

## What's On

## Folger Exhibitions

- On Exhibit 2014/15
- Symbols of Honor: Heraldry and Family History
- Ongoing Exhibitions
- **Past Exhibitions**
  - Shakespeare's the Thing
  - Here Is a Play Fitted
  - Robben Island Shakespeare
  - Nobility and Newcomers in Renaissance Ireland
  - Very Like a Whale
  - Open City: London, 1500-1700
  - Shakespeare's Sisters
  - Fame, Fortune, & Theft
  - Beyond Home Remedy
  - Vivat Rex!
  - Lost at Sea
  - Extending the Book
  - Imagining China
  - The Curatorial Eye
  - To Sleep, Perchance to Dream
  - Breaking News
  - Now Thrive the Armorers
  - History in the Making
  - Marketing Shakespeare
  - Shakespeare in American Life
  - Technologies of Writing in the Age of Print
  - Noyses, Sounds, and Sweet Aires
  - Shakespeare for Children
  - Consuming Splendor
  - David Garrick

## • Letterwriting

- Voices for Tolerance
- Pen's Excellencie
- Designer Bookbinders
- Writing on Hands
- Decade of Collecting
- Fortune
- Fooles and Fricassees
- Seeing What Shakespeare Means
- Designs from Fancy
- Papers & Porcelains
- Mapping Early Modern Worlds
- Housewife's Rich Cabinet
- Unruly Women
- Impressions of Hollar
- Yesterday's News
- Festive Renaissance
- Exhibition Catalogs

## Folger Theatre

## Folger Consort

## # John Donne's Marriage Letters

[« return to previous page](#)

Today John Donne is best known first as one of the English language's greatest poets, but in the seventeenth century he was also celebrated as a letter-writer. Given Donne's background, the letterwriting is unsurprising, for like many of his educated contemporaries, he spent time working as a secretary—to the top-ranking legal official in England, the Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, Sir Thomas Egerton. While working for Egerton Donne fell in love, and fell into a scandal that threatened to wreck his life. The scandal also prompted him to write a flurry of letters that are among the Folger's most prized possessions.

In December 1601, John Donne secretly married Anne More, the niece of his employer's wife. Unable or unwilling to face his father-in-law in person, Donne did what any good secretary would do – he broke the news of his marriage in a letter. In it, Donne begged Sir George not to “destroy” him and Anne, since “it is easy to give us happiness.” His efforts were to no avail. Sir George did not approve of his daughter's marriage, since Donne, the son of a London ironmonger, had a reputation as a womanizer and a possible Catholic. As a result, Donne was fired from his job as secretary and thrown into London's Fleet Prison. In a series of eight letters, Donne argues for his freedom, his job, and his wife. Although he eventually reconciled with his father-in-law, Donne was unemployed for the next thirteen years, forced to rely on the generosity of friends and relatives. His marriage lasted until 1617, when Anne died in childbed. Devastated by the loss, the poet never remarried.



[John Donne. Signed autograph letter to Sir George More. Manuscript, 2 February 1601/2. \(Detail\)](#)

## Related Items

[Explore the Folger's Manuscript Collection](#)



**O.B. Hardison Poetry Series**

**PEN/Faulkner**

**Talks and Screenings**

**Education Programs**

**Family Programs**

**Special Events**


**Shakespeare's Birthday**

**Digital Folger**

**Box Office**

**Plan a Visit**

**Free at the Folger**

 **Sign up for E-news!**

 **Printer Friendly**

[Copyright & Policies](#) | [Sitemap](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [About This Site](#)

**RSS** 

**Address:**

201 East Capitol Street, SE  
Washington, DC 20003  
[Get directions »](#)

Federal Tax ID #04-2103542

**Hours:**

Public  
10am to 5pm, Monday through Saturday  
12pm to 5pm, Sunday

Reading Room  
8:45am to 4:45pm, Monday through Friday  
9am to noon and 1pm to 4:30pm, Saturday

**Phone:**

Main: 202 544 4600  
Box Office: 202 544 7077  
Fax: 202 544 4623