>10</sup> He described “Beatitude: Contemplation” (Fig. 2), as “a husband [a Spencer self-portrait] and wife . . . engaged in contemplation of each



Fig. 2. Spencer, "Beatitude: Contemplation." Stanley Spencer Gallery, Cookham-on-Thames © 2001 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/DACS, London.

other, as if expressed by their rapt gaze, as though they would never stop looking" (quoted in Collis, 141). Of another painting, he remarks, "I had just drawn a composition of Christ choosing the disciples. To make it convincing I had to pilfer from one of my sex pictures an incident where a man is choosing a girl. His gesture was just right. I could take some of my sex pictures and

transpose them into religious ones, and no one would know they had ever been otherwise” (Collis, 143). And it was not just sex, it was all the activities of daily life that carried the divine, from the cowls (ventilating shaft covers on a brewery) in “Mending Cowls, Cookham” to the armchair Christ sits on in a late painting, “Christ in Cookham.” They are presented as items in a transfigured but still workaday world where “the events must seem as real as going shopping.” “I am always wanting,” Spencer continued “to establish a union between myself and what is divine and holy.”<sup>11</sup>

The most widely known Spencer painting, “The Resurrection, Cookham” (Fig. 3), depicts a heaven quite like the one Donne arrived at a dozen years earlier, but more populated, closer to the center of town. “As it is heaven,” Spencer wrote, “there is no hurrying to be off. . . . they are at home before they have got right out of their graves [“as soone as it is out of my body [it] is in heaven” in the words of that sermon]. . . . In the bottom right-hand corner is another ‘me,’ . . . the collapsing tombs interlock like the pages of a book. I love the pages of a book, an open book, and so I am where I love to be.”<sup>12</sup> And that body as book, body in book figure connects via Donne to another Spencer painting, “Love Letters” (Fig. 4):

Study our manuscripts, those Myriades  
Of letters, which have past twixt thee and mee,  
thence write our Annals, and in them will bee  
To all whom loves subliming fire invades,  
Rule and example found.  
(“A Valediction to His Book”)<sup>13</sup>

Spencer and his beloved, though divorced, wife Hilda wrote to each other from the twenties until her death in 1950 (he had divorced her in 1937), nor did her death stop his highly erotic letters. In this painting done shortly after her death, the two are in their letters, are of their letters. “Then as all my soules bee / Emparadis’d in you, (in whom alone / I understand, and grow and see”; “A Valediction of my name, in the window” 71), Spencer, had he been Donne, might have written. What he had written to her twenty years earlier was, “I thought about a week agow [sic] that is about 460 quarters of an hour ago, that I would like to stick all mine and your letters . . . neatly all over the asbestos wall of the studio . . . what a marvelous feeling of communion of all our thoughts.”<sup>14</sup> Walls, windows, letters, bodies, books, John Donne *redivivus*, one might say, had that epithet not been applied to his acquaintance, Rupert Brooke.

It was James Elroy Flecker who called Brooke “our Donne *redivivus*” in a review of Brooke’s 1911 *Poems*.<sup>15</sup> He was thinking of poems like “Dust” or “The Fish,” or “Mummia.”



Fig. 3. Spencer, "The Resurrection, Cookham." Tate Gallery, London © 2001 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/DACS, London.





Fig. 4. Spencer, "Love Letters." Private Collection © 2001 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/DACS, London.

#### Mummia

As those of old drunk mummia  
 To fire their limbs of lead,  
 Making dead kings from Africa  
 Stand pandar to their bed;

Drunk on the dead, and medicined  
 With spiced imperial dust,  
 In a short night they reeled to find  
 Ten centuries of lust

So I, from paint, stone, tale, and rhyme,  
 Stuffed love's infinity,  
 And sucked all lovers of all time  
 To rarefy ecstasy.<sup>16</sup>

The "mummy" of "Loves Alchymie" hardly rarefied ecstasy, but Brooke's Donne is clad in rather pre-Raphaelite robes. "Dust" captures more of the Donnean desire and, in two of its lines, more of an echo of the voice, as it imagines the lovers dead, crumbled in their separate night, but with the possibility of reunion remaining:

And every mote, on earth or air,  
 Will speed and gleam, down later days,  
 And like a secret pilgrim fare  
 By eager and invisible ways,  
  
 Nor ever rest, nor ever lie,  
 Till, beyond thinking, out of view,  
 One mote of all the dust that's I  
 Shall meet one atom that was you.<sup>17</sup>

Brooke's Donnean manner may be too easily come by, but the echoes are often pleasing, "And Innocence accounted wise, / and Faith the fool, the pitiable. / Love so rare, one would swear / All of earth for ever well— / Careless lips and flying hair / And little things I may not tell" ("Sometimes Even Now . . .," 155). Although there is more gesture than substance here as Brooke echoes the teacher and works the metaphor machine like an apt but not particularly inspired pupil, he does mark a significant moment in the history of Donne reception before the Grierson edition (his Donne was probably the Chambers edition, and encountered in what Dayton Haskin has documented as the newfound enthusiasm for Donne in the last years of the nineteenth century).<sup>18</sup> Brooke's letters show him reading Donne in 1907 and there are numerous other references, one a description of him setting off for Germany in 1912 with Baedeker and Donne in his pocket. He wrote three interesting reviews of the Grierson edition, the first, in *The Nation* for February 15, 1913, using the Spencer painting as its occasion: "One of the most remarkable of the English pictures in the recent Post-Impressionist exhibition depicts John Donne arriving in Heaven. 'I don't know who John Donne is,' a sturdy member of the public was lately heard to remark in front of it, 'but he seems to be getting there.'" <sup>19</sup> And, Brooke continues, with this new edition Donne is indeed "getting there." The Donne of this review "startles the soul from her lair with unthinkable paradoxes"; he is a love poet unafraid to "acknowledge that he was composed of body, soul, and mind." In the next review, Brooke set the terms for the Herbert Read / T. S. Eliot Donne: "Donne feels only the idea. He does not try to visualize it. He never visualizes, or suggests that he has any pleasure in looking at things. His poems might have been written by a blind man in a world of blind men" (141). Wrong, wrong, wrong, one is inclined to remark, but remarkably tenacious.

