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A Possible Story of Judith Donne: A Life of Her Own?

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First, it must be obvious to all that I was not invited to address the John Donne Society because of my extensive scholarship on John Donne. Ironically, the first piece I ever published was indeed a review of John Carey's biography of Donne for *Essays in Criticism* when I was still a graduate student, a book I remember I heartily disliked. But now, as then, I am ill-equipped to presume to tell this scholarly audience very much about John Donne, and most of my knowledge, in fact, I have learned by reading the work of members of this audience in the first place.

So, what am I doing here? Well, I've come to tell stories. Perhaps my stories will amuse you, coming as they do from an outsider to your field of work, commenting on the drama of John Donne studies as it unfolds in the discoveries and conflicts enacted in the pages of the *John Donne Journal*, a set of which my colleague Don Dickson kindly provided me and which I read from beginning to end rather like a Victorian serial novel. Perhaps my stories will irritate you, because with your greater knowledge, you could tell them better. Perhaps if you are sufficiently amused and/or irritated, my stories will create for you a new series of possible questions not only about John Donne, the poet, but also about the nature of early modern authorship which Donne and the studies about him represent in a larger scheme of a history of literature in the early modern period. Perhaps, too, I might cause you to ponder how the ways in which we tell stories about male writers has significance for the ways we have interpreted female ones.

After I agreed to give this presentation and provided a title for a nonexistent paper, I began my study of John Donne studies. One thing

considered as odd, or even misguided, perhaps the first step in advancing the recovery and reconsideration of early modern women writers is to consider the stories we tell about Donne's women and self-consciously generate a few more—no pun intended.

Let us consider first the debate over the possibility of Anne More's literacy, and do so from the perspective of an outsider. What stories do I see here? The pro-literate team takes its initial starting point the assertion in Walton's life of Donne that Anne was "curiously and plentifully" educated. This statement, it can be argued, comes from a valued contemporary source and furthermore, since Walton viewed the marriage of John and Anne as the fundamental "error" in his life, there would be little incentive for Walton to provide her with artificial attainments or to attempt to elevate her as an individual apart from the importance of her family connections. The anti-literate team, undaunted, points out that Walton never met the real Anne so this would be hearsay evidence and Walton is an unreliable narrator since he is not always accurate in his interpretations of events in Donne's own life. Furthermore, the anti-literate position maintains that since the very good historian of literacy David Cressy has stated that 90% of women were illiterate, Anne More was 90% likely to be illiterate. If one is content to rest one's case on Cressy's statistics, then looking at only 10% of the female population and hoping that Anne More was one of them does seem like a pointless exercise.

Now, the opening arguments as I have sketched them here are of interest for several reasons for those of us who are not Donne scholars but who are working in general on early modern women writers and readers. As much as I admire and have benefited from the work of Cressy, his methods for determining literacy have been under fire ever since that book appeared, in part for the lack of acknowledgment of the ways in which an early modern person could be literate without being able to sign his or her name, or the ways in which not only women but also members of laboring classes would fall outside the tests Cressy used. Beginning with Margaret Spufford and continuing with Keith Thomas, scholars of the history of reading have directed our attention to the ways in which our definition of "literacy" or, more expansively,

how the discourse which with we frame our questions and direct our inquiries affects our ability to perceive historical activity.[3] Still other recent essays have specifically addressed the issue of the ways in which literacy studies have affected our perceptions of early modern women in particular.[4] Most recently, for example, in Frances Teague's 1996 essay "Judith Shakespeare Reading," although she disagrees with my position about Judith Shakespeare as a representative female author, Teague does adroitly draw our attention to the ways in which reading practices in early modern times were not modern ones and goes so far to conclude—based on case studies of particular groups done by Louis Wright and David Hall—that women of this period not only read, but very likely were responsible for teaching children to read and that for women reading was a social role.[5]

To someone not involved in Donne studies directly, it is interesting to follow the determined resistance to a notion of a literate Anne More. Following the plot found in the *JDJ* Chronicles, it appears we can imagine all sorts of stories about how and why Walton was wrong, in effect creating little biofictions about Walton's motives, but we seem less free in imagining a story in which Walton was correct. I think the use of Cressy to refute Walton is an interesting move because it so clearly demonstrates the power of later generations' paradigms for analysis, in this case a 1970s model of literacy, and the attendant critical discourse to control what we look at and look for in the past. And, if one persists in looking where we are told there is nothing of value, not only Walton's motives for lying, dissembling, or prevaricating are up for scrutiny, but also one's own social agendas can become a target for analysis and biofictions. If one goes by the tone and tenor of the recent Anne More debates, it appears that to be in favor of a literate Anne Donne is either to be an enthusiastically naive empiricist or a sentimental historicist.

