

P.G. Stanwood. *John Donne and the Line of Wit: From Metaphysical to Modernist*. Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2008. 42 pp. + 8 illus. \$9.95.
 Review by MITCHELL M. HARRIS, AUGUSTANA COLLEGE (SIOUX FALLS).

The first time I was introduced to Paul Stanwood was at a John Donne Society conference about five years ago. Despite being one of the hundreds of graduate students I am sure he has met on such occasions, I never was made to feel as if I were a bothersome addition to his already demanding schedule. While standing in line at a dinner buffet, he politely introduced himself, and then quickly inquired about my research interests, asking probing questions about my then nascent dissertation. Never during this conversation was there a hint of condescension—of the wise master trying to whip the young pupil into shape. Professor Stanwood received my ideas with what seemed to be a genuine interest throughout the course of the entire dinner evening, kindly offering suggestions that might be of great benefit to me. He was both gracious and reassuring. While I cannot speak for Professor Stanwood, I am sure a part of his willingness to talk to a young graduate student throughout the course of an evening in which he could have been reconnecting with good friends and colleagues already established in the field was that the conversation with a young graduate student gave him one more occasion to experience the joy of discussing John Donne, the other “metaphysical” poets, and the deep history of the scholarly work surrounding them. I remember walking away from that dinner conversation thinking that all graduate students should be so lucky as to meet a Paul Stanwood on such occasions.

And if ever a book could come close to capturing such an experience, it would be Stanwood’s pithy *John Donne and the Line of Wit: From Metaphysical to Modernist*. Here, he maintains much of the conversational tone used in the 2008 Garnett Sedgewick Memorial Lecture—the lecture resulting in this short monograph—at the University of British Columbia. Stanwood sets out to demonstrate, in his words, “how Donne’s legacy affected his own time but also how it helped to distinguish another time, much closer to us” (11). This legacy, he maintains while borrowing from “F. R. Leavis’s fortunate phrase,” is “the line of wit” (11). If Donne is to be considered a witty poet, then Stanwood’s task is to eloquently and cogently articulate the very

meaning of wit and show his readers how those of Donne's time were drawn to it and, subsequently, how it came to have a lasting impact on modernity. This is no small task, and that Stanwood delivers on his promise in roughly thirty pages is a marvelous feat.

He begins by reminding his readers that the term "metaphysical" was first used disparagingly, if not derisively, by John Dryden to describe a number of poets from the early seventeenth century. Yet Stanwood is quick to point out that Dryden's own thoughts on wit and "metaphysical" poetry were, in some ways, self-contradictory—that is, when Dryden argued that "The composition of all Poems is or ought to be of wit" (qtd. in Stanwood 12), he was partly defining "what we have usually come to recognize as the necessary constituent of metaphysical poetry" (12). Indeed, if there was a revolt against metaphysical wit in the eighteenth century, it was not necessarily a revolt against that which was expressed by Donne. Stanwood reminds his readers that Dr. Johnson's chief objections to metaphysical poetry were largely based upon examples "of false wit" that he culled from Cowley, "and they prove not so much the general inadequacy of the metaphysical poets as the ineptness of Cowley himself" (13). He thus focuses on those metaphysical wits who were celebrated in their time, but are largely forgotten in our own, thanks in much part to Dryden, Johnson, and Alexander Pope (but perhaps for good reason): Cowley, John Cleveland, and Edward (Lord Herbert of Cherbury).

After demonstrating how such wit deviated from Donne's, Stanwood goes on to show his readers that, while largely ignored during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Donne's "metaphysical" predilections and "line of wit" were given new life in the twentieth century, largely through the "pioneering efforts of H. J. C. Grierson" and the "oracular judgements of T. S. Eliot" (21). He then traces Donne's influence from Eliot to "the Fugitives,"—John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate, "and like-minded writers, who for a time worked closely with one another" (23). Of course, most readers will better recognize the Fugitives as the "new critics." However, Stanwood does not focus on the critical work of the Fugitives, but rather their poetry and its close resemblances to Donne's "line of wit." Moreover, he demonstrates how Donne's legacy—vis-à-vis the Fugitives—continued to influence the early poetry of writers like Randall Jarrell, John

Berryman, and Robert Lowell during the twentieth century. And it is this very aspect of Stanwood's monograph that readers will most appreciate. After the explosion of theory and the rise of the culture wars, the new critics are largely remembered for their scholarship, not their poetry. Stanwood, however, gently refocuses our attention, reminding us of a story that is often no longer told, let alone heard.

Jennifer Summit. *Memory's Library: Medieval Books in Early Modern England*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008. x + 336 pp. + 8 illus. \$35.00. Review by WILLIAM E. ENGEL, THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH.

Jennifer Summit has done for the early modern English library what Anthony Grafton and Meagan Williams recently have done for the early Christian library of Caesarea. While their study explores the pioneering organizational bibliographic techniques of Origen and Eusebius later emulated by Jerome, Bede, and Erasmus, Summit focuses on the Reformation and how we are the inheritors of textual practices that developed between the two centuries bookended by Duke Humphrey and Robert Cotton. This painstaking study of the place of medieval manuscripts in the formation of the important libraries of England provides fresh insight into how primary sources have come down to us and gives us new ways to consider their origins.

While interest for readers of this journal initially may reside in Summit's treatment of Cotton's instrumentality in the generation of seventeenth-century prose and in Bacon's close connection to Thomas Bodley, there are many other insights to be found in the chapters leading up to her analysis of "premodern ideas about libraries as a place of active making" (237). Bacon, for example, is situated at the end of a long line of writers beginning with Lydgate and including More, Elyot, Spenser, and Camden, "for whom writing about libraries was a way of theorizing and imagining the objects, shapes, and limitations, of human knowledge" (201). Along the way we encounter a series of case studies that highlight the contributions of Higden, Stow, Speed, Weever, Selden, and Ussher. Throughout Summit scrupulously clarifies the extent to which libraries are to be considered narrative-producing