A late poem, "Safety," reads like a reprise of the separate planet Donne, the Donne of "The Sun Rising" and "The Good Morrow," but now in time of war: "Who is so safe as we? / We have found safety with all things undying, / . . . We have built a house that is not for Time's throwing. / We have gained a peace unshaken by pain for ever / War knows no power" (147). Some of these

late poems confronting death and war are among his weakest, most notably the multiply anthologized, "The Soldier."<sup>20</sup> As Samuel Hymes observes, however, these poems do have a "value which one would not want to lose, for they tell us with terrible accuracy of the delusions of nobility which Brooke's generation carried into war."<sup>21</sup> But many who carried Donne to war read those death-inflected poems more profoundly than did Brooke. Owen is a good example<sup>22</sup> and most strikingly, Edgell Rickword, who revealed a response very different from Brooke's variations on a Keatsian easeful death:

I knew a man, he was my chum,  
 but he grew blacker every day,  
 and would not brush the flies away,  
 nor blanch however fierce the hum  
 of passing shells; I used to read,  
 to rouse him, random things from Donne—  
 like "Get with child a mandrake root."  
 But you can tell he was far gone,  
 for he lay gaping, mackerel-eyed,  
 and stiff and senseless as a post  
 even when that old poet cried  
 "I long to talk with some old lover's ghost."

I tried the Elegies one day,  
 but he, because he heard me say:  
 "What needst thou have more covering than a man?"  
 grinned nastily, so then I knew  
 the worms had got his brains at last.  
 There was one thing that I might do  
 to starve those worms; I racked my head  
 for wholesome lines and quoted *Maud*.  
 His grin got worse and I could see  
 he sneered at passion's purity.  
 He stank so badly, though we were great chums  
 I had to leave him; then rats ate his thumbs.<sup>23</sup>

Here Donne's lines are offered in defiance of death and yet are the very materials, in a species of verbal anamorphia, out of which Death is created. Rickword brought his Donne, the two-volume *Muse's Library* edition that he had been reading at Oxford,<sup>24</sup> with him to the Front in late December, 1917, barely two months past his nineteenth birthday. Its echoes are not only audible in "Trench Poets" but in several other poems published in his first volume, *Behind the Eyes* (1921), notably "Advice to a Girl from the War," a grim recollection of "Go and Catch a Falling Star":

### The Sign of Donne

39

Weep for me half a day,  
then dry your eyes,  
Think! Is a mess of clay  
worth a girl's sighs?

Sigh three days if you can  
for my waste of blood.  
Think then, you love a man  
whose face is mud

(15)

Some years after his return to England, Rickwood was still thinking about Donne. "Divagation on a Line of Donne's: 'My verse the strict map of my misery'," which appeared in his second collection with the Donnean title, *Invocations to Angels* (1928), is both a commentary on the nature of Donne's poetry and a revisiting of that battlefield scene of death:

That tangled growth of intellect and passion,  
where thought spread sensuous, mental love's last acts,  
where doubt's exuberance even doubt defied,  
thrust skywards in the noon-day of ambition.

Till in a flash which humbled that rich Earth  
Donne saw Time's handiwork on the bodies of men,  
and Death, squat in each wrinkle as a trench,  
sniping the careless heads of Love and Mirth.

He wooed God "like an angel from a cloud",  
preaching: but sometimes the more faithful pen  
revived a metaphor that had trapped a wench  
and shames the dandy in the wimpled shroud.

(89)

"The most modern of all poets,"<sup>25</sup> Rickwood called Donne, and it is precisely this sense of Donne's contemporaneity that links the diverse voices assembled here.

Lytton Stachey also enters the picture. He reviewed the Grierson edition, indeed before Brooke did (he may well have been responsible for getting Brooke to read Donne), his own interest in Donne going back well before 1905. It was in that year that he wrote a set of poems anatomizing his despair over losing the battle to Maynard Keynes for the affections of their fellow apostle, Hobhouse. Their titles: "The Exhumation," "The Conversation," "The Speculation," "The Resolution." Strachey was a biographer and essayist, not a poet, but these poems do catch the Donne sound and image with a sort of spectral fidelity, for example, "The Exhumation," especially its concluding lines:

*Judith Scherer Herz*

Oh, what rash fancy did your spirit move  
 To resurrect my long-expired love?  
 What was there in that corpse that you should break  
 So much thick stone asunder for its sake?

.....  
 But when you stooped your lips down, and at last  
 Touched—oh, touched what?—did you not shrink aghast  
 To see in one swift second disappear  
 That vision, like the body of Guinivere,  
 And all the rich alembic of my lust  
 Turn in a moment to a little dust?<sup>26</sup>

Donne remained an interest, an intellectual resource all his life. There's an amusing anecdote of Carrington preparing herself for a trip with Strachey in 1916, boning up on her Donne. In the event, it rained a great deal and so they stayed inside, Strachey reading, Carrington painting. She did a wonderful painting of half of this scene: Strachey is lying down, his Donne volume closed but held carefully as if he were weighing it in his exquisitely shaped hands.

At about the same time across the Atlantic, Hart Crane, a poet who not only learned how to read Donne but to write him from inside his language and yet never to sound imitative or derivative, was, in his words, "runn[ing] joyfully toward John Donne!!!"<sup>27</sup> Crane found Donne "a wonder, speaking from my own experience" (25). "I am fond of things of great fragility," he wrote, "and also, and especially of the kind of poetry John Donne represents, a dark, murky, brooding, speculative vintage, at once sensual and spiritual, rather the beauty of experience than innocence" (67–68). The transformation, transmutation really, is fascinating. Crane refers to specific lines—The "Second Anniversary" 's "Thou shalt not peepe through lattices of eies, / Nor heare through Laberinth of eares"—and all of "The Expiration" as illustrating what he wanted to do as a poet: "What I want to get is just what is so beautifully done in this poem ["The Expiration"], an 'interior form', a form that is so thorough and intense as to dye the words themselves with a peculiarity of meaning, slightly different maybe from the ordinary definition of them separate from the poem. If you remember my 'Black Tambourine' [he is writing to Sherwood Anderson in 1922, the year after the publication of this early poem], you will perhaps agree with me that I have at least accomplished this idea once" (77).

The interests of a black man in a cellar  
 Mark tardy judgment on the world's closed door.  
 Gnats toss in the shadow of a bottle,  
 And a roach spans a crevice on the floor.

Aesop, driven to pondering, found  
 Heaven with the tortoise and the hare;  
 Fox brush and sow ear top his grave  
 And mingling incantations on the air.

