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John Donne's Verse Letters to Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford: Rhetorical Means to a Friendship.

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JOHN DONNE'S VERSE LETTERS TO LUCY RUSSELL, COUNTESS OF BEDFORD: RHETORICAL MEANS TO A FRIENDSHIP

A Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

John Donne's verse letters to Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford, are more than static hyperbolic praise to a patroness interchangeable with any other patroness. Rather, they are viable and personal means by which Donne creates and sustains a friendship. Through the five verse letters examined in this dissertation, "Reason is the soules left hand," "You have refin'd mee," "T'Have written then," "To the Countesse of Bedford At New-yeares Tide," and "Honour is so sublime perfection," Donne rhetorically demonstrates his understanding of and ability to function within the various contexts of Bedford's life. Using the accepted view of the epistolary form as a true representation and even extension of an essential self, Donne rhetorically inserts himself into Bedford's world through the verse letter. Then, empowered as author and "creator" of their relationship within the microcosm of the verse letter, Donne manipulates their relative positions within the letter, drawing Bedford closer to himself within this microcosm, and ideally, in the larger world of court. He demonstrates his ability to function within the Countess's courtly world by framing his verse letters to the concerns of his patroness's personal life and court career, utilizing methods expounded by Castiglione in his advice to the courtier. One such concern is the maintenance of the fiction of an idealized court society while dealing with the often sordid realities of court life. Donne explores these contradictory aspects of "being" and "seeming" in the Jacobean court in general and in Bedford's successful maintenance of her high position within that court. Because the subject of the letters is the growing relationship between Donne and his patroness, as well as the interdependence and

relative worth of client and patron(ess) within the complex Jacobean patronage system, the letters serve as metacommunicative links between Donne and Bedford. Their intermediary form mirrors their subject, the necessity of intermediaries for court success. Even after Donne's relationship with the Countess cooled somewhat as Donne took Holy Orders and gave up his pursuit for courtly success, his search for patronage did not cease, but he continued to seek both secular and spiritual rewards.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: John Donne and the Countess of Bedford

One of the most important relationships cultivated by John Donne from 1607 to 1615, his years of seeking court patronage, was with Lucy Harrington Russell, the Countess of Bedford, who was the most influential patroness of the Jacobean court except for Queen Anne herself (Lewalski, "Lucy" 52). Excluding royal ladies, she is matched only by the Countess of Pembroke in literary dedications and commendatory verses of the time (Williams 366), and served as favorite lady-in-waiting to Anne from the queen's accession in 1603 to her death in 1619. The Countess not only directly influenced the queen's patronage but also served as mediator for suits through the king's ministers and favorites, as source of much artistic patronage, and as inspiration for many of Donne's contemporaries, including Jonson, Daniel, Drayton, Holyband, Florio, Davies, Chapman, Dowland, and others.*

In addition to Donne's own prose correspondence concerning his feelings and need for Bedford, the best record remaining of their relationship is the group of verse letters Donne wrote to the Countess from 1608 to 1612, a period of frustrated ambition for Donne. His clandestine marriage to Ann More in 1601 had destroyed his hopes for a court career as secretary to Sir Thomas Egerton, the Lord Keeper, by alienating Ann's influential father, Sir George More, who then worked for Donne's

* For her relationship with these writers, see Buxton; Byard; Costello; Elton; Granger; Hogrefe; Lewalski, "Lucy"; Hogrefe; Maurer, "Real"; Newdigate; Palmer; Poulton; Saunders; Taylor; and Wiffin passim.

dismissal and refused to help the struggling couple. From 1601 to his taking orders in the Anglican church in 1615, Donne desperately sought court favor to regain his own self-respect as well as to support his ever-growing family. In approaching the Countess of Bedford, Donne did not seek her patronage in the literary sense, as Jonson sought her influence for court masque commissions, but sought a place of power and security: a secretaryship in Ireland or the Virginia Company, the ambassadorship to Venice, or other political office (Novarr 95). To this end, Donne used his good friend, Sir Henry Goodyer, as intermediary to introduce him to Bedford and her circle sometime in 1607 or 1608.

Donne found in the Countess of Bedford not only a possible source of court favor, but also a kindred spirit who could understand and appreciate the often dazzling complexities of his wit. Their introduction led to a close personal and professional friendship. Donne was not on the same social plane as his patroness, but the concept of friendship in the Renaissance did not necessitate social equality for a successful and mutual relationship. Donne's friend, Sir Francis Bacon, who himself was constantly seeking preferment, commented in "Of Followers and Friends" that equals compete and "friendship," in the older sense of benefaction, is to be found between those on different levels on the social hierarchy: "There is little friendship in the worlde, and least of all betweene equals; which was wont to bee magnified. That is, is betweene superiour and inferiour, whose fortunes may comprehend the one the other" (Works 6:528). In examining the verse letters Donne wrote to the Countess, this dissertation will explore the rhetorical means Donne used to frame his verse letters to the various contexts and concerns of Bedford's life in order to prove himself worthy of such "friendship" with his patroness.

Donne's own prose letters of 1608-1612 reveal that his relationship with the Countess grew into more than that of client and patroness. Donne dined at Twickenham, the Countess's country estate, on several occasions, and Bedford stood as godmother to his second daughter, whom he named after the Countess. He sent her literary works of various types--some of his own poetry, a translation she requested, and some fashionable French poems from abroad--and Bedford exchanged some of her own verses with him. Donne shows concern in his letters about Bedford's personal trials and disappointments and paid deathbed visits to her good friend Cecilia Bulstrode at Twickenham (Gosse, I: 188-189, 198-199, 230; II: 42-43).

Evidence of Donne's blossoming relationship with the Countess of Bedford appears in sharp contrast to the little he reveals about his relationship with his wife, Ann, who shared his life of frustrated ambition. In many ways during this period, Bedford seems to overshadow Ann Donne as a source of obvious influence on Donne's thoughts and writings. Though Arthur Marotti shows evidence that Ann was the intended reader and perhaps subject of some of Donne's poems, many feminist critics who seek her historical presence in Donne's writings stress her complete silence in the corpus (Marotti 143-44, 149; Halley 188). Ann was higher on the social scale than was Donne, but critics believe she might have been illiterate, in sharp contrast to Bedford's reputation for learning (Halley 187). When his career hopes were destroyed by his secret marriage, Donne and his wife lived at first by the charity of friends and family until Donne was able to move Ann and their now three young children to a small house at Mitcham, near London, in 1606.

Little can be gleaned of Ann's personality or interests from Donne's letters, only his own sense of imprisonment, exile, and guilt living with her at Mitcham. He

expresses such feelings to his close friend and weekly correspondent, Henry Goodyer: "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 honest devices, as giving her my company and discourse (Letters 147). Donne's relationship with Ann seems to mirror his conservative views about the inferior status and capacity of women expressed later in his sermons. In these sermons, Donne asserts that a wife should be chaste, sober, truthful, and quiet, while superior accomplishments such as wit, learning, eloquence, and music were needless (Sermons ii, 346).

In letters to or about the Countess of Bedford, however, Donne praises his patroness for her cultivation of those very "needless" accomplishments, and pays tribute to her ability to appreciate and comprehend his convolutions of wit. In both prose letters and verse letters to the Countess, in fact, Donne deals with many of the same philosophic issues seen in his letters to male friends, evidencing that Bedford was one of a group of kindred spirits with which Donne corresponded regularly, a coterie of university and Inns of Court friends that included Henry Goodyer, Henry Wotton, Thomas Roe, and Christopher Brooke. In an undated letter to the Countess of Bedford, Donne demonstrates the playful complexity of his wit as well as the mutual understanding he enjoyed with his patroness:

> Amongst many other dignities which this letter hath by being received and seen by you, it is not the least, that it was prophesied of before it was born: for your brother told you in his letter, that I had written: he did me much honour both in advancing my truth so farre as to call a promise an act already done, and to provide me a means of doing him a service in this act, which is but doing right to my self: for by this performance of mine own word, I have also justified that part of his Letter which concerned me; and it had been a double guiltiness in me, to have made him guilty towards you. (Letters 22-23)

Letters like this, rivaling the most convoluted of Donne's poetry, can only be viewed as evidence of Bedford's ready appreciation of Donne's playful wit.

Yet critics see tension in the verse letters to Bedford, as Donne attempts to reconcile the uneasiness of his subordinate position to a woman, albeit one of Bedford's accomplishments. He was caught between two Renaissance concepts of hierarchy: the social and courtly hierarchy which Bedford dominated, and the patriarchal hierarchy of nature which posited man's superiority over women. In a popular misogynistic work of the time, First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women (1558), John Knox objects to such a notion of the powerful woman both on religious and on "natural" grounds:

> To promote a woman to bear rule, superiority, dominion, or empire above any realm, nation, or city is repugnant to Nature, contumely to God, a thing most contrarious to His revealed will and approved ordinance; and finally it is the subversion of good order, of all equality and justice . . . . Woman in her greatest perfection was made to serve and obey man, not to rule and command him: As Saint Paul doth reason in these words: Man is not of the woman but the woman of the man. (Knox, John. Works. Ed. D. Laing. 6 vols. Edinburgh, 1854. Quoted in Riencourt 262)

Thus, critics like Arthur Marotti believe that Donne adopted traditional vocabulary of praise in his complimentary poetry and verse letters to proclaim his respect for his patroness(es) and his acceptance of the hierarchical status quo, yet that Donne uses several means to subvert the mode in which he was writing and to "render the very act of poetic praise deeply problematic" (Marotti 207). This dissertation will view the ways in which Donne, while self-effacingly paying tribute to the Countess of Bedford, simultaneously asserts his intellectual and literary authority.

Donne's paying suit to a powerful court lady like Bedford is made even more problematic because the position he sought as courtier is, in many ways, a traditionally

"feminine" role. Castiglione's highly influential work, The Courtier (Il Cortegiano), written in 1528 and translated into English in 1561, served as a handbook for ambitious young courtiers like Donne. The ideal courtier described in the first two books is depicted without real authority of his own and effectively powerless. As Constance Jordan comments, the courtier's status vis-a-vis his lord is similar to that of a wife in relation to her husband; it is mirrored in the observations of Castiglione's own courtiers concerning the life they lead: "Their concerns and activities, focused on providing their superiors with pleasure and diversion rather than protection or counsel, might be characterized as effeminate" (77-78). The immediate situation described in The Courtier is similar to Donne's in that the courtiers depicted are directed by two powerful women, the duchess and her deputy Emilia Pia. Thus, the tensions that are evidenced throughout the work, especially in chapter three's attempt to fashion the perfect court lady, mirror Donne's own endeavors to please his patroness and to gain a court position, which would again be a subordinate position, without losing self-respect.

Whatever tensions are evident in the verse letters to Bedford, the Countess was obviously impressed by Donne's attentions. She was generous in relieving his needs, and also actively supported him for an office he sought (Donne, Letters 145). Donne's own high opinion of his patroness is obvious both in letters to Bedford and to others, in particular those who might share the letters' contents with the Countess. He often refers to her gratefully in his letters to male friends, especially mutual friend Sir Henry Goodyer. About to leave for France, Donne asks Goodyer to keep Bedford mindful of him:

> I professe to you that I am too much bound to her, for expressing every way her care of my fortune, that I am weary before she is; and out of a loathnesse, that so good works should be bestowed upon so ill stuffe, or

> that so much ill fortune should be mingled with hers, as that she should misse any thing that she desired, though it were but for me; I am willing to depart from farther exercising her indevours in that kinde. (Donne, Letters 95)

Proclaiming that Bedford "only hath power to call the fetters of verse upon my free meditations" (Letters 117), Donne expresses to Goodyer in 1609 his feeling of guilt at approaching a new patroness, Elizabeth Stanley, Countess of Huntingdon, revealing his admiration of the Countess as well as his fear of offending her:

> . . . though I swallowed your opinion [of Bedford's worthiness] at first upon your words, yet I have since an implicit faith, and now a knowledge: and for her delights (since she descends to them) I have reserved not only all the verses I should make, but all the thoughts of womens worthiness. (Letters 104)

And he reiterates to Goodyer the Countess's importance to him: "I have made her opinion of me, the ballance by which I weigh my self" (Letters 151).

Though Donne's friendship with Bedford waned after 1614 because of her financial difficulties and her possible religious reservations about Donne's decision to take orders (for a complete explanation, see Thomson, "John Donne and the Countess of Bedford"), she served as the subject, reason, or inspiration for at least two occasional poems ("A Nocturnall upon S. Lucies Day" and "Twick'nam Garden"), three elegies (two for Bedford's friends Lady Markham and Cecilia Bulstrode, and one for her brother John), and six complete verse letters (Satires 90-104, 252-274; Epithalamions 57-63, 66-74). One of the verse letters was written specifically in consolation for the death of Bedford's close friend, and does not allow Donne the freedom to explore and actually create a relationship with the Countess as do the other five, but those remaining verse letters to Bedford remain as evidence of a growing personal and patronage relationship between two ambitious and like-minded courtiers: "Reason is our Soules left hand," "You have refin'd mee," "T'Have written then," "To the Countesse

of Bedford At New-yeares Tide," and "Honour is so sublime perfection" (Donne, Satires 90-102). The chapters that follow will examine these verse letters to demonstrate the manner in which Donne fashions his letters, which are rhetorical representations of a rhetorical man, to form a friendship where none existed before. Donne accomplishes this creation by framing his letters to the various concerns of Bedford's life. For the most part, the verse letters will be discussed in the order presented in John Donne: The Satires, Epigrams and Verse Letters by W. Milgate, who bases his decision upon probable chronology and upon the order of the letters in most surviving manuscripts.

Through these verse letters, written between 1608 and 1612, Donne rhetorically initiates and sustains ties with his important patroness and friend by demonstrating his understanding of and ability to function within the various contexts of Bedford's life. As his comments in other epistles reveal, Donne presented his letters as more than casual correspondences; they are instead rhetorical extensions of himself and the fuel of friendship. An examination of the various techniques Donne employed in his verse letters to the Countess demonstrates how he was able to frame the letters, and by extension, to frame a rhetorical "self," to match Bedford's professional life at court as well as her personal life and interests.

Chapter one will exhibit the importance of letters to a "Rhetorical Man" like Donne in maintaining friendships with his male and female friends and patrons. For Donne, who, like the Countess of Bedford, dared to fashion himself to the situation at hand to gain the best benefit, letters served as literary representations of a supposedly essential self that, in reality, could be manipulated with rhetorical techniques to give the best impression of the writer. Thus, Donne capitalizes upon the concept of letters

as a true representation of an essential self in order to fashion rhetorically a "self" that will be approved and accepted by his patroness.

Once having rhetorically positioned himself within Bedford's aristocratic world by verse letter, Donne asserts his power as author to isolate his socially superior patroness within a microcosm of his own making, allowing him greater power to manipulate his relationship with the Countess by controlling the distance between his patroness and himself in the verse letter. Chapter two will examine Donne's ever-changing "positionings" as he demonstrates his ability to create and change the fiction of the verse letter, drawing the Countess closer to him rhetorically and, he hopes, actually.

Once proving that the social distance between his patroness and himself can be rhetorically bridged, Donne demonstrates his ability to function within that charmed circle of the court by framing his verse letters to the concerns of the Countess's personal life and court career. Chapter three explores Donne's methods of fashioning himself a courtier, drawing from Castiglione's recommendations for the perfect courtier.

Among the necessary skills for success at court is the ability to maintain the fiction, however false, of an idealized court society while dealing with the sordid realities of a immoral monarch. Success in such a world dictates conforming to a different set of morals, so that virtue for a court lady like the Countess is knowing how far to dare in order to remain "on this side sinne." Chapter four pays tribute to Donne's portrayal in the verse letters of these contradictory aspects of "being" and "seeming" in the Jacobean court in general and in Bedford's skillful maintenance of her high position within that court.

In demonstrating his expertise of court life in his verse letters to Bedford, Donne also shows his understanding of the intricacies of the patronage system he wishes to enter with her help. He uses the verse letters as emissaries between himself and his patroness in order to begin and maintain a client-patroness relationship. Also, the subject of these verse letters is the growing relationship between the two, as well as the general interdependence and relative worth of client and patron in the Jacobean patronage system. The letters, then, serve as metacommunicative links between Donne and the Countess, since their intermediary form mirrors their subject, the necessity of intermediaries for court success. Chapter five examines the metacommunicative aspects of the letters as Donne proves to Bedford his understanding of the complex system of court patronage and of her success there.

Because we will view the five verse letters within the various contexts of Bedford's life and of Donne's relation to those contexts, the readings of the poems are necessarily fragmented. Chapter six attempts a summary reading of the verse letters, synthesizing the rhetorical methods Donne utilizes as he seeks to enter and function within Bedford's world. A brief look at Donne's later ecclesiastical career and writings in light of the verse letters reveals that, though the Dean of St. Paul's sought a higher Patron, he never ceased his search for preferment.

The originality and complexity of each of the five poems that are the subject of this dissertation are hardly evident in brief paraphrases; however, these brief initial summaries and explanations of each letter are intended to facilitate the discussion of the letters as a group in the following chapters.

"Reason is our Soules left hand" is an introductory verse letter in which Donne expresses his desire to know the Countess better. Positing her as divinity itself, he

explains that because of his extreme distance from Bedford (social as well as physical), he can only know her and love her through faith. Though faith may be a superior means to love, Donne seeks to balance faith with reason, not so much to increase his faith in the Countess but to understand and express his love for her. In order to ascertain rational reasons why Bedford is so loved by all, Donne scrutinizes her friends, actions, preferences, and literary interests, but is stymied in his attempt, since the reasons for his love grow so far beyond rational comprehension that he must again fall back on faith.

Donne can simply state the irrefutable fact that the Countess is good. He attributes her intrinsic goodness to her God-given birth and beauty which serve as a preserving balm. But he praises Bedford for actively improving herself by adding learning, religion, and virtue, which have strengthened her natural balm into a mithridate or antidote, preventing and curing harm. The Countess does not really need a cure, however, since she is an angel in woman's form: these active qualities serve her more as refreshing nourishment than as needed medicine. And as angel, Bedford is not only a masterwork of God but also an intermediary between God and man. Therefore Donne implores his patroness to be benevolent in her return to heaven by joining her life on earth to her eternal life in heaven, making "one life of two," since Donne would prefer to see his patroness in heaven even though she could do him much good on earth.

Even in a literal paraphrase of this verse letter, Donne's extravagant hyperbole and "violent yoking together of dissimilar images" for which he is renowned are plainly evident. But the subliminal meanings and ulterior motives for Donne's various references only become clear in light of Bedford's personal life and interests, her career

in court, and her relationship with her protege, Donne. In what ways was Donne so far from his patroness that he could only know her through blind faith? Who were these "Saints" glorified by Bedford's favor? For which "deeds, accesses, and restraints" and literary interests was Bedford known? What are the preserving aspects of the Countess's "birth and beauty," and how and why did she add her mithridatic qualities? As we view Donne's words against the background of Bedford's personal life and interests, we will see how the verse letters are not generic epistolary exercises but very personal correspondences.

The verse letter "You have refin'd mee," immediately following "Reason is the soules right hand" in most manuscripts where both appear, suggests a further stage in Donne's relations with the Countess, for he posits himself at her country estate, Twickenham, and proclaims that she has raised his level of awareness so that now he understands that worth is not intrinsic but relative to a thing's usefulness or rarity. Thus Bedford's virtue is most valuable, since most rare, at court, while her beauty is most rare and valuable in the country. In the country, the Countess is a sun-like divinity, bringing daylight and loveliness wherever she goes, and creating a new world and new creatures (including Donne). With Bedford in the country, in fact, the normal center of the world, the court, becomes the mere outskirts following a lesser sun, while all flock to Twickenham to offer praise and services to the true deity, the Countess. Yet Donne admits that he does not wish to worship her inner soul but to study her exterior beauty, as even nonreligious travelers wish to view beautiful and interesting churches for their aesthetic qualities, not their sacredness. In keeping with this religious metaphor, Donne compares his patroness to the Escorial, one of the most magnificent religious palaces.

Donne begins to blend theological with literary metaphors, finding in Bedford all rare and prophetic writings, as if she were the expurgated Book of Fate. In calling her the transcript of both good and lovely, Donne begins to join together the Countess's exterior beauty and her internal virtue, for he declares that her actions and her intentions are one. Anticipating that his praise of such a marvelous unity might be misinterpreted as flattery, Donne decides to turn from Bedford's complete fusion of beauty and virtue and return to her exterior loveliness, which can be plainly seen and believed. He ends by linking together Bedford and her Twickenham estate as the story of beauty, comparing them to paradise with its resident cherubim.

Donne's obvious attention to exteriors in this poem reflects the Jacobean concern with appearance, interpretation, and misinterpretation. How can Donne justify his claim that Bedford is the unity of "good and lovely" if he insists on concentrating on her "edifice"? How were exteriors used as true indications of inner worth, and how were they manipulated for desired effect? We will explore how the whole issue of "being" and "seeming" in the Jacobean court and in Bedford's own life affects our interpretation of Donne's emphasis on appearance in the verse letters.

A more occasional verse letter, "T'Have written then" begins in the form of an apology from Donne to Bedford for not answering one of her letters. He expresses the dilemma of responding to her letter immediately and committing the spiritual sin of Simony, paying for sacred things; or not responding immediately and committing the civil wrong, ingratitude. He compounds his quandary by admitting that, even if he did answer Bedford's letter in an attempt to repay her correspondence, even if he gave all that he had, he, as "nothing," would still have all to pay and would remain even more in the Countess's debt by being permitted to write to her. Although he cannot equal

Bedford's kindness, he hopes he can be of some good to her, as barren grounds might at least produce stone if not gold, or as pagan temples might be converted into Christian churches. He credits the Countess with sanctifying his poetry, with giving him, a stranger, a home, and with teaching him that virtue is plainly present in the world. Recounting the ill reputation that courtiers suffered at the time, Donne claims that Bedford's goodness saves both her female sex and the Jacobean court from damnation.

Yet, because the Countess is so worthy, she humbly does not believe her goodness, so Donne asks his patroness instead to contemplate with him the evils of mankind. Donne's diatribe against man's misuse of God's gifts stresses the incumbrance of the body upon the soul. After this lamentation of man's ignorance and evil, Donne states that his letter rests on two "truths" that the Countess refuses to believe: her virtue, and the evil of mankind. He admits that too much virtue is not good since it prevents her from knowing her own goodness, and also lessens her compassion for others' ills since she is not aware of these ills. At first, Donne admits that Bedford does possess "wise degrees of vice," but abruptly changes his position, belittling his previous words as "riddles." He acknowledges that vice is useful in some circumstances, as when statesmen use evil means to good ends, but that the Countess has no need of vice, since she has no evil to overcome. He ends in urging her to continue vice-free, only adding virtue as refreshment.

Why does Donne transform this verse letter of compliment into a metaphorical maze? The discussion on possible reasons for such abrupt changes and reversals in Donne's development of the verse letters will reveal how his convolutions of wit contribute to the self-image of skillful courtier he wishes to present.

Donne portrays himself as a complete non-being in "To the Countesse of Bedford At New-yeares Tide." Using the occasion of the in-between state of the change of years as an emblem of himself, he admits neither owing the past year thanks for good fortune, nor trusting the new year with hopes of success. But again, Donne changes his thoughts, for he concedes that even these perplexing times revealed to him the Countess of Bedford, and so he will repay the favor by immortalizing the Countess in verse. Even this traditional poetic promise does not work for Donne, however, for instead of his verse preserving his patroness's fame, the powerful extract of her name alchemically destroys his verse. Her goodness, truthfully expressed in his poetry, would be so unbelievable that the poetry would disappear, disgracing the very subject he meant to praise. Even if the praise were accepted, no one would believe such a lowly being as Donne could know or adequately express such magnificence. Therefore, Donne decides, the best action to take for the good of his patroness is to leave the poem altogether and turn to God to make the poem worthy of its subject. God, not Donne, will instruct Bedford in displaying her gifts, and in the various maneuverings and differing morals governing success in court. He will advise the Countess in moderating her emotions, appearances, and intentions, so that she will have little need of regret or contrition. With assurance, then, of Bedford's continued enrollment in the Book of the Elect, Donne will celebrate with his patroness a joyful new year.

Why would Donne use as a primary theme the inability to repay favor, and what are the implications of this perpetual cycle of increasing debt for an aristocratic court lady like Bedford? And why would Donne belittle himself to the extreme that he must rhetorically leave the poem altogether in order to save it? We will see that Donne's expressions of humility and inability to recompense his patroness in the verse

letters are only two of many rhetorical and actual techniques recommended for the perfect courtier by Castiglione and others.

Donne explores the relativity of worth, explaining the paradox that honor can only come from lower beings to higher, in "Honour is so sublime perfection." Using examples from theology, chemistry, geology, and alchemy, Donne advises Bedford not to worry about the social status of her praisers, citing God Himself, who welcomes the lowliest worshiper. Donne praises the Countess for her superior body that serves as an amber drop or the mythical "specular stone," truthfully revealing her virtuous soul. Thus, Bedford's outward appearance and her inner goodness are her equal concern.

Donne then seems to shift his subject by following this praise with a definition of virtue as the ability to "know and dare," or the ability to unify discretion, attention to worldly success, and zeal or religion, attention to spiritual concerns. These two should form one unified whole, like a perfect circle. However, if Donne must divide the two within the Countess, then he suggests that spiritual concerns govern her intentions, while worldly propriety governs her ways. He encourages his patroness to continue her ways and ends, without jealousy or regret, for she is above reproach.

Donne's discussion on the relative worth of lower beings has obvious implications for him as suitor to an important patroness like the Countess of Bedford. We will see how Donne's use of alchemical imagery in several of the verse letters fits in perfectly with his self-portrayal as a lowly creature, and his hopes of advancement and "sublimation" by Bedford within the patronage system.

My view of the verse letters to Bedford, which emphasizes their purposefulness and particularity, questions the assertions of previous commentators that lump all of Donne's verse letters int a kind of "generic" epistolary exercise in which, according to

Barbara Lewalski, "the patrons and patronesses can be substituted one for another since the hyperbolic topoi do not belong to any individual as such: they are recognitions of what heaven can make of any piece of human clay . . ." (Donne's Anniversaries 56). An anonymous commentator writing on these epistles in 1823 is even more vehement: "Everyone of his correspondents is, without exception, 'wisest, virtuest, best.' It is as if his letters had been composed at leisure, and kept ready, cut and dried, till wanted" (Cameron 370). Yet Donne's verse letters to the Countess of Bedford are much more than insincere, generic encomiastic utterances but are viable and personal mediators in a developing client-patroness relationship. Thus, viewing the verse letters against the various contexts of Bedford's life and Donne's hopes adds entirely new dimensions to the interpretation and enjoyment of the verse letters to Bedford, transforming them from insincere encomiastic commonplaces to purposeful, personal transactions between two skillful players in the game of court.

CHAPTER 2

". . . our letters are ourselves":

Donne's Letters as Representations of the Self

John Donne has been the subject of numerous works that attempt to define his essence. Even the titles of some of these studies demonstrate the variety of "selves" evident in his life and/or works: John Donne: Conservative Revolutionary (Andreasen), John Donne, Petrarchist (Guss), Donne: A Spirit in Conflict (Hardy), Grace to a Witty Sinner (LeComte), Donne the Craftsman (Legouis), The Monarch of Wit (Leishman), John Donne, Coterie Poet (Marotti), and The Soul of Wit (Roston). Likewise, biographers have offered diverse and often contradictory analyses of Donne's most important patroness, Lucy Russell, the Countess of Bedford. She is described as "vain, generous, and bountiful to excess" (Granger 171), a woman whose "vanity and extravagance met with no check" (Pennant 353), but whose reputation can prompt sincere defense: "That her habits were profuse, no one would deny, but probably both her means and her expenditure have been exaggerated; at all events she was a munificent patron of the arts and an encourager of literary merit . . ." (Cornwallis, xix). To one of those encouraged, she was "a learned and a manly soule" (Jonson, Epigram LXXVI). Like Donne, Bedford projects a variety of images: courtier, masquer, learned lady, poet, patroness, shrewd businesswoman, and devout Calvinist (Lewalski, "Lucy, Countess of Bedford"). The literary link between these two seemingly protean personalities, and the subject of this dissertation, is the series of verse letters Donne addressed to his patroness in the years 1607-1612.

Donne and Bedford shared more than a simple poet-patroness relationship. She, of course, had other proteges, but more than these other clients, Donne shared Bedford's ability to view the self as a possibility, not a given, and, like the Countess, Donne dared to fashion the self to the situation at hand to gain the best effect, the most benefit. The product of this "self-fashioning" (to use Greenblatt's term) is a unique combination of life and rhetoric, a certain theatricality in speech or action. Because a successful courtier is never off-stage, both Donne and Bedford attempted to stylize their entire lives according to the present audience and circumstance.

In analyzing key texts from the early modern period, Lanham defines those who adopt such a stance as "rhetorical man":

> Rhetorical man is an actor; his reality public, dramatic. His sense of identity, his self, depends on the reassurance of daily histrionic reenactment. He is thus centered in time and concrete local event. The lowest common denominator of his life is a social situation. And his motivations must be characteristically ludic, agonistic. He thinks first of winning, of mastering the rules the current game enforces. He assumes a natural agility in changing orientations. . . . He is thus committed to no single construction of the world; much rather, to prevailing in the game at hand. . . . Rhetorical man is trained not to discover reality but to manipulate it. Reality is what is accepted as reality, what is useful. (Lanham 2-4)

Thus the rhetorical view of life conceives of reality as fundamentally dramatic, and man as fundamentally a role player. Rather than possessing an essential "self," the rhetorical man or woman actively fashions a contrived self that changes and adjusts according to the situation. I contend that Donne and Bedford shared this rhetorical view of life, fashioning themselves according to the game at hand, and that Donne capitalized on that common vision in his verse letters to Bedford by showing himself able, at least rhetorically, to function within the contexts of her life. These verse letters, then, are rhetorical embodiments of a rhetorical view of life.

The blending of rhetoric and behavior is common in Renaissance courtesy literature, which began to develop at a time when an exclusive sense of aristocratic identity was being stolen, or at least encroached upon, by ambitious young men who were not born to this aristocratic class, like Donne himself (Whigham, Ambition 5). As movement across the gap between ruling and subject class was becoming increasingly possible, elite identity was becoming something to be achieved rather than ascribed, and courtesy literature offered ambitious people like Donne and Bedford what Pierre Bourdieu calls a "repertoire of rules," or what sociologists consider a "role," or a predetermined set of discourses and actions appropriate to a particular "stage-part" (Bourdieu 2). An exploration of the "role" best suited to an ambitious courtier is perhaps epitomized in Castiglione's The Courtier. In this influential work, the noble friends who inhabit the Court of Urbino occupy their abundant leisure by envisioning the perfect courtier. Their discussion makes clear that the courtier they fashion is a rhetorical man, whose artifices of eloquence structure his very life, and whose every action is chosen for its effect on his audience.

Another important work that connects literary skill and effective behavior is Angel Day's popular The English Secretorie (1586, 8 editions by 1626). A more obvious handbook for those seeking preferment, it offers advice on effective epistolary composition in order to train court administrators. Day's categories of epistles anatomize the facets of court conduct: hortatory, suasory, concilatory, petitory, commendatory, and amatory modes. And Day suggests that epistolary skills that enable one to perform well as a secretary may also bring new employment. That is, one may speak well of a subject and of one's own expressive skills at the same time (Whigham, "The Rhetoric" 866). Donne himself tried this route to success, accepting employment

as chief secretary under Sir Thomas Egerton, Lord Keeper, in 1597. (See Bald 93-127). In rhetorical theory, this reflexive attention to style is called "epideictic," the mode of rhetoric concerned with "the ceremonial oratory of display" (Aristotle 32). But whereas Aristotle meant this mode mainly for ceremonial occasions, when a certain amount of ornateness was appropriate to the subject matter, the Renaissance use denotes a mode of writing that calls attention less to the subject and more to the virtuosity of the writer.

The result of this mixture of rhetoric and self-presentation in letter form is a kind of conflicting interpretation of the letter as a traditionally sincere portrayal of an essential self, but at the same time, as a possibly manipulated portrayal of a rhetorical self. The familiar letter, written in plain and straightforward style, has been associated traditionally with sincerity, as first century rhetorician Demetrius commented: "It may be said that everybody reveals his own soul in his letters. In every other form of composition it is possible to discern the writer's character, but in none so clearly as in the epistolary" (quoted in Palmer 74). This emphasis on letters as sincere presentations of an essential self was especially helpful during the Tudor and Stuart reigns because of the importance of a courtier's presence for maintaining and advancing his position in the centralized London court. The delicate checks and balances of the Renaissance patronage system necessitated constant monitoring by both client and patron alike in order to secure power and favor, while the absolutist emphasis on "royal presence" made court attendance seem an end in itself. Few courtiers and would-be courtiers could afford a permanent London lifestyle; also, most had outlying estates and concerns that demanded their attention at least part of the year. Through use of letters, a client like Donne could not only advance his position through exhibitions of

his rhetorical skill, but could initiate and maintain important relationships through supposedly sincere depictions of the self he would like to present. He cuts through time, space, and the barriers of social hierarchy to form a relationship with another simply by locating his name and his addressee on the same sheet of paper (Maurer, "The Poetical Familiarity" 193). Then, once in this rhetorical relationship of the letter, he can justify his intrusion by relating the contents to mutual concerns that are perhaps only mutual because of the letter itself.

Donne's own correspondence often protests the importance of letters as sincere portrayals of the author, conveyances of personal feelings, and essential nurturers of a friendship. To "Sr. G. M.," he wrote, "No other kinde of conveyance is better for knowledge, or love . . . . But it is in the other capacity which must make mine acceptable that they are also the best conveyers of love" (Donne, Letters 105-107). To the Countess of Bedford, Donne describes letters as the means "by which we deliver over our affections, and assurances of friendship, and the best faculties of our souls" (Letters 23). He protests his sincerity to "Sir H. G. [Henry Goodyer]":

> Letters have truly the same office, as oaths. As these amongst light and empty men, are but fillings and pauses, and interjections, but with weightier, they are sad attestations: So are Letters to Some complement, and obligation to others. For mine, as I never authorized my servant to lie on my behalfe, (for if it were officious in him, it might be worse in me) so I allow my letters much lesse that civill dishonesty, both because they go from me more considerately, and because they are permanent; for in them I may speak to you in your chamber a year hence before I know not whom, and not her my selfe. They shall therefore ever keep the sincerity and intemeralenesse [sic] of the fountain, whence they are derived. (Letters 114-15)

In a time when physical presence was often impossible, letters for Donne served as intermediaries, go-betweens, to keep relationships alive: letters "nourish bodies of friendship" ("To Sir G. F.," Letters 74); writing letters often "is a sacrifice, which

though friends need not, friendship doth" ("To my most worthy friend Sir H. Goodere," Letters 116). Yet because these letters are to those who offer benefaction as well as friendly interchange, Donne's words can only be taken as part of a strategy for winning over his correspondent.

To his correspondents, then, Donne presents his letters as truthful and unrhetorical representations of his essential self. To the Countess of Bedford, he sends a letter, the conveyer of his noble love, "so like my soul, that as that affection, of which it is the messanger, begun in me without my knowing when my soul began, so it shall continue as long as that" (Letters 24). Donne writes Martha Garet that he is "wrapping up" his heart in his letter in order to visit her (Letters 41). He compares his letters to leaves whose root is his heart, from which they suck such good affections that they give "ever true impressions thereof" ("To Sir H. G.," Letters 115). He comments to Henry Goodyer that his letters are "conveyances and deliverers of me to you" (Letters 109). And to "G. G. Esquire," Donne directly states his point: ". . . our letters are ourselves and in them absent friends meet" (Letters 240). But as we will see in the verse letters to Bedford, Donne uses this interpretation of letters as extensions of an essential self to his advantage, as he rhetorically fashions and manipulates his various self-portrayals for desired effect within the verse letters.

