

**The Idea and Proper Use of Wit:  
Donne's Two Early Elegies as Examined by  
a Reading of Hoskyns's *Direccons for Speech and Style***

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**ABSTRACT**

In English literature one thinks of Donne when thinking of the term “wit.” Critics such as Dryden, Johnson and Eliot, each using his own approach, have all commented on wit and Donne’s wit. Contemporary literary criticism, nevertheless, seems to have ignored how Donne’s own contemporary coterie critics considered “wit” and Donne’s wit. This essay focuses on John Hoskyns’s idea of “wit” and related subjects found in his *Direccons for Speech and Style*. Hoskyns’s seventeenth-century literary tastes give us a glimpse of how an intellectual of the time who had a similar Inns-of-Court background like Donne’s might have looked at wit and the use of wit. Hoskyns’s critical opinions are scrutinised and employed to discuss two of Donne’s early Elegies: “To his Mistress going to bed” and “Jealousy.”

**Keywords:** Donne, wit, the Elegies, Hoskyns, *Direccons for Speech and Style*.

“For wit is cultural insolence. Such then is the character of the young.”

— Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, II. xii

“Yet there be some that think their wits have been asleep, except they dart out somewhat that is piquant  
and to the quick.”

— Bacon, “Of Discourse”

Wit is a term that has long been associated with Donne and his followers. His use of wit, more often than not, has been observed in the light of later comments by John Dryden, Samuel Johnson and T. S. Eliot, critics who applied to Donne’s poetry definitions of wit framed for their own times. In addition to our contemporary literary theory and criticism, the critics and theorists nearest to Donne’s own time are equally helpful in shaping modern readers’ understanding of the poet’s aims in some of his early Elegies. This paper concentrates on how John Hoskyns (1566-1638), Donne’s contemporary, in his *Direcons for Speech and Style*, discusses his own ideas about good writing. These ideas are employed here to discuss and interpret two of Donne’s early Elegies, “To his Mistress going to bed” and “Jealousy.”<sup>1</sup>

Hoskyns was close to Donne, both personally and in time, and one would expect to find some mutual influences and similarities between them. Only seven years older than Donne and a famous wit himself, Hoskyns, like Donne, was an Inns-of-Court gentleman who entered the Middle Temple in 1601. Donne was appointed Master of Revels at Lincoln’s Inn in February 1593, whereas Hoskyns had served as *terrae filius*, “an orator privileged to make humourous and satirical strictures in a speech at the public ‘act’” (*OED*), at New College, Oxford, during the 1580s, writing satirical verses which were so bitter that “he was forced to resign his fellowship [obtained 22 June, 1586], and was driven from the University.”<sup>2</sup> His *Direcons for Speech and Style* appeared towards the end of the sixteenth century when Donne was composing most of the Elegies. The *Direcons* was written between 1598 and 1603, “with the year 1599 as the most likely date of its composition.” (Hoskyns 103) One would expect that Donne and Hoskyns, being contemporaries, would have had a similar view of the concept of wit, if not a precisely identical one, but this is only partially true.<sup>3</sup> However, an analysis of the *Direcons*

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<sup>1</sup> For John Hoskyns, *Direcons for Speech and Style*, see Louise Brown Osborn, ed. *The Life, Letters, and Writings of John Hoskyns, 1566-1638* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1937). All further citations of the *Direcons* are from this edition, and hereafter cited as Hoskyns.

<sup>2</sup> *DNB* 9.1291.

<sup>3</sup> Grierson records the poem “Absence” (first appeared in print in Davidson’s *Poetical Rhapsody* in 1602; Hoskyns 285) and notes that it was “probably by John Hoskins [Hoskyns],” see Herbert Grierson,

reveals much about the way Donne's contemporaries might have viewed his wit.