Since I have already been called all of these things and more, I shall continue to ponder the problem of Anne More as literate—but not in order to illuminate her husband. As I read ever further into the adventures of the John Donne Society, I find that the plot is always thickening: just when the point appears to be settled, some archival

researcher drags into the light documents which theoretically don't or shouldn't exist. Here I refer to Ilona Bell's and Dennis Flynn's recoveries and the subsequent new arguments based on letters by Donne to Anne More.[6] And to add fuel to the fire, such new material finds interpretative support in M. Thomas Hester's intricate exploration of Donne's epitaph for his wife, which draws our attention to the richness of the possibilities in the descriptors Donne selected for her, pointing to the ambiguity in the Latin which offers praise of her as "most choice/select/or read" and "most beloved/well-read."[7] This is an essay which also sees no problem in believing Walton on this point or, more generally, imagining a literate early modern woman reader.

For myself, as will become clear, I must say that measuring the amount or level of John Donne's misogyny does not interest me nearly as much as attempting to recover the actions and activities of his female contemporaries, especially those of literate women. Thus, in spite of warnings about the dangers, I shall persist in telling a few more stories, but in the process I hope I may suggest the ways in which our commitment to certain narratives and the discourse which frames them have limited our imagination when it comes to discovering new sources of information about early modern women and their involvement in literary culture. Leaving aside the question of whether the real John Donne was a rampant misogynist or a true and tender husband,[8] those interested in recovering the texts by his female contemporaries could learn much from the stories that have been told about Donne and from the course followed by Donne studies over the last few decades.

My title gives away one of the stories I will tell. I have argued at length elsewhere that Virginia Woolf's powerful story of the alienated, abused, and suicidal woman writer in Shakespeare's day has eerily governed our subsequent treatment of early modern women writers, providing a pattern of despair, denial, and destruction we have imposed on historical women writers even in the face of historical evidence to the contrary. One must remember that Woolf's starting premise in the creation of Judith Shakespeare was that the historical conditions made it "impossible" for any woman of genius to write poetry in the Renaissance: thus, her reconstruction of the literary life of Shakespeare's

sister is an attempt to imagine and explain the specific conditions that would *prevent* a woman from writing. For those of you who haven't internalized Woolf's story of early modern authorship, let me now give you a brief and no doubt unfair plot summary. "It is a perennial puzzle," Woolf opens Chapter Three of *A Room of One's Own*, "why no woman wrote a word of that extraordinary literature when every other man, it seemed, was capable of song or sonnet."[9]

Woolf then imagines the fate of an equally gifted female in Shakespeare's family: unlike her brother, whom Woolf believed was sent to school based on the interesting point that "his mother was an heiress," his sister was self-taught with no formal instruction. Perhaps, Woolf speculates, "she scribbled some pages up in an apple loft on the sly, but was careful to hide them or set fire to them" (49). Escaping to London, she was soon impoverished and impregnated, finally killing herself. While Woolf concludes that she has no idea whether her story is true or not, "what is true in it, so it seemed to me, reviewing the story of Shakespeare's sister as I had made it, is that any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at" (51).

Well, many of you sitting in the audience are aware that indeed women did write in the Renaissance. In spite of Gilbert and Gubar's attempts to classify them as atypical, anomalous loonies, we and our students are now finally able to read women such as Amelia Lanyer, Lady Mary Wroth, Elizabeth Cary, and Arabella Stewart in convenient paperback editions rather than on microfilm. Fortunately for my students, Betty Travitsky, Sidney Gottlieb, Elaine Beilin, Elaine Hobby, Josephine Roberts, Barbara Lewalski, Jean Klene, and Louise Schleiner among many have recovered texts by women writers which suggest that the field of authorship in early modern periods was more populated by females and by a greater diversity of writers than we had previously imagined and, indeed, than Woolf's model had left us any reason to suspect.

