A COGNITIVE APPROACH TO JOHN DONNE'S *SONGS AND SONNETS*

Cognitive Studies in Literature and Performance

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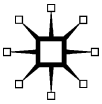

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In Memory of My Father
Dr. Jan Z. Winkelman, MD, z"l
(1942–2007)

The Trumpitt sounding dolfully . . .

Here lies a King, that ruled as he thought fit
The universal Monarchy of wit.

—Thomas Carew, "Elegy upon Donne" (1633)

Wit, understanding in the brain,
Are as the several atoms reign.

—Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle,
"All Things Are Governed by Atoms" (1664)

Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall.

—Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader* (1925)

He who understands baboon would do more toward metaphysics than Locke.

—Charles Darwin, M Notebook (1838)

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Editors' Preface

Noam Chomsky started a revolution in human self-understanding and reshaped the intellectual landscape to this day by showing how all languages have deep features in common. Gone—or least retreating—is the idea that the mind is a blank slate. In its wake, fierce debates have broken out about what the mind is and how it works. At stake are some of the most urgent questions facing researchers today: questions about the relationship between brain, mind, and culture; about how human universals express themselves in individual minds and lives; about reason, consciousness, and the emotion; about where cultures get their values from and how those values fit our underlying predispositions.

It is no secret that most humanists have held fast to the idea that the mind is a blank slate. Not only has this metaphor been an article of intellectual faith, it has also underwritten a passionate moral agenda. If human beings have no inherent qualities, our political and social systems are contingent rather than fixed. Intellectuals might be able to play an important role in exposing the byways of power and bringing about a fairer world. But evidence is rapidly piling up that humans are born with an elaborate cognitive architecture. The number of our innate qualities is staggering; human cognition is heavily constrained by genes and by our evolutionary past. It is now known that we are born with several core concepts and a capacity for developing a much larger number of cognitive capabilities under ecological pressure.

Beyond that bold headline, however, the story gets murkier. Each of the mind sciences is filled with dissonant debates of their own. In her magisterial investigation into the origin of concepts, Susan Carey writes that her goal "is to demonstrate that the disciplines of cognitive science now have the empirical and theoretical tools to turn age-old philosophical dilemmas into relatively straightforward problems."[1] Notice her sense of being on the verge rather than on some well-marked path. The terrain ahead is still unmapped. But notice,

too, her sense that scientific methods will eventually transform fuzzy questions into testable ones.

How brave, then, are language and performance scholars who, driven by their passion to understand how the mind works, seek to explore this new terrain? Brave, but increasingly in good company. The Modern Language Association discussion group on cognitive approaches to literature has grown exponentially in the last decade.[2] And the working session in cognition and performance at the American Society for Theatre Research is flourishing. Many scholars are fascinated by what cognitive approaches might have to say about the arts. They recognize that this orientation to literature and performance promises more than just another "ism." Unlike the theories of the last century, the mind sciences offer no central authority, no revered group of texts that disclose a pathway to the authorized truth. Indeed, cognitive approaches to the arts barely fit under one broad tent. Language-processing, reader- and spectator-response, pragmatics, embodiment, conceptual blending, discourse analysis, empathy, performativity, and narrative theory, not to mention the energetic field of literary Darwinism, are all fields with lively cognitive debates.

Cognitive approaches are unified by two ideas. The first is that to understand the arts we need to understand psychology. Humanists have uncontroversially embraced this idea for decades, as their ongoing fascination with the now largely discredited theory of psychoanalysis suggests. Now that psychology has undergone its empiricist revolution, literary and performance scholars should rejoice in the fact that our psychological claims are on firmer footing. Second is the idea that scholarship in this field should be generally empirical, falsifiable, and open to correction by new evidence and better theories—as are the sciences themselves. Of course this epistemological admission means that many of the truth claims of the books in our series will eventually be destabilized and perhaps proven false. But this is as it should be. As we broaden our understanding of cognition and the arts, better science should produce more rigorous ideas and insights about literature and performance. In this spirit, we celebrate the earlier books in our series that have cut a path for our emerging field and look forward to new explorations in the future.

Blakey Vermeule
and
Bruce McConachie

Preface

In navigating disciplinary boundaries, I have striven to find a workable balance. I have reminded myself that my primary audience of graduate students and professors schooled in literary studies is likely to be somewhat unaware of the current state of play in the biomedical sciences. Given that, there may have been no way to avoid getting too technical for some littérateurs, too eclectic for others, and too basic for advanced sci-guys. I hope my explanations, along with the endnotes and Appendix, directing interested readers to helpful work in the various subjects I have drawn from, prove to be sufficiently clear.