The framework of the *Direccons* is that of a handbook to diverse rhetorical figures, some forty of them in all.<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, the term "wit" itself does not exist as an independent entry; it is rather employed as a supporting role helping explain other rhetorical schemes, and is therefore scattered over several places in the *Direccons*. The word "wit" first appears when Hoskyns discusses "disordered" or "carelesse" speech:

Carelesse speech doth not onlie discreditte the personage of the speaker,  
but it doth discreditte the oppinion of his reason and iudgment it  
discreditte the truth, force, & vniformity of the matter & substance;...  
howe shall he be thought wise whose penning is thinne & shallowe?  
how shall yow looke for witt from him, whose leasure & whose head  
assisted wth the examinacon of his eyes, could yeald yow noe life and  
sharpnes in his writing... (116)

The association of wit with "life and sharpness" — qualities embraced by modern critics for the dramatic in Donne — is highly suggestive of a reading of Donne's Elegies, as is the implication that wit derives from the head assisted by the eyes.<sup>5</sup> Qualities such as "witt," "life" and "sharpnes" are all evident in Donne's style.

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ed., *The Poems of John Donne*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1912), 1.428-29. Osborn prints it and believes that it is Hoskyns's, based on Hoskyns's "command of language and imagery in his letter to his bride of three months" (Hoskyns 287). The doubtful authorship of the poem shows the closeness between Donne and Hoskyns in terms of style, and therefore indicates that they may have shared similar literary opinions. According to Aubrey, Donne and Hoskyns knew each other: "In shorte, his [Hoskyns's] acquaintance were all the Witts then about the Towne; e.g. Sir Walter Raleligh (who was his Fellow-prisoner in the Tower, where he was Sir Walter's *Aristarchus* to review and polish Sir Walter's stile); John Donne, D.D....Sir Henry Wotton, Provost of Eaton College; *cum multis aliis*"; see Oliver Lawson Dick, ed. *Aubrey's Brief Lives* (Boston: Nonpareil Books, 1996), 169-70. Better evidence of the close friendship between Donne and Hoskyns is their presence together at the dinner ("Convivium Philosophicum," in which Donne was named "*Johannes Factus*," i.e. "John clypede Made") for Thomas Coryate in the Mitre Tavern, about 1608-12 (Hoskyns 288). Other attendants of the meeting include Christopher Brooke, Sir Henry Neville and Hoskyns. In a letter dated 1615 (one set of Coryate's letters was published in 1616, entitled "Letters from Asmere, the Court of the Great Mogul, to several Persons of Quality in England; *DNB* 4.1185) Coryate describes these men of letters as "the right Worshipfull Fraternitie of Sirenaical gentlemen, that meet the first Fridaie of every moneth, at the signe of the Meremaide in Bread streete," which is evidence showing that they did meet periodically; see Tom Cain, "Donne and the Prince D'Amour," *John Donne Journal* 14 (1995): 93-111, p. 93. For the Latin text of the poem "Convivium Philosophicum," see Hoskyns 196-9; for the English translation by John Reynolds, see Hoskyns 288-91.

<sup>4</sup> Hoskyns (165-66) gives forty-two figures.

<sup>5</sup> The importance of human sight / eyes in love poetry is also emphasised in Petrarch (*Rime* 75): "The lovely eyes that struck me in such a way that they themselves could heal the wound....they [the lovely eyes] have so cut off my path from any other love....These are those lovely eyes which make the standards of my lord victorious everywhere....these are those lovely eyes that are always in my heart with kindled sparks..."; see Robert M. Durling, trans. *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The Rime sparse and Other Lyrics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1976), 174. Donne, imitating Petrarchanism of the time, writes, "For love, all love of other sights controules" ("The good-morrow," l. 10).

According to Hoskyns, “carelesse speech,” or uncared-for arrangement of words, has no wit, life nor sharpness. This is one’s first impression of Hoskyns’s concept of wit, which can also be seen as his concept of good style.

