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Harmonious Remembrance: A Response to Sarah Powrie, Ryan Netzley, and Michael Ursell*

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In responding to Powrie, Netzley, and Ursell's essays (in that and not an alphabetical order, for reasons which will become clear), I am concerned less with criticism than with augmentation, complication, and expansion. I direct readers to Judith Anderson's overview of the three papers rather than providing one of my own here.

1

Powrie's consideration of Augustinian interiority in the poem engages with the dialogic complexity so common in Donne's poetry, the interlocking yet conflicting associations between the physical and fallen world and the interior world linked to the spiritual reality of Heaven. The conflict between interiority and exteriority she examines in *The Second Anniversarie* must necessarily remain unresolved as a condition of its occasion. I see that lack of resolution as a triumph, not a problem, for Donne has no honest or unforced resolution available to him. Any resolution in this context undermines Donne's desire to situate Drury in the afterlife, which exists for the dead as a literal place but which, to the living, can only be conceptualized through spiritual interiority.

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*References: Michael Ursell, "The Pneumatics of Inspiration in the *Anniversary* Poems," *Connotations* 25.1 (2015/2016): 46-59; Sarah Powrie, "Speculative Tensions: The Blurring of Augustinian Interiority in *The Second Anniversarie*," *Connotations* 25.1 (2015/2016): 1-18; Ryan Netzley, "Learning from Anniversaries: Progress, Particularity, and Radical Empiricism in John Donne's *The Second Anniversarie*," *Connotations* 25.1 (2015/2016): 19-45. For the original articles as well as all contributions to this debate, please check the *Connotations* website at <http://www.connotations.de/debanniversaries0251.htm>.

I am not convinced that the struggle Donne experiences between blocking out exterior things to seek inner memory and the continual intrusion of those external objects reflects any form of ultimate failure. Powrie suggests that the poem does not manage "to access these inexpressible mysteries" (14) of interior wisdom, but perhaps a poem which does not express the inexpressible can nevertheless succeed through the way in which it traces out the boundaries of that which cannot be spoken. If the dead Drury embodies wisdom in this poem, then her body no longer contains the wisdom expressed through her spirit, and access to her spirit thus promises direct access to the inner thought of the soul. And yet, the kind of remembering Powrie discusses in her article cannot peacefully coexist with memorialization; *The Second Anniversarie* makes multiple distinct attempts to establish that coexistence, including that of the watchtower which Powrie so cleverly relates to the ambiguity of *specula* (see 9-12). But despite asserting that Drury, or the idealized representation Donne substitutes for her, can inspire the soul to achieve the kind of recollection of Heaven which Augustine writes about, the poem cannot sustain the dualistic separation of Drury's soul from its body despite her death presumably requiring it.

In the simplest sense, a memorial poem necessarily assumes the existence of an exterior being who has died, unless the poem's composer and subject are one and the same. In this regard, at least, Augustinian *anamnesis* can at best be triggered by this external prompt; in effect, Donne's poem would have to turn away from its initial external object in order to figure forth the recollection which Augustine and also Powrie describe.[1] In other words, if Drury represents the external object whose recognition triggers a recollection of forgotten knowledge, the need to memorialize her renders her an absent object. Drury herself must be recollected in order to trigger *anamnesis*, in effect requiring a remembering of someone who in turn will trigger a remembering. To the extent that Drury herself is not the actual subject of the memorial, that turning away can happen: Donne can substitute for Drury-as-dead-woman a Drury-as-soul whose existence owes

more to his internal landscape of imagination than to his worldly experience. And, arguably, that substitution happens in both *Anniversary* poems, as Donne extracts from them any specific description of Elizabeth Drury which would allow someone who knew her to independently realize that she is being memorialized. Pursued as a memorial to an idealized soul, *The Second Anniversarie* could potentially perform the Augustinian recollection Powrie discusses, but only if Donne did not insist on disrupting his abstraction of Drury-as-soul by repeatedly incorporating material terms into his poetry.

