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"Therefore is Gods will delivered to us in Psalms": John Donne and Poetic (Re)form

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The *Expostulation* from Donne's nineteenth *Devotion* famously hails his God as both a literal and—more emphatically—"a figurative, a metaphorical" God. Donne's focus on figure here is of a piece with his own poetic inclinations: it is hardly surprising either that he would experience the figurative aspects of divine word as essential to its power, or that he would draw attention to them in proclaiming that power to his (and his God's) readers.[1] Yet Donne's own rhetoric marks the terms of his homage as somewhat unusual:

> My God, my God, thou art a direct God, may I not say a literal God, a God that wouldst be understood literally and according to the plain sense of all that thou sayest? but thou art also (Lord, I intend it to thy glory, and let no profane misinterpreter abuse it to thy diminution), thou art a figurative, a metaphorical God too; a God in whose words there is such a height of figures, such voyages, such peregrinations to fetch remote and precious metaphors,

[1]Janel M. Mueller takes the method of this passage and the lines following it as showing its indebtedness (and indeed making "an explicit link") to the sermons rather than the poetry, since "the passage contains an acknowledgment that Donne, like the Fathers who loom large in his preaching, finds the homiletic device of figurative exposition to conduce to devotional writing," "The Exegesis of Experience: Dean Donne's *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 67.1 (January 1968): 1–19, 7.

> such extensions, such spreadings, such curtains of allegories, such third heavens of hyperboles, so harmonious elocutions, so retired and so reserved expressions, so commanding persuasions, so persuading commandments, such sinews even in thy milk, and such things in thy words, as all profane authors seem of the seed of the serpent that creeps, thou art the Dove that flies.[2]

Donne prefaces his turn to metaphor with a parenthetical insistence that it is meant as praise, insistence that rather begs the question of why a "profane misinterpreter" might fail so entirely to perceive that. That such a misinterpreter might regard it as a "diminution" attributes both an insufficiency to metaphor and a shortcoming to the divine for using it, and Donne forcefully opposes both suggestions in describing the impressive expansiveness of divine metaphoricity. In so doing, he also undoes the association that he initially establishes between "literal" or "plain" communication and comprehensibility, suggesting instead that interpreting information that is *not* "literally" communicated produces a superior understanding. Such suggestions have long been central to the study of metaphor. While classical rhetoricians often considered the clear, rapid transfer of information to be one of metaphor's more important and attractive characteristics, Aristotle also points out that there is value in such metaphors "which the mind only just fails to keep up with," since these also "convey to us a sort of information."[3] Donne's account of divine metaphors as "remote and precious"—presented in a sentence that is itself of expansive proportions—gestures most immediately to the divine

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[2]John Donne, *Nineteenth Expostulation*, in *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, ed. Anthony Raspa (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 99.

[3]See Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 3.10, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) vol. 2, 2250–51. Aristotle associates this greater duration in particular with simile, a kind of metaphor that is distinguished "only in the way it is put." Colleen Ruth Rosenfeld has recently extended this discussion of the link between duration and educative potential by identifying the "slow thinking of simile" as an important "tool of intellectual labor" in the early modern schoolroom, "Braggadochio and the Schoolroom Simile," *English Literary Renaissance* 41.3 (2011): 429–61, 447.

author's impressive "peregrinations" in formulating such metaphors in the first place.[4] In so doing, it also creates a formidable spatial and temporal framework that renders the reader's task in attempting to "keep up with" these metaphors at once more vivid and more intimidating.[5]

The "peregrinous" character of human efforts to understand divine word is also a central focus of Donne's sermons. Without relying explicitly on this term, many of the sermons dwell, like the nineteenth *Devotion*, on the considerable labor required to engage with the metaphorical nature of scriptural language. This essay considers particularly one sermon preached at Lincoln's Inn six years before Donne published the *Devotions*, a sermon that both ascribes that metaphoricity specifically to God and makes it central to efforts to understand divine will.[6] The sermon achieves that by focusing on a scriptural metaphor *for* divine will, that of arrows descending on man in the second verse of Psalm 38: "For thine arrowes stick fast in me,

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[4]Judith H. Anderson suggests with regard to the *Devotions* that "Donne's vision, arising from the physical world but also taking flight from it, remains humanly compelling. Perhaps its power can be reduced to a physical process, but if it can, the reduction is very real," *Translating Investments: Metaphor and the Dynamic of Cultural Change in Tudor-Stuart England* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 77.

[5]In a similar vein to Anderson, Brent Nelson notes that "though journey imagery does not especially dominate the *Devotions*, it is nonetheless a significant iteration of the formal pattern [of rising and falling]" that Nelson sees as essential to the text's pedagogical project, and that features prominently in the nineteenth Expostulation in particular, "*Pathopoeia* and the Protestant Form of Donne's *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*," in *John Donne and the Protestant Reformation: New Perspectives*, ed. Mary Arshagouni Papazian (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003): 247–72, 265–66. Though Nelson focuses particularly on the references to journeying that follow this passage, Donne's discussion of metaphoricity here is similarly committed to this scheme.

[6]Potter and Simpson have dated this sermon to the late spring or summer of 1618. See *The Sermons of John Donne*, vol. 2, ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1955), p. 14. Parenthetical references to this work will be by volume and page number.

and thy hand presseth me sore."[7] The sermon asks us to consider carefully what David might wish to signal by using the metaphor of "arrowes" in the Psalm, but the point is less to identify a single divine characteristic that the arrows might describe than to consider what their status as metaphor might tell us about the process by which divine will acts on us.

It is by no means a new approach, of course, to suggest that the sermons treat scriptural form as a tool of divine revelation. Alison Knight, following Sophie Read, Peter McCullough, Theresa DiPasquale, and others, describes Donne as among "the early seventeenth century's most celebrated preachers . . . [whose] intense scrutiny of the formal details of scriptural language (word order, auxiliaries, homonyms, and the like) . . . assumed that every facet of scriptural language is spiritually communicative."[8] I would suggest that Donne sees one of the more communicative qualities of scriptural language as the ways in which it does *not* obviously communicate, in which it both demands and challenges the reader's assumption of interpretative agency. This quality derives in part from the reader's obligation to recognize that such language is always mediated by mortal authors: Katrin Ettenhuber attributes Donne's acute consciousness of this obligation to Augustine, whose frequent and "complex reflections on textual communication" frequently color his consideration of the "unproblematic transmission of grace."[9] Yet the sermon also depicts God as an author whose communication is less than "plain"—to recur to the terms of the *Devotions*—even before the

[7]Donne takes his text from the 1611 translation of the King James Bible.