In terms of “wit,” or intellect, Donne has always been seen as a very witty and intellectual poet; his manipulation of dialectic and metaphoric devices made Ben Jonson, Hoskyns’s close friend, say, “that Donne himself, for not being understood, would perish.”<sup>6</sup> In terms of what Hoskyns calls “life,” Donne’s characterisations of his personae in the Elegies are so vivid that they provide a lively and poetic report of the life of the time: flattering courtiers in “Oh let not me serve so” and “but hee, as mute / As an old Courtier worne to his last sute” (ll. 29-30) in “A Tale of a Citizen and his Wife,” “sun-parch’d quarters on the City gate” in “The Comparison” (l. 31), money-power-love interrelationships in “The Bracelet,” the predatory seducer in “A Tale of a Citizen and his Wife” and the richly decorated woman in “To his Mistress going to bed.” According to the *OED* (2.a), “sharpnes,” another quality that Hoskyns associates with wit, means “intellectual acuteness, shrewdness,” which fits well with his use here and with Donne’s style in the Elegies as well: the dying, jealous husband (“Jealousy”), ugly Flavia (“The Anagram”), rationalisation of a libertine’s concept of love (“Change” and “Variety”), the inconsistency of women (“The Expostulation”) and the practice against the conventional idea of love (“Loues Progresse”).

“Nowe for fashion,” Hoskyns continues:

it consisteth in 4 things or quallities of yor style. The first is Brevity, for letters must not be treaties, or discourcings, except it be among learned men...Therefore are yow to examine the clearest passages of yor vnderstanding,...penn it fully, roundly, & distinctly, soe as the reader may not thinke a second viewe cast away vppon yor letter...for his [one’s superior’s] capacity, yow are to be quicker or fuller of those reaches, & glaunces of witt, or learning, as hee is able to enterteine them. (118-19)

It has been generally assumed that Donne’s Elegies were written mainly for a relatively small circle of “learned men” at the Inns of Court who were sophisticated

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<sup>6</sup> For Ben Jonson’s *Conversations with Drummond*, see Ian Donaldson, ed., *Ben Jonson* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985), 599. Aubrey (Dick 178) records that Hoskyns was Jonson’s “father” as a poet: “Serjeant John Hoskyns of Herefordshire was his [Jonson’s] *Father*. I remember his sonne (Sir Bennet Hoskins, Baronet, who was something Poetical in his youth) told me, that when he desired to be adopted his *Son*: No, sayd he, ‘tis honour enough for me to be your Brother; I am your father’s son: ‘twas he that polished me, I doe acknowledge it.” The *DNB* (9.1292) also records that Hoskyns “polished” Jonson’s verse so enthusiastically that he was called Jonson’s “father” as a poet.

enough to grasp Donne's "reaches & glaunces, or learning." "All the artistic, intellectual, and social coordinates of his literary work," as Arthur F. Marotti observes, must be understood in this particular context.<sup>7</sup> "In this context," Marotti further points out:

Donne expected his audience to have the literary and social sophistication enabling them to contribute cocreatively to the dramatic and rhetorical realization of his poetic texts. More generally, in late Elizabethan England, such an ability was regarded as a proper one for young gentlemen. Emotionally nuanced and dramatically suggestive poems were written for cultural sophisticates like the gentlemen with whom Donne associated while at Lincoln's Inn.<sup>8</sup> (58)

Hoskyns himself was a leading figure among these "cultural sophisticates." The mention of wit in the passage is well worth attention, for one encounters a viewpoint that associates wit with learning almost two hundred years earlier than Johnson's similar comment on Donne's learning and style in the *Life of Cowley* (1779). Hoskyns is blending together brevity, wit, life and sharpness as a whole that serves as something fundamental for the intellectual sophisticates of the time, and learning has to be added to the effort to make it complete. Later, Hoskyns returns to the concept of learning as a source of "delight" in discourse:

Therefore to delight generally take those Termes from ingenious & seuerall p[ro]fessions from ingenious Acts [*sic*] to please the learned, & from seuerall Arts to please the learned of all sorts, as from the Meteors, Planetts, & Beasts in naturall philosophie from the starrs, spheres, & their mocons in Astronomie,...from the politique gouerment of Citties, from Navigacon, from military p[ro]fession... (123)<sup>9</sup>

Hoskyns clearly conveys the idea that wit is a learned way of playing with language, and that its purpose is to please those who are at least as erudite as the author himself. This aspect of wit invites knowledgeable readers, and is evident in Donne's epistle to *The Progresse of the Soule*, in which he writes, "for I will have no such Readers as I

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<sup>7</sup> Arthur F. Marotti, *John Donne, Coterie Poet* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1986), 25.