Perhaps more relevant to his verse letters to the Countess of Bedford are Donne's comments about the epistle as a mutual exchange; they are not a gist of the news or of court gossip, but a means to an ultimate end: friendship, or at least a reciprocally advantageous client-patron relationship. Marotti calls Donne's encomiastic epistles "phatic utterances" (228). Like prayers, they serve as means of keeping open a channel of communication and thus maintaining favorable circumstances for continued

transactions between speaker and addressee. Letters, wrote Donne, have "for their principall office, to be seals and testimonies of mutuall affection, but the materialls and fuell of them should be a confident and mutuall communicating of those things which we know" ("To Sir H. Wootton," Letters 120). The key word here is "mutual." A letter, unlike a dedication or a commendatory poem, implies an exchange, a transaction, a dialogue. Donne admits he expects and receives something in return for his letters, whether it be the sustenance of an intellectual and spiritual interchange or more monetary returns:

> How shall I then who know nothing write Letters? Sir, I learn knowledge enough out of yours to me. I learn that there is truth and firmness and an earnestness of doing good alive in the world; and therefore, since there is so good company in it, I have not so much desire to go out of it, as I had, if my fortune would afford me any room in it. ("To Sir H. Wootton," Letters 120)

Composed in the plainspeaking style with roots in the egalitarian mode of humanist literary exchange, Donne's letters follow those precepts set forth by John Hoskyns in Directions, a work intended to instruct young Inns-of-Court men in the proper language of social transactions. Hoskyns recommended a style that is brief, clear, and lively, a style that could be adapted to advantage in complimentary verse or encomiastic verse epistles, where it could serve to verify the truth behind the worn cliches of praise (Marotti 33-34). And Donne utilizes this style of writing to celebrate in his letters, especially to those coterie friends who shared his years at the university and Inns of Court, the fact that the letters are themselves celebrations of mutual understanding and friendship: "You (I think) and I am much of one sect in the Philosophy of love" ("To Sir H. Wootton," Letters 121); "Therefore I have placed my love wisely where I need communicate nothing" ("To Sir H. G.," Letters 115). So the

letter for Donne is less often a means of communicating information and more a testimony of like-mindedness and reciprocal affection.

I believe Donne's contention that the epistle is the best means of representing the essential self and of expressing comraderie and mutual interest prompted him to approach the Countess of Bedford and to maintain their relationship through the verse letter. Unlike Jonson, Drayton, and others who praised Bedford and sought her patronage to advance their literary careers, Donne was not and did not want to be a professional writer (See Marotti passim). He wanted more than a poet-patroness relationship with Bedford. Therefore, instead of maintaining a more static and distant relationship with encomiastic or sentimental lyric poetry, he chose the more interactive verse letter form. As letters, according to Donne's surviving correspondence, they would supposedly reveal the writer in his real person, but as verse, they afforded him the freedom to fashion himself and his relationship with the Countess in a manner both obsequious and playful.

In their very form, the verse letters represent Donne's position and his purpose at the time of his writing. Like Donne, who lived as an outsider among those in court circles, the verse letter occupied an ambiguous place on the periphery of literature: it was not considered belles-lettres like the pretty fictions of many courtly pastorals and sonnets, nor was it interpreted as factual communication. In fact, in its freedom of content and form, the verse letter is not a fixed genre but is better regarded as a style of writing, a rhetorical mode of address that is agreeably adaptable to such poetic types as satire or the funeral elegy, which are defined principally by their subject matter and themes, or the sonnet, which is defined by its metrical and strophic form (Cameron 37). With its ostensible purpose of "correspondence," the verse letter openly

declares its basis in actual experience, and supposedly reveals the poet in his own person. Its appearance as a literary form at the end of the sixteenth century coincides with the contemporary anti-rhetorical bias toward matter, not words, reflected in Montaigne's scorn for those who admired Cicero's letters only for their style: "Fie on that eloquence, which leaves us with a desire of it, and not of things" (Montaigne, Essays XXIX, i, 266, quoted in Palmer 74). In other verse letters, and in his Satires, Donne echoes this disdain of ornament, characterizing his verse epistles as "harsh verse" (To Mr. T. W., "Hast thee harsh verse") that is more prosaic than poetic: "'Twill be good prose although the verse be evill" (To Mr. T. W., "All hail sweet Poet," Satires 27). Similarly, in his second satire, Donne objects to those who followed the literary fashions of the day, including the courtly practice of composing Petrarchan lyrics (Marotti 41).

It was because of the interpretation of the verse letter as a form truthfully revealing its author and conveying philosophical truths with emphasis on content, not rhetoric, that Donne approached the Countess of Bedford and nurtured their relationship with this particular style of writing. The fluidity of meter and subject matter rhetorically represents the letters' author, an ambitious, would-be courtier without position or purpose in life. The presupposition of the verse letter's emphasis on correspondence and content over flashy rhetoric allowed Donne access to Bedford's courtly world as he contemplated truths pertaining to the spheres in which she moved. In fact, however, Donne used the anti-rhetorical stance of the verse letter to display his wit and his rhetorical ability to negotiate those spheres he so desperately wanted to enter. As comments from his other correspondences demonstrate, Donne portrays his letters as revealing a writer's true soul--his true being. As evidenced in his verse letters

to Bedford, however, Donne dazzlingly displays a myriad of possible selves in his letters, yet not static but constantly changing, all in relation to and somewhat dependent upon his correspondent. If Donne's letters to Bedford reveal their author at all, they present a stylized and planned view of an artist in the process of carefully fashioning not only the verse letter and himself, but also the entire relationship he anticipated with the Countess.

He, therefore, used these verse letters not only as artifacts of praise to his patroness, but more importantly as rhetorical means to enter into and become a part of Bedford's social circles The letters not only define their present relationship and serve as ways of expressing hope and faith in a closer relationship to come, but are actually the means by which that closer relationship can come about. Gregory Bateson defines this type of discourse as "metacommunication," or a form of communication in which the real subject of discourse, regardless of what is actually being said, is the relationship between the speakers (178). In Donne's verse letters to Bedford, both author and intended reader have a social relationship apart from, and yet created by, the text, and that relationship can be evoked as a context of composition for author, and of reception or interpretation by reader. Thus, while Donne presents himself as someone lower on the social hierarchy contemplating Bedford, a "divinity," he brings to mind the entire hierarchical system that separates him from the Countess and from the success he desires. Yet as he works his way in, out, and around this system through his playful development of the poems, he realizes the possibilities for social mobility at the time as well as his own potential for success in Bedford's world. He poses as so far beneath the Countess so that he cannot be seen, only to demonstrate how necessary low forms are to those above. In this manner he not only relates himself to

Bedford by their extreme positions, but also implies the total interdependence of poet and patron in the patronage system. And when he assumes the courtier's role of offering careful observation and advice to a monarch, he demonstrates his knowledge of the complex workings of the court, where "seeming" is not always "beeing." By thus demonstrating his ability to negotiate all the complexities of Lucy Russell's world, and his value to her in this world, Donne hoped to prove his worth both as protege and as friend.

In order to enter into Bedford's aristocratic and courtly world, Donne had to show that the generally impenetrable social barriers between his patroness and himself could be crossed. Donne accomplishes this by isolating the Countess and himself within a microcosm of his own making, the verse letter. Once within this small world, Donne, no longer subordinate but now empowered as rhetorical creator, can position and reposition the Countess in relation to himself, drawing them closer together. We will see how Donne rhetorically manipulates relative "positionings" in the verse letter in order to bridge the social gap between Bedford and himself, creating and maintaining a relationship between both client and patroness, and between friends.

CHAPTER 3

"Positionings" in Donne's Verse Letters to Bedford

Just as Donne portrayed and celebrated the mutual understanding he enjoyed with a coterie of mostly male correspondents in both prose and verse letters, he imaged a reciprocal and personal relationship with the Countess of Bedford in his verse epistles to her. The letters are not simply generic panegyric recognitions of God in every human (Lewalski, Donne's "Anniversaries" 56) nor are they "patently mechanical" pseudo-religious encomia that are "grim, toneless" exertions like "mental arithmetic" (Cary 77). Instead, Donne fits his praise and thoughts to Bedford as an individual and to their relationship together.

Like Bedford, many of Donne's closest friends from his university and Inns of Court days were above him in social standing, yet Donne recognized the possibility of friendship between unequals in his dealings with these gentlemen, especially Henry Goodyer, with whom Donne corresponded weekly and to whom Donne probably owed his introduction to the Countess of Bedford (Bald 170). He writes Goodyer, emphasizing their difference in fortune:

> Though I know you have many worthy friends of all rankes, yet I adde something, since I which am of none, would fain be your friend too. There is some of the honour and some of the degrees of a Creation, to make a friendship out of nothing. Yet, not to annihilate my self utterly (for though it seem humbleness, yet it is a work of as much almightinesse, to bring a thing to nothing, as from nothing) though I be not of the best stuffe for friendship, which men of warm and durable fortunes only are, I cannot say, that I am not of the best fashion, if truth and honesty be that; which I must ever exercise, towards you, because I learned it of you: for the conversation with worthy men, and of good example, though it sow not vertue in us, yet produceth and ripeneth it. (Letters 65-66)

Donne demonstrates in this letter many of the techniques evident in his verse letters to the Countess of Bedford: he protests his inadequacy or even "nothingness," requiring creation through his friendship with the correspondent; he claims sincerity; he praises his correspondent's virtue; and he positions the correspondent in the role of teacher of such virtue. This view of friendship as a teacher-student relationship not only parallels the social inequality of Donne and Bedford, but echoes the classical idea of friendship. Socrates thought his mission in the world was teaching, and linked virtue and knowledge as one component in his lessons. For him, the relation between teacher and pupil was wholly that of friends, as Laurens Mills comments: "Friendship was the basic condition for instruction; no tuition fee was considered, but instead there was the idea of communism of property between pupil and teacher" (2).

From being a condition of instruction, friendship became for Socrates and others an object of instruction: its origin, its nature, and the means of its cultivation were investigated, as well as its moral and ethical bearings. According to Socrates, virtue is the fundamental, though not only, condition of friendship. Aristotle added that equality of nature and circumstances is an important condition of friendship, but the most essential kind of equality is that of interest (Mills 7). Thus, as Donne discusses in his correspondences the nature of friendship and its importance in instructing virtue, he not only praises his correspondent but also helps to nurture that common interest that bridges the gap between social unequals and creates a friendship. Through his verse letters to Bedford, Donne attempts this same creation--"to make a friendship out of nothing," for as Arthur Marotti comments, it is in this "nothing" that the interpersonal transaction can take place (22).

This chapter will explore how Donne used his "nothingness" to create, by contrast, a relationship with Bedford, who is set apart from him because of her lineage. But Donne, as ambitious courtier, must have also realized that increasing social mobility in the Renaissance offered chances for advancing beyond the set ontological notion of social identity provided absolutely and unchangeably at birth, prior to and independent of human action (Whigham, Ambition and Privilege 32). Thus, in approaching the Countess of Bedford, who was one of the golden few whose wealth and fame were birthrights, Donne took great pains in the verse letters to position himself in relation to the Countess in order to demonstrate his understanding of her identity by birth into the English aristocracy and of his relative lowliness in that social hierarchy. In the course of the poems, however, it becomes clear that positions change and players move, reflecting both Donne and Bedford's ability to fashion themselves to gain the most benefit from the situation at hand. In the verse letters, as in society at the time, the scholastic concept of esse, or absolute self. becomes esse sequitur operare, or identity derived from behavior (Whigham, Ambition and Privilege 3), allowing Donne and Bedford to meet on more equal terms, for though Bedford's position on the social hierarchy is far above that of her protege, Donne controls the rhetoric that expresses the relationship.

Donne's first strategy in drawing the Countess into a relationship is to isolate his patroness and himself in a rhetorical world of his own making. In this microcosm of the verse letter, Donne as author can position the Countess and himself at extreme levels on the hierarchy and yet still posit a relationship by their very opposition, joined as names on the same page. In the little world of Donne's verse letter, "Reason is our Soules left hand" (Satires 90-91), Bedford is pure divinity, while Donne is a distant

student of theology humbly studying her through her "Saints" or friends. Milgate remarks that this is probably the first verse epistle he wrote to the Countess, since it has the tone of an introductory address (Satires 253). Donne maintains the image of Bedford as divinity through stanza 4, which expresses that the number of reasons why Bedford is "lov'd by all" is infinite and impossible to comprehend through fallible reason, but then he begins to bring the Countess closer to earth as he suggests the possibility of heretics denying her goodness. Though Donne admits she could brave any attack as well as "high top'd and deep rooted" rocks could withstand the assault of waves, the image Donne employs descends from heavenly goddess to earthly mountain. By stanza 6, Bedford is a living being requiring "Balsamum," a healing fluid which preserved the body, to keep it fresh and new. Donne attributes this balm to Bedford's "birth and beauty," her birthright in the English aristocratic hierarchy. It will be helpful to examine the implications of this birthright, which not only preserves Bedford but also separates her from her admiring protege, John Donne.

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The aristocratic circle into which Bedford was born was not a large one, especially during Queen Elizabeth's reign. Burghley counted no more than one hundred names among the inner core of the country's notables, peers, and gentlemen in a paper drawn up in 1597, and the assessment that counted all the county tax payers assessed at twenty pounds a year or more listed above eight hundred names (MacCaffrey 99). This was a political society who knew one another directly or indirectly and were almost all personally known to the leading ministers. Court was

the magnet drawing gentry from all over England into a common social nucleus. The sixty or so peers who inherited prestige and land formed the apex of society. Their privileges were large, and they moved in an atmosphere of almost reverential respect in a society which self-consciously glorified hereditary rank. They were generally politically conservative, and were assured by their birth of certain political positions and prizes, such as the Order of the Garter (England's highest order of knighthood) and ceremonial embassies to foreign royalties. As a group, the aristocracy considered themselves set apart from and above the "commonalty," and believed that this separation was not peculiar to English society, but was ordained by God "from the beginninge" (Bacon, Essays 46).

Lucy Russell joined this select group in 1581, born the second child of John Harington of Exton and Anne Kelway, and kinswoman to Sir Philip Sidney and the Countess of Pembroke (through her grandmother, Lucy Sidney) and to John Harington of Kelston, poet and translator of Ariosto (Lewalski, "Lucy" 53). More important for her future role in the court of King James, Lucy was also related to a Bruce of Scotland in the Harington ancestry (Byard 21). The Haringtons were a rising and prosperous family who were later nearly ruined by the honors showered upon them by King James. Their fate, in fact, demonstrates the financial straits experienced at the time by many of the aristocracy whose estates were crumbling under the necessity of maintaining extravagant lifestyles to defend their position against intrusion by the new wealth of a rising middle class (See Stone 42-44). In fact, most of Lucy Russell's experiences are typical of the aristocracy of the time. Her marriage was arranged, as was usual among the nobility where marriage joined estates, not individuals. The Haringtons determined a dowry and probably publicized it on the letter circuit (Byard

21). Substantial, if not bountiful, it included a large property, Minister Lovell, and 3,000 pounds. It obviously proved satisfactory to Anne Russell, Countess of Warwick, aunt and guardian to Edward Russell, Third Earl of Bedford. Actually, Lucy was not Warwick's first choice for her nephew but her third, after two other marriage negotiations fell through (Byard 20). At age thirteen, then, Lucy Harington became the Countess of Bedford, and as was the custom, probably left her twenty-one-year-old groom to return to her parents for a few months at least (Byard 22). John Harington of Kelston, namesake and cousin of Lucy's father, pays humorous tribute in the Apologie of his work, The Metamorphosis of Ajax, to her father's marriage negotiations: ". . . though he be a free-holder, yet he hath maried his daughter to one, that for a grandfather, for a father, for two uncles, and three or four aunts, may compare with most men in England" (Newdigate 60).

Margaret Byard details accounts from the "Bedford Memorials," the notes or memoranda of Lucy's husband Edward Russell, third Earl of Bedford, that reflect not only problems particular to the young couple, but also concerns shared by the entire aristocracy at this time ("The Trade of Courtiership"). The Earl and Countess began their marriage already in debt from past generations of Bedfords, and rapidly added their own expenses. They established residence in London, perhaps at Bedford House, and the expensive social appearances expected by members of their circle began. For example, in 1595 the Earl took part in a tilt for the Queen's accession day, November 17. For this semi-military pageant, a knight, costumed and armed, mounted, and attended by a suitable number of pages, similarly costumed and armed, would cost the Bedford estate hundreds of pounds. Two years later, the Earl attended ceremonies for the Order of the Garter, necessitating other showy accoutrements as well as splendid

and valuable gifts (22). Even family weddings proved a financial burden for the aristocracy. The Earl and Countess took part in the wedding of Anne Russell, the Earl's cousin, in 1600. It was a main event of the season, attended by Queen Elizabeth herself. This was another expensive presentation for the Bedfords, who were attired in wedding garments of gold and silver laces, satins, and jewels. And, of course, their gifts to the bridal couple had to be at least as magnificent as those the Countess much later gave to her goddaughter--500 pounds in gloves and 500 pounds in money (Byard 24).

Dealing with such expenses on a day-to-day basis often prompted members of the elite to take chances in order to improve or protect their lot. In 1601, the Earl became associated with Essex's disastrous rebellion against Queen Elizabeth, and was imprisoned in the Tower for a while and fined 20,000 pounds (later reduced to 10,000) (Byard 26). The Earl professed ignorance of the entire affair, and even Bald sidesteps the issue by explaining that the Earl "indiscreetly permitted himself to become involved" in the rebellion (171). But whether or not the Earl intended to aid the rebellion, his actions spelled disaster for the family's future. He was at first confined to his house in London, and later to his house at Chenies, and he was forbidden to come within six miles of the court (Byard 26). The Earl's banishment from court put the Bedfords in a frustrating circle. The court was the center of government and the only source for them, as for all courtiers, of the privileges, monopolies, and gifts that could enable them to enlarge income and recoup their losses. But even later under King James, when the Earl was once again in good standing, he rarely appeared at court again, saying he preferred the farm and stables that had made him "unfitt for better company" (Byard 26). Evidently, then, the Countess of Bedford's "birth and

beauty" did allow her automatic entrance into a privileged society and permitted an advantageous marriage with a titled nobleman; however, these accomplishments were due to no effort on Lucy's part, but just by virtue of her "being" who she was. Actually, had Lucy continued only "being" with her unsuccessful husband, she would probably have continued living in increasing debt, slipping into obscurity at her death in 1627.

But Bedford did not rest content with her aristocratic "being" but took active steps to salvage her fortune and assure her future success. Donne acknowledges the fact that the Countess accomplished much more than just maintaining the goodness and favor she acquired at birth in "Reason is our Soules left hand." Simply exhibiting beauty and gentility is passive good that can only be studied from afar, like the strength of "high top'd and deep rooted" rocks. But Bedford, Donne remarks in stanza 7, has taken her natural gifts and has added to them learning, religion, and virtue, fashioning herself into the source of active good for others, a "methridate" that not only exhibits good but accomplishes good. In the Countess's own life, this praise of active good matches her actions in 1603 that saved the Bedford family from ignominy and made the Countess herself into one of the most dazzling ladies in the court of Queen Anne. After the Earl of Bedford's Essex debacle, the Countess and her mother accomplished a brilliant and lucky coup immediately upon the death of Queen Elizabeth by hastening to Edinburgh (as did some other nobles and ladies) to pay their respects to James I and Queen Anne. Lucy was appointed at once to the queen's bedchamber, and Lord and Lady Harington were given charge of young Princess Elizabeth's education (an honor that practically drove them to bankruptcy) (Lewalski, "Lucy" 53). Thereafter, the Countess remained a rather independent and skillful

courtier, and became one of the most celebrated patronesses of the arts during the Stuart reign.

Donne wished to be a protege of this shrewd and successful patroness. In studying Bedford's "Saints," he implies that he, too, wished to be one of her friends whom her election glorifies, one of the recipients of her active good. Naming her "The first good Angell, since the worlds frame stood, / That ever did in womans shape appeare," Donne reconciles the static hierarchy with the possibilities of mobility proved by the active good of Bedford's own actions. He also implies his own hopes of advancement through the active good of his patroness. By calling her "Angell," Donne raises Bedford above the sublunary region in which all things are subject to decay and require "balsamum" to maintain life. Yet, in the hierarchy of angelic beings, which would have been common knowledge to one of Donne's background, "Angel" holds a specific function of active good, as opposed to the orders of Seraphim, Cherubim, and Thrones (who are contemplative); and Dominations, Virtues, and Powers (who are only potentially active--their psychological state is rather of an attitude than of an action). In the lowest and active order of angels, which also contains the Principalities and Archangels, Angels occupy the bottom rank, and they form the medium between the entire angelic hierarchy and man. In effect, they go on God's errands (Tillyard 49).

Thus, by calling Bedford an angel in woman's shape, he raises her above sublunary mutability and decay yet gives her human beauty and an intermediary position between God and man. In addition, Donne emphasizes Bedford's active good in advancing her own position in life and, potentially, his position. Once the reader accepts Bedford's changing positions in the microcosm of the poem--divinity, unassailable goodness, aristocrat, self-fashioner, and Angel, it is an easy leap to accept

Bedford's role of go-between in the macrocosm outside the poem, life at court, where Donne seeks preferment. In the context of the Jacobean court, as discussed in Chapter Four, the monarch is divinity, and Bedford, as Angel, can truly serve as "His Factor for our loves," using her active good to help Donne.

In his final exhortation to her to "do as you doe / Make your returne home gracious; and bestow / This life on that; so make one life of two," Donne requests her to continue this active good, employing a term relevant to a member of the aristocracy, "gracious." Among the many obligations expected from the nobility (like service in parliament, presence at court, and a pretentious wardrobe) was an ever-ready graciousness, shown in acts of generosity and hospitality. Those living on country estates demonstrated their graciousness by maintaining many servants, giving lavishly to charity, and keeping open house for neighbors, while those at court in London bought or rented expensive town homes and entertained noble guests with splendid suppers (Kelso, The Doctrine of the English Gentleman in the Sixteenth Century 89). Donne's use of the term "gracious," then, subtly reminds Bedford of her duties and expectations as a member of the English aristocracy to exhibit graciousness, and also, in her role as divinity, to bestow "grace," or favors, on others. Thus, in the literal meaning of these two lines, Donne encourages Bedford as angel to link her earthly life to her life in heaven, and "so make one life of two," even though it means Donne must do without her here on earth.

But since graciousness implies active good and hospitality toward others, these lines also have implications for Donne in the microcosm of the verse letter. By positioning the Countess closer to himself in the little world of this verse letter, Donne has rhetorically formed a relationship with her. His exhortation to Bedford to make her

"return home gracious" indicates Donne's desire to link their relationship, formed within this epistle, to their life in the macrocosm, so that they may also have a personal friendship outside the verse letter. By linking them both within the bonds of friendship, Bedford would "make one life of two." The final two lines express Donne's hopes, for no matter how close their relationship may be within the confines of the verse letter, Donne would prefer that closeness in the outside world. Thus Donne hopes the rhetorical friendship created by and within the verse letter will extend into their everyday lives.

Donne again uses his power as author to contract the world to his relationship with Bedford and to show his worth in that relationship in "You have refin'd mee," a verse letter that immediately follows the previous letter in manuscripts where both appear, suggesting a later stage in Donne's relations with the Countess (Satires 258). The poet posits himself at Twickenham, Bedford's country estate, so that even the setting of the verse letter draws Donne to Bedford as her invited guest. Again, in this verse epistle, he stresses the need for active good over passive virtue, tying his need for help to her inner qualities. He credits the Countess for "refining" him, an alchemical metaphor emphasizing Bedford's power to raise the poet to a higher level, especially in his ability to judge value. Because of the Countess, Donne says, he understands that the true value of "worthyest things" is not intrinsic but depends on how "they are circumstanc'd"; that is, true value is relative to a thing's rarity or usefulness in a particular situation. This idea could be taken as a criticism of the whole concept of the aristocracy as somehow set apart and above common man simply by reason of birth, yet Donne immediately turns the idea into a compliment to Bedford by comparing the relative value of her virtue and beauty in court and country. In court,

where vice prevails, her virtue is relatively more valuable, as in the country, away from the splendor of court, her beauty reigns. In the process of his praise, however, Donne simultaneously places himself in relationships with the Countess and justifies his own relative worth to her. At Court, just as Bedford's virtue raises her to such a "transcendent height" that she is beyond human sight, Donne's intrinsic "lowness" makes him virtually invisible there. Yet, as he proclaims in stanza 1, value is not intrinsic but relative, so that Donne can prove his worth at court by proving his usefulness to Bedford there. She needs him, "as darke texts need notes," to explain and proclaim her virtue to those who cannot comprehend such goodness: "To usher vertue, and say, This is shee" (12). Like the enigmatical question of whether a sound exists if there is no one to hear it, Donne implies that virtue does not truly exist if it cannot be seen, and since Bedford needs a lowly creature like Donne to make her virtue evident, he creates for himself an importance that essentially reverses his "lowness" altogether.

Likewise, in the country at Twickenham, Donne can prove his worth by describing Bedford's beauty, so rare in the rustic setting. To emphasize their relationship, Donne contracts the world to Bedford's country estate, where she is the Apollo-like divinity, controlling the seasons and bringing day as she arrives in her chariot of light. As virtue is virtually invisible in the vice-ridden court, Twickenham's beauty, passively hidden in its rustic setting, is "but a grave of spices" and "a thick close bud" until the active splendor of the Countess's presence releases the true loveliness of the country. Her radiance creates a "new world" with "new creatures," and Donne, as one of those creatures, follows the "new recknings" dictated by divinity Bedford, so that daytime is whenever she is present. With this image, Donne credits

the Countess with more than just refining his judgment as in stanza 1, but with actually creating him into a new being, so that his relationship with Bedford is now all-encompassing, eclipsing all life outside Twickenham. Even court is described as only "the'Antipodes" of Twickenham, serviced by a lesser light, Bedford's "Delegate, the vulgar Sunne." But here, at Twickenham, Donne sacrifices to the true divinity, the Countess, and whether he be in a position to preach and counsel (as "priest") or simply an instrument to sing her praise (as "organ"), Donne implies that he can be of worth to her.

As if to demonstrate his worth and his ability to reconcile the dualism he proposed between Bedford's virtue in court and beauty in the country, Donne playfully shifts positions in stanza 6, dichotomizing the Countess's qualities into body and soul. With this separation, the Countess is no longer pure divinity, but her beauty (body) is simply an "ediface" or "Temples frame" for the true "Deity," her "vertuous Soule." Donne now proposes a more concrete relationship, taking a pilgrimage to admire her physical attributes, her "eyes, hands, bosome," not to worship her abstract qualities. Yet, in describing Bedford's physical beauty as transparent "walls of tender christall" enfolding the virtue of her soul, Donne finds an image, popular in both neo-platonic and alchemical doctrine, reconciling the dualism of body and soul.

In neo-platonic philosophy popular during the Renaissance, and specifically in the influential The Book of the Courtier, both of which would be known to a learned lady like Bedford, outward beauty is a true indication of inner virtue (Tourney 52):

> I say that beauty cometh of God and is like a circle, the goodness whereof is the center. And therefore, as there can be no circle without a center, no more can beauty be without goodness. Whereupon doth very seldom an ill soul dwell in a beautiful body. And therefore is the outward beauty a true sign of the inward goodness, and in bodies this comeliness is imprinted, as it were, for a mark of the soul, whereby she

> is outwardly known; as in trees, in which the beauty of the buds giveth a testimony of the goodness of the fruit. (Castiglione 347)

Likewise, the pseudoscience of alchemy linked the spiritual and physical worlds in classifying substances in a hierarchy of purity. Because alchemists believed the external world and its creatures were indications or figures of the inner spiritual world, they also believed that the physical process of purifying metals was paralleled by a spiritual purification. They graded a metal according to how much divine spirit or "light of God" it contained. This light is usually eclipsed by the grossness of physical matter, but the purer a substance is, the more likely that light will shine through it. Therefore, a lack of density both denotes purity itself and reveals the spirit. Physical beauty then is not an accidental attribute in a woman but an outward sign of spiritual purity (Crawshaw 324-27).

In calling Bedford's body "christall" or transparent in "You have refin'd mee," Donne reconciles beauty and virtue by showing the body as a window into the soul. Donne's accomplishment in stanzas 6 to 10 is threefold: he acknowledges, through alchemical imagery, Bedford's position at the top of the social hierarchy, he praises Bedford as the perfect union of "good and lovely," and he demonstrates his rhetorical abilities and knowledge of popular court doctrine in his reconciliation of apparent dualities. Now in stanzas 11 and 12, Donne combines these ideas to affirm his worth to Bedford and to confirm their relationship.

His praises, he admits, might seem mere "Poetique rage, or flattery" in an age when all do not share common beliefs. At this time of compulsory uniformity in English religion and politics, free thought was actually diffused at Court more than is supposed, especially with the strengthening of the Puritan faction (Pearson 243). Thus Donne suggests that in this time of differing religious beliefs, Bedford could not be

sure that observers would recognize the unity of her beauty and virtue, whether at court or in country. He has already proven her need for him in stanza 2 to usher virtue in court, and in stanzas 6-9 to show her beauty in the country. In the final stanza, he proves his ability to reconcile the two. In Twickenham, he will disregard the appeal to the "higher Courts" in the hierarchy of man's judgement (reason and memory) and in his evaluation of Bedford, he will rely solely on his senses, which, though lower on the hierarchy of judgement, are relatively the best means of appreciating beauty. Yet Donne subtly uses the same neo-platonic idea of beauty revealing the soul in his association of Bedford with Twickenham. Both Twickenham and Bedford are "The story'of beauty," and reflect each other. One seeing the loveliness of Twickenham would naturally wish to see its inhabitant, as one in Paradise "would seeke the Cherubin," or as one judging the Countess with "senses decree" would seek to know her goodness. Donne then ends his epistle both demonstrating his ability to praise her union of "good and lovely," and requesting closer contact with this mistress of Twickenham.

"T'Have written then," dated by Milgate as late 1609 because of topical internal references (Satires, notes on ll. 67-68, 264-65), demonstrates a closer relationship between Donne and Bedford, if only because it indicates that the two were corresponding through prose letters by now. Through examinations of the dichotomies of vice and virtue, body and soul, Donne seeks to reconcile the dichotomy of his position as a "nothing" with Bedford's as entire "Commonwealth," and again to make the point that worth and good is not intrinsic but relative to each particular situation.

Initially, Donne phrases the letter as an apology for his delay in responding to the Countess's last letter. He structures his defense into the dilemma of choosing

between a "spirituall" and a "civill" wrong: "Simony," or sacrilegiously "paying" for her sacred epistle by writing too soon; or "thanklessenesse," seeming ungrateful to his patroness by not writing soon enough. Donne's way out of the dilemma is to posture as one so low that he could never afford repayment for her favors, even if he paid all that he had; in fact, being allowed to write to the Countess in gratitude is itself an honor that he again could never repay. Thus, Donne's letters to Bedford make him even more in her debt and more of a "nothing," than before, yet these letters set up a type of cycle of dependence that perpetuates and sustains their relationship.

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Bedford was one who would appreciate Donne's image of the circle of debt. By 1606, successive loans to finance the Countess and her husband's extravagant lifestyle plus the money borrowed for the Essex fine amounted to the unimaginable sum of 62,000 pounds, an amount twenty times more than the usual annual income for an earl (Byard 27). Yet the only means to raise money for an aristocrat, who lives off his name and not his abilities, is to seek preferment at court, requiring many additional expenses of extravagant clothing, servants, and entertainment. It is little wonder that the Countess threw herself into the gaiety and splendor of the court of Queen Anne, hoping to retrieve some of the family assets squandered by her inept, indecisive husband who was of little use in court life. Also, after the deaths of her father and brother in 1614, Bedford's needs grew even greater when she inherited the Harington's "broken estate," as she called it, and debts of 40,000 pounds (Byard 28). Her father, Lord Harington, had been ruined financially because he and Lady Harington were

made responsible for the care and education of the Princess Elizabeth. The annual pension allowed them by King James (1,500 pounds at first and later 2,500 pounds) was inadequate for the princess's expensive tastes. The expenses of her trousseau and wedding in the single year 1612-1613 left the Haringtons with a debt of 3,500 pounds (Hogrefe 140).

The Countess of Bedford had other family obligations even after inheriting the Harington estate. After the death of her sister, Lady Chichester, in 1615, Bedford felt obligated to arrange a marriage portion for Chichester's daughter, especially since she had promoted the marriage. For that settlement she gave up most of the property she had from her brother's will. At the same time she was involved in another family problem: Sir John Harington had brought suit against her mother, and the outcome of that suit would have a direct effect on her own finances (Hogrefe 141). Thus Bedford lived in constant and increasing debt.

Her letters to friend Lady Jane Cornwallis, in fact, echo the very sentiments of perpetual obligation that Donne expresses in "T'Have written then." On September 12, 1620, she explains to Cornwallis, who was often a source of money and goods, that she delayed writing her until she could return "that part of your wealth you have so long binne pleased to trust me with" (Cornwallis 71). After Cornwallis's gift of a jewel, on November 28, 1623, Bedford expresses appreciation by assuming the Donnean stance of claiming insufficiency: ". . . since I cannot thanke you enuffe, I will use no words to thanke you for at all" (Cornwallis 86). Also like Donne, Bedford tries to make her relationship with Cornwallis a reciprocal one, as it probably was. On October 4, 1618, she requests "som of the little white single rose rootes I saw att Brome" and any other "extraordinary" flowers they may have for her new garden at

Moor Park, and comments, "Thus you see itt is not good being too free an offerer to a free taker, but be not discouraged, for I shall be as free a requiter whensoever you shall make me know itt is in my power" (Cornwallis 57). How much the Countess was able to "requite" her friend monetarily is uncertain, however, since just a year before her death, on March 31, 1626, she asks Cornwallis to help her find another "tumbler," a dog used for catching rabbits: "Thus, you see, I cannot leave my custum of robbing you" (Cornwallis 148).

Yet what Bedford lacked in ready cash, she made up for with the power she wielded as go-between in court. As Donne's power and worth in his relationship with Bedford lay in his ability to proclaim and immortalize Bedford's virtue in verse, Bedford's worth to her friends lay in her influence as court intermediary, a power she did exercise on Cornwallis's behalf. In 1616, she writes Cornwallis that she has taken advantage of the Queen's extended recuperation of a foot ailment to advance her friend's suit: "I have not forgotten to putte the Queen in mind of her promis to you, but in that as well as all others she is sloe in performance; I will not be so in soliciting her . . . " (Cornwallis 40-41). Nine years later, she is still using her power and influence with those in power to recompense her friend for favors: "I have written as effectually as I could to my Lo. Chamberlain, who I thinke, if it be in his power, will do what you desier" (12 April 1625, Cornwallis 125). Specific details of most of these suits Bedford advanced are lost, but what remains is the evidence of her power, influence, and importance to those friends to whom she was indebted.

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Like Bedford to Cornwallis, Donne, who presents himself in "T'Have written then" as insufficient, will never be able to repay his patroness for her favors. But as he implies in lines 10-20, he does not have to remain a "nothing." He continues the contrast between spiritual and civil, introduced in lines 1-4, to show that spiritually worthless, even profane, places and misguided people can be sanctified: in other words, their worth is not intrinsic but depends on their use. Pagan temples can be converted to Christian sanctuaries; "mistaught" strangers can be naturalized into virtue; even Donne's "Pagan Muse" can be sanctified and given a place in Bedford's favor. In the microcosm of that relationship, which can only be created and sustained by the Countess herself, Bedford is Donne's "worlds best part, or all It" (20), and Donne, though intrinsically "barren ground" (11), shows his worth through her use of him and may "yeeld (not gold) but coale or stone" (12).

