

## Learning from Anniversaries: Progress, Particularity, and Radical Empiricism in John Donne's *The Second Anniversarie*\*

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John Donne's *Anniversaries* commemorate the death of Elizabeth Drury, a young woman whom Donne never met. Although Robert Drury, Elizabeth's father, likely commissioned the poems, they appear, nonetheless, to be textbook examples of exploitative abstraction. Donne uses Drury's death to meditate on broader issues about the sinfulness of the world, the new science, and the possibilities for renovation in this life.<sup>1</sup> This essay argues, however, that *The Second Anniversarie* evades the charge of exploitation by advancing a radical empiricism in which particularity is not subject to an abstract universal conceived as its governor. In other words, the poem does not leave the process of abstraction alone to do its dirty work, running roughshod over Elizabeth Drury's life to make a more important point. Donne's attention to particularity challenges the notion that specific instances act as examples (or counter examples) for a larger rule. And, in turn, that challenge alters how readers should conceive of repetition, and, thus, the very temporal phenomenon that the poems commemorate—an anniversary. After all, these poems, like all poems of commemoration, are not just reminders of something that happened in the past but are also spurs and exhortations to change in the present. In that sense, they are decidedly pedagogical poems, teaching readers to learn from events by attending to the particularities of an occasion, not to the ways in which it is similar to some other happen-

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\*See the parallel articles on Donne's *The Second Anniversarie* in this issue, as well as the response by Judith Anderson.

For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debanniversaries0251.htm>>.

ing or phenomenon. This essay, then, teases out the radically empirical and particular understanding of learning that these poems present, one that ends up being decidedly antinomian in its refusal to subject singularities to universal laws.

### 1. Universality, Particularity, and Time

Donne's *Anniversaries* are meditations on the nature of commemorative events, but they also explore the nature of temporal progress, conceived either as degeneration or renovation.<sup>2</sup> These poems, and *The Second Anniversarie* in particular, do not merely imagine time as a general structure that organizes experience; instead, they explore how it is that we perceive movement into the future, as opposed to recognizing its past occurrence. In *The Second Anniversarie* such perception is very much a matter of attending to concrete particularities, not so that we might treat them as examples of a universal rule, but rather so as to orient our meditations toward the future. After all, that is the nature and the promise of anniversaries: the first one always implies a second, but does so only via the repetition of specific events. That is, anniversaries are a predictable sequence of commemorative instances, but one whose connections are merely chronological and numerical. The links between moments are entirely extraneous to the particular character of both the commemorating and commemorated occasions. As such, they refuse to present their own perpetuation as the expression of a universal law that governs their development in time. In the end, these poems challenge the notion that thought (and poetry) always arrogates to itself the aim of permanence and thus necessarily includes a denigration of individual transience. In that respect, the *Anniversaries* are very much a set of poems about the futural and temporal possibilities of thinking.<sup>3</sup> *The Second Anniversarie* only highlights this concern when the speaker repeatedly enjoins his own soul (and sometimes, perhaps, the reader's) to "think" (85-185), in effect counseling us on how we should perceive and interpret the world, as well as on the meaning of Elizabeth Drury's exemplarity.

The poems' central conceit, of course, is that Elizabeth Drury matters, that she is more than a mere example, more than an illustration of a general truth: she acts as an epitome of or catalyst for the dilated temporal processes described, both anatomy and progress. *The First Anniversarie* insists that the world is Drury's own microcosm: "She to whom this world must it selfe refer, / As Suburbs, or the Microcosme of her" (235-36).<sup>4</sup> This reversal is more than wit: it reveals these poems' central preoccupation with the difficulties inherent in any relationship between particular instances and universal rules—especially within a poetics motored by metaphorical comparison. This concern is even more pressing in the second poem, which closes by describing Drury as a pattern for both life and death (see 524). Donne does more than exaggerate a young woman's significance and, thus, appropriate her real, lived experience for a larger philosophical, pedagogical, or poetic aim, an accusation lodged against the poem at least since Jonson's famous quip: "if it had been written of ye Virgin Marie it had been something" (133). Donne's use of hyperbole is figurative but does not reduce his subject to a mere figure. Drury's life and death are a particular pattern that acts as if it were an unreachable universal rule:

Shee whose example they must all implore,  
Who would or doe, or thinke well, and confesse  
That aie the vertuous Actions they expresse,  
Are but a new, and worse edition,  
Of her some one thought, or one action [...] (306-10)

Significantly, those souls who seek salvation must implore the example, not the rule or its creator. And, in turn, Drury acts as the wellspring of virtuous action, but not because she represents a governing order or possesses some divine authority. Rather, one can emulate her precisely because she does not have such authority.<sup>5</sup>

The concluding lines of *The Second Anniversarie* admit as much, when they describe Jesus (or, less likely, God the Father) as the ultimate authority:

[...] nor wouldst thou be content,  
 To take this, for my second yeeres true Rent,  
 Did this Coine beare any other stampe, then his,  
 That gaue thee power to do, me to say this.  
 Since his will is, that to posteritee,  
 Thou shouldest for life, and death, a patterne bee,  
 And that the world should notice haue of this,  
 The purpose, and th' Authority is his;  
 Thou art the Proclamation; and I ame  
 The Trumpet, at whose voice the people came. (519-28)

Drury is an announcement that one imitates in order to be virtuous, a mediator or metaphor that one nonetheless emulates. What is striking about the second poem then, given this late appearance of a divine authority, is the extent to which Donne risks placing a reified idolatry—Jonson's quip comes to mind again—at the center of the poem's pedagogy. By doing so, however, he solves the very specific pedagogical problem of how universal ideals can act within an increasingly degenerating and atomized world. The difficulty is not simply that fallen human beings always fall short of the moral law, but that conforming oneself to a law is not the same thing as salvation. What one learns inside the poem is how to conform to an example or a metaphor and not a law—or rather how one might conform one's will to another's. And that process is one that must always take place inside of a particular time without a juridical appeal to a transcendent standard or code.