The black man, forlorn in the cellar,  
 Wanders in some mid-kingdom, dark, that lies  
 Between his tambourine, stuck on the wall,  
 And, in Africa, a carcass quick with flies.<sup>28</sup>

In Donne's "Expiration"—*kiss, go, ghost, death, kill, word*—carry their "ordinary meaning" but at the same time are "dye[d] . . . with a peculiarity of meaning," that is, de-and-reformed in metaphor. Crane's poem, like Donne's, 12 lines long, is not about kisses and lovers, but about black poets and musicians in the cellars of the white world cut off from the myth makers who mingle incantations on the air. But it too stays entirely inside its metaphor (as in that Frost line that defines poetry, "like a piece of ice on a hot stove, the poem must ride on its own melting"), no talking animals, just gnats, roaches, and flies. " 'Make my dark poem light, and light' . . . is the text I chose from Donne sometime ago, as my direction" (176), Crane wrote to Allen Tate, referring to the line, minus the "heavy," that comes from the same stanza in Donne's *Metempsychosis* in which he launches at Paradise. "I have always been working hard for a more perfect lucidity, and it never pleases me to be taken as willfully obscure and esoteric." But he was so taken; metaphysical, he was often called, and whatever that word means, it does seem to link these two apparently so different poets.

The connection that Crane felt between himself and Donne has more to do with deep structure than surface detail. That was certainly the way the poet and critic-teacher, Josephine Miles, approached the issue of the Donne legacy in her 1971 essay "Twentieth Century Donne": "What 17th century metaphysical, what Donnian traits could be useful to the present?"<sup>29</sup> What she found was a tradition she called "the poetry of concept countered by concept" (210) within a structure that is both "exceptive and limiting . . . not merely *and* but *but* and *yet*, with implicative *ifs* and concessive *thoughts*" (218). Her terms are different from Crane's (he figures only briefly in her examples, for his handling of time) but, like him, she locates her investigation within the articulation of the poem's elements, its language and thought (Yeats thus becomes the truest heir with other examples drawn from Auden, Eliot, Cummings, Stevens, Warren, but not from too many at the time of her writing). What she was looking for was less what a twentieth-century poet might want to take from Donne, or how such a poet might read, respond, or echo him, than what Donne and his contemporaries had "deposited" in the language that had survival power (language here conceived almost as a geological stratum—a Burgess shale of teeming syntactic forms), so that coming across W. S. Merwin's "Fear," for example,

she sees “the survival [there] of the skeleton of exceptive and adversative concept . . . as a wonder worth remark, a suggestion of the surviving power of Donne’s thought in the 20th Century” (224).

Thus, despite the interest shown in Donne by Brooke, de la Mare, Elinor Wylie, Dylan Thomas, the Fugitives, among others (connections that George Williamson had identified in his 1931 essay “Donne and Today,” where his argument had chiefly centered on the Donne/Eliot link<sup>30</sup>), Miles concludes that “few . . . have tried for or achieved that combination of values which makes for a whole likeness rather than a scattering of likenesses.” Both Miles and more recently Arthur Clements in his *Poetry of Contemplation* construct a Donne (for one he’s a conceptual, for the other a contemplative poet) then look for modern likenesses.<sup>31</sup> I am more interested in the encounter of poet to poet and in the turns of the ensuing dialogue. However, at the same time, I want to identify the multiple uses to which he has been put, the way he turns up as name, allusion, cultural reference, or simply turn of simile, in undertakings that may or may not resemble his. Or even in the way a Donne figure is suddenly reborn whole in “Natural History,” a poem E. B. White sent to his wife, Katherine Angell, in 1929: “Thus I, gone forth, as spiders do, / In spider’s web a truth discerning, / Attach one silken strand to you / For my returning.”<sup>32</sup> Donne as source for *Charlotte’s Web*?

The Donne with whom Miles opened her essay was the Eliotic Donne, the Donne she had grown up with, “direct sensuous apprehension of thought,” the immediacy of the odor of the rose, terms that she realized were inadequate as she reread and rethought the poems. It has become a familiar refrain, that mischievous paragraph in the 1921 “Essay on Metaphysical Poetry” (one paragraph and all that fuss!).<sup>33</sup> And the few echoes in the poetry are also familiar (they are not so much allusions as nods in the direction of; Eliot talked about Donne far more than he used him). The canonization narrative and the counter narratives, how Eliot needed his version of Donne for his version of Eliot, are familiar, too. But one of the real silences of that narrative is the absent book on Donne. There were the 1926 Clark Lectures, “On the Metaphysical Poetry of the 17th Century,” and the 1931 “Donne in Our Time” essay, which offered, it should be emphasized, a considerably nuanced version of the 1921 argument.<sup>34</sup> Thought and sensibility are still fissured but the emphasis now is on language; there is less about the mind of England and more about the natural, conversational style that made it possible for subsequent poets to think in lyric verse. There was, as well, an abbreviated version of the Clark in the 1933 Johns Hopkins Turnbull lectures. There were plans to publish these as *The School of Donne* but that never happened. Visions and revisions notwithstanding (and there were several), and Eliot’s insistence that the lectures not be

quoted without permission, there was no book (the lectures were only published a few years ago).<sup>35</sup> Eliot finally gave the rights to the title to A. Alvarez, whose book *The School of Donne* appeared in 1961.

Eliot's view of Donne, of course, was not his alone. Rupert Brooke had anticipated it and Herbert Read echoed and somewhat modified it two years later in his 1923 essay, "The Nature of Metaphysical Poetry," published in the *Criterion*. But in many ways more interesting than his intervention in Donne criticism, is the volume of poetry Read published the same year, *Mutations of the Phoenix*. The epigraph of the title poem is to Shakespeare's rather than to Donne's phoenix. But the mythical bird mutates and in one section "burns spiritually / among the fierce stars / and in the docile brain's recesses," giving to the phoenix riddle something of a Donnean sense of last things: "But vision is fire, / Light burns the world in the focus of any eye. / The eye is all: is hierarch of the finite world. / Eye gone light gone, and the unknown is very near."<sup>36</sup> Two other poems in that volume are explicit in their Donne references, indeed one is about Donne, spoken by him, "John Donne Declines a Benefice." The other, "The Analysis of Love," has as its epigraph, "The Ecstasy" 's "great prince in prison." Its analysis of love and lust is Read's not Donne's, but at moments is strikingly Donnean in form as Read works through Donne's language to argue against it:

In vain I have searched the visible earth  
 For any symbol of our love:  
 Doves, elephants and Abelards  
 Have seemed too empty of our mood.

