Yulia Ryzhik, ed. *Spenser and Donne: Thinking Poets*. **Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019. 248 pp. ISBN 9781526117359. $140.00 hardback.**

Despite overlapping in significant literary output in the 1590s, John Donne and Edmund Spenser have been treated in criticism as passing ships: Donne, a young man fresh out of the Inns of Court, seemingly looks forward to the Jacobean period, and Spenser, in the last decade of his life, embodies the end of the Elizabethan era. As Yulia Ryzhik highlights in her introduction to this collected volume of essays, comparison between these two mainstays of the early modern literary canon is a critical rarity, and when they are bought into conversation it is more often than not to suggest contrasting temperaments. *Spenser and Donne: Thinking Poets* is therefore a very welcome experiment, especially considering the popularity of these two writers for undergraduate and graduate courses on early modern literature, and as the continued subjects of scholarship and attentive close reading. As Ryzhik makes clear from the outset, in beginning its life as two MLA roundtables at the International Spenser Society and the John Donne Society, the volume "showcases a multiplicity of

approaches and points of entry into this area of research" but does not seek to propose a singular "robust theoretical model" (5). She does assert, however, that the central aim of the collection is to "explore and meditate on *how* these poets thought" (5). Immediate shared concerns which emerge from the volume pertain to a wide variety of critical issues, including sources, particularly both writers' engagement with Ovid, Pythagoras, and with continental early modern writers; genre; questions of periodization, particularly loosening the divisions between the Elizabethan and the Jacobean; the role of rhetorical comparison; and wider reflections on the nature of intertextuality.

As a series of prototypes for the comparison of the works of Spenser and Donne, some essays in the volume may perhaps be of more interest to Spenserians. Donne can sometimes be flattened in comparison, particularly due to a tendency in some of the essays to survey Donne's greatest hits at speed: an effect whose origins may lie in the translation from roundtable paper to book chapter. The most successful comparisons in the volume all pay more sustained attention to fewer texts. One advantage of the pairing between Spenser and Donne is that Donne's surreal and understudied poem *Metempsychosis* (c.1600-1616) takes on an unusually starring role: sustained readings appear in three chapters by Richard Danson Brown, Patrick Cheney, and Linda Gregerson. This is likely due in part to Anne Lake Prescott's reading of *Metempsychosis* as a Donnean parody of *The Faerie Queene* in her 2011 essay, "Menippean Donne".[1] Spenser's *Fowre Hymns* (1596) and Donne's *Anniversaries* (1611 and 1612) are also popular subjects, featuring in essays by Christopher D. Johnson, Niranjan Goswami, Patrick Cheney, Ayesha Ramachandran, and David Marno.

Four essays in this volume particularly stand out: Anne Lake Prescott's "Spenser and Donne look to the Continent"; Ayesha Ramachandran's "Cosmic Matters: Spenser, Donne and the philosophic poem"; Ramie Targoff's "Marriage and sacrifice: the poetics of Epithalamia"; and Anne Fogarty and Jane Grogan's "Eliot, Yeats, Joyce, and the modernist reinvention of Spenser and Donne". Ramachandran's essay perhaps most of all embodies the volume's premise of comparing how Spenser and Donne use their poetry to think. Her essay compares the shared response of Spenser and Donne to changing understandings of cosmography, inviting us to think

[1] Anne Lake Prescott, "Menippean Donne," in *The Oxford Handbook to John Donne*, ed. by Jeanne Shami, Dennis Flynn, and Hester Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 158–179.

of Spenser's *Fowre Hymns* and Donne's *Anniversaries* as philosophic poems. Ramachandran's essay also aligns with Anne Lake Prescott's in drawing attention to the continental sources to which Spenser and Donne may have been responding – in Ramachandran's case, Neo-Latin philosophical poetry. The beauty of this essay also comes from Ramachandran's appreciation of how both poets' use of poetic form is integral to the philosophical work of their poems. This leads to fine-detailed observations, such as those concerning the direct inversion of rhyme scheme in the opening of *The First Anniversary* and *The Second Anniversary,* and the recurring rhyme of "all" in *The Second Anniversary*, which creates a sense of universalizing coherence. She argues that the coherence of the texts' form and the connections built by analogy is an important counterbalance to the increasing fragmentation to which they respond: as she writes, "as a 'new Philosophy' calls all in doubt in the *First Anniversary*, poetry, the source of aesthetic coherence, provides the figurative correspondences that assert a new vision of the individual's extension into the cosmos" (141). Her side-by-side comparative close-analysis of Spenser's and Donne's texts feel like some of the most direct and dialogic comparisons in the volume.

