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Donne and Elizabeth, Countess of Huntingdon, Revisited: The Evidence of Donne's Letters

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John Donne surely was acquainted with Elizabeth (Stanley) Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon, during 1601, the last full year he served as a secretary for Lord Keeper Thomas Egerton. Donne's modern biographers have differed somewhat about the intimacy of this acquaintance.[1] Izaak Walton did not mention their relationship but wrote gilt-edged words about Egerton and Donne: the Lord Keeper did not "in this time of Master Donne's attendance upon him, account him to be so much his Servant, as to forget he was his Friend; and to testifie it, did alwayes use him with much courtesie, appointing him a

[1]The most influential opinion has been that of R. C. Bald in *John Donne: A Life* (Oxford: OUP, 1970), p. 111: "Donne was soon on cordial terms" with her, and she remained his friend "for the rest of his life"; see also in Bald, pp. 179–80, 276–77, 294, and 296n. Edmund Gosse, *The Life and Letters of Dr. John Donne*, 2 vols. (London: Heinemann, 1899), repeatedly referred to Lady Huntingdon as Donne's "old friend," who came to his assistance in both 1615 and 1622 (2:74–78 and 170). Building unsteadily on both Gosse and Bald, John Stubbs in *The Reformed Soul: a Biography* (New York: Norton, 2006), claims that she "grew to be one of Donne's closest female friends" (p. 129) and that, in 1609, she "expressed an interest in renewing ties with him" when Goodere brought her to London; although Stubbs admits that Donne "had probably not seen her since her days as a girl-bride," he insists that she "remembered him fondly" (pp. 246–47). Numerous other citations might be made, but these frame the history of the matter, for the most part assumptions not grounded in evidence.

place at his own Table, to which he esteemed his Company and Discourse to be a great Ornament."[2] However, Egerton's esteem alone cannot have rendered thirty years of steady, enduring, and cordial friendship between Donne and the Lord Keeper's youngest stepdaughter. One can hardly argue such lasting relations between Lady Elizabeth and a lesser servant of the Lord Keeper (even if as Walton says he was also in some sense the Lord Keeper's friend) merely because they resided in the same official house during one of her teenage years.

In any case, there is some question how long or whether Donne resided at York House, that ancient and insalubrious pile.[3] Neither has it been clear exactly what is meant when Donne and others have referred to his secretaryship.[4] If we look to the evidence of Donne's

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[2]*The Lives of John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Richard Hooker, George Herbert, and Robert Sanderson* (London: OUP, 1956), p. 27. Walton's sentence was quoted by Gosse, 1:90; Bald, p. 93; and Stubbs, p. 104.

[3]We know that during some or all of the time when he was employed there he held independent lodgings nearby, off the Strand, in the fashionable neighborhood surrounding the Savoy chapel, where he and Anne More were wed less than a year after Lady Elizabeth came to live with her new stepfather. Donne specified this residence in two letters written just before and just after his brief 1602 imprisonment in the Fleet: "from my lodginge by y^{e} Sauoy. 2 Februar: i60i [2]" to Sir George More (Folger Shakespeare Library [FSL], L.b.526); and "23 Febr: 1601 [2]: from my Chamber at M^{r} Haines his house by the Sauoye," to Sir Henry Goodere (London Metropolitan Archives, St. Paul's Cathedral Collection, GL, CF56). The location of the wedding can be deduced from the jurisdiction (the Court of Audience of the ecclesiastical province of Canterbury) that conducted the hearing of the law suit that Donne had furtively and successfully brought, in January 1602, to establish the validity of his clandestine December wedding; see *John Donne's Marriage Letters*, ed. M. Thomas Hester, Robert P. Sorlien, and Dennis Flynn (Washington DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, 2005), pp. 16–19 and 49–53.

[4]Walton (27) suggested that whatever Donne was doing for Egerton was a function preliminary to "some more weighty Employment in the State"; see also Steven May, "Donne and Egerton: the Court and Courtship," p. 452, in *The Oxford Handbook of John Donne* (*OHJD*), ed. Jeanne Shami, Dennis Flynn, and M. Thomas Hester (Oxford: OUP, 2011).

However, Donne's duties are unknown. Among extant documents listing names and functions of various servants of the Lord Keeper, none mentions

extant prose letters, none of which he addressed to the countess, further unexpected complexities in their relationship come into focus. Between 1601 and 1609 Donne had no known direct contact or intermediation with Lady Huntingdon. On the other hand, a table of his letters shows that from June 1609 until December 1625 he mentioned her in at least fifteen prose letters to Sir Henry Goodere; the table shows also a sixteenth mention, which is Donne's verse

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Donne's name. Two lists of the members of Egerton's staff are Huntington Library EL291 (containing entries as early as October 1600) and EL296 (made no later than 1603). Unlike Egerton's other secretaries, Donne is not found in these, nor among the rest of the Ellesmere papers or other papers of the Lord Keeper in various archives, except for only a single witnessing signature of debatable significance, not really enough to substantiate the nature of Donne's secretaryship; see Dennis Flynn, "Donne in the Ellesmere Manuscripts," *HLQ* 46 (1983): 333–36.

It is not even clear that, though given "Employment," Donne was, strictly speaking, an employee of the Lord Keeper's. Technically, as defined in the *OED*, the word *employee* is a modern American term not found in use during Donne's time, meaning one who works for wages. Donne, however, on three different occasions may have implied that he had not been paid wages during his secretaryship, most suggestively in a prose letter to Egerton stating that he had maintained "the sweetnes and security of a freedome and independency; withowt markinge owt to my hopes, any place of profit" although serving for "4 years your lordships Secretary"; Donne to Egerton, 1 March 1602 (FSL, L.b. 533). Two weeks earlier he had written similarly to Egerton that "My services never had so much worthe in them, as to deserve the favors, wherwith they were payd"; Donne to Egerton, 12 February 1602 (FSL, L.b. 528). And even earlier, prior to his dismissal, addressing Egerton in the last of his formal verse satires, which was focused on the work of Egerton's office, Donne commented that while working for Egerton he had been "most richly For seruice payd" by "hauing leaue to serue"; *The Satyres and Metempsychosis*, vol. 6 of *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*, ed. Gary A. Stringer et al. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, forthcoming in 2016), p. 208.

These statements in two letters and a poem (if they are not merely glib) may reflect a sort of noblesse strange and ambiguous to us because it was not merely affected; they may also have a bearing for or against the biographers' notion of Donne's enduring friendship with Lady Huntingdon.

letter "To the Countesse of Huntingdon," enclosed with the letter to Goodere of July 1610.[5]

Table of Donne's letters to Sir Henry Goodere mentioning the Countess of Huntingdon[6]

Date	Pp. in 1651 *Letters*
early June 1609	225–26
15 or 22 June 1609	160–64
Jul 1610	100–05
(enclosing "To the Countesse of Huntingdon")	
19 Jan 1614	179–81
late Jan 1614	182–84
14 Mar 1614	167–71
19 Aug 1614	171–74
13 Dec 1614	148–50
20 Dec 1614	217–21
28 Dec 1614	194–98
9 Mar 1619	174–76
4 Apr 1619	222–25
11 Oct 1621	199–200
18 Oct 1622	184–86
21 Dec 1625	233–37

[5]"To the Countess of Huntingdon," beginning "Man to Gods image, Eves to man was made," is to be distinguished from another poem with the same heading in most early editions of Donne's poems, beginning "That unripe side of earth." This poem is not attributed to Donne in any manuscript; some manuscripts attribute it to Sir Walter Aston. It was appended as noncanonical in Grierson's 1912 edition, though Grierson did place it within the canon in his 1929 edition. Its attribution has been questioned by more recent editors with opposite answers; see W. Milgate (ed.) *John Donne: The Satires, Epigrams, and Verse Letters* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 293–94; and Robin Robbins (ed.), *The Complete Poems of John Donne* (London: Longman, 2008), pp. 956–57. The verdict of the Donne Variorum is as yet forthcoming.

[6]This table results from collaborative work by Commentary editors of the OUP Letters edition: Margaret Maurer, Jeanne Shami, and myself.