They are too finite in their wooing  
 Linked by ambitious bonds:  
 I court you in the commonplace  
 And a wonder is in our path.

Rather we are like a plant's cells  
 Invisibly one:

. . . . .  
 And then you are universal;  
 I too: our minds,  
 Not cramp'd by figured thought  
 Unite in the impersonal beauty we possess.

By the close, however, Wordsworth has replaced Donne:

Link me with circumstance if you must,  
 But live to triumph all the same;



We'll be insensate when the whirl  
Of circumstance is past

And the ending is almost a refutation of Donne:

This mental ecstasy all spent  
In disuniting death;  
And the years that spread  
Oblivion on our zest.

(166–70)

“John Donne Declines a Benefice,” is quite different. It uses Donne’s letter to Morton taken from Walton’s *Life* as an epigraph and is a meditative monologue in which “Donne” ponders his refusal. To a certain degree it is pastiche (Donne speaks “Donne”): he talks of God who is “to man . . . a magnetic North, a call / For conscience to settle toward”; flesh is “throughshine,” at another point, “hydroptic,” the space of timeless radiance is “an intangible fire / That does not stain those white souls black,” “the body [is] left, a wickless mass / Of inchoation,” a word that occurs in the sermons, but not in the poems. The monologue is imagined as happening moments after the letter is written, but will it be sent? Has he convinced himself of the refusal? The offer is appealing, “If but the propulsion for such scheme / Were generate in this complex frame!” And then, too, he muses, what if Morton departs “And I am outcast in a wrangling world / Where an evolved soul’s of no avail, / Save for the delight of wits.” Finally, fearing to “fade into age, / Full of dissembling sanctity,” he is determined, “I’ll not! I’ll not! / Quick! To Morton! The will is set!” (159–64).

Much more than Read, however, William Empson is the poet-critic who is pretty nearly Donne’s best reader and a good poet, too, in some considerable measure because of Donne. Empson was an undergraduate at Magdalene when Eliot gave the Clark lectures, and he worked a recollection of Eliot’s coffee circle talk to the undergraduates into *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, but claimed in later years that he had never actually attended the lectures on the grounds that as an undergraduate he attended no lectures.<sup>37</sup> No other critic so directly challenges my conviction that Donne will say anything that the poem requires, truth value of little concern. Empson’s Donne means what he says, you had better believe him. This is not the place to examine Empson’s critical writing about Donne and, too, the Donne presence in his poetry has been well explored by Christopher Ricks.<sup>38</sup> There are, however, a few points worth emphasizing.

For Empson and Donne “the metaphors are not reduced to a blank obedience but are allowed to ask for themselves a richer presence,” in Ricks’s fine phrase (186). Both poets think *in* science, if not as scientists. Ricks point to

“To an Old Lady” as a poem which “makes the most serious use of the space-  
manship which Empson learnt from Donne” (179)

Years her precession do not throw from gear.  
She reads a compass certain of her pole;  
Confident, finds no confines on her sphere,  
Whose failing crops are in her sole control.

Stars how much further from me fill my night.  
Strange that she too should be inaccessible,  
Who shares my sun. He curtains her from sight,  
And but in darkness is she visible.<sup>39</sup>

In his 1935 note to the poem, Empson fretted about not getting all he wanted in: “the unconfined surface of her sphere is like the universe in being finite but unbounded, but I failed to get that into the line” (*Collected Poems*, 98). However, in the prefatory note to the 1955 *Collected Poems* he observed: “By the way, I have been much disturbed by recent theories that the universe is not, after all, finite though unbounded, as the earlier poems here often require it to be; but I retain my confidence that the sane old views we were brought up upon will come back into favour.” This is not so different from Donne’s lament over lost coherence in “An Anatomy of the World,” which one finds echoed in another poem, where Donne’s inch that was a span becomes Empson’s title, “Earth has Shrunk in the Wash” (28). There is, no doubt, a greater degree of irony in Empson’s remark about “the sane old views” than in Donne’s, but for both what the writing requires is primary, and even if old views are disturbed the intellectual excitement of the new is always present.

Like Donne, Empson listens to the “eternal silence of the infinite spaces” and asks “where is the darkness that gives light its place?” (“Letter I,” 19). Sometimes he even sounds like Donne or as Donne might have sounded some three hundred years later, as in “This Last Pain”:

This last pain for the damned the Fathers found:  
‘They knew the bliss with which they were not crowned.’  
Such, but on earth, let me foretell,  
Is all, of heaven or of hell.

Man, as the prying housemaid of the soul,  
May know her happiness by eye to hole:  
He’s safe; the key is lost; he knows  
Door will not open, nor hole close.

‘What is conceivable can happen too,’  
Said Wittgenstein, who had not dreamt of you;

And the close

Feign then what's by a decent tact believed  
 And act that state is only so conceived,  
 And build an edifice of form  
 For house where phantoms may keep warm.

Imagine, then, by miracle, with me,  
 (Ambiguous gifts, as what gods give must be)  
 What could not possibly be there,  
 And learn a style from despair.

(32–33)

The “edifice of form” to warm the phantoms, the miraculous in possibility’s despite, the style learned from despair—these get at something essential in Donne’s writing as well as in Empson’s.

It is not only for poets writing in English that this encounter has been crucial. Joseph Brodsky claimed he learned English in order to be able to translate Donne and when he left the Soviet Union for England in 1972 he had a copy of Donne in his pocket. At his 1964 trial (it was at hard labor after that, when he wrote the 200+ line “Elegy to John Donne”), he was asked his profession, “I am a poet,” he answered. Not a good answer: “Tell us why you refused to work,” the judge demanded. “I did work. I wrote poems,” said Brodsky.<sup>40</sup> “Elegy to John Donne” is in some measure a justification of that claim. “John Donne fell asleep, and all around him slept. / The pictures slept, the wall, the floor, the bedding.” In the elegy, the world sleeps, God sleeps, Donne sleeps, his poems sleep:

. . . , all lay sleeping.  
 All was asleep. The window, with its snow,  
 the white slope of the rooftop like a blanket,  
 its ridge and the whole quarter lie asleep  
 slit open by a window mortally.  
 . . . . .  
 A boat sleeps in the port. The snow and water  
 under its hull sleep wheezily and cough  
 merging far-off with heavens, long asleep.  
 John Donne lay sound asleep. The sea slept with him,  
 the chalky shore asleep above the sea.

