Journal X

Volume 4
Number 2 *Spring 2000*

Article 3

1999

"Straight From Your Heart": Convention, Sincerity, and Sexuality in Donne's Early Verse Letters

Ben Saunders
Duke University

Follow this and additional works at: https://egrove.olemiss.edu/jx

Part of the Literature in English, British Isles Commons

Recommended Citation
Saunders, Ben (1999) ""Straight From Your Heart": Convention, Sincerity, and Sexuality in Donne's Early Verse Letters," *Journal X*: Vol. 4 : No. 2 , Article 3.
Available at: https://egrove.olemiss.edu/jx/vol4/iss2/3

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Studies in English at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal X by an authorized editor of eGrove. For more information, please contact egrove@olemiss.edu.

"Straight From Your Heart": Convention, Sincerity, and Sexuality in Donne's Early Verse Letters

Ben Saunders

Ben Saunders is a Visiting Lecturer at Duke University and starting in September will serve as an Assistant Professor specializing in Renaissance literature at the University of Oregon. He is working on a book-length manuscript on Donne and issues of sexuality and literary hermeneutics. Other essays are forthcoming in The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies *and* The Yale Journal of Criticism.

Over twenty years ago, David Aers and Gunther Kress observed that "Donne's verse epistles have not received much notice from the awesome critical industry centered on his work" (138); and today, despite an almost exponential increase in critical production, the situation has not radically altered.[1] In particular, the so-called "early" verse letters, a group of some fourteen shorter poems addressed to Donne's male contemporaries, continue to be passed over almost entirely.[2] Moreover, when these texts do receive professional scrutiny, they are generally disparaged as aesthetically inferior productions or dismissed as thoroughly orthodox in sentiment. In fact, these two responses are frequently run together: the poems are held to be artistically weak precisely *because* of their designation as transparently conventional.[3] Even Arthur Marotti, who has probably done more than any other single commentator of the past few years to underline the significance of Donne's verse letters, gives these particular texts surprisingly short shrift; racing through eleven different poems in a page and half of cursory discussion, Marotti finally allows that they express "affection," but only within "the formulas proper to . . . polite social relations" (37).

Recently, however, George Klawitter has challenged this apparent critical consensus by insisting that, in the case of those poems addressed to Mr. T. W. at least, Donne expresses a form of same-sex desire that cannot be written off as conventional. Instead, Klawitter argues, this short sequence of four poems depicts Donne's intensely passionate homo-

erotic feelings for one Thomas Woodward, younger brother of Donne's undergraduate friend, Rowland Woodward (making Thomas sixteen or seventeen years old at the time of writing, according to Bald's dates). Thus, for example, in their respective readings of "All haile sweet Poet," where Marotti discovers nothing more than a polite "acknowledg[ment of] the reception of some verse from his addressee" (36), Klawitter finds playfully risqué puns praising Woodward's penis (*Enigmatic Narrator* 6). Klawitter sees other poems in the sequence as nothing less than "fervent," reflecting "an obsession with the loved one" (11) and revealing Donne "trying to seduce the younger man" (12). As might be expected, Klawitter also suggests an alternative explanation for the critical neglect of these texts; for him, the interpretive lacuna does not reflect upon the aesthetic quality of the poems (which he clearly admires) so much as it does upon the prejudicially heteronormative ideology of their readers (16; see also 4).

Clearly a wide interpretive gulf separates Klawitter from the earlier critics he is concerned to displace, raising an obvious question: who are we to believe? Over the course of the next few pages I will attempt to answer this question; in the process I hope to demonstrate not only that Donne's early verse epistles are worthy of closer critical attention than they have hitherto received but also that these poems, and their interpretive history (such as it is), can shed some light upon several issues central to current debates about the nature of early modern sexuality, including the status of the so-called "literature of friendship."

Indeed, the mere existence of this generic category may suggest to some that, at one level, the traditional argument concerning the formulaic or conventional quality of Donne's verse letters is well founded. The poems indisputably belong to a historical milieu in which the category of humanist prose epistle known as the familiar letter stood chief among institutional literary vehicles for the expression of what Donne himself called the "second religion [of] friendship" (*Selected Prose* 125), a public discourse of affection that regularly adopted the register of intense emotion.[4] Donne wrote many such familiar letters,[5] and, as Margaret Maurer has demonstrated, the theory and conventions of that prose genre almost certainly provided the basic literary model for his verse letters (235-6). But even if Donne had not found the familiar prose letter so "congenial" a form, the existence of the larger tradition of friendship literature, in either its classical or early modern incarnations, appears to present a fundamental challenge to Klawitter's reading: for who is to say that the poems to T. W. are not simply versified examples of a conventional epistolary idiom that almost everybody seems to have practiced at some time during the period, and that they therefore tell us nothing about Donne's sexual desires?

It must be admitted from the outset that Klawitter does not really address this question adequately. Although he nods in the direction of recent work in the history of sexuality, his basic critical methodology only reverses the earlier reading strategies that he rejects: he simply declares present an erotic cathexis that Grierson, Bald, Marotti, and others declare absent. Lacking a coherent alternative framework upon which to ground his interpretation, therefore, Klawitter has no means to persuade his readers of the "intense personalism" (*Enigmatic Narrator* 2) in these poems beyond his own conviction that the poems are, indeed, intensely personal.[6]

Nevertheless, Klawitter's article has several merits. Original, and acutely sensitive to the possibility of erotic nuance, it also subjects the textual history of the T. W. poems to a previously unprecedented level of scrutiny.[7] His essay is most noteworthy for its consideration of a verse epistle by Mr. T. W. probably written in response to Donne, a poem reproduced (without comment) in the apparatus of both Grierson and Milgate's editions, and (again) almost entirely ignored by subsequent critics. T. W.'s witty reply would seem to provide strong "circumstantial" support for Klawitter's general position, to the extent that it unquestionably eroticizes the notion of poetic exchange between men. For example, after commenting in a mock-serious fashion upon Donne's tendency to "skourge [and] . . . torment" lesser versifiers (itself probably a reference to Donne's coruscating attack on plagiarist poets in his second satire), T. W. adopts a submissive pose before his putative rhetorical superior:

> Have mercy on me & my sinfull Muse
> W[c] rub'd & tickled wth thyne could not chuse
> But spend some of her pithe . . .
>
> (See Donne, *Satires* 212)

Klawitter also states that the only other reader to have commented upon T. W.'s reply to Donne is no less an authority than William Empson; in typically bluff style, Empson recorded that the poem "would leave a scandalmonger in no doubt that the two lads had been up to something together" (Empson, *Essays* 187), an observation that on the face of it lends some support to Klawitter's interpretation.[8]

Framed as they are, then, we have two interpretive perspectives that appear to be irreconcilable: on the one hand, the verse letters are "formulaic" and tell us nothing about Donne's actual emotional disposition, let alone his sexuality; and on the other hand, the letters are "intensely personal," revealing a passionate homoerotic desire for a historically identifiable younger man. To paraphrase the old song, the question is whether Donne's verse letters are "straight" or "from the heart." A commitment to one position would seem necessarily to constitute a rejection of the other; thus, the logic of noncontradiction forces us to chose between them, although neither reading seems entirely satisfactory.

