John Donne Journal
Vol. 14 (1995)

"Jeasts which cozen your Expectatyonn": Reassessing John Donne's Paradoxes and Problems

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Critical evaluations of Donne's Paradoxes and Problems generally stem from Donne's own characterizations of these works in letters written at various points in his life.[1] His fullest commentary on the Paradoxes occurs in a letter believed to have been written to Henry Wotton in 1600. He begins by claiming that he sends Wotton an enclosed set of Paradoxes "only in obedience" to Wotton's importunity, protesting that even then he dispatches them unwillingly because they "carry wth them a confession of there lightness.& y^{r} trouble & my shame." Donne binds Wotton by the "religion" of their friendship to refrain from allowing anyone to transcribe copies, in order to prevent any "over reconing of them or there maker." And in disparaging terms he reveals their purpose and rhetorical strategy, both requiring secrecy:

> indeed they were made rather to deceaue tyme then her daughth^{r} truth: although they haue beene written in an age when any thing is strong enough to overthrow her: if they make y^{e} to find better reasons against them they do there office: for they are but swaggerers: quiet enought if y^{e} resist them. if pchaunce they be pretyly guilt, y^{t} is there best for they are not hatcht: they are rather alarums to truth to arme her then enemies: & they haue only this advantadg to scape from being caled ill things y^{t} they are nothings.

Donne subsequently intensifies this disparagement by stressing "there low price" and unworthiness ("they are not worth thus much

indeed signify more than critics have traditionally believed, and if those characterizations have constituted the basis for critics' low estimation of the Paradoxes and Problems, then the current critical assessment underestimates them. In what may come as a surprise, the works surpass—or cozen—readers' expectations. In one way, I shall conclude, the Paradoxes and Problems are indeed trifles, jests, and *jeux d'esprits*—but not as critics have believed. Instead, they are "Jeasts which cozen your Expectatyonn" (a label Donne formulates in his Paradox "A Defence of Womens Inconstancy") to the extent that their surface triviality disguises their underlying meaning.

In the 1600 letter to Wotton quoted above, three times Donne stresses that his Paradoxes have a surface appearance which belies their underlying nature: they appear to be swaggerers, but they are really cowards; they appear to be prettily gilt, but they are really unhatched; and they appear to be enemies to truth, but they are really only alarms to truth. In fact, Donne's metaphorical description of the dissimulative Paradox—"prettily guilt"—parallels a description in his Paradox entitled, "That the guifts of the body are better then those of the mind or of Fortune." There, the man who dissembles virtues of the mind is said to "*guild*, and enamell, yea and transforme much vice into vertu."[7] Only those readers who "resist" the prose pieces—that is, challenge their assertions in the same way that a valiant man resists a swaggerer—will ever come to learn of their deeper meaning, otherwise finding them harmless, unhatched, and friendly to the truth. Only readers who resist them possess the sophistication required to penetrate dissimulation.

Donne may have been motivated to write ironically by the only–too–real possibility that his manuscripts might miscarry or in some way wind up in the wrong hands, where unintended readers might then use them against him.[8] Donne himself alludes to this possibility in item number nine of *The Courtier's Library*: "Anything out of Anything; Or, the Art of deciphering and finding some treason in any intercepted letter, by Phillips," naming Thomas Philips, an infamous agent employed for such purposes by Sir Francis Walsingham.[9] He refers to it again in his "Advertisement to the Reader" in *Pseudo–Martyr*, when

he complains about the "curious malice of those men, who in this sickly decay, and declining of their cause, can spy out falsifyings in euery citation: as in a iealous, and obnoxious state, a Decipherer can pick out Plots, and Treason, in any familiar letter which is intercepted."[10]

Donne was not merely describing a misfortune from which he himself felt immune. Quite the contrary, the fear that his manuscripts might wind up in the wrong hands haunted him. In his letters he almost always associates this fear with a desire to conceal his writings or the sentiments expressed therein. Annabel Patterson observes that Donne's letters express a pervasive preoccupation with conditions necessitating dissimulation:

> Donne's letters produce, as a group of texts, an effect of strain, even of danger, in excess of generic shaping; . . . they show that his response to a climate of censorship and other related forms of inhibition was a constant interest in, even an obsession with, problems of interpretation and misinterpretation.[11]

This preoccupation itself—this meditation upon his own practice as a writer in hazardous circumstances—signifies a strong possibility that the entire work itself approaches being metacommentary, acknowledging and commenting upon its own rhetorical practice.[12] Donne's letters to Wotton and Goodyer juxtapose this preoccupation with explicit metacommentary upon his own dissimulation, confirming Patterson's hypothesis.

In another letter to Goodyer, dated December 20, 1614, just prior to Donne's ordination, he alludes to both the danger of circulating manuscripts and the degree of dissimulation such danger may require. Donne informs Goodyer that certain pressures force him to gather his manuscripts so that he can publish "a few Copies."[13] Yet this decision to publish risks provoking the disapproval of Lady Bedford, one of his patrons, whom Goodyer is visiting at the very moment he reads Donne's letter. Donne therefore reveals his decision in a manner calculated to escape her notice: "One thing more I must tell you; but so softly, that I am loath to hear my self: and so softly, that if that good

Lady were in the room, with you and this Letter, she might not hear."[14] Merely the possibility that Lady Bedford might learn of his decision prompts a form of caution equivalent to whispering, a significant gesture.[15] Later in this letter when Donne returns to speaking of his motivation to publish his works, his caution escalates from whispering to silence, hinting a situation so perilous that he dares not even risk mentioning it in a letter: should Lady Bedford inquire of news about Donne, Donne's instructions require Goodyer to dissimulate in order to keep Donne's secret.[16]

Even more secrecy and dissimulation cloak Donne's circulation of his manuscript book *Biathanatos*. In a letter of 1619 to Sir Edward Herbert, enclosing a copy of *Biathanatos*, Donne consigns this copy to the relative obscurity (and hence safety) of Herbert's library. Yet even in this protective obscurity, he still fears that its volatile subject matter ("new or dangerous doctrine") might unsettle the books on the shelf surrounding it.[17] At about the same time Donne wrote to Sir Robert Ker, enclosing another manuscript copy of *Biathanatos* but expressing an even greater anxiety about the manuscript's subject matter: "because it is upon a misinterpretable subject," Donne whispers, "I have always gone so near suppressing it, as that it is onely not burnt: no hand hath passed upon it to copy it, nor many eyes to read it: onely to some particular friends in both Universities, then when I writ it, I did communicate it." Donne entreats Ker to guard it as jealously as has Donne himself, restricting its circulation to only the most trustworthy of readers, and even then not allowing any of these select few to make any copy, as was apparently customary among Donne's coterie. In order to contain the book's volatility, Donne instructs Ker to inform those fortunate enough to glimpse its pages "the date of it; and that it is a Book written by *Jack Donne*, and not by *D. Donne*."[18]

2

If dangerous circumstances motivate writers to dissimulate, then by what hermeneutical principles might writers encode their dissembled material, and by what principles might readers decode it? Two

theories have been advanced: Leo Strauss' theory of "writing between the lines" and Annabel Patterson's "hermeneutics of censorship." Strauss first expounded his conceptions of rhetorical dissimulation in *Persecution and the Art of Writing*. His theory rests upon the assumption that persecutorial conditions require writers to encrypt self–incriminating subject matter:

> Persecution cannot prevent even public expression of the heterodox truth, for a man of independent thought can utter his views in public and remain unharmed, provided he moves with circumspection. He can even utter them in print without incurring any danger, provided he is capable of writing between the lines. . . . For the influence of persecution on literature is precisely that it compels all writers who hold heterodox views to develop a peculiar technique of writing, the technique we have in mind when speaking of writing between the lines.[19]

What does Strauss mean by "a peculiar technique of writing"? He means that writers encode their offensive ideas, creating in one document two texts for two different audiences: a surface–level text of apparently orthodox ideas (the "exoteric text") written to a general audience; and a deeper–level subtext of explosive ideas (the "esoteric text") targeted for a smaller, select audience of initiated readers. According to Strauss, the exoteric text consists of "a popular teaching of an edifying character," rehearsing conventional wisdom or public opinion, despite the writer's disbelief in it. Blinding the unintended vulgar audience with this smokescreen, the writer simultaneously conveys his subtext to his intended audience.[20]

But how can a writer communicate two different messages to two different audiences at once; or as Strauss puts it, "how can a man perform the miracle of speaking in a publication to a minority, while being silent to the majority of his readers"?[21] The answer underscores one of the most crucial components of rhetorical dissimulation: the writer consciously exploits language's multivalency, manipulating it to disguise the subtext beneath the surface–level text. This "peculiar technique of writing" presupposes that two different audiences pos-

sess different skill–levels as readers: the "vulgar," "unphilosophic majority" lack the skills to penetrate beyond the surface–level text, but the select initiates possess such skills:

> The fact which makes this literature possible can be expressed in the axiom that thoughtless men are careless readers, and only thoughtful men are careful readers. Therefore an author who wishes to address only thoughtful men has but to write in such a way that only a very careful reader can detect the meaning of his book.[22]

Given different skills in reading, when the unintended general audience of "careless" readers encounters this dual–level document, they will most probably apprehend only the surface–level text. However, when the intended audience of a selected few "careful" readers negotiates the document, they will pierce the ambiguity and apprehend the encoded subtext.