The snow keeps falling . . . on the speaker in his Archangel exile (Archangel! . . . there are no coincidences), on the imagined London of the past poet’s life and death. It’s a difficult poem, a dialogue of poet to poet—



Halevi's "Ode to Zion" was one of the most widely available Hebrew poems for several centuries after his death.

Throughout Amichai's poetry one hears echoes, not of lines or words, but, as with Empson, of ways of seeing, being, saying: for example, further on in "Jerusalem, 1967": "And already the demons of the past are meeting / with the demons of the future and negotiating about me," or most strikingly (as Edward Hirsch has pointed out)<sup>43</sup> in "A Pity we were such a good invention":

They amputated  
Your thighs off my hips.  
as far as I'm concerned  
they are all surgeons. All of them.

They dismantled us  
Each from the other.  
As far as I'm concerned  
they are all engineers. All of them.

A pity. We were such a good  
And loving invention.  
An aeroplane made from a man and a wife.  
Wings and everything.  
We hovered a little above the earth.

We even flew a little.

Another title could be "A Valediction Demanding Mourning." And one might describe "Travels of the Last Benjamin of Tudela," as, in some measure, Amichai's *Metempsychosis*, the poet now the fourth of these Benjamins and living on Tudela Street in Jerusalem: "My body will be dismantled and my soul / will glide out to sea, and its shape is the shape of my body in which it lay / and its shape is the shape of the sea, and the shape of the sea is like the shape of my body" (*Selected Poetry*, 79).

Like the vagrant soul, Donne turns up in all sorts of places, in Borges's encounter with *Biathanatos*, which turned him into an avid Donne reader, in Philip Larkin's "Poem about Oxford: For Monica." "It holds us, like that *Fleae* we read about / In the depths of the Second World War," in Bob Dylan's "Sister," "we die and were reborn and then mysteriously saved" ("Wee dye and rise the same, and prove / Mysterious by this love" as "The Canonization" would have it). Not surprisingly, it is mostly the poets who have read Donne with greatest intensity, but there are novelists, too, in this narrative—Virginia Woolf, for example. She, as did all Bloomsbury, read her Donne. In a 1931 diary entry, she lists things that make her happy: music, walks, writing, "and interestingly at Donne of a morning."<sup>44</sup> The following year, indeed the very day

that the invitation to deliver the Clark Lectures arrived, an offer she refused, she recorded receiving as a gift a book with Donne's autograph and notes (it was the first 1605 edition of Alberico Gentilis, *Regales Disputationes Tres*). She made detailed reading notes on his poems and her characters read and know Donne from her earliest novel onward. He appears in several of the essays and has one of his own, "Donne after Three Centuries" in the second Common Reader in 1932, where she attempted to find out how "his voice . . . strikes upon the ear after this long flight across the stormy seas that separate us from the age of Elizabeth."<sup>45</sup> She found a writer of contradictions, one who could not see the whole, who particularized, who diminished, who stared intently at detail, who at times is like us, but at others inconceivably remote, who, to the end, "retained the incorrigible curiosity of his youth," one whose "obstinate interest in the nature of his own sensations still troubled his age and broke his repose," who even in death, "must still cut a figure and still stand erect." It is his nonconformity that she valued most, his "queer individuality," her sense of him (as of her self?) as ec-centric, as at once inside and out.<sup>46</sup>

As interested as Woolf was in Donne, he does not seem as deeply implicated in her writing as he is in Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*, where he enters the "Watchman, What of the Night?" section of that novel. There the transvestite Dr. Matthew-Mighty-Grain-of-Salt-Dante-O'Connor, talks Browne and Burton, cites Montaigne and uses as a major text in his discourse on the night the lines from a Donne sermon: "We are all conceived in close prison, in our mothers' womb we are close prisoners all. When we are born, we are but born to the liberty of the house—all our life is but a going out of the place of execution and death. Now was there ever any man seen to sleep in the cart, between Newgate and Tyburn? Between the prison and the place of execution, does any man sleep? Yet he says, men sleep all the way. How much more, therefore, is there upon him in a close sleep when he is mounted on darkness."<sup>47</sup> And in the transmigrations of his imagination, O'Connor sometimes sounds like the repository of the deathless soul's wanderings in *Metempsychosis*: "What an autopsy I'll make . . . a kidney and a shoe cast of the Roman races; a liver and a long spent whisper, a gall and a wrack of scolds from Milano, and my heart that will be weeping still when they find my eyes cold, not to mention a thought of Cellini in my crib of bones" (101).

The uses to which Donne is put are sometimes profound, sometimes superficial. Vikram Seth, for example, takes his title, *An Equal Music*, and his epigraph from the sermons: "And into that gate they shall enter, and in that house they shall dwell, where there shall be no cloud, nor sun, no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light, no noise nor silence, but one equal music, no fears nor hopes, but one equal possession, no foes nor friends, but one equal communion and identity, no ends nor beginnings, but one equal eternity."<sup>48</sup> It is unlikely, however, that Donne imagined such music to have been audible on

earth, even if he could have heard *The Art of the Fugue*. Epigraph and title are made to certify the novel's high intent, but other than upping the ante for music's powers, they don't (or Donne doesn't) really matter for the novel.

On the other hand, Updike's use of Donne in *Bech at Bay* is both subtle and conceptually crucial. Quotation and allusion matter less than the name, than Donne as book. In "Bech Noir" Donne presides over Bech's first murder, as Bech brings about the seemingly "accidental" death of one of his many imagined literary nemeses at the Rockefeller Center subway station. A few minutes later "a dainty edition of Donne's Poems [is] pressed close to [Bech's] face as the news of the unthinkable truth spread."<sup>49</sup> A bit later, this time at Times Square, the book falls open to "Death Be Not Proud." Later, as the murders multiply and Bech waits for the return of Robin, his young sidekick with whom he has "known sin" (the plotting and planning of these accidents and induced suicides and occasional outright murders), he reads Froissart about the body count at Crécy and then, as a cleansing gesture, takes a dip into the little volume of Donne. In a recent meditation on the nature of faith, Updike evokes a Donnean sense of last things, his vivid realization that "we were all poised above the chasm—suddenly quite vivid to me—of our eventual deaths," the sense that "one had been suddenly flayed of the skin of habit and herd feeling that customarily enwraps and deadens our deep predicament. I later assigned this experience to a fictional character, a Jewish character, though it may be a Christian-specific form of harrowing."<sup>50</sup> And to that character, Bech, he gave Donne's poems as a marker of the soul's intricacies and deceptions.<sup>51</sup>