Underscoring his rhetorical power to reposition the Countess and himself within the verse letter, Donne then repositions his own views to emphasize, by contrast, Bedford's power to raise him. With a tirade reminiscent of his Anatomy of the World, he turns from praise of Bedford's virtue to condemnation of fallen Man's use and misuse of God's gifts. Man begins his existence as "Good seed" (49), intrinsically good and noble, containing the "First seeds of every creature" (61), but through misuse of the body, Man makes what should be "Temples, and Palaces" (56) of spiritual essence into "Caskets of soules" (56). This intrinsic goodness is not Man's doing but God's gift: these dignities are "not ingrav'd, but inborne" (55), and only Man's misuse of them makes him fallen. Donne, then, views the point made in lines 11-20 from the opposite angle: while Bedford can raise an inherently worthless Donne into something useful, Man can reduce his essentially worthy body into a prison for the soul. Thus, under

the guise of instructing the Countess, so purely virtuous that she cannot comprehend evil, Donne emphasizes Bedford's power to raise him above fallen Man.

Donne, then, strikes a careful balance between dependence and authority. Only the Countess, as virtue itself, can help him overcome his fallen condition; yet, because of his fallen condition, only a person like Donne can make the Countess aware of the evil that her goodness cannot comprehend. Here again Donne stresses the need for active, not passive goodness, implicitly criticizing Bedford's privileged and sheltered life. Without knowledge of evil's presence in the world, a passively virtuous person would lack that active charitable compassion for others that makes virtue truly perfect. Therefore, too much virtue is a vice itself; vice, used properly, can be made to perform good (by driving out other vices); the ends justify the means: Donne employs such "riddles" as his own means to a definite end--proof of his worth in the "Commonwealth" of his relationship with Bedford.

Donne even more strongly urges the Countess on to active good in "To the Countess of Bedford At New-yeares Tide," a verse letter that immediately follows "T'Have written then" in all surviving manuscripts, probably indicating a fairly close proximity in date (Satires 266). Donne begins this letter of counsel paradoxically by stressing his total lack of qualification to give counsel. He employs the liminal time of New Year's Eve/Day as emblem of his own liminal state. In this verse epistle, he cannot even call himself a "nothing," for that would be giving some type of form to his being; instead, he is in a state of flux, "Meteor-like, of stuffe and forme perplext," with no identifiable substance or location. Directly relating to his personal lack of fortune and occupation, Donne uses the verse epistle to exaggerate his inability to praise and

advise Bedford in order to position himself in relation to her and to allow himself to disappear behind "God's" advice to the Countess.

After identifying himself as unidentifiable, Donne begins to give himself form in relation to Bedford, using terms a patroness and client would understand. Donne "sums" up the years (6) and is neither "Debtor to th'old, nor Creditor to th'new" (7). His concern with "thankes" (8), "trust" (9), and "hopes" (9) relate to his present and future dealings with the Countess, and he admits that even his past empty years were valuable since "these times shew'd mee you" (10). Immediately in stanza 3, Donne shows how he can recompense the years (or Bedford) for favors, thereby advertising his own worth: ". . . I would show future times / What you were, and teach them to'urge towards such" (12). Again, his emphasis is on actively promoting good toward others as opposed to passively existing as good, a point he makes by employing alchemical imagery which relates virtue to position on a hierarchy, and implies movement on that hierarchy.

Eluned Crawshaw's discussion of the hermetic elements in Donne's works stresses the qualitative nature of alchemy. Unlike modern chemistry, alchemy classifies substances according to their purity, a hierarchy with strong moral overtones in Renaissance thinking (Crawshaw 324-25). Indeed, the very point of such an order is that everything should be involved in the movement upwards, including man, since "the aim of Hierarchy is the greatest possible assimilation to and union with God" (Dionysus, De Coelestia Hierarchia quoted in Crawshaw 325). Alchemists were acutely aware of the transience, corruption, and need for regeneration in the physical world and felt that the final cause of mutability in the universe was moral decay rather than purely physical degeneracy. Donne also, in his verse letters and elsewhere, stresses

Man's fallen condition. As previously discussed, lines 33 to 70 in "T'Have written then" form a virtual catalogue of the deficiencies of the physical world. But in these verse letters to Bedford, Donne consistently suggests that she (and through imitation, all of us) can ameliorate our sinful nature through virtue, which he sees as an analogue of balm or balsam: in alchemical terms, an indestructible and regenerative spirit which preserved and strengthened matter and which alchemists worked to find and "multiply" (Crawshaw 342).

In "Reason is our Soules left hand," Donne links this natural "Balsamum" to Bedford's intrinsic (and passive) worth as aristocrat--her "birth and beauty"--but admits that Bedford added active good to her natural balsam, forming a mithridate that not only resists evil but combats it. Therefore, the key to the resistance of evil lies in innocence which is not simply self-preserving but dynamic and outgoing, in the matter of an antidote. In "To the Countesse of Bedford at New-yeares Tide," Donne demonstrates his own role in advancing and activating the Countess's intrinsic goodness; he claims that "Verse embalmes vertue;' and Tombs, or Thrones of rimes, / Preserve fraile transitory fame, as much / As spice doth bodies from corrupt aires touch" (ll. 13-15). In his verse letters to Bedford, Donne expresses how the Countess's virtue may act as a dynamic force resisting the disintegration brought about by sin, and by implication, give form and purpose to him as her client and friend. In these lines he shows his own part in this process and in this relationship: poetry has a moral force not only because it may speak of virtue but because it may do so long after the poet and his subjects have gone.

Yet especially in this verse epistle, which initially presents the poet as without definite form or matter, Donne accentuates relative worth and mobility by constantly

changing positions and viewing images from other angles. At first, he describes the Countess's goodness as so strong and so active that it becomes the alchemical elixir of virtue that transforms what it touches into itself. Therefore, instead of preserving Bedford's qualities, Donne's verse is itself dissipated by the "strong extract" of her virtue. Then Donne shifts position: since Bedford's name is a "tincture" or elixir that can transform other substances to itself, Donne's verse and the poet are raised by her name into higher substances. The Countess, then, actually reforms and preserves Donne, who is "of stuffe and forme perplext" (3).

Donne switches positions again in stanzas 5 and 6, turning to the spiritual realm to underscore his inadequacy to praise the Countess. Since the alchemical terms he has used in stanzas 3 and 4 belong both to the physical and spiritual worlds, the transition is an easy one, which he accomplishes by reference to the reason/faith dichotomy explored so thoroughly in his first verse letter to Bedford. As strong alchemical agents can waste rather than preserve, too much grace is miraculous and may not be believed in an age when "faith is scant" (23). Even if Donne could compose poetry that would adequately yet believably praise the Countess, his own low place on the hierarchy would cause others to doubt his abilities. Here again, Donne defines his relationship with Bedford by emphasizing their extreme differences: he is "One corne of one low anthills dust, and lesse" (28); she is "infinity" (30). Donne resolves this impasse by simply leaving the poem altogether, "lest truth b'endanger'd by my praise" (32).

By having God instruct the Countess, Donne is able to retain his proper humility, offer timely advice to the Countess, and take a typical courtier's stance that, since he cannot adequately express his indebtedness, he will say nothing at all. Yet

also, this strategy positions him even closer to Bedford. In the microcosm of the verse letter, Donne is "not an inch" (30) while Bedford is "infinity" (30). But by offering his advice to Bedford from the mouth of God, Donne shifts his relationship with the Countess into the macrocosm, where, with Bedford, he is one of God's creatures, and like Bedford, hopes for eternal life. Thus, at the verse letter's conclusion, Donne can celebrate with Bedford her enrollment in the Book of Life and news of her salvation. He reenters the poem, in fact, with a plural pronoun: "and when with active joy we heare / This private Ghospell, then 'tis our New Yeare" (64-65). Though this "we" is Donne and all the other lesser beings who view Bedford from afar, I suggest it may also refer to Donne and the Countess herself, joined as children of God. Donne, no longer "of stuffe and forme perplext," has been alchemically transformed and raised through Bedford's virtue into one of the elect, so that his name will accompany hers in the Book of Life; likewise, Bedford, instructed by God/Donne, has also been transformed and is now assured of her own salvation.

Ironically, Donne's strategy of positioning himself with the Countess as children of God and hence spiritual equals mirrors that of Renaissance feminists, who argued for woman's equality with man as human beings. Though the Creation story was used to prove woman's ontological inferiority because of her creation as a helper of man and her political inferiority because of her punishment for the loss of paradise, Genesis I was also used to show woman's spiritual equality with man. She, like man, was created in the image and likeness of God and is therefore man's spiritual equal. As Constance Jordan explains, "The spiritual sameness of man and woman stands both in opposition to and as a complement of their political difference, just as the order of grace, the scene of spiritual struggle, is both opposed to and complementary of the

order of nature and historical time in which the social and political effects of spiritual struggle are manifest" (22). Thus Donne, in the feminized, subordinate position of prospective courtier, utilizes the argument of spiritual equality to attempt to bridge the social and political barriers that separate him from his powerful patroness.

Donne again employs the hierarchical aspects of alchemy and its implications for him as prospective courtier in "Honour is so sublime perfection," a verse letter that indicates a confident relationship with the Countess of Bedford, although its date or occasion are unknown (Satires 268). Donne seems, however, to depict various orderly rankings only to undermine them, as he demonstrates that higher orders do dominate over but are actually dependent upon those below. As in the other verse letters to Bedford already discussed, Donne emphasizes that worth is relative and varies according to situation.

Margaret Maurer mentions the similarities between this verse letter and Donne's earlier verses to long-time friend and poet Rowland Woodward. The relative merits of what Donne calls "discretion" and "religion" are issues he considered in his verse letter to Woodward, "Like one who'in her third widdowhood." The letters have so much the same tone, Maurer believes, that "it is as if Donne presumes that she has read the letter to Woodward" ("Real Presence" 223). Thus, by employing the same topic in his verse letter to Bedford, Donne posits an immediate relationship, equating Bedford's interests and abilities with those of one of his closest male friends. And indeed, the fact that she secured a manuscript of Donne's satires through Ben Jonson is further evidence that she shared an interest in such issues as Donne ponders in that verse letter to Woodward (Bald 173-74).

In exploring the relativity of worth, especially of his worth in relation to the Countess, Donne immediately begins "Honour is so sublime perfection" with images of hierarchy. Stanza 1 recalls the creation of the world, which was a series of orderly steps from inanimate objects to highest being, Man. Likewise, stanza 2 differentiates between the lower elements, earth and water ("these which wee tread" l. 4), and the higher elements, fire and air ("those . . . above our head" l. 6). His point is not to confirm the intrinsic and passive superiority of those at the top of the hierarchy, however, but to argue the relative worth of those lower on the scale: worth through active good. Lower creatures are the only sources of honor, for, as an external adjunct, honor can only flow from the honorer to the person honored (Satires 268). Although Donne voices in stanza 1 a common Renaissance belief that God only created the world to give Himself glory, he does not emphasize God's power, but the worth of His lesser creatures and God's dependence on them. Similarly, in stanza 2, Donne stresses the barrenness of the supposedly higher elements of air and fire, which are considered superior by nature but produce no substance useful to mankind. In contrast, earth and water, lesser elements, are much more valuable to Man, producing "all things with which wee'are joy'd or fed" (5). The implications of these lines for Bedford, a member of an extremely privileged class that lived off the labors of subordinates and produced nothing of value for society, are all too clear.

Castiglione presents the same idea of worth dependent upon usefulness in The Courtier. With reference to the courtier's need to show active good in addition to passive worth, Lord Octaviano comments:

> . . . of things which we call good, some there be that simply and of themselves are always good, as temperance, valiant courage, health, and all virtues that bring quietness to men's minds. Other be good for divers respects and for the end they be applied unto, as the laws, liberality, riches, and other like. I think therefore that the Courtier . . . may

> indeed be a good thing and worthy praise; but for all that not simply, nor of himself, but for respect of the end whereto he may be applied. (287)

Though Castiglione places the courtier in the rather passive position of a "tool" to be applied by others, his point is that the "tool" is not ontologically valuable, but its worth is judged by the work it can accomplish.

To exemplify this relativity of worth in his relationship with the Countess, Donne uses the lowest, most common substance, "despis'd dung" (12), to show its usefulness in the delicate, intricate operation of alchemical distillation, an operation whose very purpose is to transform and raise substances on the hierarchy. He continues the notion of practical use through intrinsic inferiority with examples of the greater piousness of "laborours balads" (14), which please God more than magnificent hymns, and the greater resonance of subterranean rumblings over "ordinance rais'd on Towers" (16). Thus, as Donne turns to his own relationship with Bedford, his advice, "Care not then, Madame, 'how low your praysers lye" (13) becomes a subtle but very personal statement to a woman whose portrait, described by Thomas Pennant, seems to illustrate these lines: "In the back ground she appears in a garden, in the true attitude of stately disdain, bent half back, in scorn of a poor gentleman bowing to the very ground" (355). Though Pennant was certainly no fan of Bedford's, she obviously elicited such opinions of her haughty pride, so that Donne's lines serve as bold advice and protestations of worth from a rather ignoble man who proceeds to extol his superior patroness--a patroness with the power to subdue the clouds that surround Donne, even if he were in worse straits than he is (had he "liv'd darker then were true" l. 19).

But Donne's references to honor that depends upon those lower on the hierarchy relate not only to his part in Bedford's life but also to the entire question of power in the Renaissance, especially during Elizabeth's reign. Steven Mullaney discusses the instability and vulnerability inherent in a form of power that was theatrically conceived, negotiated, and maintained, as in the Renaissance. In such a theatrical society, one views oneself through the eyes of a judgmental Other, making that Other, no matter how low his place on the social hierarchy, superior in this transaction (71-72). Stephen Greenblatt agrees and, in order to stress the theatricality of Elizabeth's reign, focuses on the queen's vulnerability. To Mullaney and Greenblatt, the poetics of Elizabethan power is inseparable from the poetics of the theatre, and there, this poetics is also inseparably bound up with the figure of Queen Elizabeth:

> . . . a ruler without a standing army, without a highly developed bureaucracy, without an extensive police force, a ruler whose power is constituted in theatrical celebrations of royal glory and theatrical violence visited upon the enemies of that glory . . . . Elizabethan power . . . depends upon its privileged visibility. As in a theatre, the audience must be powerfully engaged by this visible presence while at the same time held a respectful distance from it. "We princes," Elizabeth told a deputation of Lords and Commons in 1586, "are set upon stage in the sight and view of all the world." (Greenblatt, "Invisible Bullets" 44)

Thus, Elizabeth's visibility was not a sign of privilege or potency but of her own discomfiting subjection to the sight and view of all the world. Power resides not in the figure onstage but in the eye of the beholder. Or, more precisely, the power wielded by such a monarch, the power she was invested with, was to a large degree invested in her by the gaze of her subjects: the royal image and identity were not wholly at the Queen's command but in part the projection and hence the product of those subjects. Elizabeth wielded the power, but her audience/subjects bestowed it.

Properly staged, early modern sovereignty produced not a sense of mastery but of awe and wonder, a reaffirmation of the distance between audience and monarchical spectacle, subject and sovereign. However, Elizabeth was keenly aware that her subjects' desire for mastery was one of the necessary conditions for their proper and respectful subjection. She maintained her tenuous position as the female ruler of a patriarchal state, in fact, by combining the vulnerability of her tenuous power with the vulnerability of her gender, and turning both to her own advantage. She styled herself as the unattainable, hence endlessly pursued, Virgin Queen, adapting the conventions of pastoral romance to restructure and manage the shape of her subjects' sexual as well as political desires (Mullaney 74). She ruled, not so much by wooing the body politic, but by inducing it to woo her.

Similarly, in the theatrics of "Honour is so sublime perfection," Donne uses his vulnerability to advantage. Using alchemy's implications of hierarchy and transformation on that hierarchy, Donne postures as lowly in order to show his place in the transformation process and also his worth to then be transformed by the quintessence of virtue, Bedford. He admits her superior place on the hierarchy: she is made of "better clay" (22), even of the material of souls (23). But Donne's real emphasis in his praise of the Countess is the transparency of her physical body which allows others to see into her very soul. Her body, like amber (25) and the legendary "specular stone" (29), is truly a discovering covering, revealing and not obscuring her immortal soul. As previously discussed with reference to "You have refin'd mee," these images correspond to the alchemical gradation of matter according to how much divine spirit or "light of God" it contained. Light is usually eclipsed by the grossness of matter, but the purer a substance is, the more likely that light will shine through. A

lack of density therefore both denotes purity and reveals the spirit (Crawshaw 326-27). Since Bedford presents a "through-shine front" (27) that reveals her very "hearts thoughts" (27), her physical beauty and actions are a true indication of her moral goodness, a point Donne further develops with reference to Bedford's role as courtier in stanzas 11 to 18.

After placing Bedford at the top of the spiritual hierarchy, however, Donne again makes the point of relativity in worth. Normally, precedence in birth is evidence of superiority in a family, so that the firstborn inherits title and fortune. But as Donne shows in stanza 12, true superiority does not depend on order of existence. As Milgate explains, Aristotle's theory of the threefold soul of man states that the vegetative and sensible souls existed in man before the rational soul was breathed into him. Yet, although these first two souls had "birthright" over the third, only the rational soul was immortal, transcending and including the powers of the other two (Satires 270). This concept ties into the reference to God's creation of the world in stanza 1. In the biblical account of creation, God created inanimate objects, then animals, then the highest earthly creature, Man, who combined mortal being with immortal soul. Thus, in some circumstances, the "lastborn" takes precedence: it is all relative.

To infer his own relative worth and perfectibility, and to unite his other references to unity and perfection, court doctrine, and alchemy, Donne introduces the circle image in stanza 16. Circles serve as "poore types of God" (46) or emblems of His perfection and infinity, reminiscent of the Renaissance commonplace definition of God as an infinite circle of which the center is everywhere and the circumference nowhere (Satires 270). With this reference, Donne positions himself and Bedford together as imperfect creatures in relation to the infinite Almighty. Yet, Castiglione,

as we have seen, also used the circle in his explanation of beauty as a sign of goodness: "I say that beauty cometh from God and is like a circle, the goodness whereof is the center" (347). In his use of the circle image, then, Donne also frames himself within a courtly context with Bedford and reiterates his description of her beauty as a "discovering covering" or transparent medium revealing the virtue of her immortal soul:

> This, as an Amber drop enwraps a Bee,
> Covering discovers your quick Soule; that we
> May in your through-shine front your hearts thoughts see. (25-27)

But also, the circle image recalls the various alchemical references Donne has employed throughout the poem and indicates his own hopes in his relationship with the Countess. A circle with marked center was the alchemical symbol for gold, the highest metal on the alchemical hierarchy to which all other substances aspired. Gold was valued because of its apparent resistance to all the natural processes of decay, and thus was passively good. But gold also was the elixir vitae, able to overcome the depredations of time and slow down the decay of other substances. It could raise other substances without diminishing its own qualities, in the matter of a mithridate or antidote, and thus was an active force as well as a valuable metal (Crawshaw 342-45). This one image, then, is rich in its implications for Donne's own relationship with the Countess. He has already dared to associate Bedford with God throughout this verse letter, comparing the praises she receives to pious laborers' ballads to God in stanza 5, and declaring that her "radiation can all clouds subdue; / But one" (20-21), stopping just short of equating her with God. Donne uses the traditional emblem for God to help explain the unity of Bedford's actions and intentions in stanza 16.

Thus Donne associates this circle image, the alchemical symbol for gold, with the Countess, implying her superiority and power in their relationship. By actively using her birth and influence, Bedford's can refine and perfect Donne through her patronage, the "sublime perfection" of line 1. Bedford's beauty is an indication of her passive virtue, and that perfect union of "beeing and seeming" (32) will serve as elixir vitae for Donne in a personal relationship with the Countess as well as in a poet-patroness relationship, in which Bedford can actively preserve and advance Donne with her golden political influence as well as with her gold coins. Yet, Donne, as author and creator of the text, serves as God-like figure for the Countess, providing the medium through which Bedford's virtues are conveyed to her "audience" in the theatrically-conceived poetics of Renaissance power.

After explaining throughout the verse letter, then, that lesser creatures posses power in their ability to give honor, that the value of anything (including Donne) is relative to its use, and that Bedford has the power to raise him, Donne exhibits his confidence in their relationship by concluding with an encouraging exhortation to Bedford to continue her active good toward him: "Goe thither stil, goe the same way you went, / Who so would change, do covet or repent" (52-53). Once "despis'd dung," Donne has proven his worth, as well as his power as author/creator, and has been refined enough to offer his own advice to the Countess, as he urges her to continue receiving his honor and to continue to be the perfect metal toward which he strives.

As evident in these five verse letters to the Countess of Bedford, Donne takes great pains in the letters to position his patroness and himself in a relationship both by their extreme distances on the social hierarchy and by their relative worth to each other on that hierarchy. He rhetorically creates a little world of the verse letter,

enabling him to exclude the outside social structure and empowering him to position Bedford solely in relation to himself. Then, as the poem develops, he shows his worth to the Countess within the verse letter, and implies the possibility of a reciprocal alliance outside the verse letter. The constant shifting of these positions not only demonstrates the possibilities of social mobility at the time but also the potential for active good as well as passive virtue in a powerful aristocrat like Bedford, active good some of which Donne hopes to receive.

Viewing each verse letter as a microcosm helps to explain and justify the hyperbolic praise Donne employs that has been the target of so much criticism of these verse letters. Critics have condemned Donne's expressions of "blasphemously high regard" toward Bedford (Maurer, "John Donne's Verse Letters" 253), and the letters have been called "positively embarrassing in the way they convert some of Donne's most important motifs to the demands of patronage" (Hughes 129). Barbara Lewalski has attempted to explain that Donne's extravagant praise of his patronesses is not for the individual as person but as symbol of the image of God within each (Donne's "Anniversaries"). I suggest rather that these verse letters to Bedford are personal correspondences to a powerful patroness who, within the relative and rhetorical world of the letter, was a divinity and had the potential to "save" Donne. Asserting his power as author and creator, Donne utilizes such "embarrassing" hyperbolic praise to transform rhetorically the living, superior patroness to the traditionally subordinate figure of the female muse. Thus Donne uses the encomiastic tradition in order reposition the Countess and himself, creating a more equal relationship.

The verse letters have been considered "less than legitimate poems" because they are not written as art for art's sake (Cameron 369) and as poetry, the letters

"deserve respectful attention but not as poetry which engages Donne's whole mind" (Hughes 129). I submit that the verse letters to Bedford, as purposeful correspondences with a powerful and needed patroness, did indeed engage Donne's whole mind in these years of poverty and frustrated ambition.

CHAPTER 4

". . . the materialls and fuell of [letters] should be a confident and mutuall communicating of those things which we know"

As we have seen, John Donne presented his letters as rhetorical extensions of the self, and in his verse letters to Bedford, he demonstrated his power as writer to position and reposition himself in relation to the Countess, suggesting the possibility of a mutually beneficial relationship outside the confines of the verse letter. We will now see that, after thus showing that worth is relative and not absolute, Donne proves his own worth and ability to function within Bedford's world by rhetorically framing his verse letters, and therefore himself, within the personal and courtly context of the Countess and her noble peers. In this way, Donne can rhetorically insert himself into a world normally closed to him because of social and financial restrictions. Using Castiglione's dictates for the perfect courtier in The Courtier, we can discern Donne's methods for framing his verse letters into "confident and mutuall communicating" (Donne, Letters 120) from a courtier, to a courtier, about the intricacies of the courtier's life.

Even in framing his verse letters to Bedford's own interests and contexts, Donne follows Castiglione's advice for a successful court career. In The Courtier, Sir Fredrico recommends fitting words to the audience and the situation at hand. The Courtier should have "a knowledge in so many things that he may well vary his conversation and frame himself according to the inclination of them he accompanieth himself withal, presupposing him to be of a good judgment, and therewithal to guide himself, and,

pastimes and games" (133). In the company of the Courtier's prince, or in Donne's case, his patroness, the Courtier should likewise conform to the tastes of his "betters," and "turn all his thoughts and force of mind to love, and, as it were, to reverence the prince he serveth above all other things, and in his will, manners and fashions, to be altogether pliable to please him" (113-14). Thus, a successful courtier conforms his words, spoken or written, to his audience in style and content. Donne accomplishes this feat not only with general allusions to Court life, but with specific references to Bedford's courtly interests. A careful reading of the letters in the light of facts and events peculiar to the Countess of Bedford and Donne demonstrates a definite personalization and fashioning of the epistles by Donne to a specific audience, the Countess.

In his praise of Bedford, as previously mentioned, Donne is careful to credit not only her intrinsic worth because of her aristocratic birth, but also her own active accomplishments that helped her to rise above other court ladies during King James's reign. In "Reason is our Soules left hand," Donne praises her intrinsic "birth and beauty" (24) that serves as a balm to keep her ever "fresh, and new" (22), while in "To the Countesse of Bedford At New-yeares Tide," he speaks of her stock of "beauty" and "blood" (37), both given by God at birth. Also, of the "worthyest things" to which Donne has been refined in "You have refin'd mee," "Vertue" and "Beauty" figure among Bedford's natural gifts, while "Fortune" may be interpreted either as her inherited wealth or as an implication of the precariousness of court success. Donne adds, however, those qualities Bedford actively acquired either through her family's or her own efforts: "You have refin'd mee" refers to the Countess's reputation as virtuoso and collector, specifically mentioning "Art" (which required "Fortune") as one of the

Countess's "worthyest things" (2). Similarly, both "Reason is our Soules left hand" (l. 25) and "New-yeares Tide" (l. 37) cite "learning" as one of her attributes. "Religion" is not only mentioned as a specific concern of Bedford in "Reason is our Soules left hand" (25), but it also forms the basic matrix in each of Donne's verse letters to her.

Learning is indeed one attribute that set the Countess of Bedford apart from other women in her social circle. Although all noble ladies of the period are praised for virtue, beauty, and generosity, Bedford is one of the three or four regularly celebrated as a knowledgeable art collector, as a fit audience and worthy critic for works of literature and learning, and also as a talented poet in her own right (Lewalski, "Lucy" 60). In her later years, she became a virtuoso of sorts, collecting rare medals (Granger 171; Thomson, "John Donne and the Countess" 339) and Holbein's paintings which she valued more "then juels" (Cornwallis 50-51). As Houghton explains, the concept of the "virtuoso" was a seventeenth-century fusion of two traditions: the courtier and the scholar (58). Castiglione's perfect courtier exhibits this fusion, exhibiting learning as a "true and principall ornament of the minde," and cultivating a knowledge of painting and other arts in order to judge "the excellencie of Images both olde and new, of vessels, buildings, old coins, cameses, gravings, and other such matters" (68, 71, 81-82). As a virtuoso, Bedford would agree with Donne that, among "worthyest things," the value of such collections demonstrates that "Rareness, or use, not nature value brings" ("You have refin'd mee" l. 3).

In addition, the Countess is celebrated by Sir William Temple in his "Essay on the Gardens of Epicurus" for projecting "the most perfectest figure of a garden" that he ever saw at Moore Park, her estate in Hertfordshire (Granger 172). Lawrence Stone indicates that "in the days before bibliophily developed as a collecting mania in its own

right, the possession of a substantial library may reasonably be taken as proof of intellectual interests" (705), and the Countess's library also attests to her ample learning. She is listed by Stone as possessing one of the largest libraries between the years 1556 and 1642, with more than 180 books and manuscripts (Crisis Appendix XXXVII).

Bedford's interest in learning was probably fostered from an early age. From what is known about her parents, the Haringtons of Exton, Bedford's early education was intensely religious, with the Bible and prayers occupying a large part of the day (Byard 21). There might have even been some "Montessori" aspects to Bedford's education, since much later, when her father was put in charge of Princess Elizabeth after 1603, he had a model farm (or "petit hameau") constructed for the Princess at the Harington estate, Coombe Abbey, in order to familiarize the Princess with birds and beasts of the larger world. Parrots and monkeys were part of the livestock, as well as small-sized chickens and cows (Byard 21). Lord Harington's ideas for Princess Elizabeth might mean that he had similar ideas for his own daughter in the 1580's and 1590's.

Literary dedications and tributes to the Countess also attest to her intellectual gifts. Holiband (Claudius Desainliens), possibly Bedford's tutor for a time, dedicated his language book, Campo di Fior, or else The Flourie Field of Foure Languages (1583) to two-year-old Lucy Harington, urging her to learn languages in obedience to her parents' desire. John Florio, resident with the Haringtons for a while, also dedicated his language book A Worlde of Wordes (1598) to Bedford, praising her great proficiency in reading, writing, and speaking Italian, French, and Spanish, but especially her concern for the matter conveyed in those languages. In 1603, Florio

dedicated his translation of Montaigne's Essays to the Countess, her mother, and others, noting that he completed it while residing with the Haringtons, and that Lucy read, encouraged, and offered helpful suggestions for the work in progress (Lewalski, "Lucy" 60; Byard 21). George Chapman addressed Bedford as "faire Patronesse and Muse to Learning" in one of the dedicatory sonnets to his Homer, and Arthur Gorges's son presented his father's translation of Lucan's Pharsalia to her as "an honorable lover and Patronesse of learning and the Muses" (Lewalski, "Lucy" 60).

Bedford's intellectual and critical powers were so highly regarded, in fact, that some writers could only adequately praise her as "masculine," since she ventured beyond the normal sphere dictated for Renaissance women. In the verse letter he published with his Panegyrick in 1603, Samuel Daniel lauded Bedford's success in escaping the restrictions of the female role:

> And this faire course of knowledge whereunto
> Your studies, learned Lady, are addressed,
> Is th'only certaine way that you can go
> Unto true glory, to tru happiness:
> . . . . . .
> And no key had you else that was so fit
> T'unlocke that prison of your sex, as this,
> To let you out of weaknesse, and admit
> Your powers into the freedome of that blisse
> That sets you there where you may over-see
> this rowling world, and view it as it is. . . .
> ("To the Lady Lucie, Countess of Bedford." A Panegyricke Congratulatory Delivered to the Kings Most Excellent Majesty. London, 1603; quoted in Lewalski, "Lucy" 64))

Ben Jonson's poetic portraits of the Countess often hinge on interpretations of her name, Lucy, as symbol of her lucent wit and somewhat masculine intelligence. Lewalski cites an ode Jonson addressed to Bedford in manuscript which apostrophizes her beauty and "illustrate brightness" but especially celebrates "Her wit as quicke, and sprightfull / As fire; and more delightfull" and her "Judgement (adorn'd with

Learning)" ("Lucy" 65-66). In two of his epigrams, Jonson again stresses both her literary acumen and masculine powers of intelligence. "Epigram 94," sent with a requested copy of Donne's Satires, acknowledges Bedford's unusual taste for such poetry, declaring "Rare poems aske rare friends" and offering as proof of her worth the fact that she can read and enjoy satire (which all sinners hate) (Jonson 8: 60-61). His even better known "Epigram 76" highlights Bedford's learning and masculine strength and freedom:

> Only a learned, and a manly soule
> I purpos'd her; that should, with even powers,
> The rock, the spindle, and the sheeres controule
> Of destinie, and spin her owne free houres. (Jonson 8: 52).

And Donne himself acknowledges the Countess's almost unfeminine power, declaring that she "ransomes one [female] sex, and one Court preserves" ("T'Have written then" l. 26). Thus, he sets Bedford apart from and above all women.

This emphasis on Bedford's "masculine" qualities is in keeping with misogynistic attitudes of the time and demonstrates these writers' attempts to retain self-respect in their awkwardly subordinate position. A powerful and learned woman was considered a contradiction in terms, so that any exception to the passively virtuous female "ideal" was no longer considered purely a woman: "Her virility testified to the rightness of the general theme privileging man and legitimating patriarchy" (Jordan 35). Thus, powerful women like Bedford and Queen Elizabeth were rendered androgenous, and their excellence was seen in their masculinity, that is, their rationality, courage, independence, and physical strength (Jordan 137).

The true gauge of Donne's opinion of Bedford's intellectual abilities is his use of rather esoteric metaphors and examples in the verse letters. Though obviously demonstrations of his own theological and philosophical wit, these subjects also

indicate his assumption and admiration of the Countess's scholarship. To prove his thesis that worth is relative to its usefulness in "Honour is so sublime perfection," Donne cites Aristotle and Cardan, who both wrote that the lesser elements of earth and water are more life-giving and productive than fire and air, which are higher but produce nothing (ll. 4-6). Donne compares Bedford's transparent body that reveals her virtuous soul to "specular stone, / Through which all things within without were shown" (29-30). Milgate suggests that Donne's information about this stone, a substance which, correctly cut, had a transparency like that of glass, comes from Guido Panciroli's Rerum memorabilium iam olim deperditarum, written in Italian but first published in an annotated Latin translation by Heinrich Salmuth in 1599. Panciroli describes the Temple of Fortune built by Nero with specular stone, so that anyone inside could be seen by those outside. Donne refers to Panciroli by name in both The Courtier's Library and Ignatius his Conclave (Satires 269-70). Thus, since his comparison of the Countess's body to specular stone is a major metaphor of this verse letter, Donne assumes Bedford's knowledge of such a subject, or perhaps he assumes her familiarity with his own works, since Milgate mentions that there is no indication of the date or occasion of this poem, and it might well have been written after the publication of Ignatius his Conclave in 1611 (Satires 268).

"Honour is so sublime perfection" refers to Aristotle's theory in De Anima of the threefold soul of man, later adopted by Aquinas, in claiming that birthright does not necessarily mean superiority (ll. 34-36). The vegetative and sensible souls ("our Soules of growth and Soules of sense") were supposed to have existence in man (and had "birthright" since slightly older) before the rational soul was breathed into him. Yet, only the last soul was immortal, transcending and including the powers of the other

two, which therefore did not have "precedence" (Satires 270). Again, Donne assumes at least a cursory knowledge of these ideas in using them to advance his argument to the Countess.

Ironically, much of Bedford's independence and authority were born out of personal grief and disappointment. She had no living children: a son born in 1602 died a month later, while a daughter born in 1610 lived only two hours (Byard 26; Lewalski, "Lucy" 54). Within one year, 1613-1614, her father, brother, and only sister died, leaving the Countess as sole heir of the Harington estate, an estate incumbered by almost 40,000 pounds debt (Wiffin 66-68, 102-103). Bedford's husband, the Earl, never fully recovered court favor after his involvement with the Essex rebellion, though this exclusion may have concurred with his natural love of quiet and seclusion. Even after he regained his freedom, he only appeared at ceremonies where his rank obliged him to appear (Wiffin 66). In addition, a fall from his horse in 1612 afflicted the Earl with partial paralysis so that he was not only lame, but stammered badly as well (Bald 172). Thus, virtually yet tragically free from husband, children, and relatives, the Countess of Bedford was for the most part able to "spin her owne free houres."