How, then, may we refuse this unhappy either/or that the present state of criticism seems to demand? It may be possible to locate the excluded middle, as it were, by turning again to the texts themselves; and given the focus of my discussion so far, I will therefore embark upon a close reading of the poem Klawitter describes as the most "fervent" of the sequence:

> To Mr. T. W.
>
> Hast thee harsh verse, as fast as thy lame measure
> Will give thee leave, to him, my pain and pleasure.
> I'have given thee, and yet thou art too weake,
> Feete, and a reasoning soule and tongue to speake.
> Plead for me, 'and so by thine and my labour,
> I'am thy Creator, thou my Saviour.

Tell him, all questions, which men have defended
Both of the place and paines of hell, are ended;
And 'tis decreed our hell is but privation
Of him, at least in this earths habitation:
And 'tis where I am, where in every street
Infections follow, overtake, and meete:
Live I or die, by you my love is sent,
And you'are my pawnes, or else my Testament.

(*Satires* 60-1)

Contra Klawitter, perhaps the first thing I notice about this poem is not its extreme difference from others of Donne's poems, but rather the many elements that it has in common with them, and particularly with other verse letters. For example, from his very first line Donne makes a reflexive turn into the rhetoric of self-deprecation, addressing himself not to Mr. T. W. but to his own poem, which he then names "lame" and "weake." In another verse letter, addressed to one "Mr. B. B." ("If thou unto thy Muse be married"), Donne takes up the same posture, dismissing his own "rhymes" as

. . . prophane, imperfect, oh, too bad
To be counted Children of Poetry
Except confirm'd and Bishoped by thee.

(*Satires* 68)

The same modest pose is again adopted in "All haile sweet poet" (which, according to Klawitter, is the preceding poem in Donne's sequence addressed to T. W.):

Now if this song be too harsh for rime, yet, as
  The Painters bad god made a good devill,
  'Twill be good prose, although the verse be evill,
If thou forget the rime as thou dost passe.

(*Satires* 60)

And the idea is expressed again, rather more succinctly, in "The Storme," when Donne tells Christopher Brook: "by thy judgement . . . [my lines are] . . . dignified" (*Satires* 55). Indeed, once we begin to look, we discover Donne deploying the *topoi* of humility repeatedly throughout this group of verse letters.[9] I shall return to the possible consequences of this rhetorical posture in my conclusion, but for now I only wish to note the sheer repetition of the device. Anyone familiar with a few of these works, and perhaps even somebody who had only received one, might be forgiven for thinking him or herself in thoroughly familiar (that is, thoroughly conventional) territory on approaching "Hast thee harsh verse."

Nevertheless, if the first quatrain works to produce a sense of familiarity — as if to say "this is just Donne doing as Donne does" — then that sensation evaporates with the second line of the second quatrain, when the language of

self-deprecation is suddenly reversed. For where we might reasonably expect a further gesture towards the dignifying gaze of the reader (a compliment to Mr. T. W. and his taste, perhaps) Donne switches gears and offers instead a fairly outrageous compliment to *himself* and his creativity, explicitly identifying himself with God, and his poem with the Son: "I'am thy Creator," he says, and "thou [my poem] my Saviour." This authorial appropriation of agency and power is striking enough to rattle even a twentieth-century editor such as Milgate, who points out somewhat indignantly in his gloss that "[t]he analogy . . . breaks down as soon as it has begun, since God's Son is not God's Saviour and does not plead for his Father with a third party" (see Donne, *Satires* 213). But Milgate's literal-minded response, which seems intended to undercut Donne's self-aggrandizing project, only highlights the audacity of the image. Even the grammatical structure of the verse underscores Donne's presumption, for the line functions syntactically as an aside or parenthesis, as if to suggest that his blasphemy were a casual matter.

Donne follows this reversal of conventional expectation with a similarly unconventional compliment to his putative addressee. Developing the religious conceit of the second quatrain into an oblique commentary on scholastic disputation ("questions . . . men have defended / Both of the paines and place of hell"), Donne suggests that such questions are now quite literally academic, because, separated from T. W., he already knows what hell is like: "Hell is but privation / Of him." The full, extravagant force of this flattery will be heard only if we also recognize Donne's allusion to a specifically doctrinal conception of hell, not as a burning sulfurous pit but as the *absence* of God, the total deprivation of *His* love. The theologically orthodox version of this idea is powerfully expressed by Donne himself in one of his most famous sermons:

> [W]hen all is done, the hell of hels, the torment of torments is the everlasting absence of God. . . . [T]o fall out of the hands of the living God, is a horror beyond our expression, beyond our imagination. . . . [W]hat Tophet is not Paradise, what Brimstone is not Amber, what gnashing is not a comfort, what gnawing of the worme is not a tickling, what torment is not a marriage bed to this damnation, to be secluded eternally, eternally, eternally from the sight of God?
>
> (*Sermons* 266-7)

The unmistakable implication of Donne's argument at this point in his poem, then, is that T. W. is *also* God; in other words, Donne bestows upon T. W. the name of Creator that, moments earlier, he had applied to himself.

