

astounding tolerance toward his Italian Catholic hosts and their co-religionists” (81).

Martin is very perceptive in exploring the connections between Dante’s Beatrice, Petrarch’s Laura, and Milton’s Eve. She does, however, place too much significance on Milton’s (perhaps fictionalized) encounter with Amor in *Elegia Septima*, turning Milton into a woe-begone Petrarchan lover: “Like Dante’s initial vision of Amore, Milton’s experience—although highly fictionalized—signals a key turning point in his life. He now recognizes that the onset of manhood but does not mean liberation but submission to the feminine principle” (188). I can’t fathom how Martin derived such a conclusion from Milton’s dreamy erotic experience!

Martin speaks eloquently on Reformed and Roman Catholic doctrine, the Council of Trent, Roman politics, Neoplatonism, and possible Italian sources for Milton’s Grand Style. She has written an ambitious, controversial, eloquent study of the relation between Milton and all phases of Italian culture.

David Marno. *Death Be Not Proud: The Art of Holy Attention*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016. xi + 315. \$40. Review by DARRYL TIPPENS, ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY.

If literary criticism at its best awakens one to fresh ways of seeing old texts, makes insightful connections previously missed, or broadens the horizon of interpretation, then David Marno’s study of John Donne’s Holy Sonnets counts as a major new book in the world of Donne studies, as it delivers admirably on all counts. In this phenomenological approach to the Holy Sonnets, Professor Marno takes the reader on a long and historically rich journey through major philosophical, religious, and literary sources to demonstrate that early modern philosophers knew something that contemporary scholars generally do not, namely that religious practices, sacred poems, and thinking are related matters: “early modern projects of devotion, devotional poetry, and philosophy had a shared interest in holy attention” (218).

“Attention” holds a particular meaning in Marno’s study, transcending the modern psychological sense of a faculty of the mind (“the mind’s capacity to focus” 227). Employing theological and philosophical insights from late antiquity to the early modern period, Marno maintains that in its seventeenth-century context “attention” signifies both a disposition and a practice. It is:

...both the beginning and the end of philosophy, a disposition necessary to start thinking, and a disposition that is the result of thinking. In this book, I have tried to show that the precedent for attention’s role in thinking is holy attention’s role in prayer and poetry. By making attention a foundational concept in their philosophical and scientific systems, seventeenth-century thinkers such as Descartes and Malebranche participated in the process of appropriating a religious ideal...for them the devotional associations of attention as a practice and as a disposition were still primary. Their philosophies simultaneously enact the art of holy attention and begin the process of secularization. (227-28)

Malebranche’s claim that philosophical thinking is a form of devotion is central to Marno’s project: “The mind’s attention is a natural prayer that we address to the internal Truth, so that it may reveal itself to us. But this sovereign Truth doesn’t always answer our desires, because we do not know how to pray to it” (1, 229). With the essential connection between early modern philosophy and Christian devotional practices in mind, Marno finds much to say about Donne’s Holy Sonnets, which can be read as both lyrical prayers and attention exercises, simultaneously manifesting innate challenges to holy attention and providing the means to overcome them.

In Marno’s approach to Donne’s religious poems, doctrinal content recedes in importance: “propositional knowledge is subordinated to devotion, and devotion itself becomes a form of knowledge” (131). The critic employs a literary-critical approach called *epochē*, which entails a suspension of judgment, allowing the sonnets to “raise their own questions about their historical and conceptual contexts.” The reader, then, “instead of making assumptions about the ontological status of any entity the texts refer to (the ego, God, the resurrected body) ... [tries] to rely on the poems’ language to recover how these entities are

construed in and by the poems" (34). While Marno acknowledges that Donne's sonnets "gesture toward a theological concept or devotional practice whose understanding necessitates going beyond the poem itself" (34), a phenomenological approach liberates the reader from the need to establish Donne's particular theological orientation in any particular work. Instead, the book privileges "the literary over other types of evidence" (5).