In imagining the soul's progress from body to Heaven, for instance, Donne finds himself returning to imagery: "Heauen is as neare, and present to her face, / As colours are, and obiects, in a roome / Where darknesse was before, when Tapers come" (216-18). As with the watchtower, the metaphor tries to rise above the material world but reinforces materiality. Following this imagined excursion of the soul from out of the prison of its body, Donne returns to Drury and disrupts the dichotomy he has just established:

> […] remember then, that shee
> Shee, whose faire body no such prison was,
> But that a soule might well be pleas'd to passe
> An Age in her […] (220-23)

The act of memory thus becomes entangled with the memorial to Drury, whose body did not fit the model of the prison the poem previously established. The conclusion to this poetic injunction to "remember" finds itself deferred across twenty-seven lines which repeatedly compare her body to worldly, geographic, and temporal things. Finally, the poem completes its thought: "Shee, shee, thus richly, and largely hous'd, is gone: / And chides vs slow-pac'd snailes, who crawle vpon / Our prisons prison, earth […]" (247-49). Remembering Drury, then, entails remembering both her immortal soul and her mortal, dead body. The dilemma for Donne is not simply a conflict between radical interiority and worldly pleasures, but a conflict between remembering Drury and remembering himself.

The matter becomes further complicated because the call of Drury's soul constitutes the sustaining metaphor of the poem: recovering Heaven, remembering himself as soul free from bodily prison, requires following the example of Drury's perfected soul and pursuing that soul itself from earth to Heaven. And yet, remembering Drury means memorializing her death, and her death was a bodily phenomenon. Her absence both causes the poem and affords Donne's soul a path, a beacon to follow to Heaven: "[She] is gone, / As well t'enioy, as get perfectione. / And cals vs after her […]" (317-19). But her absence, and the poem that commemorates it, produces much of the frustration of spiritual progress. Powrie's discussion of this frustration focuses on the temporal and worldly character of Donne's distractions; considering Drury herself as both beacon and distraction further complicates her analysis and suggests both the richness and the necessity of the problem (see Powrie 6-8). Donne cannot write this poem without frustrating one or another of his ends; that frustration, I suggest, may become a third end. Instead of finding a path to internal insight or offering a worldly memorial to a woman, *The Second Anniversarie* instead binds together this world and the next through the central Christian paradox that, with grace's help, pure souls can emerge from corrupted bodies and a corrupt world. In that regard, the poem reconciles itself to death as the means through which remembering, in a purely spiritual sense, becomes possible.

2

Netzley's essay takes up *The Second Anniversarie* as a commemorative poem which challenges the impulse to universalize from particulars. I am delighted by the optimism of Netzley's reading but wonder whether Donne unreservedly shares it. The particular and temporal characteristics of the corruption, rot, and decay which cycle in and out of the poem do indeed threaten the temporal model of emergence and arrival which Netzley details. But the universalizing Heaven where

souls reside also poses a threat. For if Drury's death, commemorated, constitutes a particular moment which enables Donne to enact her as particular and to insist upon her particularity, the inevitability of Donne's own death, and that of his readers, reinforces and challenges that particularity at once. If we all die, what is it that renders Drury's death exceptional, worthy of commemoration over that of some other citizen of England who died upon the same day? Answering that Drury's character, her nature when alive, distinguishes her in death means grounding her particularity in the past, which reinforces the notion of a golden age departing, a world diminished, and not the kind of progressive regularity that permits learning of the kind Netzley describes. Conversely, if her death matters because it constitutes a model for our own, not in the sense of being a universal instance or a metaphor but in the sense of being a moment, a distinct event in time, then this signification does indeed afford the hope that our own deaths fit into a repeating pattern of decay leading to grace and eternal life. But that reading threatens to substitute the pattern itself for the universals or the governors which Netzley argues that the poem rejects.