But how does the writer guide his careful readers to the esoteric text? By disrupting their reading experience. Careless readers will not bother (or be able) to account for the disruption and simply keep reading the surface–level text, oblivious to the subtext. Careful readers will interpret the disruption as a cue from the writer to stop, reread the passage (or the entire work), and reconsider it for the possibility that it might mean more than it appears to mean on the surface. The writer, in other words, communicates to his audience affectively, trusting them to "disentangle truth from its poetic or dialectic presentation." Thus, according to Strauss, "reading between the lines" consists of a process of arduous but pleasing interpretive labor.[23]

In *Censorship and Interpretation*, Annabel Patterson appropriates most of Strauss' theory of "writing between the lines," then modifies it to apply specifically to seventeenth-century England. Agreeing with Strauss that repression obliges encoded communication, she asserts the prevalence of rhetorical dissimulation in Renaissance England:

> what we can find everywhere apparent and widely understood, at least from the middle of the sixteenth century in England onward,

> is a system of communication ("literature") in which ambiguity becomes a creative and necessary instrument, while at the same time the art (and theory) of interpretation was reinvented, expanded, and honed. I call this phenomenon "the hermeneutics of censorship."[24]

Patterson may differ from Strauss in terming this phenomenon "the hermeneutics of censorship" rather than "writing between the lines" (as well as in several other important respects), but they share many assumptions, particularly the belief that writers achieve dissimulation by consciously exploiting the ambiguity of language.[25] Patterson calls such exploitation "*functional* ambiguity." She contends that in a wide range of literary and historical texts of the seventeenth–century, writers employed literary codes that allowed them to communicate provocative ideas to their audience under the guise of literature. Some of the most important of those codes consist of cues to the reader called "metacommentary." Whether placed in the front matter, ancillary documents (such as cover letters), or in the work itself, metacommentary suggests to initiated readers the specific ways the author wishes them to decode the text.[26]

3

In the course of her exposition of the "hermeneutics of censorship," Patterson cites Donne as a practitioner of rhetorical dissimulation, devoting a little over twelve pages to remarks upon his "Satyre IV," "A Tale of a Citizen and His Wife," the "Advertisement to the Reader" prefacing *Pseudo–Martyr*, several of Donne's letters, and a sermon of 1622.[27] As we have seen, Donne's remarks about his Paradoxes and Problems in letters to Wotton and Goodyer provide further evidence of dissimulation as a central factor in his rhetorical strategy. Presenting the Paradoxes as "swaggerers," Donne requires readers who can "resist" them. Thus, according to Donne's metacommentary, his Paradoxes (like Strauss' model of the dissimulative text) consist of two different texts for two different audiences: a surface-level text targeted at general, uninitiated audiences who cannot challenge outrageous assertions; and a deeper–level text in-

tended for a smaller, initiated audience capable of resistance to "swaggerers."

The issue of audience, however, requires us to modify Strauss' hermeneutic as applied to Donne's writings. Whereas Strauss assumed that the documents in question were disseminated to the public, Donne restricted his Paradoxes and Problems to a coterie. Why then would Donne need to formulate a surface–level text for a general, unintended audience? Perhaps because the danger of miscarriage or interception, a recurring concern of Donne's, might place his manuscripts before interlopers' eyes. Hence he may have written the surface-level text, at least in part, to camouflage the subtext targeted at his coterie. In relation to the question of audience, Strauss' hermeneutic illuminates Donne's dissimulation in still other ways. Like Strauss' writers, Donne alerts his intended audience to the subtext by means of cues which provoke an affective response ("if y^{o} resist them"). This affective response, in fact, leads them to discover the ultimate purpose of the Paradoxes: "if they make y^{o} to find better reasons against them they do there office." Both the purpose and the affective cues for achieving it recall Strauss' point that the hidden meanings of the dissimulative text "disclose themselves only after very long, never easy, but always pleasant work."[28]

Strauss raises additional considerations. He argues that a writer's attitude towards telling "'noble (or just) lies'" correlates with his willingness to dissemble. Such a writer "would not deceive himself about the fact that such opinions [as he expresses in the exoteric text] are merely 'likely tales,' or 'noble lies,' or 'probable opinions,' and would leave it to his capable readers to disentangle the truth from its poetic or dialectic presentation."[29] By engaging in the writing of Paradoxes, with the goal of mounting a spurious argument, Donne tacitly acknowledges that the opinions expressed are merely such "likely tales." (As Colie remarks of the Paradox, "its duplicitous intent, honestly proclaimed, imposed an antic decorum encouraging, in many ways, to novelty and trickery."[30]) Donne even characterizes those opinions as Strauss's "noble lies" by suggesting that their falsity compels initiated readers "to find better reasons against them." Hence

Donne leaves it up to his careful "readers to disentangle the truth from its poetic or dialectical presentation." Strauss adds that the writer, rather than identify for his initiated readers his text's specific truths and lies, does "almost more than enough by drawing their attention to the fact that he did not object to telling lies which were noble, or tales which were merely similar to the truth."[31] Donne's metacommentary in the letter to Wotton accomplishes precisely this.

In addition to stressing the Paradoxes' affectivity and complex presentation of truth, the letter to Wotton accentuates an important dimension of their multi–dimensional ambiguity: the ambiguity generated by their simultaneous triviality and consequence.[32] Erasmus stresses this simultaneity in the preface to his influential Paradox, the *Praise of Folly*:

> How unjust it is to allow every other walk of life its relaxation but none at all to learning, especially when trifling may lead to something more serious! Jokes can be handled in such as way that *any reader who is not altogether lacking in discernment* can scent something... rewarding in them.... [N]othing is more entertaining than treating trivialities in such a way as to make it clear you are doing anything but trifle with them.[33]

In Donne's letter to Wotton, this ambiguity resides in the thrice–stressed discrepancy between appearance and reality. It also resonates in Donne's characterization of his Paradoxes as "nothings." Although critics have interpreted "nothings" (along with other slighting references) as if Donne were simply deprecating his own work, passing the Paradoxes off as the toys of a gentleman-amateur ("ill things" so inconsequential as not even to deserve Wotton's [or our] consideration), I believe that other evidence proves this characterization only half–true.[34]

For example, since actions speak louder than words, the lengths to which Donne went to preserve the Paradoxes suggest an attachment which belies his casual dismissal of them. Even the appearance of casual dismissal itself can be interpreted ironically, for it was a pose affected by gentleman–amateurs, who routinely passed off their writ-

ings as trifles.[35] To accept Donne's dismissive remarks at face value, more importantly, is to overlook the tradition (within the generic history of the Paradox) of selecting "nothing" as a topic for writing Paradoxes. As Henry Knight Miller observes, "The obvious changes that one could ring upon the word 'nothing' offered ironic possibilities that jesters (and moralists) did not tire of for several hundred years."[36]

"Nothing" accordingly signifies not the absence of an entity but rather the presence of a paradoxical entity known as "nothing." In the contemporaneous "Prayse of Nothing," for example, Donne's friend Sir William Cornwallis declares (among other paradoxical propositions) that "Nothing is more precious then gold."[37] Ordinarily—that is, outside the conventions of Paradox—most readers interpret "nothing" literally, in the sense "no thing" in comparison with other things. Hence, if gold is more precious than all other things, then by implication, no other thing is more precious than gold. But the Paradox writer detaches "nothing" from its comparative context, literalizes it so that, ironically, it becomes an actual entity, and transforms denial into affirmation of its existence. Moreover, by its paradoxical nature, "nothing" not only overturns conventional wisdom, inverting hierarchies to replace gold as the most precious thing, but achieves this inversion precisely because it dissimulates so successfully. After all, since "nothing" can signify two contrary meanings simultaneously, and since most people interpret "nothing" in the conventional as opposed to unconventional sense, this ambiguity allows the writer of Paradox to disguise the unconventional sense under the apparently–innocuous conventional sense. "Nothing" fools readers' expectations.