[8]Alison Knight, "The 'Very, Very Words': (Mis)quoting Scripture in Lancelot Andrewes's and John Donne's Sermons on Job 19:23–27," *Studies in Philology* 111.3 (2014): 442–69, 443. See also Sophie Read, *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Peter McCullough, "Lancelot Andrewes and Language," *Anglican Theological Review* 74.3 (Summer 1992): 304–16; and Theresa DiPasquale, *Literature and Sacrament: The Sacred and the Secular in John Donne* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1999).

[9]Katrin Ettenhuber, *Donne's Augustine: Renaissance Cultures of Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 20.

issue of textual mediation arises, by suggesting that he sends us his will in metaphors.[10]

To conceptualize divine will as metaphorical is for Donne a shorthand for the not-so-short (peregrinous, perhaps) labor required properly to understand it. Yet in positioning the human recipients of that will as readers of metaphor, Donne also creates a more reassuring and surprising prospect. The basis for this is the notion that the component parts of a metaphor—now usually referred to as the "tenor" and "vehicle" or as the "primary" or "principal subject" and "secondary" or "subsidiary subject"—alter one another.[11] This notion is already apparent in early modern definitions of metaphor: in *The Art of Rhetoric* (1560), Thomas Wilson groups metaphor among those figures in which "the nature of words is changed from one signification to an other, called [Tropes] of the Grecians,"[12] while Puttenham creates a new category of the "sensable" in the *Art of English Poesy* (1589) for figures that "alter and affect the mind by alteration of sense, and first in single words," and includes metaphor as foremost

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[10]In thus exploring the particular kind of comprehension that divine metaphoricity enables for Donne, I am indebted to Dennis Quinn's argument that "the psychology of preaching in general is, for Donne, the same as the psychology of the Bible, which works directly upon the soul and only indirectly upon men's reason," and that Donne essentially follows the Holy Ghost in his use of "figurative language [which] appeals directly to man's conscience but indirectly to the understanding." "Donne's Christian Eloquence," *English Literary History* 27:4 (December 1960): 276–97, 283. Yet I would argue that Donne's use of the particular figure of metaphor in this sermon functions slightly differently, in that Donne's explanation of the metaphor of arrows draws attention to its mechanics as figure to an extent that suggests that these mechanics should work upon the soul *through* the understanding.

[11]See I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 96; Max Black, *Models and Metaphors* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1962), p. 39; Max Black, "More about Metaphor," in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979): 19–43, 28; Chanita Goodblatt and Joseph Glicksohn, "From *Practical Criticism* to the Practice of Literary Criticism," in *Poetics Today* 24:2 (Summer 2003): 207–36, 214.

[12]Thomas Wilson, *The Art of Rhetoric*, ed. Peter E. Medine (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), p. 195.

among them.[13] How this alteration of sense takes place is a central question in more modern discussions of metaphor—specifically in the tradition shaped by I. A. Richards and Max Black and recently developed by Joseph Glicksohn and Chanita Goodblatt of reading metaphor as a process of interaction. As Glicksohn and Goodblatt put it, "(1) metaphors create new meaning and new similarity, and (2) the two components of a metaphor exert a reciprocal influence on one another"—a description that explicitly follows Black's observations that "(a) the presence of the primary subject incites the hearer to select some of the secondary subject's properties; and (b) invites him to construct a parallel implication-complex that can fit the primary subject; and (c) reciprocally induces parallel changes in the secondary subject."[14]

My particular focus is on the invitation that the metaphor thus extends to the hearer (or reader) to take part in developing its signification. Donne's sermons and poetry alike often focus on transformation, a focus sometimes conveyed through the use of metaphorical language and sometimes accompanied by explicit reflection on the properties of such language. The poetic speakers in the *Songs and Sonnets* frequently construct metaphors in which the speakers themselves are embedded as one or more of the semantic fields, thus rendering them sometimes subject to, sometimes in control of, processes of metaphorical interaction. Metaphor becomes a strategy by which a writer might reassure himself about the afterlife of his verse and the love that it describes when those are exposed to hostile or ignorant readers. In the sermons, meanwhile, Donne frequently reads God as a writer of metaphors in a manner that emphasizes his power over human readers. Yet thinking in terms of interaction also suggests that the reader's interpretation has a power of its own to alter the metaphor's signification. That Donne's God is a

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[13]George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, ed. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 262.

[14]Joseph Glicksohn and Chanita Goodblatt, "Metaphor and Gestalt: Interaction Theory Revisited," in *Poetics Today* 14:1 (Spring 1993): 83–97, 84; Black, "More about Metaphor," p. 28.

writer of metaphors, then, raises provocative questions about the capacity of human reading to influence divine will.[15]

Interaction and Grace: A Figure for Free Will?

The sermon on Ps. 38:2 initially examines the arrows metaphor in the context of its mortal authorship:

> . . . first, we shall see in what respect, in what allusion, in what notification he calls them *arrows*: And therein first, that they are *alienae*, they are shot from *others*, they are not in his own power; a man shoots not an arrow at himselfe; And then, that they are *Veloces*, swift in coming, he cannot give them their time; And again, they are *Vix visibiles*, though they bee not altogether invisible in their coming, yet there is required a quick eye, and an expresse diligence, and watchfulnesse to discern and avoid them . . . But yet, (which will be our conclusion) *Sagittae tuae*, and *manus tua*, These arrows that are shot, and this hand that presses them so sore, are the *arrows*, and is the *hand* of God; and therefore first they must have their *Effect*, they cannot be dis-appointed; But yet they bring their comfort with them, because they are his, because no *arrows* from him, no *pressing* with his hand, comes without that *Balsamum* of mercy, to heal as fast as he wounds. (*Sermons* 2:51)

The sermon sets out to ascertain precisely "in what respect" David has chosen to use "arrows" to communicate his sense of God's will, and what particular "effect" they are designed to achieve.[16] That

[15]Chanita Goodblatt makes a similar claim about a different dimension of the sermon's linguistic operations, namely its attention to "the distinctiveness of biblical Hebrew grammar," in suggesting that "the consequence [of this attention] is a transformation of the grammatical circumstances of the biblical text into both a rhetorical structure and a theological statement about the relationship between God and humankind," *The Christian Hebraism of John Donne: Written with the Fingers of Man's Hand* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2010), p. 118.