Netzley (and Deleuze, whom he refers to) offer instead the idea of a radical empiricism which refuses to enscribe that pattern of decay and grace upon the particular event of Drury's death; the signification of her death does not stem from Nature but must be generated or imposed. Netzley concludes that Donne's particularization functions by insisting upon the particular and by using that particularity to examine the patterns and universals which the poem challenges. That examination ends with arrivals, with the notion of an imminence grounded within repeated particularity. I am not convinced that this point of conclusion offers quite as much hope or beauty as Netzley wants, in part because when death arrives, it represents not a repetition but an ending.

The specific moment in the poem which Netzley reads is the metaphor of the soul's third birth as a realization of Heaven in "colours […] and obiects, in a roome / Where darknesse was before, when

Tapers come" (217-18). Netzley's interpretation of this difficult passage is an acute one, but he does not ask what it means for tapers to come into this room or, more specifically, who may be carrying them. The poem earlier uses a similar metaphor:

> Thinke then, My soule, that death is but a Groome,
> Which brings a Taper to the outward romme,
> Whence thou spiest first a little glimmering light,
> And after brings it nearer to thy sight […] (85-88)

The approaching and particular source of that light, then, the carrier of the taper who arrives, is neither Donne nor the reader, but death, the "Groome." While I think it a mistake to set the soul's birth and death's arrival against one another as clearly dichotomous, I am unsure that the full optimism and humanity of Netzley's interpretation remains available if the kind of particularized progress, the radical empirical arriving, begins with each particular act of dying. Instead, the poem brings a series of associated but conflicted terms into close proximity, refusing either reconciliation between them or the triumph of one over another. When the poem asks us to think division to be "thy happiest Harmonee" (92), it invites us to reconcile brokenness and health, life and death, but it does so in terms which permit such reconciliation as a consequence of death, an event subsequent. Asserting death as a precondition to particular or empirical understanding may be a radical maneuver, but doing so rather problematizes any subsequent application of radical empiricism by the deceased. I do not mean to imply that my reading is not optimistic along the lines that Netzley's is, but just that it is less so.

I wonder instead whether *The Second Anniversarie* draws out absence as the central element of its reworkings of empiricism. The presence, perhaps even the direct and particular observation, of that which is missing can substitute for death and open up the possibility of an arrival prior to one's final departure. In that regard, Drury's particular absence, the repeated though increasingly deferred refrain that "she's gone" which Netzley discusses (see 9), becomes a means through

which one can learn of, about, and from death without needing first to go through it oneself. In that regard, I concur wholeheartedly with Netzley that the universal and universalizing aspects of Drury's death and her departed soul's example become subordinated by the poem. It is Drury's absence, the repetition of that absence, and the ways in which it leaves us with something instead of nothing which generate Donne's radical empiricism.

The poem opens with a challenge to the world's temporality which remains steeped in time: "Nothing could make mee sooner to confesse / That this world had an euerlastingnesse, / Then to consider, that a yeare is runne [since Drury's death]" (1-3). Take Donne at his first word: "Nothing" makes him confess, the particular absence which makes material everything else, especially the rest of the poem. And yet, by the end of the poem, Donne writes: "[Drury is] the Proclamation; and I ame / The Trumpet, at whose voice the people came" (527-28). In that formulation, Donne facilitates the arrival Netzley describes, but those "people" who arrive come to hear the proclamation, not the summons to it. They come, in short, to hear Drury, and she is gone. That offers readers some hope, for, despite her absence, the commemoration of her which Donne writes remains present to us. Nevertheless, given that Donne has just claimed that commemoration merely summons us to receive the real message, our hope must be deflected either outward or inward, either to the particulars around us which also proclaim, or to the particular-universal within us.

3

That voiced trumpet blast allows for a lovely transition into Ursell's paper, especially as the particular-universal I am thinking of in my last paragraph is the Holy Spirit: particular in the sense that it exists as an independent entity and universal in the sense that it can dwell within the hearts of all believers at once. My own study of the Spirit concentrates on John Milton's monist understanding of it; Ursell argues in the direction of a monist *pneuma* in *The Second Anniversarie*,

but my discussion here will not rely on reading Donne as monist.[2] I do want to suggest, however, that the dance between a substantial Spirit in a materialistic sense and a substantial Spirit in an intangible and invisible sense plays well with how this poem functions. The outward deflection I have just discussed can as easily be seen as a deflection to the powerful Stoic *pneuma* Ursell describes, an external impetus sufficient to make music upon a lute merely sitting in the open air. And the inward deflection can potentially aim at the same entity in another form, the Holy Spirit within the hearts of Christian believers which guides them to grace. *Pneuma* may have us both coming and going.

