

A. D. Cousins and Damien Grace, eds. *Donne and the Resources of Kind*. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002. iv + 150 pp. \$35.00. Review by GRAHAM ROEBUCK, MCMASTER UNIVERSITY.

“The first book to study Donne’s writings in verse and prose chiefly in relation to ‘the resources of kind,’” the editors claim (5). The phrase is Rosalie Colie’s, the title of her 1973 study of Renaissance genre theory, and, in some respect, this collection of nine essays is a tribute to her work. Only three of the contributors, however, mention this and of these, two are the editorial bookends: A. D. Cousins and Damien Grace. Genre is an elastic concept here, more like intellectual wallpaper, perhaps, than doctrine. Grace allows that genre is often “merely supporting,” although it has been “central to Donne controversies . . . if not always acknowledged” (138-9).

Introductory essays are seldom highly rewarding for writer or reader. Cousins attempts to avoid this problem by pursuing his interest in Donne’s poetic genealogies before doing the dutiful bit: the young Donne puts his coterie on notice that he is the new “English Ovid” and the new “Marlovian poetic voice” (11). Unfortunately, the point is undeveloped, un-echoed in the essays that follow. Earl Miner’s elegant and restrained essay adopts a “dialectical approach” (24) to tensions in Donne’s poetry between truth and decorum. It is not a simple dialectic, for in a world “fractured by religious disputes” (26), decorum itself can become the instrument of truth, and the violations of old decorums “reveal new truths” (28). Miner neatly engages the reader’s attention with his analysis of a Donne letter to the Countess of Bedford, which is “without any discernable meaning beyond notice of itself” (29): a case in which decorum is itself the meaning. When Donne “means,” and when he conveys absence of meaning is a fascinating question in recent Donne studies, to which this is a fine addition. Professor Miner’s comment that we are “hard pressed to understand” rank,

hierarchy, and degree (29), as if to a freshman class, may sound somewhat unsophisticated here, but it turns out to be pertinent to some other pieces in the volume.

“Mannerist Donne”—L. E. Semler’s essay—takes us into the world of Donne’s understanding of aesthetics and the relationship of poetry to visual arts via an “examination of some of Donne’s poems [that] will allow non-visual formal legacies a natural enrichment derived from aesthetic meanings accessible to Donne in the 1590s” (40). It is not an easy journey, perhaps because the limited canvas of an essay is over-crowded with concepts, formulae, lists of rhetorical terminology and jargon, as well as invocations of Italian painting and of Isaac Oliver’s drawings, characterized as “brilliant” (44) and “astonishing” (48), but not reproduced on the page. Semler’s awareness that his prose mimics the mannerist’s “*horror vacui*,” and Donne’s own practice, particularly in the verse epistles and the Elegies (central to the argument), is perhaps signaled by frequent attempts to clarify: “in other words,” “put shortly,” “quite simply,” etc. But he also directs the reader to his *The English Mannerist Poets and the Visual Arts* (1998) where these concerns are dealt with in greater detail.

Poetry as a construct of cultural pressures and anxieties is Heather Dubrow’s perspective on Donne’s Elegies and the ugly-beauty tradition. As do Miner and Semler, Dubrow discusses “The Anagram,” drawing attention to its latent male rivalry—a rivalry emphatic in “The Comparison,” which she selects as the most interesting in the tradition. For Semler “The Anagram” is the locus of Donne’s “theory” that “bodies are no more nor less than language” (51); for Miner it shows how a truth shatters a decorum (25). Dubrow, however, is not going to let Donne so readily off the hook. The charge is “Misogynistic antagonism towards all women” (67). Misogyny is the *leitmotif* of the essay and of Donne himself (if you are persuaded), that “resident alien in the discourse of Petrarchism” (59). In an interesting treatment of “The Autumnal,” Donne is seen trying to control his anxieties and fears through his “usual linguistic games” (61). But why note a critical source to

establish the freshman insight that the *carpe diem* theme has to do with fears of mortality? Dubrow reminds herself that “one should not neglect the element of play . . . the light-hearted . . . playful wit” (62), but this does not detain her in her search for more troubling anxieties. Is Donne a skillful manipulator of ironies and contradictions as “literary curators” argue, or is poetry “another shard of a warring culture”? (68).