[16]Debora Kuller Shuger invokes a similar textual framework for the relationship between God and man as it is described in this sermon, arguing that "to undertake to interpret implies the prior acknowledgment that one

effect is to "wound" but also—indeed "as fast as" those wounds are received—to "heal" them, and this healing inheres in the cultivation of "watchfulnesse" by the pious target of the arrows. Watchfulness (or so it would appear initially) will enable some individuals to avoid the arrow altogether, but the sermon also suggests that the arrows "cannot be disappointed," that they *will* wound their human targets. And as becomes even clearer in subsequent passages, this wound itself is in fact—or should be—the stimulus for watchfulness: that is, for greater attention to one's spiritual condition.

The "quick eye" of "watchfulnesse" is lexically continuous with Donne's visual idiom in summarizing what "we shall see" during the sermon's trajectory. Such seeing is, of course—on occasions of public speech ranging from sermons to conference paper presentations—often used rhetorically as a rather more inviting alternative to "I will tell you" or "I hope to convince you."[17] But it also reminds us, in the context of an early modern sermon, that the preacher is taking his listeners through a text, one that some may also be used to seeing literally as readers, and that some may be seeing only in the figurative sense of comprehension as he reads it—in both the stricter and the looser, interpretative sense—for them.[18] And the idiom bears

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dwells within a master narrative in which all events are pedagogic signs," *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics, and the Dominant Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997; first published University of California Press, 1990), p. 201.

[17]For a consideration of the means by which a sermon is at times "preached to a public" and at times reliant for its rhetorical effect on its listeners "*not* recognizing sermons as public speech," see Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), pp. 82–85.

[18]While I refer in this instance to "listeners" in order more fully to explain the rhetorical complexity of "we shall see," I will usually describe those engaging specifically with Donne's sermons as readers rather than listeners or congregants. In this, I follow P. M. Oliver and others—and the suggestions of the anonymous reader, for which I am grateful—in noting that the printed texts of the early modern sermons that remain to us often do not correspond directly to those preached from the pulpit, and that in Donne's case this is likely the result of his own revisions. Indeed, Oliver reads the very appeals to an auditory in many of the sermons as evidence of this process, suggesting that "most of the sermon-texts we possess contain addresses to a listening congregation which have been written into them," *Donne's Religious Writing: A*

additional weight here because Donne is charging us to "see" that the metaphor is itself about readerly perception. We must imagine a literal volley of arrows descending speedily upon us in order to cultivate sensations of anxiety and vigilance as an approximate model for the spiritual vigilance that God desires in us.[19] As Dennis Quinn puts it, this "Biblical image [of arrows] is like the Platonic, not the poetic image; it is a physical shadow of a spiritual reality. It is these images which are at the center of Donne's sermons; hence the fear or solace which the sermons create is meant to be a symbolic reflection of the spiritual reality behind the text."[20] In thus intimating that the arrows—and our visceral response to them—are a metaphor for a less concrete "spiritual reality behind the text," moreover, Donne is suggesting that that reality is itself textual, in that it involves our acting as attentive readers of divinely authored metaphors. Both the particular terms of the arrows metaphor and the fact *that it is a metaphor* help us better to understand the structure of our relationship with God. The link of hermeneutic "seeing" with the "quick eye" required properly to respond to the arrows frames that response as reading and the arrows as texts because they are sent by a forceful hand that is also

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Discourse of Feigned Devotion (London: Longman, 1997), p. 238. Arnold Hunt also refers to Oliver in his discussion of this phenomenon, arguing that "no study of early modern sermons that relies on printed sources can afford to ignore this distinction," *The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and their Audiences, 1590–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 160–61.

[19]That the arrows teach practical lessons in this way accords particularly with the second of the three methods traditionally used in approaching the scriptural text: as Potter and Simpson gloss it, treating the text "'morally' or 'by application,' as God's word, sent by the Holy Ghost through the medium of David for the moral instruction of mankind" (*Sermons*, Vol. 2, "Introduction," p. 18). Though "conventional enough" (ibid.), the threefold method is a particularly explicit focus of this sermon and indeed of Donne's further sermons on this Psalm and, as Goodblatt emphasizes (*Christian Hebraism*, p. 116), on the Prebend Psalms. Although there is a nominal link between the figural focus of the sermon that interests me and the *third* interpretative method, often described as "figurative," I would emphasize that the figure in question—that of metaphor—is pertinent particularly to the second, "moral" method of reading the scriptural text, and to Donne's teaching of that method.

[20]Quinn, "Donne's Christian Eloquence," p. 288.

that of a writer. Donne's assertion that the arrows "are his" suggests not only that the decrees they represent come from God but that so, too, does their status as metaphors. Though the arrows metaphor is that of the psalmist, Donne intimates that the metaphorical nature of the decrees he refers to is God's by emphasizing that the account of arrows hitting us represents his sending us a cue for interpretative action. The sermon asks its readers to analogize reading the scriptural text to receiving divine will, to imagine God as sending literal metaphors that become legible to us when they "stick fast" in us.[21]

Through this emphasis on our watchfulness as readers, Donne turns his focus onto the potency of our action as well as God's. The arrows are transformed from hurtful into healing forces through our reading of how and why they "wound" us. In emphasizing that we are both objects of the arrows' chastisement and its readers, and in suggesting that our reading may alter the arrows' nature, Donne introduces the structure of a metaphorical interaction into the sermon. The arrow is the vehicle (or secondary subject) to the tenor (or primary subject) of divine will, and the evolution of the former from something that only "wounds" into something that can also "heal" gives the latter an increasingly merciful aspect. But this evolution also allows us to imagine metaphorical interaction at work in a more daring way. If our response to the arrow has a part to play in eliciting its healing capacities, then we bear some responsibility for the vehicle's assuming its more merciful shape. And the possibility of an interaction between tenor and vehicle suggests that we might be able to alter the tenor—divine will. With almost implausible boldness, Donne's figuration invites his readers to see the careful interpretative activity that he is teaching them as a blueprint for how they might influence the metaphor's original author: God himself.

Yet as we shall see subsequently, the sermon also insists that this readerly interpretation is subject to further perusal (and further transformation) by that author. In so doing it raises the possibility that the transformations effected by our reading are simply the result of

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[21]Goodblatt suggests that in "choosing to follow the translation of the King James Bible, 'sticke' [. . .], Donne thereby draws out the semantic consequences of the Hebrew verb form to place the full intention of action and violence firmly in God's hands," *Christian Hebraism*, p. 127.

forethought—or perhaps predestination—on the part of that author, of his choosing to make newly available to his readers the "comfort" that his arrows already bring with them.