This essay will review available evidence, arguing that while spanning decades their extended acquaintance was conducted only through an intermediary, Sir Henry Goodere, and was apparently troubled by some early violation of etiquette on Donne's part, which is why Donne's relation to the countess appears for the most part to have been more uneasy and fitful than intimate or enduring.

Discernible in the table above are three groups of letters, each group written during a different period with distinct concerns. The first group are Donne's earliest extant mentions of Lady Huntingdon, more than seven years after the end of his employment by Egerton, including his only authenticated direct address to the countess, the verse letter evidently written for and sent to Goodere only in response to Goodere's request, a poem that (as Margaret Maurer has pointed out) may never have been delivered.[7] The second group includes seven letters of 1614, all written in connection with Donne's campaign for church preferment, leading to his ordination and a royal chaplaincy early in 1615. The third group includes four letters of 1619–22 and one of 1625, similarly coinciding with another pivotal point in Donne's professional career, his participation as a chaplain in the Doncaster embassy of 1619–20, leading to his promotion to the deanery of St. Paul's following his return from the embassy. These campaigns for preferment may have motivated Donne's mentions of Lady Huntingdon; but except for the last one, there is no extant evidence that he received any support.

In none of these letters to Goodere does Donne mention any current occasion when he had recently been or expected soon to be in the presence of the countess. However, he does more than once write of having been with her at a much earlier though unspecified period; and he does several times with gratitude mention her remembering him, frequently asking as well to be remembered to her. The impression these letters leave is that from 1609 through Donne's latest years they knew each other no longer as current acquaintances, not having spent much if any time together after 1601. As years passed, only in memory do they seem to have been associated apart from Donne's use of Goodere's mediation; as far as we know, memory was augmented only by what they may have been told about each

[7]Maurer, "The Verse Letter," *OHJD*, p. 216.

other during their conversations or correspondence with Goodere after early 1609, when Goodere began to attend on Lady Huntingdon rather than on her elder cousin Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford.[8]

In other words, it seems that (whatever Lady Huntingdon's awareness of Donne at some unspecified period in the past) during the three periods when these fifteen letters to Goodere (and one poem) were written, she knew him mainly because of things Goodere had recently told her and mainly as a friend of Goodere or (in Donne's phrase, expressing distancing precision) as a "servant" of her servant. There are also indications that the quality of their relationship included some hindrance to greater closeness, something alluded to but again unspecified in these letters, seemingly some action of Donne's, possibly a violation of etiquette, possibly some verses he had written. Perhaps our best illustration of this past, obscure, and as far as we know never fully excused offense is a crabbed passage from the next to last letter in this table, the letter Donne sent to Goodere on 18 October 1622, retrospectively summing up his relationship with the countess:

> The devotion which I owe, and (in good faith) pay in my best prayers for her good, in all kinde awakens me to present my humble thanks for this, that her Ladiship retains my name in her memory: she never laid obligation upon any man, readier to expresse his acknowledgement of them, to any servant of her servants; I am bound to say much of this, for your indemnity; because though I had a little preparation to her knowledge in the house where I served at first, yet, I think, she took her characters of me, from you: And, at what time soever she thought best of me in her life, I am better then that, for my goodnesse is my thankfulnesse, and I am every day fuller of that then before, to her La$^{p.}$[9]

This problematic recollection, which may be corrupt in the only text we have, in essence seems to say,

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[8]This conclusion results from collaborative work by Commentary editors of the OUP Letters edition: Margaret Maurer, Jeanne Shami, and myself.

[9]*Letters to Severall Persons of Honour* (London: Richard Marriot, 1651), pp. 184–85.

> I am thankful for the fact that Lady Huntingdon remembers my name. She has not obligated anyone, no servant of any of her servants, more willingly disposed than I am to acknowledge her requirement—something I must say to indemnify you, who have been (despite her earliest experience with me) the main source for whatever she thinks of me now; and whenever it was that her opinion of me has been highest, I am now better than I was then, because I am continually grateful to her.

One problem in interpreting this passage is that what Donne means here by an obligation to Lady Huntingdon is not clear, although he surely seems to think Goodere will understand; nor is it clear why he stresses his need to support Goodere with indemnity in this matter. As is often the case, the problem would be less a problem if only we had Goodere's half of the correspondence.

Goodere's own relations with the countess have not been detected earlier than 1609, which seems the earliest year he can have begun telling her about Donne. But Donne's lasting uncertainty by October 1622 about when exactly Lady Huntingdon "thought best" of him, as well as his sense that her assessment at one or more points may not have been as favorable as he would like it to have been, and his assurance that he has since improved if only by being more and more thankful to her for merely recalling him—these together express a reserve reflecting his general disposition towards her in all these letters, increasingly the attitude of one who has become accustomed to communicating exclusively through an intermediary. It is surely in part, if not mainly, a matter of formal etiquette that Donne presented himself as a servant of her servant, never as a friend to her. This is distinctly different from the way he presented himself in letters describing his and Goodere's relationship to the countess of Bedford, with whom after a brief period in 1607–08 when Goodere introduced them, Donne had maintained for quite a while a personal friendship apart from Goodere's intermediation and perduring after Goodere's active service to Lady Bedford had evidently run aground and all but ended during and especially towards the end of 1608.[10]

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[10] For discussion of the 1608 lapse of association between Goodere and Lady Bedford, see Dennis Flynn, M. Thomas Hester, and Margaret Maurer,

Given the retrospective of Lady Huntingdon in Donne's 1622 letter to Goodere, a sketch of her life from 1601 to 1609 is perhaps now useful. Almost immediately after her arrival at York House (as Lady Stanley), she had without delay been wedded (in her fifteenth year[11]) to fifteen-year-old Henry, Lord Hastings, heir apparent to the earldom of Huntingdon; the young couple were promptly separated to concentrate on their respective educations, Lord Henry returning to Queens College, Cambridge, his spouse returning to her tutors at York House. Beginning in 1605, Henry Hastings having inherited his earldom, Lady Hastings then becoming Lady Huntingdon, the couple began to reside at Ashby-de-la-Zouch in Leicestershire. Lady Huntingdon's letters from Ashby make no mention of Donne but show that she was then largely occupied with child rearing: four pregnancies and births are recorded from 1606 to 1612, when she was twenty-six.[12] In her letters, Lady Huntingdon can be seen in these years also to have been concerned with estate management on behalf of her husband, who was often absent on business as Lord Lieutenant of Leicestershire, usually elsewhere in the county, less frequently at London.[13]

"Goodere at Court, 1603–1610," *JDJ* 31 (2012): 61–98. Donne's continuing personal association with Lady Bedford can be seen in various letters up to and beyond his ordination.

[11]According to *ODNB*, Elizabeth Stanley was baptized on 6 January 1587, making her about five years younger than Lady Bedford. However she may have been born in September 1586; G. E. Cokayne, *The Complete Peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain and the United Kingdom* (London: St. Catherine Press, 1910–1959), 6:658.

[12]In July 1606 she was reported pregnant at Ashby with her first child, Lady Alice Hastings, born on 14 December 1606. On this pregnancy, see Sir John Harpur to Gilbert Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, 31 July 1606 (*Talbot Papers in the College of Arms*, ed. G. R. Batho, vol. 2 of *A Calendar of the Shrewsbury and Talbot papers in Lambeth Palace Library and the College of Arms* [London: HMSO, 1966–72], 287). The births of the countess's other children, spaced evenly in 1608 (Ferdinando, 18 June), 1610 (Henry, 28 September), and 1612 (Elizabeth, 2 May), were recorded in manuscript pedigrees (British Library, Harley 4849/172 and 4774/1b).