As I have said elsewhere, I have no problems with Woolf's story being an accurate representation of an artist alienated from his or her

culture, but I have great problems with it being used as a guide to research on early modern Englishwomen's experiences as writers or readers. Using Judith Shakespeare as our guide, we never would have recovered Lady Ann Southwell, Elizabeth Cary, Lady Mary Wroth, An Collins, Anna Weamys, or Elizabeth Melville. And I do think that one reason their recovery has been so slow is that we have had a failure of imagination when it comes to conceiving how and where to conduct research on early women. Imaginatively stuck in a denial of women's agency and abilities which Woolf inherited from the very misogynist academics who locked her out of the library, we fail to see, as Margaret Ferguson has pointed out, the necessity for "a degree of epistemological skepticism" and also for a greater awareness of the limits on investigations imposed by the discourse employed to construct the questions being asked. Ferguson rightly urges those interested in the study of early modern women to "keep firmly in mind the fact that different degrees of literacy, and even competing conceptual definitions thereof, not only mediate our knowledge of the past but help constitute what counts as the past worth studying."[10]

And here, a story from personal experience: the process of recovering such early modern women for the classroom has been slowed (and interestingly still is) by fellowship committees and advisory boards who consciously or not uphold Woolf's position that women simply didn't write before Aphra Behn. For them, it is a waste of time and money to support the resurrection of such ghosts or literary curiosities. In addition to my early association with the Brown University Women Writers Project, recently I have been following the development in Britain of the Perdita Project, a multi-university sponsored attempt to recover early modern women's manuscript materials in a systematic way. I have read with dismay dismissals of the Project on the grounds that the quantity of material to be recovered is insignificant and that it is only tangential for constructing our knowledge of the early modern period, responses not dissimilar to those the Women Writers Project faced a decade earlier. It is very frustrating to attempt to work on materials which are firmly denied either an existence or significance by those in positions of authority, if not of knowledge, but such is the

potency of Woolf's story-telling, among others, that the ghost of Judith Shakespeare seems still to sit in the chair we have designated for other early modern women writers.

Since we appear to be unable culturally to do without the type of biofiction Woolf supplied, what would have happened, I wonder, if Woolf had selected a different writer on which to model her story of being an author than Shakespeare? Say, John Donne? Such a move would not be outside the realm of possibility given Woolf's reading habits. Although she first mentions Donne in rather unflattering terms—"For three hundred years and more a dead preacher called John Donne has cumbered our shelves," she opens a 1920 review of Logan Pearsall Smith's *Treasury of English Prose* appearing in *The Athenaeum*, "the other day Mr. Pearsall Smith touched him with his wand, and behold!—the folios quake, the pages shiver, out steps the passionate preacher"—she came to revise her appreciation of him as a poet over the next four or five years.[11] In a 1924 essay for *Vogue* entitled "Indiscretions," Woolf warns that while it is always indiscreet to mention whom one holds in affection, among literary figures for whom she feels an "instinctive response to the lure of personal liking in the printed page," John Donne emerges as a figure second only to Shakespeare:

> There is a poet, whose love of women was all stuck about with briars; who railed and cursed; was fierce and tender; passionate and obscene. In the very obscurity of his mind there is something that intrigues us on; his rage scorches but sets on fire; and in the thickest of his thorn bushes are glimpses of the highest heavens, and ecstasies and pure windless calms. Whether as a young man gazing from narrow Chinese eyes upon a world that half allures, half disgusts him, or with his flesh dried on his cheek bones, wrapped in his winding sheet, excruciated, dead in St. Paul's, one cannot help but love John Donne. (*Essays of Virginia Woolf*, 3: 463)

Thus it would seem that we might have some grounds at least for imagining Woolf's amusement at the stories I shall start to spin. When

I speak of swapping out Donne for Shakespeare in imagining early women writers' experiences, let it be noted, I am not looking at him as a model of attitudes towards women, but instead the way in which he conducted his practice of authorship. What would have been the aftermath had Woolf selected not the successful, bourgeois Protestant playwright as her model of the Renaissance writer but instead a writer often in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes, the Catholic-connected John Donne? What would have been our expectations then about the nature of a woman writer's experiences in early modern England if Woolf's concept of authorship had been derived not from the commercial world of the London stage but instead from the amateur coteries and the milieu of social, occasional verse that characterized the universities and the provinces as well as London's literary life? What would have been the effect of considering the intersection of religion and women's literary activities in the way it is has been done for Donne? Finally, what would have been the impact of considering as a model the career of a poet whose fame and critical reputation has varied with the generation which read him?