N. H. Keeble, on Donne and the Renaissance love lyric, makes one hear the resounding dissonance between the heading “Songs and Sonnets” and the poems so labeled. He points out that the lyric is not a genre but, with a nod to Earl Miner, a “mode.” “Lyric” would not, as a noun, be known to Donne, and Puttenham “knows of lyric poets, but they write songs and ballads, not lyrics” (71). Keeble argues that Donne “declines the lyric mode” (73). Outbidding Dubrow’s “resident alien” status for Donne, Keeble’s Donne has “only disdain” and “contemptuous derision” (76) for Petrarchism. This argument leads to the powerful statement that “each successive poem in the collection finds another way to declare itself not a sonnet,” thus rendering a blow to the Renaissance sonneteering tradition that “proved fatal” (77). What then can we say of the voice of these poems? For Keeble, Donne is not troubled by anxieties, but “untroubled by contradiction,” as “chameleon like,” he tries on “a succession of masks” (82). This finely-honed essay concludes by drawing a line from Donne to Browning’s monologues to Eliot’s equal generic inappropriateness in “according J. Alfred Prufrock a love *song*” (82).

When “Anglican devotion acquired chic” (87) is the provocative context for F. W. Brownlow’s reading of *Holy Sonnets*. This fine revisionist study makes us think afresh about what is going on in these poems and in “*La Corona*”—a body of work that Brownlow, following Gardner, dates from 1608 and characterizes as responding to changing court tastes and patronage. Donne is still a man of honor (the importance of Dennis Flynn’s work is acknowledged) for whom the Church is no fit place. Brownlow’s close inspection presents a Donne not caught up in theological debate or

soteriological angst, but rather in a “style and mode of self-presentation [that] reveal the influence of the theater” (94), one who “shows no interest in the details of his sins” (98). “As due by many titles . . .” is characteristic in that “nothing at all happens . . . despite its urgent opening” (95). Nevertheless, the sonnets are neither frivolous nor empty: the plight of the solitary soul is their ground, and their purpose is “taming terror” (100). In Brownlow’s deft handling of Donne in an existential frame, neither the outrageousness nor the wit of these works is the least diminished.

Marea Mitchell in “Gender, Genre, and the Idea of John Donne” arraigns Donne for the *Anniversary* poems as one might in a freshman class: the dead body of the girl will not sustain the philosophical weights . . . the hyperbolic flights,” etc. (108). That Elizabeth Drury was “trapped in lines studied primarily because of Donne’s renown for other verse” (113) conveys Mitchell’s engagement with the poems. Again: “the *Anniversaries* are generally studied because they belong to Donne and to his canon, and therefore have to be accounted for” (114). Unfortunately, this accounting betrays no awareness of the wealth of scholarship accorded these poems (see the Variorum edition of Donne, vol. 6, 1995), or of the major study by Edward Taylor, *Donne’s Idea of a Woman* (1991), nor even of the judgment of Milgate, whose edition Mitchell cites: “Donne’s most sustained compositions in verse . . . the finest long poems written in English between *The Faerie Queene* and *Paradise Lost*” (xxxiv). How would Mitchell account for Donne’s engagement with that body of knowledge, which, as scholars have long recognized, gripped the minds of Donne’s contemporaries?

Eugene D. Hill’s essay is intriguingly titled “Donne the Snake Handler.” Its focus is the Donne sermon of January 25, 1629 on Acts 28.6: “They changed their minds and said, that he was a god.” Hill makes much of the connection of the Dean to Paul, and he also provides a vivid and persuasive context for the sermon. This is historical scholarship at its best. Hill expands the work of Jeanne Shami on Donne’s “double-edged” politics, repeating her admonition about reading the sermons: we don’t read poems literally; why do

so with sermons (120)? There are so many rich, suggestive strands to this study, written with exemplary clarity—and an appropriately dramatic flourish—impossible to summarize in this space. Donne is on dangerous ground that prefigures the Civil Wars: a context here given its due force. A riveting study.

The collection is lightly edited: some essays have “Works Cited,” others do not. The index is the bare-bones sort. There are stray italics, etc. Although not for freshmen nor the “general reader,” it is a valuable addition to Donne studies.

Walter Stephens. *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002. xv + 451 pp. \$35.00. Review by THOMAS MOISAN, SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY.

Those drawn to the faintly sensational title of this engaging and learned study are advised not to overlook the end of its subtitle: “the Crisis of Belief.” Closely interrogating an array of documents reporting corporeal interactions of demons and witches from the late Middle Ages and the “early” Early Modern era, Walter Stephens argues that the preoccupations these writings record respond to deep anxieties within the Catholic Church both prior to and during the Reformation about articles of faith and teachings it held to be, but were proving not to be, beyond question. Making a compelling case for a thesis that at a glance might seem counterintuitive, Stephens maintains that the theologians and, as he calls them, “witchcraft theorists” who produced these accounts saw demonic immanence, not as a threat to the tenets of the Church, but as their confirmation.

To be sure, Stephens draws this inference concerning things spiritual from texts highlighted by details decidedly material, from tales of, indeed, demon lovers, or rather, demon fornicators, forcing their attentions upon witches and more unsuspecting humans, and from anecdote involving a variety of other forms of corporeal interaction with, and penetration by, demons, from demonically