In emphasizing the importance of readerly activity even as it circumscribes it in this manner, the sermon uses metaphorical interaction as a way into the knotty issue of divine grace. As much of the scholarship on the sermons emphasizes, Donne's convictions regarding the operations of grace are far from clear. Lori Anne Ferrell reads his rhetoric as decidedly "anti-Calvinis[t]," and Achsah Guibbory has emphasized that he "qualifies, revises, and even undoes Calvinist assumptions about predestination and salvation" to an increasingly marked extent in the sermons dating from after 1620.[22] Guibbory perceives Donne's growing tendency to focus on grace in particular as a clear marker of his turn toward Arminianism, arguing that "in the sermons of the mid and late 1620s, he places an Arminian emphasis on human free will, the universal offer of grace, and the largeness of God's mercy."[23] And some commitment to this notion of the more universal operations of grace is already perceptible in this earlier sermon. In his discussion of the arrows and of our obligation to read them, Donne seems at times to figure God's will in a manner more akin to a Calvinist scheme of predestination, and at times to subscribe to a notion of grace as something available to all, which some might resist—a notion that indeed bears the hallmarks of Arminianism, or at least of anti-Calvinism.[24]

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[22]Lori Anne Ferrell, "Donne and His Master's Voice, 1615–1625," *John Donne Journal* 11 (1992): pp. 59–70; Achsah Guibbory, *Returning to John Donne* (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2016; first published Ashgate, 2015), p. 186.

[23]Guibbory, p. 177.

[24]His flirtation with these various possibilities is perhaps unsurprising since the sermon also precedes the 1622 *Directions to Preachers*, which, as Mary Morrissey notes, "specified that the 'deepe points' of predestination were not to be discussed in public pulpits and by minor clerics," *Politics and the Paul's Cross Sermons, 1558–1642* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 96. As Morrissey also notes, though, "the emphasis on the 'deepe points' of predestination is crucial, as it was possible that the more pastoral aspects of this doctrine (the comfort of assurance of faith, for example) might be

The very absence of a consistent and explicit commitment one way or the other prompts readers to undertake more searching theological inquiry. Yet this prompt is tempered with recommendations to respectful submission before divine mystery, an attitude that some critics have associated particularly with Calvinism, and that Donne recommends even more explicitly in a sermon on John 14:20, preached on Whitsunday 1630 at St. Paul's:

> It is enough for a happy subject to enjoy the sweetnesse of a peaceable government, though he know not *Arcana Imperii*, The wayes by which the Prince governes; So is it for a Christian to enjoy the working of Gods grace, in a faithfull beleeving the mysteries of Religion, though he inquire not into Gods bed-chamber, nor seek into his unrevealed Decrees.[25]

Debora Shuger, following Peter Lake, regards Donne's invocation of the *arcana imperii* here as emblematic of the ways in which "Calvin's emphasis on the sovereignty of the divine will pervade[d] English Protestantism."[26] The fact that Donne invokes these decrees in order to suggest that "searching after [them is] to miss the point," moreover, has been read by Jeanne Shami as indicating that Donne discourages racking one's brains over predestination, but nonetheless subscribes clearly to reformed theology.[27] For Shami, Donne's avoidance and sometimes explicit criticism in his sermons of focusing too extensively on predestination evidences instead his desire to promote a "reformed spiritual life" centered on "that which concerns obedience, holy life, and good works."[28]

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excluded from the ban" (p. 96)—an important reminder of the possibilities still available to preachers even after the ban came into effect.

[25]*Sermons* 9:246. Also cited in Shuger, *Habits of Thought*, p. 167.

[26]Shuger, *Habits of Thought*,160. See also Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982; repr. 2004), p. 119 (cited by Shuger).

[27]Jeanne Shami, *John Donne and Conformity in Crisis in the late Jacobean Pulpit* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), p. 97.

[28]Ibid.

As compelling as this capacious notion of reformed spirituality is, though, the range of theological gestures in the sermons also suggests a desire to consider the challenges and pleasures of "faithfull believing" in terms that avoid confessional specificity altogether.[29] The sermon on Psalm 38:2 seems to suggest that we should be assured of God's grace in a manner that nonetheless requires us to be alert and virtuous—a requirement concomitant with the more particularly Calvinist thinking that Shami ascribes to Donne. Yet there are also several less Calvinist elements in the sermon, particularly its hints that it is possible to fall away from divine grace. Even while the sermon suggests that the confident close reading of divine metaphors may yield an assurance of election, it *also* suggests that close reading—or the failure to do it—has pragmatic spiritual consequences:

> If the arrow, the tentation, be yet on this side of thee, if it have not lighted upon thee, thou art well; God hath directed thy face to it, and thou may'st, if thou wilt, continue thy diligence, watch it, and avoid it. But if the arrow be beyond thee, and thou have cast it at thy back, in a forgetfulnesse, in a security of thy sin, thy case is dangerous. (*Sermons* 2:60)

Though the arrow here represents temptation rather than chastisement, a thoughtful engagement with it seems as necessary as in the previous passages. How one may respond to it is largely determined by whether it has "lighted" in or out of one's sight, whether God "hath directed thy face to it." Yet individual volition is given an explicit and important role to play with "if thou wilt": one can choose, irrespective of the arrow's landing spot, how one engages with it. And the consequences of failing to do so lurk behind the menace of "thy case is dangerous": the clearest implication of these lines is that the forgetful casting aside of the arrow will lead to its wounding you unprepared. Taken in conjunction with the earlier

[29]Like several of the other critics I have cited, Alison Shell and Arnold Hunt also hesitate to ascribe any firm confessional weight to rhetoric like that in the Whitsunday sermon, noting that "Donne was 'notoriously reluctant to discuss the topic' of predestination," "Donne's Religious World," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Donne*, ed. Achsah Guibbory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 65–82, 78.

notion that the arrow may bring with it a cure, moreover, to "forget" it is also to deny oneself the possibility of its evolving into a new form as a result of one's interaction with it—but as a result, too, of God's mercy in granting it the capacity thus to evolve. Thus Donne lays heavy emphasis on the importance of human action in response to divine arrows, while never asserting definitely that such agency is decoupled from divine predestination. Such skilful doctrinal manoeuvring is, as David Colclough has suggested with regard to its appearance in a later sermon on Isaiah 32:8 "a startling, yet characteristic move" for Donne.[30] The sermon on Psalm 38:2 performs its particular non-committal doctrinal dance by structuring the ways in which we navigate divine will as metaphorical interaction, using the mechanics of metaphor sometimes to advocate probing enquiry into and sometimes submission to God's "unrevealed decrees."[31] To cultivate both of these attitudes is to gain, as Ettenhuber puts it, "a fuller comprehension of God's word in the world."[32]

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[30]David Colclough, "Silent Witness: The Politics of Allusion in John Donne's Sermon on Isaiah 32:8," in *The Review of English Studies* 63:261 (2011): 572–87; 584. It is important to acknowledge that Colclough's discussion of this later sermon, preached before the king at Whitehall on April 15th 1628, focuses primarily on Donne's use of unattributed quotations to undertake subtle political critique, critique of which his assertion of "essentially Arminian theology in the language of high Jacobean Calvinism" becomes only a secondary "startling, yet characteristic" part. Yet that Donne turns a discussion of grace to political ends in this manner is nonetheless, I would suggest, a testament to his larger commitment to this lack of clear-cut theological definition.

