greater attention.

The author notes that Donne’s devotional verse, in contrast to the poetry of George Herbert, “has still not seen a book-length study” since the scholarship of Barbara Lewalski (31). One can hope that other scholars will address this unhappy lacuna in the years ahead. Though his study only considers selected sacred poems, David Marno’s *Death Be Not Proud*, in laying such a massive scholarly foundation, gestures in a hopeful direction. The seventy additional pages of endnotes will reward the curious reader with a bounty of historical, philosophical, literary, and theological data—opening promising new areas of inquiry.

In an age in which attention deficit disorder appears to be a chronic and universal malady, *Death Be Not Proud* deserves special notice for recovering ancient and early modern attention exercises, which not only invite us to read Donne afresh, but which may also help us to consider other writers’ works with finer and more fruitful attention.


There was a time when the poets told us what to read. Poetic canon making may be an interest of the scholar, especially today, but scholarly rigor does not necessarily entail the kind of aesthetic sensitivity that can draw out the lines that poets will take and follow. Enthusiasm for what we might call a poem’s aesthetic attributes sharply rises and falls with academic fashion, and the paths of poets as they burrow and borrow only occasionally align with the interests of the academy. With the ascendancy of the poet-critic in the middle of the twentieth century, however, things were different—for a while. George Gascoigne and Fulke Greville, for instance, were actively promoted by critics like Yvor Winters, the “sage of Palo Alto.” Winters’s revaluation of the renaissance canon seemed especially suited to produce poets; among his students were Thom Gunn, Robert Pinsky, and Robert Hass, all of whom went on to demonstrate the value of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century verse in their own poetry seminars and workshops. Greville’s poems were rescued from obscurity by Gunn, who put out an edition
Robert Pinsky’s 2013 *Singing School*, a “personal anthology” of seventy-seven poems from throughout history meant to demonstrate “the vital unity of writing and reading,” features not only poems by Gascoigne and Greville, but also single poems by Walter Ralegh, Thomas Campion, Chidiock Tichborne, and two each by the seventeenth-century poets Ben Jonson, Robert Herrick, and George Herbert. Shakespeare and Milton each get one. John Donne, however, makes no appearance.

Working against the enduring resurrection and revaluation of Donne by Herbert J.C. Grierson and T.S. Eliot, Winters asserted in the 1960s that Donne was esteemed for his poetic weaknesses. A. Alvarez, who also championed Gunn, provided a counterbalancing effect of poetic-critical enthusiasm for Donne and the Donnean influence throughout the 1960s and ’70s. In the present era, when the concept of the poet-critic has broken apart at its flimsy hyphen, Donne and Herbert, even more than Shakespeare and Milton, have been the primary renaissance influences on new poetry. These two poet-clerics, motivated as they were by humbler ambitions, have not dominated the canon as Shakespeare and Milton have. They are far less likely to have college syllabi devoted exclusively to their works. But Donne and Herbert nonetheless have been supremely influential to those who have continued the craft of writing poetry.

However, the gradual separation between the aims of scholar-teachers and poet-teachers has left two distinct ways to study Donne and Herbert—and two distinct populations of readers, both of which, it seems, will always find these two poets but will be doomed to think themselves alone in their admiration.

While Herbert has had a far greater share of essays written on him in relation to his twentieth-century poetic imitators (see, for example, the 1994/1995 issue of *The George Herbert Journal*, edited by Jonathan F.S. Post), Donne has been equally influential on “contemporary” poets, if not always studied in a way that reveals this fact. *John Donne and Contemporary Poetry: Essays and Poems*, edited by Judith Scherer Herz, therefore aims to repair both a gap and a rift by offering an assessment of Donne’s particular influence on contemporary poetry that is accessible both to scholars and practicing poets. The impulse is laudable, the
objective is both challenging and urgent, but the result makes a reader wonder if the project is, these days, too idealistic to succeed. Perhaps the two camps have by now pulled too far apart. Perhaps poets do not have the necessary rigor or historical understanding to articulate trustworthy lines of influence, or perhaps scholars do not have the sensitivity or eye for art to turn in a close reading able to elucidate technique. Perhaps there are too few readers who even see a problem with the polarization within literature departments that leads to two groups studying the same poet in isolation. This present collection of essays and poems, indulgent as it sometimes feels and insightful as it sometimes becomes, is foremost intended to produce an arc of enthusiasm for Donne across these poles. But is enthusiasm enough?