Marno is devoted to a close reading of Donne's religious poetry "to see how it might confirm or problematize the conceptual or historical information [gathered] from external sources" (34). The poems do not "posit propositionally anything about their references," Marno maintains, but serve as "representations of their speakers' thought experiments" (34). Donne "audaciously experiments with a poetics whose ultimate aim is not only to cultivate attention or to depict the struggle with distraction, but to actually achieve a state of intransitive attention. This objective sets Donne's poetry apart from virtually all of its precedents" (145).

To demonstrate that the poems "are *already* phenomenologies" (34), Marno offers close readings of selected Holy Sonnets and "La Corona." "Death be not proud," is analyzed with particular care twice—first in Chapter 1 and again in Chapter 7. The author shows how the art of attention works:

...Donne's poems are meant to be devotional *proofs* insofar as their purpose isn't just to allow a speaker to think a Christian doctrine but also to think it with cognitive certainty. This suggests an unusual sense of proof. In the poems, the doctrine appears certain, not when it is logically or empirically proven, *but when the speaker experiences it as a thought occurring to him*. Since this experience occurs within and because of the poem's attention exercises, the poem turns out to be a type of proof that provides evidence only insofar as it is being attended to. In other words, the poem is a proof that cannot be abstracted from the act of thinking it. (4, emphasis added)

Thus, the Holy Sonnets offer:

...insight not only into the history and phenomenology of holy attention, but also into how the protocols of liter-

ary close reading are themselves influenced by devotional precedents. In other words, what is at stake in attending to Donne's poems isn't just the knowledge we might gain from them but also how we gain that knowledge. (5)

Donne's sacred lyrics, to summarize, can be understood (and experienced) as both attention exercises and experiments in poetry.

By appealing to diverse sources—including the epistles of St. Paul, the works of Augustine (especially the *Confessions*), various ascetic figures, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Catholic spiritual exercises (especially those of Ignatius of Loyola) and Protestant prayer manuals—Marno demonstrates how vast and enduring in the West has been the anxiety over (and the need to ameliorate) humanity's incapacity to attend. Distraction is Augustine's preoccupation, and it is Donne's too. The Holy Sonnets "tend to dwell in distraction" (152).

Marno's argument is presented in seven chapters with a concluding Coda. In Chapter 1 ("The *Pistis* of Faith") Marno articulates Donne's model of devotion. The goal of "Death be not proud" is "to provide a radically subjective proof, a proof that is certain because it pertains only to the subject" (35). The poem allows the speaker "to think a religious doctrine with a certainty that is subjective and existential" (33). In Chapter 2 ("The Thanksgiving Machine") Marno argues that thanksgiving is "a telos inherent to the devotional life" (65), and "Death be not proud" is a thanksgiving poem. Marno faults past critics for failing to note how central thanksgiving is to Donne's devotional poetry: "thanksgiving is the end of the devotional poem" (66). Chapters 3 and 4 ("Distracted Prayers" and "Attention Exercises") survey various late antique, medieval, and early modern works concerned with attention and distraction. In Chapter 5 ("*Extentus*") Marno explores an Augustinian theme pervasive in the West, namely that, as creatures of flesh and blood, situated in space and time, humans are necessarily subject to distraction. Donne too feels the inevitable "scattering of the self" and seeks "to overcome distraction by poetic means, by turning distraction against itself" (37). In chapters 6 and 7 ("*Sarcasmos*" and "The Spiritual Body") we learn that Donne is riveted to the problem of the physical body's distractions, but finds that the inattentive fleshly body (*sarx*) can be transcended through the recognition of a "spiritual body" not subject to distraction (199-201).

Marno's knowledge of Scripture, the Christian tradition, philosophy, and rhetoric is considerable, but his close readings may not always convince. His analysis of "At the round earth's imagined corners" is a case in point. The author cites the poem as evidence of the narrator's distraction, evident in the poem's discrepancy between form and content, with its dramatic break between the octave and the sestet. Many critics have noted the abrupt shift between octave and sestet, but Marno notes an earlier fissure in lines 7-8, where the narrator includes living believers ("and you whose eyes / Shall behold God, and never taste death's woe") in the scene of the Last Judgment.