Well, let's say flat out at the start that it appears that basing a story on Anne More might prove a dangerous path. Just imagine the plot devised by a second-generation follower of Woolf for a fictional character whose life events correspond to Anne More's: the young Anne, who lost her mother in childbirth, drifts about in a male dominated household. She must have been lonely, alienated, and uneducated, and obviously when she was shipped off to her uncle's house, she was easy prey for the dashing, poetic, and opportunistic Jack Donne. In this story, Anne indeed would provide an early version of smart women who make dumb choices, who love too well and to their harm: swept her off her feet by Donne's Chinese eyes, Anne's clandestine marriage plunged her into a life lacking the social comforts she had been raised to expect; his career ambitions shattered rather than enhanced as he had imagined, Donne had little use for Anne except as a vessel for his lust. Of course she was illiterate, having been raised by her father—and after fifteen years of watching Donne pen his misogynist works and after hearing them read scornfully in front of her in the

knowledge she wouldn't get the point, her opinion of poets in general was low. Finally, after being forced to bear twelve children in fifteen years, the exhausted and spent Anne joined her mother in death, leaving the world with her last stillborn child.

Well, that doesn't sound like a very promising story to further research either, does it? But what would happen if we switched the focus from Anne More to look more broadly at the lives of Donne's other female relatives: what would the story be like which was based on his mother's and his sisters' lives?

The first major difference, of course, is that it was John Donne's father who died when he was a child and his mother who oversaw the education of her children, male and female (much as Woolf attributes Shakespeare's education to his mother). If one looks at the pattern of family experience based on John Donne's family rather than Shakespeare's, it is apparent that before the young Donne was sent to Oxford, he grew up in an environment with a lot of women, and that these women possessed power and money, both in the form of domestic authority as in the situation of his mother and the female members of her family, but also obviously, with the person and symbol of Queen Elizabeth on the throne. In addition to his mother and sisters, Donne's childhood world was populated with female relatives, several important enough to figure in his father's will: Bald notes, for example, that the will specifies a cousin, Alice Donne, as being a member of the household when she was under age 21, and there was also a specific bequest to Donne's aunt, Elizabeth Marvin, his mother's sister.[12]

Obviously, as Heather Dubrow has pointed out in her essay on parental death in Tudor/Stuart England, the death of the husband or father hardly converted the family into a patriarchal-free zone. Nevertheless, as Dubrow demonstrates, the death of the father "complicated the workings of power and authority" in ways we have not thoroughly explored.[13] While some very interesting work has been done on the relative status of wives and widows, it would be interesting, too, to look further at families as a whole as a specific type of community where, as in Donne's family, the structural continuity is determined not by the males, but the surviving women. If one takes the patterns of life

experiences from Donne's mother and sister, what story about being an author could we imagine for Judith Donne?

Donne's mother, born Elizabeth Heywood, was the granddaughter of Sir Thomas More's sister and the daughter of the epigrammatist John Heywood. As Bald admits, although we note that he cannot imagine that Elizabeth had any conscious agency in it, "some of [John] Heywood's talents and independence of mind were almost certainly inherited by his daughter and transmitted to her son" (22); although he can imagine a mother transmitting talents and abilities to a son, perhaps it is not too surprising that Bald isn't interested in imagining the possibility of the same being transmitted to her daughters. Perhaps we should be.

Interestingly, given the conflict over whether Walton was correct in his assertion that Anne More was "curiously" learned, I have not found much quarrel with the assertion that Donne's early education was guided by his mother. R. C. Bald notes about Donne's lack of early knowledge of Greek, but his apparently excellent French that it "opens the way for an interesting speculation...[that] it is quite probable that Heywood owned a representative collection of French literary works printed early in the sixteenth century, and these, left behind in his daughter's house, could easily have been at hand for the youthful Donne to explore" (41). And, if Bald can imagine that, it should not prove too hard for us to imagine that his mother, sister, and cousin Alice read there as well and cause us to reconsider the presence of books and libraries in a home as an ingredient in "being an author."