If critics consider Donne's Paradoxes to be "nothings" in light of these considerations, then Donne's apparent dismissal of the Paradoxes is actually only half true. For as "nothings," the works share the same protective ambiguity enjoyed by the term "nothing": in popular perception they appear as trifles, yet this trifling appearance disguises their disorderly subtext, thereby facilitating dissimulation.[38] Rosalie Colie notes that "equivocation is the paradoxist's protection... against his detractors."[39] Thus there are perfectly good grounds for interpret-

ing Donne's characterization of his Paradoxes as "nothings" ironically, not literally—as itself an instance of dissimulation.[40]

Contemporaneous passages of metacommentary upon Paradoxes, such as in Anthony Munday's prefatory matter to his translation of Estienne's translation of Ortensio Lando's Paradoxes, underscore the same characteristics Donne highlights and introduce still others relevant to Donne. In his preface "to the friendly reader," Munday argues (as does Donne) that Paradoxes not only make truth appear all the more truthful by contrasting it with spurious argument, but also exercise readers' intellects in the process of compelling them to distinguish truth from falsehood. Both features acquit Paradoxes from the scandal implicitly attending them. Yet immediately after stressing these two praiseworthy features as his justification for publishing them, Munday undercuts his argument, shifting the justification from the edification to the pleasure of the reader. Now, Munday reminds his "friendly" readers that, despite the edification of truth, a temporary departure from truth to the alternative explanations delineated in Paradoxes creates a sense that there is a "diversitie of things." This "diversitie of things," in fact, "comfort[s] mens spirites" more than "daily and continually... behold[ing]" truth.[41] If variety pleases more than constancy (a paradoxical thesis Donne advances in his Paradox "A Defence of Womens Inconstancy"), then the temporary consideration of alternative (though admittedly false) explanations in the course of reading Paradoxes pleases more than invariably contemplating the truth.

This temporary, pleasing consideration of explanations opposed to conventional wisdom duplicates the phenomenon Joel Altman has characterized as the "Tudor play of mind." Altman argues that rhetorical training in Tudor England—particularly the technique of arguing both sides of a question—taught students to explore questions more than assert answers. When these students later produced plays, those plays

> functioned as media of intellectual and emotional exploration for minds that were accustomed to examine the many sides of a theme,

> to entertain opposing ideals, and by so exercising the understanding, to move toward some fuller apprehension of the truth.... Thus the *experience* of the play was the thing.[42]

Although Altman focuses on drama, he contends that "the habit of arguing *in utramque partem* permeated virtually all areas of intellectual life." In particular, his findings illuminate the practice of writing Paradoxes and Problems, in which writers explore the unconventional sides of questions. During the experience of Paradox, the audience enjoys that temporary consideration of alternative explanations of the question which Munday designates as "that diversitie of things." In another consideration relating to Donne's *Paradoxes*, Altman notes that as a "creative pastime," arguing both sides of the question "need not proceed beyond disputation to secure conviction; here, its value lay rather in exercising the inventive faculty to produce effective proofs."[43] Similarly, in his letter to Wotton, Donne points out that his Paradoxes "were made rather to deceaue tyme then her daughth^{r} truth," not presuming to secure conviction but rather to engage temporarily the intellects of audiences: "If they make y^{o} to find better reasons against them they do there office." In this sense, they duplicate the propensity of Tudor plays to exercise the inventive faculty.

To recapitulate, the foregoing analysis has argued that in his 1600 letter to Wotton, by characterizing the enclosed Paradoxes as "nothings," Donne anticipates the only–too–real danger that his letter might miscarry. This trivialization conceals their subversive nature from uninitiated readers. But for initiated readers, such apparent disparagements instead function as metacommentary, signalling the Paradoxes' underlying provocativeness.

4

Similarly, in his 1607 letter to Goodyer, Donne trivializes his Problems as "light flashes" and "hawkings." In some respects like the word "nothings," "hawkings" conveys both the trivial and the serious, ambiguously signifying both recreation and ratiocination. For example, in his verse letter "To Sir Henry Goodyer," Donne chides

Goodyer for being "too indulgent to your sports," chief among them hawking.[44] Ben Jonson's contemporaneous epigram, "To Sir Henry Goodyer," further elaborates the ambiguous sense of "hawking." Jonson similarly portrays "hawking" as recreation, yet also treats it as a more serious activity, associated with learned discourse:

> *Goodyer*, I'm glad, and grateful to report,
> My selfe a witnesse of thy few days sport:
> Where I both learn'd, why wise–men hawking follow,
> And why that bird was sacred to *Apollo*,
> Shee doth instruct men by her gallant flight,
> That they to knowledge should toure upright,
> And never stoupe, but to strike ignorance:
> Which if they misse, they yet should re–advance
> To former height, and there in circle tarrie,
> Till they be sure to make the foole their quarrie.
> Now in whose pleasures I have this discerned,
> What would his serious actions me have learned?[45]

Robert Burton's "Digression of the Air," written somewhat later, further deploys the metaphor of hawking as one conflating recreation and ratiocination.[46] If the notion of "hawking" can signify not simply recreation but a combination of recreation and learned discourse, then as the term Donne uses to designate the Problems, it may subtly characterize them as more than trifles, indeed implying that they have, simultaneously, a more serious dimension. Donne's phrasing in the 1607 letter to Goodyer reinforces this suggestion of seriousness in hawking. He writes that his Problems "have been my hawkings in my sorry journies."[47] His emphasis upon "my" ("*my* hawkings... *my* sorry journies") invokes an implicit contrast: Goodyer carries on his hawking, and Donne writes these Problems as his own, analogous pursuit. Goodyer pursued hawking so seriously that Jonson foregrounds it in his epigram, and Donne reproves him for it; by portraying his Problems as an analogous activity, Donne may suggest something of the seriousness with which he wrote his Problems.

Donne undercuts his apparent dismissal of the Problems still further by divulging the lengths to which he has gone to preserve them.

For if Donne had truly disparaged his Problems, he would hardly have bothered to circulate them. Shame would have compelled him to burn them or suppress them. Yet in three different letters to Goodyer (one in 1604 and two in 1607), he encloses one or more Problems, a gesture implying that he not only valued them but solicited Goodyer's reactions to them. Further, in two of these letters he implores Goodyer to return what must be a growing collection, including, significantly, still others in addition to those presently enclosed:

> I end with a probleme, whose errand is, to aske for his fellowes. I pray before you ingulfe your self in the progress, leave them for me;

and again:

> I must add my entreaty, that you let goe no copy of my Problems, till I review them. If it be too late, at least be able to tell me who hath them.[48]

In the first quotation, Donne pleads twice for their return, repetition that, along with the stress upon time constraints ("before you ingulfe your self"), sounds a note of urgency. The same urgency reverberates in the second quotation as Donne "entreat[s]" Goodyer not to circulate any copies of the Problems until Donne has first had a chance to "review them." Perhaps here we detect something of an author's sense of pride in his work, pride testifying to the seriousness with which he takes them. Additionally, phrases such as "too late" and "at least be able to tell me who hath them" augment pride with protectiveness, perhaps even desperation. Donne expresses similar urgency in an analogous situation when he writes to Goodyer in 1614 trying to gather his poems.[49]

If Donne's tone indicates his seriousness about the Problems, so does his attitude toward the context in which he wrote them: during his "sorry [or "Surry"] journies." At first glance, journeying on horseback could be regarded as wasted time, an occasion for idle flights of fancy to amuse oneself and kill time. Such a view corroborates the literal interpretation of the Problems as "light flashes." But

the evidence of Donne's letters suggests that Donne regarded horseback riding as a favorite occasion for writing. In a letter to Goodyer written in September 1608, he describes the conditions in which he presently writes, contrasting them with ideal conditions:

> I write not to you out of my poor Library, where to cast mine eye upon good Authors kindles or refreshes sometimes meditations not unfit to communicate to near friends; nor from the high way, where I am contracted, and inverted into my self; which are my two ordinary forges of Letters to you. But I write from the fire side in my Parler, and in the noise of three gamesome children; and by the side of her, whom because I have transplanted into a wretched fortune, I must labour to disguise that from her by all such honest devices, as giving her my company, and discourse, therefore I steal from her, all the time which I give this Letter, and it is therefore that I take so short a life, and gallop so fast over it. . . .[50]

According to this letter, composing while on horseback appears to be one of two most productive settings for writing: as in his library, on horseback he enjoys the kind of solitude that allows him to concentrate and formulate a sustained discourse ("meditations," "Letters"). Indeed, Donne reinforces the efficiency of composing on horseback by contrasting it with trying to write in his parlor, where he is distracted by three "gamesome children" and a wife whose presence triggers both affection and guilt. If we interpret the 1607 letter characterizing the Problems in light of this letter of 1608, then the "sorry [or "Surry"] journies" Donne cites actually represent ideal opportunities for composition, thus rendering Problems written during those journies not "light flashes" designed to kill time but rather the kind of artworks that emerge from a "forge." As confirmation, I would add that Donne apparently composed other works while on horseback, including "Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward," which few Donne scholars would dismiss as an idle flight of fancy.