Anne Lake Prescott, in a similar vein to her bravura essay on the potential sources of *Amoretti* 67, points to some potential classical and early modern European sources which may have influenced Spenser and Donne.[2] She reminds us to "remember to look to" Europe "when we think of what Spenser and Donne saw, admired, stole, flaunted, wanted, and feared" (117). Signaling part of a theme of the volume, Lake Prescott highlights Ovid as a shared source for both writers; Linda Gregson's chapter in the volume also focuses on both writers' response to the Roman poet of exile. Lake Prescott's essay leans into some of the differences between the writers, emphasizing their different experiences of travel: Spenser did not travel to mainland Europe, whereas Donne did. She notes Donne's frequent use of Spanish sources versus Spenser's interest in medieval sources. She also broadly characterizes the different purpose and style of their intertextuality, suggesting that "Spenser wanted his readers to recognize his clear allusions to famous writers […], but much of what he noticed and recycled in his writings was more a help to his own discourse than something to flaunt" whereas "Donne can seem more explicit, at times indeed flashy" (110). The chapter reflects on the nature of intertextual references, questioning

[2] See Anne Lake Prescott, "The Thirsty Deer and the Lord of Life: Some Contexts for *Amoretti* 67-70," *Spenser Studies*, Vol. VI, (1986), 33-77.

whether sources are always intended to be clearly legible to their readers. The chapter includes a wealth of exciting suggestions for sources for individual texts by Spenser and Donne, such as Stephen Bateman's *Travayled Pylgrime* (1569), which Lake Prescott proposes as a structural source for Book I of *The Faerie Queene*. This work, a translation of the Burgundian Olivier de la Marche's *Le Chevalier Délibéré* (1483), features the journey of a knight and his companion Lady Memory on separate horses, a visit to Error, Pride, Despair, and finally even a heavenly palace. She questions whether the liturgical structure of the *Amoretti* (1595) was influenced by Joachim du Bellay's sonnet sequence *Olive* (1549), which also draws on the liturgical calendar for its structure. She also passingly refers to François Rabelais's *Pantagruel* (1542) as containing an example of a catalogue of imaginary books that parallels Donne's "Courtier's Library" (116). These, and many more illuminating insights, make the chapter useful for those working on any of the individual texts upon which Anne Lake Prescott touches.

Ramie Targoff's essay compares sexual violence in Spenser's and Donne's respective epithalamia. As she powerfully observes, while the contributions made by the two poets to the genre have been compared before:

> what is altogether missing from many comparisons between Spenser's poem to his bride and Donne's "Epithalamion Made at Lincoln's Inn" […] is any attention to the poets' shared invocation of sexual violence, and, specifically, the idea of a bride as fulfilling the role of sacrificial offering (171).

Targoff's essay includes a survey of classical sources for early modern epithalamia. She subsequently contrasts these classical epithalamia, which crucially end outside the closing doors of the bridal chamber, with George Puttenham's disturbing description of the hymn's intention to drown out any cries of pain emerging from the bedchamber, and to rouse the bride in the morning whether she is found "dead or aliue, or maimed by any accident nocturnall".[3] This survey, in and of itself, will provide a useful starting point for anyone working on early modern iterations of this mode of poem. Her subsequent readings of the two texts by Spenser and Donne are some of the most compelling examples of close reading in the volume, including a particularly sensitive (if immensely disturbing) reading of Donne's use of the verb "embowell" (see 181). In

[3] George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (London, 1569) quoted in Ramie Targoff, "Marriage and sacrifice: the poetics of the Epithalamia," 175.

a further extension of the continued Ovidian theme of the volume, Targoff reflects on the implications of Ovidian references in Spenser's *Epithalamion* and draws a mournful fragment of Sappho's epithalamion into conversation with the opening of Donne's "Epithalamion Made at Lincoln's Inn".

Finally, in this volume's tracing of intertextual relationships, Anne Fogarty and Jane Grogan look forward to the modernist reception of Spenser and Donne, illuminating the critical and creative responses to the two poets made by T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, and James Joyce. The treatment of Yeats and Joyce feels particularly timely in its exploration of the two Irish writers' reckoning with Spenser's colonial history and his literary influence. There is also something pleasingly early modern about the role of two crucial gift exchanges of books in changing Yeats's and Joyce's readerly relationships with Donne, which the chapter highlights: Herbert J.C. Grierson's gift to Yeats of two volumes of his edition of *The Poems of John Donne* in 1912, and Harriet Shaw Weaver's gift to Joyce in 1922 of a small volume of Donne's poetry. Yeats's praise of Donne to Grierson encapsulates the ethos of this collection of essays: "the more precise and learned the thought the greater the beauty".[4]

A strength of this volume as a whole, and for undergraduate teaching especially, is that every essay foregrounds the nature of the comparison made between the two writers and justifies that comparison, whether that is based on proximity of composition, shared genre, subject matter, sources, or rhetorical strategies. For students embarking on similar comparisons of any canonical writers, these reflections will model the importance of considering *why* they are comparing their chosen writers and exactly what type of question can be generated by bringing authors into conversation.

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[4] W.B. Yeats, *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, ed. by Allan Wade (London: Rupert Hart Davis, 1954) quoted in Anne Fogarty and Jane Grogan, "Eliot, Yeats, Joyce, and the reinvention of Spenser and Donne," 212.