[13]These holograph letters from Ashby to her husband bear no dates but have been conjecturally dated by archivists in 1605, 1607, and 1609 (Huntington Library, Hastings Correspondence, HA 4809–22). On the

Of trips to London by the countess there were evidently few; between her second and third pregnancies one visit, beginning on 20 January 1609, is recorded in Hastings' accounts. This was travel in her husband's company that seems to have been related to a then ongoing health problem, probably his, although this is not certain; in any case, during these days several visits to a London doctor are recorded.[14] Subsequently, although the earl appears to have returned to Leicestershire, Lady Huntingdon remained in London and at court: at Whitehall palace on 2 February, she danced in Ben Jonson's Masque of Queens as one of eleven subsidiary queens (including Lady Bedford), all ranged below the real queen, "Bel-Anna" Stuart, in a pyramidal tableau that resolved into all their individual dances. We have no evidence that on this or any other occasion Donne had opportunity to renew acquaintance with the countess; but Lady Huntingdon's London trip may well have led to his indirect contact with her, through his friend Goodere's becoming her servant, beginning at about this time.[15]

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Donne's earliest extant mentions of the countess came in three letters to Goodere written during 1609–10, as he began to write and then publish *Pseudo-Martyr*, first gaining the encouragement of King James with the assistance of the courtier James, Lord Hay.[16] Earliest

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financial difficulties of the Huntingdon estate, "in spite of the Stanley dowry of £4,000," see Thomas Cogswell, *Home Divisions: Aristocracy, the State and Provincial Conflict* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 72ff.

[14]Huntingdon Library, HA Financial Papers, "A Note of the Disbursements since the Audit" (of October 1608), fols. 4v–5r, listing dates and fees paid to a "Dr. Atkins" at London. The earl wrote ca. 1613 that for about eight years he had been suffering from vertigo incurred in having been thrown from a horse (Huntington Library, HA 4/331).

[15]On Goodere's transition from service for Lady Bedford, to service for Lady Huntingdon, see Flynn, Hester, and Maurer, "Goodere at Court, 1603–1610," pp. 75–94.

[16]This conclusion results from collaborative work by Commentary editors of the OUP Letters edition: Margaret Maurer, Jeanne Shami, and myself.

Pseudo-Martyr would seem unlikely to have been dedicated to the king without permission; nor would Donne have written it unless somehow

was a brief remark that "I remember that about this time you purposed a journey to fetch, or meet the Lad. *Huntington*."[17] A week or two later, Donne wrote again from Mitcham, more nearly anticipating this journey of Goodere's, and in a postscript urged, "*Never leave the remembrance of my poor service unmentioned when you see the good Lady.*"[18] These mentions of Lady Huntingdon, in part prompted by Goodere's new service and imminent departure from London to wait on her, suggest that prior to 1609, since their time together in 1601, Donne may have contemplated though he had not tried to initiate or develop direct or independent, continuing or renewed, closer personal relations with the countess. Donne's further relations with Lady Huntingdon (whatever these had been in the past) seem from this time to have been conducted exclusively through Goodere, although it seems plausible that in the context of Donne's return to the court after 1606, when he began to associate with courtiers more powerful than Goodere, he may have come to envision the possibility of patronage by Lady Huntingdon as well as by Lady Bedford and Lord Hay.[19]

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appropriately sponsored at court. Concerning Donne and Hay, see an exchange of four letters, found among Donne's posthumous papers by his son and subsequently published in *A Collection of Letters, Made By S^r^ Tobie Matthews, K^t^.* (London: Henry Herringman, 1660). These letters are a saved draft of Donne's letter to Hay (in November 1608), ibid., pp. 330–32; a saved reply from Hay (also in November 1608) ibid., p. 295; another saved draft of Donne's letter to Hay (in late November or early December 1608) ibid., pp. 330–32; and a third saved draft of Donne's letter to Hay (in early June 1609) ibid., p. 335.

These and some of the letters tabulated for this essay are here assigned dates to be explained by commentary in the OUP edition of Donne's prose letters, now progressing toward completion.

[17]Donne to Goodere, early June 1609; *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour*, p. 225.

[18]Donne to Goodere, 15 or 22 June 1609; ibid., p. 164.

[19]As mentioned, Donne's association with Lady Bedford, originally through Goodere, extended from 1607, but he seems to have been aware of her and of Goodere's connection to her as early as 1602; see Donne to Goodere, 23 February 1602 (London Metropolitan Archives, St. Paul's Cathedral Collection, GL, CF56). At court by October or November 1608 Donne had been introduced to James, Lord Hay, who began to mention his name to King

These circumstances are ambiguously suggested in another letter to Goodere from London in July 1610, a letter more detailed and informative about Donne's then current relation to Lady Huntingdon, still only through the mediation of Goodere. He had been asked by Goodere to write (as he had written to Goodere's earlier patron, Lady Bedford) a verse letter to Lady Huntingdon acknowledging and praising her virtue, of which he had heard from Goodere but evidently had not yet himself experienced:

> For the other part of your Letter, spent in the praise of the Countesse, I am always very apt to beleeve it of her, and can never believe it so well, and so reasonably, as now, when it is averred by you; but for the expressing it to her, in that sort as you seem to counsaile, I have these two reasons to decline it. That that knowledge which she hath of me, was in the beginning of a graver course, then of a Poet, into which (that I may also keep my dignity) I would not seem to relapse. The other stronger reason, is my integrity to the other Countesse, of whose worthinesse though I swallowed your opinion at first upon your words, yet I have had since an explicit faith, and now a knowledge: and for her delight (since she descends to them) I had reserved not only all the verses, which I should make, but all the thoughts of womens worthinesse.[20]

Donne's "two reasons to decline" Goodere's request to write such a poem are that Lady Huntingdon had known him (during some time together not clearly specified) not as a mere poet but as a person of comparative gravity and dignity who lapsed into writing verse; and that he had made a promise to write about the virtue of women only for Lady Bedford, of whom he had similarly at first learned from Goodere but subsequently had come to know from his own

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James (see Donne's letter to Hay during this period in *A Collection of Letters*, pp. 330–32).

These conclusions resulted from collaborative work by Commentary editors of the OUP Letters edition: Margaret Maurer, Jeanne Shami, and myself.

[20] *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour*, pp. 103–104. This letter is discussed briefly by Bald, pp. 179–80 and 276; and Stubbs, p. 247.

experience. This careful contrast, between eventually direct knowledge of Lady Bedford and what he believes about Lady Huntingdon merely because it is "averred" by Goodere, shows again that, though he had heard Goodere's opinion, his personal familiarity with the younger countess was by 1610 still mainly with what she had been in the past; and that no counterpart to his direct dealings with Lady Bedford had yet occurred between him and the adult Lady Huntingdon.[21]

Nevertheless, in a remarkable *volte-face*, Donne's letter immediately reveals that, despite not wishing to "relapse" in Lady Huntingdon's eyes into the role of a poet, he has already written and obediently enclosed a poem, though perhaps not the one Goodere had expected or could forward:

> But because I hope she [i.e. Lady Bedford] will not disdain, that I should write well of her Picture, I have obeyed you thus far, as to write: but intreat you by your friendship, that by this occasion of versifying, I be not traduced, nor esteemed light in that Tribe, and that house where I have lived. If those reasons which moved you to bid me write be not constant in you still, or if you meant not that I should write verses; or if these verses be too bad, or too good, over or under her understanding, and not fit; I pray receive them, as a companion and supplement of this Letter to you; and as such a token as I use to send, which use, because I wish rather they should serve (except you wish otherwise) I send no other.[22]

He has acted with the "hope" that Lady Bedford "will not disdain, that I should write well of her Picture"; that is, as Margaret Maurer has explained, write about Lady Bedford by writing about her younger cousin, Lady Huntingdon, whose virtue as described by Goodere has seemed similar to what Donne had praised in Lady Bedford.[23] Donne

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[21]This conclusion resulted from collaborative work by Commentary editors of the OUP Letters edition: Margaret Maurer, Jeanne Shami, and myself.

[22]*Letters to Severall Persons of Honour*, pp. 104–105.