It is because the poem's pedagogical action occurs in and through a fallen world that *The Second Anniversarie* is so often concerned with the effects of time's passing, its speed, and its effects on empirical perception. The poem insists that speed fundamentally alters what it is that we perceive, in the process challenging the distinctions that would ground our temporal distinctions between past and future. It evokes an "undistinguished" speed that contracts all sequence into a single entity: "[...] speed vndistinguish'd leades / Her through those spheares, as through the beades, a string, / Whose quicke succession makes it still one thing" (208-10). If speed undistinguished makes everything one thing, does this then mean that there is no such thing

as a singular, pivotal occasion, like Drury's death or its anniversary? And is this what the progress of a soul looks like, the transition into indistinguishability? *The Second Anniversarie* exhibits an obsession with such questions. It characterizes heavenly knowing as intuitive and immediate—"In Heauen thou straight know'st all, concerning it" (299). But it also insists that the reader's soul has, or at least should have, no interest in scientific or empirical astronomical investigations—"Shee carries no desire to know, nor sense, / Whether th'Ayrs middle Region be intense" (191-92). The speaker also counsels his own soul to abandon the lessons of sensation and imagination: "When wilt thou shake of this Pedantry, / Of being taught by sense, and Fantasy?" (291-92). Yet this is also a poem that presents the perception of heaven as decidedly similar to quotidian empirical perception—"Heauen is as neare, and present to her face, / As colours are" (216-17). Thus, in shaking off sense, *The Second Anniversarie* does not counsel us to retreat from the world of degenerating particular representations depicted in *The First Anniversarie* and place our faith and hope in a future heaven of universality, in which particularity has been eliminated; rather, it offers a redeemed and, frankly, more radical empiricism in its place, one that acknowledges the central role of time in the process of knowing particular things.

*The Second Anniversarie* depicts universals as immediately apprehensible in their temporal arrival and departure. Drury is not a specific instance of temporal alteration within a general architecture or teleological plan because universality does not amount to an immutable rule outside of time. Instead, time appears inside of both poems as a crucial element of our empirical perception—of what and how we know—and not merely as a threat to the security of our immutable knowledge. This poem insists, then, that one does not learn against or athwart time but rather with time and its passage as a valuable positive component—and that precisely because a universal reaffirmed by examples is not really learning, so much as it is a mere recollection or recognition of the truth that was always there. Such a conceptual architecture essentially reduces an individual soul's

progress and learning to little more than an already illustrated path and, in so doing, denies the gravity of the specific perils that each soul is seeking to escape.<sup>6</sup> To put it another way, if there is a general providential plan at work guiding human beings toward a harmonious end, then the goal of learning is recognizing and having faith in the broader plan—and subsequently organizing particulars inside of this schematic. For Donne and his poems that is a recipe for denying the significance of singular events and individuals, the very particularities that the poems seek to remember. These poems treat anniversaries as something more than mere chronological reminders of a more important power gurgling beneath the surface of phenomena—the universal rules, plans, or rulers of which these singular instances are only imperfect instantiations.

Thus, when *The First Anniversarie* laments lost correspondences between heaven and earth, it does so not in order to condemn the new science, but rather to preserve the value and pedagogical effectiveness of particular instances:

What Artist now dares boast that he can bring  
 Heauen hither, or constellate any thing,  
 So as the influence of those starres may bee  
 Imprisond in an Herbe, or Charme, or Tree,  
 And doe by touch, all which those starres could do?  
 The art is lost, and correspondence too. (391-96)

The loss that Donne describes here is not a banal reaffirmation of chaos's reign or a general assertion about how the center cannot hold. The loss mourned in this moment is that of the power of particular instances—herbs, charms, and trees. As such, these lines conceive of particularity as something more than an illustration—after all, there are multiple mere illustrations of regeneration and degeneration in even a fallen universe. Correspondence and art mean something extremely specific in this passage: not merely an argumentative structure of exemplary instances, alongside various similarities and analogies, but the imprisonment—the capturing and holding but not the governing—of universality and its capacities inside of particularity. As such, they set out to reaffirm a radical empirical particularity in

their presentation of the importance of singular temporal instances. That matters, of course, because the afterlife portrayed in the second poem will look very different if one conceives of it not as reentering into an abstract system of correspondence already prepared, but rather as recapturing or re-embodiment of universals as particulars.

Given the poems' suspicion of a transcendent universality that could provide a measure for our educational progress, how do we know when we are learning? The second poem's two epistemological positions—the impulse to transcend the empirical world and its epistemologies and the drive to render this soul's progress within sensuous metaphors—are decidedly at odds and make it difficult to discern how it is one could recognize progress, development, or really any movement, in the present. Is recognizing a progress toward heaven decidedly different than the worldly, empirical seeing or knowing that the poem, sometimes, condemns? Does sense only provide particular, metaphorical approximations of the really important things, general concepts and rules? These are especially pressing questions for any examination of the nature of events and their commemoration. If particular happenings merely serve as pedagogical examples of more general truths (about the decline of the world through sin or the possibilities for redemption), then time appears as little more than a blank uniform field. *The Second Anniversarie*, I argue, considers time to be a much more transformative factor than that.