[31]Brian Cummings makes a related argument with regard to a sermon on Genesis 17:24 preached at St. Dunstan's-in-the-West on New Year's Day, 1625, suggesting that Donne "puts the very question into the heads of his audience that he claims he wants them not to ask," *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 403.

[32]Ettenhuber, 9. Ettenhuber claims that Donne attains this fuller understanding through intertextuality, and specifically that his "writings construct Augustine as a conduit to this higher form of cognition" (p. 9). While I follow her particular attention to Donne's Augustine at several moments in this essay, I borrow her words here rather in relation to her broader consideration of Donne's tendency to use textual materialism to

Reading Between the Arrows

Donne's lesson on appreciating divine will as metaphorical begins, as so often, with Augustine, to whom he turns as a basis for portraying our condition of spiritual insufficiency in lexical terms. He glosses Augustine's treatment of the arrows in his *Confessions* as follows:[33]

> Briefly, in that wound, as wee were all shot in *Adam*, we bled out *Impassibilitatem*, and we sucked in *Impossibilitatem*; There we lost our *Immortality*, our *Impassibility*, our assurance of Paradise, and then we lost *Possibilitatem boni*, says S. *Augustine*: all possibility of recovering any of this by our selves.
>
> (*Sermons* 2:55)

As Ettenhuber notes, "the idea that we lost all capacity for good in original sin ('perdidimus possibilitatem boni') is a staple of Augustine's soteriology," one that Donne applies "to almost every aspect of his theology of sin and salvation."[34] By framing this idea specifically in terms of impassibility, Donne invokes a concept widely recognizable as a fundamental distinction between mortal and immortal: "in its Renaissance usage," Mary Floyd-Wilson notes, "passibility meant the vulnerability inherent in being human."[35] The near identity of the words *Impassibilitatem* and *Impossibilitatem* underscores Augustine's rueful observation of how easily and

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reflect on divine authorship: "one of the principal aims of Donne's Augustinian recourse is to celebrate the original creator of meaning, and in that sense his intertextuality is about the apotheosis of God-as-author, not his death" (p. 9).

[33]Ettenhuber views Donne's frequent references to the patristic texts as representative, in part, of the English Church's need to "prove itself as the true heir to the primitive tradition [by revisiting] the first witnesses to its practices" (*Donne's Augustine*, pp. 49–50).

[34]*Donne's Augustine*, p. 72.

[35]Mary Floyd-Wilson, "English Epicures and Scottish Witches," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 57:2 (Summer 2006): 131–61; 134. Floyd-Wilson's argument follows especially Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) and Timothy J. Reiss, *Mirages of the Self: Patterns of Personhood in Ancient and Early Modern Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

imperceptibly the one has "bled" into the other during the Fall, of how easily mankind has lost a more godlike nature through sin. Yet that wordplay also generates the more dramatic suggestion that the loss is not, in fact, final.[36] The care with which Donne turns to distinguishing "impassibilitatem" from "impossibilitatem" functions almost as a subtle injunction to his listeners to consider the very ease with which the one becomes the other, with which "a" gives way to "o," as a hint that the reverse transformation is possible, and that some spiritual element of "impassibility" may be recuperated along with its lexical substance. Thus the easy slippage between these words invites a reading somewhat against the downcast grain of the passage, a reading that also gains ground from the final words of the sentence: "by our selves." While they communicate Augustine's conviction of our sinfulness, they also raise the more comforting prospect that we are *not* by ourselves. With God's help, we might gain precisely the assurance that the passage describes as hard to attain but subtly suggests, through sophisticated wordplay, is within our reach.

A conviction in the potency of divine grace is, of course, at the center of Augustine's theology, and Mary Arshagouni Papazian reads passages such as this one as evidence of Donne's own Augustinian conviction in "the strength of God's grace to overcome our inherited and inevitable sinfulness, as well as the importance of our living by our knowledge of both God's grace and man's sinfulness."[37] Donne's Augustinian emphasis on divine grace in this passage leaves considerable space for reflection on how practically to live by that knowledge. "By our selves" does intimate that some action *of* "our selves" is required *as well as* divine grace, and Donne's wordplay positions close reading as that action; indeed, it invites his readers not only to read carefully but also consciously to recognize that such

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[36]This suggestion accords with Brent Nelson's observations that in both the sermons and the *Devotions*, "Donne often arranges his material to bring his congregation low in order to raise them up again with a new vision." "*Pathopoeia*," 255.

[37]Mary Arshagouni Papazian, "The Augustinian Donne: How a 'Second S. Augustine'?" in Papazian (ed.), *John Donne and the Protestant Reformation*, pp. 66–89, 78. Though Papazian is referring here specifically to another sermon preached in 1618, her discussion also includes consideration of that on Psalm 38:2.

reading can alert them to possibilities for spiritual optimism.[38] The lexical resemblance of "impassibilitatem" and "impossibilitatem" throws into sharp relief the magnitude of the difference between the divine and mortal elements that those words represent, but—as indicated above—it also suggests that that difference can be lessened with a little help from the divine. Donne charges his readers to undertake the challenge of reconciling these suggestions, and in so doing to marvel at the capacity of words thus simultaneously to establish an unbridgeable gulf and to provide the materials to bridge it. Reminded by these two words that we *cannot* become godlike, we are also invited to think that we *can*—and at a secondary level we are impressed *that words*, and the *very same words*, can make us think that we can. And such an impression, in a sermon that frequently describes our relationship to God in terms of linguistic figuration, is a particularly potent one.