Finally, and perhaps most persuasively, in a 1604 letter to Goodyer, Donne confirms that he takes his Problems seriously by intimating the amount of time, effort, and risk he has invested in drafting and revising

the Problem he encloses, a piece on the subject of "women wearing stones," evidently no longer extant but originally "occasioned" by Goodyer. The letter further discloses that, having "occasioned" this Problem, Goodyer later added to it a "protestation of cleanlinesse," on which Donne compliments Goodyer as he returns it. In other words, the following stages in the writing process apparently had elapsed: Goodyer originally inspired Donne with the idea to write the Problem ("occasioned by you"); Donne then wrote it and sent it to Goodyer. Goodyer, in turn, studied it and added the "protestation of cleanlinesse," returning the augmented Problem to Donne. Donne, in turn, studied Goodyer's addition (enough to appreciate the strategy motivating it) and then revised it further still, for he returns it again to Goodyer—an unnecessary step had he allowed it to remain as revised by Goodyer.[51] Such care confirms that Donne took the Problems far more seriously than his apparent dismissals imply.

Furthermore, since the 1604 letter accompanies and introduces a Problem, it is possible to consider its remarks upon the Problem enclosed as metacommentary. This metacommentary, significantly, discusses a strategy of dissimulation generally characteristic of Donne's rhetorical dissimulation in the Paradoxes and Problems. Here Donne decodes Goodyer's dissimulative "protestation of cleanlinesse" appended to the "women wearing stones" Problem, stressing the similarity of its strategy to Martial's:

> it seems, you were afraid women should read [the "stones" Problem], because you avert them at the beginning, with a protestation of cleanlinesse. *Martiall* found no way fitter to draw the Romane Matrons to read one of his Books, which he thinks most morall and cleanly, then to counsell them by the first Epigram to skip the Book, because it was obscene.[52]

According to Donne, Martial recognized that his female readers were hypocrites, feigning distaste for sexual innuendo but actually revelling in it. Martial, therefore, outdissembled them: he warned such women that the "obscen[ity]" of his book should deter them from

reading it, appearing to confirm their piety but actually enhancing the book's appeal. His overt warning actually constituted a covert invitation. The phrase "it seems" (cf. use of the phrase in *Hamlet*) tips off Goodyer's dissimulation. Goodyer's "protestation of cleanliness," by analogy to Martial, presumably consisted of a similar disclaimer placed at the "beginning" of the Problem which, like Martial's, exploited his female readers' hypocrisy and confirmed their low morals, especially if the work in question involves a bawdy pun on "stones," meaning testicles.[53] Interpreting Donne's discussion of dissimulation in the cover letter as metacommentary intimates the presence of dissimulation at least in the enclosed Problem, if not the Problems generally. Thus the metacommentary of Donne's letters provides a reader with cues to search for encoded subtexts, and a basis to interpret his characterizations of the Paradoxes and Problems ironically.

5

Metacommentary within the Paradoxes and Problems themselves corroborates an ironical interpretation of Donne's dismissive characterizations in the letters. I shall limit my discussion to four examples, beginning with the opening lines of the Paradox "That by Discord things increase," turning then to the long version of the Problem "Why doe Woemen delight so much in Feathers?"—the site of the fullest metacommentary upon the Problems within the Problems themselves—and concluding with the Paradoxes "A Defence of Womens Inconstancy" and "That a Wise Man is knowne by much Laughinge."

Donne's Paradox "That by Discord things increase" begins with quotation of and comment on a passage from Martial's *Epigrams*:

> Nullos esse Deos, inane caelum
> Affirmat Selius, probatque, quod se
> *Factum, dum negat haec, videt beatum*
>
> So I assever this [thesis] the more boldly, because while I maintaine it, and feele the contrary repugnances and adverse fightings of the Elements in my body, my body increaseth; and [because] whilst

> I differ from common opinions, by this discord the number of my Paradoxes encreaseth.[54]

In literary works written for a coterie, as in the case of the Paradoxes and Problems, the author tends to foreground himself, his performance, and his relationship to his audience—all within the work itself.[55] Here Donne obviously highlights all of these elements by calling attention to himself in the opening lines of the Paradox, a crucial moment in his performance. Donne then intensifies the focus not only by noting the effect his performance has on his audience, but also by gauging how audience response in turn affects himself. Culminating in explicit reference to the activity of writing Paradoxes, Donne's heightened self-referentiality reveals itself as metacommentary.

As metacommentary, this passage demonstrates that the writing of Paradoxes not only validates but also perpetuates itself, generating its own self–referential activity.[56] For by arguing the paradoxical thesis that by discord things increase, Donne challenges conventional wisdom ("common opinions"), eliciting readers' opposition (or "resistance" in the words of the letter to Wotton). This resistance, in turn, compels him to justify his position, which, in turn, provokes still more resistance. This increased resistance invites still more justification, and so on in a self–perpetuating cycle which validates Donne's original thesis that by such discord (as arguing this or other paradoxical theses) things (such as Paradoxes) increase. The cycle of assertion and resistance exemplifies the rhetorical situation Donne describes in his letter to Wotton ("if they make y° resist them"), which one critic has aptly characterized as a "verbal drama," a metaphor capturing the Paradox's performative and combative qualities.[57]

The opening lines of the Problem "Why doe Woemen delight so much in Feathers?" resemble those of the "Discord" Paradox but more obviously underscore the work's rhetorical dissimulation.[58] Donne begins obliquely, delineating three reasons why, after second thoughts, he now declines to posit the principle of *Similis Simili* as his first answer:

> To say *Similis Simili* is too round, and it is obvious to every one. And it is besides the scope of my reason in my Problemes, which extends onely *ad verisimile*, not to an expresse and undenyable truth, as this reason is.[59]

The first two explanations for eschewing *Similis Simili*—it "is too round, and it is obvious to every one"—imply that Donne wrote the Problems, as he might have written the Paradoxes, partially for performance, whether read aloud in a group or read silently in solitude. Again, coterie literature tends to foreground the writer, his audience, and the rhetorical situation. Donne here foregrounds those elements by casting himself as a performer, placing himself in front of an audience, and then heightening the drama inherent in this scene. Donne's self–reflexivity itself induces much of this drama: for having spotlighted himself in the act of performing, he then calls attention to the fact that he not only anticipates his audience's reaction to his planned explanation (too "obvious") but that this anticipation compels him, just as he begins, to halt and reformulate strategy—indeed to improvise.

While this false start intensifies the Problem's drama, it also reveals several clues about the speaker, audience, and rhetorical situation. Donne, by eschewing the "obvious" answer, advertises the fact that he prides himself on his difficulty and sophistication. It is not enough for him to utter an easy answer; he must dazzle his audience with something surprising, beguiling their expectations. Hence he may have contrived this false start so that the appearance of improvisation underscores his virtuosity. And if his audience will find *Similis Simili* too "obvious," then they, too, possess considerable intelligence, not only grasping the phrase's philosophical nuances but already thinking to use them to correlate women and feathers. These considerations point to the esotericism of Donne's coterie—esotericism prerequisite for decoding dissimulation.[60] "[R]ound" reinforces the performative dimensions of the rhetorical situation. It signifies fullness, entirety, completion (*O.E.D.*, "round" 7a,9a), indicating that *Similis Simili* answers the question so well ("too round") that it precludes further

comment. If nothing else remains to be said, then Donne has ended the performance with two words. How much more masterful could he be?

But this master enjoys performing, and for the sake of preserving the occasion for his performance, Donne must create the illusion of suspense: he therefore rejects the "expresse and undenyable truth, as this reason is" and instead chooses to articulate a discourse he knows to be unnecessary and less than true.[61] The Problem, therefore, is self–advertised artifice, much like the Paradoxes described in the letter to Wotton: it deliberately rejects truth in order to engage in a temporary and pleasing consideration of alternative explanations of reality—that "diversitie of things" which, as Munday points out concerning the Paradox, "comfort[s] mens spirites" more than "daily and continually. . . behold[ing]" truth.[62] In this sense, the Problems similarly replicate the "Tudor play of mind," functioning as "media of intellectual and emotional exploration for minds that were accustomed to examine the many sides of a question," the series of explanations to the proposed question reflecting those many sides of the question.[63]

Further evidence in the "Feathers" Problem invites readers to reconsider their first impressions of the opening passage and reread it for the dissimulated subtext: if the "scope" of Donne's "reason" in this Problem (and in the Problems generally) does not "extend. . . to an expresse and undenyable truth," then to what does it extend? By contrast, Donne implies, it extends to the converse of "expresse and undenyable truth": un–express and deniable truth. If "express" means "explicitly stated" and "of unmistakable import" (*O.E.D.*, "express" 3a)—adjectives which corroborate "obvious" and "round"—then by contrast Donne's Problems merely imply, insinuating part of the message and allowing readers to infer the rest. That message, moreover, is by nature slippery and ultimately unprovable (deniable). The second characteristic—deniability—further clarifies and redefines the first. Implicit communication not only correlates with but enables deniability. And implicitness and deniability, significantly, constitute functional ambiguity. Hence by this metacommentary, Donne reveals that in his Problems, he writes between the lines, dissimulating a subtext.

