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Donne's Correspondence with Wotton

Claude Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth

One of John Donne's chief correspondents in the formative years of the late 1590s was Henry Wotton, with whom he exchanged both verse and prose letters. An examination of these exchanges not only illustrates Donne's mastery of two distinct yet related forms of discourse, but also demonstrates that the verse epistles and prose letters are equally referential and occasional. Complex transactions between individuals whose deep friendship was increasingly strained by the pressures of career aspirations, the letters in verse and prose exchanged by Donne and Wotton vividly document the course of a relationship lived out under the shadow of the political tensions of the declining years of Elizabeth's long reign. The correspondence between Donne and Wotton partakes of the cult of friendship that was important to both men. The prose letters that constitute the bulk of the exchanges may indeed be described, in Angel Day's definition of the familiar epistle, as the "mutuall talke of one absent friend to another" and, in Donne's own words, as "the best conveyers of love."[1] But while Donne asserted that the writing of letters to a friend was "a kind of extasie, and a departure and secession and suspension of the soul, which doth then communicate it self to two bodies,"[2] this description is misleading insofar as it suggests that his letters—in either prose or verse—are somehow loftily detached from their contexts. In fact, the opposite is true. Donne's letters may participate in the ethereal communion of souls, but they are also firmly rooted in and decisively shaped by concrete and immediate realities.

Donne's friendship with Wotton probably dates to 1584, when the latter, then sixteen years old, transferred from New College, Oxford, to Hart Hall, where the twelve-year-old Donne had newly matriculated. Between 1586, when Donne left Oxford, and the mid-1590s, the paths of the two young men diverged. Wotton moved to Queen's College, where he studied until at least 1588; the next year he embarked on a far-ranging tour of the Continent in preparation for a career in public service. On his return to England in 1594, he was appointed one of the chief secretaries to the Earl of Essex, who in the mid-1590s was, in Walton's words, "one of the darlings of fortune and in greatest favour with *Queen Elizabeth*."[3] Donne's activities in the years immediately after leaving Oxford are less certain, but in 1591 he began legal studies at Thavies Inn, and in May 1592 he entered Lincoln's Inn,

where he was to stay until at least 1595. Near the beginning of 1596, the friends were reunited, as Donne then also enlisted in the service of Essex, perhaps under the sponsorship of Wotton. Both took part in the Cadiz expedition of 1596 and in the Azores (or Islands) expedition of 1597. In the fall of 1597, their careers diverged again. Donne accepted a position with Thomas Egerton, newly appointed Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, while Wotton remained in the employ of Essex. The correspondence of the two is profoundly shaped by their experience as ambitious young men concerned with their survival in the corrupt and potentially corrupting Court.

The crucial contexts for understanding the correspondence of Donne and Wotton are the tumultuous political events of the final decade of Elizabeth's rule, especially those revolving around the mercurial and headstrong Essex. Many years later, in his "Parallel" lives of Essex and Buckingham written to Plutarch's model, Wotton commented on his former employer's mental and emotional deterioration in the 1590s: "I know not how, like a gathering of Clouds, . . . towards his latter time, when his humours grew Tart, as being now in the lees of favour, [Essex's progressive 'Melancholy'] brake forth into certain suddain recesses; sometimes from the Court to *Wansteed*, otherwhiles unto *Greenwich*, often to his own Chamber, Doors shut, Visits forbidden, and which was worse, divers Contestations (between) with the Queen her self (all preambles of ruine) . . . ."[4] But Essex's emotional instability only exacerbated the intense rivalries and vicious backbiting of a Court increasingly divided between his own adherents and those of Sir Robert Cecil, Lord Burghley's colorless but cooly competent son. One of the few disinterested parties amid this fierce power struggle at Court was Donne's employer, the Lord Keeper. While Egerton was a friend of Essex,[5] he owed allegiance to neither faction, seeing himself bound only by his duty to the queen. In the crises of the late 1590s, the Lord Keeper attempted to exert a calming influence on Essex, often advising him to temper his rash words and impetuous behavior. Ultimately, however, he was to serve as the earl's jailer and prosecutor. As employees of Essex and Egerton, respectively, Wotton and Donne were often working at cross-purposes.

Donne's correspondence with Wotton was undoubtedly voluminous. The four verse epistles and twelve prose letters from Donne to Wotton and the single poem and four prose letters from Wotton to Donne that survive probably represent only a small fraction of their exchanges.[6] In these extant letters, both men repeatedly bewail the miscarriage of communications, refer to letters that were never delivered, and chide the other for not writing often enough, usefully reminding us of the difficulty of maintaining a correspondence under adverse conditions and of the signal importance of the exchanges for these particular individuals. Most of the surviving correspondence in prose and verse may be grouped in relation to four distinct episodes centering on the political fortunes of the young courtiers: the crisis of the summer of 1598 occasioned by Essex's quarrel with the queen and his

self-exile from Court; Essex's Irish campaign of the spring and summer of 1599, in which Wotton participated; the disgrace of Essex in the autumn and winter of 1599-1600; and the revival of Wotton's fortunes at the accession of King James, who knighted him and sent him on his first embassy to Venice in 1604. These external events that provide the context and dictate the rhetorical strategies of the correspondence help explain several salient features of the exchanges between Donne and Wotton, including especially their obliquity, discretion, self-consciousness, and tension. Indeed, full appreciation of both the prose and verse letters depends on recovering the historical and biographical contexts in which they were written, for the two kinds of communication are equally tailored to the particularities of their specific occasions.

What follows is a contextual/conjectural reconstruction of the surviving correspondence in prose and verse of two neophyte courtiers whose career aspirations and personal friendship were intertwined yet also divergent.[7] The correspondence provides a glimpse into a dangerous world of intrigue and instability as seen through the eyes of young men at once attracted to that milieu and repulsed by it. The correspondence also offers a fascinating record of a friendship affected variously by the stresses of politics and finally altered altogether by the success of one colleague and the frustration of the other. In addition, the exchanges between Donne and Wotton are important for the biographical information that they clarify (especially Donne's alleged partisanship toward Essex) and for the psychological insights into the personality of each participant that they provide. As documented in this correspondence, Donne grows from a brash young man affecting a fashionable cynicism into a more astute observer of the political scene; he emerges as a concerned and considerate ally who is often apprehensive about the potential conflict between his allegiance to the Lord Keeper and his obligations to Wotton; and, having supported his comrade through some dark periods, he greets Wotton's ultimate success with a joy that is severely tempered by regret at his own failure. Finally, the correspondence is significant by virtue of the fact that the prose letters (to say nothing of the verse epistles) are crafted works in their own right. Donne's letters are at once valuable and revealing documents and difficult and problematic texts.[8] The goal of this contextual reconstruction is to exploit them as documents while elucidating them as texts.

I

Donne's earliest surviving letter to Wotton (Burley ms., f. 298), designated no. 8 in Simpson's *A Study of the Prose Works of John Donne*,[9] probably dates from early 1598. It apologizes for the writer's inability to fulfill his pledge of a visit to his friend, most likely at his family manor of Bocton Malherbe in Kent, where

Wotton periodically sought refuge from the burdens of Court life and public responsibility. What is most telling about this brief and hurried letter, however, is its conclusion, where Donne laments that he has no news to send from Court: "Sir I would some great princes or men were dead so I might chuse them or some states or Countryes overthrowne so I were not in them that I might have some news to ease this itch of writing which travayles me for in our owne or in the d'amours Court I know nothing worth your reporting whereof I might justyfy this reprobate headlong letter." The irreverence about the Court (finding it, for example, equivalent to the "d'amours Court" of the Middle Temple's recent Christmas revel), and about the princes and great men there, will over the course of the correspondence become increasingly cynical and satiric, while the subject of news from the Court will continue to dominate the correspondence. Irreverence toward the Court was itself a courtly attitude but seems also to have been a particular characteristic of the young men who looked to the Earl of Essex for preferment. Hence, Donne could reasonably suppose that his anti-Court posture would be welcome and shared at Bocton Malherbe even as it may also reflect his own peculiarly liminal position as a person in Court but certainly not of it. Given his family's Catholicism and his own socially suspect origins as the son of an ironmonger, it is not surprising that Donne would always feel himself an outsider in Court circles. Donne's belief that he has to justify his letters to Wotton in terms of the news they contain is especially significant (and somewhat ironic) in light of the correspondence that ensues. The two men obviously look to each other for support in the midst of the intrigues and machinations at Court. Even more importantly, the friends also apparently serve each other as safe repositories for potentially dangerous information, the dissemination of which is perilous yet absolutely necessary for Donne, who by his own admission suffers from an "itch of writing." The relationship of the two young men is clearly that of trusted confidantes, linked by ties of friendship and common political and social interests.

Another letter from Donne to Wotton (Burley ms., f. 294v), that designated no. 10 by Simpson, verifies the impression conveyed by letter no. 8 that the sharing of information was a major element of the young courtiers' friendship. While there is nothing in the letter to date it with certainty, it was likely written in the first half of 1598, when Wotton was living at Essex House in the Strand, the earl's London headquarters. Like no. 8, this letter is in the form of an apology. Donne begins by explaining that illness has prevented him from seeing Wotton recently and that the cure for his illness currently keeps him homebound: "Sir if I had remembred that I should have wanted your sight I would not have beene sick or at least I would not have beene well by so ill a meanes, as taking phisick: for I am bound by making my self loose." Then, in a brilliant conceit, he explains why he so misses encountering Wotton: "me thinks now that they err wittyly which teach that saints see all mens actions in god as in a mirror. [F]or I am sure that if I were but glorified with your sight I should gather many particulars of carieres and altibaxos (as that

fryer sayes) wherein fortunes tumblers are exersised at and from the Court, for I hunger to know who and why and when doth what." Whereas in letter no. 8, Donne confessed to his need to send Court news to Wotton, here he expresses his eagerness to hear such gossip—the particulars of careers and of the vicissitudes of "fortunes tumblers"—from Wotton. He concludes the letter by telling his friend that more than anything else he longs to see him: "when I have drunk one potion more to my health and weakned my self I shalbee strong enough to find you att Essex or rather than not at all at Court where you shall find me (a miracle in that place) your honest frend." It is noteworthy that Donne would prefer to see Wotton at Essex House rather than at Court, which he disdains as a place of intrigue and mendacity but where he has, he asserts, nevertheless managed somewhat miraculously to preserve his own integrity. The exemption of Essex House from the general condemnation of the Court should not be seen as definitive evidence of Donne's personal allegiance to the earl and his party, however; it more likely reflects Donne's characteristic attempt to assume the perspective of his correspondent. As Margaret Maurer emphasizes, Donne's "particular genius as a letter-writer is his ability to conceive of a relationship that unites him to a correspondent around the message he makes the subject of the letter."[10] This process involves both his projection of an image of himself and his introjection of an image of his correspondent. In the exchanges with Wotton, Donne seems eager to assume Wotton's perspective on a number of issues, including his attitude toward Essex, though real differences on that score will eventually emerge to create significant tensions in the correspondence.