This book touches on the history of science, philosophy, literary criticism, and other domains of humanistic inquiry, all with their own genealogies, controversies, arcana, orthodoxies, and heresies. I make no claims for inclusiveness or total command of these fields, but I have tried very hard to get things right when I include them to make some point about Donne. But just to be explicit, this book is not meant to be exhaustive: it is not meant to judge whether Donne's outlook on love was more Scholastic or anti-Petrarchan, or which premodern proto-scientists were closest to anticipating contemporary discoveries about atoms. Basically, it is meant to illuminate Donne's amorous verse from a New Humanist perspective. It must then also be pointed out that since the life sciences are currently experiencing exuberant growth and shooting off in many directions, this study should be considered an interim field report, its hypotheses subject to modification as the latest findings are assessed.

In referring to Donne's love poems, I have normalized the spelling *Songs and Sonnets* throughout; examples from the *Elegies* are also treated, and there are occasional invocations from his other writings as well as illustrations drawn from other poets old and new, good and bad. *Songs and Sonets* is nonauthorial; it was first used as a category in the 1635 second edition of Donne's *Poems*, four years after his passing. His editors appropriated the phrase from the *Songes and sonettes*

of 1557, an influential collection of lyric poetry by Surrey, Wyatt, and others (later editions had different spellings), now known as *Tottel's Miscellany* after its compiler. Since it was not authorized by Donne, I have elected not to retain the original orthography. His lines, though, are quoted in the old spelling, which, however idiosyncratic, brings us a bit closer to his pronunciation and sometimes to elements of the author's word play.

Acknowledgments

No man—not even the spiritual descendant of Herr Professor Doktor, the Great Winckelmann—is an island. This is especially true for a published author. Many good souls were instrumental in helping me bring this production to completion, and it is a pleasure, after "all this labor of my penn" as my alter ego Donne once put it, finally to give thanks.

Constance Jordan, Nancy Easterlin, and Abbie Evans all nursed this project along. Rainer Hilscher made suggestions for improvement on several matters, criticism made less stinging by the consumption of a fair amount of strong beer during our conversations. Elva Baca Graham merits canonization for again serving as my patron saint. Everybody in the John Donne Society exemplified knowledgeable collegiality; extra credit goes to Ilona Bell, Siobhán Collins, Theresa DiPasquale, and Chanita Goodblatt for reading rough drafts of my chapters and providing condign commentary. The "twelve golden angels" of my Great Donne senior seminar at Bowling Green State University, spring 2009, also offered significant input. In and around East Hall, Erin Labbie supplied noetic and alimentary nourishment along the way, while Christina Yaniga proved a thoughtful, patient interlocutor, and ineffably more. Many others in Bowling Green, including colleagues, friends, librarians, and students, played a part in moving this study forward too, for which I am much obliged. At my publisher Palgrave Macmillan, my editor Brigitte Shull and her crew, including her able assistant Maia Woolner and two tough-minded anonymous readers, have earned my utmost gratitude for making this book real.

During the years when this manuscript was taking shape, Proud Death took his inexorable toll on three fine scholars who must be remembered. It was a tremendous loss when Adam Max Cohen, z"l, succumbed to cancer; his work on early modern technology and literature remains a model, and our conversations helped a lot. He will

be missed but not forgotten. All who knew them were also saddened by the passing of two other brilliant gentlemen: John Shawcross, editor of Donne's poetry; and New Humanist Denis Dutton. Thankfully, their legacies survive through their books.

The Folger Shakespeare Library, the University of Michigan Libraries, and BGSU's Jerome Library were all welcome places to do research, and I am grateful for the countless quality hours I spent in their stacks and reading rooms. The Westminster Public Library in England graciously sent its precious old copy of *English Posies and Posy Rings* by Joan Evans, published in 1931, across the pond through interlibrary loan, and it was useful for contextualizing "A Jeat Ring sent" in chapter 2. Fortunately it wasn't torn to pieces like the one Donne regretfully apologized for in a Latin verse letter, "De Libro frustatim lacerato." My sincere thanks go as well to the Special Collections staff at the University of Michigan's Hatcher Graduate Library for making various seventeenth-century tomes and their Tixall volumes—"extremely rare" in Jenijoy La Belle's words—available; the latter contain Catherine Thimelby's billet doux, which starts chapter 8, and lots of other good stuff.