## 2. Radical Empiricism

As Marshall Grossman notes, the macrocosm-microcosm analogy that appears so often in Donne's verse is evidence of his obsession with the epistemological and ontological relationship between particular and universal, "one of the crucial philosophical problems of the Renaissance":

How to relate the particular to the universal so as to produce an intelligible world by uniting appearance, which is understood to be time-bound, and thought, which seeks the stability of a truth outside time. The intelligibility

of a world still understood according to an idealist principle, and thus conceiving of truth as a verisimilar reproduction of an ideal that remains always self-identical and comprehensive, resides in the ability of the subject to locate each particular that it encounters within the concept proper to it. Particular individuals appear as unintelligible *things* until they are subsumed under concepts. (155)

Grossman describes these poems as a lament for a lost conceptual homogeneity, the identity of, and not just the analogy between, the macrocosm and microcosm (178). Donne, however, does not go gently into the good night of such a riven epistemological landscape, but rather attempts to produce a new aesthetic relationship between particular and universal, one that would not reduce the former to nothing more than a piece of evidence in a broader argument. In contrast to *The First Anniversarie*, the second poem offers a more optimistic portrait of the power of metaphor, and temporal metaphors in particular, to bridge this chasm. Donne attempts to rethink the relationship between particularity and universality so that the former is not always a resented deviation from or approximation of the latter. Such a revision also allows for the possibility of perceiving emergence and arrival even in a decaying world. As a result, we are able to do more with this world than lament its inevitable decline and postulate its ineradicable difference from the heavenly. In this respect, *The Second Anniversarie* also depicts temporality as something strikingly different than the sequential historical specificities that dominate modern criticism. It is not just that there is a contradiction between the universal injunction to “always historicize” and the examination of historical particularities. Even the notion of contradiction, dialectical or otherwise, assumes a tendency toward general harmony that remains at odds with any persistent attention to particularities: i.e., an attention to particularities that does not have an ulterior aim, taxonomic, pedagogical, or moral.

So how does one perceive, simultaneously, progress and its symbolic conclusion or condensation, especially given our flawed perception of a flawed and decaying world? If worldly particularity—the controversies of ants and matters of fact—are as irrelevant as *The*



*Second Anniversarie* maintains, then what makes Drury's particularity different and significant? It does seem difficult to square Drury's singular importance with the denigration of irrelevant particularities within the poem:

What hope haue we to know our selues, when wee  
 Know not the least things, which for our vse bee?  
 We see in Authors, too stiffe to recant,  
 A hundred controuersies of an Ant.  
 And yet one watches, starues, freeses, and sweats,  
 To know but Catechismes and Alphabets  
 Of vnconcerning things, matters of fact [...] (279-85)

In turn, how would one prevent Drury's exploitation as a mere example, as an inconsequential brick in a much larger edifice? At root, Donne's epistemological meditations here reveal an abiding concern with the essentially domineering structure of all universals; that despite the imperative to focus on the truly important objects of knowledge, doing so always risks sublating all singular happenings—like the progress of a singular, individual soul, not to mention the resurrection of its particular body—under general categories that degrade the very thing purportedly worthy of praise.

In presenting Drury's death as a contingent event that provokes more important contemplations, the subtitle to *The Second Anniversarie* only highlights Donne's obsessive concern with this problem: "Of the Progres of the Soule. Wherein: By Occasion of the Religious Death of Mistris Elizabeth Drury, the incommodities of the Soule in this life and her exaltation in the next, are Contemplated" (p. 22). This event of exaltation is simultaneously futural and finished, as "next" and the passive construction, "are [c]ontemplated," imply. And the phrase "by occasion" ambiguously designates her death as both a pivotal event and an insignificant happening.<sup>7</sup> The subtitle describes the event as an excuse and prompt for the mulling over of abstract lessons, but the event is not itself part of a larger argumentative whole, an instance that supports a general rule. Donne's pedagogical *précis*, accordingly,

highlights the poem's concern with that most paradoxical of epistemological ventures, a science of the concrete.

Unlike *The First Anniversarie*, which, as Catherine Gimelli Martin claims, challenges Baconian empiricism (see 169-74), *The Second Anniversarie* asks us to adopt a more radical empiricism, one that would take seriously the notion that universals are more apprehensible than particulars. That is the point of a speed that makes everything one thing: as opposed to the slow progress toward the teleological aim of universal rules (either their building or uncovering), this poem presents the accelerated, temporal perception of particulars as itself a type of knowledge. Martin's reading of *The First Anniversarie* locates Donne within a scholastic and patristic tradition at odds with the developments of the new science:

The likelihood of an attack on Bacon becomes stronger still once the reader realizes that in order to "see" Elizabeth Drury as she really is, "no longer occluded from ou[r] view by the individuating properties of matter, which are unintelligible," one must accept the "consequences of hylomorphic theories of 'substance'" that make universals more easily perceptible than particulars in Donne's essentially scholastic system of thought [...] they ["Ideas"] signified "species" or kinds in the Aristotelian/Thomistic sense of intelligible ideas or defining essences: patterns or plans that make the thing what it essentially is. In the process of anatomizing these essences or epitomes of created things, Donne is thus reaffirming the idea that scholastic universals rather than Baconian particulars are truly and enduringly "knowable." (174-75)<sup>8</sup>