[23]Maurer, "The Verse Letter," *OHJD*, pp. 215–16: "'picture' in the sense of another person who has the same qualities as the lady to whom Donne has

goes on to stress again that his acquaintance with Lady Huntingdon is slender, rooted in his past experience with her "Tribe, and that house where I have lived." He specifies further his uncertainty whether his verses will be "over or under her understanding, and not fit" and entrusts them to Goodere's discretion, not simply requesting delivery to the countess. Nothing up to 1610 suggests that in writing a verse letter to Lady Huntingdon Donne had since 1601 experienced, apart from what Goodere or others may have told him, any renewed or direct contact with the countess; nor any new personal knowledge of her virtue; nor any special cordiality beyond conventional courtly etiquette.[24]

For more on the peculiarities of Donne's enclosed verse letter to Lady Huntingdon, see parts 3 and 5 below.

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A similarly distant relationship can be glimpsed in the second group of letters tabulated above, written during 1614, after Donne had committed himself in a resolution "to make my Profession Divinitie."[25] The earliest of these letters to Goodere, on 19 January, closes with another of Donne's postscripts following his signature: "*Which name when there is any empty corner in your discourse with that noble Lady at Ashby, I humbly beseech you to present to her as one more devoted to her*

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made the promise, that is, the countess Goodere had suggested Donne court."

Donne's words here bear comparison to his words in a later verse letter addressed to Lady Bedford herself but left unfinished, where he tried to justify his verses concerning other women's virtue by the thought that, though he had "to others lent / Your stock, and over prodigally spent / Your treasure," nevertheless he was impenitent because these writings constituted only object lessons of Lady Bedford's virtue "By studying copies, not Originals" (Milgate, *Satires, Epigrams, and Verse Letters*, p. 104). See also Donne's later verses addressed to Catherine (Howard) Cecil, Countess of Salisbury, especially ll. 37–64 (ibid., pp.108–109).

[24]This conclusion resulted from collaborative work by Commentary editors of the OUP Letters edition: Margaret Maurer, Jeanne Shami, and myself.

[25]The phrase quoted is from Donne's letter (delivered by Hay) announcing his resolution to Robert Carr, Viscount Rochester, in mid-July 1613 (*A Collection of Letters*, pp. 319–20).

service then perchance you will say."[26] This somewhat paradoxical injunction again expresses mainly Donne's feeling of distance from the countess; he views himself as one whose name will suit only an "*empty corner*" of her conversation and whose devotion to her may thus not easily be described or recognized, even though it is real. If as seems likely Donne at this time was focused in large part on his quest for church preferment, his words in this letter do not suggest expectation yet of much effective aid from the countess.

Goodere, whose patronage relations were perhaps even more insecure than Donne's, was hardly in a position to appreciate Donne's irony and could hear nothing in it but complaint and criticism. This fact becomes clear with Donne's mention of Lady Huntingdon in a second 1614 letter only a couple of weeks later, responding to what must have been Goodere's testy amazement, in part provoked by the 19 January postscript:

> I deprehend much inclination to chide me: and it is but out of your habit of good language that you spare me. So little occasion as that postscript of mine, could not bring you so near to it, if nothing else were mistaken, which (so God help me) was so little, that I remember not what it was, and I would no more hear again what I write in an officious Letter, then what I said at a drunken supper. I had no purpose to exercise your diligence in presenting my name to that Lady, but either I did, or should have said, that I writ onely to fill up any empty corner in your discourse.[27]

Goodere apparently had imagined in the postscript a complaint that Donne's interests had perhaps been slighted in Goodere's conversation with the countess, whereas (Donne protests) he meant nothing but that his interests were hardly likely to resonate with hers, except as matters of little note in (he repeats) an "empty corner."[28]

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[26]Italics in original, *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour*, p. 181.

[27]Ibid., 18[2]–8[3].

[28]These conclusions resulted from collaborative work by Commentary editors of the OUP Letters edition: Margaret Maurer, Jeanne Shami, and myself.

Continuing confusion about Donne's possible access to Lady Huntingdon's patronage through the mediation of Goodere is conveyed in a 14 March letter replying to another Goodere had recently written:

> You mention again some thing which it seems you are not willing I should understand of my Lady *Huntington*: some of your former Letters, have spoken of some other former Letters, (which I never saw) which speak of the matter as of a history and thing done; and these later Letters speak of it Prophetically, as of a future contingent. I am glad the often remembrance of it, gives me often occasion of thankfulnesse to her, for retaining me in her memory, and of professing my self in my end, and ways, her most humble servant.[29]

Donne's own testiness may appear here, as if Goodere had claimed long since to have elicited the favor of the countess towards Donne, but Donne as yet awaited any consequence. This expression echoes and precedes a continuing sense in Donne's mentions of Lady Huntingdon that she remembers him and his name without yet having taken any action to assist him.

In a fourth letter of 1614, addressed from London to Goodere at Ashby on 19 August, Donne mentions that when they had last parted, a few days earlier, Goodere had been leaving London for Leicestershire to join the royal progress already bound for a two-day visit with the Earl and Countess of Huntingdon at Ashby on 18 and 19 August.[30] Donne had been preoccupied with other business, but

> I might have overtaken you. And though perchance if I had gone, it might have been inconvenient for me, to have put my self into my L. Chamberlains presence, if the sicknesse be earnest at Ashby, and so I should nothing have advanced my businesse, yet I should have come to that noble Lady with better confidence, and more assurance of a pardon, when I had brought a conscience, that I came despoiled of

[29] *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour*, p. 169.

[30] The 1614 summer sojourn of the royal progress at Leicester was recorded by John Nichols (ed.), *The Progresses, Processions, and Magnificent Festivities of King James the First*, 4 vols. (London: J. B. Nichols, 1828), 3:22.

> all other respects, only to kisse her hands, in whose protection I am, since I have, nor desire other station, then a place in her good opinion.[31]

Donne's words seem to imply that he and Goodere had discussed whether at Goodere's invitation Donne too would be well advised to go to Ashby; but one impediment had been the fact that the royal favorite Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset, serving in his recently appointed position as Lord Chamberlain of the king's household, would also be present at Ashby. Somewhat more than a year earlier, in mid-July 1613, Donne had written the letter (for delivery by Lord Hay) asking Carr, then Viscount Rochester, for his help in Donne's effort to enter the ministry; but the favorite had then made no direct response to this request, perhaps not knowing what to make of it. Instead he had given Donne money and told him for some reason to stay out of his presence; and in the meantime suggested he would keep an eye out for opportunities that might advantage Donne, secular opportunities other than the chaplaincy Donne evidently sought.[32]

Writing to Goodere in August 1614, Donne explained with some regret that, had he left London and overtaken Goodere on the way to Ashby, he might have been able to avoid Somerset only if the progress had been rerouted on account of rumored plague in the vicinity of the Huntingdon estate. In this case he might have gone ahead and presented himself to Lady Huntingdon without seeming to have come merely because of "my businesse" with Somerset, "with better confidence, and more assurance of a pardon, when I had brought a conscience, that I came despoiled of all other respects, only to kisse her hands, in whose protection I am, since I have, nor desire other station, then a place in her good opinion." These careful distinctions and wistful reflections suggest Donne's sense that for some reason he needed scrupulously to observe court etiquette, if he expected a pardon from the countess, even though through Goodere he had

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[31]Ibid., pp. 172–73.

[32]These instructions and the money given during the summer of 1613 were mentioned in Donne's letter to Carr sent on 23 September 1613; *A Collection of Letters*, pp. 316–17. On the earl's not yet having known what to do about Donne's suit, see Alistair Bellany, "The Rise of the Howards at Court," *OHJD*, pp. 547–48.

gained "a place in her good opinion." This scenario of his visiting her seems to have existed only in Donne's and Goodere's imaginations; instead of gaining personal access he remained at London and in relation to Lady Huntingdon merely a friend of Goodere's she had known earlier in her life. For a considerable period, he suggests, he had been pretty much without a place even in her good opinion,[33] but through Goodere he had gradually been able to achieve at least some esteem. This letter may suggest that Donne's behavior had involved some earlier breach in relation to the countess for which he felt a need to request pardon, although no occasion for such pardon seems ever to have arisen.