Donne's first verse letter to Wotton, beginning "Here's no more newes, then vertue," must be seen in the context established by the earlier prose letters, for it is a communication between ambitious young would be statesmen who guardedly share information about the Court.[11] Written on July 20, 1598, in the midst of an ominous breach between Queen Elizabeth and the Earl of Essex that lasted through August of that year and threatened to paralyze the government, the verse letter is a savage attack on the Court. The quarrel that forms the backdrop to the letter occurred on July 1, 1598. As Thomas Birch describes the incident, when the queen failed to approve the earl's candidate for commander of the English forces in Ireland, Essex "turned his back upon her in such a contemptuous manner, as exasperated her to such a high degree, that she gave him a box on the ear, and bid him go and be hang'd. Upon this he put his hand to his sword, and, when [Lord Admiral Howard] interposed, swore that he neither could nor would bear such an indignity, nor would have taken it even from HENRY VIII. and so left the Court."[12] Essex was still sulking, probably at his country estate of Wanstead, when Donne wrote the verse letter, which was undoubtedly intended to console Wotton—himself absent from Court because of the breach—for his exclusion from political involvement. It may be that Donne on July 20 actually had no more news than Wotton was already aware of, but written at a time of crisis—when Essex had

exiled himself from Court, Lord Burghley lay dying, and the Irish problem was festering—the opening gambit is more probably meant to be disingenuous, as well as cautious. The poem is designed to reassure Wotton that, whatever specific events might occur, they would of necessity be merely variations on the familiar story, "That vice doth here habitually dwell" (l. 3). This youthfully cynical and extreme posture is both a measure of the poet's despair with the conditions at Court and an expression of his concern for his colleague, whose fortunes seemed so firmly linked to those of the unstable and currently eclipsed Essex. Adopting a fashionable anti-Court attitude that he assumes will be welcomed by Wotton, Donne expresses scornful amusement at the machinations of vicious courtiers; "let us," he implores his friend, "at these mimicke antiques jeast, / Whose deepest projects, and egregious gests / Are but dull Moralls of a game at Chests" (ll. 22-24). The poem's final line—"*At Court*; though *From Court*, were the better stile"—indicates clearly the motive behind Donne's satire. The conclusion advises that, given the vices "*At Court*," Wotton should consider himself better off away "*From Court*."

But from Wotton's reply, the verse letter beginning "'Tis not a coate of gray, or Shepheards life," it is clear that the older friend failed to appreciate Donne's consolatory message. Wotton's measured and deliberative response rejects his friend's extreme and frenetic condemnation of the Court, arguing instead that it is not place that makes for morality or immorality, but one's state of mind. Moreover, the elaborately solicitous final stanza of Wotton's poem, which praises Donne as "less ill then I, and much more Wise" (l. 28), actually questions the younger poet's presumption in counseling the older, and implies an element of hypocrisy in Donne's advice, written from Court, that Wotton abandon his long-cherished political hopes at Court. Wotton's reminder that ". . . tis no harme mortality to preach, / For men do often learne when they do teache" places the burden on Donne to practice what he preaches. Although Donne had laboriously justified his own presence in the corrupt Court—"Yet as to' get stomachs, we walke up and downe, / And toyle to sweeten rest, so, may God frowne, / If, but to loth both, I haunt Court, or Towne" ("Here's no more newes," ll. 4-6)—that explanation clearly rang hollow to Wotton, who in effect tells his friend, "Physician, heal thyself." Wotton's poem tactfully rebukes the nervous extremes and impassioned tone of Donne's verse letter. Rejecting the advice that he content himself with retirement from the treacherous public world, Wotton advocates Stoic indifference and moderation as more efficacious means of coping with political disappointments.

In response to Wotton's mild rebuke in "'Tis not a coate of gray," Donne redirected his approach and attitude in his reply, the justly celebrated verse letter beginning "Sir, more then kisses, letters mingle Soules." When late in "Sir, more then kisses" Donne writes of Wotton, "I'advise not you, I rather doe / Say o'er those lessons, which I learn'd of you" (ll. 63-64), he at once acknowledges the justice

of Wotton's objection to "Here's no more newes" and states the literal truth. Wotton's poem has caused Donne to rethink and as a consequence to modify the thesis of "Here's no more newes"—that Wotton should consider himself fortunate to be away from the corrupt Court—in the direction of the latter's position in "'Tis not a coate of gray." Donne's assertion that "Countries, Courts, Towns" are equally hazardous in their potential to "staine" (ll. 8, 10) is another way of stating that place in and of itself is immaterial to morality, and his admission that "wee must touch" these arenas of life (l. 10) accepts Wotton's premise that retirement from the world is vain as an answer to its evils. Significantly, however, in modifying the persona and thesis of "Here's no more newes" in "Sir, more then kisses," Donne neither sacrifices his integrity nor surrenders his role as advisor to his friend. Rather than meekly abandoning his harsh attack on the Court, he broadens the target of his satiric scorn to include the city and the country as well, ultimately finding "(O knottie riddle)'each is worst equally" (l. 20). Moreover, he tacitly acknowledges and accepts Wotton's worldly ambition—and by inference his own—by offering counsel directed toward continued Court employment. This advice—especially the injunction for Wotton to blend in with his surroundings, "so, closely thy course goe, / Let men dispute, whether thou breathe, or no" (ll. 57-58)—cautions Wotton to keep a very low profile.

Donne's warning probably reflects his awareness, gained through his position in the Lord Keeper's household, that in the days since July 20, Essex's fortunes had taken an even steeper downward turn. On July 18, Egerton had written a lengthy letter to the still sulking earl, offering him some strongly worded advice: "Policy, duty, and religion, enforce you to sue, yeelde, and submit, to your Soveraigne, betweene whom and you there can bee no proportion of duty. When God requires it as a principall duty and service to himselfe; and when it is evident, that great good may ensue of it to your friends, your selfe, your Country, and your Soveraigne, and extreame harme by the contrary: there can bee no dishonour or hurt to yeelde, but in not doing of it, is dishonour and impiety." A few days later, in a petulant reply, Essex asked: "When the vilest of all indignities are done unto mee, doth *Religion* enforce me to serve? doth God require it? is it impiety not to doe it? why? cannot Princes erre? cannot subjects receive wrong? is an earthly power or authority infinite? Pardon me, pardon mee my Lord, I can never subscribe to these principles. . . ."[13] These are dangerous sentiments, and nearly two years later, in an official censure of Essex's conduct during the Irish campaign of 1599, this letter to Egerton was "objected to the earl, . . . mr. FRANCIS BACON, who was council for the queen against him, stiling it *bold and presumptuous, and derogatory to her majesty*."[14] As Egerton's secretary, Donne was in an excellent position to have seen this letter from Essex as soon as his employer received it, that is, only a few days before he wrote "Sir, more then kisses." Hence, the advice implicit in the simile of the fishes in the verse letter may be seen as an oblique yet conspicuous and informed signal to Wotton not to draw attention to himself and his relationship to his patron at a time when the earl persisted in committing *lese majèsté*.

The exchange of verse letters between Donne and Wotton in the late summer of 1598 reveals a number of significant aspects of the relationship between aspiring courtiers who are caught up in events over which they have very little control. Wotton emerges as the more mature and tactful of the two, the controlling moral force and the teacher; while Donne seems brash and impetuous, he is quite amenable to instruction from his friend. In the exchange, Wotton tempers Donne's youthful cynicism and implicitly rebukes his presumption, thereby prompting the younger poet to a more reasonable though no less virtuoso performance in the gem of the sequence, "Sir, more then kisses," which successfully combines crabbed satire and Horatian intimacy. But if one of the young men seems more mature than the other, they are equally concerned with performing the offices of friendship. Especially noteworthy in this regard is Donne's commendation of Wotton at the end of "Sir, more then kisses," as one who

> free from German schismes, and lightnesse
> Of France, and faire Italies faithlesnesse,
> Having from these suck'd all they had of worth,
> And brought home that faith, which you carried forth,
> I throughly love. (ll. 65-69)

This tribute recognizes Wotton's superior experience and proven steadfastness. In Donne's eyes, his friend is a person whose character has been tested and thereby strengthened. Having maintained his faith in the face of the many temptations he encountered abroad, Wotton, his colleague now concedes, is in no danger of being corrupted by the Court. And by extension, neither is Donne. Having absorbed Wotton's rules for remaining virtuous in a corrupting environment, the poet has made them "my rules" (l. 70), and through the pun on his own name at the poem's conclusion, he identifies completely with his friend. The valorization of friendship that marks the 1598 exchange of verse letters between Donne and Wotton is also characteristic of their correspondence as a whole.

The question of friendship is at the heart of another letter that Donne may have sent to Wotton during the crisis of the summer of 1598, the prose letter designated no. 7 by Simpson (Burley ms., f. 297r-v). This letter seems to be in response to prose letters from Wotton now lost, which may have challenged Donne's presumption in "Heres no more newes" more explicitly than "'Tis not a coate of gray," and to a subsequent silence from Wotton that Donne fears may indicate a chill in his friend's regard for him. Donne begins letter no. 7 by protesting that Wotton is holding him to an impossible standard of faultlessness and explaining that if he has offended him it was not intentional: "Sir Me thinks your good discretion should not call ill fortunes faultes. [N]or threaten me with your silence because I wanted meanes to answere your last letters. [I]t is not an age to looke for faultlesnes in your frend[.] [I]t is well if wee err reasonably and excusably[.] [T]herefore if you coole

not in frendship be not loath to write for letters are frendships sacraments. And wee should be in charyty to receave at all tymes." Clearly Donne is worried about his relationship with Wotton and eager to be reassured that his ally continues to love him. "I would bee loath to find a languishing or decay in my frends affections," he states, and adds with exaggerated modesty, "which I feare the less because theire good opinions are not built or sustaind by any my desert which would soone fayle but by theire owne judgments from which every man is loath to depart." The anxiety that Donne reveals in this letter about his friendship with Wotton recurs repeatedly over the course of their correspondence and suggests an emotional neediness or insecurity at the base of the younger man's relationship with his more experienced and slightly older colleague.

In a long section of letter no. 7 that follows, Donne relates the possible disruption in his relationship with Wotton to the evils of the age itself, and echoes the satiric anti-Court sentiments of the verse letters. Then he turns again to his colleague and the question that inaugurated the exchange of verse letters, whether Wotton should remain in the country or return to Court. In a passage similar to the commendation of his well-traveled friend at the end of "Sir, more then kisses," Donne concedes that Wotton, who has armored himself with "that mettal which nature hath infused into you, and the love of learning hath hammered and fashioned," is strong enough to return to the vice-ridden Court without endangering his integrity. Then, in a witty and self-mocking turn, he adds that he nevertheless cannot "honestly perswade you to abandon the Country bycause if my fortunes fitted it I should perswade you to stay there by my exsample." Like "Sir, more then kisses," this letter modifies the absolutist position staked out in "Heres no more newes." Without abandoning the condemnation of the Court, Donne grants Wotton's major point in "'Tis not a coate of gray" that morality is independent of place. Moreover, he responds to his friend's detection of a strain of hypocrisy in the argument of "Heres no more newes" by disarmingly admitting his own inconsistency, attributing it to the exigencies of fortune. He concludes the letter by self-consciously adopting the exaggerated pose of anti-Court satirist even as he expresses the hope that Wotton will return to the Court: "yet I desyre much sometyme to see you here and to have you a little trip though not fall nor stumble att ambition, or other distractions. [L]east I seing an honest man happy should begin for your sake to love the world againe which I would be loath to do." In its wry and circumlocutious way, this conclusion comically relegates the issue of Wotton's courtly ambitions to a function of Donne's carefully cultivated pose of world-weariness, yet it does so without obscuring the potential dangers to which those ambitions will inevitably expose Wotton.

II

The quarrel between Essex and the queen was to all outward appearances mended by September 1598, when the earl and his retinue returned to Court. The most pressing problem facing Elizabeth's government in the fall of 1598 was the Irish question, which had been made urgent by the defeat of the English army led by Sir Henry Bagenal at the massacre of the Yellow Ford on August 14. By the end of November, Essex had accepted a commission to lead an expedition against the Irish rebels commanded by Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone. Because of the power struggle at Court, Essex was fearful of leaving England for any lengthy period of time. "I am not ignorant what are the disadvantages of absence," he wrote, "the opportunities of practising enemies when they are neither encountered nor overlooked." Although he well knew that "The Court is the centre" of all his aspirations and that his "enemies may be advanced" during his absence, he nevertheless reluctantly concluded that "it is the fairer choice to command armies than humours."[15] Throughout the winter of 1598-99, Essex assiduously prepared for a massive campaign; and in April, he landed in Ireland with 16,000 foot soldiers and 13,000 horsemen. Wotton accompanied Essex on this ultimately ill-fated adventure, and his surviving correspondence with Donne from this period focuses on its frustrations.