The chapters are unusually diverse in focus and design, and the poems that thicken the middle of the book sometimes display signs of their prior life before they were meant to show Donnean techniques. The chapter authors have diverse backgrounds and appear to write for equally diverse audiences. There are essays by poets who are also distinguished Renaissance scholars (Kimberly Johnson, who offers an essay and several poems, and Joseph Campana) that would be appropriate in a specialist journal; there are insightful meditations by poet-critics (Cal Bedient, Alicia Ostriker, and Carl Phillips) who have had a long and productive relationship with Donne; there are relatively fresh poems by poet-critics (Stephen Yenser and Stephanie Burt) who offer brief discussions of Donne’s influence on those poems; there are essays by poets who are known mostly as Donne specialists (Sean H. McDowell); and there are poems by those who are known mostly for being poets (Katie Ford, Molly Peacock, and Rowan Ricardo Phillips). And then there are the usual suspects: Heather Dubrow, who offers a contextualizing essay as well as a separate cluster of “Epithalamia and Aubades,” and Jonathan F. S. Post—both scholars who in many ways and for many years have advanced the notion that poets have something to show scholars.

But at which audience is the collection addressed? Its steep price tag says “scholars” not “poets,” but its content says “probably not scholars of Donne”; even in its digital form, it is too expensive for graduate students to buy, but one hopes they will download it from their libraries. But in appearing to be designed for no audience in
particular, the book perhaps will find one among those who wish to better understand the poets and poet-critics who contributed to the book. Such was certainly the case with the most enduring attempt to demonstrate the depth of contemporary poetry’s debt to renaissance poets, *Green Thoughts, Green Shades: Essays by Contemporary Poets*, edited by Post in 2002. This book features essays on different early modern poets written by famous contemporary poets, including, among others, Phillips, Yenser, and Bedient (who wrote the essay on Donne). It comes as no surprise that this earlier book—referred to in academic parlance as having “anticipated” the present one—has become a reference point for several of the contributors, though the inevitable comparison leaves a reader puzzling over whether the reach of *John Donne and Contemporary Poetry* is hampered by its specificity.

So what does Donne look like when viewed from creative writing departments? The Donne canon is small but lively, consisting primarily of Meditation 17, “Batter My Heart,” “The Flea,” “The Sun Rising,” “A Nocturnal Upon St. Lucy’s Day,” “Go and catch a falling star”—essential poems, all of them. And what does “contemporary poetry” look like when we trace out the Donnean line? Judging from the volume’s two essays (Johnson’s and McDowell’s) that follow what Herz calls the “Donne and Poet X” model (7), those who might be classed in the present-day “school of Donne” turn out to be two poets who died in the past five years: Seamus Heaney and Brett Foster. Yet in just two paragraphs of her introduction Herz gives a sketch of Donne’s tremendous influence throughout the twentieth century, briefly mentioning Joseph Brodsky, Yehuda Amichai, Paul Muldoon, Adrienne Rich, Mark Jarman, and even Bob Dylan’s “Oh, Sister” (mistakenly titled “Sister”). If Stephen Yenser is right to claim that Donne appears “everywhere in recent American poetry” (120), this volume clearly does not hope to be as comprehensive about its subject as its title might lead one to expect.