Yet not all saw Bedford's masculine learning and power as completely praiseworthy. When Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, rebuked her boldness in precipitously proposing a marriage between her brother and his daughter, he politely but revealingly commented that in this instance she "more resembled her sex in loving her own will than she does in those other noble and discreet parts of her mind (wherein she has so great a portion beyond most of those I have known)" (Quoted from a 1606 letter from Salisbury to Lucy Bedford's father in Maurer, "Real Presence" 219). Thus, Salisbury criticizes her tenacity in pressing suit as a feminine "loving [of]

her own will" which temporarily overshadowed the traditionally more masculine "noble and discreet parts of her mind." Also, as Arthur Marotti suggests, Jonson's satiric portrayal of the Ladies Collegiate in Epicoene is probably based on the group of learned and independent women associated with the Court, led by Bedford and including her kinswomen Bridget Markham and Cecilia Bulstrode, a group known for what was considered in the Renaissance as masculine interests and accomplishments (Marotti 206). In Jonson's comedy, these women, led by the domineering Lady Haughty, are described as "A new foundation . . . here i' the towne, of ladies, that call themselves the Collegiates, an order betweene courtiers, and country-madames, that liue from their husbands; and giue entertainement to all the Wits and Braueries o' the time, as the call 'hem: crie downe, or vp, what they like, or dislike in a braine, or a fashion, with most masculine, or rather hermaphroditicall authoritie: and, euery day, gaine to their colledge some new probationer" (Jonson 5: 166-67).

Donne also acknowledges Bedford's role as a powerful leader of a distinctive circle of women with intellectual interests when, in his introductory verse letter to the Countess ("Reason is our Soules left hand"), he attempts to understand her through her friends:

> Therefore I study you first in your Saints,
> Those friends, whom your election glorifies,
> Then in your deeds, accesses, and restraints,
> And what you reade, and what your selfe devize. (9-12)

These lines also refer to another aspect of Bedford's intellectual abilities: her critical appreciation of literature and her talent as poet in her own right.

As previously mentioned, the Countess was very interested in Donne's satires and enlisted Ben Jonson's aid in procuring a manuscript of them. Donne's prose letters show that he and the Countess also exchanged verses, both written by themselves and

by others. In a letter written probably in 1609, Donne requests some of the Countess' poems that she had shown him at her country estate, protesting her modest hesitation to send them and complimenting the poems as excellent exercises of her wit:

> I do not remember that ever I have seen a petition in verse, I would not therefore be singular, nor adde these to your other papers. I have yet adventured so near as to make a petition for verse, it is for those your Ladiship did me the honour to see in Twicknam garden, except you repent your making' and having mended your judgment by thinking worse, that is, better, because juster, of their subject. They must needs be an excellent exercise of your wit, which speak so well of so ill: I humbly beg them of your Ladyship, with two such promises, as to any other of your compositions were threatenings; that I will not show them, and that I will not believe them; and nothing should be so used that comes from your brain or breast. (Donne, Letters 67)

In his promise not to believe the sentiments expressed in her verse, Donne hints that these might have been love poems, and in his assurance that he will not show them to others, he demonstrates the coterie aspects of the poetry he and Bedford exchanged. Also proving the intimacy of their poetic interchange is the fact that only one of Bedford's poems is extant. Thus, rather than public aesthetic exercises, their poetic exchanges were personal and individualized correspondences that helped to position Donne and his patroness on more equal terms through common interest.

Most critics now agree that Bedford also authored the poem "Death be not proud, thy hand gave not this blow," a work good enough to be attributed to Donne himself in the 1635 edition of his works and often thereafter (Donne, Epithalamions 235-37). Claude Summers convincingly argues that this poem forms part of a poetic dialogue or debate between Donne and the Countess, as he attempts to comfort his patroness on the deaths of her kinswomen, Lady Markham and Cecilia Bulstrode, who died within three months of each other at Bedford's estate at Twickenham ("Donne's 1609 Sequence of Grief and Comfort"). Donne's "Elegie on Mrs. Boulstred," beginning

"Death I recant," is structured like a masque, with an introductory "anti-masque" arguing the supremacy of Death, and a concluding "masque" that dismantles the argument by referring to Cecilia Bulstrode's victory over death. Despite this reversal, however, Donne's heterodox first half seems to have disturbed Bedford, perhaps because its emphasis on the universality of death contradicted somewhat the Calvinist principle of predestination to which the Countess subscribed (Summers 14-16). In response, she wrote her own "Elegie" beginning "Death be not proud, thy hand gave not this blow" in which she challenges Donne's contention that "In all this All, nothing else is, but [Death]" (l. 26).

The fact that Bedford's first line matches that of Donne's Holy Sonnet 10 presents some interesting possibilities. Most critics assume that Bedford quotes Donne's sonnet, and Helen Gardner uses this theory to support her argument for an early date for Donne's Holy Sonnets (Donne, Divine Poems xlviii). Yet, there is no definite proof of which poem was composed first, Donne's sonnet or Bedford's elegy, so that the possibility exists that Donne quotes Bedford in his Holy Sonnet.

If Bedford does quote Donne, she does so ironically, for her elegy seems to reject Donne's entire approach in his own elegy to Bulstrode by challenging his notion that Bulstrode's demise was a victory for Death. Instead, she argues, the death of the just (as Bulstrode was) is a summons from God, not from Death, so that Death has power only over the reprobate (Lewalski, "Lucy" 75). The Countess demonstrates her Calvinist certainty of Bulstrode's election by taunting Death: "Goe then to people curst before they were, / Their spoyles in Triumph of thy conquest weare" (ll. 21-22). Summers believes that Donne, perhaps stung by the implicit rebuke in Bedford's elegy, responded with another elegy on Bulstrode, beginning "Language thou art too narrow."

In this poem, Donne apologizes to Bedford not only for the inadequacies of the present poem, but also for the failure of his previous elegy on Bulstrode. Though Donne never explicitly acknowledges the Countess's "Elegie," the new poem adopts Bedford's imagery and terms of reference, revealing its author's awareness of the Countess's objections (Summers 18-19). Thus, Bedford's literary interests and poetic responses directly influenced Donne's own poetic imagination.

Donne also sent messages and poetry to Bedford in letters to others, like Sir Henry Wotton, to whom he writes from France, "I have been a great while more mannerly towards my Lady Bedford, then to trouble her with any of mine own verses, but having found these French verses accompanied with a great deal of representation here, I could not forbear to aske her leave to send them" (Donne, Letters 125-26). He also writes to Henry Goodyer, "instead of a Letter to you, I send you one to another, to the best Lady, who did me the honour to acknowledge the receit of one of mine, by one of hers; and who only hath power to cast the fetters of verse upon my free meditations . . . " (Letters 117). Comments like these in more informal prose correspondences demonstrate that Donne shared and appreciated Bedford's literary interests and tastes. In the more formal verse letters to the Countess, literary metaphors abound. In light of Bedford's literary interests, tastes, and reputation, Donne's literary metaphors, which might seem conventional or even commonplace in other Renaissance encomiastic verse, take on added meaning. Her rare virtues are "darke texts" needing interpretation by an understanding poet like Donne; "Of past and future stories, which are rare," Donne finds Bedford "all record, all prophecie," the "book of Fate" purged of all "sad nor guilty legends"; she is "the transcript, and originall" of good and lovely; and she is "The story'of beauty,'in Twicknam" ("You have

refin'd mee" ll. 11, 51-54, 56, 70). Her letters to Donne are so sacred, he fears repaying her with one of his might seem like "Worst of spirituall vices, Simony" ("T'Have written then," l. 2). In his verse letters to Bedford, then, Donne acknowledges their mutual interest in writing and poetry, thereby not only framing the letters to her as audience, but also linking himself to his patroness through their mutual interest in writing and literature.

In addition to her reputation as astute critic of art and literature, and writer in her own right, Bedford and her family were also known as pious Calvinists. Her father, the first Lord Harington, was known for his wisdom and sobriety. Members of the Catholic party were said to be jealous of his position as tutor and guardian to the Princess Elizabeth, an honor King James undoubtedly bestowed because of Harington's unquestionable Protestantism. The Harington children were strictly educated. The Countess's brother grew to be a great reader of Calvin and a strict observer of Sunday, leading an exemplary life of prayer and study. While he was abroad, Jesuits reportedly attempted to poison him, killing his tutor and hastening his own death (Thomson, "John Donne and the Countess" 332).

The Countess herself was the recipient of many dedications by prominent English Calvinists and Puritans, which present her as a religious woman of Calvinist leanings, associated through her family and by her own proclivities with Puritan reformist elements in England and with the cause of international Protestantism abroad. Though not offering personal praise, these dedications imply praise in their assumption that she will value the worthy and profitable lessons the treatises contain and that, through her patronage, she will aid their dissemination (Lewalski, "Lucy" 60). In 1595, William Perkins offered her a meditation on death, reminding her of

Solomon's precept to "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth." In 1608, Thomas Draxe dedicated his treatise on predestination and the final conversion of the Jews to her. Richard Stock's funeral sermon for Bedford's brother, John Harington, in 1614 urged the Harington family to emulate his "worthy graces and practise of godliness." In 1615, Clement Cotton, noted translator of Calvin, offered a treatise on martyrs to the countess and her mother, and in 1620, also presented Bedford his translation of Calvin's lectures on Jeremiah. The Countess's chaplain, Nicholas Byfield, dedicated a set of sermons to her in 1617, noting that she had already heard many of them "with great attention" (Byfield, epis. ded.). In 1621, John Reading dedicated to her a meditation on the uses of both sickness and health, a very appropriate topic after the Countess's serious bout with smallpox in 1619 (Lewalski, "Lucy" 61; Grimble 175).

It is to an earlier serious illness, in late 1612, that most commentators attribute external signs of an intensification of Bedford's Calvinist piety. Chamberlain wrote to Dudley Carleton on August 1, 1613, describing the Countess's obvious religious conversion upon her return to Court:

> Marry, she is somewhat reformed in her attire, and forbears painting, which, they say, makes her look somewhat strangely among so many vizzards, which, together with their frizzled, powdered hair, makes them look all alike, so that you can scant know one from another at the first view. Dr. Burgesse, who is turned physician, was much about her in her sickness, and did her more good with his spiritual counsel than with natural physic; and his manner of praying was so well liked by Monsieur Mayerne, or Turquet, that, thinking to do him a pleasure, he commended him to the king, who was so well moved that he should dogmatize (as he called it) in his court, that he commanded the archbiship to look to it; who, sending for him, used him somewhat roughly, and enjoined him not to practice within ten miles of London. (Birch, I 262)

Thus, Bedford took rather serious risks of offending her companion "vizzards" in court by outwardly displaying her piety, yet she continued to work for John Burges's

reinstatement until he was allowed to return in 1616, and sought his advice on several occasions thereafter (Lewalski, "Lucy" 61). Patricia Thomson, in fact, suggests that Dr. Burges became Donne's competitor for Bedford's attentions, citing Burges's Calvinist influence as a factor in later drawing Donne and Bedford apart ("John Donne and the Countess of Bedford").

But during the period of his verse letters to the Countess, Donne enjoyed a close relationship with Bedford and sought to frame his epistles to her own religious interests and piety. Donne himself was demonstrating a deepening religious interest at the time, writing his three religious prose works, Biathanatos, Pseudo-Martyr, and Ignatius his Conclave during the period of his closest friendship with the Countess (See Bald, Chapter IX). As we have seen, Donne creates a fiction in each verse letter with the primary premise of Bedford as divinity or higher being. From this assumption, Donne is free to employ spiritual and hyperbolic metaphors without fear of blasphemy, since he is simply keeping within the fiction he has created. Within these religious fictions, however, Donne includes numerous references personally meaningful to the Countess which enable him to frame the verse letter to accord with Bedford's actual life and interests. Also, as we will later discuss, Donne constantly stresses the struggle between, and simultaneous union between, body and spirit, secular and sacred, as he attempts to reconcile Bedford's pious leanings with both her earlier (1604-1609) daring appearances in court masques and her crafty maneuverings in court politics.

Even in Donne's introductory verse letter to the Countess, "Reason is our Soules left hand," Donne frankly defines Bedford's sacred role in this fiction by addressing her as "divinity, that's you" (2). From that assumption, he argues the relative worth of reason and faith in his budding relationship with her through religious metaphors

fitting to such a matrix: Bedford's close friends are "Saints" (9) glorified by their friendship to the Countess; not even one "Heretique" (17) could deny her goodness; Bedford is "The first good Angell, since the worlds frame stood, / That ever did in woman's shape appeare" (31-32) and is also "Gods masterpeece, and so / His Factor for our loves" (33-34). Donne, not yet personally familiar with the Countess, can only know her from "far faith" and, in order to understand and to express his faith, must study her friends and actions in order to arrive at a reasonable comprehension of the Countess's goodness. Like Sir Thomas Browne and other Renaissance writers, however, Donne realizes that some concepts can never be rationally understood and must simply be accepted upon faith. Bedford is one such concept:

> But soone, the reasons why you'are lov'd by all,
> Grow infinite, and so passe reasons reach,
> Then back againe to'implicite faith I fall. (13-15)

Yet in the last stanza, Donne's seemingly unselfish and self-sacrificing wishes for the Countess's return to heaven show a very rational awareness of Bedford's worth here on earth, especially to this hopeful protege: "For so God helpe mee,'I would not misse you there / For all the good which you can do me here" (37-38). Donne frames his wishes for secular patronage within a religious context he hopes will be pleasing to the Countess, who was herself both pious and ambitious.

Donne continues to mix the secular with the sacred in "You have refin'd mee," in which he credits the Countess for teaching him that value is relative to its "Rareness, or use" (3). Discussing the rareness, and therefore value, of Bedford's virtue in court and beauty in the country, Donne again posits the Countess as a sun-like divinity in the country, who sends her delegate, the "vulgar Sunne" (26), to perform lesser religious duties at Court while she is at Twickenham. Donne includes himself with the

friends who flock to Bedford as "sacrificers" (28), "Priests, or Organs" (29), obeying the Countess and proclaiming her dictates. Yet, in this verse epistle, Donne demonstrates his wit by completely reversing the dependence on faith expressed in "Reason is our Soules left hand" and by instead relying totally on "senses decree" (68), using the Countess's outward beauty as proof of her inner virtue. He does not request an intimate knowledge of Bedford's being but petitions that he may simply "survay the ediface" (34) of her body, noting that "In all Religions as much care hath bin / Of Temples frames, and beauty,'as Rites within" (35-36). On this rather secular "pilgrimage" (43), Donne concentrates on the Countess's physical attributes, her "eyes, hands, bosome" (46) that serve as virtue's "pure Altars" (46). He compares Bedford's lovely ediface to "the'Escuriall" (48), one of the largest and most beautiful of religious establishments in the world, while those who praise other beauties are mere "Bablers" of insignificant "Chappels" (48).

Donne not only concentrates on the secular, but gently ridicules sacred disputation on more theological topics in his modest apology for his flattering verses. In scholastic theological debates ("nice thinne Schoole divinity" l. 61), Donne contends, the same evidence can be twisted or slanted in order to "furder or represse" heresy (62). He fears that this praise, intended to please the Countess, might be likewise misconstrued as "Poetique rage, or flattery" (63) and produce an effect opposite to that intended. But though Donne seems simply to return to his original idea of relative worth, praising the rare beauty of Twickenham and its owner, the Countess, in the country, he actually joins the sacred and secular and endears himself with Bedford with his ending metaphor:

> The story'of beauty,'in Twicknam is, and you.
> Who hath seene one, would both; As, who had bin
> In Paradise, would seeke the Cherubin. (70-72)

Knowing Bedford's interest in the beauty of her country estate, and her pious background, Donne appropriately compares Twickenham to paradise and the Countess to one of the resident cherubim, the order of angels known for contemplation and beauty. Moreover, he describes Twickenham as an actual physical extension of the Countess: "Who hath seene one, would both" (71). Thus, as Bedford is the perfect combination of "good and lovely" (55), the outward beauty of Twickenham attests to the inner goodness of its owner. In this manner, Donne manages to counteract the charge of flattery in the poem by making Bedford herself the manifestation and thus the creator of this "story of beauty" in Twickenham.

Donne further explores the relative merits of spiritual and physical in "T'Have written then," a rather slippery verse letter because of Donne's constant repositioning of himself and reconsidering of his topics, especially vice and virtue. At the poem's beginning, Bedford seems to be all spiritual, all virtue. As mentioned, her letters to Donne are so sacred, he feels that repaying her with one of his would be "Simony" (2), the theological crime of buying sacred objects. She is "vertues best paradise" (75), not only virtuous but is virtue itself: "Your (or you) vertue" (25). Donne, on the other hand, is worse than merely secular: he is nothing at all (7), only "barren grounds" (11). Yet as the poem develops, so does Donne, because of his insistence on the active power of virtue. By permitting their relationship, Bedford has spiritualized Donne and has given him purpose: "In me you'have hallowed a Pagan Muse, / And denizend a stranger" (16-17). He acknowledges her Christ-like function of savior, since by her learning and power, so above that thought possible of women at the time, the Countess breaks the traditional bonds that imprison her sex, and by her virtue, she redeems the immoral court: she "ransomes one sex, and one Court preserves" (26).

As if to demonstrate his new spiritual insight and his new feeling of worth because of Bedford, Donne invites the Countess to "meditate" upon "others ills" (32) as he launches upon a tirade condemning the impositions of the body upon the soul (33-70). Though a rather curious manner of developing a complimentary verse letter, Donne's insistence upon man's natural depravity would be of interest to a pious Calvinist like Bedford, and he personalizes the jeremiad even more by incorporating subjects of personal and timely concern to the Countess: "We'have added to the world Virginia,'and sent / Two new starres lately to the firmament" (67-68). Donne here refers to the 1609 reorganization of the Virginia Company, with which Donne sought a position as secretary (Bald 162). Such a topic would not only concern Donne's hopes of patronage, but also would pique the interest of the Countess, who, with her husband, engaged in colonial enterprises during the period of Donne's acquaintance. The Earl of Bedford, in good company with other patrons of letters like the Earls of Pembroke and Southampton, was one of the "adventurers" for Virginia, while the Countess is named in the Bermudas Charter of June 29, 1615 (Thomson, "John Donne and the Countess" 338). Touching upon an even more personal matter, Donne's mention of "Two new starres" in the heavens is very likely a reference to Cecilia Bulstrode and Lady Markham, two of Bedford's kinswomen and closest friends, who both died at Twickenham in 1609. The implication is that both the venturers and the dead women are exploring new and hopefully better worlds. Also, the juxtaposition of these two allusions, one a commercial venture and the other a spiritual trial, parallels Donne's own attempts, in the verse letter, to appeal to Bedford's piety while furthering his chances for patronage.

The slipperiness of Donne's praise is especially evident in lines 71-90, in which he seems to reverse his position on the necessity of both vice and virtue several times as though he were afraid of offending the Countess. The poem, he says, stands "on two truths" (72), both of which, Donne asserts, the Countess refuses to believe: the vice of the world and her own virtue. This, Donne implies, is a fault, since too much humility would lead her to suspect her own virtue, and refusal to believe that others are vicious would prevent virtuous compassion. Therefore, to truly praise Bedford, Donne must admit that she "hath some, but wise degrees of vice" (76), a logical conclusion that Donne supports with evidence from court politics, in which rulers often use questionable methods to put down corruption and treachery: "Statesmen purge vice with vice, and may corrode / The bad with bad" (83-84).

This idea of employing underhanded methods to obtain good results, or the concept of the ends justifying the means, is very relevant in light of Bedford's own maneuverings in court politics, and also coincides with Castiglione's emphasis in The Courtier:

> For since ill is contrary to good, and good to ill, it is, in a manner, necessary by contrariety and a certain counterpoise the one should underprop and strengthen the other, and where the one wanteth or increaseth, the other to want or increase also; because no contrary is without his other contrary. (93)

By suggesting the necessity of vice with virtue, then, Donne not only gives approval to the Countess's maneuverings but shows himself skillful and knowledgeable in the workings of court.

In "To the Countesse of Bedford At New-yeares Tide," Donne returns to the same religious fiction expressed in his introductory verse letter, "Reason is our Soules left hand," that Bedford's goodness, too infinite to be rationally comprehended, must

simply be accepted upon faith. Donne's fear in this later verse letter, however, is that his verse, praising the Countess's miraculous virtue, would never be believed in this heretical age, "now faith is scant" (23), and that his hyperbolic praise might instead disgrace his patroness. Or, even if others would agree that his praise is true, Donne is afraid that no one would accept the truth because of his own lowly status:

> . . . they will doubt how I,
> One corne of one low anthills dust, and lesse,
> Should name, know, or expresse a thing so high,
> And not an inch, measure infinity. (27-30)

As in "Reason is our Soules left hand," Donne seems to back away humbly and unselfishly so as not to hinder the Countess in her virtuous and blessed way. In this verse letter, though, Donne does not send the Countess off to heaven but sends heaven down to her: he turns to God "to make it [Donne's praise] good" (35).

Yet as Donne relates God's words, we see that His words are not of praise but of advice and counsel from courtier to patroness. Marotti comments that, couched in the language of religious and moral counsel, this whole six-stanza section of the epistle makes the same association of courtly success and spiritual health found in the prose letters, other verse epistles, and the Anniversaries (227). "God" advises Bedford to behave carefully at Court and to make the best use of her personal and social resources (her "beauty, learning, favour, blood" l. 37). Explaining that the Court was a complex environment in which morally "Indifferent" (43) realities outnumbered obvious "good and bad" (41) ones, "God" justifies some practice of "vain disport" (44) as long as it remains "On this side sinne" (45), a judgement that depends totally on one's moral tolerance (Marotti 226). Also, Bedford is advised to balance her life of sophisticated pleasure with times of devotion and withdrawal from Court activities: some "houres / Which pleasure, and delight may not ingresse" (46-47).

The difficult lines, "And though what none else lost, be truliest yours, / Hee [God] will make you, what you did not, possesse, / By using others, not vice, but weaknesse" (48-50) can be paraphrased as suggested by Milgate, "God will give you ways to exercise and increase your virtue, even beyond what you now possess, in your dealings with the weaknesses of others" (Donne, Satires 267). Yet, as Marotti comments, these lines also suggest a kind of ruthlessness and exploitation of others that was prevalent in Court maneuvering, a warning of the dangers of Court politics that continues in the next two stanzas (227). In order to protect her "fame" (57) from defamatory gossip, the Countess is advised to exercise "a discreet warinesse" (57) and emotional restraint, repressing "Joy, when your state swells, sadnesse when 'tis lesse" (59-60) to prevent both envy and scorn.

Thus, God's advice is not spiritual counsel at all but is Donne's diplomatic way of showing his own knowledge of the intricacies of court life through use of politically religious language which offered him the opportunity to question and criticize the official ideology that sanctioned its use (Marotti 227).

Donne ends "Reason is our soules left hand" by encouraging Bedford to continue her present course: "do as you doe, / Make your return home gracious" (34-35), and in "T'Have written then," he urges her to "be content" with her perfect mixture of vice and virtue. As a pious woman with Calvinist leanings, Bedford was very likely careful to examine her own spiritual life, scrutinizing her acts and intentions for signs of God's saving grace, which Calvinists believed manifested itself in worldly success. Thus she could only be pleased with these verse letters' assumption of her salvation as one of the Elect. Donne similarly assures Bedford in "To the Countesse of Bedford At New-yeares Tide" that she has nothing to fear or regret, even in the face of

God: "Hee cannot, (that's, he will not) dis-inroule / Your name" (63-64), a direct reference to the Calvinist concept of the Book of the Elect, the roll of all those predestined to be redeemed. Therefore, Donne implies that Bedford does live her life according to God's advice quoted above, and will not only succeed at Court but will continue to be enrolled with other redeemed Christians. Without endangering himself or insulting the Countess, Donne has shown his own diplomacy and wit in creating a personal message of assurance and good news, this "private Ghospell" (65) of the verse letter.

Donne not only proclaims Bedford's unity of virtue and beauty but also compliments her learning and religion and again encourages her to continue her already perfect ways in "Honour is so sublime perfection," a verse letter concentrating on relative worth and subtle diplomacy yet still within a religious framework. He advises Bedford to accept praise from even the lowest of creatures, citing as example God Himself, who created inferior creatures simply to give Himself honor. But Bedford is not just one of these inferior beings, but more perfect than all mankind: God "made better clay" (22) for her temporal body, or used spiritually superior material, "Soules stuffe such as shall late decay, / Or such as needs small change at the last day" (23-24). Thus, made of the same substance as souls, Bedford's outward beauty is a true indication of her inner virtue: it reveals her "hearts thoughts" (27).

Donne's emphasis on Bedford's transparent body leads to his discussion of her unity of "Beeing and seeming," a topic quite relevant to Donne's discussions of Bedford's assumed inner piety and her outward appearance and actions at court. In the religious context, Donne names inner saintliness "zeale" (38) or "religion" (39), while secular concern for appearance is "discretion" (37) or "wit" (44). The lines

"Discretion is a wisemans Soule [or, main concern], and so / Religion is a Christians" (40-41) underscore the evident disparity between concern for outer appearance and inner virtue, but Donne insists on the unity of these concerns in life:

> . . . these are one. . . .
> Nor may we hope to sodder still and knit
> These two, and dare to breake them; nor must wit
> Be colleague to religion, but be it. (42-45)

Not only does this concept relate to the Calvinistic insistence upon working in the world rather than living in cloistered prayer, it also echoes Castiglione's advice in The Courtier on the necessity of unity and harmony of all good qualities in order to make the courtier a perfect whole:

> Therefore it behooveth our Courtier in all his doings to be chary and heedful, and whatso he saith or doeth to accompany it with wisdom, and not only to set his delight to have in himself parts and excellent qualities, but also to order the tenor of his life after such a trade that the whole may be answerable unto these parts, and see the selfsame to be always and in everything such, that it disagree not from itself, but make one body of all these good qualities, so that every deed of his may be compact and framed of all the virtues . . . all [virtues] are so knit and linked to one another that they tend to one end, and all may be applied and serve to every purpose. (99)

To illustrate his own position on the unity of inner virtue and outer behavior, and to spiritualize his rather practical advice to the Countess, Donne employs the image of the circle. As mentioned, this emblem refers to the commonplace definition of God as an infinite circle of which the center is everywhere and the circumference nowhere, but it also implies geometrically perfect unity between religion and discretion:

> In those poore types of God (round circles) so
> Religions tipes, the peeclesse centers flow,
> And are in all the lines which all wayes goe. (46-48)

Like the perfect circle, whose center is an indivisible, "peeclesse" point that "flows" into each radius, religion should form the indivisible center and should flow into all the ways of our lives (Satires 270). Though presenting this ideal, Donne particularizes his comments to Bedford, who must live in a court which in reality was anything but ideal, and acquiesces that if religion and discretion must be divided or ranked in the Countess, "then religion / Wrought your ends, and your wayes discretion" (49-50).

By these words, Donne justifies any actions on Bedford's part which may be dictated by worldly discretion rather than spiritual zeal. He also echoes the doctrine of ways and means implied in "T'Have written then" with the idea of using vice to purge out vice (ll. 83-86) and, as in that verse letter, he can urge the Countess to continue in her ways (and means):

> Goe thither stil, goe the same way you went,
> Who so would change, do covet or repent;
> Neither can reach you, great and innocent. (52-54)

In each of the verse letters discussed, we see Donne personalizing his panegyric to Bedford, following Castiglione's advice to fit words to the audience and situation at hand. By concluding the letters with assurances of the righteousness of the Countess's life and actions, Donne not only appeals to her pietistical strain but also subtly requests continued favor from his patroness. In developing the poems, Donne demonstrates his understanding of and his ability to function within the Countess's courtly contexts by reconciling what he terms in "Honour is so sublime perfection" as "beeing and seeming," a concept of deception that we will see governed the entire philosophy of King James and his court.

CHAPTER 5

The Courtly Context:

Donne's Reconciliation of "Being" and "Seeming"

> Kings, being publike persons, by reason of their authority, are as it were set (as it was said of old) upon a public stage, in the sight of all the people; where all the beholders eyes are attentively bent to looke and pry in the least circumstance of their secretest drifts: Which should make Kings the more carefull not to harbour the secretest thought in their minde, but such as in the [sic] owne time they shall not be ashamed openly to avouch; assuring themselves that Time the mother of Veritie, will in due season bring her owne daughter to perfection. (James I, Basilikon Doron 1603 prefatory letter, The Political Works 5)

> Qui nescit dissimulare, nescit regnare ("He who does not know how to dissimulate, does not know how to rule": Weldon 32)

The obvious discrepancy between these two concepts of self-presentation encapsulates the contradictions inherent in James's metaphor of King as actor, contradictions that reverberate throughout the entire Jacobean court of which the Countess of Bedford was a part. If the King is set on stage and is dependent upon an audience, then his need to be correctly interpreted by that audience governs his every action. He is always at risk of being misinterpreted, however virtuous or honest his intentions might be. James continues in his handbook of kingship, Basilikon Doron, that the monarch must not only impose good laws, he must exemplify them:

> . . . with his vertuous life in his owne person, and the person of his court and company; by good example alluring his subjects to the love of virtue, and hatred of vice. . . . Let your owne life be a law-booke and a mirrour to your people, that therein they may read the practice of their owne Lawes; and therein they may see, by your image [emphasis mine], what life they should leade. (James 30)

Therefore, his actions are not governed by inner virtue but by efforts to produce the image, the appearance, of virtue.

James well understood the risk of misinterpretation. He continues in Basilikon Doron:

> It is a trew old saying, That a King is as one set on a stage, whose smallest actions and gestures, all the people gazingly doe behold: and therefore although a King be never so praecise in the discharging of his Office, the people, who seeth but the outward part, will ever iudge of the substance, by the circumstances; and according to the outward appearance, if his behaviour bee light or dissolute, will conceive prae-occupied conceits of the Kings inward intention: which, although with time, (the trier of all trewth,) it will evanish, by the evidence of the contrary effects, yet interim patitur iustus; and praeiudged conceits will, in the meane time, breed contempt, the mother of rebellion and disorder. (43)

James's quandary was that he wanted his people to think his actions (at least his official ones) were a sincere indication of his inner virtue. In a favorite metaphor, he likened his breast to a "Christall window" (James 285):

> Not such a Mirror wherein you may see your owne faces, or shadowes; but such a Mirror, or Christall, as through the transparentnesse thereof, you may see the heart of your King. (306)

Yet often his actions were a direct contradiction of even common decency. A contemporary description of King James indicates little by way of inner worth and virtue:

> His tongue too large for his mouth, which ever made him speak full in the mouth, and made him drink very uncomely, as if eating his drink . . . his skin was as soft as taffeta sarsnet, which felt so, because hee never washt his hands . . . his legs were very weake, having had (as was thought) some foul play in his youth, or rather before he was born, that he was not able to stand at seven years of age, that weaknesse made him ever leaning on other mens shoulders; his walke was ever circular, his fingers ever in that walke fidling about his cod-piece. (Goldberg 55)

Other accounts show James behaving scandalously in public with his male favorites, causing the court to conjecture that worse happened in private. In Traditionall

Memoyres, Francis Osborne claims that the king chose his favorites solely on the basis of their looks, and "the love the king shewed was as amorously conveyed, as if he had mistaken their sex, and thought them ladies; which I have seene Sommerset and Buckingham labour to ressemble, in the effeminateness of their dressing." Osborne continues that James was seen "kissing them after so lascivious mode in publick, and upon the theatre, as it were, of the world" that it "prompted many to imagine some things done in the tyring-house, that exceed my expressions" (I, 275). In official matters, the image James promoted of himself as concerned and active ruler was also contradicted by his avoidance of parliamentary matters, preferring to remain in the country to pursue his passion for the hunt.

Yet, we will see that the public image of the Jacobean Court, as portrayed by masques at the time, was one of splendor, learning, virtue, and benevolence. In employing the metaphor of Player King in his writings and speeches, James attempted to circumvent this obvious contradiction of "being" and "seeming," though not resolve it. As monarch, James could publically present himself as whatever idealized image he desired, Sun King, peacemaker, scholar, father; and as actor, he could maintain the fiction in words if not in deeds. James thus attempted to control the audience's interpretation of his actions by setting the rules of interpretation. He affirmed his role as King by claiming the power was given by God himself. According to Michael Foucault, this is the way sovereign power affirms itself: it claims that what it enacts is outside itself and transcendent; it imposes a fiction (93-94). This fictional, idealized world of the Jacobean court was the domain of Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford, and the goal of ambitious courtier John Donne. And to prove his ability to function within

that charmed circle, Donne framed his verse letters to Bedford to recreate and attempt to resolve the basic contradiction of the Jacobean court: being and seeming.

We have seen how Donne takes the King's prerogative by imposing his own fiction on the world of his verse letter, creating his own microcosm and enabling him to create likewise a relationship with the Countess where none existed before. The roles Donne creates for Bedford in these verse letters, as he transforms, positions, and repositions his patroness, are similar to the roles James assumes in his fictionalized self-presentation before his people, especially in his role of Divinely-appointed monarch. In Donne's microcosm of the verse letter, the Countess is "divinity" (l. 2) whose friends are "Saints" (l. 9), then "The first good Angell" in woman's shape (l. 31-32), "Gods masterpeece" (l. 33), and finally God's "Factor for our loves" (l. 34) ("Reason is our Soules left hand). In "You have refin'd mee," Bedford is again a divinity in a chariot of light (19) creating a "new world" (21) and "new creatures" (22), "vertues temple" (44), "th'Escuriall" (48) of churches, "all record, all prophecie" (52) of rare past and future stories, "the transcript, and originall" (56) of good and lovely, "The Mine, the Magazine, the Commonweale, / The story of beauty,'in Twicknam" (69-70) and a cherub in paradise (72). She is "the worlds best part, or all It" (20), vertue itself (25), "vertues best paradise" (75), and a "Commonwealth" (87) in "T'Have written then." In "This twilight of two yeares," the Countess is "infinity" (30), while in "Honour is so sublime perfection," she is a deity who "can all clouds subdue; / But one" (20-21), and a superior human being "for whose body God made better clay, / Or took Soules stuffe such as shall late decay" (22-23). Bedford's shifting roles not only demonstrate Donne's power as creator but also mirror the protean personae King James assumed in his official and private fictions.

James claimed to derive his position directly from God, and in effect, took God's place on earth. In a letter of 1586, he argued that Elizabeth could not take the life of his mother, Mary, Queen of Scots, for sovereigns were those "quom he [God] hath callid goddis" (Goldberg 27). Speaking to the Star Chamber in 1616, James declared, "Kings are properly called Iudges, and Iudgement properly belongs to them from God: for Kings sit in the Throne of GOD, and hence all Iudgement is derived" (James 326). In his poems, he insistently identified with Apollo, god of poetry, medicine, and the sun, and also identified himself with Solomon for his learning and wisdom. His unpopular 1604 peace treaty with Spain was part of the process by which James sought to be known as a peacemaker king, and he chose as his motto, Beati Pacifici (Blessed are the Peacemakers) (Bergeron 78). Throughout his career, James invoked the style of gods, which Goldberg defines as "the claim to total freedom in the reshaping of discourse to proclaim power" (27).

Not only in his claim to divinity did James reshape discourse and impose a fiction, but he also did so in his relationships with others. David Bergeron believes that James fashioned fictional family relationships with others because of his lack of familial relationships as a child (47). He called his cousin Elizabeth "cousin," "sister," "mother," and when he was twenty years old and Elizabeth fifty-three, he tried to arrange a marriage with her and call her "wife" (Bergeron 47). James called his favorite, George Villiers, his "wife" and "child," while Villiers responded to the king's fiction by calling him "dad" and "sweetheart" (Bergeron 178, 182). In his claim to be "the Common Father of all his people" (George Marcelline, quoted in Bergeron 68), James imposed the facade of a happy, strongly-knit royal family, and advertised his fatherly role through public spectacles, like the royal entry pageant of 1604, Prince

Henry's investiture ceremonies in 1610, and the elaborate wedding celebration for Princess Elizabeth in 1613. These public demonstrations of power, worth, and beauty show the importance of spectacle in creating the image of the Stuart royal family, which in reality was beset with ambition, jealousy, and resentment at each new royal favorite who took James's love and attention away from his own family (Bergeron 114).