Earlier redactions of several sections of this work were delivered as talks: at the MLA Conventions in Washington DC in 2005 and Chicago in 2007, at the University of Rhode Island's splendid symposium on consilience in 2009, at the Ohio Medieval Colloquium in 2009, and at the Donne conference in 2010. I appreciate the feedback and remarks of my attentive audiences at all those venues. Chapter 2 initially saw light in *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* (volume 12, 2011), and I thank the editor, Kenneth Womack, for his assistance and for permission to use that material here. My interpretation of "Farewell to love" found in chapter 5 was published in the *John Donne Journal* (volume 29, 2010), edited by Tom Hester. An earlier version of chapter 7 is copyright © 2009, The Johns Hopkins University Press. This article first appeared in *Philosophy and Literature*, Volume 33, number 2, October 2009, pages 329–44. It was ably edited by Garry Hagberg and the late, lamented Denis Dutton. The cover image, "Royaume d'Amour" (U 998.24.20), appears courtesy of the University of Victoria Art Collections in British Columbia, Canada.

My family and friends were again simply invaluable. My gratitude extends out to all of them as well as to the rest of the far-flung and eclectic support crew and correspondents comprising my *guanxi*. To the swimmers representing the BGSU Falcons or Ann Arbor Masters, and to the other naiads and poolsharks who shared the pain and fun of workouts and meets: Hip hip hooray! Also deserving of special

mention are my "companions of the camp": to the multitalented Second Lieutenant Sarah Sosa Brubaker; to Ralph Hanna III, the embodiment of keen, curious, and idiosyncratic scholarship; to professors Andy Fleck and Barbara Zimbalist, covering the early modern and medieval eras; to Wanda Hartmann Oehrli, BA, MBA, PhD, who diligently answered chemistry questions whenever they arose; to my pet betta Percy Fysshe Shelley; and "to thee, philosophical" Alex Cherup: *¡muchísimas gracias!* I also send a most hearty thank you to all of my *mispocheh*: to the Freedmans and Winkelmans stretching from coast to coast, to my brothers Larry and Jeffrey and their clans, and to my mom the quondam English major. My father—physician and surgeon, jazz musician, raconteur, veteran naval officer, and all-around Renaissance man—unfortunately did not live to see this publication, but he certainly did a lot to generate it, and I hope he would have been impressed with how it turned out.

To give credit where credit is due, this little treatise would have been simply inconceivable without all of the lessons taken to heart from "the profane mistresses" of "my idolatrie" (*HSWhat*, 9–10); *merci* after all, and Godspeed, particularly to M.E.E.P., Chen-Chen, Jules, Blondie, and La Inka.

Finally, I am honored yet humbled to be part of the long heritage of Western humanism and modern science, and this peripatetic scholar relished trodding the pathways laid by the intrepid efforts of those who came before me. In ways great and small I am indebted beyond measure to the teachers and researchers who preceded me, and who passed on their ideas, in some cases ones formulated centuries ago.

Mistakes are mine; I hope that even they can spur the next generation to "doubt wisely" (*Sat3*, 77), and to go forward in search of wisdom.

Abbreviations and References

CCJD	*The Cambridge Companion to John Donne*, ed. Achsah Guibbory
CH	*John Donne: The Critical Heritage*, ed. A. J. Smith
DM	*John Donne's "desire of more": The Subject of Anne More Donne in His Poetry*, ed. M. Thomas Hester
DNB	The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
JDJ	*John Donne Journal*
Marriage Letters	*John Donne's Marriage Letters in The Folger Shakespeare Library*, eds. M. Thomas Hester, Robert Parker Sorlien, and Dennis Flynn
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
Rime sparse	*Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The Rime sparse and Other Lyrics*, trans. Robert Durling
RP	*Romantic Passion: A Universal Experience?* ed. William Jankowiak
Selected Letters	John Donne, *Selected Letters*, ed. P. M. Oliver
Sermons	*The Sermons of John Donne*, eds. G. Potter and E. Simpson
Theory and Criticism	*The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent Leitch
Walton	Izaak Walton, *The Life of Dr. John Donne*

The text of Donne's poetry is that of the Shawcross edition, using the Variorum's abbreviated titles for short quotations or examples not otherwise identified. References to the King James Bible and the Riverside Shakespeare will be cited parenthetically.

Following the usage of linguists, conceptual metaphors are printed in small capitals (e.g., DEATH IS A REAPER), and phonemes are represented according to the standard symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet, so "love" is [l∧v] and "ecstasy" is ['ɛkstəsɪ].