In encouraging readers of the sermon to imagine their relationship to God as analogous to the intimate and flexible connection that lexical similitude can establish between seemingly unlike entities, Donne's gloss of Augustine lays the groundwork for the sermon's subsequent presentation of the soul as a textual artifact directly inscribed by God:

> So that these arrows which are lamented here, are all those miseries, which sinne hath cast upon us; *Labor*, and the childe of that, *Sicknesse*, and the off-spring of that, *Death*; And the *security* of conscience, and the *terrour* of conscience; the *searing* of the conscience, and the *over-tendernesse* of the conscience; Gods quiver, and the Devils quiver, and our own quiver, and our neighbours quiver, afford, and furnish arrows to gall, and wound us. These arrows then in our Text, proceeding from *sin*, and sin proceeding from *tentations*, and inducing *tribulations*, it shall advance your spirituall edification most, to fix your consideration upon those *fiery darts*, as they are *tentations*, and as they are *tribulations*.
>
> (*Sermons* 2:56)

[38]Floyd-Wilson, "English Epicures," p. 134.

While "these arrows then in our Text" clearly gestures towards the text of the Psalm itself, the previous lines also allow us to understand this text as a reference to our selves. The arrows are the "gall" that produces the "terrour" and "searing" and "over-tendernesse" in our conscience on account of our sins, and they are also, perhaps, the iron gall ink that inscribes the conscience in a rather less fleshly fashion.[39] That the galling arrows are furnished from "quivers" also invites us to imagine them as the arrow's less violent feathered friend—the quill pen. Donne's repeated invitation to *read* the arrows as literary instruments by no means detracts from the violence with which they wound: rather, it emphasizes that the potency of these wounds should prompt us not only to "lament" but also to a more productive response. That response is "consideration" of the arrows "as they are *tentations*, and as they are *tribulations.*" In differentiating between these contingencies, Donne builds upon his previous "impo/assibilitatem" example and continues to emphasize the value of reading ourselves as a text, written (or galled, perhaps) by God. That the arrows derive from "the Devils quiver, and our own quiver, and our neighbours quiver" is fully compatible with their divine origins: God shapes different afflictions to serve the same end, that of stirring the conscience into feeling.

Yet this passage also reminds us, perhaps more clearly than does the above engagement with Augustine, that our nature affects the relative shapes of the arrows. Though their evolution is crafted by God's writerly hand, the arrows correspond to the sins that we have ourselves committed. "Consideration" suggests, moreover, that by consciously fostering a more deliberate engagement with them we might transform them afresh, triggering their capacity to cure the sins that have shaped them:

> God shall not refuse any soul, because it hath been shot with these arrows; Alas, God himself hath set us up *for a mark*, says Job, and so says *Jeremy, against these arrows*. . . . only that soul, that refuses a cure, does God refuse; not because they fell upon it, and stook, and stook fast, and stook long, but because they never, never went about to pull them out;

[39]Iron gall ink, based on iron sulphate, was the most common writing ink in early modernity.

> never resisted a tentation, never lamented a transgression, never repented a recidivation. (*Sermons* 2:65)

Through our efforts to read rightly, the chastisement becomes an assurance. God offers "a cure," Donne suggests, in response to the mortal effort to pluck out the arrow. It is clear that the cure is already present in the arrow: as Donne puts it much earlier in the sermon, in fact, "they bring their comfort with them" (2:51). Nonetheless virtuous human effort is required to activate that "cure." Once the individual human soul perceives and acts upon the need to respond to the arrow, and (in particular) perceives even the pain it brings as a testament of divine purpose, then the arrow offers them the cure that they believe to be there.

This sequence accords with orthodox reformed theology in that human action, important though it is, is nonetheless predicated on the presence of divine grace. The importance of conviction in that grace is emphasized in the Geneva Bible's marginal gloss on this Psalm:

> This example warneth us never to despaire, be the torment never so great: but always to crye unto God with sure trust for deliverance.[40]

Even while Donne takes his text from the King James rather than the Geneva Bible, that the latter remained widely read in England after 1611 suggests that he is likely to have been familiar with it—and with its marginal notes. The phrases quoted above are appended as a specific gloss on verse 8, but they describe the attitude that reading the Psalm in its entirety should foster in us, and in that they exemplify reformed confidence in God's "deliverance." Donne's sermon seems, in large part, to be setting out a model of assurance that accords well with that confidence. Yet his warning that God refuses "that soul, that refuses a cure," though legible within a Calvinist predestinarian framework, nonetheless suggests that it is possible to *refuse* deliverance and that such a refusal is the condition for God's, a suggestion rather more consistent with an Arminian scheme of conditional election. This suggestion is framed by Donne's

[40]*The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2007), 242v.

positing a complex relationship not only between the arrow and the divine will that sends it, but also between the arrow and its human "mark." Since "God himself hath set us up *for a mark*," we are both readers of and participants in the action described by the metaphor, and the significance of this relationship becomes even clearer when considered in terms of interaction. The arrow is a metaphor for God's will for us, but it seems also to occupy an interactive relationship toward *us*, since it is shaped by our sinful nature into a form with the capacity to shape us anew—*if* we respond correctly to it. Once again the arrow appears to function as a secondary subject not only with regard to the primary subject of God's will, but also with regard to mortal souls.[41]

This form of interaction is more clearly at work in Donne's account of our part in the arrows' capacity to serenade us:

> . . . for in every *tentation*, and every *tribulation*, there is a *Catechisme*, and *Instruction*; nay, there is a *Canticle*, *a love-song*, *an Epithalamion*, *a marriage-song* of God, to our souls, wrapped up, if wee would open it, and read it, and learn that new tune, that musique of God. (*Sermons* 2:68)

Contained within the arrows, Donne suggests, is music sung directly by God "to our souls," and the seductive intimacy of such a performance is emphasized by the connection of these musical genres with marriage rites. Yet this brief excursus into the auditory realm quickly gives way, once again, to the textual, and in this return the emphasis shifts powerfully to our agency. That we must "read" is described as essential if we are to experience "tribulation" as both beautiful and appealing; indeed, the grammar of this sentence retroactively makes *us* responsible for transforming "every *tentation*, and every *tribulation*" into a "*Catechisme*, and *Instruction*," and ultimately for transforming the sternness of such instruction into the sweetness of music. Read one way, the transformation only exists in the conditional

[41]See Chanita Goodblatt and Joseph Glicksohn, "From *Practical Criticism*" and "Conversations with I. A. Richards: The Renaissance in Cognitive Literary Studies," *Poetics Today* 31:3 (2010): 387–432. Goodblatt and Glicksohn follow Richards, Black, and others in their discussion of interaction.

mood; the music is only present in each arrow "*if* [italics mine] wee would open it, and read it." Our capacity to experience it as music is thus explicitly predicated on our engaging actively with it as readers.