James's protean images only continued those mythicized self-presentations his predecessor, Queen Elizabeth, either created for herself or allowed her subjects to confer upon her. Like James, Elizabeth presented herself in a variety of roles: a Queen of Shepherds, a new Deborah, a Cynthia or Diana, and a secularized Virgin Mother to the nation. In addition, because, like Bedford, she had the complication of being a woman in power, she felt the need to present herself in speeches and public pronouncements as an androgenous figure in order to calm political anxieties of her as a frail woman on the throne: she was both man and woman, queen and king, mother and firstborn son (Marcus 137). In sermons and public entertainments, she was associated with male heroes as well as with more familiar female ones: not only Belphoebe and Astraea, but also St. George, David, Moses, Solomon, Alexander, and Aeneas (Marcus 143). And Elizabeth, like James, was the focal point of every court spectacle. Yet, as Margaret McGowan explains, Elizabeth remained a more static and lonely figure: "Her incredible loftiness of being was acutely expressed by poets who spoke the adoration felt by courtiers toward their monarch . . ." (178). James, however, was depicted not so much as a lonely pinnacle of State but as a busy center toward which all eyes turn and from which all activity begins. There was a robustness about the Jacobean Court that, in comparison, made the Elizabethan Court seem more

like Fairyland (McGowan 179). Thus, though both monarchs presented planned "selves," James seemed more actively involved in his role and more readily able to adapt to the situation at hand, like Donne and Bedford.

Under King James, the surface show of an ideal court ruled by a divinely-ordained monarch possessing the wisdom of Solomon and the devotion of a father to his people was generally at odds with the inner reality of Jacobean court politics. In demonstrating his understanding of the fiction of court, and of its reality, Donne frames his verse letters to Bedford to illustrate and explore the fiction while subtly hinting at the reality. Previous discussions have shown that through positionings and repositions, Donne utilizes James's absolutist stance not to claim power for himself, but to make himself nothing and instead to give all power to the Countess, upon whom he is totally dependent for his being. Then, as he personalizes the letters to Bedford's private life and concerns, he suggests that this fiction is not only a public portrayal but permeates every facet of the Countess's existence. This chapter will examine how Donne frames his letters within a courtly context to show that he shares Bedford's knowledge of those "state secrets" that constitute Jacobean court life, the understood discrepancy between being and seeming, and that he is worthy to take a place in that courtly world.

Though he demonstrates his understanding of the salacious reputation of life at court, Donne is careful to separate and raise Bedford above the squalor. Bedford is immune from the evils of court, not only personally protected by the "Balme" of her aristocratic birth and her God-given beauty, but also able to prevent "what can be done or said" against others by the "methridate" of her added learning and religion ("Reason is our Soules left hand," ll. 21-28). In "You have refin'd mee," Donne justifies the

presence of the Countess's virtue in a Court "which is not vertue's clime" (70) by noting that its rarity there increases its value; in fact, her virtue is so rare at Court that it cannot be seen without Donne's interpretation. As the presence of James, the roi soleil, created Court and gave it its entire purpose, Bedford's divine light creates a new world, making Court and its "vulgar Sunne" (26) inferior "Antipodes" (25).

Donne gives a more obvious acknowledgment of Court degeneracy in "T'Have written then":

> I have beene told, that vertue'in Courtiers hearts
> Suffers an Ostracisme, and departs.
> Profit, ease, fitnesse, plenty, bid it goe. (21-23)

But he immediately justifies his "hearsay" with what his own senses tell him, again employing the image of Bedford as preserving balm or mithridate:

> But whither, only knowing you, I know;
> Your (or you) vertue two vast uses serves,
> It ransomes one sex, and one Court preserves. (24-26)

The implication is that Donne, not personally knowing Court but personally knowing Bedford, an important member of that Court, uses her "seeming" as an indication of the Court's "being." In this way, Donne does not have to defend Bedford's presence in the sordid world of Court, but can concentrate on Bedford's innocence as a redeeming quality of Court.

One of the means Donne employs to show his comprehension of court life is to demonstrate his understanding of the importance of "seeming," or exterior presentation. As previously discussed, Donne and Bedford shared a rhetorical view of life which conceives of reality as fundamentally dramatic and of man as fundamentally a role player. For them, as for any ambitious courtier of their time, success in court had little to do with inner worth and everything to do with making a favorable impression upon

those in power. The Earl of Suffolk supports this assertion in a letter to Sir John Harrington of Kelston in about 1611, in which Suffolk counsels Harrington on the best means to court advancement:

> You are not young, you are not handsome, your are not finely; and yet you will come to Courte, and think to be well favoured! Why, I say again, good Knight, that your learning may somewhat prove worthy hereunto; your Latin and your Greek, your Italian, your Spanish tongues, your wit and discretion may be well looked unto for a while, as strangers at such a place; but these are not the thinges men live by now-a-days. Will you say the moon shineth all the sommer? That the stars are bright jewels fit for Car's [Robert Carr, the King's favorite] ears? That the roan jennet [James's favorite horse] surpasseth Bircephalus, and is worthy to be bestridden by Alexander? That his eyes are fire, his tail is Berenice's locks, and a few more fancies worthy your noticing. (Nichols, ii, 414)

Donne shows his understanding of such court expectations by stressing Bedford's outward appearance and actions in his verse letters to her. To learn more about her in his introductory letter, Donne first studies the Countess in "Those friends, whom your election glorifies" ("Reason is our Soules left hand," ll. 9-10), which echoes Castiglione's advice to judge a person by his choice of friends:

> For undoubtedly reason willeth that such as are coupled in strict amity and inseparable company, should also be alike in will, in mind, in judgment, and inclination. So that he who so is conversant with the ignorant or wicked, he is also counted ignorant and wicked. And contrarywise he that is conversant with the good, wise, and discreet, he is reckoned such a one. For it seemeth by nature that everything doth willingly fellowship with his like. (The Courtier 130)

Castiglione also acknowledges that, in addition to one's friends, "all the behaviors, gestures, and manners, besides words and deeds, are a judgment of the inclination of him in whom they are seen" (129). Donne agrees with this view, attempting to learn about Bedford in her "deeds, accesses, and restraints, / And what you reade, and what your selfe devise" ("Reason is our Soules left hand," ll. 11-12). Even, then, in his introductory verse letter in which Donne crafts a "first impression" of himself for the

Countess, Donne shows his awareness of the importance of appearance by subtly placing Bedford in the position of the one making the first impression.

Donne clearly demonstrates the importance of exteriors in "You have refin'd mee," in which he acknowledges the Countess's "vertuous Soule" (32) but chooses instead to survey her "ediface" (34), specifically citing her exterior "eyes, hands, bosome" (46) that serve as "vertues temple, not as shee" (44). Acknowledging the danger of misinterpretation of actions and appearances, Donne comments, "Oft from new proofes, and new phrase, new doubts grow, / As strange attire aliens the men wee know" (65-66). Yet, as if to discount the possibility that Bedford's beauty is not an indication of her worth, Donne leaves "all appeale / To higher Courts" and proclaims, "senses decree is true" (67-68). In "Honour is so sublime perfection," again Bedford's superior physical body is emphasized, made of "better clay" (22) or "Soules stuffe such as shall late decay" (23). And Donne stresses the importance of sincere and believable appearances and the danger of misinterpretation in "To the Countesse of Bedford At New-yeares Tide." First, he admits the fear that his high praise of the Countess, however justified, might be beyond belief in an age when "faith is scant" (23) so that his verse would discredit rather than extol his patroness; that is, "you [Bedford], and it [the poem] too much grace might disgrace" (25). In addition, since one's credibility depends upon his appearance, Donne concedes that no one would believe a "nothing" like himself, however credible his praise might be. Diplomatically avoiding the issue altogether, Donne turns to God to relate the advice he himself wishes to give, especially dealing with the importance of outward appearance: "Hee [God] will best teach you, how you should lay out / His stock of beauty, learning, favour, blood" (36-37), and "He [God] will make you speake truths, and credibly, / And make you doubt,

that others doe not so" (51-52) [emphases mine]. The importance, then, lies as much in "laying . . . out" God's gifts as in possessing them; as much in speaking truths "credibly" as in speaking them at all, so that in this rhetorical society, virtue, worth, and sincerity only exist if recognized and believed by the audience.

Castiglione, always aware of the reality of court life, agrees with the importance of presentation, stressing the necessity of a good first impression:

> Also as touching the opinion of men's qualities, the good or ill report at the first brunt moveth our mind to one of these two passions; therefore it cometh to pass that for the most part we judge with love or else with hatred. You see, then, of what importance this first imprinting is, and how he ought to endeavor himself to get it good in princes if he intend to be set by, and to purchase him the name of a good Courtier. (26)

And The Courtier abounds with recommendations for giving good impressions, first or otherwise. The courtier should not only be skillful in battle, but should make sure his skill is in plain sight of those he wishes to impress:

> . . . where the Courtier is at a skirmish, or assault, or battle upon the land, or in such other places of enterprise, he ought to work the matter wisely in separating himself from the multitude, and undertake his notable and bold feats which he hath to do with as little company as he can and in the sight of noble men that be of most estimation in the camp, and especially in the presence and, if it were possible, before the very eyes of his king or great personage he is in service withal; for indeed it is meet to set forth to the show things well done. (100-101)

Clothing also should be artfully chosen to give the impression desired:

> . . . he [the Courtier] ought to determine with himself what he will appear to be, and in such sort as he desireth to be esteemed so to apparel himself, and make his garments help him to be counted such a one, even of them that hear him not speak, nor see him do any manner thing . . . . And not this alone, but all the behaviors, gestures, and manners, beside words and deeds, are a judgment of the inclination of him in whom they are seen. (128-29)

Thus Castiglione's emphasis on exterior appearance demonstrates the preeminence of seeming over being in the realm of court.

In fact, the importance of outward impression often excused or even promoted deception in the forming of that impression. Castiglione explains that the process of acquiring outward grace is one of imitation:

> And even as the bee in the green meadows fleeth always about the grass, choosing out flowers, so shall our Courtier steal this grace from them that to his seeming have it, and from each one that parcel that shall be most worthy praise. (38)

In his recommendation to "steal" grace from others and fashion oneself according to the impression one wishes to make upon others, Castiglione conceives of the perfect courtier as a work of art, or perhaps artifice, with every action carefully calculated for a chosen effect. Yet even this studied grace should be concealed for effect, so that the courtier appears to use no effort at all as he dazzles his audience. Castiglione explains how to show such sprezzatura:

> . . . use in everything a certain recklessness, to cover art withal, and seem whatsoever he doeth and sayeth to do it without pain, and as it were, not minding it. And of this do I believe grace is much derived. (38)

This casualness in action "imprinteth in the minds of the lookers-on that whoso can so slightly do well, hath a great deal more knowledge than indeed he hath . . . " (42). The result, then, is "a very art that appeareth not to be art" (38), a carefully contrived deception, "seeming" that is not "being."

In his verse letters to Bedford, Donne demonstrates his understanding of this courtly matrix of imitation and tactical deceit by employing in the letters the same rhetorical means to improve one's image as those recommended for the successful courtier. Self-depreciation is a mode of self-representation closely related to sprezzatura for the courtier. Because the courtier is constituted by his audience, he must rely on the praise of others, but should show his deeds using modesty as a veil

paradoxically to magnify his perfections. Thus, modesty is the secular equivalent of humility, and as a virtue, is something (paradoxically) of which to be proud (Whigham, Ambition and Privilege 102-103). Castiglione's description of the practical use of such modesty resembles moves in a game:

> Yet ought a man always to humble himself somewhat under his degree, and not receive favor and promotions so easily as they be offered him, but refuse them modestly, showing he much esteemeth them, and after such a sort that he may give him an occasion that offereth them to offer them with a great deal more instance; because the more resistance a man maketh to in such matter to receive them, the more doth he seem to the prince that giveth them to be esteemed, and that the benefit which he bestoweth is so much the more, as he that receiveth it seemeth to make of it, thinking himself much honored thereby. And these are the true and perfect promotions that make men esteemed of such as see them abroad; because when they are not craved, every man conjectureth they arise of true virtue, and so much the more as they are accompanied with modesty. (117-18)

In such a matrix, deceit and virtue are almost necessarily tangled with one another, since virtue is judged solely by outward actions (or "seeming"), and those actions are governed by artful, premeditated self-presentation.

One way of demonstrating such modesty rhetorically is to apologize for one's inadequacy, a method advocated by King James himself, who wrote on the art of praising, "Ye shall rather prayse hir vther qualiteis, nor her fairnes or hir shaip. . . remiting that your wittis are sa smal . . . remiting alwayis to the Reider to iudge of hir" (James, Ane Short Treatise contaeining some Reulis and Cautelis to be observit and eschewit in Scottis Poesie, 1584, quoted in McGowan 180). Castiglione's characters likewise not only recommend such humility for the perfect courtier, but enact this calculated modesty whenever called upon to speak. For example, when asked to teach the assembly how to effectively use humor and jests, Messer Bernardo protests, ". . . even so ought not I, in the presence of hearers that have much better

understanding in that I have to say, than I myself, take upon me to entreat of jests" (153-54). Beginning with such protestations of inadequacy, a courtier can only pleasantly surprise his audience with what follows, demonstrating the sprezzatura of performing difficult tasks with ease.

Donne also humbly protests his inadequacy in his verse letters to Bedford. His "lownesse" at court is so extreme, he cannot be seen in "You have refin'd mee" (ll. 7-8). In "T'Have written then," Donne is a "nothing" who owes his patroness so much and owns so little, he may pay all he has "and yet have all to pay" (ll. 7-8). And in perhaps his most graphically humble self-presentation, "To the Countess of Bedford at New-yeares Tide," Donne is worse than nothing--he cannot be called anything at all:

> This twilight of two yeares, nor past nor next,
> Some embleme is of mee, or I of this,
> Who Meteor-like, of stuffe and forme perplext,
> Whose what, and where, in disputation is,
> If I should call mee any thing, should misse. (1-5)

When he does find metaphors for himself in this verse letter, he is "one corne of one low anthills dust, and lesse" (28) or "not an inch" (30).

Another rhetorical strategy of self-representation used by courtiers is the overt anticipation of criticism, similar to that expectation of misinterpretation expressed by James in Basilikon Doron (p. 43) quoted at the beginning of this chapter. By warding off such attacks before they have a chance to occur, the courtier testifies to his honest intentions as well as to his skill in favorable self-presentation. For example, Sir Thomas Elyot's The Book named the Governor proposes to describe a just public weal. In the apology to the book, Elyot assures his noble readers that he does not presume to teach those who obviously know better than he, proclaims he is speaking of virtue and vice in general and not "to the reproach of any one person" (xiv), and asks his

dedicatee Henry VIII "to deign to be patron and defender of this little work against the assaults of malign interpreters which fail not to rend and deface the renown of writers, they themselves being in nothing to the public weal profitable" (xiv). So those who misread his advice are parasites, and approval of the book designates the legitimate public servant (Whigham, Ambition and Privilege 118).

In like manner, Donne acknowledges the possibility that his praise of the Countess of Bedford in the verse letters might not be believed or might be rejected as flattery. He assures Bedford, "That you are good: and not one Heretique / Denies it: if he did, yet you are so" ("Reason is our Soules left hand" 17-18). Thus, he who does not believe in the Countess's divinity is branded as a "Heretique," a term not only invalidating any attack on Bedford's goodness but also maintaining the religious matrix of the poem. In "You have refin'd mee," Donne admits his hyperbolic praise might be misinterpreted as insincere (ll. 60-66). He anticipates criticism of his often perplexing conceits by likening the conceits to new styles of clothing on an old friend. Though his praise may seem hyperbolically insincere, tasting "of Poetique rage, or flattery," they simply adorn the sincere truth of Bedford's worth. In this way, he acknowledges the power of rhetoric, which can manipulate surface meanings and interpretations, or "seeming," but identifies his lines with the "one truth" that all hearts profess--that is, with "being."

As previously discussed, Donne voices his fear of disgracing the Countess by his "just praise" in "To the Countess of Bedford at New-yeares Tide." Verse truthfully expressing Bedford's miraculous goodness and beauty would lack all "Reason and likelihood, the firmest Base" (22) in an age when "faith is scant" (23) and, misinterpreted as flattery, Donne's poem would then disgrace the Countess with "too

much grace" (25). With a courtier's humility, Donne leaves the poem altogether, "lest truth b'endanger'd by my praise" (32), asking God to validate his words. Though the words continue to be Donne's, he has averted any accusations of insincere flattery and has made the noble gesture of modestly deferring to one better qualified to offer advice.

****

Thus, the world Donne sought to enter through his verse letters to Bedford, the world of the Jacobean Court, was one of deception--a pretend realm filled with ambitious actors ready to enact and thus affirm whatever fiction the monarch imposed upon them. The question in such an environment of deceptive conformity was how the courtier could make himself stand out from the horde of sycophants and attract the favorable attention of the monarch without going too far and breaking the fiction. Castiglione's advice to break away from the crowd and perform magnificent feats in battle alone and in full view of the sovereign no longer applied in the modern court, whose knights purchased their titles from a king whose treasury was always empty. Instead, these feats of daring must be more subtle and civilized, performed within the confines of an idealized court: ". . . let him set all his delight and diligence to wade in everything a little farther than other men, so that he may be known among all men for one that is excellent" (Castiglione 33). In his efforts to attract attention, though, the courtier must also show the effortlessness of sprezzatura and must remain within the behavioral confines of what Castiglione termed decorum or moderation:

> . . . let him do whatsoever other men do; so he decline not at any time from commendable deeds, but governeth himself with that good judgment that will not suffer him to enter into any folly; but let him

> laugh, dally, jest, and dance, yet in such wise that he may always declare himself to be witty and discreet, and everything that he doeth or speaketh, let him do it with a grace. (35)

This careful balancing act of demonstrating sprezzatura and decorum while maintaining the fiction of an idealized court was the true virtue of a successful courtier. Donne acknowledges this fact in "Honour is so sublime perfection": "And vertues whole summe is but know [possess decorum] and dare [demonstrate sprezzatura]" (33). In this verse letter, Donne counterpoises "zeale" or "religion," spontaneous enthusiasm, to "discretion" or knowledge in the ways of the world, carefully calculated behavior performed for its effect on the audience. These two qualities must be joined in a successful courtier, so that ways and means seem to be one:

> Discretion is a wisemans Soule, and so
> Religion is a Christians, and you know
> How these are one; her yea, is not her no.
>
> Nor may we hope to sodder still and knit
> These two, and dare to breake them; nor must wit
> Be colleague to religion, but be it. (40-45)

The perfect courtier must demonstrate the appearance of sincerity in his seeming so that his exterior is taken as a true indication of his interior.

But in the context of court life, in which "seeming" often has little to do with "being," any such statement of "being" must retain some ambiguity. Throughout this verse letter, Donne praises Bedford's sincerity, describing her body as an "Amber drop" (28) or "through-shine front" revealing her vertuous soul. But since Donne proclaims, "Beeing and seeming is your equall care" (32), contemporary readers might recall the questionable sincerity of James's wish for his breast to be a "Mirror, or Crystall, as through the transparentnesse thereof, you may see the heart of your king" (James 306).

And, according to God's/Donne's advice in "To the Countesse of Bedford At New-yeares Tide," the court follows an entirely different set of moral standards from the rest of the world:

> . . . good and bad have not
> One latitude in cloysters, and in Court;
> Indifferent there the greatest space hath got;
> Some pitty'is not good there, some vaine disport,
> On this side sinne, with that place may comport. (41-45)

Donne admits here that in court, good and evil exist, but the largest area of moral concerns is "Indifferent," or relative to the situation at hand. Thus, Donne's praise of Bedford's unity of "seeming" and "being" becomes problematic, since that virtuous "being" is governed by morals that are largely "indifferent." In fact, any action is acceptable so long as it remains "On this side sinne" and not beyond the boundaries of court decorum. With court decorum and sprezzatura, the Countess of Bedford retained her envied position as Queen Anne's "only favourite" (Chamberlain, i, 306) by remaining just "On this side sinne," becoming a major player in one of the most spectacular affirmations of James's fictional ideal, the court masque.

Though court masques had flourished in England for more than a century, the form was revitalized for the Stuart court by the work of Inigo Jones and Ben Jonson. An allegorical mixture of music, poetry, and dance, the masque was essential to the life of the Stuart court: masque allegories gave a higher meaning to the realities of politics and power while its idealized fictions created heroic roles for the leaders of society (Harris 35). Like Donne's verse letters to Bedford, masques attempted to embody, affirm, and celebrate the idealized fiction King James imposed upon his court. Also like the verse letters, masques were not art for art's sake but were strictly occasional: either the creator of the masque had a specific event like a wedding or

investiture to celebrate, or he had to contrive the masque to conform to a central conceit given him by the patron. For example, in 1605, Queen Anne expressed a desire that she and her fellow masquers should appear as blackamores, giving Ben Jonson the task of inventing a poetic justification for the sudden appearance of an invasion of negresses at the English court. He did so admirably, succeeding also in affirming the king's central role in masque and court:

> Niger, accompanied by his daughters and their attendants, has arrived together with Oceanus at the Court of England. He explains to Oceanus that his daughters have fallen into a profound despair on hearing of the superior beauty of nymphs living in other parts of the world, and have been wandering, in obedience to a vision, in quest of a land "whose termination (of the Greek) sounds tania," where they hope to get cured of their blackness. At this point in the action the moon goddess reveals herself, and explains that she has now come to announce that her prophesy has been fulfilled, in that the daughters of Niger have arrived at Britania, a land governed by ("bright Sol") i.e., King James
>
> "Whose beams shine day and night, and are of force
> To blanch an AEthiop and revive a corse." (Welsford 175)

Like Donne, however, Jonson and Jones understood that the idealized vision of court was a fiction of King James's making. As Donne mingled in his verse letters to Bedford the ideal fiction with subtle hints of the sordid reality of court life, Jonson and Jones acknowledged both fact and fiction by developing two separate sections for the court masque. The first, called the antimasque, was performed by professionals and presented a world of disorder or vice, accentuating everything that the ideal world of the second, the courtly main masque, was to overcome and supercede (Orgel 40). In form, these main masques were variable, but certain characteristics were constant: the monarch was at the center, and members of the court enacted roles within an idealized fiction (Orgel 41). The masque form resembles, quite strikingly, Donne's verse letters to Bedford, which are themselves celebrations and embodiments of a courtly fiction.

The climactic moment of the masque was nearly always the same: the fiction opened outward to include the whole court, as masquers descended from pageant car or stage and took partners from the audience. In fact, no fine distinction existed between the stage and audience. The masquers were the spectators, in that the Queen, her ladies, or their lords, all qualified equally to assume the characters of the masque, and conversely, the spectators were the masquers in that they interacted with the actors throughout the proceedings. Characters called upon "Ladies" to respond, judge, or comment; they appealed to the King, exalted him, or paid him homage. Interchange was fluid and constant in these two spheres that were merely extensions of each other (McGowan 193). What the noble spectator watched, he ultimately became. Likewise, Donne places himself rhetorically within the fiction of his verse letters to Bedford, strategically positioning himself into a relationship with the Countess there in hopes of extending that rhetorical relationship into the larger fiction of the court.

In many ways, the Jacobean masque and the courtly verse letter are congruent expressive forms. Donne's careful attention to the hierarchical structure and positionings in his verse letters to Bedford is mirrored not only in the hierarchy of masque characters but also in the seating of the courtly audience. King James was the true focal point of the masque, even when he was one of the spectators. Courtiers insisted that the king be placed in the audience not for his best view of the production but where he could best be viewed by the rest of the audience (Orgel 15). The closer one sat to the monarch, the "better" one's place was, an index to one's status, or more directly, to the degree of favor one enjoyed, so that even the audience became an emblem of court structure. Ambassadorial disputes frequently hinged upon the legations' placement at the Christmas masque. James found that an easy way to insult

the Venetians was to seat them farther from the royal box than the Spaniards. Thus, the masque became a political tool as well as a celebration of royal power and aristocratic community (Orgel 11).

Similarly, Donne, as we have seen, took care to position himself in relation to Bedford, drawing her closer to himself within the microcosm of the verse letter. In this way he accomplished rhetorically what seating arrangements for the court masque accomplished physically: a closer proximity to the one in power and raised status on the court hierarchy.

A contemporary description of The Masque of Queens in 1609 indicates the splendor, extravagance, and allegorical nature typical of those masques in which Queen Anne and the Countess of Bedford appeared:

> 2nd February. At Whitehall was enacted a masque of Ben Jonson's devising which he names The Masque of Queens, being a celebration of honourable and true Fame bred out of Virtue. The masque was preceded by a foil or anti-masque of 12 women in the habits of hags or witches, sustaining the persons of Ignorance, Suspicion, Credulity, and the like. The King being set and the whole company in full expectation the scene which first presented itself was an ugly Hell, flaming beneath and smoking to the top of the roof. Then to hollow and infernal music came forthe sundry witches, all differently attired, some with rats on their heads or shoulders, others with ointment pots at their girdles, all with spindles, timbrels, rattles or other venefical instruments. The device of their attire and the invention of the scene and the machine was M. Inigo Jones's. The witches thus making their charms, Ate their Dame enters to them and they fall into a magical dance, full of preposterous change and gesticulation (for they do all things contrary to the custom of men, dancing back to back and hip to hip, making their circles backward and the like). In the heat of their dance was heard a sudden loud blast of many instruments, with which not only the hags but the whole scene also vanished, and in place of it appeared a glorious building, figuring the House of Fame, on top of which was discovered the twelve Masquers, sitting upon a triumphant throne made pyramid-wise. Hereupon comes forward a person, dressed like Perseus, expressing Masculine Virtue, to enumerate the eleven Queens, who were such as Penthesilia, Camilla, Candace, Boadicea etc., and lastly Bel-Anna, Queen of the Ocean. So the Masquers, having descended, mounted in three triumphal chariots wherein they rode about the stage. Then they descended from their chariots and danced two curious dances, after

> which they took out the men and danced the measures for a full hour. In their third dance they disposed themselves into letters honouring the name of Prince Charles; and after that they fell to galliards and corantos, and so taking their chariots again returned to the House of Fame. The dancers in this masque were the Queen, the Countesses of Arundel, Derby, Huntingdon, Bedford, Essex, Montgomery, the Viscountess Cranborne, and the Ladies Elizabeth Guildford, Anne Winter, Windsor and Anne Clifford. (Harrison 127-28)

Thus, the twelve hag antagonists to true fame are overcome by Heroic Virtue, represented by Queen Anne as Bel-Anna and her eleven other virtuous queens of antiquity and legend. Although Jonson states that the particular parts were disposed "rather by chance, then Election," Bedford's personation of Penthesilea, queen of the Amazons, is not likely to be accidental. As the most ancient queen, the martial Penthesilea led the procession, figuring forth power linked to virtue, valor, and beauty (Lewalski, "Lucy" 58).

Both masque and verse letter are forms that enact Castiglione's recommendations for courtly behavior, so both writing verse letters and giving, creating and participating in these masques were opportunities to show one's understanding of magnificence, decorum, and sprezzatura. The monarch or aristocrat who sponsored the masque demonstrated his aristocratic graciousness and largesse, for the cost of these productions, given only once or twice before a few privileged guests, was often staggering. In 1618, King James devoted 4,000 pounds, a sum valued at over 40,000 pounds today, on the cost of a single production, while in 1633, the Inns of Court spent over 21,000 pounds, or over 200,000 pounds today, on such a presentation. If the king were the host, his liberal nature was demonstrated by this expenditure; if the hosts were his subjects, no doubt could remain concerning their loyalty and the essential nobility of their nature. By hosting the masque, then, these aristocrats demonstrate the "graciousness" Donne requests of his patroness ("Reason is our Soules

left hand" l. 35) and prove that they are superior by birth: for their bodies, "God made better clay" ("Honour is so sublime perfection" l. 22).

The inventor of the masques demonstrated his ability to conform his tastes and talent to the patron, "making his will, manners and fashions, to be altogether pliable to please him" (Castiglione 114). Because the better masques, especially those written by Jonson, were often intricate neo-platonic allegories about the power of kingship or the nature of virtue, they embodied that pleasing complexity (so evident in Donne's verse letters) that Castiglione thinks is a quality of good writing:

> . . . if the words that the writer useth bring with them a little--I will not say difficulty--but covered subtlety, and not so open, as such as be ordinarily spoken, they give a certain greater authority to writing, and make the reader more heedful to pause at it, and to ponder it better, and he taketh a delight in the wittiness and learning of him that writeth, and with a good judgment, after some painstaking, he tasteth the pleasure that consisteth in hard things. (45)

We have already mentioned how such epideictic style can draw attention to the subject and writer as well, so that the allegorical complexities of the masques not only celebrated the court it allegorized but also the creator of the masque. Thus even writing the masque was an opportunity to win favor with monarch and court.

Aristocratic participants in the masque also had the opportunity to show their courtly accomplishments before their noble peers as well as the monarch--to "laugh, dally, jest, and dance," and do it "with a grace" (Castiglione 35). Through their elaborate and often scandalous costumes, they could also follow Castiglione's recommendation that the courtier should not dance openly unless in disguise:

> Because to be in a mask bringeth with it a certain liberty and licence, that a man may among other things take upon him the form of that he hath best skill in, and use bent, study, and preciseness about the principal drift of the matter whereabout he will show himself, and a certain recklessness about that is not of importance, which augmenteth the grace of the thing, as it were to disguise a young man in an old man's attire, but so that his garments be not a hindrance to him to show

> his nobleness of person . . . . Because the mind of the lookers-on runneth forthwith to imagine the thing that is offered up to the eyes at the first show, and when they behold afterward a far greater matter to come of it than they looked for under that attire, it delighteth them, and they take pleasure at it. (105)

Through use of masks and costumes, then, the noble ladies and men who participated in the masques could feel free to demonstrate the daring and sprezzatura necessary to gain notice, but could feel that they had not overstepped the bounds of decorum, since they were part of a metaphysical conceit.

Donne likewise assumes various fictitious poses and creates elaborately complex fictions in the microcosm of his verse letters to Bedford in order to explore the possibilities of their relationship "in disguise," without the fetters of their real distance in the social hierarchy. He is a distant student of theology studying Bedford from afar in the introductory "Reason is our Soules left hand," while in "You have refin'd mee," he changes roles several times to illustrate the relativity of worth: he is exegete of virtue (l. 12), one of Bedford's "new creatures" (22), one of her "Priests or Organs" (29) and a secular pilgrim who petitions to survey her "edifice" (34). In "T'Have written then," Donne is a "nothing" (7), a "stranger" (17), and barren ground that hides the possibility of a rich return (11). He is a complete non-being in "To the Countesse of Bedford At New-yeares Tide," neither "Debtor to th'old [year], nor Creditor to th'new" (7), "One corne of one low anthills dust, and lesse" (28), who can best affirm the truth of the Countess's worth by leaving the poem altogether (32). And in "Honour is so sublime perfection," Donne, as one of Bedford's low "praysers" (13), uses his lowness to advantage in bestowing upon his patroness the "sublime perfection" of honor. Besides allowing Donne the freedom to fashion himself and his potential relationship with the Countess to his advantage, Donne's various roles underscore his

courtly concern with "seeming" over "being" and also parallel Castiglione's recommendation for deceit to advance one's image in the eyes of others. Like the masque, then, Donne's verse letters reinforce the Jacobean emphasis on appearance that James proclaims in his metaphor of king as actor.

True courtier that she was, the Countess of Bedford totally adapted herself to Queen Anne's love for the masque, and her closeness to the queen gave her special status as participant in and arranger of masques. Samuel Daniel acknowledged that she recommended him to the queen to create the Christmas masque of 1604, and she also served as rector chori or leader of the masquers in that performance. Donne associates her closely with the queen in planning the Christmas masque in a letter to Sir Henry Goodyer in November, 1608, and John Chamberlain referred to her as "Lady and Mistress of the Feast" at which Jonson's Lovers Made Men was performed (Lewalski, "Lucy" 56). Whether or not any masque roles were specifically imagined or created for her, Bedford probably was able to choose the roles she desired in order to project a desired image, with the same qualities Donne celebrates in his verse letters to her: wisdom, piety, independence, and power.

The Countess appeared in the first of the Jacobean Christmastide or Twelfth Night masques on January 8, 1604, Daniel's Vision of Twelve Goddesses. The Queen and eleven noble ladies were portrayed as classical goddesses offering their characteristic qualities and blessings to grace the new reign. According to Daniel, the queen chose to represent Pallas (signifying Wisdom and Defense), flanked on either side by Juno (Power) and Venus (Love and Amity). Bedford portrayed Vesta, not an obviously central role since it placed her in the second rather than the first triad of goddesses in the procession. But in Daniel's explanation of the allegory, Vesta

represented Religion, garbed "in a white Mantle, imbrodred with gold-flame," with "a burning Lampe in one hand, and a Booke in the other." Thus, the role of Vesta was associated most closely with Pallas, the queen, and with the blessing specified in the masque as the primary support of the realm:

> Whose maine support, holy Religion frame:
> And Wisdome, Courage, Temperance, and Right,
> Make seeme the Pillars that sustaine the same. (Daniel, Works 3: 188, 190, 197)

The Countess took a clearly preeminent role among the queen's ladies in Jonson's and Inigo Jones's Masque of Blackness on January 6, 1605, as well as in its sequel, The Masque of Beauty, on January 10, 1608. As previously described, Blackness portrayed the queen and eleven of her ladies as daughters of Niger, garbed in azure and silver with rich pearl ornaments, and having every quality of inner and external beauty except for their black skin. These ladies are led to Britain, whose sun-king's brightness could blanch an Ethiop, and are promised that after observing due rites for a year, they will attain full perfection (Lewalski, "Lucy" 57). Bedford, who portrayed Aglaia (Splendor, one of the three Graces), held the place of honor beside Queen Anne, who represented Euphoris (Abundance). Both carried a golden tree laden with fruit as a symbol of their conjoined qualities. Carleton offered a highly critical account of the production but noted Bedford's place of honor:

> At the further end was a great Shell in the form of a Skallop, wherein were four Seats; on the lowest sat the Queen with my Lady Bedford; on the rest were placed the ladies Suffolk, Darby, Rich, Effingham, Ann Herbert, Susan Herbert, Elizabeth Howard, Walsingham, and Bevil. Their Apparell was rich, but too light and Curtizan-like for such great ones. Instead of Vizzards, their Faces, and Arms up to the Elbows, were painted black . . . but it became them nothing so well as their red and white, and you cannot imagine a more ugly Sight, then a troop of lean-cheek't Moors. (Jonson, 10: 448)

In the sequel, postponed for two years because of wedding masques during the intervening Christmastides, the ladies have achieved the perfection of white skins and most of their allegorical names have been changed. Though Jonson does not specify the role each lady plays, the queen is obviously Harmonia, enthroned with a golden crown and a dress showing qualities of all the others, and Bedford probably again represents Splendor (the only personage bearing the same name as before) and is again presented first. The image she projects in this masque differs radically and daringly from her role as Vesta; she appears "In a robe of flame colour, naked brested; her bright hayre loose flowing" (Jonson, 7: 186-87). Yet her rather daring appearance was accepted by her courtly audience, as was her contradictory role as Vesta or religion, as part of the sprezzatura necessary to succeed in court life. If, as Donne contends, "vertues whole summe is but know and dare" ("Honour is so sublime perfection," l. 33), Bedford embodied the ideal of court virtue, knowing how far to dare in order to attract the attention of the monarch.