<sup>8</sup> Marotti (58) also notes that "in using the theater metaphor in the introduction to Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*, Nashe assumed that 'Gentlemen' readers would value a 'tragicomedy of loue...performed by starlight' partly because they would have had the social awareness and sensibility needed to read such poems."

<sup>9</sup> "Acts" could be a copyist's error for "Arts"; Vickers has "arts," see Brian Vickers, ed., *English Renaissance Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 2003), 402.

can teach” (Grierson 1.294). Again, Hoskyns’s concept of wit confirms that Donne is a coterie poet. Assessed on this Elizabethan elitism, Donne would no doubt have occupied some space on Hoskyns’s private reading list. Donne, like his contemporaries such as Bacon, loves and uses all sorts of scientific knowledge (“naturall philosophie”) of the time in his writings; one aspect of it is his singular fascination for alchemy. The very mention of the imaginary “Cockatrice” (basilisk, l. 8) in “The Perfume,” the “Remora” in “Loues Progresse” (l. 58) and “Remoraes” in “To Sir Henry Wotton” (“Sir, more than kisses,” l. 8) shows Donne’s interest in strange “Beasts.” Astronomy-related subjects are no less frequent than natural philosophy in his poetry. Donne had a strong liking for astronomy; he once owned a copy of Kepler’s *De stella nova* (1606).<sup>10</sup> His copy of the latter is “bound with another one by Kepler which may have been Donne’s, whose interest in astronomy and contemporary science is well known.”<sup>11</sup> The internal evidence for this interest can be found in such poems as “A Valediction: forbidding Mourning” (ll. 9-12) or “A nocturnal upon S. Lucies day, Being the shortest day” (ll. 37-41).” Even in a religious sonnet such as “I am a little world made cunningly,” astronomy is still employed as a way of confessing the author’s own past sins (ll. 5-9). In the two *Anniversaries*, astronomy is extensively used as well. In the *Elegies*, direct astronomical references are utilised to elaborate and justify Donne’s daring libertinism in “Variety”:

The heauens reioyce in motion, why should I  
 Abiure my so much lou’d varietye  
 And not with many yeouth and loue diuide... (1-3)

Donne is employing here the astronomical notion of “the uniform motions of the heavenly bodies” in order “to justify the principle of relativity in love and his own propensity for inconstancy.”<sup>12</sup>

The reader certainly finds both explicit and implicit passages concerning (mostly contemporary) “politique gouerment of Citties” in the *Elegies*. In “Jealousy” Donne compares his own defiance towards the husband’s authority over

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<sup>10</sup> Geoffrey Keynes, “More Books from the Library of John Donne,” *The Book Collector* 26 (1977): 29-35, p. 29.

<sup>11</sup> Keynes, 30. Keynes (31, n. 2) suggests that one should also consult Margaret Wright, “Donne’s Book of Stars,” *Communication* (U of Manchester, Nov. 1975): 20-21. For Donne’s interest in and relationship with Kepler, see R. C. Bald, *John Donne, A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1970), 228-30, and Marjorie Nicolson, “Kepler, the *Somnium*, and John Donne” in *Science and Imagination* (Ithaca: Great Seals Books, 1956), 58-79. Donne actually met Kepler in 1619 in Germany; see Robert H. Ray, *A John Donne Companion* (New York: Garland, 1990), 193, and Wilbur Applebaum, “Donne’s Meeting with Kepler: A Previously Unknown Episode,” *Philological Quarterly* 50 (1971): 132-34.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Monroe Coffin, *John Donne and the New Philosophy* (New York: Columbia UP, 1937), 53.

the mistress to the residents of Southwark and the Germans:

As the inhabitants of Thames' right side  
Do Londons Maior or Germans the Popes pride. (33-34)

In order to persuade the unnamed friend in "The Anagram" into marrying unattractive Flavia, Donne specifies one contemporary continental event to prove that physical ugliness, like accumulated refuse, can be profitable:

When Belgiaes Cityes, the round Cuntryes drowne  
That durty foulnes guards, and armes the towne. (41-42)<sup>13</sup>

In "The Bracelet," contemporary political and monetary issues are deftly and wittily mixed with syphilis, economic power, the religious and the military:

Weare they but crownes of France, I cared not  
For most of them their naturall cuntry rott  
I thinke possesseth, they come here to vs  
So leane, so pale, so lame, so ruinous,  
And howsoere french kings most Christian bee  
Their crownes are circumcis'd most Iewishly.  
Or weare they Spanish Stampes, still trauailing  
That are become as Catholique as their king  
Those vnlick'd beare-whelps, vnfil'd pistolets,  
That more then Canon shotts auayles or letts... (23-32)

In comparing the English coins ("they," l. 23) to other things, Donne teases out all the current politics and diatribes against the French and the Spanish. His attacks on the French, the Italian and the Dutch are even more severe and detailed in "On his Mistris."<sup>14</sup> Besides, in terms of "navigacon," a theme which will be treated more

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<sup>13</sup> Line 41 "refers to the Wars of Independence against Spain, particularly during the 1580s and '90s," see John T. Shawcross, ed., *The Complete Poetry of John Donne* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), 61.

<sup>14</sup> A similar kind of diatribe can also be found in Browne's *Religio Medici* (II. 4): "There is another offence unto Charity, which no Author hath ever written, and few take notice of, and that's the reproach, not of whole professions, mysteries and conditions, but of whole nations, wherein by opprobrious Epithets wee miscall each other, and by an uncharitable Logicke from a disposition in a few conclude a habit in all. *Le mutin Anglois, et le bravache Escossois; / Le bougre Italien, et le fol Francois; / Le poultron Romain, le larron de Gascongne, / L'Espagnol superbe, et l'Aleman yurongne*"; see L. C. Martin, ed. *Religio Medici and Other Works* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1964), 60. Martin (311) notes that "these lines are based on parts of Sonnet lxviii in Du Bellay's *Les Regrets*, 'Ie hay du Florentin l'vsuriere auarice.'"

thoroughly later in this study, there are at least two evident examples in the Elegies. In “Loues Progresse,” for example, Donne provides a 30-line long passage (ll. 43-72), one of his most erotic descriptions of the female body, using navigational terminology. Similarly, Donne’s “roving hands” (l. 25) are compared to a vessel that sails on the metaphorical ocean of the woman’s body in “To his Mistress going to bed.”

To explain and understand fully Donne’s encyclopaedic poetics, it must be remembered, on the one hand, that Donne’s studies include classical literature, Italian, French, Spanish, scholastic philosophy, the Fathers, law and travel.<sup>15</sup> Donne’s learning as demonstrated in his poetry shows, on the other hand, that he is a true master of this kind of intellectual blending of wide-ranging realms of knowledge; pleasing the erudite does not seem to be his focus here. Hoskyns’s “terms from seuerall p[ro]fessions from ingenious Arts” applies perfectly to Donne’s imagery, which encompasses a great diversity of fields: medicine, alchemy, astronomy, geography, philosophy and nautical knowledge. Donne’s use of learning is, above all, “ingenious.” Analysing it from this angle, it is clear that Hoskyns, unlike Dryden who used the word “wit” in a derogatory sense, still advocates the use of wit in poetry. For a poet like Dryden, “nature” and “decorum” are the most important, and whatever disturbs the order of these two should be deprecated. In the time of Hoskyns and Donne, on the contrary, wit stood out as the mark of genius, and was therefore encouraged. This is one of the major changes in literary taste in the early modern era.