In this reading, abstract ideas are not the exclusive province of a governing, conditioning, and categorizing mind, but rather occur at the level of material sensation. Yet instead of opting for an Aristotelian or patristic perception of a timeless universal category, *The Second Anniversarie* insists that we know only through (not despite) the temporal passing of events. The universal is not a buttress against the ravages of decay; and neither is a sense datum the rock of the real from which one might erect an epistemological edifice. Such induction dreams of the same escape from temporal disturbance that one sees in a transcendent rationalism. In this poem, sense, imagination, and even reason do not gesture beyond time or fight against its depredations in

the name of permanence. We know moments, occasions like Drury's death, which require that we reconceive temporal progress as the universal that we know and not as a threat to a static notion of eternity. Such a seemingly subtle alteration, though, has important consequences for how we conceive the process of learning, as well as the error or inadequacy it seeks to remedy.

Donne's *Second Anniversarie* suggests that we are learning neither from sense nor from imagination, but rather that we learn directly—without a governing intermediary—from time, especially the experience of temporal arrivals. The poem shows us an alternative vision of how we might contemplate and conceive time, as something other than a meaningless substrate populated occasionally by important moments, which always only fall back into and confirm the tyranny of time's universal conditioning structure. Donne's poem rejects this model because the world does not conform to the structure of logical argumentation, with supporting examples leading to general truths: the world is not a problem to be solved or an argument to be won. This is especially so given the fallen nature not only of the world itself but also of the epistemological tools used to comprehend it. In other words, *The Second Anniversarie* does not just pose the question of whether we experience individual elements or the broader patterns of which they form a part; it also offers an alternative notion of what knowledge about the world entails, rejecting the spatial, architectural model of category recognition in favor of one keyed to the repetition and modification of particular instances. Such an understanding requires that universals be something more than the additive product of particular parts or the imposition of a governing structure onto disorderly phenomena. Instead, if we are going to learn from a poem or an occasion, that means perceiving its pattern of regularity (not rule) as an event in the present, as opposed to recognizing it after the fact, as a result of various deductive procedures. In this respect, Donne attempts to take seriously both the identity of microcosm and macrocosm in the world as we experience it and the possibility of real epistemological epiphanies.

*The Second Anniversarie* shares with its predecessor a suspicion of analytic partition, but it does not merely trumpet the value of universal categories at the expense of atomized “matters of fact” (285). As we have seen, both poems ask us to reimagine the relationship between universal and particular. But just as important is the rationale for this reimagining. *The Second Anniversarie* directs this suspicion not toward skepticism and the limits of knowledge but rather toward the threat to harmony that any brand of governance implies:

But as in Mithridate, or iust perfumes,  
Where all good things being met, no one presumes  
To gouerne, or to triumph on the rest,  
Onely because all were, no part was best.  
And as, though all doe know, that quantities  
Are made of lines, and lines from Points arise,  
None can these lines or quantities vnioynt,  
And say this is a line, or this a point,  
So though the Elements and Humors were  
In her, one could not say, this gouernes there. (127-36)

These lines insist that extracting a governing principle from the welter of empirical quantities and elements is not only a mistakenly prideful epistemological quest; doing so also misunderstands the nature of a redeemed soul and world. The poem certainly condemns skepticism for mistakenly giving value to the world’s decaying carcass: “For though to erre, be worst, to try truths forth, / Is far more busines, then this world is worth. / [...] He honors it too much that thinks it nought” (53-54, 84). However, skepticism alone does not account for the errors in this line of inquiry. By insisting that all elements and humors are contained within the microcosm of Elizabeth Drury, these lines reveal not just the impossibility but also the irrelevance of locating a governing authority. One cannot say which element governs inside of Drury because answering such a question is pointless, not just impossible: either we already know this authority or its identity is irrelevant. In effect, this passage shows that behind analysis always lurks the desire to determine who governs, thus transforming knowledge of the world into control of that world. Donne suggests, in

contrast, that universals are not laws that rule particulars; and he does so in order to wrest our knowledge of the world away from a system fundamentally contaminated by questions of authority and power.<sup>9</sup>

In this sense, Donne's *Second Anniversarie* grapples with and, ultimately, rejects the ideological blueprint of royal progresses, designed as they are to demonstrate and display rule. The *Anniversaries* do not affirm recollection and recognition as the primary aims of poetry (or education), and neither do they support an epistemology in which universals govern particulars. As such, the poems' use of repetition does not signal the authoritative drumbeat of spectacular power but rather a refusal to allow the easy leap from signs in their immediate presentation to more mystical sources of authority (whether universal categories or the body of the monarch) that undergird them. In fact, *The Second Anniversarie* implies that we misread a progress when we imagine it as a representation of something else, whether the cyclical display of royal authority or the unfolding of a developmental plan. For Donne, such an interpretive gesture always presumes precisely what is at issue: how to perceive and learn from the temporal movement that occurs right in front of our eyes.<sup>10</sup>

Donne's poem attempts to thwart an empiricism that always knows where it is headed—toward governing resemblances and overarching regulations, the timeless understanding that Grossman anatomizes. Thus, it replicates a philosophical controversy about the nature of perception and virtuous action that extends back at least to Aquinas. Terry Eagleton describes this debate as a search for a "science of the concrete," a science that ultimately becomes intimately bound up with the aesthetic:

For Aquinas, this [an understanding of individual things] is the function of *phronesis*, which involves a non-intellectual knowledge of concrete particulars, and which is the lynchpin of all the virtues. It is a kind of sensory or somatic interpretation of reality, a point relevant to what I shall have to say later of Aquinas's reflections on the body. Much later, at the heart of the European Enlightenment, a science of the sensory particular will be born to counter an abstract universalism, and its name is aesthetics. Aesthetics be-

gins life as that oxymoronic animal, a science of the concrete, investigating the logical inner structure of our corporeal life. (3)

This science of the concrete has an equally apt formulation in the “radical empiricism” of Gilles Deleuze, which opposes empiricism to a rationalist attachment to final ends.<sup>11</sup> For Deleuze, rationalism carries with it an impulse to finality, of being done with history before it has even begun (see *Expressionism in Philosophy* 149). Neither Donne’s anatomy of degeneration nor his model of the soul’s progress submits to such final confidence.

These are poems that treat process in its particularity, without a guiding telos, either immanent or imminent. For Deleuze, it is the function of final causes within time that fundamentally distinguishes the radical empiricism of Spinoza from its other variants, in the work of Leibniz, for example:

As opposed to that of Leibniz, Spinoza’s dynamism and “essentialism” deliberately excludes all finality. Spinoza’s theory of *conatus* has no other function than to present dynamism for what it is by stripping it of any finalist significance. If Nature is expressive, it is not so in the sense that its different levels symbolize one another; sign, symbol and harmony are excluded from the true powers of Nature. (*Expressionism in Philosophy* 233)

Finality gives a governing order to the world and, in so doing, allows for the transformation of particularity into exemplarity. It is precisely this movement, the movement of an empiricism securely purposive and, ultimately, self-annihilating in its quest for generality, that Donne’s poems attempt to evade. The anniversaries of Elizabeth Drury’s death matter because they are repetition without significance, because they allow for a focus on the abstract processes of degeneration and progress without the purportedly necessary oscillation between particular and general, means and ends, material sign and its correspondent ideational meaning. It is in this sense, then, that Donne attempts a radical empiricism: by turning the perception of abstractions themselves into particularities, not the reduction of these particularities to inconsequential steps or illustrations—i.e., examples.

In Virginia Woolf's estimation, Donne's penchant for particularity challenges the Elizabethan drive toward a seemly, if nonetheless baroque general order—metaphor conceived as a series of harmonious correspondences:

The typical Elizabethan with his love of eloquence, with his longing for brave new words, tended to enlarge and generalize. He loved wide landscapes, heroic virtues, and figures seen sublimely in outline or in heroic conflict [...] Donne's genius was precisely the opposite of this. He diminished; he particularized. Not only did he see each spot and wrinkle which defaced the fair outline; but he noted with the utmost curiosity his own reaction to such contrasts and was eager to lay side by side the two conflicting views and to let them make their own dissonance. It is this desire for nakedness in an age that was florid, this determination to record not the likenesses which go to compose a rounded and seemly whole, but the inconsistencies that break up semblances, the power to make us feel the different emotions of love and hate and laughter at the same time, that separate Donne from his contemporaries. (28-29)

Woolf here highlights Donne's disavowal of the very unifying finality that Deleuze describes. It is not that metaphor and resemblance no longer occur in Donne's work but that their governing aim no longer prescribes their future. Instead of subordinating particularity to such a categorical master, always working in the subterranean depths, Donne treats it as a temporal event with an open future. Particularity is not the repetition, with a difference, of a more general rule or resemblance; neither does it accumulate and allow for later deductions. As such, this poem imagines learning's epiphanies as something more than the revelation that everything novel or surprising has always already occurred, *in potentia*, that what looks like change and progress is really only the adumbration of a plan to which one was not privy. Despite Donne's penchant for thinking of the world through and in metaphor, these poems do not treat metaphor, or art in general, as a mechanism for conditioning phenomena into submission.<sup>12</sup> Figures themselves occur within this world, and not simply as levers for the opportunistic exercise of our own governing power.

### 3. Repetition, Singularity, and Rule

Repetition is pivotal to Donne's pedagogical aims, a fact that we often mistake insofar as we conceive of it as little more than an unfortunate means to an end: e.g., a sop to human intellectual weaknesses or a reaction against loss. *The Second Anniversarie* undoubtedly repeats and modifies the first: that is the point of an annual commemoration. However, the refrains within each poem also attempt something more ambitious than reminding us of something we might happen to have forgotten. They return readers, yet once more, to the central facilitating role that time has in Donne's conception of learning and knowledge.

Joseph Hall's dedicatory poem to *The Second Anniversarie*, "The Harbinger to the Progres," insists that Donne achieves his own progress by repeating and remembering Drury's. More importantly, he characterizes this achievement as a type of immanent wandering that also, simultaneously, issues in elevation, a mounting upwards:

So while thou mak'st her soules Hy progresse knowne  
 Thou mak'st a noble progresse of thine owne,  
 From this worlds carcasse hauing mounted hie  
 To that pure life of Immortalitie;  
 Since thine aspiring thoughts themselues so raise  
 That more may not beseeme a creatures praise,  
 Yet still thou vow'st her more; and euery yeare  
 Mak'st a new progresse, while thou wandrest here;  
 Still vpwards mount; and let thy makers praise  
 Honor thy Laura, and adorne thy laies. (27-36)

The dedicatory poem echoes the evocation of itinerant royal progresses early in *The First Anniversarie*: "When that Queene ended here her progresse time, / And, as t'her standing house, to heauen did clymbe" (7-8). In both of these cases, the royal progress is something more complicated than the repetitive demonstration of power. "Progress" in each case connotes a wandering, repetitive movement, certainly, but it also issues in an elevating change: climbing to her heavenly house in the case of the first poem; mounting upwards in the case of "The Harbinger to the Progres." "Progress," in this instance, does not mean



the inexorable improvement of later centuries. The second poem in particular insists on a repetitive learning that is more than a mere reminder of the same universal laws or a revelation of the momentarily hidden. Repetition does not promise us access to a universal, governing category but rather affirms the importance of temporal reoccurrence (and not just commemoration) for any notion of learning that is not going to run roughshod over particularity.