Wotton's first letter to Donne about the Irish expedition was written enroute to Dublin, from the port of Beaumaris, probably on April 11, 1599. The letter (Burley ms., f. 295), Smith no. 42, dramatically confirms the impression conveyed by the earlier exchanges that an important element of the relationship between the two men was their usefulness to each other in sharing news about the Court. But there is a significant difference. Whereas in the earliest surviving prose letter from Donne to Wotton, the former proclaimed his eagerness to send news from the Court as a means to relieve his "itch of writing," in this letter Wotton protests that Donne has not sent any such information:

> I must wonder that since my comming to London I have not many tymes heard from you from whom I expected a truer representation of those parts where you live then from any other vessell of lesse receipt. [A]nd indeed besyds your love you should yeeld somewhat in this to our present humors which if they have not matter of truthe to work uppon are likely to breed in themselves some monstruous imaginations. Wee are put into [B]eamorris by the scanting of the wind upon us which to me is a preparative for Ir[ish] st[orm]s[.] May I after these kisse that fayre and learned hand of your mistress then whome the world doth possesse nothing more vertuous[.] [F]arwell sodenly. [F]or if I should give way to myself I should begin againe.

> Sir It were not only a wrong, but a kind of violence to put you in mynd of my buisnes and therefore the end of this is only to salute you. [F]arwell. [Y]ou must not forgett septies in hebdomada to visit my best and dearest att Thr[esorer's].

In its curious mixture of complaint, compliment, wheedling, and apology, this letter is intriguing. The peremptoriness of the beginning is uncharacteristic, a measure of Wotton's desperation at this time. The reproachful opening sentence implies disappointment in Donne for not having supplied the kind of information Wotton had requested before his departure for Ireland. The reference to "those parts where you live" may allude specifically to Egerton's establishment at York House or more generally to the Court. The cryptic allusion to Donne as a "vessell of... receipt" not only acknowledges Donne's previous role as informant, but may also, through its commercial metaphor, imply that Donne failed to deliver on an unspecified quid pro quo, an impression that is dissipated though not entirely erased by the personalizing of the subsequent plea for information. The second sentence replaces the first sentence's chastisement for a past failure with an urgent appeal for current service, citing in support of that suit both Donne's love for Wotton and the precariousness of the writer's immediate situation, cut off as he is from news of the Court. The appeal to friendship may in fact subtly question whether Donne's love for Wotton remains vital. In the absence of honest information, he writes, "our present humors . . . are likely to breed in themselves some monstruous imaginations." This sentence graphically conveys the uncertainties that Essex and his party felt as they embarked on the adventure in Ireland, leaving behind a Court teeming with enemies conspiring against them. The request that Donne "yeeld somewhat in this" may imply that he had specifically refused to serve any longer as a conduit of information about the Court, or at least that Wotton interprets his silence as such a refusal. The references to truth in both sentences are also significant in terms of the dynamics of the Wotton-Donne relationship, for Donne signs two of his prose letters to Wotton with the subscription "your honest friend." Although in "Heres no more newes" Donne had acknowledged the vulnerability of those courtiers "arm'd with seely honesty" (l. 13)—"Like Indians 'gainst Spanish hosts they bee" (l. 15)—Wotton is no doubt here subtly playing on his friend's self-representation as fearlessly truthful.

The abrupt transitions in the initial paragraph of Wotton's letter from the first long sentences seeking information to the brief report on the arrival at Beaumaris to the cryptic compliment to Donne's "mistress," whose "fayre and learned hand" Wotton would like to kiss, reveal a great deal of anxiety on Wotton's part and perhaps a degree of self-doubt as to the appropriateness of the letter's request. Following the perfunctory account of his progress toward Dublin, Wotton prefaces his compliment to the mistress with the self-conscious question, "May I after these," a phrase that may be read in two ways. In one reading, it simply expresses

the hope that Wotton may greet Donne's mistress after the expedition, that is, that he will survive the campaign; but in another reading, the phrase acknowledges that Donne might justly find the tone and substance of the first part of the letter offensive, that is, "May I, after so importuning you for news, still address my compliments to your Lady." While it is impossible to identify this person with any confidence, the reference is most likely to Lady Egerton; more tantalizingly, however, the mistress in question could conceivably be the sixteen-year-old Ann More, whom Donne would later marry in a scandalous proceeding.[16] If Wotton's comment is a reference to Donne's clandestine relationship with Ann More, it serves Wotton's rhetorical purposes as yet another assertion of his intimacy with Donne. In any case, the letter concludes with a paragraph in which the urgent request for news is seemingly retracted; "the end of this [letter]," Wotton disingenuously writes, "is only to salute you." However disingenuous, the retraction nevertheless incisively reminds Donne of the potential dangers of the request and apologizes for its necessity—"it were not only a wrong, but a kind of violence to put you in mynd of my buisnes," Wotton admits—thereby increasing the note of urgency that characterizes the letter as a whole even as it concedes that the request may have overstepped the bounds of propriety.

Donne probably replied to Wotton with the letter Simpson designates no. 17 (Burley ms., f. 297v). Although there are no external references in the letter by which to date it, it seems to be a direct response to the request for information in Wotton's letter and to the concern about Donne's reticence expressed in it. Donne writes:

> Sir as well in Love as in greife why should not sylence be interpreted a signe rather of store then want? so if you construe myne at this tyme you shall not be mistaken. And besyds your frendly censure of me will deserve thanks: Let me intreat you mayntayne this Love betweene us by this meanes of sylent discoursing whereby I shall hold the defect of absence half cured and made by conceit a well formed presence untill it may be so indeed. Which I will further. And although you can never receave from me so worthy a love as may justly deserve yours yet you shall have mine what it is in the highest measure and if your gentle disposition can frame it pleasing to your self I shall hold myself happy because I have my most ernest desyre satisfied in being reputed as I am
>
> your honest frend.

In this letter, Donne finesses Wotton's plea for news from the Court, but nevertheless reassures his friend of his continued esteem. His love, he tells him, remains as strong as ever and sustains him in their separation. In response to Wotton's complaint that in the absence of honest information, his "present humors" are "likely to breed in themselves some monstruous imaginations,"

Donne urges him to interpret his silence otherwise, as "a signe rather of store then want." In other words, he implicitly promises an outpouring of information in the future; but in the present, of course, the letter offers no current news at all. Although he strongly amplifies his love for Wotton and in his subscription pointedly reasserts his own truthfulness, Donne steadfastly refuses his friend's request. He does not specify reasons for the refusal, but they are not difficult to guess. As an employee of Egerton, Donne may have been specifically instructed not to communicate substantively with members of the Essex retinue. In addition, he undoubtedly felt that it was unseemly and probably dangerous to do so at this doubtful time; he certainly knew that his communications were subject to inspection and interception. Moreover, exposed as he was to anti-Essex maneuvering at Court, Donne may have himself already begun to doubt the wisdom of the earl's Irish campaign, as will become obvious later.

Somewhat after sending letter no. 17, and after receiving no reply from Wotton to his own statement of continued friendship, Donne probably wrote the third verse epistle directed to Wotton, "H. W. in Hiber. belligeranti." This work needs to be seen in the context created by Wotton's letter and its request for news, as well as located within the climate of suspicion fostered by the Elizabethan Court's fetish for censorship and spying. The verse letter opens as peremptorily and reproachfully as Wotton's prose letter from Beaumaris had:

> Went you to conquer? and have so much lost
> Your self, that what in you was best and most
> Respective friendship should so quickly dye?

Beneath the witty motif of conquering and being conquered initiated here and continued throughout the poem is a serious meditation on the possibility that the expedition to Ireland may threaten the friendship of the two men. These lines are, on one level of meaning, an elaborate protest that Wotton has not fulfilled the duties of friendship by writing more often; but in them Donne also directly expresses the fear that in his devotion to Ireland (and, by implication, to the cause of Essex) Wotton may have sacrificed the best part of himself, his capacity for a friendship based on mutual respect. Wotton's fear that Donne might find his request for Court news at so perilous a time offensive and presumptuous seems to have been justified, and perhaps compounded by Wotton's apparent silence in response to Donne's prose letter no. 17. Donne's point in the main body of the poem (ll. 4-16) is that the Irish expedition is worth neither the loss of their friendship nor the mental suffering ("lethargies," l. 9) that it exacts of Wotton, the latter perhaps a reference to the "monstruous imaginations" to which he had admitted. Donne pleads:

> Lett not your soule (at first with graces filld
> And since and thorough crooked limbecks, stild

> In many schooles and courts, which quicken it,)
> It self unto the Irish negligence submit. (ll. 13-16)

On the one hand, this passage is a compliment to Wotton similar to that which concludes "Sir, more then kisses": Wotton's soul is not only naturally filled with graces but it has also been distilled and refined by his wide experience in many "schooles and courts." On the other hand, however, the passage also expresses serious concern that Wotton's refined soul might be damaged by his experience in Ireland. The curious term "Irish negligence" (l. 16) seems calculatedly ambiguous. At first glance, it might be read as a conventional English aspersion on the Irish people and their manners, in which case the sense of the passage could be interpreted as warning Wotton not to imitate the Irish whom he might encounter on the campaign. But the term may also be read as referring covertly to the mission itself, particularly since his enemies at Court were beginning to characterize Essex's conduct of the undertaking in terms of gross negligence.[17] From this perspective, the poet's plea is that Wotton not permit his soul to be tainted by his devotion to Essex's cause. Whatever allegiance Donne may have earlier felt toward the earl, by this point he seems to regard Essex warily, fearing that in his inept execution of the Irish campaign the favorite was courting disaster.

Donne's poem concludes by directly addressing the subject that Wotton's letter had specifically raised, the communication of information at a dangerous and difficult time. Employing a negative formula that implicitly criticizes Wotton's request for news from the Court, Donne defines the kinds of letters he would like to receive from his friend:

> I aske not labor'd letters which should weare
> Long papers out: nor letters which should feare
> Dishonest cariage; or a seers art:
> Nor such as from the brayne come, but the hart. (ll. 17-20)

In this conclusion, Donne distances himself from the role in which he has been cast by Wotton. The exchange that he now desires is not that of one informant to another but that of mutually respectful friends. He requests that Wotton send him neither "labor'd letters" (perhaps a characterization of the letter from Beaumaris) nor letters that might prove dangerous if stolen or misinterpreted. As Wesley Milgate points out, "There is a pun on 'seer'; the reference is to the common practice of reading some one else's correspondence before re-sealing it and sending on the message. Donne is asking, not for secret or dangerous news, but for a letter conveying friendly feelings."[18] In defining the kind of letter he would like to receive from Wotton, Donne in effect also defines the kind of letter he is prepared to send to Wotton. He thereby rejects his friend's request for confidential information from the Court. In so doing, he acts to protect Wotton as well as

himself. The verse letter should be read both as a criticism of Essex's Irish adventure and as a response to the censorship and intrigue that intensified at the Court during this period. The poem may be intended as a mild rebuke to Wotton for presuming on his relationship with Donne; in addition, it insinuates that Ireland and Essex are not worth the loss of the two men's friendship and conveys an acute awareness of the perils of communication at a dangerous time.