Klawitter notes some of these aspects of the poem in his own interpretation, but while he sees them as singular and unusual, and so as evidence of Donne's profound emotional involvement with his subject, it is hard for me to see them as anything other than what an older criticism once called "typically Donnean." The contracted world of the octet in which Donne plays the King of kings momentarily dilates in the sestet to include the object of address, in a rhetorical movement of expansion and contraction that is thoroughly recognizable from more famous hetero-amorous lyrics like "The Sunne Rising," "The

Anniversarie," "The Canonization," and "The Good Morrow."[10] As in those more familiar texts, a rhetoric that purports to be centripetal, spinning an outwardly directed message of affection to another, actually begins by turning centrifugally, becoming an inward-looking hymn to the independent and creative Donnean self, before it expands outward again to include the other as part of a restructured universe that nevertheless continues to place Donne at its center. This entire process, which we might punningly call Donne's ego-centric spin on the Copernican revolution, is enabled here by the insistently reflexive motion of a poem that actually never makes Mr. T. W. a direct object of address. The intimacy of the second-person pronoun is reserved throughout by the poet for the poem itself.

Moreover, coming as it does only after the position of the Godhead has already been ascribed to Donne and his works, T. W.'s deification seems more of a power-sharing scheme than a total abdication of omnipotence — as if Donne were suggesting that he and his loved one could run the entire universe together. Certainly, by the end of the poem, Donne cannot be said to have completely relinquished the position of the Almighty, for he concludes with another potentially blasphemous self-aggrandizing image. The application of the word "Testament" to his verse in the final line is glossed by most editors as a suggestion that the poem might function as Donne's legal will in the event of his death, but it is hard not to hear an echo of the Biblical sense of "Testament" as well. In fact, in the context of his earlier blasphemies, Donne may be hinting that his verse could serve as a kind of "New (lover's) Testament" for future generations, or, indeed, that his love for Mr. T. W. might inspire a new religion, an earthly love that can adequately imitate or perhaps even substitute for divine love.

Once again, these suggestions are by any conventional standard quite outrageous, but they have also been described as typically Donnean; for example, similar arguments were traced long ago in "The Relic" and "A Valediction: Of the Book."[11] Nor is Donne done with turning familiar poetic convention on its head, for in these final lines he takes the clichéd claim that love poetry confers immortality upon its subject — a claim perhaps most familiar to us from Shakespeare's sonnets — and applies it to the poem itself: "Live I or die, by you [my poem] my love is sent." Stunningly, it seems that the only immortality conferred by Donne's poetic tribute will be his own; but once again, even this final solipsism could appear almost conventionally Donnean, at least to his more hostile critics.

To summarize, then, at least one of Donne's "conventionally affectionate" letters of friendship can actually be seen to employ extravagant conceits and rhetorical devices of a type associated with many of the "Songs and Sonets" — poems traditionally identified as being among the most sincere, intimate, and loving in the canon of English literature.[12] However, by sketching these affinities I do not mean simply to argue that the verse letters are therefore also "sincerely" erotic poems; nor do I intend to suggest a reverse, corollary argument, that the "Songs and Sonets" are only "conventionally" affectionate. (Obviously, the extent to which the latter group of poems can be said to draw upon the actual life experience of the author remains contested, and the interpretive

principles upon which such arguments are based have been strongly challenged by poststructuralist theories of the decentered authorial subject. From this point of view, the reality of the "Songs and Sonets" cannot be naively assumed, any more than that of the verse letters.) Instead, by demonstrating that Donne's ostensibly "sincere" heteroerotic love poems *and* the apparently "conventional" letters of friendship both draw upon a remarkably similar image repertoire, and share numerous stylistic devices, I am attempting to offer an argument that cuts in both directions, as it were, placing a question mark over both the presumptive "sincerity" of the first category *and* the "conventionality" of the second.

We can draw out this argument by developing an apparent paradox that arises from the comparison between the Donne of the verse letters and the Donne of the amorous poems. For, in declaring "Hast thee harsh verse" to be "conventionally Donnean," I am of course appealing to a long-standing critical commonplace that already defines "Donnean" as synonymous with extravagance, literal or figural conceit, and the disruption or reversal of convention. In other words, to say that "Hast thee harsh verse" is conventionally Donnean is also — or only — to say that it is conventionally unconventional, which ultimately suggests a distinction that cannot be maintained.

The paradox is only apparent, as I will show; but a version of it lurks behind the difference of opinion with which I began, between Klawitter and the traditional critics he repudiates. For the very question of whether the verse letters are "formulaic" or "sincere" proceeds from the mistaken assumption that, in the final analysis, a distinction between the formulaic and the sincere can always be maintained. In other words, both sides of the interpretive dispute err in presuming the validity of an opposition between "conventional" meanings on the one hand and "unconventional" or "sincere" meanings on the other, and this error precipitates a series of unforeseen, unfortunate, and unhistorical conclusions.

To elaborate: the interpretive stance adopted by those critics who would dismiss the affective content of Donne's verse letters to T. W. (and others) as "merely conventional" provokes at least two theoretical objections. The first objection is to an initial presumption about the process through which literary conventions are identified. For example, Marotti's casual remarks about "proper social formulas" suggests that the form of the poem, the language from which it is constructed, can be separated from the emotional significances — that is, the affective content — without too much difficulty. It is as if the conventional elements of the verse in question were available as self-declaring critical guidelines prior to any act of interpretation. But this cannot be the case, because to describe something as conventional is *already* to have interpreted it. This is not to say that Marotti, or anyone else for that matter, may not have good reasons for declaring a passage formulaic. It is simply a reminder of the fact that formulas and conventions do not float upon the surface of texts like so much social precipitate; they are not preestablished facts, but are themselves the result of interpretive reconstruction, and, as Klawitter's very different reading attests, their transparency cannot be assumed.

A second and more telling objection follows from the first, because even if conventional "formulas" were available as *a priori* interpretive guides, the ques-

tion of exactly what they were formulas *for* would remain. After all, to say that these poems contain "conventional" or formulaic expressions of affection between men does not ultimately leave us any the wiser as to the order, intensity, social function, or limits of those expressions of affection.[13]

Similar objections can be put to Klawitter from the other side. Klawitter's error is to believe that the sincerity of a text must be measured in terms of its distance from convention; that is, he seems to think that the less conventional something appears to be, the more "real" it must be. But as a rhetorician of Donne's stature would have known from any number of textbooks, sincerity itself is a rhetorical posture that comes armed with its own repertoire of conventions. To this extent, sincerity is always performed. To put the point in the now familiar vocabulary of poststructuralism, language is always already conventional, which is simply to say that we can only convince one another of our sincerity, or indeed, of anything at all, by deploying a sign system, the meanings of which have been previously (that is, conventionally) established.