Whether Donne's understanding of *pneuma* quite matched the Stoic model is a question too large for this response. I do want to gesture at a definitional tangle, however, both in the general sense of the substance and the specific sense of the Holy Spirit. Stoic *pneuma* and Catholic and Protestant *spiritus* become enmeshed in an ongoing debate over the ways in which spirit and matter exist and interact; alchemy, in particular, operates in ways which can conflict and complement both ancient and contemporary understandings of the air, the Spirit and the animating breath of life.[3] Despite the Spirit's role as authorizing agent in the Protestant doctrine of the inner scripture, pneumatology in England found itself locked in a fundamental debate about the role of the Spirit in interpretation, the degree to which it facilitates reason or bypasses it entirely, and even the precise manner in which the Spirit dwells in believers' hearts.[4] The Spirit's own position as the least defined of the elements of the Trinity further complicates matters: where the Father cannot be named and Jesus Christ saves through his incarnated name, the Holy Spirit has no name except in relation to the first two. I suggest that this tangled set of indefinite definitions associates the Spirit with Donne's larger exploration of the relationship between body and soul; much of the complexity of his poems stems from the same basic ambiguities and problems which make the Spirit so hard to define.[5]

Beginning, then, with the assumption that Stoic *pneuma* operates within *The Second Anniversarie*, what strikes me most about the poem

is how little it relies upon direct reference to the Holy Spirit. The sole mention of the Holy Ghost comes in describing virgins who decline sex so that they can preserve the sanctity of the Spirit's temple within themselves (see 353-55). The larger context for the reference is the exhortation to Donne's "drowsy soul," called to go up to "where thy new eare / Shall in the Angels songs no discord heare […]" (339-40). In an expansion of Ursell's discussion of music and *pneuma*, I suggest that the Spirit's presence can best be registered in the poem in moments of music generally and harmony specifically.[6] The soul called to rise to Heaven, then, will indeed be wafted up by the inspirational powers of the Holy Spirit, along with and in parallel to the inspired poetry which lifts readers in a figural sense to the Heaven where Drury's soul now dwells.

One of the poem's two references to breath invites readers to imagine themselves dying:

> Thinke thy selfe laboring now with broken breath,
> And thinke those broken and soft Notes to bee
> Diuision, and thy happiest Harmonee. (90-92)

Again, music and *pneuma* appear in proximity and association, which reinforces Ursell's discussion of Orpheus in relation to *pneuma*. More specifically, the "broken […] Notes" of dying breath produce "division" that is "happiest Harmonee." Setting aside the figural reading which, in this context, may be most obvious—harmony with God means dying first—I want to instead emphasize the actual conditions of music in the period. Harmony relies upon the blending of multiple voices, a concord like that between the angels in Heaven, and, by extension, the angels and Drury's soul. Part-singing involves breaking musical unison and replacing it with divided voices, and that division in turn produces harmony when it happens in proper proportion. Donne is not just describing a meditation upon death; he is trying to enact harmony through division, through separations. Those separations include soul from body, one year from another, Heaven from Earth, perfection from corruption, immortality from illness and death.

Donne's poem registers that, as in part-singing, breaking these other things apart can produce harmony rather than disrupting it, and that harmony relies upon division.