Donne's distinction between *Similis Simili* and "onely *ad verisimile*" further confirms in two ways that he dissembles. First, *Similis Simili*, or "like to like," conveys a full correspondence between two things, indeed a correspondence so complete that it obviates further comment ("too round"). In contrast, "onely *ad verisimile*" draws merely a partial correspondence, this partiality facilitating (if not instigating) not only further comment but specifically implicit and deniable comment. As demonstrated by Bacon's metaphor of "half–lights," Patterson's principle of implied analogy, Puttenham's conception of allegory, and Donne's nuancing of "nothings," partial correspondence best facilitates dissimulation.[64] Partial correspondence, furthermore, protects both writer and reader, allowing both to "offend without witnes," or, as Bacon puts it in "Of Simulation and Dissimulation," enabling "a man [to] leave ... himself without observation, or without hold to be taken, what he is."[65]

Second, Strauss argues that a writer's attitude towards telling "'noble (or just) lies'" correlates with his willingness to dissimulate. Such a writer, he continues, "would not deceive himself about the fact that such opinions [as he expresses in the surface–level text] are merely 'likely tales,' or 'noble lies,' or 'probable opinions,' and would leave it to his philosophical readers to disentangle the truth from its poetic or dialectic presentation."[66] By declaring that the "scope of my reason in my Problemes ... extends onely *ad verisimile*," Donne announces that he writes his Problems with precisely this attitude. Strauss adds that rather than identify for his philosophic readers his text's specific truths and lies, the writer does "almost more than enough by drawing their attention to the fact that he did not object to telling lies which were noble, or tales which were *merely similar to the truth*"[67] —or as Donne puts it, "onely *ad verisimile*."

I argue above that, when Donne characterizes his Paradoxes as "nothings" (and his Problems as "hawkings"), he capitalizes upon the ambiguity of "nothing" to cloak the less frequently–used, unconventional meaning under the more frequently–used, innocuous meaning, thereby providing himself an alibi. In his Paradox "A Defence of Womens Inconstancy," Donne repeats this strategy, justifying women's

inconstancy by likening it to forms of entertainment whose harmlessness correspondingly sanitizes inconstancy. Donne begins by equivocating, exchanging "inconstancy" for its related and less pejorative synonym, "change." Change, as opposed to inconstancy, propels natural phenomena to completion ("perfectyon"). If this is true, Donne demands, then "why should that which is the perfectyon of other things [change] be Imputed to women as greatest Imperfectyon?" Anticipating his audience's objection—"[b]ecause thereby they deceive men"—Donne again equivocates on the key term of his argument, this time redefining "deceive" to be pleasing. In fact, to illustrate the pleasure afforded by deceit, and thus the harmlessness of women's inconstancy, Donne reminds his audience of the entertainment they derive from various pastimes which also rely upon deceit: "Are not your witts pleased with those Jeasts which cozen your Expectatyonn? You call it pleasure to be beguyled in Tryfles, and in the most excellent Toye in the world you call it Treacherie. . . ." Here he progressively dilutes the damage wrought by inconstancy (already euphemized to "change") by successively minimizing those instances of inconstancy to mere "Jeasts," "Tryfles," and "Toye[s]."[68]

Conflating types of inconstancy with types of "Jeasts" not only intermingles the trivial and the corrosive, blurring the categories of harm and pleasure; it also focuses audience attention upon "Jeasts" in and of themselves, apart from their resemblances to types of inconstancy. Let us therefore consider more closely the specific kinds of "Jeasts which cozen your Expectatyonn." The operative term—"cozen"—generally means to cheat or beguile, often by skillfully deceptive persuasion. If calculation and guile inform cozening, aligning it with dissimulation, then "Jeasts which cozen your Expectatyonn" may very well refer to verbal jests which rely upon rhetorical dissimulation, including such apparent trifles and toys as Paradoxes. Numerous similarities between these "Jeasts" and Donne's Paradoxes confirm the identification, as two critics have noted.[69] For in order to "cozen your Expectatyonn," a "Jeast" must mingle a trivial surface appearance and a provocative subtext. This surface appearance, however, must fool the audience only temporarily, for at pre-

cisely the right moment, the jest's perpetrator will remove the disguise, revealing its true nature and surprising the audience. Only at this point does the jest's true nature dawn upon the audience, and it is the rapid succession from surprise to comprehension following the moment of revelation which evokes the affective response of pleasure. Obviously, then, this kind of jest replicates the rhetorical dissimulation of Donne's Paradoxes, all the way from the Paradox's dual nature to the affective response it generates. Another consideration enhances the correlation: rhetoricians used "*paradoxon*" as the "technical term to describe a conclusion contrary to that which the speaker has led them to expect."[70] Thus when describing "Jeasts which cozen your Expectatyonn," Donne, by metacommentary, describes his own Paradoxes, pointing out that they dissemble in much the same way.

Donne's Paradox "That a Wise Man is knowne by much Laughinge," not only elaborates the similarities between jests and Paradoxes, but more obviously equates the two. It sketches two public performances of jests: in the first, Donne poses as an observer at "the hearing of Comedies or other witty reports." There, he "note[s]" that because some do not understand the "jeasts" they witness, they mimic their companions, laughing when they laugh, in order to "seeme wise and understanding."[71] Besides satirizing pretentiousness, this anecdote dramatizes the way Paradoxes ("witty reports") may have been performed orally for groups in coterie conditions.[72] The second sketch in the "Laughinge" Paradox reinforces its performative qualities. Donne once again dramatizes a public performance, this time a situation where a man

> affect[s] an humor of jeasting, and is content to deject, and deforme himselfe, yea to become foole, to none other end that I can spy, but to give his wise companions occasion to laughe, and to shew themselves wise.

Having sketched this scene, Donne then substitutes himself for the performer, his Paradox for the jest, and his coterie audience for the performance's audience. He then invites "all wise men (yf any wise

men do read this paradox) ... [to] laugh both at it and me."[73] Again, through explicit self–referentiality, Donne confirms that his description of jests is simultaneously metacommentary upon his Paradoxes.

Further examination of these jests corroborates their resemblance to Donnean Paradoxes. The letter to Wotton indicates that sophisticated readers of Paradoxes signify their apprehension of the works' true nature by their affective response. In the same way, Donne argues that truly wise men register their apprehension of others' folly (not their own folly) by another form of affective response—laughing. He writes,

> I always did and shall understand that Adage, *per risum multum possis cognoscere stultum*, that by much laughing thou mayst know ther is a foole, not that the laughers are fooles, but that amongst them ther is some foole at whome wise men laugh.[74]

The allusion to Erasmus signals the similarity between the modes of wit in the Paradoxes and in *The Praise of Folly*.[75]

In addition, the distinction between the two kinds of laughers has still other implications which return us to the rhetorical dissimulation inherent in Donne's Paradoxes by virtue of their intermingling of the trivial and the consequential. If laughter constitutes a form of critique, as Donne's Paradox contends, then since the majority of people uphold conventional wisdom, they signify their ignorance of laughter as a form of critique and confirm their place among mere belly–laughers. Their ignorance, in fact, prevents them from distinguishing the two kinds of laughter; for, to them, only one kind exists. Consequently, if the ignorant cannot infer that a truly wise man's laughter constitutes criticism of their own folly, then by capitalizing upon that ignorance, a truly wise man can safely criticize them by laughing. In fact, the speaker and his mistress do precisely this in the Elegy, "Jealousy," when they "openly ... flout" her husband "In scoffing riddles."[76] In short, laughter's ambiguous combination of levity and consequence, like the ambiguity of "nothing," "hawkings," and the writing of Paradoxes itself, yields the perfect dissimulative protection.

6

As a closing meditation, I would ask readers to consider the finale to Donne's "Laughinge" Paradox. Donne observes that during "these later formall times," the "promptnes to laughing is so great in wise men, that I thinke all wise men (yf any wise men do read this paradox) will laugh both at it and me."[77] On the one hand, Donne's hesitation—"yf any wise men do read this paradox"—teasingly insults his readership, reinforcing the personal intimacy characterizing coterie conditions. But perhaps just as importantly, by means of it Donne could also be said to address readers today: after reading this Paradox, how will we respond to it? Our response, like the different kinds of laughter discussed in the "Laughinge" Paradox, might reveal the extent of our appreciation (or lack of appreciation). On the one hand, will we scoff *at* it in the sense that we consider it a "nothing"— a mere jest, an idle flight of fancy, a trifle of Donne's youth incapable of serious import? This is the prevailing critical estimation (or "Expectatyonn") of the Paradoxes (and Problems). Those who hold it resemble those allegedly wise men of Donne's "Laughinge" Paradox who dissemble in the sense that they "pretend not to see" Donne's Paradoxes, passing over and neglecting them (*O.E.D.*, "dissimulate" 1). To the extent that their subversive subtexts pass unnoticed, today as then, the Paradoxes and Problems continue to "offend ... without witnes."[78] However, I believe that Donne's Paradoxes (and Problems) are rather "Jests which cozen your Expectatyonn," in the sense that they embody far more than their trifling appearance and critical assessment imply. Indeed, if my hunch is right, we will laugh *with* this Paradox, this affective response signifying that we have apprehended the dissimulated subtext, just as Donne's metacommentary invites us to do.