After the death of John Donne's father, Elizabeth Donne, who was then in her earlier thirties, remarried some six months later John Syminges, a doctor in Physic of Oxford. Syminges himself was a widower in his fifties with two married daughters, and when he died in 1588, Bald informs us that "the administration of his very substantial possessions passed into the hands of his widow" (49). Three years later, John Donne's then twice-widowed mother married a third time in 1591 to a Richard Rainsford. Elizabeth Heywood Donne Syminges Rainsford died only a few months before her son John, having buried three husbands, raised and educated numerous children, and having been

mistress of many men's property. Interestingly for our story-telling possibilities, when she died, she was once again cloistered in a female community within the male structure, passing her final days in the house of one of her granddaughters.

Donne's historical sister, Ann, also offers some interesting life moments from which we might construct a story of a fictional Judith Donne. Like her mother, sister Anne also was married more than once and survived both of her husbands. Her first husband, a barrister, left her with debts and a son; her second, William Lyly, was for 7 years the secretary of Sir Edward Stafford, the English ambassador in Paris. Lyly, described by Joseph Hall as "a witty and bold Atheist," ended his career under the patronage of Sir Robert Drury, Stafford's nephew and the father, of course, of Elizabeth Drury, the subject of Donne's *Anniversaries*. Bald notes that although Donne himself claimed never to have met Elizabeth Drury, Bald imagines that "his sister must have known [Elizabeth Drury] during most of her childhood" at Hawstead (240). Imagine, however, what we can do with that connection in terms of understanding women's positions in the patronage system.

Thus, the building blocks for a possible story of a fictional Judith Donne seem rather different from those selected by Woolf for a female member of Shakespeare's family. Let's try imagining one: Judith Donne, who never really knew her biological father, grows up in a world where even though husbands and fathers die on a regular basis, the family itself continues through its network of aunts, stepsisters, female cousins, daughters, and granddaughters. Like her brothers, she benefitted from being in house containing the library of a noted literary man. Like her brothers, her education was overseen by her mother. We could even imagine without too much strain that even though she did not follow her brothers off to the Universities, young Judith Donne was a correspondent with her brother John, as he was later with other women of his acquaintance such as Bridget White, Lady Kingsmill. Judith Donne would probably marry in her early twenties, bear several children, and, if she followed the pattern of the other Donne women, bury her husband. For my story, let's imagine that rather than repeatedly remarrying, she stayed a widow, raising and educating her children,

maintaining close ties with her mother and siblings, and finally dying at a ripe old age. The End.

Boring, you say. Yes—but, what does imagining this story permit us to consider in reconstructing early modern women's literary lives? What significance does framing the narrative in this fashion have for the recovery of early modern women writers? I would argue that imagining such fictions permits us to imagine possible new sites of authorship in which women might participate in a variety of roles, and once one has imagined the possibility, what then remains is to investigate such new areas for archival and historical evidence of women's participation in literary culture. It is not that the archival materials are being reinterpreted—but we can now think to ask it different questions if we are not looking for a successful commercial author.

If one can imagine John Donne as a model of the young author, one can imagine that through him his sister might have seen another view of the literary world than that sought by Judith Shakespeare. Following the pattern suggested by Arthur Marotti's re-imagination of John Donne as a "coterie" poet, recently refined by Richard Wollman, one confronts a new set of issues not only about Donne, but also access to literary culture for women.[14]

Nor would imagining this type of activity for a fictional Judith Donne be long without actual historical example for support. When one turns one's attention away from commercial genres and instead surveys the ways in which literary pursuits—both the creation of texts and circulation and consumption of them—were part of early modern life, it becomes clear that many of our original premises about the nature of the barriers to women's participation would be circumvented. Through the example of John Donne, we can explore the domestic nature of early modern authorship, one which does not demand a room of one's own as the key necessity for authorship, but instead a circle of family members and good friends.

This type of social literary activity generated out of a domestic site, for example, is found in the practices of Constance Aston, the daughter of Sir Walter Aston, to whom Donne's verse letter to the Countess of Huntingdon, "That unripe side of earth," as Dennis Kay has observed,

was once attributed.[15] Not only Constance was engrossed by literary matters, but her sister and brother were as well and Constance became the directing, editorial figure in a literary network which, with its base in Staffordshire circulating poems among neighbors and relatives, but also extending at times to Spain and the Continent through her father, her brother Herbert, and his friend Sir Richard Fanshawe. Interestingly, as Deborah Larson notes, both Constance and her sister-in-law Katherine quote "Dr. Dunne" with enthusiasm in their letters.[16]

If we can imagine Judith Donne participating in activities such as those documented in the Aston family, whole new areas for research open up. How many more provincial families enjoyed literary pursuits as part of their domestic arrangements? What roles did the women in these families play in the creation, distribution, and preservation of such manuscripts? The answers to such questions still lie in largely uncatalogued family libraries, and in boxes of unsorted "domestic correspondence" scattered throughout the county record offices. Since that type of manuscript papers has previously been consulted only for information about either male members of the family or in search of published male writers, it may be time, as the Perdita Project has begun to do, to return to them, only asking different questions.