Hoskyns, however, warns the young Templar who received the *Direccions* against the improper use of wit:<sup>16</sup>

With yor better yow are not to put riddles of yor witt, by being too scarce of wordes....<Perspicuity> The next good pptie of Epistolarie style is perspicuitie & is often tymes indangered by the former quality (*Brevity*) oftentimes by affeccion of some witt ill angled for, or ostentacon of some hidden termes of art; few wordes they darken the speech, & soe doe too many, as well too much light hurts the eyes as too little...  
(119-20)

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<sup>15</sup> Donne’s erudition is well-treated in Grierson 2.2-6. Grierson further points out that “from an unpublished letter,” we learn that “Donne had read Dante.” This “unpublished letter,” in which Donne wrote “Even when I begun to write these I flung away Dant[e] the Italian, a man pert enough to bee beloved and too much to bee beeleaved,” see John Hayward, ed., *John Donne, Dean of St. Paul’s: Complete Poetry and Selected Prose* (London: The Nonesuch P, 1942), 441-43.

<sup>16</sup> Osborn observes (Hoskyns 106-07): “It is interesting to speculate, however, as to whether he may not have been Robert Harley (1579-1656). Young Harley entered the Middle Temple on 24 October 1599 and was bound with Hoskyns for his first instruction, and apparently they lodged in the same chambers....Harley became a knight of the Bath upon James’s coronation, and later was Master of the Mint and a member of Parliament.”



It is worth emphasising that Hoskyns is dealing here with letters rather than poetry, but there is no doubt that his focus on perspicuity marks a divergence from Donne. Hoskyns had been credited by Jonson with having “polished” him, and is here much closer to Jonson than to Donne, and may well have shared Jonson’s view that Donne was a difficult poet.<sup>17</sup> But the mention of wit, though misused here, implies at least that the use of it requires a high intellect, even if too much of it might cause difficulties in understanding. By using the simile “too much light,” Hoskyns still looks at the sparkling side of wit; he is merely insisting that overusing it will cause some negative effects. The phrase “too much light” seems, in fact, to be echoing Donne’s “Satyre III”: “and this blind- / nesse too much light breeds” (ll. 68-9).

Hoskyns is also relevant to Donne when he defines and sets rules for the proper use of metaphors. His definition reads:

A *Metaphore* or *Translacon* is the friendly & neighborly borrowing, of one word to expresse a thing wth more light & better note: though not soe directly & prop[er]lie as the naturall name of the thinge meant would signifye:...is streching an imytacō of truth by Art & endeavor.  
(121)

“To his Mistress going to bed” is a good demonstration of what Hoskyns means here. The wit of the poem is mainly built upon the sea-voyage metaphor (ll. 25-32) and the astronomical-topographical-angelological transformations of the mistress’s body (ll. 5-24):

Licence my roving hands, and let them go  
Behind, before, above, betweene, below.  
Oh my America, my newfound land,  
My kingdome, safelyest when with one man man’d.  
My Myne of pretious stones; my empiree;  
How blest ame I in this discouering thee!  
To enter in these bonds, is to be free,  
Then where my hand is sett, my seale shalbee. (25-32)

The reader is confronted with a kaleidoscopic cosmos of ideas — geography, the Age of Great Discovery, colonisation,<sup>18</sup> European imperialist plunder of gold and precious stones and traffic in African slaves<sup>19</sup>, politics and paradox. In trying to claim his

<sup>17</sup> John Aubrey, *Brief Lives* (Dick 169); Jonson, *Conversations* (Donaldson 599).

<sup>18</sup> Words such as “kingdome” and “man’d” in line 28 imply the practice of colonisation of the time.

<sup>19</sup> European engagement in colonist plunder is clear in line 29, and therefore “empiree” may refer to an

right to the mistress's nakedness, Donne depicts a much more complicated picture than the mere nudity itself. In other words, Donne does shed "more light" and offer "better note" to the reader's appreciation of female nudity; he is crafty enough to manipulate diverse ideas in these lines, and his subjects interact with one another like atoms. Moreover, the heavenly imagery (l. 5) and the angelic references (ll. 19-24) help dilute the explicit eroticism of the poem and, consequently, show Donne's wit in his artistic treatment of the subject. He has done more than giving "more light and better note"; he has provided more wit as well. The metaphors employed do not debar the reader from understanding the poem; on the contrary, they fit well with Hoskyns's credo of perspicuity, for "it is metaphor above all that gives perspicuity, pleasure and a foreign air," as Aristotle puts it.<sup>20</sup>