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Notes

[1] Critics have traditionally approached these works generically and biographically. Generic critics contextualize Donne's Paradoxes and Problems with respect to their generic histories, charting the origins and evolution of the genres, major precursors and practitioners, stock topics and themes, and characteristic rhetorical strategies. For overviews of generic qualities of the Paradox, see: Theodore Burgess, *Epideictic Literature* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1902), pp. 157–66; Arthur Pease, "Things Without Honor," *Classical Philology* 21 (1926): 27–42; E. N. S. Thompson, *The Seventeenth-Century English Essay*, Univ. of Iowa Humanistic Studies 3.3 (Iowa City: Iowa Univ. Press, 1927), pp. 94–105; Walter G. Rice, "The *Paradossi* of Ortensio Lando," *Essays and Studies in English and Comparative Literature* 8 (1932): 59–75; Alexander Sackton, "The Paradoxical Encomium in Elizabethan Drama," *SEL* 28 (1949): 83–104; A. E. Malloch, "The Techniques and Function of the Renaissance Paradox," *SP* 53 (1956): 191–203; Henry Knight Miller, "The Paradoxical Encomium with Special Reference to its Vogue in England, 1600–1800," *MP* 53 (1956): 145–78; Sister M. Geraldine, "Erasmus and the Tradition of Paradox," *SP* 61 (1964): 41–63; J.B. Leishman, *The Monarch of Wit: An Analytical and Comparative Study of the Poetry of John Donne* (London: Hutchinson Univ. Library, 1965), pp. 77–84; Rosalie Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 3–40; William Slights, "*Epicoene* and the Prose Paradox," *PQ* 49 (1970): 178–87; and Helen Peters, ed., *John Donne: Paradoxes and Problems* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980) pp. xvi–xxvii. For overviews of the Problems' generic qualities, see Thompson, pp. 99–100; and Peters, pp. xxvii–xlv.

Biographical critics contextualize Donne's Paradoxes and Problems with his life, mind, and art. They may pursue the general relationships between Donne's life and art during each period—e. g., how Inns of Court style informs the Paradoxes or how frustrations Donne experienced emerge in his Problems (Arthur Marotti, *John Donne, Coterie Poet* [Madison; University of Wisconsin Press, 1986], pp. 45–47, 178–89). They may compare and contrast the positions Donne articulates on certain topics within the Paradoxes and Problems with his positions on those same topics in previous and subsequent writings (Evelyn Simpson, "Donne's 'Paradoxes and Problems,'" pp. 32–45 in *A Garland for John Donne, 1631–1931*, ed. Theodore Spencer [Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1931]). Similarly, they may compare and contrast the artistry (particularly the wit) of the Paradoxes and Problems with those of previous, subsequent, and/or contemporaneous writings, most often seizing on the Paradoxes to launch into discussions of the Elegies and Satyres (Wilbur Sanders, *John Donne's Poetry* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1971], pp. 27–43; and Leishman, pp. 77–84); or using the Problems to bridge into *Biathanatos*, *Pseudo-Martyr*, or *Ignatius His Conclave*.

[2] Evelyn Simpson, *A Study of the Prose Works of John Donne*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1948), pp. 316-17.

[3] John Donne, *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour (1651)*, ed. M. Thomas Hester (Delmar, NY: Scholar Press, 1977), p. 88. Peters (p. xlv, n.1) notes that "sorry" is printed "Surry" in the text of the letter that appears in Donne's *Poems* (1633).

[4] For examples of literal interpretation, with regard to both Paradoxes and Problems, see Simpson, "Two Manuscripts of Donne's *Paradoxes and Problems*," *RES* 3 (1927): 129; and "Donne's 'Paradoxes and Problems,'" p.29; Geoffrey Keynes, *A Bibliography of Dr. John Donne, Dean of Saint Paul's*, fourth edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p.93; and Murray Roston, *The Soul of Wit: A Study of John Donne* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp.87–88. In contrast, Tom Cain's review of Peters' Oxford edition of the Paradoxes and Problems argues that the Paradoxes "are strikingly reminiscent of the best of Donne's secular poetry and suffer no more from 'lightnes' than does 'Air and Angels'" (*British Book News*, Nov. 1980, p.694); and Robin Robbins' review stresses that the Problems are "substantial," contending that "the Problems aim at more than entertainment. They are substantial anticipations of the serious works" (*TLS*, 12 Sept. 1980, p.996).

[5] For example, Paul Siegel, "Donne's Paradoxes and Problems," *PQ* 28 (1949), 508 and 511, refers to the Paradoxes and Problems as "youthful *jeux d'esprit*" and cautions readers that the works "should not be mistaken for something other than intellectual jugglery." Reiterating the misperception of these works as schoolboy exercises, Colie describes them as "exercises of his early years" (p. 103). R. C. Bald, *John Donne: a Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970) while characterizing the Paradoxes as "brilliant trifles, learned as well as ingenious," nevertheless echoes Siegel: "But it would be a mistake to regard them as anything more than *jeux d'esprit*" (p. 125). Still others pun on the words "paradoxes" and "problems" to invent titles for chapters devoted to Donne's early life (e. g., Thomas Docherty, *John Donne, Undone* [London: Methuen, 1986], p. 15; and N. J. C. Andreasen, *John Donne, Conservative Revolutionary* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1967], p. 3). I could multiply examples, but my point is proven most persuasively by the conspicuous absence of studies that regard the works as anything other than idle flights of fancy—or, indeed, that bother with them at all.

[6] The substance of Donne's provocative subtexts falls outside the scope of the present study but is covered elsewhere. See my dissertation, "'Jeasts which cozen your Expectatyonn': Rhetorical Dissimulation in John Donne's *Paradoxes and Problems*" (Purdue Univ., 1996); and "'offending without witnes': Recusancy, Equivocation, and Face–Painting in John Donne's Early Life and Writings," *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 22 (1996), forthcoming.

[7] Peters, p. 13 (emphasis added). Although I rely throughout upon Peters'

edition, reviewers have identified various problems in it: see Robbins, p. 996; Cain, p. 694; Janel Mueller, *Renaissance Quarterly* 34 (1981): 458–63; John T. Shawcross, *Analytical and Enumerative Bibliography* 5 (1981): 46–53; D. F. Bratchell, *N & Q* 29 (1982): 76–78; G. R. Evans, *RES* 34 (1983): 73–74; Dennis Flynn, *JDJ* 3 (1984): 99–103; and Jenny Mezciems, *MLR* 79 (1984): 150–52.

[8] Similarly in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Polonius confiscates Hamlet's poem (and epistle) to Ophelia (2.2.108ff), and Hamlet purloins and alters the orders carred by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (5.2.14ff). Dennis Flynn, *John Donne & the Ancient Catholic Nobility* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 1995), pp. 71 and 109, notes that Tudor government agents not only intercepted but doctored correspondence. See also Annabel Patterson, "Misinterpretable Donne," *JDJ* 1 (1982): 39–53. Patterson observes that letter writing was "simultaneously safe and dangerous, as letters (Donne frequently reminded his correspondents) may 'miscarry.' The result, in Donne, is a curious mixture of candor and circumspection, an equivocal stance frequently expressed as ambivalence, often accompanied by the fear of being misunderstood" (pp. 42–43). She notes eleven different instances in Donne's *Letters* where Donne himself mentions the unreliability of mail delivery (p. 53, n. 10).

[9] *The Courtier's Library*, ed. Evelyn M. Simpson, trans. Percy Simpson (London: Nonesuch, 1930), pp. 45, 61. John Archer elaborates upon Philips' career in *Sovereignty and Intelligence: Spying and Court Culture in the English Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1993), p. 125. Archer's book, more generally, illuminates the conditions in which Donne wrote.

[10] *Pseudo-Martyr* (Delmar, NY: Scholar, 1974), sig.2v.

[11] Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1984), p. 103.

[12] Patterson, *Censorship*, p. 66.

[13] *Letters*, p. 197.

[14] *Letters*, p. 196.

[15] In Donne's Problem "Why are Statesmen most Incredible?" he returns to this same metaphor of whispering necessitated by the danger of miscarriage or interception. He speculates that "the businesses about which these men [i. e. statesmen] are conversant [are] so conjectural, and *so subject to unsuspected Interventions*, that they are therefore forcd to speake oraculously, multiformly, *whisperingly*, generally (and thereby escapingly)" (Peters, p. 45, emphasis added). Whispering, not merely coincidentally, pervades the conspiratorial environment of Tiberian Rome in Ben Jonson's *Sejanus*; cf. especially 1.31, 2.195, 3.15, and 3.464.

[16] *Letters*, p.197. Similarly, Hamlet dared not disclose the secrets of his voyage to England in his letter to Horatio (*Hamlet*, 4.6.24–26). Francis Bacon's related essay "Of Simulation and Dissimulation" notes that secrecy, the first degree of dissimulation, often accompanies dissimulation itself; *Essays and New Atlantis*,

ed. Gordon S. Haight (New York: Walter J. Black, 1942), p. 23.