We have seen how Donne acknowledges Bedford's skill at self-presentation and her ability to know and dare. He praises her in "Reason is our Soules left hand" for supplementing her aristocratic birthright with added qualities--learning, religion, and virtue (25-26)--that allow her both to save herself and to help others. In "You have refin'd mee," Donne presents Bedford as one who knows that value is relative and dares to manipulate that value to best advantage, whether in court or country. Yet, she is able to conceal any false presentation or purposeful self-fashioning, appearing as the neo-platonic ideal of a perfect unity of "good and lovely" (55). Showing herself so innocent that she can neither believe her own good nor others' ills, Bedford must be instructed by Donne about man's fallen condition and about her own virtue in "T'Have

written then" (33-80). Even in this instruction, however, Donne subtly acknowledges the Countess's expertise in court politics with "Even in you, vertues best paradise, / Vertue hath some, but wise degrees of vice" (75-76). "God's" advice in "To the Countesse of Bedford At New-yeares Tide" only recounts Bedford's known activities in court: her actively added qualities of learning and favor (37), her adherence to the "indifferent" court moral standards (43), her use of others for her own advantage (50), her skill in underhanded court politics (57-59), and her ability to use deceit for a favorable self-presentation (39, 51-56, 59-60). And throughout "Honour is so sublime perfection," Donne explores Bedford's courtly unity of religious zeal and secular discretion, acknowledging her calculated self-presentation: "Beeing and seeming is [her] equall care" (32). Bedford's daring appearance in court masques, then, is just another calculated action demonstrating her ability to "know and dare" (33).

In the Jonson-Inigo Jones wedding masque, Hymenaei, celebrating the ill-starred nuptials of the Earl of Essex and Frances Howard, the Countess of Bedford and the Countess of Rutland portrayed the two most important powers of Juno Pronuba who come down to confirm the union: Cinxia, who defends the unclad Bride, and Telia, who perfects the union at last (Jonson, 7: 218). Bedford chose to be painted by John De Critz in the costume designed for these lady masquers (Lewalski, "Lucy" 58). Jonson's detailed description of the attire not only shows his courtly attention to outward appearance but also indicates the aura of fantasy and magnificence in these masques:

> The Ladies attyre was wholly new, for the invention, and full of glorie; as having in it the most true impression of a celestiall figure: the upper part of white cloth of silver, wrought with JUNOES birds and fruits; a loose undergarment, full gather'd, of carnation, strip't with silver, and parted with a golden Zone: beneath that, another flowing garment, of watchet cloth of silver, lac'd with gold; through all which, though they were round, and swelling, there yet appeared some touch of their

> delicate lineaments, . . . their haire . . . bound under the circle of a rare and rich Coronet, adorn'd with all varietie and choise of jewels; from the top of which, flow'd a transparent veile, downe to the ground . . . . Their shooes were Azure, and gold, set with Rubies and Diamonds; so were all their garments. (Jonson, 7: 230)

These bejewelled players embodied the glory and extravagance of a court revelling in its own magnificence.

The last masque in which the Countess is known to have played a major part is the spectacular Masque of Queenes already described. Her costume as Penthesilea, with elaborately plumed classical helmet, sword, and virtually transparent corselet, also reveals Bedford's willingness to dare to go as far as is permitted: in Castiglione's words, "to wade in everything a little farther than other men" (33), in Donne's words, remaining just "On this side sinne" ("To the Countesse of Bedford At New-yeares Tide" l. 45). Only in light of the Countess of Bedford's daring appearances in these masques and, as will be discussed in the next chapter, her skillful maneuverings within the court patronage system, can the wit and rich ambiguity of Donne's comments in the verse letters to Bedford be fully appreciated.

During the next decade, Bedford is mentioned only occasionally in relation to masques and entertainments, perhaps for several reasons. Her serious illness in the winter of 1612-13 and subsequent "conversion" through the ministration of John Burges have already been described. In addition, after 1610, the subject matter of the court masques changed somewhat when Prince Henry came of age. He and his attendants preferred men's masques, tilts, and barriers. Also, in 1619 Queen Anne died, and Bedford's beauty was marred by smallpox, which, according to Edward Howard, had "so seasoned her all over, that they say she is more full and foule then could be expected in so thin and leane a body" (Chamberlain, ii, 244-45).

The fact that Bedford avoided the masque after the pious ministrations of Dr. Burges demonstrates the daring implicit in such participation. As Orgel explains, the greatest problem posed by such an art form as the masque is protocol. Masquers are not actors: a lady or a gentleman participating in a masque remains a lady or gentleman, and is not released from the obligation of observing all the complex rules of behavior at court. At a time when many agreed with William Prynne in 1633 that "Women-Actors" were "notorious whores" (Histrio-Mastix, or the Scourge of Players, 1633, quoted in Orgel 39-40), an aristocrat like the Countess of Bedford dancing and performing in often revealing costumes led to scandal. After The Masque of Blackness, Lady Anne CLifford wrote, ". . . all the Ladies about the Court had gotten such ill names that it was grown a scandalous place, and the Queen herself was much fallen from her former greatness and reputation she had in the world" (Clifford 16-17). Even Queen Anne herself seemed to step beyond the bounds of decorum, making the magnificent spectacle of the royal family into an unconscious parody. The Venetian ambassador described Queen Anne's appearance in 1617: "Her Majesty's costume was pink and gold with so expansive a farthingale that I do not exaggerate when I say it was four feet wide at the hips. Her bosom was bare down to the pit of her stomach, forming as it were, an oval." Diamonds and other jewels sparkled in her hair, which also contained "such a quantity of false hair dressed in rays (sparsi in giro) that she looked exactly like a sun flower" (Calendar of State Papers Venetian 79, 80). The image of splendor eventually became ludicrous.

But during the period of Donne's verse letters to the Countess of Bedford, the Jacobean court was still a world of splendor and magnificence, and Bedford was at the height of her power as court lady and patroness. To frame his verse letters to the

Countess's own courtly activities, Donne demonstrates rhetorically the courtly balance of decorum and sprezzatura within letters whose subject is that delicate balance. He shows how to "know and dare" within the confines of the verse letter, dazzling with his wit and hyperbole yet remaining inside the bounds of subservient praise. As Margaret Maurer discusses in her excellent article, Donne risks indiscretion even by his act of writing Bedford, in a courtly context in which human effort is necessary but no necessary reward is attached to it ("The Real Presence" 212). Donne dazzles with his daring wit throughout the verse letters to Bedford, daring that is only effective if the Countess accepts it. His overall metaphor of Bedford as divinity or virtue itself is one such bit of daring, though acceptable as an echo of James's own self image as roi soleil, an image further reinforced by court masques.

Other examples show Donne's playfulness, an important quality in the successful courtier, whose work is often framed as play (Whigham 88). Often this playfulness is revealed in the letters by ambiguity. In "Reason is our Soules left hand," Donne confesses that the reasons why Bedford is "lov'd by all / Grow infinite, and so passe reasons reach" (13-14) so he must rely on faith to understand her worth, "And rest on what the Catholique voice doth teach" (16). Naturally, the obvious meaning of "catholic" is "universal," but praising a countess so well known for her own Calvinist leanings, as well as for those of her family, with a term like "catholic" demonstrates a bit of daring, especially in an introductory verse letter. In the same letter, he also takes a misogynistic stab with his proclamation of Bedford as "The first good Angell, since the worlds frame stood, / That ever did in womans shape appeare" (31-32). Though again not overtly insulting, the line might cause offence, and could have just as easily scanned if the poet had written the safer phrase, "in human shape appeare."

He similarly insults the female sex in "T'Have written then," in which he cites two uses that female virtue serves: "It ransomes one sex, and one Court preserves" (26). The references, of course, are perfectly in keeping with misogynistic ideas of the time (see Camden, Kelso, Latt, Rogers, Rowbotham, Springer, Woodbridge, and Wright for contemporary attitudes toward Renaissance women). After all, even Ben Jonson paid Bedford the highest complement he could conceive by calling her "a learned, and a manly soule" (Epigram LXXVI). Nevertheless, Donne's playful insults are definite risks for an ambitious courtier whose future depends upon the Countess's interpretation of his verse letters to her.

Donne refers to the relativity of value again with some ambiguity in "You have refin'd mee." The idea that "use, not nature value brings; / And such, as they are circumstanc'd, they bee" (3-4) shows some daring, knowing that Bedford's privileged position at court was only due to her lucky (or ingenious) coup at King James's accession. Also, he explains that since court is "not vertues clime" (7), then virtue's "transcendent height . . . makes her not be, or not show" (8-9). These lines, supporting the idea of the relativity of value at court or country, also suppose that Bedford's virtues are not visible at court because so transcendent. In a world of "seeming" in which virtue only exists if visible, these lines make Bedford's virtue "not be."

Continuing a rather playful criticism of court degeneracy, "T'Have written then" seems to support Leishman's description of Donne's verse letters as "a kind of elaborate game" (144) in which the poet "contrives to maintain an illusion of seriousness as though he were demonstrating truths of the first importance" (130). Even in the opening lines of the poem, Donne seems to have tongue in cheek as he hyperbolically

describes Simony, the buying or selling of ecclesiastical pardons, offices, or services, as the "Worst of spirituall vices" (2) and "thanklessnesse" as the "worst of civill vices" (4). Yet in the context of the Jacobean court, in which buying and selling of pardons, offices, or services was business as usual, thanklessness could be one of the worst of vices, since any gain in court was owing to the whim of the patron and not to personal desert.

Donne's development of the letter is almost comical, as he proclaims that Bedford is so worthy that she does not see her own worth, modestly preferring not to hear praise of herself (30-31). Instead of praising her anyway, in usual encomiastic fashion, Donne totally turns his attention to "others ills," in a thirty-eight line account of the fallen condition of man (ll. 33-70), a rather curious manner of complimenting a patroness. When he finally does return to his main purpose, it is to criticize gently the "perversenesse" of her excessive virtue, which will "Neither beleeve her good, not others ill" (74). However, Donne does not link the Countess to this criticism as would be expected, but instead praises Bedford, "vertues best paradise" (75), for possessing "some, but wise degrees of vice" (76), expanding upon the advantages of balancing vice and virtue:

> Too many vertues, or too much of one
> Begets in you unjust suspition;
> And ignorance of vice, makes vertue lesse,
> Quenching compassion of our wrechednesse. (77-80)

Again, the expectation is that Donne will continue in this manner, voicing Castiglione's view, already cited, that a balance of both good and evil are necessary (Courtier 93). Yet Donne seems to halt in his tracks with "But these are riddles" (81), and proceeds to reverse himself totally. He admits that "Some aspersion / Of vice

becomes well some complexion" (81-82), specifically citing often corrupt court politics in which the ends justify the means:

> Statesmen purge vice with vice, and may corrode
> The bad with bad, a spider with a toad:
> For so, ill thralls not them, but they tame ill
> And make her do much good against her will." (86)

But now Donne protests that the Countess has no need of such vice to balance her virtue:

> But in your Commonwealth, or world in you,
> Vice hath no office, nor good worke to doe.
> Take then no vitious purge, but be content
> With cordiall vertue, your knowne nourishment. (87-90)

Most commentators interpret Donne's last lines as a total reversal on his arguments for the necessity of vice (See Lewalski, "Lucy" 69 and Marotti 223-25). Marotti comments that the lines seem as "though Donne deliberately resisted coming to the logical conclusion of his poetical discourse, forcing a conventional complimentary statement into a structure in which it really does not fit" (225).

Surely Donne would not have confused his argument to this extent without some reason, since the entire purpose of the letter is to represent his abilities as writer and courtier, all with sprezzatura. I suggest that, besides demonstrating that "covered subtlety" and difficulty in writing that Castiglione recommends for a greater appreciation from the audience (Castiglione 45), Donne's verse letter exemplifies in its very organization the poet's awareness of the discrepancy between the fictitious ideal of court, the "seeming," and the often sordid reality, the "being," of court life. He undermines the ideal with the real in seeming contradiction, yet in perfect conformity to the life of the Countess of Bedford. The ideal is that Bedford is pure virtue, so full of humility that she can neither recognize her own goodness nor the vice in others.

The reality is that man, especially the courtier, is a fallen creature, accomplishing nothing of true worth, living in an atmosphere of make-believe: "So wee have dull'd our minde, it hath no ends; / Onely the bodie's busie, and pretends" (39-40).

Donne daringly and playfully comes close to joining the two realms by admitting that Bedford has "some, but wise degrees of vice," and even in his negation of this thought, he utilizes the image of Statesmen purging vice with vice, in the manner of an immunization, "For so, ill thralls not them, but they tame ill / And make her do much good against her will" (85-86). This image of "immunization" sounds very similar to that in his introductory letter to the Countess, in which he praises her not only for her birth and beauty that serve as a "Balme" to keep her fresh and new, but also for her added learning, religion, and virtue that form a "methridate, whose operation / Keepes off, or cures what can be done or said" ("Reason is our soules left hand" ll. 21-28). A mithridate is often associated with immunization to a poison by gradually introducing nonlethal amounts into the system until the body has built up a tolerance to normally lethal amounts. The similarity between the good intentions of the corrupt statesmen in "T'Have written then" and Bedford's methridatic abilities to keep off or cure what can be done or said seems too striking to be unintentional, so that Donne, in ending "T'Have written then," succeeds in both returning to his idealized fiction of Bedford while associating her with the reality of corrupt court politics.
The issue raised in the poem, how a supposedly virtuous patroness can succeed in a corrupt world which requires questionable means to achieve one's ends, is never fully resolved. What is evident is Donne's awareness of Bedford's actual courtly dealings, an awareness that upsets the encomiastic formulations of the verse (Marotti 225). Donne also shows his own expertise in writing, causing Bedford to take "a delight in the

wittiness and learning of him that writeth, and with a good judgment, after some painstaking, [she] tasteth the pleasure that consisteth in hard things" (Castiglione 44).

Donne then exemplifies the discrepancy between being and seeming in his verse letters in his very attempts to reconcile the two. On the surface level, he voices Castiglione's neo-platonic philosophy of the unity of "good and lovely," but he subtly undermines that philosophy, as does Castiglione, by contrasting or mingling the realms of fiction and reality, seeming and being. In The Courtier, surface perfection is the only real perfection necessary, so Castiglione artfully uses that surface as a true indication of inner worth, claiming "whatsoever is good and profitable hath also everymore the comeliness of beauty" (348), so that goodness and beauty are one:

> And it may be said that good and beautiful be after a sort one self thing, especially in the bodies of men; of the beauty whereof the highest cause, I suppose, is the beauty of the soul; the which, as a partner of the right and heavenly beauty, maketh sightly and beautiful whatever she toucheth, and most of all, if the body, where she dwelleth, be not of so vile a matter that she can not imprint in it her property. Therefore beauty is the true monument and spoil of the victory of the soul, when she with heavenly influence beareth rule over material and gross nature, and with her light overcometh the darkness of the body. (349-50)

This argument is similar to that employed by the Renaissance aristocracy, who felt that the ease and sprezzatura of a true gentleman is only exhibited by one of noble birth. But as Castiglione explains that this noble appearance may be acquired through imitation and practice, he also concedes that beauty may be enhanced through artful but discrete cosmetics, so that again The Courtier demonstrates the tension and contradictions evident between the fiction and the reality of court life.

Donne also seeks to use Bedford's loveliness as an indication of inner worth in order to reconcile being and seeming in the verse letters. Like Castiglione, he stresses the unity of outward beauty and inner worth:

> In good and lovely were not one, of both

You were the transcript, and originall,
The Elements, the Parent, and the Growth,
And every peece of you is both their All:
So'intire are all your deeds, and you, that you
Must do the same thing still: you cannot two.
("You have refin'd mee" ll. 55-60)

And in "Honour is so sublime perfection," Donne again proclaims the transparency of Bedford's "seeming," so that it is a true indication of her "being" (ll. 25-27). Yet Donne subtly hints that such a "discovering covering" may be artfully contrived with his apparent compliment, "Beeing and seeming is your equall care, / And vertues whole summe is but know and dare" (32-33). If the unity of good and lovely were naturally inherent in the Countess, she would have no need to concern herself with appearances. But showing herself as good and lovely is Bedford's "equall care," indicating effort on her part to maintain at least the appearance of that unity. And by linking beauty and virtue to the concerns of court, "know and dare," Donne tries to fit Castiglione's neo-platonic ideal into the practical concerns of court life, especially later when he concedes that the ideal unity of spontaneous zeal (or religion) and studied grace (discretion) might have to be split in the reality of ways and means of court politics:

If either wrought in you alone
Or principally, then religion
Wrought your ends, and your wayes discretion. (49-51)

In order to maintain the "seeming" of encomiastic verse, Donne ends his letters with enthusiastic urgings to the Countess to continue her already perfect ways, again voicing Castiglione's praise of physical beauty as a means to heavenly love. Through love kindled by bodily beauty, one begins to see with "the eyes of the mind" and comes to love the beauty of the soul, rejecting the body as a "feeble shadow" (Castiglione 360). Led beyond sense and reason to understanding, the soul learns an appreciation

of the universal beauty of all bodies, and thence an understanding of heavenly beauty, so that the soul wishes to join with that beauty in heaven:

> Thus the soul kindled in the most holy fire of heavenly love, fleeth to couple herself with the nature of angels, and not only clean forsake sense, but hath no more need of the discourse of reason, for, being changed into an angel, she understandeth all things that may be understood; and without any veil or cloud, she seeth the meine sea of the pure heavenly beauty, and receiveth it into her, and enjoyeth that sovereign happiness that can not be comprehended of the senses. (361)

Donne likewise ends his verse letters by returning to the idealized fiction of court, praising Bedford for raising him above worldly concerns and urging her on, yet following his often subversive development of each letter, these endings are at best ambiguous. In "Reason is our Soules left hand," he urges the Countess, "Make your returne home [to heaven] gracious" (35), and he hopes, through her mediation as God's "Factor for our loves" (34), to join her there:

> For so God help mee,'I would not misse you there
> For all the good which you can do me here. (37-38)

But as previously discussed, this unselfish concern for the Countess's welfare must be understood in light of Donne's need for Bedford as "Factor" here on earth. Assuring the Countess that she is vice-free in "T'Have written then," Donne recommends she "be content / With cordiall vertue, your known nourishment" (89-90), but only after an extremely convoluted argument for the necessity of vice in the reality of court life. News of Bedford's enrollment in the Book of the Elect in "To the Countesse of Bedford At New-yeares Tide" causes Donne "active joy" (64) and gives substance to the poet who was, like the twilight of two years, "of stuffe and forme perplext" (3). Yet this assurance of Bedford's salvation comes only after "God" gives her blatantly practical advice on her "seeming" in court. In "Honour is so sublime perfection," Donne exhorts Bedford, "Goe thither stil, goe the same way you went, / Who so would change, do

covet or repent" (52-53). Throughout the poem, however, Donne has equated virtue with the ability to "know and dare" (33), or the ability to balance decorum with sprezzatura for best effect in court, so that the religious terms "covet" and "repent" take on very secular meanings in context. And, since the very argument of "You have refin'd mee" is a total reversal of Castiglione's philosophy of beauty which leads man from earthly to heavenly love, its ending can only be subversive. Donne praises Bedford as the unity of "good and lovely" (55), yet instead of using that beauty to lead him to an appreciation of heavenly love, Donne rejects any appeal to "higher Courts" (68) and chooses to concentrate solely on "senses decree" (68) here on earth. The ending celestial metaphor comparing Twickenham to heaven and Bedford to the resident cherub maintains the tone of the entire verse letter that can only be described as tongue-in-cheek.

Through obvious, and sometimes not-so-obvious, minglings of the often sordid "being" of court life with the cosmetized and idealized "seeming" of the fiction of court, Donne succeeds in demonstrating his ability to function within that contradictory realm, both by showing his understanding of the discrepancy between being and seeming, and by rhetorically manipulating the discrepancy within the verse letters to Bedford, transforming contradiction into reconciled paradox. These letters are not only passive encomiastic utterances but also active transactions in the complex and interdependent patronage system through which any form of advancement in the Jacobean court must come. We will now explore how the verse letters, as metacommunication, analyze the very poet-patroness relationship that they helped create, serving Donne and Bedford as mediators, or in Donne's words, as "Factors for our loves."

CHAPTER 6

Donne's Verse Letters to Bedford:

Mediators in a Poet-Patroness Relationship

We have seen how Donne views his letters as rhetorical extensions of himself by which he bridged time, space, and the barriers of social hierarchy to form and maintain a relationship with another: ". . . our letters are ourselves and in them absent friends meet" (Letters 240). But Donne fashions his verse letters to the Countess of Bedford as more than "seals and testimonies of mutuall affection" (Letters 120): these verse letters not only help to initiate and define the relationship between Donne and his patroness, but are means of expressing hope and faith in a closer relationship to come between poet and patroness, and are actually the means by which that closer relationship can emerge. The main subject of the verse letters is the growing alliance between Donne and Bedford in the complex but necessary system of patronage that governed any hope of preferment in the Jacobean court. As intermediaries or go-betweens in a client-patroness relationship, the verse letters perform the same service that Donne hopes Bedford will perform as his patroness: to mediate successfully between her ambitious client and those who offer advancement in court. Thus, the form and function of the letters reflect and reinforce their subject matter. Gregory Bateson defines this type of discourse as "metacommunication," or a form of communication in which the subject of discourse is the relationship between the speakers (178). In Donne's verse letters to Bedford, both author and intended reader have a client-patron relationship apart from, and yet created by, the text that

can be evoked as a context of composition for author, and of reception or interpretation for reader. And that context of composition is the intricate, interdependent system of political and artistic patronage in which Bedford thrived.

Patronage in early modern England, the "cynosure of all political and social relationships" (Sharpe and Zwicker 13), was an outcome of earlier feudal relationships by which the Crown secured loyalty and service in exchange for position and privilege. But since these earlier civil servants had been in large part clerics holding benefices in the Church, there was no clear idea of a regular salary paid from public funds. In the early sixteenth century, when the state took over functions of the church and guilds, more offices were available to the ambitious courtier, yet often the rewards of these offices were less tangible and more honorary, maintaining the lingering notion of personal service to the monarch in which service and reward lay at the monarch's pleasure. In the Elizabethan court, most royal servants did enjoy a fixed annual fee, but in many cases it had been fixed in the previous century or earlier, and like other aspects of Elizabethan administration, took no account of economic changes (MacCaffrey 104). Under James, the financial situation grew even worse for those seeking financial gain at court, for the King's lavishness to his favorites meant decreasing rewards for the increasing number of courtiers. James tried to augment the court treasury by offering titles for sale, a significant change from the Tudor mix of payment for civil service with personal loyalty. In fact, according to Linda Levy Peck, everything was for sale at the Jacobean court: titles, honors, offices, privileges, and monopolies. Such sales raised revenues for the Crown and its favorites at a time when other sources, including parliamentary subsidies, were drying up. Meanwhile, such sales allocated rewards in a system in which demand greatly exceeded supply (Peck

41). However, this market corruption also produced an atmosphere of fierce competition and underhanded dealings that characterized the court of James I, an atmosphere in which Bedford thrived.

By 1603, there were three types of rewards at the Crown's disposal, some entailing more tangible rewards than others. Honors, like the Order of the Garter, were traditional rewards of the monarchy to supporters, but often cost more to receive than to give, since the honoree was expected to dress and entertain lavishly in celebration of the event. Margaret Byard's account of the increasing debts of the Countess and her husband because of such "rewards" are typical of the aristocracy at this time ("The Trade of Courtiership" passim.). In addition, the Crown offered privileges like annuities, pensions, and land let or sold on favorable terms, which provided real and substantial profits attractive to peers, London businessmen, and ambitious newcomers. Finally, the largest category of royal bounty was court office. These offices conferred benefits of power (like that of chief minister), status (like a lord-lieutenantship of a shire), influence in distribution of Court favor (like gentleman of the bedchamber), and profit (Peck 30).

These were the types of rewards Donne sought as he approached the Countess in 1607, at a time of frustrating unemployment, an ever-growing family, and "the incommodity of a little thin house" at Mitcham (Bald 158). As Patricia Thomson, Arthur Marotti, and others have pointed out, Donne considered himself an amateur or "coterie" poet, treating poetry as an avocation, part of a life and career whose main goals, even for some time after his ordination, were social status and advancement (Marotti x). He aspired to a social position above that of professional poets like Jonson and Daniel, who sought print and publicity: he preferred to associate with Sir

Henry Wotton, Sir Henry Goodyer, Sir Thomas Roe, and his other courtier friends, and desired a place in a scheme of social rather than of literary patronage (Thomson, "Donne and the Poetry of Patronage" 310).

In approaching the Countess through his verse letters, Donne followed the usual procedure for attaining court preferment: finding a court patron or patroness who had access to various political appointments and honors in order to enter into the patronage network. Suitors such as Donne employed any means to introduce themselves to and ingratiate themselves with the patron, including kinship ties, family allegiances, and regional ties. We have seen how Donne framed his verse letters to Bedford's personal concerns to deepen their relationship, but he also used mutual friends like Henry Goodyer to advance his position with the Countess, and even created family allegiances with his patroness by both naming his eldest daughter "Lucy" in her honor, and asking Bedford to serve as the child's godmother (Bald 170, 176).

To show his understanding of the complexities of the patronage system, Donne frames his verse letters to Bedford to reflect the roles of the courtier-poet with his patroness in such a relationship, emphasizing the interdependence of this type of alliance in a rhetorical society. At the Jacobean court where "seeming" was all-important, the true measure of a patron's position was not the actual powers he wielded, but the show of power evident in a swarm of followers whose pestering presence testified to the patron's august standing. The patron, then, is as dependent upon clients for social status as they are upon the patron for royal bounty. In the Jacobean Court, these relationships were not necessarily permanent or exclusive, for suitors often applied to more than one patron and changed their allegiance when a patron lost influence (Peck 30).

Also, as Whigham points out, these clients and patrons did not occupy permanent roles but relative positions on the patronage hierarchy. They were defined by their activities, not their ontological identities (their "seeming" actions, not their essential "being"): "Courtiers of all ranks were by turns . . . suitors to their superiors and patrons to their inferiors" (Whigham 12). In fact, within court society, the greatest amount of patronage was shown between people of adjacent ranks. Though all reward ultimately came from King James, only a select few favorites had access to the monarch, so that a prospective client was forced to go through many channels for advancement of his suit. Even the relationship between patron and client in James's Court was not direct, but also included indirect and more amorphous relations of friends of friends and enemies of enemies. As head of a faction, the patron might find himself granting favors to those of whom he knew little. Thus, the patron was judged by his ability to deliver to his clients, and the constant scramble for decreasing rewards created anxiety on the part of the patron as to whether or not he could fulfill his part of the patronage contract. As often as not, the Jacobean patron found himself as much acted upon as acting (Peck 45).

Arthur Marotti believes that Donne's shifting positions in the verse letters, debasing himself while showing his relative worth, was due to the poet's resentment of the role as deferential suitor that he assumed in these works. Donne's methods of development undercut and subvert the traditional encomiastic mode, rendering the very act of poetic praise "deeply problematic" (208, 207). Yet, as we see, this interdependence and anxiety was not peculiar to Donne's personal situation but was very much a part of the patronage system Donne wished to enter, and as

metacommunication, the verse letters to Bedford describe and explore the relativity and interdependence in the relationship between the poet and his patroness.

The introductory "Reason is our Soules left hand" emphasizes the distance between Bedford and her prospective client who, too lowly to enjoy the blessing of the Countess's sight, must love her through blind faith. Yet even in his linking of faith to the superior right hand and reason to the subordinate left, he admits the necessity of both: "we cannot want that [left] hand" (6). The implication is, of course, that even subordinate things have use and purpose. Employing theological metaphors, Donne also praises the Countess for adding the active good of "learning and religion, / And vertue" (25-26) to her aristocratic but passively self-preserving "birth and beauty" (24). This emphasis on active good over passive existence is very relevant in light of Bedford's success in a patronage system that judged the worth of a patroness not by who she was but by what she could do for her clients.

We have already discussed how Donne changes and reduces Bedford's position in the poem from "divinity" (2) to "Angell" (31) to God's "Factor for our loves" (34), a very realistic description of a lady who served as intermediary for countless suits under a king who believed himself God's chosen representative on earth. To conclude this verse letter, Donne capitalizes on that very political-religious theory of Divine Right to show solemn deference to his patroness while wittily asking for her help. In calling Bedford "Gods masterpeece" (33), he suggests that, after all, Bedford herself is the creation of a higher "patron." But while praising her intrinsic worth, Donne links that theological praise to her relative position and activities as court manipulator by naming her mediator, or "Factor for our loves" (34). Throughout the poem, Donne's religious language carries social and political significance, so that any mention of "God" recalls

the monarch who sat "in the Throne of GOD" (James 366) and "quom he [God] callid goddis" (Goldberg 27), King James. Donne's urging can then be understood on two levels, depending on the metaphorical interpretation of "God," "home," "life," and "here" in the contexts of Bedford's life. In the obvious religious meaning of lines 33-38, "God" is literally the supreme being, "home" is Bedford's heavenly home, "life" is Bedford's own life, and "here" is existence on earth. In this interpretation, Donne encourages Bedford, as angel in woman's shape, to link her earthly life to her life in heaven, and "so make one life of two," even though it means that Donne must do without her physical presence here on earth.

But in the context of Bedford's life at court and of this letter as Donne's introductory request for patronage in that court, "God" is the supreme being of the Jacobean patronage system, King James, upon whom all advancement, at least indirectly, depended; "home" is Bedford's high place in court; "This life" is Donne's present position as petitioner; "that [life]" is Bedford's secure place in court; and "here" describes Donne's unsuccessful and unhappy life in Mitcham. In this light, Donne encourages Bedford, as a prominent member of Queen Anne's bedchamber, a courtly "masterpeece" of James's making, and also, as political manipulator of royal suits, a "Factor for our loves," to continue her successful role as patroness. But he requests that she make her return home (to court) "gracious" or generous by taking Donne with her--bestowing "This life" (Donne the petitioner) on "that" (life at court), making "one life of two" (Donne the courtier). In this context, the last two lines of the poem emphasize Donne's desperate feelings of exclusion, for however the Countess may be able to dole out help to him outside of court, stranded at Mitcham, he would not want to miss sharing her physical presence in court. Donne's comment, "For so God helpe

mee" takes on a richer, more ambiguous meaning beyond that of interjection, then, since Bedford began the letter as divinity. The reader may well wonder which "God" Donne implores--the Supreme Being, King James, or the Countess herself.

Donne's use of the verb "bestow" in this poem also sheds light on the frustrations and insecurity inherent in the Jacobean patronage system which often treated writers like property. For example, when the elder Henry Goodyer died in 1595, Michael Drayton, who spent most of his young life in Goodyer's service, was in effect cast out on the world. Two years later, he dedicated The Epistle of Queen Isabel to Richard the Second, to Bedford's husband, claiming that Goodyer had "bequeathed" the poet to the service of the Countess of Bedford, and that by Goodyer's death, Drayton's Muse had been "left a poore Orphane to the worlde" (Newdigate 56, 75). Though aided by Bedford as well as the Astons, Rainsfords, and Prince Henry, Drayton never again found the security he enjoyed in Goodyer's service. Similarly, George Chapman, promised 300 pounds on completion of his Homer translations, failed to get it from the heirs of his patron Prince Henry, who died in 1612. Samuel Daniel received steady support from the Herbert family, but was not bound permanently to the service of the Herberts. He left their household and lived for a while with the Cliffords and even with Queen Anne (Thomson, "The Literature of Patronage" 269). In seeking a political appointment, Donne pursued a more secure course than that of professional poet, but even he was disappointed in his expectations of Bedford's help. After he penned the "Obsequies to the Lord Harrington" in 1614 as a memorial to her brother, Bedford impulsively offered to pay off all Donne's debts before he entered the Church, yet because of her own financial difficulties was only able to give 30 pounds (Bald 295-96). With all the insecurities and indignities typical of such a system of

patronage, a client might well feel he could be "bestowed" from one patron to another, or in Donne's sense in this verse letter, from one way of life to another.

Donne continues to stress the relativity of worth in an interdependent patronage system in "You have refin'd mee" by claiming that he has been raised or alchemically refined by Bedford so that he can now see the higher truth, "Rareness, or use, not nature value brings; / And such, as they are circumstanc'd, they bee" (3-4). In his very first words, Donne implies the interdependence of his relationship to his patroness. By referring to Bedford as an alchemist, whose success is defined by success in refining material, Donne implies that Bedford's success is likewise defined by her effectiveness in raising her present material, the poet. To demonstrate the relativity of worth according to circumstance in context of the patronage system, Donne equates intrinsic "Vertue," artificial "Art" and "Beauty," and uncertain "Fortune" all as "worthyest things" (1-2); that is, in the world of court patronage, attracting the attention of a prospective patron through appearance, crafted by artifice, is the true virtue of a successful courtier, and leads to fortune in court. We have discussed how deception and virtue are necessarily entangled in the rhetorical world of court, and also how the courtier must distinguish himself before his patron by showing a flamboyant but easy grace, which Castiglione calls sprezzatura. Donne shows his knowledge of such sprezzatura in this verse letter by demonstrating it with this verse letter, daring to prove his worth to Bedford.

In this world of exterior appearance, virtue does not exist unless seen by others, and this, claims Donne, is why the Countess needs him. Bedford's virtue at the dissolute Court is so rare and at such a "transcendent height" (8) that it cannot be seen, so cannot exist. Donne, though too low to be seen at court, can serve Bedford

by translating and explicating her virtue with his verse so that her virtue can be seen and believed:

> For, as darke texts need notes: there some must bee
> To usher vertue, and say, This is shee. (11-12)

In return for Donne's exegesis, Bedford, as court mediator, can make a "new world" (21) for her client, who will be remade into one of her "new creatures" (22). Though rather hyperbolic by modern standards, the concept of being "created" in the context of human underlings in power relations was common in Jacobean England, since favorites of King James could be totally remade at the monarch's pleasure. George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, is a good example. James idolized this handsome young man and lavished gifts and titles upon him. In January, 1616, Buckingham became Master of the Horse; in April, member of the Order of the Garter; in August, Viscount Villiers; in January, 1617, earl of Buckingham; and in February, 1617, member of the Privy Council, an honor that Prince Charles did not receive until 1622 (Bergeron 166). In May, 1623, James created Villiers Duke of Buckingham, the only duke in England at that time without a trace of royal blood (Bergeron 176). Buckingham himself then became the most important mediator between petitioners and the crown, creating his own "creatures." Bald quotes Donne's brother-in-law, Sir John Oglander, who explained why Sir George More, Donne's father-in-law, failed to receive promised offices: ". . . the King had sworn to Sir George that he should be Master of the Wards when he went out of Town, yet the Duke of Buckingham would have it for another of his creatures" (130).

Donne stresses the necessity and complexity of such mediation in the Jacobean patronage system in stanza five of "You have refin'd mee." He calls the sun Bedford's "Delegate" (26) who does "offices" for the Countess, and names himself and Bedford's

other clients as "sacrificers" (28) and "Priests, or Organs" (29), intermediaries and instruments for the patroness, who "sound [her] influence, and [her] dictates say" (30). Thus Donne presents the possibility of his own position as intermediary on the patronage hierarchy, once he has been raised by Bedford, and his power to then advance her position through his praise and obedience.

We have analyzed Donne's playful development of the poem as a survey of Bedford's "ediface," not her inner virtue. In the light of his claiming worth as her client, Donne's ambiguous words, "These are Petitions, and not Hymnes," give the verse letter a witty and obviously commercial reason for being. The words themselves embody the sprezzatura necessary to such a petitioner, as Donne dares to go as far as he can to amuse and attract his patroness. In stressing the importance of exteriors over interiors, Donne adds more weight to his claim that the Countess needs him to identify and clarify her inner virtue to the court, for in this rhetorical world, as he explains, "senses decree is true" (68).