In the mistaken belief that he has discerned, or, more accurately, that he *can* discern the "real" Donne in the poems to T. W., and in an effort to persuade us to his vision, Klawitter makes a series of anachronistic commitments. Among these we can include his notion that Donne's verse letters are somehow more "private" than his other poems (and hence more persuasive as autobiographical records of genuine feeling). There are numerous problems with this position, perhaps the most elementary being that almost all of Donne's poetic output can quite reasonably be described as "not intended for a general public" (*Enigmatic Narrator* 7). As an argument it hardly distinguishes the verse letters, which therefore cannot be held to have any more "credibility as autobiographical material" (3) than anything else by Donne that circulated in manuscript. The necessary association of private writing with manuscript production is not one that Donne would have understood. Indeed, such a presumption begs the question of whether and how it makes sense even to speak of a "general" public for poetry in the late sixteenth century.[14]

Still more problematically, the argument that Donne deliberately chose a more "private" genre to express his homoerotic desires could be said to reify, inadvertently, the public/private binary as conterminous with the binary of heterosexuality and homosexuality. In other words, Klawitter is here presupposing the existence of a Renaissance closet, as if some stigma would have necessarily attached itself to *all* such expressions of desire during the period. This presumption also risks anachronism, for while it would be incorrect to claim that the English sixteenth century was characterized by the enlightened toleration of alternative sexualities,[15] there are good reasons to be hesitant before applying post-Enlightenment conceptions of sexuality to Renaissance texts. As Alan Bray has repeatedly observed, Elizabethan society does not seem to have conceptualized homosexuality as the province of a distinct minority. Expressions of revulsion against sodomy were common enough, but, significantly "it was not part of the individual's nature: it was a part of all human nature and could surface when the mind was dulled or sleeping" (40). Thus, while the metaphor of the closet forms a central part of present-day conceptions of sexuality, lying behind the notion that any expression of homoerotic desire must always violate

some social taboo, it may not accurately reflect the way in which Renaissance individuals conceptualized their own erotic practices.[16]

These ideas have significant implications for our understanding of the early modern context in which Donne's verse letters circulated, and for our understanding of the interpretive difficulties they present today. Most importantly for my purposes here, the question of whether these poems embody a "sincere" or a "conventional" desire is rendered doubly meaningless, both to the extent that it is based upon a theoretically untenable opposition, and because it anachronistically presumes the existence of a Renaissance closet. The interpretive paradigm in which the very opposition of "sincere" and "conventional" is framed only recognizes homoerotic desire if it is accompanied by the signs of transgression. Conversely, it follows that if there is no sign of transgression, then there can be no genuine desire. Because discussions of Donne's verse letters have traditionally taken place within this intellectual framework, those on the "merely conventional" side are able to presume that, since the writing, manuscript circulation and eventual publication of Donne's verse letters prompted no homophobic outcry, the desires they express cannot be taken as "sincere"; while Klawitter, on the "sincere" side, discovers "evidence" that the verse letters did provoke some measure of homophobic anxiety after all. But if the notion of a Renaissance closet is anachronistic, then it becomes possible to imagine many activities, signs, gestures, and forms of social exchange normatively imagined by our own culture as trangressively erotic that may have seemed devoid of such transgressive content in an early modern setting.[17] Thus, for example, what the post-Enlightenment era always calls pederasty might occasionally have taken that name in certain Renaissance contexts; but, in other contexts, it might simply have been called part of the education process — or part of the legitimate courtly exchange between a gentleman poet and a younger man beginning to take his place in the adult world.

It may be helpful at this juncture to make absolutely clear what I think can and cannot be gleaned from these extraordinary documents. It seems to me that the one thing that must remain beyond our reach is positive knowledge as to whether or not genital contact either occurred or was sought by either of the parties in this exchange of letters. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has observed with reference to Shakespeare's sonnets, "the sexual context of the period is too far irrecoverable for us to be able to disentangle boasts, confessions, undertones, overtones, jokes, the unthinkable, the taken-for-granted, the unmentionable-but-often-done-anyway" (35), and so on, with any degree of certainty.[18] What *can* be said with certainty, however, is that while most of the manuscript versions of "Hast thee harsh verse" omit line 6 of the Westmoreland version, and while the first printed version of 1633 also omits line 5, and while in the Westmoreland text itself, as we know from Klawitter, these same lines, along with most of line 2 and lines 8-10 are crossed out — in short, while "Hast thee harsh verse" seems to have an unusually troubled textual history[19] — poems like the following were generally reproduced entire:

To Mr. R. W.

If, as mine is, thy life a slumber be,
Seeme, when thou readst these lines, to dreame of me,

> Never did Morpheus nor his brother weare
> Shapes soe like those Shapes, whom they would appeare,
> As this my letter is like me, for it
> Hath my name, words, hand, feet, heart, minde and wit;
> It is my deed of gift from mee to thee,
> It is my Will, my selfe the Legacie.
> So thy retyrings I love, yea envie,
> Bred in thee by a wise melancholy,
> That I rejoyce, that unto where thou art,
> Though I stay here, I can thus send my heart,
> As kindly'as any enamored Patient
> His picture to his absent Love hath sent.
>
> (*Satires* 64-5)

This poem, presumed to be addressed to Thomas Woodward's elder brother Rowland, is the first sonnet in a verse letter made up of two sonnets and a four-line envoi; and, even without taking the time for an exhaustive analysis, it is possible to identify numerous similarities between it and "Hast thee harsh verse." The witty equation of the poet's physical and spiritual essence with the material and formal properties of the verse is common to both, for example — right down to a repetition of the Sidney-esque pun on poetic "feet." The image of the text as a legal testament also reappears, and the general argument of both poems — that they figuratively, legally, and, in the case of the portrait, visually represent their author and his feelings — is the same. Even the grandiose analogy between Donne's creative powers and those of a God can be found in both poems, albeit translated from a Christian to a pagan register.

By pointing out these more than superficial resemblances, I would not be misunderstood as saying that Donne felt similar desires for both brothers, as if such knowledge of Donne's emotional experience were actually available (although I don't think there is anything inherently unreasonable about such an assumption — after all, the theme of siblings as rivals in desire is common enough). At the same time, it is obviously not my intention to foreclose issues of affective content either. Instead I believe that it is precisely in order to address such issues that we must first answer the bibliographic and historical questions that emerge most forcefully from the juxtaposition of these two ostensibly similar poems: why does the first have a seemingly troubled textual history, while the second does not? What is the content of this scribal anxiety, if it is indeed anxiety we are seeing? Just what *is* the matter with Donne's "Hast thee harsh verse"?