Yet these lines can also be read as suggesting that the music is there already, "if"—that is, *and we may access it if*—we are ready to look for it. While continuing to emphasize the importance of our reading, then, this interpretation diminishes our creative authority. Responding as a careful reader can shape our experience of the arrow, but every "*Canticle*, [. . .] *love-song*, [. . .] *Epithalamion*, [or] *marriage-song*" is nonetheless "of God." Even while experiencing the arrow as beautiful is contingent in part on our engagement, then, the presence of that beauty has been ensured by the God who sends the arrow in the first place.

That God stimulates our interaction with his will for us by sending it in beautiful forms is, of course, part of the logic behind Donne's choice of the literal text that he focuses on in this sermon:

> I may have another more particular reason [for preferring the Psalms], because they are Scriptures, written in such forms, as I have been most accustomed to; Saint *Pauls* being Letters, and *Davids* being Poems: for, God gives us, not onely that which is meerly necessary, but that which is convenient too; He does not onely feed us, but *feed us with marrow, and with fatnesse*; he gives us our instruction in cheerfull forms, not in a sowre, and sullen, and angry, and unacceptable way, but cheerfully, in *Psalms*, which is also a limited, and a restrained form; Not in an *Oration*, not in *Prose*, but in *Psalms*; which is such a form as is both curious, and requires diligence in the making, and then when it is made, can have nothing, no syllable taken from it, nor added to it: Therefore is Gods will delivered to us in *Psalms*, that we might have it the more cheerfully, and that we might have it the more certainly, because where all the words are numbred, and measured, and weighed, the whole work is the lesse subject to falsification, either by substraction or addition. (*Sermons* 2:49–50)

In arguing that the text's "measure[ment]" is a guard against "falsification," Donne turns once again to form as a sign of divine authorship. Even though the scripture is written by David, it is God's

choice, Donne contends, to give it us in "cheerfull forms"—that is, in words that are "numbred, and measured, and weighed." That the Hebrew Psalms "were constructed according to the same principles as Greek and Latin"—that is, that they were written in the metrical or "numbered" forms so appealing to Donne—was, however, a misconception on Donne's part.[42] But it was a popular misconception. As a group, early modern English psalmists are notable for their almost universal decision to versify their versions of the Psalms, and very few of them would have realized that they were not in fact staying faithful to the Hebrew in so doing.[43] As Chanita Goodblatt has argued, Donne can be designated (according to Matt Goldish's definition) as a "third-order Hebraist," one "who could read *some* Hebrew, but who knew and used significant amounts of Jewish literature in Latin and vernacular translation."[44] Thus he, like other translators of the period including Mary Sidney and George Sandys, would likely have used the Latin versions as his "originals."[45] Indeed, Hannibal Hamlin asserts that even competent Hebraists might have found "the nature of Hebrew poetry . . . obscure."[46] The Hebrew Psalms do not employ quantitative meters or rhyme, but the parallelism that is "the basic feature of biblical songs—and, for that matter, of most of the sayings, proverbs, laws, laments, blessings, curses, prayers and speeches found in the Bible" was misconstrued by many early translators, most famously (and influentially) St. Jerome, as a kind of metricization.[47] Ironically,

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[42]Hannibal Hamlin, *Psalm Culture and Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 87.

[43]That biblical poetry is metrical has been strenuously denied by F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp on the "telling and simple" grounds that "no such countable units [of rhythmic pulses] get repeated for long stretches—never more than a couplet or two or three or even slightly more." F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 99.

[44]Goodblatt, *Christian Hebraism*, p. 22. Goodblatt applies Goldish's definition of a "third-order Hebraist" from Matt Goldish, *Judaism in the Theology of Sir Isaac Newton* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998), p. 18.

[45]Shell and Hunt, p. 66.

[46]Hamlin, p. 87.

[47]See James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and its History* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 1, and Hamlin, p. 85 ff. As Robert Alter emphasizes, parallelism is instead characterized by

then, while many early modern translators used metrical verse as a means of authentication and tried to convince themselves and their readers of their proximity to the Hebrew by purporting to replicate its verse forms, this "replication" makes evident their distance from it. And though Donne himself would have been able to engage with the Hebrew, his investment in the metrical "numbering" of the Psalms as indicating their close connection to divine authorial will suggests that this irony escaped him too.[48]

Writing for Pleasure: A Passible God?

Or, perhaps, that it did not escape him, since the final turn in Donne's focus on numbering is ultimately not in diminishing but in highlighting the possibility of human as well as divine authorship. Toward the end of the sermon, numbering transcends the specific context of the metrical Psalms to become one of the sermon's sharpest statements of the interactive nature of our relationship to divine will:

> Lord teach us to number thy corrections upon us, so, as still to see thy torments suffered for us, and our own sins to be

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"evident and at times almost extravagant repetition of elements of meaning from one verset to the next," repetition that nonetheless enables "dynamic movement from one verset to the other," *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1985), p. 10.

[48]Zim notes that "Psalms were regarded as peculiarly efficacious and delightful texts for moral instruction because of their intrinsic poetic qualities," and defines the specifically "poetic" qualities that thus seemed to give them a uniquely instructive power among the Scriptures as including "the metaphors, the similes, apostrophes and parallelisms of the Hebrew poetic text," *English Metrical Psalms: Poetry as Praise and Prayer, 1535–1601* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 34. Quitslund argues against the tendency to exceptionalize the Psalms on this basis, asserting that "a great many Edwardians made little distinction between the Book of Psalms and other biblical texts," and thus that "the question to ask about all the Edwardian biblical versifications . . . is thus not only, 'What are metrical Psalms for?' but, 'What is metrical scripture for?'" *The Reformation in Rhyme: Sternhold, Hopkins, and the English Metrical Psalter, 1547–1603* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 59. In opposing the distinction, as Quitslund notes, she is nevertheless bolstering Zim's argument for the power of meter.