Donne may have followed up "H.W. in Hiber. belligranti" with a prose letter (Burley ms., f. 302), the one designated no. 27 by Simpson. This is a much more consolatory communication than the verse epistle, and one fraught with apprehension. It expresses great concern that Wotton has not responded to any of Donne's letters. "If you please to write I will with all gladnes answere your letters," Donne begins, adding: "yf you please to be sylent yet will I answere your affection which need not be testified unto me by letters; whereof myne owne sure knowledg and the cleerenesse of my soule unto you will not suffer me to have the least doubt." Despite this assertion of confidence and of a clear conscience, the letter is, in fact, riddled with doubt and perhaps some guilt. Donne assures Wotton unconditionally that "You have all liberty with me, all authoritie over me," and then gets to the crux of the matter:

> Only it doth very much trouble me that any thing (what I cannot ghesse) should deprive me of the happines I was wont to have in your letters whereby I have enjoyed you at such distants: yt makes me doubt least I have made some fayle in judgment (for other it is impossible), if so, I desire you to shew it me, and chyde for I will take it kindly and amend; if not, then chyde your self in my behalf; for one of these in Justice I crave of you.

Despite the jesting tone, Donne is clearly very apprehensive about Wotton's silence, which he fears may be the result of something that he has said or done or, more likely, not said or done. Although he (no doubt disingenuously) asserts that he cannot guess how he may have offended his friend, he nevertheless admits the possibility that he may have committed some grave failure of judgment. That failure could, he no doubt has considered, either be his refusal to send the news Wotton had requested or his implicit criticism of the Irish expedition in "H.W. in Hiber. belligranti." Donne urgently desires an explanation from his friend and reassurance that their relationship remains intact.

Donne receives that reassurance after a fashion in Wotton's next letter from Ireland (Burley ms., f. 253v), Smith no. 44. Written from Dublin, probably in July of 1599, this letter begins with an exasperated criticism of Donne's letters and an expression of acute anxiety about Wotton's own previous communications, which may have miscarried or been intercepted:

> Sir It is worth my wondering that you can complayn of my seldome writing: when your owne letters come so fearefully as if they tread all the waye uppon a bogg. I have receaved from you a few and almost every one hath a commission to speake of divers of their fellowes, like you know whome in the old comedy that askes for the rest of his servants: but you make no mention of any of mine, yet itt is not long since I ventured much of my experience unto you in a peece of paper: and perhaps not of my creditt: It is that which I sent you by A. D. whereof till you advertise me I shall live in fitts or Agues.

The reference to Donne's complaint of Wotton's seldom writing directly responds to letter no. 27 and may also allude to "H.W. in Hiber. belligeranti." In any case, Wotton does not let Donne entirely off the hook. He objects that his friend's letters say nothing of substance. They speak only of each other and fail even to acknowledge, much less respond to, Wotton's communications. By this time, the Court had officially forbidden—upon pain of death—writing or speaking about the Irish situation,[19] so Donne's discretion is hardly surprising, however disappointing and provoking of anxiety it is to Wotton. The description of Donne's letters as coming "fearefully" is probably meant to apply to their contents and their author as well as to their mode of transmission. At the same time, however, Wotton himself has obviously begun to have second thoughts about the frankness of his own letters, living, as he says, in "fitts or Agues" until he knows whether Donne has received them, especially the letter entrusted to "A. D."[20] The fear is primarily that the letters may have miscarried and fallen into the hands of enemies; Wotton no less than Donne knows that their actions and correspondence are under intense scrutiny by Court spies and other officials. But there may also be some faint questioning here of Donne's loyalty. Wotton's expression of fear is a plea for assurance not only that Donne actually received the potentially discreditable piece of paper on which Wotton "ventured much of my experience," but also that he can still be trusted.

Wotton's momentary questioning of Donne's loyalty passes as he proceeds to promise more information; yet it also seems to resurface as he includes Donne among those who misunderstand Essex and his accomplishments in Ireland:

> I do promise you not only much but all that which hath hitherto passed in my next; of the future I would fayne speake now if my judgement were not dim in the present. Whatsoever wee have done or meane to do, wee know what will become of itt when it comes amongst our worst enimies which are Interpreters. I would there were more Oneales and Macguiers, and O'Donnells and Macmahons and fewer of them. Itt is true that this kingdome hath ill affections and ill corruptions; but they where you are have a stronger disease: you diminish all that is here done and yet you

> doubt (if you were neerly examined) the greatnes of itt: so as you beleeve that which is contrary to as much as you feare. These be the wise rules of pollicy, and of Courts: which are uppon earth the vaynest places. I will say no more, and yet perad venture I have sayd a great deale unto you. God keepe you and us in those wayes and rules and kinds of wisdome that bring mortall men unto himself.

Wotton's agitation is apparent in this part of the letter, as he admits his mistrust of his own judgment.

Tellingly, Wotton regards the greatest danger of the campaign to be not the Irish rebels but the "Interpreters" at Court, who, he believes, will distort Essex's accomplishments in Ireland. The attack on the interpreters may be in part a response to Donne's criticism of the campaign in "H.W. in Hiber. belligeranti." It certainly reflects Essex's own conviction that he was being concertedly undermined by "the malace and practice of mine enemies in England, who first procured a cloud of disgrace to overshadow me, and now in the dark give me wound upon wound," as he complained in a letter to the Privy Council dated July 17, adding that "England and Ireland, subjects and rebels, do not only familiarly speak of the power they have had in this my absence to supplant me in the favour of my Sovereign; and the insolent liberty they take to scoff and jest at me and my services; but also make collections of every circumstance, wherein I have been offered, since my coming over, disgraces and discomforts."[21] Wotton's attack may also be a reaction to learning of the royal suspicion of Essex's conduct, which Elizabeth expressed in several letters to the earl in July, including one in which she bitterly denounced his refusal to engage Tyrone. After protesting that Essex has accomplished nothing to justify the enormous expense of the operation, she remarked: "Whereunto we will add this one thing, that doth more displease us than any charge or expense that happens, which is, that it must be the Queen of England's fortune (who hath held down the greatest enemy she had), to make a base bush kern to be accounted so famous a rebel, as to be a person against whom so many thousands of foot and horse, besides the force of all the nobility of that kingdom, must be thought too little to be employed."[22] As Lacey remarks, the discovery of the disapproval at Court caused the earl's young followers to rally around their leader: "They resented criticism from courtiers who would not risk their own life and health in a country whose mysterious hazards could only be understood by those who had known them personally."[23]

In describing the sickness at Court, Wotton moves from a general indictment of others there ("they where you are," which may refer either to the Court generally or to York House particularly) to a more specific indictment of a "you" that is inclusive of Donne: "yet you doubt (if you were neerly examined) the greatnes of it." Clearly Wotton now counts Donne among those who are unsympathetic to his party, who deliberately diminish Essex's achievement in Ireland even as they

really know, or at least suspect (i.e., "doubt"), its greatness. Moreover, he seems to imply that his friend has himself become infected by the disease of the Court and its vanity. "I will say no more," he concludes, but adds, "yet peradventure I have sayd a great deale unto you," inviting Donne to read between the lines of his letter. Again, there seems to be an implicit plea for Donne to protest this judgment of him and to assure his friend that he is not to be counted among the interpreters and doubters.

Wotton's final surviving letter to Donne about the Irish expedition (Burley ms., ff. 253v-254), Smith no. 45, is less impassioned and less imploring than the previous ones, as though he has come to accept the fact that he cannot count upon Donne's material support, but nevertheless is committed to sustaining the friendship and making use of Donne in whatever ways are still possible. Significantly, it reveals Wotton's own growing doubt about the Irish adventure. Written from Dublin probably in late July, the letter was borne to Donne by "a gentleman of Germany" who had attracted Wotton's interest and aid. The long first paragraph of the letter is an introduction of this person to Donne and a request that Donne examine him to discover whether he has paid some debts for which Wotton has pledged his bond. Again, Wotton asks Donne to procure information for him, though now the information is apparently of a personal rather than political nature. Interestingly, and perhaps revealing of the subtlety of his mind, Wotton entreats Donne to perform this task in such a way "that there be ministred no conceipt unto [the German] of any distrust in mee," and offers several suggestions as to how the information may be gained obliquely. He also encloses for Donne a mysterious document which he is to read, seal, and deliver. "[Y]ou must neither be ignorant of the matter nor know all . . . . iff you desire to know more you taste the forbidden tree," Wotton warns. This part of the letter represents Wotton as a master of intrigue who is prepared to use Donne in his machinations but who is also concerned with protecting him.

The second half of the letter is devoted largely to a "discourse of our condition heere." Wotton describes Dublin as "rather ill inhabited then seated: the people, of good naturall habilities but corrupted some with a wild, some with a loose life and indeed there is almost no thing in this Contry but itt is either savage or wanton." He finds the Irish superstitious, inhospitable, and secretive, and promises to write more fully of them later, when he has "gotten a litle authority of experience here." Then, almost defiantly, he adds: "For our wars I can only say we have a good cause and the worthyest gentleman of the world to lead itt." Despite the commitment to reticence implied by the phrase "I can only say," Wotton concludes the letter with an account of a battle, and the following wistful and revealing statement: "Wee are here amongst boggs and woods[,] that is where they would have us to bee: while they are only unfortunate in this, that they scant knowe what is left them more to desire. Certaynely obedience and good publique ends brought us hither, not our owne wisdome I dare warrant itt." These final comments reveal Wotton's acute

awareness that despite their capture of towns, the English are nevertheless being defeated by the guerrilla tactics of the rebels, who actually control the order and place of battle. Notwithstanding the loyalty and admiration he unabashedly expresses for Essex, Wotton knows that the campaign is proving not only unsuccessful, but also foolish. Significantly, however, the attribution of the English presence in Ireland to "obedience and good publique ends" has the effect of obscurely blaming the disaster not on Essex but on the queen herself, a suggestion whose audacity is underlined by the self-conscious exclamation, "I dare warrant itt."

III

In late August, 1599, Essex finally obeyed the queen and her Privy Council and led an expedition north to engage Tyrone. When he encountered the rebel, he was impressed both by the strength of the Irish forces aligned against him and by the comparative weakness of his own army, ravaged as it was by disease, desertion, and the battles of the earlier expeditions. On September 8, Essex, defying the expressed directions of the queen and Council, concluded a truce with Tyrone, with Wotton acting as one of the principal negotiators. Knowing full well that his enemies at Court would interpret the truce with a rebel as unacceptable and dishonorable, Essex decided that the only way to justify his actions was through a direct appeal to the queen. Disregarding her order that he not leave Ireland without her prior approval, he handed over the Irish sword of state to Archbishop Loftus and Sir George Carew and, with Wotton in his retinue, left for England on September 24. Arriving at Nonsuch Palace on September 28, Essex burst into the queen's bedchamber and confronted the startled monarch. Elizabeth, however, resisted his considerable personal charm. After three meetings with him (and after ascertaining that he was not accompanied by an army), she confined him to his chambers and, on October 1, placed him in the custody of Lord Keeper Egerton and had him transferred to York House in London, where he was to stay until late March of 1600, when he was allowed to resume residence in Essex House under the charge of Sir Richard Berkeley. It was during this six-month period that the next four exchanges took place between Donne and Wotton. Wotton's whereabouts at this time are not certain, but he probably alternated between London and Bocton Malherbe, attempting to be as inconspicuous as possible.

Donne probably wrote the prose letter that Simpson designates no. 3 (Burley ms., f. 299v) several weeks after Wotton's return from Ireland with Essex. The letter begins by bemoaning the fact that an earlier letter was not delivered: "Sir but that I have much ernest sorrow for the losse of many deere frends in Ireland I could make shift to greive for the losse of a poore letter of mine which sought you there after your retorne: in which though there were nothing to bee commended but that it was well suted for the place and barbarous enough to go thither: yet it should have

brought the thanks and betroathed to you the love and services of one who had rather bee honest then fortunate." This opening, like so many of Donne's letters to Wotton, reassures the addressee of his friend's continuing support, an issue that was likely of urgent concern at this critical juncture, when Essex was under house arrest and his (and Wotton's) future seemed far from certain. The reference to the loss of many friends in Ireland probably includes Sir Thomas Egerton, the Lord Keeper's son, who died in Dublin Castle from wounds received in battle; Donne took part in Egerton's elaborate funeral in Chester on September 26. Donne's description of himself as "one who had rather bee honest then fortunate" continues his characteristic self-representation, but in the present circumstances, when Wotton—because of his connection with Essex—might be seen as decidedly unfortunate, the description also implies solidarity with his friend.