At this point contemporary scholarship on the relation of "friendship" literature to questions of sexuality proves extremely helpful. Returning again to the work of Alan Bray, for example, one might consider the relevance of his discussion of the "uncanny" symmetry between the image of the masculine friend and the image of the sodomite. According to Bray,

> The distinction between the two kinds of intimacy was apparently sharp and clearly marked: the one was expressed in orderly "civil" relations, the

> other in subversive. . . . But . . . [o]n occasion one can also come across a document that appears . . . to be putting the two together and reading a sodomitical meaning . . . into just those conventions of friendship that elsewhere seemed protected from that interpretation.
>
> (47)

Bray concludes that the "shadow" of sodomy "was never far from the flower strewn world of Elizabethan friendship and . . . could never be fully distinguished from it" (57); but he also suggests that the potentiality for some scenes or expressions of friendship to be read sodomitically depended on the absence or presence of additional social signs and conventions that "a contemporary would have seen far more readily than we do" (50). For example, "true" friendships, as distinguished from sodomitical relationships, were generally thought possible only between men of the same social status because any suggestion that the affective bond in question was based on the desire for economic or social advantage rather than personal loyalty could mark a relationship as potentially sodomitical.[20] At the same time, according to Bray, the category of sodomy itself was never *exclusively* linked to the incidence of sexual acts but also carried with it associations of political and theological transgression; thus, the "taint" of sodomy might cling to a friendship if one or more parties were also to be suspected of condoning or practicing Catholicism, for example. In addition, as Jeff Masten has recently pointed out in work building upon Bray's initial foundations, "what we normatively now call *homosexuality* is in English Renaissance culture dispersed into a number of discourses" besides that of sodomy, "each of which differently negotiates power relations" (36). Thus, for example "*pederasty* emphasized an age difference . . . [where] . . . *sodomy* . . . often suggested sexual relations between men of differing social class."

Rereading the verse letters with these ideas in mind, even ostensibly (or "conventionally"?) similar poems like "Hast thee harsh verse" and "If, as mine is" start to look quite different. According to Bray's elaboration of the semiotics of Renaissance friendship, the first poem seems far more likely than the second to blur the line separating the literature of friendship from a representation of sodomitical desire. After all, "Hast thee harsh verse" is not only apparently addressed to a much younger man but is also by far the more nakedly blasphemous of the two poems. Indeed, as my earlier close reading of that poem implies, it stands among the more theologically daring works of Donne's oeuvre. Further evidence of this interpretation may be seen in that fact that, as I have already noted, line 6 is the most regularly "omitted" part of the poem — that is, the line that specifically introduces the notion of Donne as a Godlike creator ("I'am thy Creator, thou my Saviour"). It is therefore possible to accept Klawitter's suggestion that "Hast thee harsh verse"' may have been thought "compromising," even in a Renaissance context, but only in a far more qualified sense than he intends — because this "compromising" content is almost certainly not reducible to the text's apparent articulation of desire. Instead, that articulation registers as shocking only insofar as it occurs in conjunction with a display of irreverence and/or a transgression of boundaries such as age and class.

Thus, while previous commentators have inevitably located a correct or proper response to Donne's early verse letters in a correct or proper conception of Donne's sexuality, I would argue that, on the contrary, there is no sexual "truth" to be told by these poems, at least insofar as they belong to an interpretive economy prior to the disciplinary subjection of sexuality. Instead, I suggest that they bespeak the special *a*ffect of friendship — a socio-affective bond that relates to the literary and educative discourses of Renaissance humanism, and to modern regimes of sexuality, in ways that our history and our literary criticism are only now beginning to explicate. For this reason, of course, the range of social and interpretive effects of that affect — and any further conclusions that we might wish to draw about the structure of Donne's own thinking on these matters — remain highly contestable. However, before suggesting some ways in which further investigations of these complex discursive relationships might proceed, I would like to note what is perhaps the most radical implication of Donne's idealized conception of friendship, as it pertains to the humility *topos* that I have already argued is a dominant feature of his persona in these poems.

One crucial effect of Donne's humble (im)posture is to make the perspective of his addressee central to the aesthetic success of the poems. Indeed, we might say that Donne's self-deprecations are part of a rhetorical strategy that constructs or positions the ideal reader precisely as a "friend" — someone who will always "impute excellence," or provide the confirmatory blessing that makes the poems worthy of the name.[21] In an interesting anticipation of reader-response theory, the production/recognition of a "good" poem — in this case, a verse letter — is explicitly figured as a collaborative activity between author and reader; Donne repeatedly claims that he cannot produce good poems without good friends to read them. In other words, for Donne, friendship is an affect that cements the bonds within an interpretive community wherein his "imperfect" and "prophane" verse will be "bishoped." One consequence of this conception is that, for Donne, between friends, there really is no such thing as bad poetry; and, it appears, no such thing as blasphemy either. It is surely just a short step to imagine that for Donne, between friends, there could be no imputation of sodomy — no matter what form that friendship took.

In conclusion, then, the fascinating effects of affect produced by these verse letters confirm Donne's place among the list of canonical figures whose work as a whole — and not only in the much cited example of "Sappho to Philaenis" — might be productively reread in the light of recent developments within the study of sexuality, and in the critical field of queer theory.[22] Perhaps more importantly, however, the interpretive questions raised by these neglected poems have implications for our understanding not only of other works by Donne but also of the Renaissance amatory lyric in general; not the least of which might be to undermine the artificial borders between poetic genres, such as those separating the amatory and the epistolary, or the elegiac and the satiric.[23] Finally, however, I should reiterate that it has not been my purpose here to "out" Donne — an anachronistic project, as I have indicated — but to raise questions about the processes whereby critical discussion of "the greatest love

poet of them all"[24] has been constituted in relentlessly heteronormative terms that are in all probability no less anachronistic. If Donne's early verse letters teach us anything, they teach a lesson concerning both the necessity *and* the difficulty of attending to the historical and cultural contingencies of eroticism.