However, the title’s vague “and” defers the question of what a reader might hope to expect from the volume. A more conventionally focused collection might have studied this line of influence, adding to it substantial examinations of other poets who get mere mention: Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Lowell, James Merrill, John Ashbery, Jorie Graham, Clive James, A.D. Hope, Alice Fulton, Stephen Edgar, as well
as Linda Gregerson and Timothy Donnelly (both of whom were once part of the gatherings that gave rise to this book). And a yet different collection might have discussed how and why Thom Gunn became a less Donnean poet in his middle career, or how Stanley Kunitz works through Donne’s “harsh” metricality to arrive at a concept similar to what Herz herself has brilliantly analyzed as Donne’s “voiceprint.” A different collection still might focus on even more mainstream negotiations with Donne’s canonicity in Billy Collins’s “Memorizing ‘The Sun Rising’ by John Donne” or Van Morrison’s bizarre “Rave on John Donne,” or it might examine the gargantuan presence of Meditation 17 in popular songs such as, say, Paul Simon’s “I Am a Rock” or the Van Dykes’ “No Man Is an Island.”

The essays we do get range widely in every sense. In addition to Heather Dubrow’s articulation of the institutional problems the book seeks to address—which might be all too clear for anyone who has sought this collection out—we have a number of highlights worth anyone’s attention. Carl Phillips’s chapter, “On the Road with Donne,” offers a compelling reading of Holy Sonnet 5 and tempting conclusion that, for Donne, God is “restlessness itself” (27). Molly Peacock’s discussion of Donne’s “vital verbs” demonstrates that the relation of “motion” and “emotion” is based on more than mere sound. Cal Bedient’s essay offers many insights into three aspects of Donne’s rhetorical-poetic achievement: his “verbal gusto,” his “stanza motions”—which like Peacock’s “vital verbs,” constitute “figures of feeling and motion” (181)—and finally his metaphors and images, which are in Bedient’s account the “very axis of [Donne’s] thought” (187). Joseph Campana’s anchoring essay on “turning” as an act and a figure of what he calls “Donne’s Kinetic Poetics” allows him to work through “conversion” and the “turning away” of shame in order to give us, yet again, a Donne whose “concrete poetics derive from a kinetics of motion” (204). This entire collection could be linked by the interest some of its best pieces display in the concept of motion.

Donne’s influence on the collection’s featured poems, however, is sometimes hard to divine, even with the ensuing explanations, which point us to concepts like “mysterious alchemy” (82, 112) just as often as to the more helpful elucidations of Donne’s “medial off rhymes” to be adopted (107) or his absence of “compromise” to be worked
Kimberly Johnson’s wit is undeniably Donnean in poems such as “A Nocturnall upon Saint Chuck Yeager’s Day,” where we can clearly recognize the precursor in Donne, while Ostriker’s “Question and Answer” feels as if it might have a more Herbertian analogue. On the other hand, Stephen Yenser’s “Musing” offers a tremendous amount more than its accompanying process note indicates. The poet’s customary etymological flair and “Yensership,” too, can be aligned with the concept of motion as it offers a “melismatic” distortion of the name Melissa in a wild series of associations brilliantly structured as an epanalepsis starting and concluding with the name Melissa—thus making the poet end where he begun. The poems are most interesting when they perform a feat Donne might have performed rather than imitate something he did do, and the essays are at their strongest when they undertake a careful and close analysis of Donnean technique.

Yet the very nature of close analysis requires that one’s fidelity to the text be matched by fidelity in representing the text. It is deeply regrettable that the publisher of this book did not share the enthusiasm its contributors had for their work. Each essay or clutch of poems is presented with utter indifference to its being a chapter of a physical book; each bears at the bottom of the first page a DOI and other emblems of the brutish efficiency with which the book was made to live in both paper and electronic worlds. After each author’s name there is an icon of a little envelope that, once clicked, presumably would have launched an e-mail to the author—a helpful thing to have while proofs are being prepared on screen, but a comically ineffectual thing to run one’s finger across in a book. But again, this is just an accompanying emblem. Far more troubling is the negligent copyediting. Lines are misquoted (“Dull sublunary sense” [174]), Latin is botched (“Donne redivus” [2]), and, to take one of many examples, the name of a contributor is misspelled—twice—in a single index entry (“Phillios, Rowan Ricado” instead of “Phillips, Rowan Ricardo”). Problems of this scale make one less apt to balk at the batch changes that were haphazardly performed, or at the trouble that was evidently had typesetting even transliterated Hebrew, or at apostrophes turned so as to be confusable with quotation marks, or at punctuation that is simply missing, or at bold type randomly applied, or at book titles that have been mysteriously shorn of their italics. With this kind of
carelessness, ironies abound. Molly Peacock’s essay talks about the implications of a missing word in the first line of Herbert’s “Prayer (I),” yet those responsible for her contributor biography have omitted a word from its first line.