Donne's expression of support for Wotton becomes more explicit as he contrasts the current communication with the lost letter and apologizes for his recent neglect:

> [T]his letter hath a greater burthen and charge; for it caries not only an assurance of myself to you but it begs a pardon that I have not in these weekes sought you out in England by letters and acknowledged how deep roote the kindnes of your letter hath taken in me: but as in former innocent tymes estates of lands passed safly in few words (for these many entangling clauses are ether intruded at least to prevent or breed deceit) so unchangeable frendship being ever the same and therefore not subject to the corruption of these tymes may now in these few and ill lines deliver me unto you and assure you none hath better title then you in
>
> your poore frend and Lover.

Donne's neglect of Wotton since the sudden return of Essex was no doubt dictated by reasons of policy, as his own employer held his friend's employer under house arrest. The cryptic reference to "the kindnes of your letter" may allude to a communication that has not survived, but it could conceivably refer to one of the letters discussed above. The burden of the present letter is to assure Wotton that Donne's recent neglect constitutes neither betrayal nor abandonment. Their friendship, Donne avers, will survive the current crisis and remain safe from the mutability of the corrupt times. As in so many of his communications with Wotton, Donne attempts to adopt the presumed perspective of his friend, implying that the parlous state in which Essex is presently ensconced is itself a reflection of the depravity of the age, its pervasive mendacity and inconstancy. In assuring Wotton of his continuing loyalty, however, Donne carefully separates the claims of unchanging friendship from those of shifting political alliances even as he describes the obligations of friendship in terms of a social order that has degenerated. The tactic is analogous to the way Donne treats love in many of his

Songs and Sonets, such as "The Sunne Rising" and "The Canonization," where the persona both challenges the values of the social and political order and also subsumes them into a counter realm where lovers reign supreme. Here Donne also inverts his society's power structure, endowing friendship with a legitimacy and innocency that politics can no longer claim.

The next surviving letter (Burley ms., ff. 295v-296) in the Donne-Wotton correspondence is probably the one that Simpson designated no. 5 in *The Prose Works of John Donne*. Actually, however, the letter is most likely by Wotton and addressed to Donne, rather than vice versa, as Simpson claimed. In its balanced phrases and Latin tags, it is far more characteristic of Wotton's style than of Donne's, and should probably be dated in October or November of 1599. It opens with the mildly chiding statement, "I will answere your letter bycause I remember I had a promyse from you of many of them[,] which is not easy for you to make me forgive you." The letter may, then, be a direct response to Donne's letter no. 3, a premise that is supported by the subsequent acknowledgment of Donne's pledge of unchanging friendship. Wotton continues by informing Donne that "I understand Sir Maurice Barkly is in towne[.] I have sent my man unto him cum salute plurima, but dare not wish him where we shall meet at supper least I commit some exces of gladnes." This curious—perhaps sardonic—statement probably reflects the cloud of suspicion that Essex's associates were living under at this time. Wotton is certain that he is being spied upon and he fears that a reunion with Berkeley, who served with Donne and Wotton on the Cadiz expedition, might attract doubtful notice. What follows seems to be a direct but cryptic comment on his own current status at Court (as well as that of his fellow associates of Essex, perhaps especially those who accompanied the earl on his precipitous journey from Ireland): "Wee are here yet not contented: though the very lookes of princes be satisfactorie: but as honest minds are not apt to do wrong so no doubt they receave the deepest impresions of injuries." The meaning of this enigmatic statement is probably that Wotton is still deeply concerned (i.e., yet not contented) about the way he is regarded at Court even though he has had no formal or concrete evidence of official disapproval; he implies that he may simply be overly sensitive, receiving the impression of injuries that he has not actually sustained. Such a statement not only communicates the kind of exquisite torment that Wotton felt as he existed in a state of limbo but it also implicitly requests information from Donne as to Wotton's current standing at Court. Inasmuch as Essex had prominently cited him as one of the chief negotiators of the ignominious truce with Tyrone, Wotton had good reason to fear being seriously implicated in the earl's disgrace.[24]

Wotton then turns to the subject of friendship that dominated Donne's letter no. 3: "I am glad of your frendship for many causes and amongst the rest you shall give me leave to make this use of it[:] that wee may sometymes togeather privately speake of the course of these wor[l]dly things which are governed with much instability. I will conclude that virtus is in terris peregrina in cælo civis." The

request for a private conversation is hardly surprising, given the aura of secrecy and the context of suspicion that governs the communciation itself. The request certainly indicates a heightened sense of danger about the exchange of letters during a time of instability and volatility, and it may also imply that even a private meeting might be perilous. Moreover, the conclusion that "virtus is in terris peregrina in cælo civis" (virtue is a foreigner on earth, a citizen in heaven) itself expresses a profound disillusionment with worldly affairs,[25] but one that is hardly surprising for an adherent of Essex at this dubious time, when the earl is under house arrest but not yet formally charged.

Probably the next letter in the surviving correspondence is that designated no. 6 by Simpson (Burley ms., f. 296v). It was likely written in January of 1600 and directed to Wotton at Bocton Malherbe, where he had no doubt retreated after Essex's household was ordered dispersed on December 3, 1599, with "every man to seeke a new fortune."[26] At this time, Essex was still languishing in confinement at York House. The censures against him had been publicly pronounced by the Star Chamber on November 29, with Lord Keeper Egerton roundly denouncing Essex's conduct, but no sentence had yet been formally passed. Suffering from a severe illness, the earl, having requested communion in preparation for death during the first week of December, was widely reported to be gravely ill. Indeed, on December 10, a rumor that he had actually died led to the tolling of church bells in London. In Court circles, however, some observers, including, apparently, the queen, believed that the accounts of his illness were greatly exaggerated and that Essex himself promoted them as a ploy to gain sympathy.

Donne's letter opens with an expression of love for Wotton that manages also to comment bitingly on the climate of spying and censorship that shapes their correspondence: "Sir That Love which went with you followes and overtakes and meetes you. [I]f words seald up in letters be like words spoken in those frosty places where they are not heard till the next thaw they have yet this advantage that where they are heard they are herd only by one or such as in his judgment they are fitt for." Donne then goes on to dissociate himself from the Court, in a manner similar to that he used in "Here's no more newes" and in letter no. 7, written during an earlier period when Wotton was also exiled from Court. "I am no Courtier," Donne asserts, "for without having lived there desirously I cannot have sin'd enough to have deserv'd that reprobate name: I may sometymes come thither and bee no courtier as well as they may sometymes go to chapell and yet are no christians." He explains his current presence at the Court in a witty but scathing indictment of the place as a center of all manner of vice:

> I am there now where because I must do some evill I envy your being in the country[,] not that it is a vice will make any great shew here for they live at a far greter rate and expence of wickednes[,] but because I will not be utterly out of fashion and unsociable. I gleane such vices as the greater

> men (whose barnes ar full) scatter. [Y]et I learne that the learndst in vice suffer some misery for when they have reapd flattery or any other fault long there comes some other new vice in request wherein they are unpracticed. [O]nly the women are free from this chang for they are sure they cannot bee worse nor more throwne downe then they have beene: they have perchance heard that god will hasten his judgment for the righteous sake[,] and they affect not that hast and therefore seeke to lengthen out the world by there wickednes.

Following this brilliant but generalized satire in which Donne indicts his own Court employment as inevitably contributing some small part to the general evil, he turns to some specific news that would have been of particular interest to Wotton:

> The Court is not great but full of jollyty and revells and playes and as merry as if it were not sick. [H]er majestie is well disposd and very gratious in publique to my Lord Mountjoy[.] My lord of Essex and his trayne are no more mist here then the Anngells which were cast downe from heaven nor (for any thing I see) likelyer to retourne.

Donne then comments on Essex's illness, which his enemies alleged to be pretended: "he withers still in his sicknes and plods on to his end in the same pace where you left us. [T]he worst accidents of his sicknes are that he conspires with it and that it is not here beleeved." He concludes by remarking, "that which was sayd of Cato that his age understood him not I feare may be averted of your lord[,] that he understood not his age: for it is a naturall weaknes of innocency. That such men want lockes for themselves and keyse for others."

This letter reveals Donne as an astute observer of the current political crisis. While his satiric comments on the Court are similar to those expressed during the crisis of the summer of 1598, he now seems more observant and more reflective. His juxtaposition of the queen's public favoritism toward Essex's former rival Lord Mountjoy and her elaborate display of a lack of concern about Essex and the rest of his retinue implies a more subtle understanding of her policy than the witty but broadshot condemnations of the Court might suggest. The contrast of the frivolities at Court with the suffering of the earl effectively dramatizes Essex's pitiful plight; it indicates a full measure of human sympathy for the earl but not, as Arthur Marotti alleges, partisanship.[27] The comment that Essex and his followers are "for any thing I see" no likelier to return to Court than the fallen angels to heaven conveys a message of immediate concern to Wotton. Addressed as it is to one of the earl's former employees, the observation may be evidence that Wotton has cut his ties with the disgraced former favorite and that Donne no longer considers him part of the earl's "trayne." It is, however, unlikely that Donne would in any case include Essex's secretaries in the aristocratic context in which he refers

to the earl's "trayne" here; he more probably refers to such close and prominent associates of Essex as the Earl of Southampton. The perspective that Donne adopts in this letter is that of an outside observer writing to another outsider, a stance consistent with the liminal position vis a vis the Court that Donne and Wotton habitually assume in their correspondence. The comments concerning Essex's illness accurately suggest the suspicion with which all of the earl's actions were regarded at Court yet they also imply an alternate explanation to the cynical belief that the illness is merely a ploy to gain sympathy, namely that it is exacerbated by the earl's psychological depression. Moreover, the observation that Essex did not understand his age is rendered exceedingly diplomatically, as "a naturall weaknes of innocency." Donne thus is able to blame Essex for his own disgrace, but at the same time attribute it to the corruption of the times, a diagnosis likely to be acceptable to Wotton. The assessment that "such men [as Essex] want lockes for themselves and keyse for others" expresses an independent judgment, but one that casts the earl as a victim of his own naivete and romanticism, presenting him as one who is unable either to dissemble or to detect the dissembling of others. Tellingly, the comment itself is inflected with the language of spying and suspicion characteristic of the intrigue-ridden Court. Moreover, the letter itself marks a dramatic change of status within the relationship of the two men, as Donne here emerges as a confident observer and commentator offering advice to his colleague, whose future prospects must have seemed in grave doubt.