[17] *Letters*, p. 20.

[18] *Letters*, pp. 21-22.

[19] Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1952), p. 24.

[20] Strauss, pp. 34–36.

[21] Strauss, p. 25.

[22] Strauss, p. 25.

[23] Strauss, pp. 35 and 37.

[24] Patterson, *Censorship*, p. 18.

[25] Patterson's theory of "the hermeneutics of censorship" departs from Strauss' theory in a few important ways. First, Patterson studies a range of seventeenth-century literary genres, not a transhistorical tradition of philosophic texts. Second, and more importantly, Patterson reassesses the nature and value of the exoteric and esoteric texts. Strauss believes that the exoteric text consists of mere ideology—dross in comparison to gold—while the esoteric text contains the philosophical truth which amounts to a demystification of that ideology. Patterson, on the contrary, believes that the exoteric text consists of what we now consider literature, while the esoteric text consists of political critique of the contemporary government. Patterson thirdly disagrees with Strauss as to the scope of the conspiracy: whereas Strauss says that only a selected few knew how to decode the esoteric text, Patterson argues that at least a few more readers—including, significantly, the same government authorities whom writers criticized—knew the literary codes by which to decode the esoteric text. In fact, according to Patterson, a tacit contract existed whereby seventeenth-century governments allowed the expression of subversive sentiments provided that the author articulated them according to an arbitrarily chosen, state sanctioned code (*Censorship*, p. 53). Those who violated that code incurred the government's wrath.

[26] Patterson, *Censorship*, pp. 18 and 55–56.

[27] Patterson concludes that she has barely been able to "scrape the surface of the topic" of rhetorical dissimulation in English Renaissance literature (p. 30). Though limited, Patterson's findings intimate the potential of a fuller study of rhetorical dissimulation in Donne's writings. Recent studies have begun to realize that potential. In her study of the Somerset epithalamion, Heather Dubrow exposes numerous rebukes buried among the poem's superficial compliments ("'The Sun in Water': Donne's Somerset Epithalamion and the Poetics of Patronage," in *The Historical Renaissance: New Essays on Tudor and Stuart Literature and Culture*, eds. Heather Dubrow and Richard Strier [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988], pp. 197– 219). Ted–Larry Pebworth, too, discovers muted criticism amidst the praise in "Obsequies to the Lord Harington" ("'Let Me Here Use That Freedom': Subversive Representation in John Donne's 'Obsequies to the Lord Harington," *JEGP* 91 [1992], pp. 17–42).

For some time Dennis Flynn has been exploring this phenomenon in the works most closely associated with the Paradoxes and Problems. As early as 1969, Flynn argued that for satiric purposes, Donne deliberately misattributed "An Essay of Valour" and three companion essays to Sir Philip Sidney and Sir Francis Walsingham respectively ("Three Unnoticed Companion Essays to Donne's 'An Essay of Valour,'" *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 73 [1969], pp. 429-37). If these ironic misattributions served to veil subversive references to the patrons of Donne and Sir Robert Cotton (in whose manuscript collection the four pieces appear), then they ultimately satirize them ("Three Unnoticed Companion Essays," pp. 438-39). In this sense, Flynn anticipated what later critics (such as Dubrow and Pebworth) would foreground: the ambivalence Donne evidently felt towards his patron. In like fashion, Flynn demonstrated in a 1973 essay that Donne's two characters, "The Character of a Scot at the First Sight" and "The True Character of a Dunce," caricature actual Jacobean contemporaries: the "Dunce" parodies Thomas Coryate, and, more dangerously, the "Scot" lampoons King James ("The Originals of Donne's Overburian Characters," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 77 [1973], pp. 63–69). In "Irony in Donne's *Biathanatos* and *Pseudo-Martyr*," *Recusant History* 12 (1973), 57–66, Flynn similarly uncovers a sustained, though covert, critique, of another contemporary, Sir Edward Coke. And in "Donne's *Ignatius His Conclave* and Other Libels on Robert Cecil," *JDJ* 6 (1987), 163–83, Flynn explicitly adopts Patterson's hermeneutic, uncovering relentless critique of Cecil in such works as "Metempsychosis," *The Courtier's Library*, *Ignatius His Conclave*, and various letters.

[28] Strauss, p. 37.

[29] Strauss, p. 35.

[30] Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica*, p. 5

[31] Strauss, p. 35.

[32] For more on this combination, see also Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica*, pp. 5, 11, and 21; Leishman, *Monarch of Wit*, p. 80; and Marotti, *John Donne, Coterie Poet*, p. 47. A. E. Malloch contends that the artificiality of the Paradox allows the speaker to deflect repercussions from the serious implications of his argument by dismissing those implications as part of his perfomance ("The Techniques and Function of the Renaissance Paradox," pp. 195-96), much as Patterson argues that a dissembling writer justifies subversive messages by attributing them to the source he quotes (*Censorship*, p. 65). Although this ambiguity can be attributed to the conventions of Paradox, in Donne's case it might also be more. Flynn notes that a mixture of gravity and levity, not coincidentally, characterized the sensibility of Donne's ancestor, Sir Thomas More (*Donne & the Ancient Catholic Nobility*, p. 21). This sensibility apparently became something of a family tradition, manifesting itself in Donne's grandfather, John Heywood, and uncle, Jasper Heywood (p. 41). Eventually it came to inform Donne's Latin Epigrams (p. 191), and, as I am arguing here, the Paradoxes and Problems.

[33] *The Praise of Folly*, trans. Betty Radice (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p. 59; emphasis added.

[34] Speaking a half-truth corresponds to a form of dissimulation Bacon describes as displaying something at "half-lights" (*Essays and New Atlantis*, p.21).

[35] Arthur Marotti, *John Donne, Coterie Poet*, p. 3; and J. W. Saunders, "'The Stigma of Print': A Note on the Social Bases of Tudor Poetry," *Essays in Criticism* 1 (1951): 147.

[36] Miller, "The Paradoxical Encomium," pp. 163–65.

[37] Sir William Cornwallis, *Essayes of Certaine Paradoxes* (London, 1616), sig. F4r, line 15.

[38] When Hamlet dissimulates an explosive subtext—the murder of King Hamlet—under the guise of courtly entertainment, he designates this protective ambiguity as "poison in jest" (3.2.232). Hamlet's epithet—"poison in jest"—epitomizes the way dissimulators disguise subversive sentiment under the guise of innocent, even playful, expression. *Hamlet*, along with Bacon's "Of Simulation and Dissimulation," reads as a textbook illustration of rhetorical dissimulation.

[39] *Paradoxia Epidemica*, p. 38.

[40] Donne compounds the joke by embedding a paradox within the Paradox––and that by dissimulating the paradox–within. A. E. Malloch suggests still other, related paradoxes embedded in this characterization. Underscoring the affective response required by the Paradoxes, he observes that as "nothings," the Paradoxes "do not really have natures at all. . . . They exist only within the antithetical action of the reader, and if he allows them (i.e., allows them an existence), he is making another paradox, viz., That Nothing Is" ("The Techniques and Function of the Renaissance Paradox," p. 192). This ontological paradox itself, Malloch continues, derives from a distinction between two different types of being: being "may be predicated of any existent thing" and it "may also signify the truth of a statement, even when the subject of that statement is mere negation and does not exist in its own right at all" (p. 192). Hence as arguments, the Paradoxes (strictly speaking) do not exist because they are really parodies of arguments, not arguments. Yet as statements of arguments (however parodic), they nonetheless exist (p. 193).

[41] Anthony Munday, trans., *The Defence of Contraries. Paradoxes against common opinion* (London, 1593), sig. A4r.

[42] Joel Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1978), p. 6. Altman continues that this experience "was, in some measure, set apart from that of ordinary life, so as to provide a leisured *otium* wherein the auditor was freed to discover or recall—and then to contemplate—ideas and feelings not always accessible or expressible in the life of a hierarchical Christian society" (p. 6). This "leisured *otium*" occurs during the duration of the play, a period when the audience "suspend[s] its ordinary judgments" and "entertain[s] for a while the alternative possibilities the action will present" (p. 24).

Altman characterizes this period of "aesthetic skepticism" as "an interlude of extended quest, free from the constraints of politic choice, that enriched their vision of reality and returned them to the actual with a deeper sense of its complexity" (p. 30).

[43] Altman, pp. 32 and 34.

[44] John Donne, *The Complete English Poems*, ed. A. J. Smith (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), pp. 210-11, lines 19–20, 33–36.

[45] *The Complete Poetry of Ben Jonson*, ed. William B. Hunter (New York: Norton, 1963), pp. 35–36.

[46] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Floyd Dell and Paul Jordan Smith (New York: Tudor, 1955), II, ii, 3, pp. 407-38.

[47] *Letters*, p. 88.

[48] *Letters*, pp. 99 and 108.

[49] *Letters*, pp. 196–197.

[50] *Letters*, pp. 137–138.