The refrains in these poems, “Shee, shee is dead, shee’s dead” (183, 238, 326) in *The First Anniversarie* and “Shee, shee is gone; shee is gone” (81) in *The Second Anniversarie*, emphasize Drury’s absence, but in so doing work against the entropic decline or renovating progress that each poem charts. Yet the refrains differ in important respects. In the first poem, the repetition is almost identically stated throughout: “Shee, shee is dead; shee’s dead: when thou knowest this, / Thou knowest [...]” (183-84). The only change is the contraction of “knowest” to “knowst” (238-39, 325-26). *The Second Anniversarie* is a much more multifarious affair. The first instance of the refrain resembles the format of the first poem: “Shee, shee is gone; shee is gone; when thou knowest this [...]” (81). Subsequent iterations, however, dilate this compact formula:

Shee, shee, thus richly, and largely hous’d, is gone [...] (247)

Shee, shee, not satisfied with all this waite,  
(For so much knowledge, as would ouer-fraite  
Another, did but Ballast her) is gone [...] (315-17)

Shee whom we celebrate, is gone before.  
Shee, who had Here so much essentiall ioye,  
As no chance could distract, much lesse destroy [...]  
[...] shee to Heauen is gone [...] (448-50, 467)

Shee, who by making full perfection grow,  
Peeces a Circle, and still keepes it so,  
Long’d for, and longing for’it, to heauen is gone [...] (507-09)

On the one hand, these refrains occur with increasing frequency in *The Second Anniversarie*, implying acceleration, Drury’s or our ever-

quicken approach to heaven. On the other hand, the expansion of apposite modifications between “shee” and “is gone” implies deferral. Together, these elements—the increasing frequency of an ever-expanding refrain—appear less like a static bulwark against decay than as an attempt to incorporate, inside of repetition itself, precisely these moments of expansive subordination.

As Sarah Powrie maintains, Donne uses the new science within his poetry as a way to expand the parameters of a static Neoplatonic world, not merely as a means of critiquing or overturning it:

Donne’s world harmony abandons moderated restraint in favor of unceasing growth and ever augmenting intensity [...]. Rather than refer to the perimeter of a circle to illustrate nature’s designs, Donne describes how the central point of concentrated intensity unfolds outward into an image of rounded fullness. His celestial, seasonal, and elemental world music is represented in growing patterns of circles. (233)

However, in contrast to her reading of the watchtower image in *The Second Anniversarie*, in her essay in this volume, I suggest that Donne does not use the distractions of empiricism to avoid a more important internal spiritual reflection. That is, I tend not to consider the poem as marked by a series of digressions, errors, or failures. *The Second Anniversarie* here too is interested in a type of expansion, in this case expanding the parameters of what can be seen:

Thou look’st through spectacles; small things seeme great,  
Below; But vp vnto the watch-towre get,  
And see all things despoild of fallacies:  
Thou shalt not peepe through lattices of eies,  
Nor heare through Laberinth of eares, nor learne  
By circuit, or collections to discerne. (293-98)

In this case, the watchtower rectifies the lack of proportion inherent in the inductive reasoning that attends empirical perception, not any fundamental weakness in empiricism itself. That is, it is the circuitousness of the collections that Donne here seeks to remedy, insisting that what one sees from the watchtower is a whole entity, in proper

proportion. However, just as importantly, this perception occurs as a single, instantaneous particularity.

The poem, then, does not just offer us a self-reflexive formalist paradox, a digressive and expansive form jarring against a content interested in speed. By co-opting expansion, the refrain, as a formal element, allows us to treat a universal as a particularity, one apprehensible within the formal repetitions that characterize our immanent, routine experiences. The poem treats the apprehension of events as something that occurs within poems, in the present, as we read them. It rejects the notion that literature is primarily the representation of an exterior world of really important occasions and happenings, of things and their qualities. It thus also rejects the notion that we should be looking for verification of our empirical perceptions in another realm of abstract likeness or authoritative power. After all, poems are not mere windows onto more basic empirical stimuli, but contain and are empirical stimuli themselves. Events, then, are alike in the temporal aspect of their occurrence, their adverbs, not in the represented qualities that their components possess upon arrival, their adjectives.