Notes

1. Given the "awesomeness" of the Donne industry any neglect is, of course, relative. For some discussions of the verse letters prior to that of Aers and Kress, see Cameron, Hunt, Leishman, Lewalski, Maurer, Stapleton, Storhoff, and Thomson. Hunt's analysis is the least substantive in its treatment of what at one point are called Donne's "generally feeble and listlessly written commendatory epistles to Noble Ladies" (182). Thomson's and Leishman's analyses focus on issues of compliment, patronage and sincerity, with Thomson emerging as the more hostile critic ("the desire to please brought out the worst in Donne"[280-1]); Stapleton's source study reads certain letters in the light of Plato and Paracelsus; Lewalski argues that the verse letters addressed to female patrons can be productively read as poetic blueprints for the *Anniversaries*; Maurer grounds a sensitive exposition of the letters as a whole in humanistic epistolary theory; and both Storhoff and Cameron attempt to describe the social context and rhetorical techniques of the deliberative or morally didactic poems addressed to men. None of these authors discusses the so-called "early" verse letters — that is, the *nondidactic* poems addressed to men — in any detail. Since Aers and Kress wrote, three book-length studies of Donne have appeared that devote a substantial number of pages to the verse letters, by Arthur Marotti, George Parfitt and George Klawitter, respectively. Three articles have also been published: DeStefano's, which largely recapitulates Lewalski's earlier argument; Summer's and Pebworth's, an interesting attempt to read some of Donne's "classically" didactic verse back into its immediate social context; and Klawitter's, a slightly different version of the first chapter of his book. Again, none of these books or articles discusses the so-called "early" verse letters in any detail, with the exception of Klawitter, whose work I engage in this essay.

2. The "early" chronological designation of Donne's nondidactic verse letters addressed to men derives from Bald ("Verse Letters"). Following Bald, Storhoff, Maurer, Cameron, and DeStefano place the composition of the verse letters in a progressive narrative: the nondidactic poems addressed to male friends come first; the didactic or moralized poems to those same friends are seen as belonging to a "middle" phase; and the poems to female patrons — certainly the most discussed, if not the most admired of these texts — belong to a "later" period. However, although much of Bald's original article remains plausible, the "early" assignment of a significant number of poems is based entirely upon his conviction that their "crudity [and] conventionality" (283) indicate the inexperience of the author — that is, upon what Bald later admits are "grounds of style" alone (287). The larger chronology should therefore be regarded with suspicion, at least to the extent that it reinscribes a conservative narrative wherein the frivolous productions of youth give way to a more explicitly mor-

alized sensibility. Such a narrative also risks heterosexism by associating the notion of Donne's artistic development with an equally notional "progression" from male to female addressees. Therefore, except in those cases where external evidence is available, it may be preferable to leave the dating of the various verse epistles an open question.

3. Grierson initiates the dismissive tradition with his monumental edition of Donne's poetic works from 1912. Commenting upon the poem addressed "To Mr. T. W." that begins "All haile sweet Poet," he quickly moves to inform the reader that the epithet "sweet" "must not be taken too seriously [because] Donne and his friends were . . . complimenting one another in the polite fashion of the day" (165). The same conventional note is struck some years later by Bald, who describes the poems as consisting "of little more than elaborate exchanges of compliment" (*John Donne* 74). This interpretation leads naturally to a negative assessment of the verse letters' aesthetic merit: the poems "are certainly the least mature of Donne's," at once "unconvincing" and a "concession to the sonneteering vogue" (75-6). The few subsequent critics to consider the poems generally follow Grierson and Bald unquestioningly, often using the very same language. For example, Storhoff writes, "The early epistles are . . . slight achievements when we consider the extent of Donne's mature talents; dealing mainly with the writing of poetry, [they] . . . lack the profundity and artistic sophistication exhibited by his other works" (11). DeStefano reproduces the same position without acknowledging either Storhoff or Bald when she declares that the early verse letters are "conventionally complimentary on the subjects of friendship and poetry; they represent experiments . . . which foreshadow . . . the middle and late [epistles]" (79); and later: "what marks these epistles as lesser achievements is their conventionality, whimsy, and lack of logical rigor" (81).

4. The popularity of the familiar letter resulted at least in part from the widespread influence of Petrarch's imitations of Cicero's letters in this mode. For a summary of the ancient ideals of friendship and their influence and reinscription within the discourses of Renaissance humanism, see Weller.

5. In one particularly telling example, addressed to Sir Henry Goodyear, Donne relates the positive benefits of masculine friendship upon the "understanding" to heterosexual coupling and then goes on to apologize for not having written at greater length, in a display of almost comic copiousness, for almost a page and half, before wryly concluding that "my whole letter is nothing but a confession that I should and would write" (*Selected Prose* 125-6).

6. As a result, Klawitter is forced to urge his case in prose that is sometimes hyperbolic ("in no other group of verses by Donne can we follow so meteoric a path from hot to cool, light to dark, headiness to sobriety" [15]) and sometimes hollowly coercive ("there is an anxiety in the first poem to T. W. that we best accept as genuine" [7]). Ironically, in order to strengthen his case, Klawitter even closes down the possibility of homoerotic intent in any other verse letters by Donne, claiming that "none reaches the same intensity of love as those to T. W." (18).

7. For example, Klawitter observes that in the Westmoreland manuscript certain lines have been "crossed out" in three of the four poems to T. W. This

particular manuscript collection is often said to be in Rowland Woodward's hand, a presumption that leads Klawitter to speculate that Rowland himself censored any tribute that seemed "too tawdry . . . to pass along as any heritage of his brother" (*Enigmatic Narrator* 12). Klawitter records the relevant lines in his critical apparatus, along with his opinion that the lines affected "are among the most compromising in the letters" (214). If we accept this "blue pencil" explanation, it would seem to confirm Klawitter's claim that the poems were extremely personal documents, "not intended for a general public" (7); and this in turn would seem to support his more general assertion that Donne's verse letters to Mr. T. W. have "more credibility as autobiographical material than [his] lyric verse" (3) because of their private nature. However, we do not have to endorse the notion that Woodward himself edited the Westmoreland manuscript (clearly the lines could have been crossed out by someone else at a later date); nor is it necessary to conclude that these acts of "excision" can be entirely explained as the result of "compromising" content (after all, the question of what might be called "compromising" during this period is precisely the issue). But by giving these textual variants such prominence, Klawitter raises questions that cannot be summarily dismissed as the product of "polite social conventions" alone.

8. Even Empson's comment, in all its plainspoken brevity, may display a desire to downplay the significance of the exchange (Donne was not a youthful "lad" at this time, after all, even if "Mr. T. W." was). Klawitter deserves credit for bringing this document forward for critical scrutiny, although his analysis of the poem is not without problems — entirely eliding its potential significance as a representation of *female* same-sex relations, for example (T. W. also refers to the action of poetic muses rubbing together as "mistique tribadree"). This "lesbian" aspect of the text is considered (somewhat astonishingly, to the exclusion of any reference to male homoeroticism) in the only other (very brief) discussion of this poem of which I am aware, by Elizabeth D. Harvey (135).