The final surviving letter of Donne's to Wotton specifically related to the crisis of late 1599-early 1600 is likely that designated no. 4 by Simpson (Burley ms., f. 295v). It was probably written in February or March of 1600, since it refers to a letter of Wotton's dated the 25th of January. Like letter no. 6, letter no. 4 also discourses on the corruption of the Court. "I am now free from an ague," Donne writes, and adds: "though I am afrayd the state bee not so: for certaynly the court hath in it much unnaturall heate and the courts and seats of princes are the harts of all realms which taking forme from theyre humors are more or lesse corrupted as they confine or enlarge theyre owne wills." Donne somewhat dilutes this unusually bold criticism of the queen by conceding that the corruption he finds at the English Court is by no means confined to it, "for certaynly all tymes are of owre nature and all courts produce the same effects of envie and detraction of jelousy and other humane weakneses." He concludes philosophically, "[T]hus it must be till we gett above the moone whose motions as some have ingeniously erred do make us variable." This statement may, however, be somewhat more than merely a comment on earthly susceptibility to mutability and decay; Edward Le Comte sees in it an allusion to Elizabeth as a willful and fickle monarch, "the aged moon whose cold light no longer shone on her erstwhile favorite."[28] If such an allusion is intended, then the letter implies that there may be no hope for the improvement of the Court until Elizabeth dies, or, more pertinently, that Wotton has no prospects of rehabilitation as long as she reigns. The letter ends with Donne

remarking that "I can from hence requite you with no news which hath made me fill paper with the vanyty of myne owne discourse." He does, however, add the curious and pointed information that "in this place you are more unacquaynted, then obscure." This perplexing phrase may be a response to the implied question in Wotton's earlier letter as to how he is regarded at Court, a request that may have been urged more explicitly in the lost letter dated January 25th. Donne's distinction may be intended to reassure Wotton that at Court he is not closely connected with Essex's troubles; it contrasts the state of being "unacquaynted" (unknown or unfamiliar or inexperienced; see *OED*, defs. 2 and 3) with that of being "obscure" (dim or dark; see *OED*, def. a. 1), with its etymological suggestions of shade and darkness. Donne may thus cryptically signal his friend that he has escaped serious implication in the disgrace of the earl, but that his best course is to lie low and to remain "unacquaynted" at Court.

This letter is the last of the extant politically charged correspondence between Wotton and Donne centering on their respective loyalties to Essex and Egerton. Essex recovered from his illness, and in June of 1600 a full hearing and inquiry into his conduct of the Irish expedition was held in York House, under the chairmanship of Egerton. On August 26, the earl was set at liberty to retire to the country, but was ordered never to appear at Court again. Undoubtedly frightened by the possible consequences of his association with the queen's former favorite, Wotton cannily slipped into temporary oblivion. By the time of Essex's rebellion, trial, and execution, all occurring in rapid succession in February of 1601, Wotton was again on the Continent and out of harm's way. Donne, meanwhile, seemed to be well on the road to a successful public career, serving as Egerton's protege in the Parliament of 1601. Then catastrophe struck. He was reluctantly but irrevocably dismissed from the Lord Keeper's service for having secretly married his employer's niece. As evidenced by three surviving prose letters and a verse epistle, however, Wotton and Donne maintained their friendship and their correspondence for at least a decade longer.

IV

The letters that Simpson designates nos. 9 and 11 were probably written in the latter part of 1600, after Wotton had abandoned his connection with the Earl of Essex. These long letters contain very few references to the Court, and they are far more meditative and ruminative than the earlier prose correspondence. They address Wotton not as a fellow courtier but as one who shares Donne's interest in literature. The turn away from the political issues and tensions that dominated the earlier correspondence undoubtedly reflects the change of circumstances of the addressee and illustrates Donne's persistent awareness of audience and occasion. It may be that Wotton's temporary retirement from an active involvement in public life forced the friends to redirect their relationship to those common passions on

which it was originally founded. These letters revealingly discuss Donne's reading practices, his intellectual independence, and his attitude toward his own poetry. They also, however, address issues of particular interest to men whose aspirations to careers of public service were strong yet deeply ambivalent, including such topics as the attractions of the contemplative life and the dangers of poetry.

Letter no. 9 (Burley ms., ff. 298v-299) is particularly interesting as a disquisition on reading and as an early statement of the anxiety of influence. "I am no great voyager in other mens works: no swallower nor devowrer of volumes nor pursuant of authors," Donne declares, explaining that "I do therefore more willingly blow and keep awake that smale coole which god hath pleased to kindle in mee then farr off to gather a faggott of greene sticks which consume without flame or heat in a black smoother." The point, of course, is not that Donne does not read widely; indeed, the letter's allusions to Shakespeare and its long discussion of Dante leave no doubt of its author's thorough immersion in the works of others. Rather, the point is that he wishes to rely on his own experience and inspiration rather than to imitate other writers. The confidence in his own talent apparent here may help explain the innovation and originality of his poetry. Certainly, his valorization of that small coal "which god hath pleased to kindle in mee" at the expense of study and imitation distinguishes him from such contemporaneous literary theorists as Ben Jonson. Perhaps most interesting in terms of his relationship with Wotton, however, are the remarks he makes about Dante, an author that Wotton undoubtedly brought to his attention. Donne attacks Dante ("a man pert enough to bee beeloved and to much to bee beeleeved") for placing in purgatory Pope Celestine V, who had resigned the papacy for a life of contemplation. "[I]f he will needs punish retyrednes thus what hell can his witt devise for ambition?" Donne asks. The digression on Dante in effect tactfully continues the debate about the contemplative and active lives that informed the friends' 1598 exchange of verse letters. In defending Celestine V's choice of retirement, Donne may be subtly supporting Wotton's (temporary) withdrawal from public life, as well as attempting to find some consolation for his own (forced) retirement. The letter ends with a witty statement of intellectual independence that is at once self-assertive and self-mocking: "so say I of authors that they thinke and I thinke both reasonably yet posibly both erroniously; that is manly: for I am so far from perswading yea conselling you to beleeve others that I care not that you beleeve not mee when I say that others are not to bee beeleeved: only beleeve that I love you and I have enough." Donne's apprehensive resistance to influence and his tolerant skepticism, as well as his deconstructive wit, are aspects of what Martin Seymour-Smith describes as "the astonishingly 'modern' temper of his thinking."[29]

Letter no. 11 (Burley ms., ff. 308v-309), which accompanied a manuscript of some of Donne's paradoxes, is an important record of the poet's regard for at least some of his early poetry, including the Satires and the Elegies, as well as for the

prose paradoxes. He sends the manuscript, he says, "Only in obedience," explaining that "I love you and myself and them to well to send them willingly for they carry with them a confession of there lightnes[,] and your trouble and my shame." After dismissing them as "nothings" having been "made rather to deceave tyme then her daughther truth," Donne implores Wotton to promise him, "upon the religion of your frendship that no coppy shalbee taken for any respect of these or any other my compositions sent to you." He expresses his anxiety about the circulation of his work in terms of fear and shame, telling Wotton that "I meane to acquaint you with all myne: and to my satyrs there belongs some feare and to some elegies and these perhaps shame. [A]gainst both which affections although I be tough enough yet I have a ridling disposition to bee ashamed of feare and afrayd of shame. [T]herfore I am desirous to hyde them without any over reconing of them or there maker." Donne's apprehensiveness about his work and its circulation witnesses at once to the power of censorship in the late sixteenth-century and also to his own profound ambivalence, both as poet and as courtier. "[A]shamed of feare and afrayd of shame," the poet is "desirous to hyde" these potentially damaging works, but not to destroy them; hence, he is willing to circulate them among a coterie of close friends. Fittingly, he turns immediately to second Wotton's expression of friendship, before proceeding to pithy comments about Aretino and the unanticipated effects of censorship ("beleeve me he is much lesse then his fame and was to well payd by the Roman church in that coyne which he coveted most where his bookes were by the counsell of Trent forbidden which if they had beene permitted to have been worne by all long ere this had been worne out") and a promise to procure Wotton a copy of a translation of the Psalms. This letter not only reveals the poet's nervousness about his work, but also his consciousness of the ironies of the elaborate censorship systems of his day, as well as his sardonic attitude toward the workings of the institutionalized Church in which he was born.

With the accession of James VI of Scotland to the English throne on the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603, Wotton's political fortunes dramatically brightened. While Wotton's association with Essex precluded any advancement as long as Elizabeth ruled, such was not the case under James. Indeed, the Essex association probably worked to commend Wotton to the new monarch, since the earl and his followers had consistently supported James's claim to the throne of England. In addition, in 1601 Wotton had personally warned the Scottish monarch of a Spanish Catholic plot to assassinate him, and James was grateful for the intelligence. The only obstacle to Wotton's preferment under James might have been Cecil, Essex's old enemy, who continued in office under the new monarch; but even he expressed a favorable opinion of Wotton's abilities. Learning of Cecil's approbation, Wotton wrote to the Secretary from Venice on May 23, 1603, offering his "poor service" to James's government, "though it come both unseasonably and late." Speaking "with plainness," Wotton acknowledged his onetime allegiance to Essex, but protested that by the time of the earl's rebellion, he had "removed" himself "unto

these parts (either of purpose or by accident), from the knowledge and participation of ill . . . ." Self-conscious that his approach to Cecil might bespeak a disloyalty to the memory of his former employer, Wotton faced the issue head-on, in the process revealing some resentment toward Essex's treatment of him, perhaps recalling especially the earl's attempt to scapegoat him for negotiating the truce with Tyrone: "the world (which must somewhat be satisfied) might think me more obliged to a tender and reverent remembrance of my master, than they that knew him worthy of opposition. And yet as I owed him a double duty—the duty of fidelity to his person while he lived, and the duty of reverence to his memory after his death—so I think I may justly say that he owed unto me in some respects more regard of me than I found about him."[30] His submission was successful, and Wotton went on to a distinguished career in the new Stuart government.

Wotton was knighted on July 8, 1604, and sent as Ambassador to Venice on July 19th. The verse letter that Donne wrote to salute him on his rise to this new eminence can probably be dated fairly close to these two events. Although Walton alleges that the verse letter was sent to Wotton the morning before he left England,[31] the postscript to the copy of the poem in the Burley manuscript (f. 286), designated prose letter no. 14 by Simpson, suggests that it was sent somewhat earlier, since it is subscribed "such a one as I may yett kisse your hand." The poem is characteristically generous, but it is also shadowed by the equally dramatic change in Donne's own fortunes as the result of his marriage. Whereas so many of the earlier exchanges between Donne and Wotton involved the former consoling the latter for political reverses, this verse letter is written from a different vantage point entirely. In it, Donne is painfully conscious that the disparity of fortune is now altogether in Wotton's favor.

The ruling conceit of the poem is that it is an "honest paper" that follows in a stately procession, bringing up the rear after "those reverend papers" of the King that appointed Wotton ambassador, after "those learned papers" of Wotton's own studious preparation for public service, and after "those loving papers" of his friends' farewells. "Admit this honest paper, and allow / It such an audience as your selfe would aske" (ll. 17-18), Donne implores. To define his poem as honest is, of course, to continue the conspicuous self-representation as trustworthy friend that marks many of Donne's exchanges with Wotton. Such a definition also, however, subtly reminds the newly named ambassador of the pervasive mendacity of the political world to which he has returned, and recalls the harsh anti-Court satire of their earlier communications. Donne's phrase may also anticipate the sentiment of Wotton's own witty definition of an ambassador as one sent to lie abroad for his king. Certainly, the sense of that aphorism is implicit in Donne's lines, "What you must say at Venice this meanes now, / And hath for nature, what you have for taske" (ll. 19-20). That is, the avowal of friendship ("To sweare much love" [l. 21]) that will be merely your duty at Venice is, in contrast, here sincerely and naturally meant by me. The implication is that Donne has maintained his honesty, while Wotton will not be able to do so.

The balance of the poem is concerned with how Wotton's success will affect his friendship with Donne. The love that the "honest paper" swears is pledged

> not to be chang'd before
> Honour alone will to your fortune fit;
> Nor shall I then honour your fortune, more
> Then I have done your honour wanting it. (ll. 21-24)

What is most interesting about this avowal of love, apart from its playful puns on the various meanings of honor and fortune, is its strong sense of contingency, which seriously undercuts its pledge of constancy. Donne is acutely aware that the honors heaped on Wotton now and in the future will distinctly alter their relationship, especially since he sees no prospect of his attaining a comparable status. Tellingly, in the next quatrain, he specifically contrasts his own position with Wotton's. At some cost of rationalization, he asserts that, while both conditions are oppressive, it is easier to bear the lack of greatness than the burden of governing it, for the former involves managing only one's own business, while the latter involves the care of "others vices" (l. 28). Even as he congratulates Wotton on his rising fortunes, he reminds him of the dangers and responsibilities that accompany greatness.