The final three letters of this group, tabulated as written in December 1614, dwell further on the two triangles (Donne-Goodere-Bedford and Donne-Goodere-Huntingdon) in both of which Goodere and Donne had served or were still serving. In these letters Donne seems to compare the complexities of patronage he had been seeking from the two noble ladies in relation to his suit for church preferment.[34] In his letter of 13 December, Donne mentions apprehension about whether his recent letters to Goodere have been received, "which have been many, and large, and too confident to be lost, especially since, (as I remember) they always conveyed others to that good Lady"—i.e., Lady Huntingdon, on whom Goodere was attending in the midlands.[35] Answering Goodere's most recent letter, Donne states that he cannot "discern by it that you have received any of mine lately." In any case, he acknowledges word in Goodere's letter that Lady Huntingdon has purposed to assist Donne in "the next term" (i.e. in Hilary term 1615), implying earlier discussion of the

[33]This conclusion resulted from collaborative work by Commentary editors of the OUP Letters edition: Margaret Maurer, Jeanne Shami, and myself.

[34]This conclusion resulted from collaborative work by Commentary editors of the OUP Letters edition: Margaret Maurer, Jeanne Shami, and myself.

[35]Bald (p. 295) mistakenly took Donne's phrase "that good Lady" to refer to Lady Bedford; but Lady Bedford remained in London, not with Goodere, who was out of town to the north. It appears that the important letters to which Donne here refers may never have been received and that their enclosures for Lady Huntingdon may also have gone astray, because the last earlier letter to Goodere still extant is one of 12 September (*Letters to Severall Persons of Honour*, p. 205).

matter. In response to this promise by the countess, Donne has immediately taken an "act of assurance of the performance" expressing confidence in her worth by "fixing times to my creditors," as he prepares with the help of friends to clear all his debts; "for by the end of the next terme, I will make an end with the world, by Gods grace."[36]

Continuing concern with this matter is central in Donne's next weekly letter to Goodere on 20 December, where he recounts that in answer to a related question he had put to Lady Bedford (through their mutual friend Sir Thomas Roe) whether "any scruple should arise in her" about Donne's entering the ministry, "she was somewhat more startling, then I looked for from her: she had more suspicion of my calling, a better memory of my past life, then I had thought her nobility could have admitted." These surprising reactions of Lady Bedford were in one way gratifying to him, since his past life had long been a principal blot on his reputation. However, "her other way of expressing her favour to me"—i.e., giving him the money he needed to clear his indebtedness before he could honorably take orders—disappointed him because she did not offer to pay with

> that cheerfulnesse, as heretofore she hath delivered her self towards me. I am almost sorry, that an Elegy should have been able to move her to so much compassion heretofore, as to offer to pay my debts; and my greater wants now, and for so good a purpose, as to come disingaged into that profession, being plainly laid open to her, should work no farther but that she sent me 30*l*. which in good faith she excused with that, which is in both parts true, that her present debts were burdensome, and that I could not doubt of her inclination, upon all future emergent occasions, to assist me. I confesse to you, her former fashion towards me, had given a better confidence; and this diminution in her makes me see, that I must use more friends, then I thought I should have needed.[37]

[36]Ibid., pp. 148–49.
[37]Ibid., pp. 218–219.

She had sent him only £30, not an inconsiderable sum but evidently less than the amount of his indebtedness he had shown her.[38] Donne also recalls here that Lady Bedford, on receiving in the late winter of 1614 a funeral elegy Donne wrote after the death of her younger brother John Harington, Baron of Exton, had offered "to pay my debts," which then amounted to less than his current obligations. He goes on to express misgivings to Goodere about the effect Lady Bedford's example might have on the largesse Lady Huntingdon has offered for "the next term":

> I am afraid out of a Contemplation of mine own unworthinesse, and fortune, that the example of this Lady, should work upon the Lady where you are: for though goodnesse be originally in her, and she do good, for the deeds sake, yet, perchance, she may think it a little wisedome, to make such measure of me, as they who know no better, do.[39]

It would seem that, despite Lady Huntingdon's promise, nothing had yet altered Donne's sense of distance from her or doubt about the reliability of her support.

A week later, on 28 December, Donne wrote yet again to Goodere about his problems of patronage in quest of a royal chaplaincy. He confided that he was under pressure to dedicate to Somerset a privately printed edition of his verse, a kind of tariff to pay before he could proceed with his plan to gain church preferment at the new earl's hands:

> One thing more I must tell you; but so softly, that I am loath to hear my self: and so softly, that if that good Lady were in the room, with you and this Letter, she might not hear. It is that I am brought to a necessity of printing my Poems, and addressing them to my L. Chamberlain. This I mean to do forthwith; not for much publique view, but at mine own cost, a few Copies. I apprehend some

[38]In 1614 £30 would have had the relative purchasing power of about £5000 pounds in 2013, according to the website <http://www.measuringworth.com> in a calculation made on 22 September 2014.

[39]*Letters to Severall Persons of Honour*, pp. 219–20.

> incongruities in the resolution; and I know what I shall suffer from many interpretations: but I am at an end, of much considering that; and, if I were as startling in that kinde, as ever I was, yet in this particular, I am under an unescapable necessity, as I shall let you perceive, when I see you. By this occasion I am made a Rhapsoder[40] of mine own rags, and that cost me more diligence, to seek them, then it did to make them.[41]

Donne abhors above all the thought that Lady Huntingdon, whose support he still hoped for to discharge his debts, may learn these circumstances of his dealings with Somerset.

> This made me aske to borrow that old book of you, which it will be too late to see, for that use, when I see you: for I must do this, as a valediction to the world, before I take Orders. But this is it, I am to aske you; whether you ever made any such use of the letter in verse, *A nostre Countesse chez vous*, as that I may not put it in, amongst the rest to persons of that rank; for I desire very very much, that something should bear her name in the book, and I would be just to my written words to my L. Harrington, to write nothing after that. I pray tell me as soon as you can, if I be at liberty to insert that: for if you have by any occasion applied any pieces of it, I see not, that it will be discerned, when it appears in the wholepiece. Though this be a little matter, I would be sorry not to have an account of it, within as little after Newyears tide, as you could.[42]

As Daniel Starza Smith has shown, Goodere often incorporated passages from Donne's letters and poems into compositions of his own.[43] Donne at some point near the start of his friendship with

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[40]Rhapsoder, or rhapsodist is defined (*OED*) as a collector of miscellaneous literary pieces or a reciter of poems (as opposed to their authors), "Freq. *depreciative* (esp. in early use), with implication of a lack of intellectual substance."

[41]*Letters to Severall Persons of Honour*, pp. 196–97.

[42]Ibid., pp. 197–98.

[43]*John Donne and the Conway Papers: Patronage and Manuscript Circulation in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), Part II.

Goodere had made his writings an open book for "use" in any way Goodere desired, ordinarily entrusting to him even sole copies of them, treating him as if he were in some senses a literary executor, as he repeats he meant to do with his verse letter to Lady Huntingdon: he had not simply sent it to Goodere for delivery but had implicated Goodere's judgment whether or not to deliver it, as well as how otherwise to "use" it. In this letter of 28 December 1614, Donne refers to that verse letter (which had been enclosed with his July 1610 letter to Goodere), questioning whether it may since have been put to any use with hazardous influence on his current plan. Four and a half years later, Donne is clearly under the impression that Goodere may have excerpted a passage or passages from the "wholepiece," whether without, before, or after delivering the verse letter. Donne also seems to think Goodere still may have the poem; it is not certain, considering these things, whether or not Donne doubted that (or knew whether) Goodere ever delivered it. In some earlier letter not extant, he may have asked to have the poem returned ("This made me aske to borrow that old book of you. . . ."), having entrusted to Goodere his only copy, thus adding to earlier writings already in Goodere's possession. If so, Goodere has not yet returned it.[44]

4

The final tabulated group of extant letters testifying to the character of Donne's ongoing relation to the Countess of Huntingdon were all written between 1619 and 1625, a period during which Donne had been appointed to serve James Hay (created Viscount Doncaster in 1618) as chaplain to the embassy Doncaster led into Germany and the United Provinces; following his service on this embassy, Donne was promoted dean of St. Paul's Cathedral. The embassy and the promotion were alike occasions calling for considerable capital expense in both preparing for and assuming each office. During this period, the earliest of Donne's letters to mention Lady Huntingdon again was one addressed to Goodere on 9 March 1619, about two months before the embassy departed; it included at the end another of Donne's closing requests to be remembered: "You forget me absolutely and intirely,