> infinitely more that occasioned those torments, than those corrections that thou layst upon us. (*Sermons* 2:70)

The import of Donne's prayer is that we should be grateful that the punishments we receive at God's hands are significantly fewer than our sins, and thus fewer than we deserve. The sermon's prayer that God "teach us to number [his] corrections upon us," moreover, suggests that in thus learning to read rightly we might learn to produce our own numbered versions of the measured will of God. "Number" itself is an interactive metaphor, indicating that as we are impressed (both literally and metaphorically) by the quantity of God's "torments," we are transformed. Indeed, especially since "number" irresistibly recalls Donne's giving thanks that in the Psalms "all the words are numbred, and measured, and weighed," its appearance here suggests that we become ourselves numbered artefacts like the Psalms, or even perhaps that we write poetic "numbers" of our own. That "number" can thus indicate both our reception of a process that acts upon us and a creative process that we can undertake, and that the former can produce the latter, is a beautifully apt expression of the generative mechanics of interaction, one that further illuminates the passage from the *Devotions* that begins this essay and which I partly reproduce here for ease of reference:

> . . . a God in whose words there is such a height of figures, such voyages, such peregrinations to fetch remote and precious metaphors, such extensions, such spreadings, such curtains of allegories, such third heavens of hyperboles, so harmonious elocutions, so retired and so reserved expressions, so commanding persuasions, so persuading commandments, such sinews even in thy milk, and such things in thy words, as all profane authors seem of the seed of the serpent that creeps, thou art the Dove that flies.[49]

Though "remote peregrinations" gestures, as I have discussed above, to the beautiful expanses covered by divine metaphor, the terminology used so evocatively to describe them is, of course, Donne's own. He

[49]Donne, *Nineteenth Expostulation*, p. 99.

generates a series of metaphors that seem to derive their energizing force, as well as their subject, from God's. When strengthening his image of a nourishing God by endowing that capacity to nourish, itself already metaphorized as "milk," with "sinews," Donne does so in a sentence that seems perpetually to continue, that cannot but draw attention to its own remarkable attenuation. In this way he at once slyly draws attention to the role of his hyperbolic poetics in glorifying the reader's picture of God and intimates that that poetic capacity originates in the first place with God, whose magnificence has inspired it.[50] This circular suggestion further safeguards its (earthly) author from accusations of hubris or even of heresy by denigrating him: the long-delayed result clause of his metaphoric marathon defines the "profane authors" that, of course, include him as descendants of the creeping serpent—appropriately, perhaps, given the sinuous twists of his rhetoric building to this moment. Yet that rhetoric has also traced the path of "the dove that flies," once again associating him with its heights even while the explicit point of the phrase is to distance him from them.[51] Thus the *Devotion* subtly sets forth Donne's poetic skill as the reward for attending to divine metaphor.[52]

The highly wrought appeal of Donne's language in the *Devotion* may also inform our reading of the model of interaction that underpins

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[50]Kimberly Johnson reads this prolix sentence as "Donne's rapturous aria on his '*metaphoricall God*,' itself sumptuous with figurative language in a proliferation that mimics the ostentatious poeticism of the discourse he extols, [which] situates the incarnational power of God's language in its expressive tropes," *Made Flesh: Sacrament and Poetics in Post-Reformation England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), p. 117. Following Johnson, I would suggest that Donne also situates that incarnational power in the very self-reflexivity that Johnson also notes here, as a part of his case for an interactive relationship between his language and God's.

[51]Mueller marks this as the starting point for Donne's "[doing] away with the distinction between the World and the word" in a similar manner, but to slightly different ends: "on the strength of his insights into Scriptural language he undertakes the exegesis of his experience. Donne begins to read signs of God's mercy as surely in his body as in the pages of his Bible." "Exegesis of Experience," p. 15.

[52]Donne points to his history of poetic composition more explicitly (if less elegantly) in the sermon on Psalm 38:2 too, in saying that the Psalms are such forms as he has been "most accustomed to."

Donne's discussion of the arrows in the sermon. If learning to "number" intimates that the human soul should be a text both shaped by its engagement with divine language and able to write itself, then the readership for that writing comes directly into question.[53] That God acts as an anticipatory reader of human actions is a foundational assumption of attributing to him a more Arminian foreknowledge, as his refusing those who "refuse a cure" might invite us to do: if God anticipates what kind of text his creatures will write in response to his, he may determine their status as elect or not in accordance with that prospective reading. But Donne's reflection on the experience of reading poetic language, both in the *Devotion* and in his gratitude in the sermon that "Gods will [is] delivered to us in *Psalms*," associates a kind of pleasurable surprise with that experience that emphasizes once again how the flexibility of poetic language can create something new. Certainly this may be the distinction between divine and human poetics: that God's metaphors can please and surprise us, while nothing that we produce is capable of surprising him. Indeed this is a premise not only of predestination but also of passibility, which "names experiences of being whose common denominator was a sense of being *embedded in and acted on by* [. . .] circles—including the material world."[54] As Reiss also notes, there is a temporal dimension to this embedded nature, since "in a sense, these circles *preceded* the person, which acted as *subjected* to forces working in complicated ways from 'outside.'"[55] God's position as *not* subject to time or to the influence of such circles as Reiss describes was fundamental to early modern conceptions of personhood, and Donne, as mentioned above, follows

[53]Kate Gartner Frost also considers "numbering" in relation to this passage from the nineteenth *Expostulation*, stating succinctly that "Donne's own language will strive to be like God's, and God spoke his Creations in figures of number, weight, and measure." *Holy Delight: Typology, Numerology, and Autobiography in Donne's Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 98. For Frost, though, this is a cue less to focus on metrical numbering than on numerological symbolism in the *Devotions* as well as more broadly in Donne's oeuvre.

[54]Reiss, *Mirages of the Self*, p. 2. Reiss formulates this definition as a gloss on ancient conceptions of passibility, but these conceptions endured, as he emphasizes, "until much later," and certainly into early modernity.

[55]Ibid.

Augustine in discussing passibility as a categorical distinction between mortal and divine in this very sermon. Yet that discussion, as I have also suggested above, offers the (close) reader an orthographic hint that mortals may in fact be able to regain a nature closer to that of God with divine help, and I would suggest here that Donne's discussion of readerly pleasure hints at a similar possibility: that God might, to some degree, become passible. Even if God foreknows how we will respond to the "galling" arrows that he sends to us, the sermon's repeated indications that we have a genuine choice to make in formulating that response perhaps suggests that God might experience our choice as though he did *not* fully foreknow it—or at least what precise form it might take. While Donne by no means makes this suggestion explicit, he makes it something to be taken seriously through his emphasis on the pleasures of form, and on the capacity of language to surprise readers who do anticipate its meaning as well as those who do not. Donne allows us fleetingly to think as poets that, without changing God's will, we might perhaps render him passible enough to be pleased with the numbers we produce. To number is always to count what God has given us, but is perhaps also to give it back to him "the more cheerfully."

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