I wonder, though, if the Holy Spirit is in some way displaced in its function by the perfect soul commemorated by the poem. If Elizabeth Drury herself, "in that squadron" (356) of virgins who lay with the Holy Spirit alone, held herself in perfect union with it, and if that perfect soul now holds the power to lift others to Heaven, then Drury's soul becomes at the least a type of the Holy Spirit and may potentially act in its stead. There is an argument to be made, I think, drawing in part upon the language of alchemy and the "essentiall" joy (470) Donne associates with Drury, for Drury's soul as a substantial (though not precisely material) means of grace; in effect, it is a version of the Holy Spirit which can be named and invoked by name, a substantial substitute for a Catholic Saint (see 511-22) or even (with Jonson's comment in mind) for the Virgin Mary herself.[7] As evidence, I would point to the shift from air to joy as the poem proceeds, a shift which concludes as Donne describes Drury:

> […] two soules,
> Or like to full, on both sides written Rols,
> Where eies might read vpon the outward skin,
> As strong Records for God, as minds within […] (503-06)

Might Donne here render Drury's double soul as scripture, the "strong Records for God" of his word? When Donne insists that "[t]he purpose, and th'Autority is his [God's]" (526), he directly situates Drury as "the Proclamation" (527); does scripture not proclaim God's goodness and his kingdom? *Pneuma* may not simply sustain and draw together Donne's poem, it even may directly represent Drury's soul, the substantial expression of who and what she was returning to Earth on the anniversary of her death in order to draw others up to Heaven with her.

But enough of these airy heights and speculations. Descending again to the level of the text, I conclude by suggesting that the vi-

brancy of *The Second Anniversarie*, like that of many of Donne's poems, involves the ways in which poetic substitution and figuration work hand-in-hand with two kinds of differentiation and division: harmonious and discordant. A pneumatic harmony generated through the division between Drury's soul and our still-embodied selves presumably requires the strict governance of the God whose order produces harmony, working along the lines laid down by Ursell's essay. And yet, as Netzley argues, Donne's poem complicates the very notion of governance; harmony as universal concept must be set against particular harmony, the product of a specific moment in time which repeats without necessarily advancing. Think of a piece of choral music, performed again and again, enacting at each moment a harmony built upon the abstracted structures of musical notes and the physical and literal breaths of the singers. And yet, while the beauty of such music, like Drury's beauty, can indeed draw the listener into alignment with the divine proportion underlying harmony, it also risks substituting the aesthetic pleasure of the experience for the experience's ends, as Powrie's examination describes.[8] In any event, as with any singer who blends his voices with others to produce harmony, I find myself deeply gratified at the richness of the music formed by these three lead singers and our responsive descants.

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NOTES

[1]For Plato's original concept of *anamnesis*, see *Meno* 81c2-d4. Ables argues that Augustine replaces *amamnesis* with illumination, substituting the illuminating force of divine insight for the prior existence of the soul. See Ables 284-86; and Dobbell 37-40.

[2]See Ainsworth, *Milton and the Spiritual Reader* 78-79, and "Milton's Holy Spirit in *De Doctrina Christiana*" 17-18.

[3]This question of the soul's materiality or lack thereof can also be seen in broader debates about the soul and body. See Sugg's discussion of how Donne insists on a skeptical approach to the soul's nature, driven in part by advances in the field of medicine (see 140-46). For a quick overview of the linkage between alchemy and vitalism in the period, see Chang, esp. 324-25.

[4]I am unaware of a comprehensive study of early modern pneumatology in England, but Nuttall provides a good sense of the debates taking place within Puritan communities during the period.

[5]Examples include "The Ecstasy," which explores the blurring boundaries between bodies and souls in ways which problematize a dualistic understanding of them, and "Good-Friday, 1613 Riding Westward," which worries at the linkages between soul and Christ's blood. Donne's poems on sick bodies also work on the problem of bodies and souls.

[6]For a general overview of harmony and its connection to Christianity generally and the Spirit specifically, see Hollander and Spitzer. McColley looks closely at music in Donne (94-133) but does not consider the Spirit in her discussion.

[7]See Jonson 133: "he [Jonson] told Mr Donne, if it had been written of ye Virgin Marie it had been something to which he [Donne] had answered that he described the Idea of a Woman and not as she was" (133).

[8]Anderson (68) suggests eros redeems memory in this poem problematic in itself. I agree but see that redemption.

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