[44]This conclusion resulted from collaborative work by Commentary editors of the OUP Letters edition: Margaret Maurer, Jeanne Shami, and myself.

whensoever you forget me to that noble Countesse."[45] In another letter addressed to Goodere, on 4 April 1619, Donne mentions that he has been serving (as he had in Goodere's days of service to Lady Bedford) to facilitate the forwarding through Goodere of pacquets of letters from and to the country residence of the countess, a kind of business that had evidently been entrusted to Goodere in turn by Bedford and then by Huntingdon. Near the end of this letter again Donne mentions Lady Huntingdon, thanking Goodere "for all your favours, and benefits, so principally for keeping me alive in the memory of the noblest Countesse, whose commandement, if it had been her La^ps^ pleasure to have anything said or done in her service, at *Heydelberg*, I should have been glad to have received."[46] This offer would seem to renew an earlier offer to carry, during the imminent Doncaster embassy, a message or gift from the countess to Queen Elizabeth of Bohemia, of whom the house of Hastings was a strong support. No evidence has been found whether such an offer by Donne was ever accepted.

Donne's next extant mention of the countess came in a letter addressed to Goodere on 11 October 1621, nearly two years after his return from the embassy and about a month before his election and installation as dean of St. Paul's cathedral. In this letter Donne again closes with a wish to be remembered: "If in any letter I leave out the name of the La. *Hunt*. or La. *Burdell*, or your daughters, tell them, that I named them. I take the falshood upon me, for I intend it very really, and very humbly, where I am good for anything in any of their services."[47] Possibly Donne's good humor signifies that he had received support from the countess in or on attaining his new eminence; if so this is the earliest evidence of such support.

Donne wrote as dean of St. Paul's his fourth letter to mention Lady Huntingdon during this period. It is the 18 October 1622 letter already discussed in part 1 of this essay, including Donne's retrospective view of his relations with the countess. He begins the letter by observing that, had Goodere's last letter not mentioned her, he would have had nothing worth writing in answer. His profuse

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[45]*Letters to Severall Persons of Honour*, pp. 176.

[46]Ibid., pp. 222 and 224–25.

[47]Ibid., p. 200. "La. *Burdell*" has not been identified.

thanks to her, for retaining "my name in her memory," are balanced by a sense of obligation to her and yet a firm assertion that Goodere's representation of Donne's interests in mediating them with the countess must be indemnified and has been faultless. What these statements may imply about patronage Donne received from Lady Huntingdon is unclear, although, had Goodere been successful at Ashby in advocating Donne's interests, one would have expected thankful mention of support by the countess in this letter to Goodere.

Donne's final extant letter to Goodere mentioning the countess was written on 21 December 1625. Donne explains to Goodere, towards the close of the letter, that

> I reserve not the mention of my Lady Huntington to the end of my Letter, as grains to make the gold weight, but as tincture to make the better gold, when you finde room to intrude so poor and impertinent a name, as mine is, in her presence. I beseech you, let her Lad: know, that she hath sowed her favours towards me, in such a ground, that if I be grown better (as I hope I am) her favours are grown with me, and though they were great when she conferred them, yet, (if I mend every day) they increase in me every day, and therefore every day multiply my thankfulnesse towards her Ladiship: say what you will (if you like not this expression) that may make her Ladiship know, that I shall never let fall the memory, nor the just valuation of her noble favours to me, nor leave them unrequited in my Exchequer, which is, the blessings of God upon my prayers.[48]

As ever Donne's words imply that Goodere remained from 1609 until 1625 his intermediary with the countess, with whom it seems he still had not had any personal contact since early 1602. The striking difference here is his profuse thankfulness for "her favours," which he says have been "sowed" and have been not only "great when she conferred them" but "increase every day." Whatever these references mean, they are unprecedented in any extant letter; all Donne's earlier mentions of Lady Huntingdon refer to her remembering him, but not one characterizes her favors in any way, certainly not as a sowing of

[48]Ibid., pp. 236–37.

gold. It may well be that only following his promotion to the deanery did he receive from her the kind of assistance he may have hoped for since 1609.

5

Donne's surprising verse letter "To the Countesse of Huntingdon,"[49] the "companion and supplement" to his prose letter to Goodere in July 1610, may well have been his only writing addressed to the countess, probably written only because Goodere had requested it. The poem is not what one would expect in such a communication, especially considering what Goodere had requested (see Donne's discussion of the request above, on pp. 35–39). Its opening lines are far from expressing polite approach, much less praise for Lady Huntingdon's virtue. Wesley Milgate, the Oxford editor, called them "almost insulting," which is a palpable understatement; Theresa DiPasquale has called them "archly sexist" and "cheeky":[50]

> MADAME,
> Man to Gods image, *Eve*, to mans was made,
> Nor finde wee that God breath'd a soule in her,
> Canons will not Church functions you invade,
> Nor lawes to civill offices you preferre.
> (1–4)

Donne begins with an allusion to Genesis 1:26–27, asserting not only that Eve was created in the image of Adam rather than in the image of God but also that she may not have been given a rational soul. Editors have pointed out that these assertions contradict the very text to which they refer; and that Donne himself in two sermons, of 1622 and 1630, later rejected this interpretation, characterizing it as

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[49]Milgate, pp. 85–88 and 247–50; and Robbins, pp. 696–702. See also Helen Gardner, "Notes on Donne's Verse Letters," *MLR* 41 (1946): 318–21; and George Klawitter, "John Donne and the Countess of Huntingdon," *Wisconsin English Journal* 28 (1986): 10–12.

[50]Milgate, p. 249; and DiPasquale, "Donne and the Spectre of Misogyny," *OHJD*, p. 682.

extravagantly witty.[51] Jesting in the verse letter that Lady Huntingdon and all other women may lack rational souls, Donne adds that this circumstance accounts naturally for the fact that women are barred from holding office in church or state.

The poem proceeds through its next two stanzas further to explore the same jocular vein by distinguishing between ordinary but rare comets in the interstellar regions and miraculous novas:

> Who vagrant transitory Comets sees,
> Wonders, because they'are rare; But a new starre
> Whose motion with the firmament agrees,
> Is miracle; for, there no new things are;
>
> In women so perchance milde innocence
> A seldome comet is, but active good
> A miracle, which reason scapes, and sense;
> For, Art and Nature this in them withstood.
> (5–12)

Donne applies the distinction to suggest a practical and natural inability in women (including his addressee) of even passive goodness or, barring a miracle, an inability to do anything good, because both of

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[51]Milgate, p. 247; and Robbins, pp. 697–98. See also *The Sermons of John Donne*, 10 vols., ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1953–62), 4:241: ". . . Wee are sure *Women* have Soules as well as *Men*, but yet it is not so expressed, *that God breathed a Soule into Woman*, as hee did into Man"; and, more frankly, with relatively less reservation, 9:190: ". . . some men out of a petulancy and wantonnesse of wit, and out of the extravagancy of Paradoxes, and such singularities, have called the faculties, and abilities of women in question, even in the roote thereof, in the reasonable and immortall soul. . . . No author of gravity, of piety, or conversation in the Scriptures could admit that doubt, whether woman were created in the Image of God, that is, in possession of a reasonable and an immortall soul." Concerning the latter passage, Potter and Simpson (pp. 20–21) quote Donne's earlier repeated, contrary view doubting women's ensoulment, including lines 1–2 of the verse letter to Lady Huntingdon.

Himself having admitted "that doubt" on more than one occasion, the dean in his 1630 sermon seems to imply his persuasibility that several of his earlier writings (including the verse letter to Lady Huntingdon) have been extravagant products of "petulancy and wantonnesse."

what without a reasoning soul they cannot learn and of what they are otherwise inclined to do.