Two plays also offer a similar contrast and may help focus the still lingering and not really answered question "why Donne?"—Wallace Shawn's *The Designated Mourner* and Margaret Edson's *Wit*. In an elegant discussion of Shawn's play, Dayton Haskin explores whether it matters that it is Donne whose obliteration from human memory the mourner sets out to mourn? Is it Donne, in particular, or Donne as a name for poetry in general? He finds that it is, indeed, Donne that matters, but not necessarily the familiar Donne, rather the Donne of excess, of bad taste and impertinence, the Donne who played Elizabeth Drury's designated mourner, a role, Haskin argues, Shawn takes for himself in the play; and also the Donne whose sermons were autobiographical acts, scripts with which his readers could recreate the lost original performances.<sup>52</sup> The point I would underline here is that Donne matters in this play, that the questions Who is and What is Donne are the crucial ones.

It is precisely in these terms, however, that Donne does not matter for Edson's *Wit*, despite the constant reiteration of his name and at least one of his texts, "Death Be Not Proud." To be sure, the body is a book and those anatomizing doctors read its parts with the scholarly attention that Professor Bearing had lavished on her Donne texts, both doctors and scholar eschewing the sentimental, the merely human. But for all the niceness of the pointing (no melodramatic semicolons, only sighing commas), Donne is reduced to that "brilliant

. . . guy [who] makes Shakespeare sound like a Hallmark card,”<sup>53</sup> and at the climax is trumped by Margaret Wise’s Runaway Bunny (“shucks, said the little bunny, I might just as well stay where I am and be your little bunny”) and displaced, too, by that culturally more assimilable Shakespeare and his flights of angels. Donne here means “difficult writer,” but not one that Edson seems to have read much of. I don’t think Edson really likes Donne or his poems; still the debate she stages over how to read them, or at least one of them, does quite beautifully set up that extraordinary moment when her scholar heroine passes over that slight breath, the comma between life and death.

Life, Death—last things: Donne and Emily Dickinson are probably the two most spectacular death poets in English (a connection that has been made musically in John Adams’s *Harmonium*, a setting of Donne and Dickinson poems). Although Dickinson often sounds like Herbert, one of whose poems she had copied in a notebook, the obsessive fascination with death rather recalls Donne. There is no real evidence that she read Donne, but one feels that she must have. Yet Virginia Woolf’s comment about Donne wanting to cut a figure even in death, which gets at the combination of death’s head and dandy that has intrigued so many, does not describe Dickinson’s more impersonal, less melodramatic encounters with death. It does, however, point exactly to what the mid-century American painter and poet Marsden Hartley saw and heard. His “The Last Look of John Donne” (Fig. 5) works with the familiar image that Donne had had painted so that he could contemplate it as he lay dying, but it is not quite as remembered; it is a little less smiling, less composed than the original effigy (Fig. 6). Hartley painted it in 1940, not long before his own death and in the direct frontal style that he was working in then, most notably in his portrait of fellow painter, Albert Ryder, who stares at the viewer with a Donne-like fierceness and whose white wool tuque suggests Donne’s shroud. It was during this period that Hartley was also writing a sequence of poems called “Patterns for Prayers,” all suffused with a Donnean anguish, sensibility, and language. They reprise the Holy Sonnets; one begins “Look down ever-intimate one / see the bird of these ultimate and inevitable wishes cries out from its crucifixion in the sky,”<sup>54</sup> or

O lift me—majestic Sire  
 touch me with your quenchless  
 fire.  
 Keep me—O keep me from falling  
 down—down into the incredible  
 abyss  
 Of human helplessness.  
 Lend me one ray from the  
 inexhaustible sun  
 of your immeasurable love.





Fig. 5. Marsden Hartley, "The Last Look of John Donne." © Brooklyn Museum of Art.

I would, like the gentle dove,  
fly to some aspect of your  
most generous heaven  
and there be saved from dire  
oblivion.

(312)

At the time that Hartley painted the portrait effigy, and with the concluding lines from Donne's "Oh my black soul . . ." echoing, he wrote a poem that



Fig. 6. John Donne, effigy

brilliantly recapitulates the encounters I've been tracing here. There is a gesture of recognition, a question or two, an acknowledgment of shared sympathies, yet a registering of something else, of danger, of distance, of frozen light:

John Donne in His Shroud:

It was a smart caprice  
to dress  
you like this.  
Was it a borrowed occasion  
as some hire evening suits for a party?

And the white poppy  
on top of your head,  
does that mean now white  
that once was red?  
For red is the color of a pagan wine  
of brisk desire  
and of flesh-fire—  
white is for calm attire.

In any case, if it is character  
is wanted in a face  
I would say—look at  
John Donne,  
that will suffice,  
fierce passion turned to ice  
and frozen light.

(195)

The *ars moriendi* tradition that Donne inherited, replayed, eroticized is one link from then to now, so, too, are the intellectual curiosity, the cynicism, the “fierce passion,” the linguistic extravagance, the insistent embodiment of the spirit. Yet none of these equals Donne, who remains a multiple, unresolvable provocation. As the allusions accumulate, there is always another sighting to record or encounter to assess. He is certainly useful coin for those who want to trade on his name now that Shakespeare’s stock is possibly too common. But for those who take him on, speak to and through him, receive the “blood transfusion” in Al Purdy’s words, the results can be astonishing. In either case, Van Morrison’s 1983 song provides fitting last words:

“Rave on, John Donne, rave on.”

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### Notes

My gratitude to four attentive and very helpful readers: Ed Pechter, Dayton Haskin, Nicola Nixon, Clifford Duffy.

1. See Susanna Avery-Quash, “‘Valuable Assistance’: Stanley Spencer’s Friendship

with Gwen and Jacques Raverat," *Apollo* 150 (Nov. 1999): 3–11; Kenneth Pople, *Stanley Spencer: A Biography* (London: William Collins Sons, 1991), 27.