9. Other examples include "To Mr. R. W." ("Kindly 'I envy thy Songs . . ."), "To Mr. S. B." ("O thou which to search . . ."), and "To Mr. E. G." ("Even as lame things . . .").

10. In using the phrase "typically Donnean," I do not mean to presume Donne's transhistorical self-similarity. Instead, I am examining the rhetorical processes whereby that subjectivity-effect is produced. The sense that these poems give us unmediated access to "Donne" is another consequence of the sheer repetition of the humble posture in these poems; the gesture itself becomes a sign of Donne's self-consistency — his very "Donne-ness." The transparently conventional device actually reinforces the notion that this is "Donne" speaking (because, we think, this is how "Donne" always speaks).

11. For example, this interpretation of "The Relic" has been powerfully articulated by William Empson. Indeed, Empson is responsible for some of the most consistently brilliant arguments regarding Donne's heretical metaphysics of earthly love; his invaluable contributions have recently been anthologized (see Empson, *Essays*). According to Empson, Donne's blasphemies are more than isolated and hyperbolic "sweet nothings"; they are in fact evidence of a larger philosophical project to elevate sexual love above or even beyond the level

or spiritual love. Of course, it should be noted that Empson's opinions, particularly with regard to "The Relic," have been dismissed as cranky by such authorities as Helen Gardner and John Carey. For a good summary of the debate, see Haffendon's introduction, to Empson, *Essays,* especially 13-14.

12. The predominant strain of traditional criticism has argued for some basic connection between life and art in Donne's heteroerotic verse, often utilizing biography to date the composition of individual poems. See Haskin for an excellent critical historiography of this process with regard to "The Canonization."

13. In other words, the most effective response to a traditional criticism that says, "Don't worry about this language — it's quite conventional" might not be to say in return, "No, in this case it's sincere," but rather to insist that the assertion of conventionality does not short-circuit further inquiry: "Yes, this language of affection *does* appear to be conventional. Now what does *that* mean?" Forrest Tyler Stevens makes a version of this simple but profound point in a discussion of a case in many ways parallel to that of Donne's verse letters to T. W., that of Erasmus' letters to a younger scholar, Servatius Rogerus. These letters also contain numerous emotional and perhaps erotically charged passages. Stevens exercises admirable scholarly caution in his reading, acknowledging that the "true" nature of the relationship between Erasmus and Rogerus cannot be known (not, at least, if we insist on reducing the "truth" of any relationship to the question of whether or not genital contact took place); but, at the same time, Stevens calls the bluff of those interpreters who would dismiss the homoeroticism of the Servatius letters as "'simply' conventional." Importantly, Stevens does *not* dispute the formulaic quality of Erasmus' letters (the conventionality of their potential homoeroticism is for him in some ways precisely the point) but he does reject any recourse to that conventionality or "literariness" that would result in the *desexualization* of these texts, "as if the literary were the agent which would police the propriety of sexual content and connotation" (125). Alan Stewart takes Stevens' argument as one starting point for his own detailed study of the relationships between sodomitical and humanist discourse during the period.

14. To complicate the public/private distinction further, it should be noted that as a genre drawing upon both ancient classical and recent humanist literary traditions, the verse letter might even have been properly considered a more "public" form of expression than the amatory lyric.

15. Although, after praising Alan Bray for underscoring the oppressive function of sodomitical discourse, Klawitter himself concludes with this very claim: "Not only was the period remarkably literary, it was also tolerant. . . . [W]e have every reason to believe that homosexuality was more tolerated than not" (24).

16. The same point also holds for another of Klawitter's suggestions: that the T. W. poems in the Westmoreland manuscript were censored because of their "compromising" nature. Again, his assumption seems to be that a contemporary scribe or publisher could only have been prompted to an act of censorship by the presence of homoeroticism, and homoeroticism alone. But the problem embodied by a poem such as "Hast thee harsh verse" is not so much

whether it is "compromising" or not, in the sense of whether it is "sincerely" or "conventionally" homoerotic; rather the problem is that we as twentieth-century readers cannot know whether what we consider "compromising" would have been so considered by a sixteenth-century audience.

17. A version of this argument has been made by Jonathan Goldberg:

> If . . . sodomy named sexual acts only in particularly stigmatizing contexts, there is no reason not to believe that such acts went on all the time, unrecognized as sodomy, called, among other things, friendship or patronage, and facilitated by the beds shared, for instance, by servants or students, by teachers and pupils, by kings and their minions or queens and their ladies. . . . Hence the unlikelihood that those sexual acts called sodomy, when performed, would be recognized as sodomy, especially if, in other social contexts, they could be called something else, or nothing at all.
>
> (19)

18. Sedgwick's essay on the sonnets is full of extraordinary insight; however, it should be noted that her more well-known and influential argument regarding the dependence of patriarchal power structures upon homosocial bonds which are themselves forged in and through the exchange of women "between men" has been criticized as inadequate to the culture of Renaissance humanism. As Hutson has observed, many homosocial/erotic exchanges (and the difficulties of distinguishing the points along this continuum is exactly the point) between men during the period "tend to be, reflexively, about *literature*"; that is, they tend to articulate themselves "as arising from the intimacy of shared reading and writing" (3). Indeed, the verse letters of Donne and T. W. are obviously at one level examples of the phenomena Hutson describes. Alan Stewart, building in part upon Hutson's work, has argued further that in fact "humanist rhetoric presents itself as implacably opposed to . . . [the] system of social perpetuation" that Sedgwick delineates (xxn. 11).

19. By speaking of the poem in this way, I may be thought to be presuming the existence of a single "original" version of "Hast thee harsh verse" from which all other versions may be thought to deviate with varying degrees of accuracy. However, I do not intend to give any one version of the text such originary status; to the contrary, I am interested in the implications of the simple fact that so many versions exist, especially insofar as these various versions may tell us something about the effects this poem may have had — or may have been anticipated as having — upon seventeenth-century readers.