These first three stanzas are frank if jovial misogyny, musing about an impertinent question Donne had elsewhere addressed in his Problem, "Why hath the common opinion afforded women souls?" We know that from at least 1607 to 1609 Donne had written and enclosed in letters to Goodere preposterous Problems, among them perhaps the one to which he seems to refer in the opening of this verse letter to Lady Huntingdon; in 1609 Goodere may have shown this Problem to her.[52] Lacking evidence of such a context for these lines, it would stretch the meaning of the word to call his style here appropriate for reopening or renewing after years relations with a distant or estranged countess.

Donne may indirectly, through Goodere, already have shared this sort of bluff, cynical humor with Lady Huntingdon, who perhaps had not been offended, so that this poem's first, bizarre approach to her directly after eight or nine years could be read, not as inappropriate familiarity but as entertainment, intentionally flouting the conventions of a courtly verse letter. But Donne's approach even in this case is not easy to fathom, especially when considered in relation to what later in the poem he seems to admit may have been thought indiscretion or wrongdoing in his past relations with the countess. Briefly and generally speaking, as will be seen below, there is a recurring undertone of flippant irreverence in this poem. It is quite unlike anything Donne ever addressed directly to the Countess of Bedford, although it may be compared to some of his sarcastic, later remarks about her, in letters to Goodere.[53]

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[52]This conclusion was anticipated in and resulted from collaborative work by Commentary editors of the OUP Letters edition: Margaret Maurer, Jeanne Shami, and myself.

On Goodere's successive receptions of Problems from Donne, see *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour*, p. 88 (in 1607), p. 108 (in 1608), and p. 99 (in 1609).

[53]See, e.g., *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour*, pp. 74–77, 92–93, and 125–26, all written to Goodere during Donne's trip to the continent in 1611–12. Despite these sarcasms in later prose letters, Donne's attitude towards the femininity of Lady Bedford is strikingly at odds with his attitude in the verse letter to Lady Huntingdon. Potter and Simpson (9:21) quote from a 1608

After the salutation "MADAME," through the first forty lines of the verse letter to Lady Huntingdon Donne refers to her only as one among women in general, employing the pronoun "you" only in the plural, while expressing before all else in the poem a good part of his society's habitual and conventional derogation of and even disdain for her sex. Even where in the fourth stanza Donne turns and begins to pay extraordinary compliment to Lady Huntingdon and other women, this is only through the plural pronoun, still a reference to women in general rather than to the countess herself:

> As such a starre, the Magi led to view
> The manger-cradled infant, God below:
> By vertues beames by fame deriv'd from you,
> May apt soules, and the worst may, vertue know.
> (14–16)

Here Donne compares an aggregate of women to the most miraculous of novas, the star of Bethlehem (Matt. 2:2 and 9–11), which led astrologers to see that the blessed virgin had given birth to God in a stable, an incident that, deriving from the Incarnation in a woman's womb, made it possible for all souls, even "the worst" (i.e. women's souls) to know virtue. As a woman, Lady Huntingdon may have no reasoning soul, but she is a constituent of femininity, the medium through which God made virtue available to all the world.

In the next seven stanzas, Donne continues to develop the history of virtue in relation to women:

> If the worlds age, and death be argu'd well
> By the Sunnes fall, which now towards earth doth bend,
> Then we might feare that vertue, since she fell
> So low as woman, should be neare her end.
>
> But she's not stoop'd, but rais'd; exil'd by men
> She fled to heaven, that's heavenly things, that's you;

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verse letter to Lady Bedford: "you are here / The first good Angell, since the worlds frame stood, / That ever did in womans shape appeare" (Milgate, 91); the *Sermons* editors link this passage to Donne's refuting, in his 1630 sermon, "that observation, that never good Angel appeared in the likenesse of woman."

> She was in all men, thinly scatter'd then,
> But now amass'd, contracted in a few.
> (17–24)

To the contracted state of virtue in the world he contrasts the apparent annual "declination" of the sun, which some sixteenth-century writers thought evidence of the decay of creation.[54] As the sun may indicate the coming death of the world through its inconsistent course nearer to the earth, so virtue might have been thought near its death, too. Before the Incarnation, exiled to heaven by the sin of Adam, virtue was but "thinly scatter'd" in all men. Yet paradoxically, by declining in the Incarnation to a lodging "So low as woman," virtue has in effect "fled to heaven," to women, who were thus rendered "heavenly things."

> She guilded us: But you are gold, and Shee;
> Us she inform'd, but transubstantiates you;
> Soft dispositions which ductile bee,
> Elixarlike, she makes, not cleane, but new.
> (25–28)

George Klawitter has paraphrased this passage: "it is no great honor for men to be virtuous because they are created directly by God in His likeness, but for a woman to be virtuous requires total transformation."[55] Men, created in the likeness of God, could be veneered with knowledge of virtue through the birth of the Incarnation in the virgin's womb; but far more thoroughly transformed by the Incarnation were women, who became like an elixar. The "soft dispositions" of women have been capable of "transubstantiation," in the alchemical

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[54]"Closely associated with this idea is the notion, apparently transmitted widely by Bodin and Melanchthon, that the sun actually is nearer the earth than in the past. . . . Donne appears to accept both the inequality of the sun's motion and its reputed approach to the earth in the way these opinions were currently interpreted to argue for the general decay of the earth," Charles M. Coffin, *John Donne and the New Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), pp. 136–37; cf. Donne's *The First Anniversary*, ll. 251–84.

[55]Klawitter, p. 12.

sense, by virtue not merely modified but made a completely new substance, virtue itself.

Women's transformation into virtue has grown and inheres not in their being female but rather in their being wives and mothers. Their virtue is more a function of these roles than an outgrowth of femininity, as is clear in the fact that some women do not become wives and mothers:

> Though you a wifes and mothers name retaine,
> 'Tis not as woman, for all are not soe,
> But vertue having made you vertue,'is faine
> T'adhere in these names, her and you to show,
>
> Else, being alike pure, wee should neither see;
> As, water being into ayre rarify'd,
> Neither appeare, till in one cloud they bee,
> So, for our sakes you do low names abide.
>
> Taught by great constellations, which being fram'd,
> Of the most starres, take low names, *Crab*, and *Bull*,
> When single planets by the Gods are nam'd,
> You covet not great names, of great things full.
> (29–40)

If women's virtue were inherent in their femininity, it would be as invisible as virtue itself and would not appear, as water vapor and air do not appear except together in a cloud. Helen Gardner has paraphrased this passage: "Both you and virtue are too pure for sight; but, just as when water evaporates into air, neither is visible until the aqueous vapour is condensed into a cloud, so, in order to become visible to men, you show virtue in the low forms of womanhood, wifehood and motherhood."[56] The "low names" of wives and mothers thus help men distinguish women and virtue.

Similarly, the "low names" of constellations contrast to the exalted names of planets; like constellations, women as wives and mothers are "of great things full," and thus accept modest representation. Donne's analogizing here assimilates to the example of the blessed virgin the

[56]Gardner, p. 320.

lowness and the triumph of Lady Huntingdon and those of other women; the likeness is enhanced by the fact, which Donne seems to have known, that as he wrote these stanzas in July 1610 the countess herself was seven months pregnant with her third child. Her ongoing role as wife and mother is at the center of the poem's compliment.

The argument of the poem for the final thirty lines turns to the singular import of the countess's virtue; at the point in this poem when Donne first uses the pronoun "you" in the singular, we find a counterpart to this in his first usage of the first person singular "mee" and "I":

> So you, as woman, one doth comprehend,
> And in the vaile of kindred others see;
> To some you are reveal'd, as in a friend,
> And as a vertuous Prince farre off, to mee:
>
> To whom, because from you all vertues flow,
> And 'tis not none, to dare contemplate you,
> I, which doe so, as your true subject owe
> Some tribute for that, so these lines are due.
> (41–48)

Editors have glossed "one," in line 41, as referring to the countess's husband Henry Hastings;[57] but "one" seems rather to mean anyone contemplating her as a wife and mother. (Another possible reading is that "one" is the object rather than subject of the verb "comprehend," referring not to her husband but to her unborn child.) By her roles as wife and mother (i.e., "So" in line 41, referring back to the previous stanzas), Lady Huntingdon can be comprehended as a woman and seen as of worth comparable to "kindred others" (perhaps alluding to Lady Bedford). "To some" (perhaps alluding to Goodere) she seems a friend, but to Donne she seems of exalted and distant nobility; yet Donne dares to contemplate her because, understood as a wife and mother, she exemplifies all the virtues and because such daring is itself a virtue. The poem he is writing is owed to her virtue, as the tribute of a subject to a prince.