Had Virginia Woolf selected John Donne as her model of the author, perhaps we would have turned our attention sooner to the amateur writers in a period in which to be an amateur was hardly any indication of the quality of the verse or the commitment to the art. Instead, with Shakespeare as our model of authorship, we have tended to concentrate on women's participation in commercial literary modes such as the drama and thus had to wait for Aphra Behn to arrive and be commercially successful.

As Ernest Sullivan's recent book reminds us, just because a manuscript author's works were not published in the form of collected works, they nevertheless were available to what he terms "functionally illiterate" readers in miscellanies and song books.[17] Certainly, when one looks at the miscellanies and song books published during the Restoration by Playford and others, one is struck by the number of lyrics attributed to women writers. Again, by looking at the pattern of

Donne's presence in print rather than Shakespeare's, perhaps we would have started looking sooner at the ways in which song books and miscellanies procured their texts and asked the questions about gender implicit not only in who composed the lyrics but also who owned and read the volumes.

There is one other area concerning early modern women's involvement in the world of authorship and letters in which having John Donne as our model rather than Shakespeare might have caused us to look with more interest much sooner. In addition to the connections through her brothers to an academic and social literary milieu, our fictional Judith Donne would have grown up as part of a network of Catholic families. Daughters as well as sons were raised in a world in which one's religion was an introduction to the dangers of politics as well as the politics of faith. We can imagine young Judith Donne would have witnessed the same dynamics of survival as part of the Catholic community that Carey and Flynn have imagined for John Donne.[18] She would have known that her mother and her family were active in this world, and that the women in her family held fast to their faith even when under pressure. Bald, for example, declares that Elizabeth Donne's "obstinate recusancy" would color her public actions throughout her life and not to her benefit.

Our fictional Judith Donne, like her mother, was probably still a Catholic and thus part of a tightly woven net of relationships, and a network adept at transmitting texts, both printed and manuscript. As Nancy Pollard Brown's fascinating study "Paperchase: The Dissemination of Catholic Texts in Elizabethan England," has reconstructed, we can imagine that Judith Donne might well have been positioned to participate in even more dangerous manuscript practices than penning songs and sonnets. Brown concentrates on reconstructing the sophisticated system for circulating information, manuscripts, and secretly printed Catholic texts as part of the Jesuit Mission which was carried on through family connections. Tracing the efforts of the scrivener Peter Mowle, Brown uncovers a network of Catholic families with connections to Spitalfields, London who in turn received and preserved Catholic writings in the provinces; "in the record of his laborious and courageous copying," Brown summarizes, "Peter Mowle has created

a pattern of East Anglian piety, made up of individuals or of families who in their country houses had also the courage to collect Catholic works for their own edification or for the instruction of their children."[19]

Perhaps this early 16th-century network of manuscript transmission lies behind a phenomenon I recently came across in reconstructing provincial literary circles involving women in the 1640s and 1650s; I found that the provincial literary circles which have the most extensively preserved materials are from Catholic families such as the Tixall papers of the Aston family in Staffordshire, and in Hampshire in the family setting of Elizabeth Cary's son Patrick and her daughter Victoria Uvedale. In looking at Brown's list of the recipients of Moule's manuscript copies and the dedication of the volumes, it is noticeable that, as Brown puts it, they are "addressed mainly to ladies whose houses were also in [East Anglia]," including the Viscountess Hereford of Parham in Suffolk, and Lady Paulet, who was—not without interest for Donne scholars—the daughter of Sir Edward Neville.