In the Jacobean patronage system, all is given and nothing is earned, in that no matter how the client reciprocates through praise, support, or artistic endeavors, any preferment he receives is given solely at the whim of the patron, not because of his own efforts. Donne explores the impossibility of repayment or even adequate gratitude in such a system with "T'Have written then," a verse letter that continues his exploration of the relativity of worth and interdependence between client and patron. Apologizing for not answering one of Bedford's letters, Donne comments, "nothings, as I am, may / Pay all they have, and yet have all to pay" (7-8). This expression of total dependence echoes other courtiers of the extravagant Jacobean court, for as Goldberg explains, "excessive gifts create excessive obligations" (137). Since no courtier can

truly earn his titles and gifts because all favors are at the whim of the patron, no courtier can ever truly repay these favors. Repeatedly, in letters to the King, favorite Buckingham recorded his inability to return the King's gifts, or even to use them at the rate that James offered them: "If I should give you dewe thankes for all you have done for me, I should spend my time in nothinge els" (Goldberg 137). In a letter dated March 24, 1623, Villiers writes to James, "I would faine give thankes, but alas what can I doe or say or thinke, if I consider eyther the number of your favors or the paynefull time you tooke to doe them in, I may ese my hart in saying some thinge, but never satisfie the dett or detter in saying enough" (quoted in Bergeron 176). Likewise, in "T'Have written then," Donne protests that even the act of thanking is a privilege entailing more obligation, leaving him owing even more than before (9-10).

Never content to lie groveling, Donne immediately begins to justify his act of writing, balancing his dependence upon Bedford with his relative and potential worth to her as suitor in lines 11 and 12. As seemingly "barren grounds" have the potential for worth, Donne, as Bedford's protege, has the potential to give back ("yeeld") at least something of worth to her, if only to add to her status as patroness. By "admitting" or "chusing" Donne's emissary, his verse letter, and by tapping into her client's potential worth, Bedford has "denizend a stranger" (17) and has helped outsider Donne enter into that hallowed ground of King James's court. In return, Donne will continue to proclaim Bedford's worth to the world, a worth so worthy that the Countess herself humbly refuses to believe it.

Donne continually stresses, in both his letters to male friends and his verse letters to Bedford, his need to be a part of something, to belong to a group, in order to possess an identity. He thought, ". . . to be no part of any body, is to be nothing":

> At most, the greatest persons, are but great wens, and excrescences; men of wit and delightfull conversation, but as moales for ornament, except they be so incorporated into the body of the world, that they contribute something to the sustentation of the whole. (Letters 51)

In the verse letters to Bedford, "creation" for Donne, then, means admission into the desired social group, the court of James I. As David Aers and Gunther Kress contend, "being" for Donne "is defined in terms of membership of the group to which he aspires: creation is therefore a social act, the act of admitting, drawing in the individual to the group" (31). His feeling of non-being and hopes of creation through the patronage system are most obvious in "To the Countesse of Bedford At New-yeares Tide," in which Donne presents himself to the Countess as a total nonentity, "of stuffe and forme perplext" (3), ready to be created by his patroness through entrance into court. He introduces the idea of transaction in such a relationship with the use of terms like "Debtor" and "Creditor" (6) and immediately continues by explaining to Bedford what he can offer in return for her favors:

> In recompence I would show future times
> What you were, and teach them to'urge towards such.
> Verse embalmes vertue;'and Tombs, or Thrones of rimes,
> Preserve fraile transitory fame, as much
> As spice doth bodies from corrupt aires touch. (11-15)

Donne seems to be offering a conventional example of the exegi monumentum motif, claiming that his verse will immortalize his patroness, as in Shakespeare's "Not marble, nor the gilded monuments / Of princes shall outlive this powerful rime" (Sonnet LX, 480).

But in the reality of the Jacobean patronage system, as we have seen, there is no way to earn or repay adequately the favors of a court patron, and Donne acknowledges that fact by reversing the traditional claim of the immortalizing power of verse. Instead of the power of his verse preserving Bedford's name, the power of her

name destroys his verse, which is obviously made of weaker stuff (ll. 16-20). The alchemical metaphors in this stanza not only emphasize Donne's need for creation but also imbue Bedford with the power to bring Donne's being out of nothingness and to raise her creation into something of higher worth.

It is his lowly state (or lack of any state), Donne contends, that prevents him from adequately praising his patroness, since even if the poet could capture Bedford's worth in verse, no one would believe such a nonentity, "one corne of one low anthills dust, and lesse" (28). Thus, Donne stresses the interdependence of the patronage system: the poet offers immortalizing verse in recompense for "creation" and advancement in court, yet he needs to be "created" by his patroness in order to praise her in verse that will be believed. Thus, all transactions in such a system depend on the whim of the patron, and no favor can really be recompensed adequately. Realizing the impossibility of expressing thanks or of sufficiently repaying her favor through verse, Donne uses a typical courtier's tactic: he says nothing, but leaves "lest truth b'endanger'd by [his] praise" (32). In "leaving" the poem, Donne protests his inadequacy in a manner similar to George Villiers quoted above, yet with greater effect, recalling Sir Thomas More's anecdote of a dinner party, fictionalized from a real gathering at Cardinal Wolsey's home, which More describes in A Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation. At the dinner, a vainglorious prelate waited to hear his oration complimented by his guests. Each gave flattering acclaim, until it was the turn of the last guest, a "wily fox" of a priest who surpassed all in the craft of flattery. Knowing he could not exceed the others' compliments, this last speaker said nothing but "Oh" (quoted in Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning 11). In like manner, when Cordelia was asked to outdo her sisters in their false protestations of love for their father, King

Lear, she truthfully admitted that she could add "Nothing" (Shakespeare, King Lear I,i, 91). Bedford herself employs the same tactic with her friend, Lady Cornwallis, to whom the Countess was often indebted. Thanking Cornwallis for a jewel on November 28, 1623, she protests, "since I cannot thanke you enuffe, I will use no words to thanke you for at all" (Cornwallis 86). Like More, Shakespeare, and Bedford, Donne knew that sometimes the best thing to say is to say nothing at all, a strategy congruent with Castiglione's recommendation of hiding one's real skill for greater effect. Puttenham, in fact, calls this strategy Aposiopesis or the Figure of Silence, an "auricular figure of defect" in which "we begin to speake a thing, and breake of in the middle way, as either it needed no further to be spoken of, or that we were ashamed, or afraid to speake it out" (178). Thus, the "nothing" said by a skillful courtier expresses much.

Yet Donne does not end his poem; instead, he turns to God, the ultimate patron, "to make it good" (l. 35). A mediator like Bedford would well appreciate this reminder of the relativity of her standing in the hierarchy of the patronage system. As previously discussed, a patron to one was a client to another in this complicated matrix. Though the Countess served as the source of many favors to writers and courtiers, she herself was at the beck and call of the king and queen, and as her letters to Lady Cornwallis reveal, her time was not her own. On September 9, 1614, Bedford was forced, at the last minute, to change her plans to visit Cornwallis because the King decided to prolong his stay at her house "against whos coming, and during his stay att my house, all my tyme and litle witt was so taken up about the busnes of house keepinge as itt made me lay all else aside" (24). In the same letter, the Countess explains that when she then attempted to visit her nephew Henry, Fifth Earl of

Huntingdon, "there I met with a peremtory commandement from the Queene to wayte upon her at Woodstocke, which I did, though with so ill health as I had much adoe to get heather to use the helpe of some phisicke . . . " (25). In other letters, she recounts similar instances revealing her lack of liberty: her performing double-duty when one of the Ladies of the Bedchamber was ill in December, 1615 (30), and her constant attendance upon the ailing Queen Anne in October, 1618 (57). Thus, the Countess's presence in court was an indication not only of her high standing in court hierarchy but also of her relatively subordinate status as servant to the king and queen.

Though Donne defers to the higher patron, God, in his advice to the Countess, he does not leave the poem permanently but concludes with an affirmation of his alliance with the patroness, joyfully celebrating with her the "private Ghospell" (65) of her salvation. He rejoices at Bedford's advancement before God since he is allied with her as a fellow child of God and joins in her triumph. This interdependence of fortune likewise alludes to Donne's relationship to the Countess in the Jacobean patronage system, for any advancement Bedford enjoys means advancement for all her suitors, just as any disgrace likewise disgraces these clients. Castiglione, in fact, advises the courtier that, if his patron is proven corrupt, "he ought to forsake his service, lest he bear the blame of his lord's ill practices, or feel the heart grief that all good men have which serve the wicked" (340). But in Donne's verse letter, Bedford's enrollment in the Book of the Elect is welcome news for her client. Donne, the non-entity "of stuffe and forme perplext," caught between two years, has been created as the Countess's protege, and linked with her can celebrate "our New Yeare."

Perhaps Donne's most obvious statement of the reciprocity of dependence in the patronage system is his verse letter, "Honour is so sublime perfection." Here Donne

encapsulates the entire poet-patroness interdependence by explaining that honor can only come from lesser creatures to those above on the hierarchy. In this way, honor is like an alchemical process, in which lesser substances are used in sublimation:

> So from low persons doth all honour flow;
> Kings, whom they would have honour'd, to us show,
> And but direct our honour, not bestow. (7-9)

Therefore, the patron benefits from advancing his clients, since their social standing has a direct effect on the quality of honor the patron will receive from these clients.

Both Sir Thomas Elyot and Stephano Guazzo, authors of contemporary courtesy books, concur with Donne's message here. In The Book named the Governor, 1531, Elyot observes that promoting good men benefits their betters, for it stimulates such men to "endeavor themselves with all their power to increase that opinion of goodness, whereby they were brought to that advancement which needs be to the honour and benefit of those by whom they were so promoted" (192). Guazzo rhetorically questions in The Civile Conversation of M. Steeven Guazzo, 1574, "Who ought not to bee glad to honour another, for so muche as (according to the saying of the Philosopher) hee whiche is honoured, for like unto the Sunne, the beames of honour by reflexion, as it were, doe shine backe againe upon him" (I: 165). Clearly, the patron's own reputation derives from the character of his dependents, so that the patron's preferment of others will both reflect and honor that patron.

That same interdependence affects the client, also. An alliance with an unworthy or unsuccessful patron can destroy an ambitious courtier's career. Thus, the real "profession" of courtier is to guide the patron (or monarch) along right paths, not only for the patron's own betterment, but for the good of all his dependents. Castiglione explains that such guidance is the courtier's entire raison d'etre:

> The end, therefore, of a perfect Courtier (whereof hitherto nothing has been spoken) I believe is to purchase him, by the means of the qualities which these Lords have given him, in such wise the good will and favor of the prince he is in service withal, and that he may break his mind to him, and always inform him frankly of the truth of every matter meet for him to understand, without fear or peril to displease him . . . . And therefore, in mine opinion, as music, sports, pastimes, and other pleasant fashions are as a man would say, the flower of courtliness, even so is the training, and the helping forward of the prince to goodness and the fearing him from evil the fruit of it. (288-289)

Yet however well-intentioned, the courtier/client must not offend his patron with advice but must fashion it in a manner acceptable to the patron, even if it involves fiction or deceit:

> . . . as the wary physicians do, who many times, when they minister to young and tender children in their sickness a medicine of bitter taste, anoint the cup about the brim with some sweet liquor. The Courtier, therefore, applying to such a purpose this veil of pleasure in every time, in every place, and in every exercise, he shall attain to his end, and deserve much more praise and recompense than for any other good work he can do in the world, because there is no treasure that doeth so universal profit as doeth a good prince, nor any mischief so universally hurt as an ill prince. (294)

In this manner, Castiglione raises even the artful deceit of the courtier into an invaluable contribution to the well-being of the commonwealth. As we have seen, Donne frames his verse letters to Bedford to the contexts of her life, following Castiglione's recommendations to enter into favor with his patroness. Now we will explore Donne's methods of framing advice to his patroness, as he attempts to ingratiate himself with the Countess and "afterward bend [her] to virtue" (Castiglione 339).

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In most of the five verse letters we have discussed, Donne, either blatantly or more subtly, offers practical advice to the Countess or urges her on to active good. In "Reason is our Soules left hand," Donne offers little of critical advice, since this is an introductory letter. But after praising the "methridate" of the Countess's active good, Donne takes the position of adviser by exhorting her to continue her generous ways, joining her virtuous life on earth with her eternal life in heaven, as he subtly expresses his wish to accompany her to court. Similarly, in "You have refin'd mee," Donne is careful to disguise his advice to Bedford by not directly linking his observations on the ills of court life to the Countess. Because court is not "vertues clime," Bedford's goodness might not be perceived unless she has someone (like Donne) to help express it. Also, in emphasizing the Countess's unity of good and lovely, he introduces the idea that being and seeming in court are not always the same, so that in praising such unity of being and seeming, Donne implies it is an unusual occurrence in the Jacobean court.

In "T'Have written then," Donne hides his subtle recommendation for balancing vice with virtue from Bedford (and from the reader) by playfully offering contradictory comments which even he terms "riddles." He first gently criticizes his patroness for the "perversenesse" of her excessive virtue, which will "Neither beleeve her good, nor others ill" (l. 74), then reverses himself twice afterward. First, he admits that the Countess does possess "some, but wise degrees of vice" (76) necessary to survive in an often immoral court, then is careful to offer general advice on the importance of balancing vice with virtue in the statesman's world of court. But he immediately seems to contradict his advice of balancing vice and virtue, as if he fears he has ventured too close to the truth to be accepted by his patroness, and returns to Castiglione's

"sweetened cup" of an idealized fiction, assuring her of no need for a "vitious purge" in her already-perfect "Commonwealth" (ll. 89, 87). Yet by then urging her to continue to nourish herself with "cordiall vertue," Donne subtly suggests that Bedford add to and fortify her virtue, implying less-than-perfect goodness.

Donne fictionalizes his own recommendations for behavior at court by voicing them through God, the ultimate patron, in "To the Countesse of Bedford At New-yeares Tide." The practical advice "God" offers is perfectly in keeping with realities of Jacobean court life. Bedford, as God's client and his "creation," is a commodity, so must make the best show of "His stock of beauty, learning, favour, blood" (37) in order to make a good return to her creator. In the court atmosphere of often vicious competition and changing fortune, Bedford should never feel too confident of her position, nor cease to concern herself with all-important appearances in order to remain the Queen's favorite. God will therefore "perplex security with doubt, / And cleare those doubts; hide from you'and shew you good, / And so increase your appetite and food" (38-40). Mirroring Castiglione's recommendations and Donne's own comments about the necessity of vice with virtue in court, God's advice admits that a different set of moral standards govern court life; in fact, most moral issues in court are "indifferent" (43), and behavior is acceptable as long as it remains "on this side sinne" (45). Thus, even God admits the necessity of sprezzatura or daring, justifying Bedford's scandalous appearances in Jacobean court masques.

Acknowledging that a courtier's life is work framed as play, God advises balancing the business of court politics with the pleasures. Yet even hiding behind the voice of God, Donne feels the need to sweeten his counsel concerning political wheeling and dealing:

And though what none else lost, be truliest yours,

> Hee [God] will make you, what you did not, possesse,
> By using others, not vice, but weakenesse. (48-50)

Since Bedford possesses "what none else lost," or complete virtue, she does not have the balance of vice needed for success at court. Therefore, God will help her to use the weaknesses of others to complement her pure virtue and help her in her court career. Naturally, the ambiguity of "using" others' weakness reveals the true nature of advancement in the patronage system, in which one courtier's rise meant another's fall.

Admitting the importance of "seeming" and of court intrigue, God advises the Countess to speak truths "and credibly" (51) but to doubt the appearance of truth in others. God, in fact, will aid Bedford in her maneuverings and her questionable means to ends by providing "keyes, and locks, to spie, / And scape spies, to good ends" (53-54). If the Countess ventures beyond "this side sinne," God will help her protect herself, showing "What you may not acknowledge, what not know" (54-55). Though God will give Bedford the appearance of an innocent conscience, he will provide a more practical awareness, "a discreet warinesse" (59), of the ways of the world. Thus emphasizing Castiglione's recommendation for moderation in all things, even in vicious court disputes, God also advises moderation in escaping and revenging offences, as well as a balance of joy with sadness. Because of her innocent conscience Bedford has little or no need to regret her means to ends: "From need of teares he will defend your soule, / Or make a rebaptizing of one teare" (61-62). Given this "private Ghospell" (65) from the Ultimate Patron, Bedford can feel secure in continuing her court career and in advancing her protege, John Donne.

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Bedford was one who would truly appreciate such subtle but clear references to court scheming, for she acquired and maintained her high standing as member of Queen Anne's bedchamber with just such maneuverings. As Margaret Maurer has pointed out, the record of successful courtship is hard to document since most deals were secret or at least unrecorded, but Donne and other suitors knew that the Countess of Bedford was an important go-between in court transactions ("The Real Presence" 216). In 1618, John Pory advised his friend Sir Dudley Carleton to press his request for a secretaryship through "mylady of Bedford (who is above measure powerfull with both the Marquesses and mylord Chamberlaine)" (PRO SP James I, 103/111, 28 November 1618, quoted in Lewalski, "Lucy" 55). Donne also sought the Countess's aid when he was angling for Geoffrey Fenton's post in Ireland (Letters 145). When the King's favorite, the Earl of Sommerset, had "rendered himself odious to the chief nobility and courtiers" by his "arrogant demeanour and repeated insolencies," Bedford helped in the scheme to "drive out one nail by another" (or, in Donne's words, to "purge vice with vice") by introducing George Villiers to James and ultimately accomplishing his acceptance into the bedchamber (Wiffin 104-106).

The Countess did not restrict herself to such important court politics but also used her influence over much lesser appointments, writing at great length to Dudley Carleton, the Ambassador at the Hague, concerning the fate of a common serving boy:

> Doctor Burgess coming to me yesterday told me he was making all the happy preparation he could to send over the youth he brought with him to the Hague and whom it seems the King of Bohemia was resolved should have gone to Duke Charles, whereof his friends make full reckoning. But I willed Doctor Burgess to make stay of his journey till I heard from your Lordship, by reason of what you said to me of the King's desire concerning Will. Gombleton. For it were too much for the other friends not only to lose the cost they have been at, but to have the youth receive the disgrace of being refused when he came there. And that they might the sooner know what to expect, I spake yesterday with my boy's father, who leaves him to me to dispose as I please, that

> am very willing to present him to the King if he will command his service, but other wise will make it no request of mine. For I neither covet to be rid of him, nor for his advancement to prefer him as a burden to the King. Wherefore I beseech you Lordship order this according to your discretion; and believe, I had rather keep than part with the boy, if you do not find the King himself the continuance of such a will to have him as he may be very acceptable. Where of when you have informed yourself, I beseech you let me as soon as may be hear what he, and the other shall do, and I will see your directions obeyed . . . . (S.P. Dom. James I 122/90, quoted in Grimble 172)

Thus, a simple matter of the employment of a serving boy gives Bedford the opportunity to show her loyalty to the king and to utilize her network of court mediators.

Bedford's letters to friend Lady Cornwallis also reveal her constant suing for advancement of others. In 1616, she writes, "I have not forgotten to putte the Queen in mind of her promis to you, but in that as all others she is sloe in performance; I will not be so in soliciting her . . . " (Cornwallis 40-41). In a later letter, she again assures her friend, "I will not faile to obey you to the Queen of Bohemia, nor to make such mencion of you as become my love and knowledge of you" (43). And using intermediaries herself, Bedford again offers Cornwallis assurances of favor in a letter of 12 April, 1625, after Charles had ascended the throne: "I have written as effectually as I could to my Lo. Chamberlain, who I thinke, if it be in his power, will do what you desier." Yet, she reveals her fear of losing influence under this new administration: "After the funeral it is expected that he [Charles] will make some alterations among the great officers, and the common voice is, change my Lord Chamberlain's staff into that I never but with sorrow see in other hand than that held it last" (125). The Countess's fears for the Lord Chamberlain were aggravated by the fact that death had just deprived her of another strong source of influence at court, Lord Hamilton, Steward of the Household, about whom she writes to Cornwallis, "For myself I must

truly say I am a maimed body and worse, and so is my Lord Chamberlain, the last person left of power that I can rely on for the worth of his affection and friendship to me; and to speake freely to you, the only honest harted man imployed that I know now left to God and his countrie" (119). Even earlier, Bedford acknowledged the uncertainty of power toward the end of James's reign. On 24 April, 1623, she writes to Carleton of the difficulty in procuring a place for him, complaining that in these times "those that are nearest the well-head know not with what bucket to draw for themselves or their friends" (Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, 1619-23, Vol. 143, p. 569, quoted in Maurer, "The Real Presence" 228).

Much of Bedford's efforts as influential go-between were exerted in arranging marriages that were important to her either politically or personally. In 1607, she pressed suit with her father to arrange a marriage for her brother John to the daughter of Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury. Probably because Salisbury thought he could make a better match, he evaded the Harington's overtures, and in a long letter (some of which has been already quoted with reference to Bedford's "masculine" traits) to Bedford's father, Sir John Harington, Salisbury pays grudging compliments to matchmaker Bedford even as he rejects the Harington proposals:

> Therefore I must be thus far bold with the Countess, that if she had not more resembled her sex in loving her own will than she does in those other noble and discreet parts of her mind (wherein she has so great a portion beyond most of those that I have known) she might have moved you to suspend the sending up of any particularities at this time, knowing as she does that all which is before rehearsed is all that could have the proceedings [sic]. (Cecil Papers, Vol. 19, p. 45, quoted in Maurer, "The Real Presence" 219)

Bedford's boldness in making this unwelcome marriage offer outright seems to have exerted enough pressure on Salisbury that he was forced to relate his refusal more to the means than to the content of the proposal, but his indirect comments to the

Countess, carefully laced with compliments, indicate his displeasure (Maurer, "The Real Presence" 219).

Bedford also negotiated for a favorable match between her motherless, thirteen-year-old niece, Anne, and the Earl of Arran. She writes Cornwallis concerning her plans: ". . . if I can compose things according to my wishes; an offer being made for her pleases me well, and I doubt not will take effect if her unreasonable father can be brought to do what he ought, which, if love will not make him, I hope fear will prevaile: but of this lett no speache passe you, because itt is yett too early . . ." (Cornwallis 57-58). Her end remarks demonstrate the necessity of "discretion" in such delicate negotiations, negotiations that fell though for Bedford, as she complains in a letter to Cornwallis:

> Sir Robert Chichester's [Bedford's brother-in-law] scurvie dealing hath broken up the match betwixt his daughter [Bedford's niece Anne] and my Lo. of Arran, which drives me to play my game another way than I had layed my cards, and will hold me a Londoner till the ende of the next terme . . . . (Cornwallis 79)

This failure was merely a loss but not defeat for this skillful player in the game of court.

The Countess continued more successfully in other marriage deals. She arranged the match between Lord Hay and Lady Lucy Percy, the Earl of Northumberland's youngest daughter, even over Northumberland's strong objections. She also assisted in the rather clandestine marriage of Sir John Smith and Lady Isabella Rich, niece of the Earl of Essex (Wiffin 106-107). Bedford's interest in these liaisons was not totally sentimental but also venal, since she could expect reward and favor for helping to accomplish an advantageous match. Her own words prove that

she considered her efforts an investment. In a letter to Cornwallis of 9 September, 1614, the Countess regrets the death of her cousin, Frances Markham:

> . . . haveing ever had cause to hope, if God had spared her lyfe, she wold have repayd my care of her with honnor and comfort; whearin at her ende she hath not deserved me, though my hope of seeing her happily bestowed be frustrate. Had she lived till Allhollandtyde she had died a wife, for I had concluded such a match for her, as I had reason to beleive she should have lived contentedly; but He that disposeth all things hath provided far better for her. (Cornwallis 25-26)

Besides expecting indirect return on such "investments" as marriage deals, Bedford used more direct, sometimes questionable, tactics in her position as go-between to garner for herself a more assured income. She convinced Sir Francis Bacon to cut 2,000 pounds from his Chancery profits to provide pensions for herself and the Marquis of Hamilton in 1619 (Prestwich 269). She also took advantage of the monopolies that proliferated after and despite parliament's condemnation of monopolies in 1614. The Countess procured patents on copper farthings, sea coal, and gold and silver thread (Lewalski, "Lucy"). That last monopoly on gold and silver thread was abused and deeply resented, for there was a big market for this luxury product, as Lady Cranfield's inventory with her embroidered dresses and bundles of gold and silver lace indicates (Prestwich 278). In arranging for this monopoly, the Countess showed herself a real wheeler-dealer. She induced the capitalist Burlamacci to bring over to England a Frenchwoman, Madame Turatta, to teach the manufacture of gold and silver thread; in return, Bedford received a reward. But the patent was riddled with abuses, with yellow silk often being substituted for gold thread (Thomson, "John Donne and the Countess of Bedford" 23).

In Jonson's scathing attack on these rackets, The Devil is an Ass, Bedford may be satirized in the character Lady Tailbush, the court contact of Meercraft, the prince

of projectors. One of Meercraft's proposed monopolies was cosmetics, but Lady Tailbush's service to her sex echoes Lady Bedford's import of fashionable foreign needlewomen (Prestwich 278-79). To an audience irritated by the gold and silver thread monopoly, Meercraft's market-research has a familiar ring:

> Sir, it shall be no shame to mee, to confesse
> To you, that wee poore Gentlemen, that want acres,
> Must for our needs, turne fooles up, and plough Ladies
> Sometimes, to try what glebe they are: and this
> Is no unfruitefull piece. She, and I now,
> Are on a project, for the fact, and venting
> Of a new kinde of fucus (paint, for Ladies)
> To serve the kingdome: wherin shee her selfe
> Hath travell'd, specially, by way of service
> Unto her sexe, and hopes to get the Monopoly,
> As the reward, of her invention. (Jonson, vi, 222)

Other bits of evidence attesting to Bedford's power and efficacy in the Jacobean patronage system are the numerous times her name is mentioned as "gossip" or godmother in court christenings, usually in addition to one of the monarchs. John Chamberlain reports that on April 30, 1616, the Countess and Queen Anne were godmothers for Robert Ker's daughter; and on March 15, 1617, there were two christenings in the chapel at Whitehall:

> . . . the first on Tuesday, March 11th, of a son of the Lord Haddington's, where the king, the Earl of Southampton, and the Countess of Bedford, were gossips; the other on Thursday, the 13th, of a son of the Lady Fielding, sister of the Earl of Buckingham, who was partner with the king and the same Lady of Bedford in that business. (Chamberlain, I, 626; II, 63)

The fact that the Countess is named godparent in addition to the monarch in these christenings not only emphasizes the necessity of gaining the favor of an intermediary as well as the monarch in the patronage system, but also shows Bedford's expertise in playing this role. Thus, in naming Bedford as godmother to his daughter Lucy, Donne

was only one of many who hoped to strengthen connections with his patroness with such familial ties.

True courtier and go-between that she was, the Countess continued to honor and advise Princess Elizabeth even after the princess became the unfortunate and dethroned Queen of Bohemia in 1619. In 1621, Bedford made a hazardous sea voyage to visit Elizabeth in the Hague and frequently sent news and advice to her. In this urgent note sent to Dudley Carleton, another intermediary, Bedford warns of dangerous rumors circulating in court about an unauthorized visit Elizabeth planned to make to England:

> For Gods sake preache more warning to the Queene whom she uses freedom to, else she will undo herselfe, and make others afrayd how thet interest them-selves in her servis, though for my part I will never omitt making good my professions to her as becoms a faithfull and carefull servant. (PRO SP James I, 140/57, 28 March 1619, quoted in Lewalski, "Lucy" 55)

The fact that the queen was rumored to be planning her visit while her brother Prince Charles was in Spain (and perhaps in some danger there) raised suspicions that she wished to be on hand should circumstances call her to the throne (Lewalski, "Lucy" 307, note 16). To calm these suspicions, the Countess offered direct advice to the Electress and urged her to write to her brother Charles indicating what good report she has heard of him from England:

> And madam, give me leave to wish that you would in one letter, at least, take notice of what you hear of him from them who will neither flatter him nor dissemble with you; since there is nobody who doth well but is glad to hear thereof. And it is both a part of their recompense, and encouragement to them to persevere and strive for more and more glory, that such notice is taken of deserving praise, as may assure them they are greater gainers by that they do, than they are for how much soever blood or titles may enrich them with, above other men. (Collection of Letters, by Tobie Matthews. London, 1660, quoted in Wiffin 113)

The "seeming" of Bedford's words not only echo Donne's encouragement of active good over passive being, but also follow directives advocated by Castiglione and others to praise a monarch in order to spur him on to greater good. For example, Erasmus writes, "No other way of correcting a prince is so efficacious as presenting, in the guise of flattery, the pattern of a really good prince" (Erasmus, I, 397). Yet the real "being" of Bedford's advice to Elizabeth, in effect, is to flatter Charles in order to calm suspicions and enlist the prince's support. Thus, she dared to advise the Electress on the manipulations that were a way of life for the Countess herself.

In her successful court career, then, Bedford demonstrated a knowledge of just how far to dare in order to attract attention but remain "on this side sinne." She also realized the value of secrecy or discretion in court matters, as is evident in her correspondences to Cornwallis. In a letter to an unknown friend concerning marriage negotiations, the Countess is vehement about the discretion of her subject:

> I send you Sir Robert Carr's letter to me, in confirmation of part of mine: when you have read it, I pray you throw it in the fire . . . . If you taste this, I should be glad, as soon as you can, to have conference with you about it; for many points touching it that are not to be discovered by letter, your judgment, I doubt not, will easily take hold of. Many I forbear here to mention; one only I will not omit, and that is, to recommend unto you secrecy in this, whether it die in the birth or be proceeded in; for that is necessary, for more reasons than one . . . . I have enjoined my father Mayerne not to break the seal I have set on his lips, except it be to open them to my Lord Chamberlain, with whom yet I have had no speech of this; for it is but a night old with myself. The same liberty I consent to you taking . . . . (Harl. MSS. cod. 7000. 28. p. 110, quoted in Wiffin 116-117)

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It is this kind of delicate, manipulative mediation to which Donne refers in his most blatant poetic example of a courtier's advice to a patron, "Honour is so sublime perfection." As in Bedford's advice to Electress Elizabeth, Donne uses praise both to reward the Countess's efforts to unite her outward appearance and inner virtue, and to encourage her to continue making "Beeing and seeming" her "equall care" (32). He admits that he and others attempt to emulate her success in maintaining appearances:

> You teach (though wee learne not) a thing unknowne
> To our late times, the use of specular stone,
> Through which all things within without were shown. (28-30)

Describing Bedford's outward appearance as "specular stone," a stone which, when cut correctly, had a glass-like transparency, Donne seems to praise her outward appearance as a true indication of inner virtue. But in then limiting the "whole summe" of virtue to the ability to "know and dare" (32-33), he quickly proves that his statements should be taken in the context of court, which has a different set of rules. As Castiglione explains, this aptitude in knowing how far to dare also includes the ability to discern the "being" from the "seeming": ". . . the virtue by which we choose this good indeed, and not that by the which falsely appeareth to be, may be called true knowledge . . . " (Castiglione 299). It is knowing upon whom to rely for needed favors, how much to tell, how much to keep secret, what letters to burn after reading. It is, in Donne's words, "Natures first lesson, so, discretion" (37).

Yet discretion, though a necessary safeguard in court life, can stunt advancement if not balanced with zeal and daring, which Donne terms "religion" (41), for the perfect courtier must be an equal, moderate mixture, according to Castiglione:

> Therefore it behooveth our Courtier in all his doings to be chary and heedful, and whatso he saeth or doeth to accompany it with wisdom, and not only to set his delight to have in himself parts and excellent qualities, but also to order the tenor of his life after such a trade that the whole may be answereth unto these parts, and see the selfsame to

> be always and in everything such, that it disagree not from itself, but make one body of all these good qualities, so that every deed of his may be compact and framed of all the virtues . . . all are so knit and linked to one another that they tend to one end, and many be applied and serve to every purpose. (Castiglione 99)

Because Donne's political success was intertwined with that of his patroness, he had a natural concern with her reputation and advancement. As we have seen, Bedford was known for her often scandalous appearances in court masques, as well as for clandestine political negotiations and questionable means to wealth. Thus, Donne, like Castiglione, advises the Countess to balance her life with moderate mixtures of daring and discretion, and to link the parts so well that they become one:

> Nor may we hope to sodder still and knit
> These two, and dare to breake them; nor must wit
> Be colleague to religion, but be it. (43-45)

Using the symbol of the perfect circle, Donne stresses the need for a unified and balanced way of life, so that seeming and being are in reality one. Yet this is the reality of the Jacobean patronage system, in which virtue is judged by one's ability to know and dare, and the "ends" of preferment justify the "means" of getting there. Thus Donne concludes his advice to Bedford with a rather contradictory acknowledgement of the impossibility of uniting being and seeming, means and ends, in the world of court:

> If either ever wrought in you alone
> Or principally, then religion
> Wrought your ends, and your wayes discretion. (49-51)

If a perfect union of religion and discretion is not possible, then the Countess can at least prioritize the degrees of each by using her sometimes questionable dealings in court affairs to good end, since the "end" of court preferment for herself or others is all that matters. Like other statesmen, she can "purge vice with vice" ("T'Have written

then" l. 83), helping herself and others by continuing her career as a skillful player in the patronage game.

Thus, after himself balancing idealized advice with the realities of the Jacobean patronage system in "Honour is so sublime perfection," Donne can only encourage the Countess to continue her brilliant success in the system:

> Goe thither stil, goe the same way you went,
> Who so would change, do covet or repent;
> Neither can reach you, great and innocent. (52-54)

At the height of her power as patroness and go-between, Bedford has no need for jealousy, no need for regret, especially in aiding deserving clients like Donne. By governing her means with discretion and her ends with pious zeal, she can and does remain "great and innocent."

Thus, through his rhetorical intermediaries, the verse letters, Donne demonstrates his knowledge of the ideal and the reality of the Jacobean patronage system by exploring its complex interdependencies, rewards, and abuses. In his verse letters to Bedford, he also attempts to prove his ability to fulfill his part of the client-patroness relationship not only by praising and encouraging this adept courtier, but also by offering careful but relevant advice that he hopes will benefit both the Countess and her grateful client.

CHAPTER 7

A Summary Reading of the Verse Letters and Donne's Continued Search for Patronage

We have explored the various contexts for which Donne's verse letters to Bedford served as metacommunicative transactions in a growing client-patroness relationship. We can now look at each poem as a whole in light of these contexts, as we view the process of Donne's rhetorical creation of a friendship "out of nothing."

Donne's introductory verse letter, "Reason is our Soules left hand," stresses the distance between the Countess and her potential client by positioning the Countess as a far-off divinity and Donne as a lowly student of theology who can only know her by faith. Introducing the concept of relativity of worth, Donne admits that, though faith (the soul's right hand) is the best way to reach divinity, he wishes to know the Countess personally (through the "squint lefthandednesse" of reason) so that he can rationally understand and accurately express his blind faith in her. As Donne explains his methods of deepening his understanding of and friendship with Bedford, he actually does show his knowledge of the Countess. In addition to framing the entire poem within a religious matrix to appeal to Bedford's pietistical strain, Donne further personalizes the verse letter by referring to her "Saints" (9), or her well-known group of influential court friends; her "deeds, accesses, and restraints" (11), or her court negotiations and manipulations; and "what you reade, and what your selfe devize" (12), her interest in literature and writing. The verse letter, then, is

metacommunicative, since it has for its subject the creation of a relationship, and the letter itself is Donne's means of creating that relationship.

The verse letter also demonstrates Donne's ability to function within the sphere he wishes to enter. By framing the letter to Bedford's personal life and interests, Donne follows Castiglione's recommendations for the perfect courtier to frame himself to the tastes of his patron. In addition, the methods Donne employs to get to know Bedford better also mirror Castiglione's advice on the careful choice of friends and the importance of a first impression. Finally, by placing Bedford in the position of making the first impression, Donne not only exhibits the wit and sprezzatura of a good courtier, but also shows that he shares her rhetorical view of life, in which everyone serves as an audience for someone else.