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[57]Milgate, p. 250; and Robbins, p. 701.

The following stanzas, however, do not show the special courtesy owed to a prince, returning directly to the transgressive familiarity of the poem's opening lines and to the question, raised by Donne's cover letter to Goodere (quoted on p. 7 above), whether Lady Huntingdon is capable of understanding Donne's poem:

> If you can think these flatteries, they are,
> For then your judgement is below my praise,
> If they were so, oft, flatteries worke as farre,
> As Counsels, and as farre th'endeavour raise.
>
> So my ill reaching you might there grow good,
> But I remaine a poyson'd fountaine still;
> But not your beauty, vertue, knowledge, blood
> Are more above all flattery, then my will.
>
> And if I flatter any, 'tis not you
> But my owne judgement, who did long agoe
> Pronounce, that all these praises should be true,
> And vertue should your beauty,'and birth outgrow.
> (49–60)

If she thinks his poem is flattering her, she crassly fulfills her own suspicion; even if it were true that he flatters her, flattery is sometimes as effective as good counsel. In this way his deceit might become meritorious, even though it proceeded from and even though he might "remaine a poyson'd fountain still." This phrasing describes her judgment of his poetry and may help explain the puzzle of their prolonged estrangement after 1601, as if it stemmed from an earlier "occasion of versifying" at which he had descended to the "course, then of a Poet," and consequently been "traduced" or "esteemed light in that Tribe." In any case, her best features are less resistant to flattery than is his will not to perform it. And even if he does flatter, he flatters not her but his own judgment, which at some past time predicted (perhaps in verse) that her growth in virtue would surpass her beauty and noble breeding.

The direction taken by the poem here may well have dictated Goodere's unwillingness to deliver a poem so inconsistent with what he had requested. This would not be the only case in which Donne,

for purposes we must discover, enclosed in a letter to a friend an inappropriate letter that his friend declined to deliver.[58] He closes with two stanzas and a couplet in the same vein:

> Now that my prophesies are all fulfill'd,
> Rather then God should not be honour'd too,
> And all these gifts confess'd, which hee instill'd,
> Your selfe were bound to say that which I doe.
>
> So I, but your Recorder am in this,
> Or mouth, and Speaker of the universe,
> A ministeriall Notary, for 'tis
> Not I, but you and fame, that make this verse;
>
> I was your Prophet in your yonger dayes,
> And now your Chaplain, God in you to praise.
> (61–70)

Following his violent and challenging gambit in ll. 49–52, Donne goes on to characterize the history of his personal relationship to the countess as having begun long ago and having included his proleptic praise of her adult virtues while she was yet a child. If now, grown to virtuous adulthood, she pays proper heed to honor God, who has truly fulfilled Donne's prophecies, she will be constrained to admit that everything Donne has said was true. This agreement between them would mean that he can hardly be faulted as the author of this verse letter, since she herself and her fame say the same things about her. Once he served as her prophet; in this poem he serves as her "Chaplain." This usage in the 1610 verse letter to Lady Huntingdon

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[58]This conclusion resulted from collaborative work by Commentary editors of the OUP Letters edition: Margaret Maurer, Jeanne Shami, and myself.

Among such letters, for example, were one addressed to Robert Carr, then Viscount Rochester, enclosed in one addressed to Sir Robert Ker (later Earl of Ancrum); *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour*, pp. 290–91 and 294–95 respectively. Two other examples may well be a prose letter to George Garrard (ibid., pp. 259–61), who seems as had Goodere earlier to have suggested that Donne write praise in a verse letter to yet another countess, Catharine (Howard) Cecil, Countess of Salisbury. See also Donne's poem addressed to her (Milgate, pp. 107–10).

appears to be Donne's earliest extant reference to himself as a chaplain.

6

To sum up, Donne's mentions of Lady Huntingdon in letters all appear during periods when he was active and successful in seeking specific patronage goals: in 1609–10, he was engaged in writing *Pseudo-Martyr* and dedicating its publication to King James; in 1614, he sought to make his profession divinity in a royal chaplaincy; and in the years following 1619, as a chaplain he served the embassy of James Hay, Viscount Doncaster, and then was appointed dean of St. Paul's cathedral. Throughout all three periods, Donne does not appear to have had any personal contact with the countess, although repeatedly he remembered having been in her presence at some period earlier than 1609; he also expressed repeated gratitude that she too remembered that experience.

His prose letter of July 1610, and its enclosed verse letter addressed to the countess, both made reference to "the beginning" of his experience with her, when she knew him in "a graver course, then of a Poet, into which (that I may also keep my dignity) I would not seem to relapse." Further, he expressed sensitivity to and apprehension about the possibility of a negative outcome if Goodere showed his verse letter to Lady Huntingdon: "I have obeyed you thus far, as to write: but intreat you by your friendship, that by this occasion of versifying, I be not traduced, nor esteemed light in that Tribe, and that house where I have lived." This apprehension may reflect an earlier episode of ridicule or disdain from that quarter, from "that Tribe, and that house," terms that have generally been interpreted to refer to Egerton's house; but Donne, in speaking of a "Tribe" and a "house," may recall in 1610 some experience specifically with the house of Stanley, one of two families that lived in residence together following the October 1600 marriage of Alice Stanley, dowager Countess of Derby, to Lord Keeper Egerton. On the other hand, Donne's years at York House were certainly years when, as manuscript evidence suggests, Donne was both active and widely perceived as a poet, even in Egerton's house. It is not clear exactly what Donne is recalling when he speaks of having been engaged, at

the time when Lady Huntingdon first knew him, in "a graver course, then of a Poet."

At the end of 1614, as a consequence of Donne's quest to gain a royal chaplaincy, he felt "a necessity of printing my Poems, and addressing them to" Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset. Again he expressed at least some apprehension (albeit diminished) about being seen publicly as a poet: "but I am at an end, of much considering that; and, if I were as startling in that kinde, as ever I was, yet in this particular, I am under an unescapable necessity." Considering such publication, Donne specifically asked Goodere about the verse letter written in 1610, wondering "whether you ever made any such use of the letter in verse, *A nostre Countesse chez vous*, as that I may not put it in amongst the rest to persons of that rank; for I desire very very much, that something should bear her name in the book." This concern probably did not address any possible embarrassment that Lady Huntingdon might have felt at the private printing of the poem; it seems more likely that Donne did not think she had ever seen it or ever would. The question was rather whether Goodere had made "such use" of the poem (by incorporating, as he was wont to do, passages of Donne's in writings of his own) in any quarter more likely than Ashby to receive exhibition or distribution of the poem, such as for example the precincts of Somerset's political allies, the Howards. Donne appears not to know what Goodere may have done with the verse letter: "I pray tell me as soon as you can, if I be at liberty to insert that: for if you have by any occasion applied any pieces of it, I see not, that it will be discerned, when it appears in the wholepiece." To be sure, Donne meant to publish a book that would be "not for much publique view, but at mine own cost, a few Copies," presumably to be given mainly to Somerset, who seems at this time inconveniently to have insisted that Donne was still, or had been, a poet.

Finally, in the aftermath of Donne's appointment as dean he mentioned having been favored with Lady Huntingdon's support, his only mention of such support in any letter. Even here Donne's relationship to Lady Huntingdon seems to have depended on the intermediation of Goodere, a circumstance significantly different from Donne's relationship to Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford. Throughout the years from 1609 to 1625, Donne presented himself in relation to Lady Huntingdon as a "servant" of her servant Goodere

rather than as her friend. This scrupulous distance he maintained, at the same time repeatedly implying on her part some sense of unspecified obligation she thought he owed to her, with some lesser estimation of his worth than he perhaps deserved, a judgment on her part that he repeatedly stated or implied did not stem from any failure in Goodere's stewardship of his interests.

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