Significantly, however, in an alchemical conceit similar to that in "H.W. in Hiber. belligeranti," Donne reassures Wotton that he is capable of the challenge posed by his sudden success:

> 'Tis therefore well your spirits now are plac'd
> In their last Furnace, in activity;
> Which fits them (Schooles and Courts and warres o'rpast)
> To touch and test in any best degree. (ll. 29-32)

The sphere of action, the last furnace for which his experience and education has prepared him, will, Donne asserts, serve as an alembic to refine and transform Wotton's character into a touchstone that will test and enhance the characters of others. Hence, the new ambassador will indeed manage well the burden of greatness; not only will he prove immune to the vices of others, but he will actually improve those with whom he comes into contact, even those of the "best degree." In poignant contrast, Donne's success is of a different kind entirely. He bears so well the tyranny of Fortune "That she thinks nothing else so fit for mee" (l. 36). As Marotti observes, in speaking of his own removal from the world of activity, the poet assumes an ironic stance that dignifies his ruined state but only thinly disguises his envy of his friend's success.[32] In the concluding quatrain, Donne invokes God's blessings on Wotton in terms that emphasize the disparity of status that now separates the friends:

> But though she part us, to heare my oft prayers
> For your increase, God is as neere mee here;
> And to send you what I shall begge, his staires
> In length and ease are alike every where. (ll. 36-40)

While the quatrain asserts the friends' equality in the eyes of God, it is nevertheless excruciatingly conscious of the fact that they are no longer equals in the eyes of the world. The "honest paper" that swears love to Wotton and prays for his "increase" also plaintively records Donne's suffering under the tyranny of "Fortune (if there be such a thing as shee)" (l. 34). The poet's characteristic self-deprecation is here expressed especially disturbingly when he questions his very existence, "For mee, (if there be such a thing as I)" (l. 33). Divided against itself and tinged with a complex mixture of emotions, including envy, disappointment, and self-denigration, the poem congratulates Wotton on his success yet also sadly notes that Fortune has parted the friends by more than geographical distance.

The distance between the friends is obvious in the final extant letter of their correspondence (Burley ms., f. 301), the prose letter designated no. 29 by Simpson. She dates the letter to 1608 or 1609, near the end of Wotton's first embassy to Venice and during Donne's bleak Mitcham years, when he was without steady employment and sought (mostly unsuccessfully) preferment from former associates. The letter is, among other things, a not so subtle request for patronage in which Donne both flatters Wotton and reminds him of their friendship:

> Sir All this while like a silke worme I worke myself into a bottome or clew and by my former sylence and contemplation of your honorable merits I am so increased in my inward love and desire to doe you service, as when you shalbee pleased to untwine me, you shall find lenght enough in my desires though perhaps my thred of performance be very small. If therefore in the accompts you cast of your frends you do not summ me upp amongst the rest it will very much greive and molest me, bycause though I am content others take me only for a cypher, to increase the number of theire frends yet I am ambitious to be reputed of some number with you whose frendship I know and judgment admitts no cypher. And bycause I cannot but comunicate with my frends that which I know I will tell you that it did much rejoyce my hart when I heard my Lord E[llesmere] by his honorable testimony give great reputation to the Lord Ambassador of Venice as to one of very great fidelitie and excellent dexterity and skill in publike businesses of which he had given acceptable proofe and experience to his Majestie: now as I doubt not but your desyre to merit him, so (if you willbe pleased not to thinke I presume to advise you) besydes that satisfaction of your excellent dispatches nothing wilbe more acceptable then some such models and frames ere I speake this

(without comission) for that I know both your dispositions and I desire to encrease his good opinion of you.

In its greater formality and more deferential courtesy, as well as in its tone that borders on sycophancy, this letter is very different from the earlier communications. Despite its touching references to the longstanding friendship between the two men, it is less a familiar letter than one in which a suitor seeks to ingratiate himself with a social or political superior. In short, it partakes of the language of the patronage system. It is not clear exactly what specific office Donne may be seeking, but the opening conceit of the silkworm disarmingly announces his availabilty "to doe you service"; and one need not be overly cynical to suspect that the report of Wotton's commendation by Egerton, now Lord Ellesmere, is merely a pretext to bring Donne to his old friend's attention and to remind him of his renewed ambition. The proffered excuse for the letter, "bycause I cannot but comunicate with my frends that which I know," seems more than a little ironic in light of the earlier conflict between Donne and Wotton over the question of news from the Court, but it may be intended to announce the writer's availability for service as confidant and informant. Donne's courteous self-denigration here rings with a decided tone of defeat. His indirection—his refusal or inability to speak entirely frankly of his need of patronage—may be a reflection of his pride and subtlety of mind, as well as a convention of letters seeking patronage, but it is also a measure of the distance between the former friends. Certainly, the elaborate demurral "(if you willbe pleased not to thinke I presume to advise you)" bespeaks an entirely different relationship from that assumed in such earlier communications as "Here's no more newes." Thus the surviving correspondence of Donne and Wotton comes to an end in an ingratiating and importuning letter whose most salient feature is the worldly success of one and the frustrated ambition of the other.

Although no further correspondence between Donne and Wotton exists, the two men maintained a warm association until Donne's death, and the Ambassador no doubt rejoiced in his old friend's eventual rise to eminence in the Established Church. Wotton, who later became Provost of Eton College, may indeed have caused the surviving letters to be copied and preserved as part of his preparation for writing a proposed life of the distinguished Dean of St. Paul's. These exchanges, however, are far removed in time and spirit from those later triumphs. Rather, they document the ambitions and fears of neophyte public servants on the peripheries of power in Elizabeth's *fin de siecle* Court. Placed in their proper contexts and order, these youthful letters illuminate both the friendship of Donne and Wotton and the momentous events that shaped and tested it. In addition, contextualizing the correspondence vividly demonstrates the larger point that Donne's prose and verse letters are highly referential texts and documents that respond to particular crises and are tailored to specific occasions. Contextualizing the exchanges also reveals the extent to which Donne's letters to Wotton are

complex transactions in which the poet both projects himself and introjects his image of his friend. They are letters of courtship in several meanings of that term. Moreover, the contextual/conjectural reconstruction offered here suggests that the verse letters and prose letters are interdependent, both kinds equally functioning as instruments of conceptual communication. Whether exercised in prose or verse, Donne's epistolary mode is more rhetorical than lyrical and more persuasive—or paraenetic—than contemplative.[33] Dynamic exchanges between aspiring courtiers immersed in the tumultuous politics of the final decade of Elizabeth's reign, the correspondence has an immediacy and force not heretofore recognized. Although John Carey has suggested that the "newslessness" of many of Donne's letters may be attributed to his "almost pathological self-absorption,"[34] a study of the letters to Wotton yields a different explanation, one rooted not in Donne's vanity but in his sensitivity to audience and occasion. The climate of censorship and suspicion that variously constrained the correspondence with Wotton may have induced habits of discretion and indirection that helped fashion the poet's letter-writing long into his future. Written during the formative years of the late 1590s and early 1600s, Donne's verse and prose letters to Wotton revealingly embody creative responses to important public crises even as they also record the tensions and rewards of a significant personal relationship.

University of Michigan-Dearborn

Notes

[1] Angel Day, *The English Secretary (1599): A Facsimile Reproduction*, intro. Robert O. Evans (Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1967), p. 8; John Donne, *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour (1651): A Facsimile Reproduction*, intro. M. Thomas Hester (Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1977), p. 106.

[2] Quoted, with contractions silently expanded, from Donne, *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour*, p. 11.

[3] Quoted from the first version of Izaak Walton's *The Life of Sir Henry Wotton*, prefaced to the first edition of *Reliquiæ Wottonianæ* (London: R. Marriot, G. Bedel, and T. Garthwait, 1651), sig. b8v. The biographical and historical details in this present essay are based on information in R. C. Bald, *John Donne, A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970); Logan Pearsall Smith, *The Life and Letters of Sir Henry Wotton*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907); Robert Lacey, *Robert Earl of Essex* (New York: Atheneum, 1971); Francis Henry Egerton's entry for Lord Keeper Thomas Egerton in Andrew Kippis, ed., *Biographia Britannica*, 2nd ed. (London: for T. Longman, et al., 1793), 5:562-81; Mary Anne Everett Green, ed., *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, 1598-1601* (London: Longmans, Green, 1869); Ernest George Atkinson, ed., *Calendar of State Papers, Ireland, 1598-1599, 1599-1600, 1600* (London: for Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1895, 1899, 1903); Thomas Birch, *Memoirs of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*, 2 vols. (London: for A. Millar, 1754); Richard Arthur Roberts et al., ed., *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Honourable the Marquess of Salisbury*, 24 vols. (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1883-1976); and C. L. Kinsford, ed., *Report on the Manuscripts of Lord de L'Isle and Dudley*, 2 vols. (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1934).

[4] Wotton, *A Parallel between Robert Late Earle of Essex, and George Late Duke of Buckingham*, in *Reliquiæ Wottonianæ* (1651), pp. 8-9 (sigs. A4v-A5). As Lacey notes, the earl was rumored to have

syphilis, and the nervous disorder that progressively plagued him after 1596 is symptomatic of a late stage of that disease (*Robert Earl of Essex*, pp. 201-202).

[5] As Francis Bacon reported in 1596, Essex and the newly appointed Lord Keeper "love and join very honourably together, out of which correspondency and noble conjunction betwixt MARS and PALLAS, betwixt justice and valour, I mean betwixt so admirable a nobleman as the earl, and so worthy a justicer as my lord keeper, I doubt not very famous effects will daily spring to her majesty's honour, the good of the state, and the comfort of both their lordships particular true friends" (Birch, *Memoirs*, 2:145-46).

[6] The entire extant prose correspondence between Donne and Wotton, as well as Donne's verse epistle to "H. W. in Hiber. belligeranti," is preserved in only one early source, the so-called Burley manuscript (now Leicestershire Record Office ms. DG. 7/ Lit. 2), which also contains an early copy of Donne's "To Sir H.W. at his going Ambassador to Venice." Early this century, when the manuscript was in private hands, Logan Pearsall Smith had a transcription made of most of its contents and edited three of Wotton's prose letters to Donne (numbered 42, 44, and 45 in *Life and Letters*) from that transcription; Herbert J.C. Grierson also edited Donne's verse letter to Wotton fighting in Ireland from the transcription (*The Poems of John Donne*, 2 vols. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912], 1:188-89), noting that shortly after he examined the manuscript and collated the transcription of its poetical contents against the original, the manuscript itself was destroyed by fire (2:cxi, n. 1). From the same transcription, Evelyn Simpson edited the 32 prose letters that she believed to be Donne's, including them in Chapter 12 of *A Study of the Prose Works of John Donne* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924; 2nd ed., revised, 1948). Since her *Study* first appeared, the authorship of several of the Burley letters that she prints as Donne's has been challenged; see the protracted exchange by Baird Whitlock, I.A. Shapiro, David Novarr, and R.C. Bald in *The Times Literary Supplement* in 1952 (pp. 556, 597, 613, 629, 645, 700, 743, and 837), especially the unsupported assertions concerning their authenticity by Shapiro in his letter of 12 September (p. 597). Of the thirteen prose letters designated by Simpson as being from Donne to Wotton, Shapiro accepted Donne's authorship of only two (nos. 11 and 14), but asserted that no. 11 was not written to Wotton; that six (nos. 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 29) may possibly be by Donne (noting that in his own edition of Donne's letters, then in preparation, "I exclude them from the canon of Donne's authenticated letters, and relegate them to an appendix"); was "very doubtful whether Donne could have written" four others (nos. 4, 10, 17, and 27); and assigned letter no. 5 to Wotton, rather than to Donne. In addition, he challenged Wotton's authorship of the three Burley letters printed in Smith, as well as Smith's supposition that they were written to Donne. Shapiro never completed his edition of Donne's letters and never gave reasons for his judgments, making it difficult to take his objections seriously.