20. The emphasis on equality between friends can be traced back to Aristotle's insistence that the true friend is an "other self." The classist notion that only "gentlemen" can be true friends has its roots in the *de Amicitia* of Cicero: "I am not now speaking of the friendships of ordinary folk, or of ordinary people." The disdain for vulgar friendship is perhaps clearer in the Latin, which speaks of "de vulgari aut de mediocri" (56).

21. Margaret Maurer has also skillfully demonstrated that the humble pose constitutes an "early version of [Donne's] emphasis on reciprocal friendship" (247), an emphasis she sees recurring, in different forms, throughout most of

the verse letters to men, including the later "didactic" poems. Indeed, Maurer only just stops short of describing the affective possibility that emerges from Donne's use of the vocabulary of masculine friendship as an erotic cathexis. It remains throughout her essay as a possibility she is more willing to countenance than most other critics, as for instance when she writes that Donne's letter to Wotton, "Sir, More than kisses," "verges on complaint" (249).

22. See Blank for the most recent of many attempts to draw out the social, sexual, and canonical implications of this putatively "lesbian" text. It may help to place my opening remarks about the critical neglect of the early verse letters into some perspective to note that more articles have been published on "Sappho to Philaenis" in the last fifteen years than on the entire body of the verse letters (a somewhat ironic statistic if we recall that "Sappho to Philaenis" was actually grouped *with* the verse letters in the 1635 edition of Donne's poems, and only placed among the "Songs and Sonnets" in this century, by Grierson).

23. Moving beyond the circumscribed realm of the literary, Donne's verse letters would appear to confirm Alan Stewart's thesis that the *topoi* of friendship "are not only reflections of, but also originary contributions to, novel social relations that are forged through and maintained by textual skills" (xxviii-xxix). The story I have attempted to tell here about "Hast thee harsh verse" indicates just how novel — and therefore subject to misrecognition, both in the past *and* the present — these "social relations" were, as well as suggesting the necessity for further investigation into the interpretive possibilities created by the intersection/blurring of humanist and sodomitical discourse during the period.

24. This quotation comes from the jacket of A. J. Smith's Penguin edition of Donne's poems.

Works Cited

Aers, David, and Gunther Kress. "'Darke Texts Need Notes': Versions of Self in Donne's Verse Epistles." *Literature and History* 8 (1978): 138-58.

Bald, R. C. "Donne's Early Verse Letters." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 15 (1952): 283-9.

—. *John Donne: A Life*. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1986.

Blank, Paula. "Comparing Sappho to Philaenis: John Donne's 'Homopoetics.'" *PMLA* 110.3 (1995): 358-68.

Bray, Alan. "Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England." *Queering the Renaissance*. Ed. Jonathan Goldberg. Durham: Duke UP, 1994. 40-61.

Cameron, Allen Barry. "Donne's Deliberative Verse Epistles." *English Literary Renaissance* 6 (1976): 369-403.

Cicero, Laelius. *De Amicitia* [*On Friendship*]. Trans. F. O. Copley. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1971.

DeStefano, Barbara L. "Evolution of Extravagant Praise in Donne's Verse Epistles." *Studies in Philology* 81 (1984): 75-94.

Donne, John. *John Donne: The Complete English Poems*. Ed. A. J. Smith. London: Penguin, 1986.

—. *John Donne: The Satires, Epigrams and Verse Letters*. Ed. Wesley Milgate. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1967.

—. *Selected Prose.* Ed. Helen Gardner and Timothy Healy. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1967.
—. *The Sermons of John Donne.* Vol. 5. Ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn Simpson. Berkeley: U of California P, 1959.
Empson, William. *Essays on Renaissance Literature: Volume 1: Donne and the New Philosophy.* Ed. John Haffendon. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995. 159-99.
—. "Rescuing Donne." *Just So Much Honor.* Ed. Peter A. Fiore. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1972. 95-148.
Goldberg, Jonathan. *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities.* Stanford: Stanford UP, 1992.
Grierson, Herbert J. C., ed. *The Poems of John Donne.* Vol. 2. London: Oxford UP, 1912.
Harvey, Elizabeth D. *Ventriloquized Voices: Feminist Theory and English Renaissance Texts.* London: Routledge, 1992.
Haskin, Dayton. "On Trying To Make The Record Speak More About Donne's Love Poems." *John Donne's Desire of More.* Ed. M. Thomas Hester. Newark: U of Delaware P, 1996. 39-65.
Hunt, Clay. *Donne's Poetry.* New Haven: Yale UP, 1954.
Hutson, Lorna. *The Usurer's Daughter: Male Friendship and Fictions of Women in Sixteenth-Century England.* London: Routledge, 1994.
Klawitter, George. *The Enigmatic Narrator: The Voicing of Same-Sex Love in the Poetry of John Donne.* New York: Peter Lang, 1994.
—. "Verse Letters to T. W. from John Donne: 'By You My Love Is Sent.'" *Journal of Homosexuality* 23 (1993): 85-102.
Leishman, J. B. *The Monarch of Wit.* London: Hutchinson U Library, 1957.
Lewalski, Barbara. *Donne's Anniversaries and the Poetry of Praise.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973.
Marotti, Arthur. *John Donne, Coterie Poet.* Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1986.
Masten, Jeffrey. *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997.
Maurer, Margaret. "John Donne's Verse Letters." *Modern Language Quarterly* 36 (1976): 234-60.
Parfitt, George. *John Donne: A Literary Life.* New York: St. Martin's P, 1989.
Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire.* New York: Columbia UP, 1985.
Stapleton, Laurence. "The Theme of Virtue in Donne's Verse Epistles." *Studies in Philology* 55 (1958): 369-403.
Stevens, Forrest Tyler. "Erasmus's Tigress." *Queering the Renaissance.* Ed. Jonathan Goldberg. Durham: Duke UP, 1994. 124-40.
Stewart, Alan. *Close Readers: Humanism and Sodomy in Early Modern England.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997.
Storhoff, Gary P. "Social Mode and Poetic Strategies: Donne's Verse Letters to His Friends." *Essays in Literature* 4 (1977): 11-18.
Summers, Claude, and Ted-Larry Pebworth. "'Thus Friend's Absent Speak': The Exchange of Verse Letters between John Donne and Henry Wotton." *Modern Philology* 81 (1984): 361-77.

Thomson, Patricia. "The Literature of Patronage, 1580-1630." *Essays in Criticism* 2 (1952): 267-84.
Weller, Barry. "The Rhetoric of Friendship in Montaigne's *Essais.*" *New Literary History* 9 (1978): 503-23.