2. Several Donne lines have the "to be or not to be" or "what's in a name" familiarity: "Death be not proud," "all coherence gone" and, most notably, the two from Devotion 17: "no man is an island" and "for whom the bell tolls." In running a Westlaw search one observes over and over a lawyer citing, a judge reciting from that passage, most often in its most anodyne generalizable reading, although not always, as in a case in the Wisconsin Appeals Court (1986): "No man is an island, John Donne wrote. Likewise, no man is a municipality." Or a 1994 Illinois case brought by a bank, "LaSalle is unable to prove any set of facts which would indicate a pattern of racketeering activity in Baker's [the defendant] part. Insufficiently pleading the element of pattern 'rings the death knell' for civil RICO [Racketeering, Influence, and Corruption Act] claims. . . . In this sort of case, LaSalle Bank should 'never send to know' as John Donne put it, 'for whom the bell tolls.' Otherwise it would learn the same lesson as earlier civil RICO plaintiffs: 'It tolls for thee.'" There were a few surprising exceptions to this default citation. One, a 1972 San Francisco decision on maternity leave policy argued that "it is no longer permissible to treat women in that manner described by John Donne in the passage at the end of 'Loves Alchymie'" and then cited the lines beginning, "Hope not for mind in women." And in a 1952 federal tax case, the judge dismissed an argument that although no motive existed during the man's life, such motive was born the moment he died, by remarking that "this paradoxical notion of death's creative power will fascinate anyone who admires the writings of the lawyer-poet-preacher John Donne, but I think it has no place in construing statutes." "Copr. (C) West Group 1999 No claim to orig. U.S. govt. works."
3. Harold Bloom has an intricate discussion of this encounter in *The Western Canon* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994), 413–32, particularly of *Hamlet* in the library scene in *Ulysses* and *Macbeth* in *Finnegans Wake*.
4. Arthur Power, *Conversations with James Joyce*, ed. Clive Hart (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1974), 102.
5. There do not seem to be any references in *Ulysses*, but in Adaline Glasheen's *Third Census of Finnegans Wake: An Index of the Characters and Their Roles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), two allusions are noted. "Then, begor, counting as many as eleven to thirtytwo seconds with his pocket browning, like I said, wann swanns wann, this is my awthorrtory, he kept forecursing hascupth's foul Fanden, Cogan, for coacockey the key of John Dunn's field fore it was for sent and the way Montague was robbed and wolfing to all went off and who burned the hay . . ."; ". . . Cave of Kids or Hymanian Glatstoneburg, denary, danary, donnery, dom, who entirngly as he continues highly fictional. . . ." *Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber & Faber, 1967), 516, 261 (and a doubtful third), 76.
6. There is, of course, considerable slippage between text and person, between what Coleridge, echoing Jonson, called the "poet for all ages" and the historical person (Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books* plays with just such blurring). And there are numerous movies and novels that try to imagine Shakespeare—*Shakespeare in Love*, for example, or Anthony Burgess's *Nothing Like the Sun*, or Leon Rooke's *Shakespeare's Dog*, or John Mortimer's *Will Shakespeare the Untold Story*. For accounts of the ways in which Shakespeare has been taken on in the twentieth century, see Ruby Cohn, *Modern Shakespeare Offshoots* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976) and the report of the 1982 International Shakespeare Conference on the topic, "Shakespeare and the Twentieth Century"; this was also the topic at the 1996 Sixth World Shakespeare Congress. See also Marianne Novy,

- Women's Revision of Shakespeare: On the Responses of Dickinson, Woolf, Rich, H.D., George Eliot and Others* (Champagne-Urbana: Illinois University Press, 1990) and Christy Desmet and Robert Sawyer, *Shakespeare and Appropriation* (London: Routledge, 1999).
7. Doug Beardsley and Al Purdy, *The Man Who Outlived Himself: An Appreciation of John Donne: A Dozen of His Best Poems* (Madeira Park, B.C.: Harbour Publishing, 2000), 9.
  8. John Donne, *Sermons*, ed. G. R. Potter and E. M. Simpson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953–62), vol. 7, 71.
  9. Some of Spencer's writings on art and religion formed part of the Golden Cockerel Press's *Sermons by Artists* (London, 1934). Spencer took as his text, I John 4:8: "He that loveth not knoweth not God: for God is Love." See Pople, *A Biography*, 345.
  10. Quoted by Maurice Collis, *Stanley Spencer: A Biography* (London: Harvill Press, 1962), 142.
  11. Quoted by Fiona MacCarthy, *Stanley Spencer: An English Vision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), catalogue plate 56. Spencer was also thinking of a Donne sermon when he painted "Christ Preaching at Cookham Regatta," 1953: "God will speak unto me, in that voice and in that way, which I am most delighted with and hearken most to" (*Sermons*, vol. 10, 111), explaining in a letter that he linked Christ's preaching from a boat to the Cookham Regatta and to Handel concerts at the Horse Ferry: "It isn't such a far cry from people listening to Handel and people listening to Christ preach." *An English Vision*, catalogue plate 60; Pople, *A Biography*, 26.
  12. Quoted by MacCarthy, *An English Vision*, catalogue plate 13. Spencer remarked that behind the painting was the distinction Donne made in a sermon between the two types of resurrection, "Before the resurrection of the body, there should be another resurrection, a spiritual resurrection of the soul from sin . . . That in the Church, now by Grace, and that in the Grave hereafter by Power" (Easter Day, 1625, *Sermons*, vol. 6, 274–76).
  13. *The Complete English Poems of John Donne*, ed. C. A. Patrides (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1985), 75.
  14. 7 July 1930 in *Stanley Spencer the Man: Correspondence and Reminiscences*, ed. John Rothenstein (London: Paul Elk Ltd., 1979), 41.
  15. See Timothy Rogers, *Rupert Brooke, A Reappraisal and Selection from His Writings* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1971), 188 and Robert Brainard Pearsall, *Rupert Brooke: The Man and the Poet* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1974), 90.
  16. Rupert Brooke, "Mummia," *The Complete Poems of Rupert Brooke* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1957), 46.
  17. *Ibid.*, 49. "The Fish" is in some ways less studiously Donnean; indeed, Brooke described it as an effort to work in the "L'Allegro" manner and metre. But to my ears, at least, there is an interesting echo of Donne's "Elegie on Mistress Boulstred" where "harmless fish monastic silence keep":

In a cool curving world he lies  
 And ripples with dark ecstasies.  
 The kind luxurious lapse and steal  
 Shapes all his universe to feel  
 And know and be; the clinging stream  
 Closes his memory, glooms his dream,  
 Who lips the roots o' the shore, and glides  
 Superb on unreturning tides.