The Burley manuscript was not, however, destroyed by fire; and its recent reappearance has allowed scholars to reassess its contents. The volume is clearly a composite, made up of gatherings in various hands on different kinds of paper. What now seems clear is that at least some of the gatherings, including the two on which the letters in question are entered, are letterbooks kept by Wotton, in which his secretaries copied letters and other documents sent by and to him; see the appendix to Ilona Bell, "Under y^e^ Rage of a Hott Sonn & y^r^ Eyes: John Donne's Love Letters to Ann More," *The Eagle and the Dove: Reassessing John Donne*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986). pp. 48-52. It is highly likely that the letters in question preserved in the Burley manuscript are from and to Donne. Moreover, the internal evidence of the letters themselves, especially their congruence with the unquestionably authentic verse letters, strongly supports their authenticity. Simpson's letter no. 5, however, should be assigned to Wotton rather than to Donne. The two prose letters in the posthumously published *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour* purportedly written by Donne to Wotton (pp. 120-27, 140-43) were actually written to Sir Henry Goodyer; see Hester's introduction to the 1977 facsimile, pp. xviii and xix.

[7] Since doubt has been cast (however irresponsibly and implausibly) on the authenticity of the Donne-Wotton prose letters in the Burley manuscript, and since some of them cannot be dated precisely, our reconstruction must necessarily be considered conjectural. However, by locating the verse and prose letters contextually, we hope both to bolster the authenticity of the prose letters and to demonstrate their interdependency with the verse letters. One more caveat, however: not only are the surviving letters

merely a fraction of the actual correspondence between Donne and Wotton, but the fact that it seems to have been Wotton who preserved the letters (and chose which letters to save) also introduces an element of bias in our reconstruction. He may have saved or destroyed letters on the basis of the light in which those letters cast him. That is, the surviving correspondence may not be totally representative of the actual exchanges.

While our enterprise is more elaborate, it is in the same vein as the projects of contextual reconstruction in R.E. Bennett's "Donne's Letters from the Continent in 1611-12," *Philological Quarterly* 19 (1940): 66-78, which orders nineteen of Donne's surviving letters chronologically; and in Ilona Bell's "Under y^e^ Rage of a Hott Sonn & y^r^ Eyes," which provides a context for Simpson letters numbered 13, 15, and 16. Although Bald cites a few of the letters of the Donne-Wotton correspondence, he does not attempt to order them and he provides (brief) contexts for only eight: Simpson letters numbered 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 (*John Donne, A Life*, pp. 107-08, 119-23). Edward Le Comte, *Grace to a Witty Sinner: A Life of Donne* (New York: Walker, 1965), pp. 62-70, also makes use of several of the letters, providing brief contexts for them.

[8] Annabel Patterson, "Misinterpretable Donne: The Testimony of the Letters," *John Donne Journal* 1 (1982): 39-53. Other critical studies of the prose letters include Martin Seymour-Smith, *Poets through Their Letters: From the Tudors to Coleridge* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969), pp. 84-122; A. C. Partridge, *John Donne: Language and Style* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1978), pp. 174-90; John Carey, "John Donne's Newsless Letters," *Essays and Studies* 34 (1981): 45-65; Margaret Maurer, "The Poetical Familiarity of John Donne's Letters," *Genre* 15 (1982): 183-202; and Bell, "Under y^e^ Rage of a Hott Sonn & y^r^ Eyes." Studies of Donne's verse letters include Laurence Stapleton, "The Theme of Virtue in Donne's Verse Epistles," *Studies in Philology* 55 (1958): 187-200; John Jordan, "The Early Verse Letters of John Donne," *University Review* (Dublin) 2 (1962): 3-24; W. Milgate, "Donne as Moralist—The Verse Letters," *John Donne: The Satires, Epigrams and Verse Letters*, ed. W. Milgate (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. xxxiii-xl; D.J. Palmer, "The Verse Epistle," *Metaphysical Poetry*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer (1970; rpt, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), pp. 73-99; Patricia Thomson, "Donne and the Poetry of Patronage: The *Verse Letters*," in *John Donne: Essays in Celebration*, ed. A.J. Smith (London: Methuen, 1972), pp. 308-23; Margaret Maurer, "John Donne's Verse Letters," *Modern Language Quarterly* 37 (1976): 234-59; Allen Barry Cameron, "Donne's Deliberative Verse Epistles," *English Literary Renaissance* 6 (1976): 369-403; Gary P. Storhoff, "Social Mode and Poetic Strategies: Donne's Verse Letters to His Friends," *Essays in Literature* 4 (1977): 11-18; David Aers and Gunther Kress, "'Dark Texts Needs Notes': Versions of Self in Donne's Verse Epistles," *Literature, Language and Society in England, 1580-1680*, by David Aers, Bob Hodge, and Gunther Kress (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan; Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1981), pp. 23-48; and Ted-Larry Pebworth and Claude J. Summers, "'Thus Friends Absent Speake': The Exchange of Verse Letters Between John Donne and Henry Wotton," *Modern Philology* 81 (1984): 361-77. Other recent works that explore the political inflections of Donne's poetry and/or consider the prose or verse letters include Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984); Arthur Marotti, *John Donne, Coterie Poet* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986); and David Norbrook, "The Monarchy of Wit and the Republic of Letters: Donne's Politics," *Soliciting Interpretation: Literary Theory and Seventeenth-Century English Poetry*, ed. Elizabeth D. Harvey and Katherine Eisaman Maus (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 3-37. Although *Censorship and Interpretation* does not consider Donne's correspondence with Wotton, the exchanges need to be seen in the context of what Patterson defines as "the hermeneutics of censorship."

[9] Although we identify the individual letters of the Donne-Wotton correspondence by their Simpson and Smith numbers, both those editions contain errors of transcription. For that reason, we quote the letters themselves directly from the Burley manuscript, silently expanding obvious abbreviations and brevigraphs and modernizing the use of *i*, *j*, *u*, and *v*. Our emendations of punctuation and capitalization—as well as our conjectural expansions of ambiguous abbreviations and brevigraphs—are indicated by square brackets. We quote the four Donne verse letters to Wotton from John T. Shawcross, ed., *The Complete Poetry of John Donne*, Anchor Seventeenth-Century Series (Garden City, NY:

Doubleday, 1967), and the Wotton verse letter to Donne from Ted-Larry Pebworth's forthcoming critical edition of Wotton's poems. For the full text of Wotton's poem, see Pebworth and Summers, "Thus Friends Absent Speake," pp. 368-69.

[10] Maurer, "The Poetical Familiarity of Donne's Letters," p. 184.

[11] The following discussion of "Here's no more newes," "'Tis not a coate of gray," and "Sir, more then kisses" is heavily indebted to our essay "Thus Friends Absent Speake," which provides a fuller discussion of this exchange.

[12] Birch, *Memoirs*, 2:384.

[13] Both letters are quoted, with italics reversed and *u* and *v* made to conform to modern usage, from John Speed, *The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine* (London: J. Sudbury and G. Humble, 1611), pp. 877, 878. Speed dates the Lord Keeper's letter "Iulie 18.An.1598" (p. 877). Both letters circulated widely in manuscript, where they are most often dated October 15 and 18, 1598, respectively; and they have frequently been printed with those dates. However, recent historians have accepted Speed's dating.

[14] Birch, *Memoirs*, 2:388.

[15] *Manuscripts of . . . the Marquess of Salisbury*, 9:6.

[16] In defense of the latter possibility, it is pertinent to observe that Walton some fifty years later described the young Ann as "curiously and plentifully educated" (*The Lives of John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Richard Hooker, George Herbert, and Robert Sanderson* [London: Oxford University Press, 1927], p. 31). Moreover, in a letter of 1600 (Simpson no. 15) that Ilona Bell argues is directed to Ann, Donne himself refers to her "fayre learned hand" ("Under y^e^ Rage of a Hott Sonn & y^e^ Eyes," p. 41). In addition, Wotton's tribute to the mistress's virtue may also correspond to Donne's representation of Ann More. In "To Mr. C.B.," a verse letter addressed to Christopher Brooke, who gave the bride away at Donne's clandestine wedding, Donne refers to Ann as "the Saint of his affection" (l. 3).

[17] For accusations by the Privy Council that Essex was negligent in prosecuting the Irish campaign, see the Council's letter to Essex dated July 20, 1599, in *Calendar of State Papers, Ireland, 1599-1600*, pp. 101-02. As Egerton's secretary, Donne was in a position to know well these accusations.

[18] Milgate, ed., *John Donne: The Satires, Epigrams and Verse Letters*, p. 233.

[19] *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1599-1601*, p. 225.

[20] Since Smith or his amanuensis wrongly read "A.D." as "A.R.," the conjecture that Wotton may be referring to Sir Alexander Radcliffe, a colonel who died in Ireland in August of 1599 while commanding a regiment under Sir Conyers Clifford (*Life and Letters*, 1:308, n. 2), is incorrect. Le Comte erroneously read the initials as "A.B." (*Grace to a Witty Sinner*, p. 63).

[21] *Calendar of State Papers, Ireland, 1599-1600*, pp. 95-96.

[22] *Calendar of State Papers, Ireland, 1599-1600*, p. 99.

[23] Lacey, *Robert Earl of Essex*, p. 233.

[24] On September 30, while confined to his chambers at Nonsuch Palace, Essex wrote (and Cecil immediately endorsed) a "relation of the manner of government of the kingdom of Ireland," which includes the following: "I used in the treaty with Tyrone, Sir Warham Sentleger. . . , Sir William Warren, . . . Sir William Constanble, and H. Wotton, my secretary, who both are come over with me, and H. Wotton hath both the articles of cessation, signed by Tyrone, and the instructions I gave to treat, and is best able to deliver all circumstances, the whole business being chiefly left to Sir Warham Sentleger and to him" (*Calendar of State Papers, Ireland, 1599-1600*, p. 160).

[25] During his earlier travels on the Continent, Wotton had used this same Latin phrase in a letter written from Rome to Lord Zouche in October of 1592: "yet comfort I myself that in wandering up and down in a strange land, I imitate though not the nature, yet the fortune of virtue, which certainly is *peregrina in terris, in caelo civis* (Smith, ed., *Life and Letters*, 1:290). Simpson reports as well that the antiquary Francis Douce had seen the same phrase written by Wotton in a German album in 1610 (n. 3 to letter no. 5). The association of the phrase with Wotton supports his authorship of letter no. 5.

[26] *Manuscripts of Lord de L'Isle and Dudley*, 2:420.

[27] Arthur Marotti, *John Donne, Coterie Poet*, p. 126. It is important to remember that, as Norbrook points out, "Donne kept a certain distance from the Essex circle, in which militant Protestant views were dominant, and he had connections with Essex's rivals Ralegh and Northumberland" ("The Monarchy

of Wit and the Republic of Letters," p. 12). See also R. E. Bennett, "John Donne and the Earl of Essex," *Modern Language Quarterly* 3 (1942): 603-04.

[28] Le Comte, *Grace to a Witty Sinner*, p. 67.

[29] Seymour-Smith, *Poets through Their Letters*, p. 91.

[30] Quoted from Smith, *Life and Letters*, 1:317.

[31] Walton, *Lives*, p. 114.

[32] Marotti, *John Donne, Coterie Poet*, p. 115. But see Storhoff, "Social Mode and Poetic Strategies," pp. 13-14, for an idealized reading of the poem.

[33] On Donne's conception of the letter, see Cameron, "Donne's Deliberative Verse Epistles," pp. 370-75.

[34] Carey, "John Donne's Newsless Letters," p. 49.