The majority of the pieces in *John Donne and Contemporary Poetry*, whether essays or poems, are linked by their ruminative method, which possibly gives too much authority to personal recollection and self-expression. In our current climate, the expressive liveliness of this unusual volume comes closest to that of a festschrift—for Donne, perhaps, or even for the self as it negotiates with Donne—and as such it suffers from its tendency toward chatty and unhurried discussion. But the benefit of all this is a volume-length colloquy that does not need to frame its revelations with scholarly impersonality. In what is the heart of this collection, the essay by Jonathan F.S. Post assembles three poems to create “a little biographical story” (71) that reflects his own life. Perhaps this is where Donne’s unique resonance can be found. With short poems focused through certain emotions or emotional compounds (“kind pity” comes to mind), he is a writer of poems that are valuable in their very modularity. Those poems offer themselves to be assembled in a unique—Stephanie Burt might say an “inconsistent”—way that in combination makes sense for the individual. The collage we might construct of Donne’s poems makes them things we turn to “in times of trouble” (68). Katie Ford turned to Donne “during a time of [her] own instability” (83). Alicia Ostriker proclaims heritage from Donne by learning from him to “take God personally” (86). Heather Dubrow talks about a “love affair with Donne that started in college” (103). In the case of Rowan Ricardo Phillips, the “Donneness of Donne,” encountered in an inherited copy of *The Love Poems of John Donne*, “bled into” him (112).

Can criticism perform the same expressive function as Donne’s verse? After reading Mark Dow’s chapter, I think this may be possible. Dow’s polymathic argument moves from Hebrew to Malayalam, from Cotton Mather to New Criticism to the linguist Alvin Liberman, then into the intrigues of paraphrase among translators at the United Nations, then on to Bob Dylan, John Cotton, a brief digression into a quote from Expostulation XIX, then to the Hebrew Psalms, then to what Donne called “Sidneian Psalmes,” then the thirteenth-century
Zohar, then an eccentric game of “jinx” Dow used to play with his brother, then to a story about a subway drummer named Bongo, then to Nicholson Baker’s *The Anthologist*, then to the *Bay Psalm Book*, then back to Cotton Mather, then on to reproducing a letter Dow’s mother sent to him “when an ex-girlfriend’s mother died,” then to Kierkegaard’s discussion of inner voices, before concluding by saying, “Often we have something to say. Most of the time we just want to be heard.”


*The Memory Arts in Renaissance England* is a wonderful compendium of excerpted texts ranging over two centuries, from 1509 to 1697. Its distinguished editors—William E. Engel, Rory Loughnane and Grant Williams—have divided the collection thematically into six parts: the art of memory, rhetoric and poetics, education and science, history and philosophy, religion and devotion, and literature. Each part and excerpt comes with a helpful introduction, as does the volume as a whole. The book is unusual on at least three counts: its focus on England as an intellectual sphere separate from Europe, the wide variety of texts sampled, and its inclusive sense of what constitutes the memory arts. It also makes interesting claims, declaring, for example, that “the art of memory as understood in England was much different from the continental tradition [Frances] Yates describes” in her seminal 1966 work, *The Art of Memory* (4). The editors disagree with Yates’s view that “after the 1580s in England the art of memory can be understood as a Brunian phenomenon, infused with occultish energies of Neoplatonism and hermeticism, and innately related to the Italian tradition.” They argue that Yates’s focus on Bruno implies a “univocality” about the memory arts in England that “simply does not accord with the facts” (4). But if Yates errs by engaging with “outliers … writing on the Rosy Cross” and thereby narrowing her focus, this volume may over-compensate by offering a definition of the memory arts so capacious that it encompasses all manner of ways