18. Dayton Haskin, "Reading Donne's *Songs and Sonnets* in the Nineteenth Century," *John Donne Journal* 2 (1985): 225–52.
19. Reprinted in Rogers, *A Reappraisal*, 135.
20. Lytton Strachey did a terrific parody of "The Soldier" in an Imaginary Conversation between Sennacherib and Rupert Brooke. Says Sennacherib, "Not that my army lacked poets either. I remember one young man who wrote some very remarkable verses, to the effect that if he happened to be killed on foreign service, wherever he might be buried there would be a piece of Assyria." In *The Really Interesting Question and Other Papers*, ed. Paul Levy (New York: Capricorn Books, 1974), 43.
21. Samuel Hynes, "Rupert Brooke," in *Edwardian Occasions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 150. See also Paul Fussell's chapter, "Oh What a Literary War," in *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 159.
22. See Richard Badenhause, "Wilfred Owen on John Donne: 'You've got a hell of a breath,'" *The Midwest Quarterly* 33 (1992): 181–92.
23. Edgell Rickword, *Behind the Eyes: Selected Poems & Translations* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1976), 13.
24. Charles Hobday, *Edgell Rickword: A Poet at War* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1989), 33.
25. Quoted in *ibid.*, 53.
26. These were printed by Desmond MacCarthy in his essay, "Lytton Strachey and the Art of Biography," originally written "circa 1934." It was reprinted in *Memories*, ed. Robert Kee (London: 1953), 31–49. Under his pen name, Affable Hawk, MacCarthy wrote several articles about Donne's poetry.
27. Donne's name occurs here in a list of other poets, including Webster, Marlowe, and Baudelaire: Crane to William Wright, Oct. 17, 1921, *The Letters of Hart Crane, 1916–1932* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 67. In another letter he talks of his "long-standing friendship with Donne, Webster, and Marlowe" (71).
28. Hart Crane, "Black Tambourine," *Collected Poems*, ed. Waldo Frank (New York: Liveright, 1933), 63.
29. Josephine Miles, "Twentieth Century Donne," in *Twentieth Century Literature in Retrospect*, ed. Reuben Brower (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 218.
30. George Williamson, "Donne and the Poetry of Today," in *A Garland for John Donne: 1631–1931*, ed. Theodore Spencer (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith [1931], 1958), 153–76.
31. Arthur Clements, *The Poetry of Contemplation: John Donne, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan and the Modern Period* (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1990).
32. E. B. White, "Natural History," quoted by John Updike, "Magnum Opus," *The New Yorker* (July 12, 1999): 78.
33. T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), 286–87.
34. T. S. Eliot, "Donne in Our Time," in *A Garland for John Donne: 1631–1931* (1958), 1–19.
35. T. S. Eliot, *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*, ed. Ronald Schuchard (London: Faber and Faber, 1993).
36. Herbert Read, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1946), 177–82.
37. See Eliot, *Varieties*, 14.
38. Christopher Ricks, "Empson's Poetry," in *William Empson: The Man and His Work*, ed. Roma Gilla (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 208–12.

39. William Empson, *Collected Poems* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1955), 15. In the prefatory Corrigenda, Empson notes: "While I'm at it, there ought to be a full stop not a comma after night in the *Old Lady* poem for the rhythm."
40. Cited by Nicholas Bethell in his edition of Brodsky's poems, *Elegy to John Donne and Other Poems*, trans. Bethell (London: Longmans, 1967), 8.
41. Translated by Richard Wilbur, *The New Yorker* (Dec. 27, 1999 & Jan. 3, 2000): 72.
42. Yehuda Amichai, *Selected Poetry*, ed. and trans. Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 6.
43. Edward Hirsch, *How to Read a Poem and Fall in Love with Poetry* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999), 90. Hirsch uses the translation of Assia Guttman. In his discussion, he compares Amichai's airplane to Donne's compasses: "Amichai finds an image for the lovers, as Donne did, in terms of our modernity" (92).
44. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, Vol. 4: 1931–35, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (London: Penguin 1983), 44 (19 September 1931).
45. Virginia Woolf, *Collected Essays*, Vol. 1, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), 32.
46. Much of this has already been investigated, most recently by Diane Gillespie in a study, which she began with Louise Schleiner, of the multiple "I's/eyes" of *The Waves*, that is, the multiple subject positions from which both Donne and Woolf viewed the world, arguing that the novel can be read as Woolf's *Divine Poems*. "Through Woolf's 'I's': Donne and *The Waves*," in *Virginia Woolf: Reading the Renaissance*, ed. Sally Greene (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999), 211–44. See also Juliet Dusinberre, *Virginia Woolf's Renaissance* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997), especially chapter 3, "Virginia Woolf Reads John Donne"; and Alice Fox, *Virginia Woolf and the Literature of the English Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).
47. Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* (New York: New Directions, 1946), 97. Donne, 28 March 1619, in *Sermons*, vol. 2, 197.
48. Vikram Seth, *An Equal Music* (New York: Broadway Books, 1999).
49. John Updike, *Bech at Bay* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1998), 158.
50. John Updike, "The Future of Faith," *The New Yorker* (Nov. 29, 1999): 91.
51. Another novel that works through this harrowing, although in more straightforward terms, is Gail Godwin's *Father Melancholy's Daughter* (New York: William Morrow, 1991). It is in some considerable measure imagined through Donne as well as Vaughan, making particular use of "Good Friday 1613: Riding Westward" and "The Crosse" in its portrait of an Episcopalian minister, Father Gower, and his daughter who "would like to be a writer and a priest" (402; she is moving incrementally, not unlike Donne himself, toward taking holy orders). The novel is both family romance and a revisiting of the Donne dilemmas of self-interest/selflessness, self-doubt/conviction (one senses the *Divine Poems* and the two *Anniversaries* as silent witnesses), as it traces the progress of the soul in its quest to burn off its rust and its deformities. Interestingly, though, little that is essential is changed here. This is seventeenth-century Donne alive and well in late twentieth-century Virginia.
52. Dayton Haskin, "When Performance Is at Odds with Narrative: *The Designated Mourner* as Wallace Shawn's Wager on John Donne," *Narrative* 8 (2000): 182–209.
53. Margaret Edson, *Wit* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1999), 76.
54. Marsden Hartley, *The Collected Poems*, ed. Gail R. Scott (Santa Rosa, Calif.: Black Sparrow Press, 1987), 311.