*The Second Anniversarie* does delay a complete, holistic perception into the future. Thus, the poem maintains that it is in heaven that we know immediately: “In Heauen thou straight know’st all, concerning it, / And what concerns it not, shall straight forget” (299-300). But this heavenly knowing is also a live possibility in the present, in part as a consequence of the poem’s decidedly quotidian metaphorical depiction of it. The speaker describes a “long-short Progresse” (219) and a third birth that revolves around a face-to-face perception or even revelation. Significantly, this immediate experience is also very much like everyday empirical perception:

So by the soule doth death string Heauen and Earth,  
For when our soule enioyes this her third birth,  
(Creation gaue her one, a second, grace,  
Heauen is as neare, and present to her face,  
As colours are, and objects, in a roome  
Where darknesse was before, when Tapers come. (213-18)

Donne does not make things easy for us here. The second simile explaining heaven's proximity is temporal: it is as near as objects that appear when light enters a dark room. The first is probably spatial: heaven is as near as colors to our immediate perception. The temporal simile negates what the spatial one initially offered: immediacy as spatially present transparency. The second, temporal simile makes nearness or proximity a matter of arrival, not a matter of presence or experiential readiness-to-hand. And it is this innovation—the rendering of proximity as a matter of temporal expectation as opposed to sensory presence—that enables the apprehension of universals in the present, and not just in a postmortem future of intuitive immediacy.

Once an entity comes into being, it locates itself within an entire qualitative taxonomy. Donne's poem suggests, however, that arrivals themselves are universal. Human beings can perceive the event of arrival, when an entity emerges or reveals itself. When they do so, they are not recognizing a universal concept, but perceiving and apprehending it. It is not just that all being is really becoming, but that becoming is an apprehensible, abstract development that is also perceivable as a particularity. Such a perception of development as it occurs, in the present, is the ultimate effect of the dilated refrains in *The Second Anniversarie*: they reoccur, but without numerical regularity, either in their size or in their frequency. As such, they insist that general patterns themselves are not the endgame of knowledge but rather a way station that requires its own particular attention. The simile on heavenly knowing's temporal arrival also emphasizes this phenomenon: even if universals are always already there, hiding in the dark, it is their temporal appearance, an anticipated illumination or even epiphany, that we know. In this poem, that anticipatory gesture prevents such knowledge from being confined only to a life after death.<sup>13</sup>

Donne, then, presents two apparently different accounts of the human perception of knowledge, salvation, and joy's arrival. It is either right there at hand, immediate like colors; or it is right there at hand, only in need of an enlightening to make it apparent. He initially

insists that arrival itself connotes impermanence: “All casuall ioye doth loud and plainly say, / Onely by comming, that it can away” (485-86). Yet *The Second Anniversarie* also holds out the possibility of a permanent, present arrival of joy: “Ioy of a soules arriuell neere decaies; / For that soule euer ioyes and euer staies” (489-90). These lines do not merely maintain that, once a soul arrives in heaven, its joy is permanent; it is the celebration of arrival that never decays, the very event that Donne’s *Second Anniversarie* purportedly commemorates. Moreover, this joy is not statically repeated: “This kind of ioy doth euery day admit / Degrees of growth, but none of loosing it” (495-96).<sup>14</sup> Just as importantly, this growth is not mere proliferation or addition for “No Ioye enioyes that man, that many makes” (434). Through this simile about coinage, Donne shows that the expansion of which the poem speaks is not merely the colonization of the world via a multiplication of metaphors, analogies, or examples—i.e., the expansion of the domain in which a general rule governs. Instead, expansion connotes an increase in amplitude or intensity, the significance and power of a particular instance.

What would it mean to celebrate an arrival that also constantly expands in this fashion? An arrival, of course, would seem to be punctual, an event that can only be anticipated or lamented after the fact, never experienced. Yet in this poem, it is also an occasion endlessly repeated and capable not only of commemoration but even of symbolic reanimation in the present. That figurative repetition is how we perceive universality in an infinite universe: generalities are not there to act as moderating restraints on particulars, precisely because they would have to anticipate and cover that very spatial and temporal infinity. They are, in sum, neither legislators nor laws. Donne’s *Second Anniversarie* asks us to conceive of universals as a species of expansive repetition, as very much like commemorating an anniversary again, for the second time. Similarity and likeness occur in these poems, but such occurrences do not rely on a fixed table of unreachable, timeless resemblances. In this respect, this second poem ceases to resent the world of which it is a part, relentlessly pawing

after the subterranean truth that would explain, and thus stop, all of this repetition. It also conceives an empiricism that would not be mired in a mere probabilistic particularity, trying to outwit, gamble on, or otherwise lord it over the future.

The radicality of Donne's empiricism resides in his refusal to accept the notion that universals rule particulars, that we should imagine the world and its regulation as analogous to a political model of sovereignty. Moreover, he refuses to treat universality as the telos of particularity. Here too is a radical empiricism in that it refuses to subsume itself under generality, dynamic or static, in the future. The *Anniversaries* do not present phenomena as in need of abstract conditions for their explanation and sorting. A real and radical empiricism would look at the world and observe its universal regulations. It would not look at the world and assume that it lacks rule. Donne's verse, then, imagines universals as abstractions that operate alongside their particular instantiations. Instead of crisis and its ultimate heavenly solution, *The Second Anniversarie* offers an immanent vision of the world's reproduction and regeneration. The result is an empiricism that considers the repeated rearticulation of regularity as part of its ambit, that we reanimate even the laws of nature over the course of their purported discovery.