Perhaps Judith Donne would, like Lady Paulet's granddaughter, Jeronima Waldegrave, have read Catholic manuscripts as a child. Jeromina, born around 1603 and raised in Borley, Essex, wrote assertively on the blank page of a manuscript volume of Southwell's poems and prose, "Jeromina Waldegrave is a good garle but that nobodi cer for her;" she became a nun in the Abbey at Ghent (Brown, 129). Of course, being a Catholic girl, Judith Donne, too, would have had another option than marriage, that followed by some of Elizabeth Cary's daughters, to enter convents on the continent. Perhaps Judith Donne, too, would have ended up on the Continent in a convent, like her historically real distant kinswoman, Gertrude More. Gertrude More was the daughter of Cresacre More, a direct descendant of Sir Thomas; she was described by her biographer as a woman who was "consumed" with reading and writing and she ended her days as the Prioress of the convent at Cambray.[20] Gertrude More's manuscript texts were published posthumously under the title *The Ideot's Devotions.*

Like the provincial social coterie constructed around familial ties and characterized by domestic literary production, the Continental convent has escaped our previous stories about sites of early modern English women writers. A possible story of Judith Donne, however,

would foreground not only the dangerous dynamics of her family's faith, but also permit us to consider the importance of the private education of children in Catholic families and the dissemination of texts through both print and manuscript. Perhaps had Virginia Woolf selected Donne, even if she had not dwelt upon the significance of being born not only female but also Catholic during this period, I am sure that subsequent generations of scholars directed by the recent investigations concerning John Donne's Catholic life would have looked more quickly and more closely at the literary activities carried on by Catholic converts such as Elizabeth Cary and the implications behind the network of texts; perhaps it might have even drawn our attention to the world of the convent as a source of women's writings during the early seventeenth century and forced us to inquire about the relationship between a woman's religion and textual transmission during this time.

Enough however of such idle imaginings. What is the point of my stories and all their "perhaps," those thin connecting tissues of "might" and "possibly"? What I think is interesting in this exercise of re-imagining the early modern woman writer using Donne rather than Shakespeare as a starting point is that it not only permits us to consider new ways in which the sites of authorship for women could be reconceived and possibly reconstructed but also suggests that there may be evidence waiting to be recovered if the right questions were asked of the archives. The switch from Shakespeare to Donne as a model for the practices of authorship would give us several new ways to consider evidence when searching for early modern women's texts. First, by switching to Donne, we are seeking to reconstruct not a commercial world of literature but a social one; we need to be looking less for commercial playwrights and poets among women and more for the type of social literary activity practiced by Donne and his male friends and female patrons. Continuing our focus on a manuscript audience rather than a printed one, Donne's example reminds us that we should investigate the correspondence networks of Catholic families and look more closely at Catholic women both at home and in the convent.

Finally, as the second part of my title suggests, I think that the type of fictions one creates which determine the discourse used to frame research and direct our attention to possible sources of information still

has one more stage to go—to imagine a story in which one does not first imagine an established male figure as the model against which to measure and interpret women. While not denying the potency of a patriarchal environment, it nevertheless should be possible to imagine a story about an early modern woman in which she had a life of her own, as opposed to always being conceptualized in relationship to a masculine figure. It is clear from generations of scholarship about men that we have had no problem whatsoever in imagining stories about famous men in which women were entirely erased; while I have no wish to return to a Victorian model of Eminent Men and simply substitute Women, the artificial exercise of imagining a female life without constant reference to what the men were doing would refresh our investigative imaginations and force us to recognize what we assume about early modern life.

The end goal of such frivolous imaginings is not to assert that my imagined story of Judith Donne is true, but to suggest possibilities for new ways to look at what it means "to be an author" and to permit us to explore the archives for new materials relating to the domestic nature of literary culture as well as the commercial and to consider the intersections between religion, technology, and authorship. So, although I have little to offer John Donne scholars, I am deeply grateful for the work donne, which I believe will permit me to see more.

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Notes

1. Julia M. Walker, "Ann More: A Name Not Written," in *John Donne's 'desire of more': The Subject of Anne More Donne in his Poetry*, ed. M. Thomas Hester (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1996), pp. 92, 89. Walker cites Janet E. Halley's "Textual Intercourse: Anne Donne, John Donne, and the Sexual Poetics of Textual Exchange," in *Seeking the Woman in Late Medieval and Renaissance Writers*, eds. Sheila Fisher and Janet Halley (Nashville: Univ. of Tenn. Press, 1989).