Hoskyns's "to expresse a thing with more light & better note" can illuminate "To his Mistress going to bed" further if one applies it from the perspective of Wildean aestheticism. In *The Decay of Lying* (1889), Wilde asserts that:

Consider the matter from a scientific or metaphysical point of view, and you will find that I am right. For what is nature? Nature is no great mother who has borne us, She is our creation. It is in our brain that she quickens to life. Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see it, depends on the arts that have influenced us. To look at a thing is very different from seeing a thing. One does not see anything until one sees its beauty. Then, and only then, does it come into existence. At present, people see fogs, not because there are fogs, but because poets and painters have taught them the mysterious loveliness of such effects...They did not exist till art had invented them.<sup>21</sup>

The combination of female nudity and the discovery of North America certainly produces a new perspective, in that whenever the reader thinks of one, the image of the other appears, with the effect of the two converging as one. It is Donne's wit in using the metaphor combining them both that strikes the reader's imagination and emphasises "the mysterious loveliness of such effects" which otherwise could well be ignored in daily dullness — "to expresse a thing with more light and better note." "A *Metaphor*," Hoskyns notes, "is pleasant because it enricheth our knowledge wth two things at once wth the truth and wth similitude as this" (122). With "To his

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extension of sovereignty to foreign lands (i.e. Africa and South America). Donne uses the word "Emperyes" in "Paradox IX" ("That by Discord things increase") to mean "absolute dominion"; see Helen Peters, ed. *John Donne: Paradoxes and Problems* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1980), 87.

<sup>20</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 3.2.7-10 (1045 a); see John Henry Freese, trans. *The Art of Rhetoric* (London: William Heinemann, 1926), 355.

<sup>21</sup> Hazard Adams, ed., *Critical Theory since Plato* (New York: HBJ, 1971), 683.

Mistress going to bed,” it is not just “two things at once” that one has learned from reading it, but a multitude of diverse and yet artistically connected ideas.

Though Hoskyns advocates the use of metaphors, he cautions against any extravagant use of them in a way that seems to distance himself from Donne again:

The rule of a Metaphor is that it be not too bold not too farr fetch'd, & though all Metaphors goe beyond the significacon of things, yet are they requisite to match the compasinge sweetnes of mens myndes that are not content to fix themselues vppon one thing but they must wander into the confynes like the eye that cannot chuse but view the whole knott, when it beholds but one flower in a gardin of purpose... (121-22)

Hoskyns is not alone in employing “farr fetch'd” to describe certain metaphors; Aristotle is the classical source of the idea:

The fourth cause of frigidty of style is to be found in metaphors;...and if they are far-fetched, they are obscure, as when Gorgias says: “Affairs pale and bloodless...”<sup>22</sup>

Donne’s use of metaphors, if excessive in any sense, is due to and can be explained by “the decay of allegory as a natural mode of poetic expression” in medieval literature.<sup>23</sup> It is open to question, however, whether Hoskyns would have found Donne’s use of metaphors in the Elegies far-fetched or obscure. In “Jealousy” a succession of metaphors elaborate on and define the “many dangers” which face the protagonist in a way that modern readers may find contrived:

Now I see many dangers, for that is  
His Realme, his Castle, and his Diocis.  
But if as envyoues men which would revile  
Their prince...  
.....  
As the inhabitants of Thames right side  
Do Londons Maior or Germans the Popes pride. (25-28; 33-34)

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<sup>22</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric* (1406 b; Freese 365). More references to the idea of “far-fetched,” including Hobbes and Sidney, can be found in Elizabeth J. Cook, “Thomas Hobbes and the ‘Far-fetched,’” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 44 (1981): 222-32.

<sup>23</sup> William John Courthope, *A History of English Poetry* (1903) vol. 3, in A. J. Smith, ed. *John Donne: The Critical Heritage*, vol. 2 (London: Routledge, 1996), 230. Hereafter cited as *Heritage 2*.

