

Elizabeth D. Harvey and Timothy M. Harrison, “Embodied Resonances: Early Modern Science and Tropologies of Connection in Donne’s *Anniversaries*.” *ELH* 80.4 (2013): 981-1008.

John Donne’s *Anniversaries*, written in 1611 and 1612, ostensibly aim to commemorate the death of Elizabeth Drury, daughter of the poet’s patron Sir Robert Drury. In doing so, they take in the whole earth, the sun and stars, music, theology and philosophy in comparisons so wide-ranging and hyperbolic that many, Ben Jonson included, deemed these poems both indecent and blasphemous. In “Embodied Resonances: Early Modern Science and Tropologies of Connection in Donne’s *Anniversaries*”, Elizabeth D. Harvey and Timothy M. Harrison trace a path through Donne’s dense and sometimes obscure poetic imagery using the principle of ‘resonance’. The *Anniversaries*, they argue, express Donne’s epistemological anxieties about new philosophy which “calls all in doubt.” However, through the use of ‘resonance’, the poems also evoke a sense of cosmic connectedness which links the poet, the reader, Elizabeth Drury’s body, and the celestial firmament.

The complex nature of the poems under examination requires Harvey and Harrison to conduct a similarly detailed analysis, with close attention to the contemporary and ancient contexts which informed Donne’s use of comparison as well as the choice of compared objects. The first section of the essay examines the mechanisms of analogy and metonymy, finding the boundaries between the two “porous and elastic” (987). Crucially, the authors argue, metonymy constitutes not only comparison but contiguity between two spheres. Elizabeth Drury’s death, which disturbs and “disfigures” the earth, is thus “less a correspondence of similitude than it is of causality; her departure is a blow, a wound, a loss rooted in materiality” (987). Simultaneous comparison and contiguity likewise underpins the authors’ idea of ‘resonance’; an early modern term connected with musical harmony which in this argument serves as useful shorthand for connections which are both imaginative and material in nature.

Resonance, argue the authors, is written into the *Anniversaries* in numerous ways which engage with contemporary epistemological concerns. These include medical doctrines – the notions of “signatures” and curative “balm” – and natural philosophical ideas, most prominently magnetism. In various ways, ideas about signatures, magnetism and balm are each shown to rely on the notion that individual objects may be linked metonymically – that is, may “resonate” – with larger cosmic or celestial systems. For example, the authors look to the doctrine, initiated in ancient scholarship and developed in the early modern period by Marsilio Ficino and Paracelsus, that earthly bodies (principally plants and minerals) were “impressed” with certain properties of the stars, and that these properties might, albeit sometimes with difficulty, be read in the plants’ “signatures” (990). In these poems, the article contends, Donne highlights the potential of signatures only to assert that the “legibility of astral influences in earthly things” is longer possible, and so “unfolds what it means to connect by imagining a cosmic breakdown in connection” (991). Moreover, it is argued, that pattern of highlighting “resonant” epistemologies and positing their breakdown is repeated throughout the *Anniversaries*. The earth’s nourishing balm is used up, and the world cries out for a “magnetique” force to bring broken elements back together (993). At length, however, Harvey and Harrison show how the poems’ visions of worldly confusion are mingled with others of celestial

ecstasy. While worldly, sensory knowledge might be incomplete and corrupt, Donne's poetry – or, indeed, the body of Elizabeth Drury – may act as the “tuning fork” (1002) via which heavenly harmonies are able to resonate “through the metonymic lattices of flesh” (1002).

It is certainly nothing new to state that Donne's poetry, in particular the *Anniversaries*, is deeply invested in natural philosophical and medical ideas, nor that the poems mix epistemological anxieties with holy ecstasies. Nonetheless, this article provides a particularly richly detailed look at the influence of “new philosophy” upon the poet's consciousness. Moreover, it supplies an engaging argument for Donne's disturbing vision of incoherence existing compatibly with, even facilitating, hopes of a greater coherence between material and celestial realities. Tightly focussed on the *Anniversaries* and their utilisation of Drury's body, the principle of metonymy as both a material and a comparative connection also raises broader questions. The article leads one to wonder: just how widespread such ‘resonances’ might have been in sixteenth and seventeenth-century natural philosophy? How might a tendency toward metonymy in natural philosophical ideas have been socially and culturally influenced? Finally, what resonant frequencies remain to be sounded in early modern literature?

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