2. Judith Scherer Herz, "Reading [out] Biography in 'A Valediction forbidding Mourning," *JDJ* 13 (1994): 140-41.

3. David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1980); Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and its readership in seventeenth-century England* (Athens, GA: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1981); see also for a contrasting representation of literacy Spufford's article, "First Steps in literacy: the reading and writing experiences of the humblest seventeenth-century spiritual autobiographer," *Social History* 4 (1979): 407-435. Sara Heller Mendelson, "Stuart Women's Diaries" in *Women in English Society 1500-1800*, ed. Mary Prior (London: Methuen, 1985) has a useful analysis of how gender factors skew Cressy's results. See also Keith Thomas, "The Meaning of Literacy in Early Modern England," in *The Written Word: Literacy in Transition*, ed. Gerd Bauman (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986).

4. See the summary of recent work on women and literacy in Margaret Ferguson "Response: Attending to Literacy," in *Attending to Women in Early Modern England*, ed. by Betty S. Travitsky and Adele F. Seeff (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1994): 265-79 and, for an overview of work currently in process in the history of reading, the very interesting collection *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, eds. James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996).

5. Frances Teague, "Judith Shakespeare Reading," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 47 (1996): 361-73. See also Naomi Tadmor, "'In the even my wife read to me': women, reading, and household life in the eighteenth century," in *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, pp. 162-74.

6. Ilona Bell, "'Under ye Rage of a Hott Sonn & yr Eyes': John Donne's Love Letters to Ann More," in *The Eagle and the Dove: Reassessing John Donne*, ed. Claude J. Summer and Ted-Larry Pebworth (University of Missouri Press, 1986): 25-52; Bell, "'if it be a shee': The Riddle of Donne's 'Curse'," in *John Donne's 'desire of more'*, 106-39; and Dennis Flynn, "Anne More, John Donne, and Edmond Neville," in *John Donne's 'desire of more'*, 140-48.

7. M. Thomas Hester, "'*Faeminae lectissimae*': Reading Anne Donne" in *John Donne's 'desire of more'*, 20-21.

8. On these topics, see for example, Lindsay A. Mann, "Misogyny and Libertinism: Donne's Marriage Sermons," *JDJ* 11 (1992): 111-32; Camille Wells Slights, "A Pattern of Love: Representations of Anne Donne," in *John Donne's 'desire of more*, 66-88; Frances M. Malpezzi, "Love's Liquidity in 'Since she whome I lov'd,'" in *John Donne's 'desire of more'*, 196-203; Ashsah Guibbory, "Fear of 'loving more': Death and the Loss of Sacramental Love," in *John Donne's 'desire of more*, 204-227 and Graham Roebuck, "'Glimmering lights': Anne, Elizabeth, and the Poet's Practice," in which he concludes that "Donne's attitude toward women remains an enigma despite the quantity of scholarly attention directed at it": *John Donne's 'desire of more*,' 172.

9. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1957), p. 43.

10. Ferguson, "Attending to Literacy," 277.

11. Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 3: 171.

12. For an account of Donne's relatives, see R.C. Bald, *John Donne. A Life* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970).

13. Heather Dubrow, "The Message from Marcade: Parental Death in Tudor and Stuart England," in *Attending to Women in Early Modern England*, 153.

14. Arthur Marotti, *John Donne, Coterie Poet* (Madison, WI: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1986) and *Manuscript, Print and the English Renaissance Lyric.* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1995); Ted-Larry Pebworth, "John Donne, Coterie Poetry, and the Text as Performance," *Studies in English Literature, 1599-1900* 29 (1989): 61-75, and Richard Wollman, "The 'Press and the Fire': Print and Manuscript Culture in Donne's Circle," *Studies in English Literature, 1599-1900* 33 (1993): 85-97.

15. Dennis Kay, "Poems by Sir Walter Aston, and a Date for the Donne/Goodyer Verse Epistle 'Alternis Vicibus'," *RES*, new series, 37 (1986): 203.

16. Deborah Aldrich Larson, "John Donne and the Astons," *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 55.4 (1992): 635-41.

17. Earnest W. Sullivan, II, *The Influence of John Donne: His Uncollected Seventeenth-Century Printed Verse* (Columbia, MS: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1993).

18. See John Carey, *John Donne,* and Dennis Flynn, *John Donne and the Ancient Catholic Nobility* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1995).

19. Nancy Pollard Brown, "Paperchase: The Dissemination of Catholic Texts in Elizabethan England," *English Literary Manuscripts*, 1 (1989): 129.

20. Gertrude More, *The Holy Practices of a Devine Lover* (Paris, 1657). See also the later posthumous edition of her works *Spiritual Exercises* (1658), for some insight into her life in the convent as a literate woman.