Donne continues his contrast of reason and faith, sacred and secular, in admitting that he cannot rationally comprehend his love of the Countess, since "the reasons why you'are lov'd by all, / Grow infinite, and so passe reasons reach" (13-14). He must be content, then, to fall back on "implicite faith" and believe the general consensus of Bedford's worth. Yet while admitting that she is above rational comprehension, Donne proceeds to draw her to himself rhetorically by comparing her with images that are increasingly sympathetic to him as a mere mortal. First calling the Countess "divinity" (2), Donne then likens her to earthly "high top'd and deep rooted" rocks which can be washed by waves but not overthrown (19-20). He further humanizes her and personalizes the poem by explaining that, although her aristocratic birth and beauty provide a "Balsamum" (22) that preserves her body, Bedford has additionally added to her passive goodness the active good of "learning and religion, / And vertue" (25). This reference to her well-known erudition and Calvinist leanings

not only acknowledges the Countess's efforts at self-improvement, but also underscores Donne's advocation of active good over passive virtue, especially in his own expectations of a deepening relationship with Bedford.

Not content with her self-preserving birthright, then, Bedford has actively and ambitiously advanced in the court hierarchy so that she can now help others: her added qualities have formed "A methridate, whose operation / Keepes off, or cures what can be done or said" (27-28). She does not need this antidote for herself, however ("this is not [her] physicke" l. 29), so she can use it for others. In acknowledging Bedford's power to protect others not only from physical harm, "what can be done" (28), but also from verbal threats, what can be "said" (28), Donne subtly refers to the often underhanded maneuverings and negotiations that make up the Countess's environment in the Jacobean court. Donne's theological language, then, takes on secular and practical meanings as he presents an idealized fiction with undertones of the practical realities of Bedford's life. Thus, his image of Bedford as a "good Angell" (31) not only humanizes and stresses Bedford's intermediary status in the spiritual realm but also positions the Countess closer to Donne and emphasizes her status as go-between in the realm of court. As an angel in human form, Bedford enjoys both God's presence and man's, serving as intermediary between the two.

In repositioning the Countess from divinity to angel, then, Donne has accomplished rhetorically a closer relationship with his patroness and has also demonstrated his understanding of the relative positionings of the patronage system he would like to enter. Since Bedford, as patroness, is the source of all Donne's hopes for court advancement, she is "divinity" for him. She has the power to "create" him, and though he can request favors, give praise, and attempt thanks, he can never earn or

repay her goodness. Likewise, Bedford, though Donne's patroness, is also suitor to those higher on the patronage hierarchy. She also has been "created" by King James as a lady of the Queen's bedchamber, and as we have seen in her own correspondence, she also must make requests and proclaim her inability to earn or requite favor.

Thus, in his linking of reason and faith, spiritual and secular, Donne mingles his theological images with realities of Bedford's court life, so that idealized images take on practical implications. As angel, Bedford is truly "Gods masterpeece, and so / His Factor for our loves" (33-34). In the context of court, Bedford is also a "masterpeece," but of court "divinity" James I, King by Divine Right; and in the complex network of the Jacobean patronage system, the Countess is likewise one of the "Factors" of the King's favor. Donne, now more closely linked with the Countess in her intermediary status, can confidently offer his patroness encouragement and advice:

> do as you doe,
> Make your returne home gracious; and bestow
> This life on that; so make one life of two.
> For so God helpe mee,'I would not misse you there
> For all the good which you can do me here. (34-38)

We have seen how these lines can be interpreted according to the fictionalized ideal of Donne's literal theological language, or in the context of the realities of Donne's request for patronage in court. Under the idealized fiction of urging the angel Bedford "home" to heaven to join her virtuous earthly life with her eternal life, Donne subtly requests that patroness Bedford bring "home" to court her protege, John Donne. His final words of unselfish good wishes, then, become a richly ambivalent plea to accompany the Countess to court.

Donne continues his exploration of the relativity of worth in "You have refin'd mee," introducing alchemical metaphors to illustrate his own worth to the Countess.

Again, Donne wittily turns the tables on Bedford by proclaiming that his new interpretation of worth is due to the influence of the Countess herself: as the quintessence of "good and lovely," Bedford has "refin'd" him and raised his level of awareness. Now he understands that "Rareness, or use, not nature value brings; / And such, as they are circumstanc'd, they bee" (3-4). Donne's list of "worthyest things"--"Vertue, Art, Beauty, Fortune"--emphasizes his point of the relativity of value, since virtue and beauty, natural and intrinsic qualities, are listed equally with art and fortune, artificial and added qualities.

Donne develops his position on the relativity of worth by contrasting the relative value of Bedford's virtue and beauty in court and country. In court, "which is not vertues clime" (7), Bedford's virtue is more valuable since more rare, while at Twickenham, the Countess's country estate, her beauty has most worth. Using this same strategy, Donne proves his own relative worth to his patroness and also demonstrates his understanding of the importance of "seeming" over "being" in the realm of court. In the Jacobean court, a world governed by an idealized fiction imposed by a monarch who claimed Divine Right, exterior appearances are all-important. Therefore, Bedford's virtue in such a court is at such a "transcendent height" (8), it cannot be seen by her fellow courtiers, so cannot be believed. Though Donne's "lownesse" (8) at court makes him equally invisible, he can be of value to the Countess by poetically interpreting her virtue, making it comprehensible to the corrupt court:

> For, as darke texts need notes: there some must bee
> To usher vertue, and say, This is shee. (11-12)

Likewise, Bedford needs exegete Donne in the country, where beauty is "but a grave of spices" (15) until awakened by the Countess, whom he represents as a sun-

like divinity. In positing himself at Twickenham, which served as a retreat for writers and suitors to Bedford, Donne automatically places himself in a relationship with the Countess and acknowledges her power as divinity and as patroness to "create" him:

> a new world doth rise here from your light
> We your new creatures, by new recknings goe. (21-22)

Donne continues to position himself in relation to Bedford as divinity, including himself among her "sacrificers" (28), "Priests (29), and "Organs" (29) who proclaim her dictates. Yet in keeping with his emphasis on Bedford's beauty in the country, Donne wittily twists his theological metaphors from the expected description of the Countess's goodness into descriptions of her physical beauty:

> These are Petitions, and not Hymnes; they sue
> But that I may survay the edifice. (33-34)

In language that suggests his venal motives in writing the verse letter, Donne exhibits his playfulness and sprezzatura while complimenting the Countess on her loveliness.

On his secular "pilgrimage," Donne's descriptions of Bedford's "edifice" join the spiritual and the physical, as he describes her body as "vertues temple" (44), and her "eyes, hands, bosome" (46) as virtue's "Altars" (46). Other women, Donne insists, are mere "Bablers of Chappels," while Bedford is "the'Escuriall" (48). Yet Donne continues to restrict his admiration for her exterior to its secular beauty, not its sacredness:

> Yet not as consecrate, but merely'as faire,
> On these I cast a lay and country eye. (49-50)

He continues to frame his verse letter and himself to Bedford's tastes by relating her interest in writing and literature to his own aspirations. Of rare stories of the past and future, she is "all record, all prophecie" (52). Bedford's past record of patronage, demonstrated by the many dedications and references to her in the literature and letters of the time, prophesy her continued help to aspiring writers and courtiers like

Donne. At this time of increasing suitors and decreasing patrons, stories of such welcomed patronage were indeed "rare" and valuable. Donne does not exaggerate, then, in referring to Bedford as "the booke of Fate," since the Countess and patrons like her became the only source and hope of future success for suitors like Donne. But by specifying that Bedford is the Book of Fate purged of all "sad and guilty legends" (54), Donne playfully assures his patroness that she will feel neither disappointment nor regret at her continued help.

Through his literary metaphors, Donne begins to reconcile, within the Countess, the heretofore contrasted qualities of beauty and virtue:

> If good and lovely were not one, of both
> You were the transcript, and originall,
> The Elements, the Parent, and the Growth,
> And every peece of you, is both their All. (55-58)

This sudden joining of beauty and virtue seems almost out of place, since the first half of the verse letter has concentrated on Bedford's exterior beauty, most rare and so most valuable at Twickenham. Yet in this stanza, Donne continues to join "good and lovely" as if to stress that the Countess's "seeming," her deeds, are a true indication of her "being":

> So'intire are all your deeds, and you, that you
> Must do the same thing still: you cannot two. (59-60)

But Donne immediately and playfully reverses himself, using the courtier's tactic of anticipating and refuting charges of flattery, as he admits the danger of misinterpretation in a courtly world of artful exteriors:

> But these [lines]. . .
> . . .
> Tast of Poetique rage, or flattery,
> And need not, where all hearts one truth professe;
> Oft from new proofes, and new phrase, new doubts
> grow,
> As strange attire aliens the men wee know. (61-66)

Thus, his own "seeming" flattery is subject to misinterpretation, so that externals, he implies, may not be an accurate indication of inner worth.

At an obvious impasse, Donne ends the letter almost comically by totally ignoring the neo-platonic issues of "higher Courts" (68) and blindly trusting "senses decree" (68): "The Mine, the Magazine, the Commonweale, / The story'of beauty in Twicknam is, and you" (69-70). Donne's choice of metaphors recalls the verse letter's opening lines on the relativity of worth, as he now subtly reveals Bedford's value to him in this client-patroness relationship. She is a potential "Mine" of wealth and opportunity; a "Magazine" of ammunition against detractors; the "Commonweale" or source of good for himself and her other suitors; and the subject or "story" of his poems of praise. And, as in his introductory letter in which Donne placed Bedford in the position of making the first impression on her client, here Donne wittily alters his original perception of Bedford's rare beauty at Twickenham. Previously (lines 13-18), Bedford's beauty challenged Donne's rhyme in the country, since it was most rare there. In fact, Bedford's loveliness was responsible for awakening the dormant qualities of Twickenham, which was "but a grave of spices" until the Countess's "face / Exhale them, and a thick close bud display" (15-16). By the final stanza, however, the Countess's estate becomes the exterior representation of its owner: Twickenham is the exterior "seeming," while Bedford is the virtuous "being" of one concept of beauty:

> Who hath seene one, would both; As, who had bin
> In Paradise, would seeke the Cherubin. (71-72)

By this turn of phrase, Donne praises the beauty of Bedford's country estate, a "paradise" for ambitious writers and courtiers, as a true indication of the goodness and

loveliness of its angelic owner. And as exegete for Bedford's virtue in court and beauty in the country, Donne proves his worth to her in either sphere.

Before he can be of worth to the Countess, an insignificant creature like Donne must first be "created" by his patroness. Donne continues to explore the relativity of value, proving his own worthiness and use to the Countess, in "T'Have written then," a verse letter which stresses Donne's total dependence upon his patroness. Under the premise of apologizing for not answering Bedford's recent correspondence, Donne expresses the total helplessness of his position as client in a patronage system in which all favor is granted at the whim of the patron, and no favor can be earned or repaid by the suitor. The suitor, then, is a "nothing" until created by the patron, and can neither offer adequate thanks nor recompense:

> . . . nothings, as I am, may
> Pay all they have, and yet have all to pay.
> Such borrow in their payments, and owe more
> By having leave to write so, then before. (7-10)

Donne admits that the privilege of thanking Bedford for her favors increases his indebtedness to her, so that the verse letter sets up a cycle of dependence that perpetuates and sustains their relationship. Also, this reference to self-perpetuating debt is very relevant to the Countess's own financial situation, and to that of most of her aristocratic friends, who were forced deeper into debt to maintain the court positions that provided their only means of revenue. Thus, while opposing himself as a "nothing" to Bedford's "everything," Donne also relates them to one another in a common indebtedness.

In like manner, Donne hints at his own relative value to the Countess by using the same concepts discussed previously--that "seeming" is not always a true indication of worth, and that "use, not nature value brings" ("You have refin'd mee," l. 3). Thus,

Donne, although seemingly "barren grounds" (11), could prove a "rich mine" to Bedford. Though not worthy by nature, Donne could prove valuable to his patroness by his usefulness to her, yielding "(not gold) but coale or stone" (12). Yet he can only be of use to the Countess if she accepts and "creates" him, if she hallows his "Pagan Muse" and gives him, a stranger to court, a position there.

As if to demonstrate his knowledge of court corruption and immorality, and to justify Bedford's presence and his own desire for a place there, Donne again alters his angle of vision on the relation between "being and seeming." Normally, courtiers suffered ill reputations because of the degeneracy of their court environment. The corruption of court, then, was accepted as proof of the immorality of its inhabitants. Donne reverses the view by using Bedford, virtue incarnate, as an indication of the court's worth:

> Your (or you) vertue two vast uses serves,
> It ransomes one sex, and one Court preserves. (25-26)

And by praising the Countess's ignorance of her own virtue, Donne not only compliments her modesty but also her skill at self-presentation, since hiding one's best traits in order to reveal them casually for greater effect is one of Castiglione's strong recommendations for the perfect courtier:

> There's nothing but your worth, which being true,
> Is knowne to any other, not to you:
> And you can never know it; To admit
> No knowledge of your worth, is some of it. (27-30)

Thus, in praising Bedford's total innocence, an obvious fiction for such an accomplished court manipulator, Donne reveals his own knowledge of court tactics.

As we have seen in the discussion of King James and the fiction he imposed upon court, an important quality of the successful courtier is the ability to maintain a

fiction while manipulating reality. In upholding his view of Bedford's naivete with regard to evil in the world, Donne maintains the fiction he as writer has created, but by educating the Countess about man's degeneracy, he also proves his own expertise in court tactics as well as his worth to his patroness. After a lengthy jeremiad lamenting man's fallen condition, which Donne personalizes to Bedford with references to the recent deaths of her two closest friends and to Bedford's interests in colonial enterprises, Donne dares to offer advice. He voices Castiglione's recommendations for a balance between vice and virtue, suggesting that an overbalance of virtue and an ignorance of vice in Bedford would be somewhat "perverse," and would not only cause her to doubt her own goodness, but would also prevent her from feeling compassion for wretched mankind.

In order to praise the Countess as courtier, then, Donne must break with the fiction he has created and acknowledge the reality of her balance of vice and virtue, demonstrated in Bedford's own life by her scandalous appearances in court masques and yet her reputation for pious Calvinism. At first, Donne seems to praise this balance:

> Even in you, vertues best paradise,
> Vertue hath some, but wise degrees of vice. (75-76)

He subtly returns to the issue of relativity of worth by acknowledging that, even with vice, "use, not nature value brings," especially in the Jacobean court:

> Statesmen purge vice with vice, and may corrode
> The bad with bad, a spider with a toad:
> For so, ill thralls not them, but they tame ill
> And make her do much good against her will. (83-86)

These lines recall Donne's previous praise of Bedford's active good, which formed a "methridate" preventing or curing evil, in his introductory "Reason is our Soules left

hand" (ll. 25-28). Thus Donne would seem to link his patroness with these crafty statesmen whose ends justify their questionable means.

Yet in proving his ability to function within the courtly context, Donne, like Bedford, must not venture beyond decorum but must remain "On this side sinne" ("To the Countesse of Bedford At New-yeares Tide," l. 45). Donne's immediate reversal of his position on the necessity of vice, then, is not only a decorous return to the fiction of Bedford's perfect virtue but also underscores Donne's rhetorical ability and courtly expertise, and is in keeping with the constant repositioning and refocusing evident in the verse letters. He playfully negates all previous arguments with "But these are riddles" (81) and confidently resumes his praise of the Countess's perfect goodness, urging her to continue her virtuous ways:

> But in your Commonwealth, or world in you,
> Vice hath no office, nor good worke to doe.
> Take then no vitious purge, but be content
> With cordiall vertue, your knowne nourishment. (87-90)

Through his careful manipulation of fiction and reality, Donne succeeds in proving rhetorically both his own ability to create and maintain a fiction, and his awareness of the necessity of questionable court tactics. In this manner, while proclaiming Bedford a virtuous "Commonwealth" and source of good for her client, Donne subtly demonstrates what they both know about the reality of corrupt court politics.

Donne again seems to reverse or reevaluate his relative position to Bedford while he explores the total interdependence of client and patroness in the complex Jacobean patronage system in "To the Countess of Bedford At New-yeares Tide." Employing the in-between occasion of the change of years as an emblem of himself, Donne stresses his need, as client, for "creation" by his patroness. Without her help, he is less than nothing--"Meteor-like, of stuffe and forme perplext" (3). Donne proclaims

himself neither "Debtor to th'old [year], nor Creditor to th'new" (7), so can feel neither gratitude for past times nor hope for the future. His choice of words, "debtor" and "creditor," to describe his non-being underscores the transactional aspects of patronage, while other words emphasize his personal aspirations in his relationship with the Countess: "thankes" (8), "trust," and "hopes" (9).

Yet again Donne suddenly reverses or qualifies his argument, deriding his lamentations on the years as "bravery," since, he explains to Bedford, "these times shew'd mee you" (10). With these words, Donne rhetorically repositions himself and refocuses the poem from the complaint of a sole non-being toward the transactions of an active, interdependent relationship with the Countess. Because he is now part of a relationship, Donne feels "created" and describes his active attempts to sustain this relationship.

In usual literary fashion, Donne proclaims the eternalizing aspects of poetry, which "embalmes vertue" (13) and preserves "Fraile transitory fame" (14). Yet Donne, as we have seen, does not wish to be a professional poet, but only uses his verse letters to the Countess as mediators and rhetorical extensions of himself to prove his worth as courtier. Not content to voice the standard promise of literary immortality, then, he wittily reverses his argument as a demonstration of his sprezzatura and wit. Instead of his verse preserving Bedford's name, her name destroys his verse:

> . . . the tincture of your name
> Creates in them, but dissipates as fast,
> New spirits: for, strong agents with the same
> Force that doth warme and cherish, us doe waste;
> Kept hot with strong extracts, no bodies last. (16-20)

Donne's use of alchemical imagery here and in several of the verse letters expresses well Donne's aspirations in the Jacobean patronage system, for alchemy implies

hierarchy, yet not a static structure but fluid and constant movement upward. By alchemically referring to the Countess as a "strong agent," Donne not only acknowledges her position on the court hierarchy as mediator, but also emphasizes her active power to destroy or to transform and perfect an aspiring courtier like Donne.

As a courtier can never repay his patron for favors, Donne protests his inability to preserve the Countess's name in verse as compensation for her "creation" of him. Even if he could express adequate praise in his poetry, no one would believe the miracle of Bedford's qualities, "now [that] faith is scant" (23), nor would they believe that a lowly creature like Donne, "one corne of one low anthills dust, and lesse" (28), could know or express such perfection. By expressing the rhetorical man's constant concern for audience response, and employing an artfully humble manner for greater effect as recommended by Castiglione, Donne frames his verse letter to match Bedford's court tactics and her own rhetorical view of life. In both the form and matter of his poem, then, Donne rhetorically posits a relationship.

Perplexed by his inability to thank or repay his patroness, Donne takes the courtier's way out and says nothing at all, deciding to "leave, lest truth b'endanger'd by my praise" (32). In turning to God to complete the poem, Donne not only fulfills the duty of a courtier to advise his patron, but he also follows Castiglione's recommendation to "sweeten the cup" of practical advice to his patroness by offering it fictitiously as words of God. Also, in appealing to the top of the spiritual hierarchy, Donne suggests Bedford's own relative position in the patronage hierarchy: though his own means of "creation" in court, Bedford herself was "created" by others. Thus, Donne links himself with the Countess as both suitors in the patronage hierarchy.

"God's" words of advice to Bedford are not generic truisms but specific suggestions that relate to the Countess's personal life and her court career. In demonstrating such interest, Donne exhibits concern not only for his patroness's personal well-being, but also for her professional success and reputation with which he, as client, is intrinsically bound. Thus God's advice demonstrates Donne's own knowledge of the Countess and of the importance of reputation in court, invariably linking Donne with Bedford in an interdependent patronage relationship.

Stressing Bedford's own "creation" by those above her on the court hierarchy, and the predominance of exterior presentation over interior virtue at court, Donne has God teach Bedford how to "lay out" or present "His stock of beauty, learning, favour, blood" (37). The Countess's passive, natural qualities, her beauty and aristocratic blood, are lumped together with her active and artificially added attributes, learning and favor in court, as God's "stock" or investment, a term which underscores the business aspects of patronage. In the hothouse atmosphere of court, no position is safe or permanent; thus, God advises wariness and careful self-presentation:

> He will perplex security with doubt,
> And cleare those doubts; hide from you,'and shew you good. (38-39)

Even God admits that the Jacobean court follows a different and relative set of morals, so that in court, "some vaine disport, / On this side sinne, with that place may comport" (44-45). In utilizing God to give such assurances, Donne excuses and even justifies Bedford's own maneuverings in court politics as well as her appearance in court masques which were often considered scandalous and beneath the dignity of their aristocratic participants. Donne does suggest discretion in these dealings, however, so that they remain "on this side sinne."

Yet the determination of what is sin and what is virtue in court depends totally upon exterior, often deceiving, appearances. Thus, in advising the Countess on court maneuverings, God also urges her to be attentive to her "seeming": in using the weakness of others, she should "speake truths, and credibly" (51); in her secret negotiations done "to good ends" (54), she must understand "what [she] may not acknowledge, what not know" (55); she should demonstrate an innocent conscience but "a discreet wariness" (57) in her dealings with others, knowing how to escape as well as to revenge offence (58); she should exhibit a courtier's moderation in all things, "to represse / Joy, when your state swells, sadnesse when 'tis lesse" (59-60).

Following God's/Donne's advice, Bedford can feel confident in her actions without doubt or regret, both in court and in her personal life. And as Donne assures Bedford of her continued success and her promise of salvation, he reenters the poem with a plural pronoun: "and when with active joy we heare / This private Ghospell, then 'tis our New Yeare" (64-65). Donne is no longer a non-being caught between two years but has been created and alchemically transformed by his relationship with Bedford into something of active worth. Joined with Bedford as a fellow child of God, Donne can celebrate with her the good news of her enrollment in the Book of Life as both begin a "New Yeare."

Donne again employs alchemical imagery to suggest transformation and perfection in "Honour is so sublime perfection." Stressing relative value over intrinsic worth to justify his own worth to Bedford, Donne explores the interdependent complexities of the Jacobean patronage system in which patrons are paradoxically dependent upon their clients to maintain superiority. In such a matrix, honor can only be given by those lower on the hierarchy, so that kings and even God Himself "but

direct our honour, not bestow" (9). Thus Donne subverts the traditional Renaissance hierarchical structure based upon intrinsic worth by praising instead the active good that can only be accomplished by lower beings or substances on the hierarchy.

Donne's use of alchemy to represent the interdependence of court patronage perfectly illustrates his point, since the whole purpose of this pseudoscience is to raise lower substances into higher. Even the delicate alchemical transformational process is better accomplished "By despis'd dung, then by the fire or Sunne" (12), so that the intrinsic superiority of the highest substances is totally dependent upon the active good of the lowest. Likewise, a court patron's power and influence is dependent upon his entourage of subordinates who serve as a visual sign of his high standing and success in granting favors. Thus, as the alchemist is judged by his ability to raise lower substances into higher, the patron is judged by his success in advancing his clients in court, so that the fate of client and patron are intertwined. Donne's advice to Bedford, "Care not, then, Madame,'how low your praysers lye" (13), takes on a very personal meaning of value, then, coming from one who wished to be sublimely "refinde."

Employing the same concept of interdependence, Donne continues both to personalize his letter to Bedford and to show his expertise in negotiating his way in the fictionalized court of James I by discussing the necessity of unity in being and seeming, discretion and religion, in the artificial world of court. Bedford, a very successful member of that court, has an intrinsic right to be there because of her aristocratic background: for her body, "God made better clay / Or tooke Soules stuffe such as shall late decay" (22-23). The Countess's body is so superior, in fact, that Donne describes it as "Amber" (25), a transparent covering which "discovers [her] quicke Soule" (26), or "specular stone, / Through which all things within without [are]

shown" (30). But as the passive superiority of higher substances depends upon the activity of inferior substances in alchemy, Bedford's high standing in court is less due to her passive superior "being" and more to the active care she gives to the exterior presentation of her worth in this rhetorical society--her "seeming." Thus in proclaiming that "Beeing and seeming is [her] equall care" (32), Donne praises Bedford's careful exterior presentation in which her actions seem to be an accurate representation of her inner virtue so that being and seeming appear to be one.

This calculated self-fashioning, this "art which appeareth not to be art" (Castiglione 38), is the true virtue of a successful courtier in a society which judges by surfaces only. Thus, reiterating "God's" message in "To the Countesse of Bedford At New-yeares Tide" that the court follows a different set of moral standards, Donne narrows the meaning of virtue for a courtier to "but know and dare" (33). True virtue for a courtier like Bedford hinges upon her success in negotiations and maneuverings, and this success depends upon her ability to balance knowledge of court procedures or decorum, which Donne terms "discretion" or "wit," and the daring or sprezzatura (in Donne's words, "zeale" or "religion") necessary to attract attention to one's cause. Bedford's own success in the Jacobean court attests to her expertise in balancing and somehow reconciling her often contradictory images of shrewd intermediary, faithful counselor, lover of the arts, pious Calvinist, and scandalous masquer.

The goal for a successful courtier, then, is not only to balance but also to unify one's actions and intentions so that "being" and "seeming" are taken to be one:

> Nor may we hope to sodder still and knit
> These two, and dare to breake them; nor must wit
> Be colleague to religion, but be it. (43-45)

Donne's use of the circle image with "peeclesse centers" (47) to emphasize this unity of religion and discretion also recalls the alchemical imagery at the poem's beginning. A circle with a central dot is the alchemical symbol for gold, the highest substance toward which all lesser substances strive, the supreme goal of the alchemist. In associating this image with Bedford, Donne implies not only her perfection but also his own striving to emulate and reach her through his emissaries, the verse letters.

But images of alchemy also suggest the discrepancy between "being" and "seeming" in James's court, since the pseudoscience is simply an idealized fiction manipulated by mountebanks and cheats who prey upon the ignorance and greed of their customers. Thus Donne qualifies his description of the fictional ideal, complete unity of "being" and "seeming," "discretion" and "religion," by acknowledging the reality of disunity, even in the Countess:

> If either ever wrought in you alone
> Or principally, then religion
> Wrought your ends, and your wayes discretion. (49-51)

Demonstrating his ability to manipulate the unity of "being" and "seeming" in an idealized fiction, as well as his understanding of the discrepancy between "means" and "ends" in the reality of court politics, Donne shows his own balance of decorum and sprezzatura as he dares to approach the Countess on her own terms.

Having justified her success as court lady, and his worth to her as a lesser creature on the hierarchy, Donne has been "sublimely perfected" to the extent that he can offer encouragement to his patroness:

> Goe thither stil, goe the same way you went,
> Who so would change, do covet or repent;
> Neither can reach you, great and innocent. (52-54)

Continuing her "equall care" of appearance and intention, means and ends, Bedford need not feel jealousy nor regret for her questionable dealings with others. By advancing worthy suitors like Donne, who will increase her status and sing her praises, she will retain her high position in court as well as her pious reputation: she will remain "great and innocent."

Donne's verse letters to the Countess of Bedford, then, are much more than the insincere, generic encomiastic utterances described by Lewalski and others; they are instead viable and personal mediators in a developing client-patroness friendship.

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Donne's friendship with the Countess of Bedford and his verse letters to her are important to an understanding of Donne's later life and work. Donne's relationship with the Countess cooled somewhat after 1613 for several reasons. Though Bedford provided Donne with literary understanding and support, her financial straits prevented more monetary aid to her struggling protege. Thus, a debt-ridden Donne was compelled to look more to other patrons and patronesses, including the Countess of Huntingdon, Magdalen Herbert and her sons, Bridget White, Robert Drury, the Earl of Somerset, and the Earl of Dorset (Bald 279-87, 237-62, 291-95). Because the poetry and verse letters to these new benefactors were intended strictly for compliment and reward, they lack the personal coterie aspects of the verse letters to Bedford.

And Donne not only offended Bedford by writing complimentary verse to other patronesses, but especially by publishing his hyperbolic praise of the deceased fourteen-year-old Elizabeth Drury, the Anniversaries, in 1611-12. Donne's poetic exchange with

the Countess of Bedford had always been in manuscript, emphasizing the coterie character of their relationship. By publishing an encomiastic work to an unknown daughter of a patron, Donne could only lessen his standing with the Countess, degrading himself to the position of "professional poet" (Saunders, "The Stigma of Print" 139-64).

Fearing Bedford's anger after the publication of the Anniversaries, Donne began an apologetic epistle, "To the Countess of Bedford, Begun in France but never perfected," in which he confesses to the Countess, "I have to others lent / Your stock, and over prodigally spent / Your treasure" (Satires 104, ll. 1-3). Obviously, Bedford's continued friendship during this period was important to Donne, yet his desire to clear all debts before he took orders in 1615 placed him in a dilemma. To raise needed funds, he secretly proposed to print a collection of his poems and to dedicate the volume to the Earl of Somerset, whom Bedford had been laboring to remove from power. Not only would this dedication have insulted Bedford, but Donne's plan of publicly printing a selection of verses addressed to other patrons and patronesses as well as to Bedford would have also humiliated a court lady like the Countess. Donne asserted that, because of his debts, he was "under an unescapable necessity" to print the collection (Bald 296).

Though Donne did not offend Bedford by going through with his plan, the Countess disappointed Donne bitterly in failing to fulfill her promise to pay all his debts before he took orders in 1615, offering him only thirty pounds. Bedford's own financial troubles, the probable reason for her meager help, have already been discussed. Donne, however, seemed to ignore the questionable loyalty of his own intentions in seeking other patronage, and attributed her behavior to the malicious

influence of her spiritual adviser, Dr. Burgess (Bald 296). Burgess, it seems, provided Donne with an excuse for the waning of his friendship with the Countess and a release from his own obligations to his patroness, as he reveals in an angry letter to Goodyer:

> Of my Lady Bedford, I must say so much as must importune you to burn the Letter; for I would say nothing of her upon record, that should not testifie my thankfulnesse for all her graces. But upon this motion, which I made to her by letter, and by Sr Tho. Roes assistance, if any scruple should arise in her, she was somewhat more startling then I looked for from her: she had more suspicion of my calling, a better memory of my past life, then I had thought her nobility could have admitted: all of which, though I humbly thank God, I can make good use, as one that needs as many remembrances in that kinde, as not only friends but enemies can present, yet I am afraid, they proceed in her rather from some ill impression taken from D. Burges, then that they grow in her self. But whosoever be the conduit, the water is the holy Ghosts, and in that acceptation I take it. For her other way of expressing her favour to me, I must say, it is not with that cheerfulnesse, as heretofore she hath delivered her self towards me. I am almost sorry, that an Elegy [that Donne wrote upon the death of Bedford's brother] should have been able to move her to so much compassion heretofore, as to offer to pay my debts; and my greater wants now, and for so good a purpose, as to come disingaged into that profession, being plainly laid open to her, should work no farther but that she sent me 30l. which in good faith she excused with that, which is in both parts true, that her present debts were burdensome, and that I could not doubt of her inclination, upon all future emergent occasions, to assist me. I confess to you, her former fashion towards me, had given a better confidence; and this diminution in her makes me see, that I must use more friends, then I thought I should have needed. (Letters 218-20)

Since Donne did begin his ecclesiastical career relatively free of debt, he obviously succeeded in making use of "more friends" (Bald 297). He continued cordial and outwardly courteous relations with Bedford, though the relationship could not have been as it was before. Donne preached before her at Harington House by her invitation as late as 1621 (Bald 540).

His years of seeking patronage were not over during this period, however, though his goals were of a more sacred character. Unable to find a secure secular position, Donne accepted King James's recommendation of a career in the Anglican

church, taking orders on 23 January, 1615. Although he had to wait nearly seven years for a major appointment, he received some benefits almost immediately, eventually becoming Dean of St. Paul's in 1621 (Marotti 275). Bald remarks that "he appears as one who had mastered at last the arts of the courtier, and it is clear, even when he finally turned to the Church, that he did not intend to abandon those arts but to rise by them" (301). According to Marotti, the death of Donne's wife in 1617 and his own serious illness in 1623, which prompted his self-scrutinizing Devotions, marked turning points in which Donne's religious commitment deepened, but, especially before his being appointed to the deanship, a position he won largely through the assistance of the infamous Duke of Buckingham, he continued to seek advancement. He traveled to Germany in 1619 on a mission for the king, he still cultivated friends in high places, and he preached regularly at Court, both in the late Jacobean and early Caroline periods (Marotti 276).

Donne wrote little poetry after his ordination, but the tensions that appear in Donne's later works are similar to those already discussed in his verse letters to Bedford. Instead of evidencing a power struggle between a subordinate courtier and powerful patroness, Donne's later writings show his conflicting desires for secular advancement and spiritual humility. Always, he desired a friend in high places. In an Accession Day sermon preached at Paul's Cross on 24 March, 1617, Donne spoke on the text "He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips, the king shall be his friend" (Proverbs 22.11):

> And in this sense, the Kings friendship that is promised here . . . is utilis amicitia, all such friends as may do him good. God promises, that to men thus endow'd and qualified belongs the love and assistance that men of plentiful fortunes can give; great Persons, great in Estate, great in Power and Authority, shall confer their favours upon such men, and not upon such as only serve to swell a train, always for ostentation, sometimes for sedition; much less shall they confer their favours upon

> sycophants and buffoons; least of all upon the servants of their vices and voluptuousness, but they whom God hath made Kings in that sense, (Masters of abundant fortunes) shall do good to them only who have this pureness of heart, and grace of lips. (Sermons I:211)

In this sermon, Donne attempts to define the concept of "friendship" as we have seen it to exist between Bedford and Donne, in terms of benefits he himself hoped to receive.

Donne continued to write some poetry specifically for advancement, such as "Upon the translation of the Psalmes by Sir Philip Sidney and the Countesse of Pembroke his Sister," which Novarr speculates Donne composed at the death of the Countess of Pembroke in 1621 in order to gain the attentions of William Herbert, Third Earl of Pembroke (157). Yet once he became Dean of St. Paul's, Donne seemed reluctant to write encomiastic poetry of this kind, since this activity no longer seemed fitting or even necessary to one of Donne's high Church position. When he complied with a request by Sir Robert Ker to compose an elegy commemorating the deceased Marquess Hamilton in 1625, his work was met with apparent criticism (Marotti 285). John Chamberlain commented on the verses, ". . . though they be reasonable wittie and well don yet I could wish a man of his yeares and place to give over versifying" (Chamberlain, Letters 2:613, quoted by Milgate in Donne, Epithalamions 209). Obviously, the time of Donne's "versifying" for secular patronage was passed.

In his serious illness of 1623, and towards the end of his life, Donne did not seem to give up his search for patronage altogether, but spent his energies in self-scrutiny as he attempted to make himself worthy of favors from the Supreme Patron. In his later poems and in many sermons, as in his verse letters to Bedford, Donne seems as concerned with his own benefits in his relationship with God as with praising his Creator. One such poem written during his illness, "Hymne to God my God, in my sicknesse" (Divine Poems 50), demonstrates that Donne never really did give up his

search for patronage, but came to view death and heaven as the attainment of success missed in life, with God as the beneficent patron who dispenses a final, spiritual reward (Marotti 285-86):

> So, in his [Christ's] purple wrapp'd receive me Lord,
> By these his thornes give me his other Crowne;
> And as to others soules I preach'd thy word,
> Be this my Text, my Sermon to mine owne,
> Therefore that he may raise the Lord throws down. (26-30)

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DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

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Major Field: English (Literature)

Title of Dissertation: John Donne's Verse Letters to Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford: Rhetorical Means to a Friendship

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