[51] *Letters*, p. 108. This scenario raises interesting questions about the possibility of communal authorship in coterie conditions, a possibility Marotti has entertained (*John Donne, Coterie Poet*, p. 5). This possibility becomes especially compelling in light of the fact that Donne and Goodyer co-authored a verse letter, "A Letter Written by Sir H. G. and J. D., *alternis vicibus*," (Donne, *Complete English Poems*, pp. 212-13). Such questions aside, at a minimum the scenario sketched in Donne's 1604 letter to Goodyer delineates a process of careful drafting and revision, and Donne himself confirms this process later in this letter by mentioning that he would like to "review" his Problems.

[52] *Letters*, p. 108.

[53] Eric Partridge, *Shakespeare's Bawdy* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 192. Donne elsewhere depicts the low sexual morals of contemporary women by again drawing an analogy to Roman matrons in his "Venus Star" Problem:

> In *Senecas* time it was a course and *un–Romane* and a contemptible thing, even in a matron, not to have had a love besides her husband, which though the Lawe required not at theyr hands, yet they did it Zealously, out of the counsell of the custome and fashion, which was Venery of Supererogation (Peters, p. 34).

Significantly, Donne again associates Martial with this indictment of contemporary vice, citing a line from the *Epigrams* that convicts the readers of their own vice: "*Et te spectator plus quam delectat Adulter.*"

[54] Peters, p. 19. Peters translates the lines from Martial (*Epigrams* 4.21, lines 1–3) as follows: "'There are no gods, heaven is empty,' Selius declares, and he proves it, because while he denies these things, he sees himself made prosperous" (p. 87). Sanders remarks that this entire opening gambit embodies the "kind of general philosophical position [that] would accommodate and nourish the energetically robust vision of life that we get in Donne's early verse and prose" (*John*

Donne's Poetry, p. 29).

[55] See Pebworth, "John Donne, Coterie Poetry, and the Text as Performance," *SEL* 29 (1989): 61–75; and Marotti, *John Donne, Coterie Poet*, pp. 14, 19, 21, and passim

[56] Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica*, p. 7.

[57] Malloch, "The Techniques and Function of the Renaissance Paradox," p. 195.

[58] The Problem "Why doe Woemen delight so much in Feathers?" exists in short and long versions. The long version occurs in only four manuscripts (Ashmole 826, Bridgewater, Dobell, and O'Flaherty) and in Rouzee's 1616 edition (Peters, p. lxxviii). It was omitted from editions of the Paradoxes and Problems until Evelyn Simpson published it in 1927 ("Two Manuscripts of Donne's *Paradoxes and Problems*," pp. 138-39). In the manuscripts it belongs to a set of three Problems that always appear as the final Problems in a manuscript's set of Problems. (The other two are entitled, respectively, "Why doth Johannes Salisburiensis writing de Nugis Curialium handle the Providence and Omnipotency of God?" and "Why did the Devill reserve Jesuits for these latter times?") Both its rarity and placement suggest that Donne may have restricted its circulation even more than the rest of his already–restricted Problems. Helen Peters attributes the short and long versions to Donne's revision, arguing that Donne first wrote the long version and then pruned it (Peters, p. lxxix). Janel Mueller disputes this hypothesis, contending that Donne more likely wrote the short version first, then added to it, much as Bacon expanded his essays (*Renaissance Quarterly* review of Peters' edition, pp. 460-62). My interpretation of Donne's metacommentary in the long version of the "Feathers" Problem supports Mueller's position. While it is possible that Donne may have articulated this metacommentary as a means of forecasting the technique of forthcoming Problems, I believe it is more probable that Donne formulated this metacommentary later in the process, more specifically, after he had already written several and therefore had had time to reflect on ("review") his work. Its appearance among the very last problems in each of the four manuscripts' set of Problems enhances the possibility that it came later rather than sooner, as if the manuscript compiler acquired it later than the other Problems and added it to a preexisting collection (such as those collections to which Donne refers in his letters to Goodyer).

[59] Peters, p. 48. "*Similis Simili*" could refer to two possible philosophical concepts. In nature, like usually produces like (*simile sibi similem generat*). More probably in this context, "*Similis Simili*" refers to the neoplatonist theory of cosmic sympathy, which holds that like is attracted by like (*simile simili attrahitur*). Erasmus, for example, cites the adage "*Simile gaudet simili* [like rejoices in like]" (*The Complete Works of Erasmus: Adages II, vii, 1 to III, iii, 100*, vol. 34, trans. R. A. B. Mynors [Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1992], I, ii: 21). If like is attracted by like, then women delight in (or are attracted by) feathers because they

themselves are like feathers in being vain, fickle. I would like to thank my colleagues from the Ficino discussion group on the internet, particularly Cees Leijenhorst of the University of Utrecht, for their advice on interpreting *Similis Simili*.

[60] A[lfred] Alvarez, *The School of Donne* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), pp. 20–42. Perez Zagorin has studied the relationship of esotericism to dissimulation, and he finds that since esotericism possesses "an innate and avowed tendency towards secrecy and concealment which might easily lead to lying and deception," it actually facilitates rhetorical dissimulation (*Ways of Lying: Dissimulation, Persecution, and Conformity in Early Modern Europe* [Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1990], p. 258).

[61] Donne's use of the Latin phrase "*ad verisimile*" gestures towards the traditional scholastic distinction between logic and dialectic: logic is concerned with that which is true simpliciter; dialectic is concerned with that which is probable ("*verisimile*"). I thank Cees Leijenhorst for pointing out this distinction.

[62] Munday, *Defence of Contraries*, sig. A4r.

[63] Altman, *Tudor Play of Mind*, p. 6.

[64] *Essays and New Atlantis*, p. 21; Patterson, *Censorship*, p. 55; George Puttenham (?), *The Arte of English Poesie*, eds. Gladys Willcock and Alice Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1936), pp. 186-87. Patterson argues that writers best dissimulate their subtext by drawing partial as opposed to complete or exact correspondences, because "often, it was the very inexactness of the analogies so produced that made them useful, by providing writers with an escape route" (*Censorship*, p. 55). In his discussion of allegory, Puttenham similarly stresses partial correspondence between the surface–level text and the subtext: "To be short euery speach wrested from his owne naturall signification to another *not altogether* so naturall is a kind of dissimulation.... *Allegoria* is when we do speake in a sence translatiue and wrested from the owne [sic] signification, neuerthelesse applied to another *not altogether* contrary, but hauing much conueniencie with it" (pp. 186-87, emphasis added).

[65] Peters, p. 3; and Bacon, *Essays and New Atlantis*, p. 22.

[66] Strauss, p. 35.

[67] Strauss, p. 35.

[68] Peters, pp. 51–52.

[69] Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica*, p. 103; and Sister M. Geraldine, "Erasmus and the Tradition of Paradox," p. 62.

[70] Leishman, *Monarch of Wit*, p. 77.

[71] Peters, p. 15.

[72] Marotti, *John Donne, Coterie Poet*, p. 9. In his essay, "The Mermaid Club" (*MLR* 45 [1950], 6–17), I.A. Shapiro extrapolates from the Latin poem, "*Convivium Philosophicum*," attributed to John Hoskyns (Louise B. Osborn, *The Life, Letters, and Writings of John Hoskyns, 1566–1638* [New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1937],

p. 288), to reconstruct the convivial gathering of some fourteen men (including Donne) at the Mitre Tavern on September 2, 1611. The poem's title, as well as the first stanza (i.e., "The *Mitre* is the place decreed, / For witty jests and cleanly feed" [qtd. in Osborn, p. 288]), stress that "its tone was both festive and intellectual" (Annabel Patterson, "All Donne," in *Soliciting Interpretation: Literary Theory and Seventeenth–Century English Poetry*, eds. Elizabeth Harvey and Katherine Maus [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990], p. 37). This is precisely the same combination of levity and gravity that, I am arguing, is characteristic of Donne's Paradoxes and Problems. In addition to this gathering at the Mitre Tavern, Shapiro extrapolates from a letter written by Thomas Coryate (for whose *Coryat's Crudities* Donne wrote a mock encomium, a species of Paradox) to suggest that a similarly convivial group of men (including Donne) met somewhat regularly on the first Friday of every month at the Mermaid Tavern ("The Mermaid Club," p. 8). These two coteries provide some indications of the performative conditions in which Donne's Paradox may have thrived. John Sparrow's research concerning Donne's essay, "Newes from the very Country" (usually grouped with the Paradoxes and Problems under the title of *Juvenilia*), enhances this possibility. He argues that discrepancies among the different versions of the essay indicate that the sayings which comprise it may have originated orally as table talk ("Donne's Table Talk," *London Mercury* 18 [1928], p. 46).

[73] Peters, p. 16.

[74] Peters, p. 14.

[75] Sister M. Geraldine, "Erasmus and the Tradition of Paradox," pp. 60–63.

[76] Donne, *Complete English Poems*, p. 95, lines 17–18.

[77] Peters, p. 16.

[78] Peters, p. 3.