The husband's bed is compared, with a strong patriarchal flavour, to a prince's realm, a castle and a bishop's diocese, things remote now, but closely connected with real life back then. The sense of a dictatorial leader is obviously cast upon the speaker's impression of and even hostility towards the husband, whose authority over the mistress is the speaker's target. With two similes that can also be treated as metaphors, Donne conveys his indifference towards the husband's diligent watch in lines 33 and 34.<sup>24</sup> The two metaphors are again related to contemporary life and, consequently, not far-fetched at all. By employing these metaphors, Donne obviously intends to enhance both his built-in, rebellious disposition and a peculiar delight in having the upper hand in an illicit love affair with a married woman. This is not only not far-fetched; it is perfectly appropriate to every sense he is trying to convey. There is nothing obscure in these lines to a poet-rhetorician like Hoskyns himself. Even if there is any, Chapman's preface to *Ovid's Banquet of Sence* can help explain the necessity of the obscure:

Obscuritie in affection of words, & indigested concets, is pedanticall and childish; but where it shroudeth it selfe in the hart of his subject, utterd with fitnes of figure, and expressive Epethites; with that darknes wil I still labour to be shaddowed.<sup>25</sup>

It is not a mere fondness of obscurity on his part that causes some readers of Donne to say that his poetry is obscure or difficult; it is actually his eagerness for striking novelty and compression of thought and feeling, together with his love of paradox, that drive him to his specific expressions and hinder one's immediate understanding.<sup>26</sup> Even in "Elegie upon the untimely death of the incomparable Prince Henry," a poem which Donne himself considered able to match the obscurity of Edward Herbert's poetry, Grosart confesses that "I find nothing unusually obscure, and some of Donne's other poems are far more difficult."<sup>27</sup> There is no obvious conceit that is

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<sup>24</sup> Aristotle states that "the simile also is a metaphor; for there is very little difference....Similes must be used like metaphors, which only differ in the manner stated" (*Rhetoric*, 1406b ff; Freese 367) "To Aristotle," Osborn (Hoskyns 107-08) observes, "Hoskyns refers at least five times in his *Direccons* and declares that the understanding of Aristotles *Rhetorique*, is the directest meanes of skill to discribe, to moue, to appease, or to prevent mocon, whatsoever; whervnto, whoesoever can fit his speech, shalbe truly eloquent."

<sup>25</sup> George Chapman, "TO THE TRVLIE Learned, and my worthy Friende, Ma. Mathew Royden," in *Ovid's Banquet of Sence*, 1595 (Menston: The Scolar P, 1970).

<sup>26</sup> In terms of "compression of thought and feeling," Donne seems to be imitating Thucydides's method: "But the most obvious of his [Thucydides's] characteristics is the effort to express as much as possible in the fewest possible words, and to combine many ideas into one, and to leave the listener still expecting to hear something more"; see Dionysus of Halicarnassus, "Thucydides," in Stephen Usher, trans. *Dionysus of Halicarnassus: The Critical Essays*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1974), 529, 531.

<sup>27</sup> Alexander B. Grosart, ed. *Poems* (1872-73) 2.113 note, quoted in Wightman Fletcher Melton, *The*

“indigested” or words too “affected” in “Jealousy” or “To his Mistress going to bed.” If any obscurity appears in other Elegies, it is partly due to Donne’s habit of using technical imagery, and partly because of the Elizabethan belief that “rich Minerals are digd out of the bowels of the earth, not found in the superficies and dust of it.”<sup>28</sup> And Donne, obviously, among most English poets of his time and beyond, is the one who digs the most, for Donne is, to borrow Hoskyns’s words, the kind of poet who “cannot be persuaded that any man that hath witt of his own is afryd of anothers witt...and for my part I had rather dy with witt then live without it” (71).

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*Rhetoric of John Donne’s Verse* (Baltimore: J. H. Furst, 1906), 119. Cf. Jonson, *Conversations* (Donaldson 597): “That Donne said to him he wrote that epitaph on Prince Henry, ‘Look to me, faith,’ to match Sir Ed[ward] Herbert in obscureness.”

<sup>28</sup> Chapman, “TO THE TRVLIE Learned, and my worthy Friende, Ma. Mathew Royden,” in *Ovid’s Banquet of Sence*.

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