Why are the living imagined as present with the dead? Marno wonders. And how can the narrator order the living to rise? Marno states what seems obvious: "those who are not dead yet...can therefore hardly 'arise'" (156). The living belong to "a category that does not really belong there" (156), Marno argues. This seems like an odd position to advance, given that Scripture and Christian tradition suggest otherwise. According to St. Paul, "the quick and the dead" belong together at the Eschaton, both rising in the air, sequentially—first the dead, then the living:

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with voice of the Archangel, and with the trumpe of God: and the dead in Christ shall *rise first*. Then we which are alive, and remaine, shalbe caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the aire." (1 Thess. 4:16-17, emphasis added)

Marno calls the inclusion of the living in this scene an "accident," "an anomaly," one of the poem's "mistakes," evidence of "the inattentive collapsing of the living with the dead" (159). However, the Bible declares that the "quick and the dead" appear together at the Last Judgment (2 Timothy 4:1). This theme is repeated in the Nicene Creed and the Book of Common Prayer, a fact not lost on Donne. In Sermon XXV, preached on Easter Day, Donne reminds his hearers that at every service the faithful recite these creedal words: "He will come again to judge the quick and the dead." Donne elaborates: "That Christ shall judge quick and the dead, is a fundamental thing. We hear it in St. Peter's sermon, to Cornelius and his company, and we say it every day in the Creed, He shall judge the quick and the dead."

Marno asks: “What could have caused the apostrophe [the prayerful appeal to God in the sestet], what might we find behind the poem’s *volta*?” (156). A plausible answer is that the transition at the *volta*, rather than signaling distraction, instead mirrors the devotional practice that meditation on the Last Judgment naturally serves as a prompt for a change of heart. The sestet, rather than presenting “a sudden withdrawal from the apocalyptic tone,” is a fulfillment of it. According to a longstanding meditative tradition, reflection on the “Four Last Things” (death, judgment, heaven, hell) is intended to stir the heart to repentance, which is exactly what happens in the sestet. The sonnet demonstrates attention, one might say, not distraction.

Despite these reservations about the author’s interpretation of “At the round earth’s imagined corners,” he deserves praise for creatively linking devotional practices, philosophy, and religious poetry. *Death Be Not Proud* is “a book about poems that pray, prayers that think, and thinking that attends, a book that tries to extend Donne’s poetic invitation to rethink each of these three categories” (38). We owe the author thanks for presenting a new account of attention’s (and distraction’s) role in some of Donne’s best-known sonnets. His arguments are finely wrought, useful not only to students of Donne and early modern literary studies, but also to others engaged with questions of philosophy, literary interpretation, and even pedagogy. (Marno’s work illustrates the relevance of Simone Weil’s prescient insight in *Waiting for God* that “devotional models of attending should serve as models for modern thought in education, ethics, and philosophy” 38.)

I recall a memorable lecture at Pepperdine University some years ago by Lee Shulman, former President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, who explained how his own intellectual formation began at an early age through intensely close readings of Talmud and Torah. He claimed that those early reading exercises in yeshiva were superb training for graduate school research. Franco Moretti observes that close readings are, “At bottom...a theological exercise” (32). Marno similarly invites readers “to consider the devotional precedents of literary criticism and to compare the kinds of knowledge devotion and literary criticism are supposed to yield” (35). Marno’s claim that “the modern protocol of close reading” has been much “influenced by devotional precedents” (2, 25) deserves

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.

Judith Scherer Herz, ed. *John Donne and Contemporary Poetry: Essays and Poems*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. xiii+221 pp. \$99.99.
Review by NICHOLAS D. NACE, HAMPDEN-SYDNEY COLLEGE.

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 reevaluation 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