The poems' refrains and repetitions reaffirm this position by insisting that one is not trying to locate a reassuring series of similarities in order to buttress or form a universal. That is, one honors and seeks to reproduce Drury's virtue only by refusing to chalk it up to a rule. In this respect, the second poem's pedagogy amounts to what Deleuze calls a "true repetition":

For exchange implies only resemblance, even if the resemblance is extreme. Exactness is its criterion, along with the equivalence of exchanged products. This is the false repetition which causes our illness. True repetition, on the other hand, appears as a singular behavior that we display in relation to that which cannot be exchanged, replaced, or substituted—like a poem that is repeated on the condition that no word may be changed. It is no longer a matter of equivalence between similar things, it is not even a matter of an

identity of the Same. True repetition addresses something singular, unchangeable, and different, without "identity." (*Logic of Sense* 287)

The danger that Deleuze describes here is not that of uniformity, but rather of a world in which truly valuable events never really reoccur. *The Second Anniversarie* offers a similar portrait of governing universals: they amount to little more than convenient taxonomic fictions of power, reducing us all to nominalists and authoritarians. Anniversaries ask us to repeat, not merely to commemorate, and in so doing they demand a respect for the singular instance that Donne finds at the heart of both learning and salvation.

In this poem, the refrains work to repeat and rearticulate singular and universal rules. They are not then an insertion of hypotactic order into an otherwise endless paratactic sequence of couplets. Donne's use of the refrain doubles the process of annual commemoration: significant and arbitrary simultaneously, an anniversary gives to empirical perception a dignity founded on the conflation of particular and universal, or rather the treating of universals as particulars. The result is the conception of anniversaries as creative and worthy of attention, precisely insofar as they eliminate the distinction between *chronos* and *kairos*—the postulation of a meaningless slate of quantity over which quality might be overlain. In this respect, *The Second Anniversarie* allows us to imagine empiricism as something other than a system of governance or a mechanism of expropriation: that is, as politics or economics. The poem asks us to stop imagining transformation, renovation, and creation as the imposition of a law or the exercise of a power. In Donne's hands, the perception of progress requires an almost antinomian empiricism, one that might finally allow us to treat a repeated event as something other than an example.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>For a strong condemnation of Donne's abstracting tendencies, see Docherty 227: "Donne's remark here indicates the admission of a guilt: the poem pretends to be about Elizabeth Drury, a commemoration of that person; but in fact it is about an idealized notion of woman and has worked to commemorate the name of Donne rather than that of Drury." For Donne's own retort to Ben Jonson on this matter, recounted in Jonson's conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden, see Jonson 133: "he [Jonson] told Mr Donne, if it had been written of ye Virgin Marie it had been something to which he had answered that he described the Idea of a Woman and not as she was."

<sup>2</sup>For the argument that the *Anniversaries* exhibit structural similarities to Ignatian meditative practices, see Martz 218-48.

<sup>3</sup>For the argument that criticism of *The Second Anniversarie* has not attended adequately to its futural orientation, see Targoff 1494.

<sup>4</sup>All references to the *Anniversaries* cite *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*, vol. 6. Unless otherwise noted, all parenthetical references are to line numbers.

<sup>5</sup>In this respect, my argument echoes Jeanne Shami's contention that Elizabeth Drury's ordinariness contrasts with the poems' tendencies toward hyperbole (see 224). Shami, though, also characterizes Donne's practice in both the *Anniversaries* and the sermons as one of looking for ordinary and accessible examples (see 221). I argue here that these poems exhibit a much more extensive critique of exemplarity than Shami's argument allows.

<sup>6</sup>For the argument that all theodicy is a cruelly immoral denial of the suffering of others, see Levinas 96: "This is pain henceforth meaningful, subordinated in one way or another to the metaphysical finality glimpsed by faith or belief in progress. Beliefs presupposed by theodicy!"

<sup>7</sup>For an account of these conflicting notions of occasion in Margaret Cavendish's verse, see Rogers 190-92, 205. For a discussion of the concept of occasion in *Lycidas*, see Netzley 131-35.

<sup>8</sup>In this passage, Martin is quoting Tayler 30-31.

<sup>9</sup>My argument here has been influenced by Heather Dubrow's recent contention that Donne advances narratives that are not interested in the assertion of power. She bases this claim on the prevalence of conditionals and an indeterminate futurity in Donne (see 66, 68-69).

<sup>10</sup>For an historical account of royal progresses in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, see Bergeron 9-104. For the contention that Elizabethan progresses were occasions for dialogue with the queen, as well as reaffirmations of her authority, see Cole 29, 40-43.

<sup>11</sup>For a succinct critical account of Deleuze's radical empiricism that focuses on his contention that conditions (universals) cannot be bigger than what they condition (particulars), see Smith 240: "[...] to be a condition of real experience,



the condition can be no broader than what it conditions—otherwise it would not be a condition of real experience, capable of accounting for the genesis of the real. It is for this reason that there can be no categories (at least in the Aristotelian or Kantian sense) in Deleuze’s philosophy, since, as Deleuze puts it, the categories cast a net so wide that they let all the fish (the real) swim through it. But this requirement—that the conditions not be broader than the conditioned—means that the conditions must be determined along with what they condition, and thus must change as the conditioned changes.”

<sup>12</sup>I am indebted to an email exchange with Jason Kerr for this formulation.

<sup>13</sup>For the related argument that *The Second Anniversarie* postulates a continuity between heaven and earth, see Shami 227-28.

<sup>14</sup>DiPasquale argues that these lines imply that “human beings can enter into a mode of existence in which both they and time are transformed, a state in which ‘accidental things,’ such as the duration of an event, ‘are permanent’” (236). She also maintains that Donne’s verse consistently depicts the Thomistic notion of aeviternity—a dynamic permanence, characteristic of angels, midway between an eternity outside of time and temporality’s constant substantial turmoil (see 227-29). My argument echoes hers in suggesting that Donne does not seek a transcendent universality or eternity outside of immanent temporal changes.

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