

## Donne's Dedication of the Sidney Psalter

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*Vpon the translation of the Psalmes by Sir Philip  
Sydney, and the Countesse of Pembroke  
his Sister.*

ETernall God, (for whom who ever dare  
Seeke new expressions, doe the Circle square,  
And thrust into strait corners of poore wit  
Thee, who art cornerlesse and infinite)  
I would but blesse thy Name, not name thee now; 5  
(And thy gifts are as infinite as thou:)  
Fixe we our prayes therefore on this one,  
That, as thy blessed Spirit fell upon  
These Psalmes first Author in a cloven tongue;  
(For 'twas a double power by which he sung 10  
The highest matter in the noblest forme;)  
So thou hast cleft that spirit, to performe  
That worke againe, and shed it, here, upon  
Two, by their bloods, and by thy Spirit one;  
A Brother and a Sister, made by thee 15  
The Organ, where thou art the Harmony.  
Two that make one *Iohn Baptists* holy voyce,  
And who that Psalme, *Now let the Iles rejoyce*,  
Have both translated, and apply'd it too,  
Both told us what, and taught us how to doe. 20  
They shew us Ilanders our joy, our King,  
They tell us *why*, and teach us *how* to sing.  
Make all this All, 3 Quires, heaven, earth, & sphears;  
The first, Heaven, hath a song, but no man heares,

The Spheares have Musick, but they have no tongue, 25  
 Their harmony is rather danc'd than sung;  
 But our third Quire, to which the first gives eare,  
 (For, Angels learne by what the Church does heare)  
 This Quire hath all. The Organist is hee  
 Who hath tun'd God and Man, the Organ we: 30  
 The songs are these, which heavens high holy Muse  
 Whisper'd to *David*, *David* to the Iewes:  
 And  *Davids* Successors, in holy zeale,  
 In formes of joy and art doe re-reveale  
 To us so sweetly and sincerely too, 35  
 That I must not rejoyce as I would doe  
 When I behold that these Psalmes are become  
 So well attyr'd abroad, so ill at home,  
 So well in Chambers, in thy Church so ill,  
 As I can scarce call that reform'd, untill 40  
 This be reform'd; Would a whole State present  
 A lesser gift than some one man hath sent?  
 And shall our Church, unto our Spouse and King  
 More hoarse, more harsh than any other, sing?  
 For *that* we pray, we praise thy name for *this*, 45  
 Which, by thy *Moses* and this *Miriam*, is  
 Already done; and as those Psalmes we call  
 (Though some have other Authors)  *Davids* all:  
 So though some have, some may some Psalmes translate,  
 We thy Sydnean Psalmes shall celebrate, 50  
 And, till we come th'Extemporall song to sing,  
 (Learn'd the first hower, that we see the King,  
 Who hath translated those translators) may  
 These their sweet learned labours, all the way  
 Be as our tuning, that, when hence we part 55  
 We may fall in with them, and sing our part

**Copy-text:** B (1635). **Texts collated:** H6 (O'Flahertie ms.); B-G (1635-1669 eds. of Donne's *Poems*); H (Tonson, 1719); I (Bell, 1779); J (Anderson, 1793); K (Chalmers, 1810); L (Alford, 1839); M (Lowell, 1855); N (Grosart, 1872-1873); O (Grolhier, 1895); P (Chambers, 1896); Q (Grierson, 1912); S (Hayward, 1929); T (Bennett, 1942); U (Gardner, 1952); Z (Shawcross, 1967); AA (Smith, 1971); DD (Patrides, 1985); Di (Dickson, 2007).

**Partial Historical Collation<sup>1</sup>**

- 2: square  $\Sigma$ ; squear D–F  
 28: heare B–F H6 J L; here G +  $\Sigma$   
 35: and  $\Sigma$ ; aud D–F  
 39: thy  $\Sigma$ ; the H6 T Di  
 46: thy B–G O; this H6 +  $\Sigma$   
 47: donne H6; done  $\Sigma$   
 53: those B–G H–S DD Di; these H6 T U Z AA  
 56: part  $\wedge$  B; part.  $\Sigma$

“Upon the translation of the Psalmes by Sir *Phillip Sydney*, and the Countesse of Pembroke his Sister” (*Sidney*) was first printed in the 1635 edition of Donne’s *Poems, by J. D. with Elegies on the Authors Death* (B) and has subsequently appeared in all major editions of Donne’s poems, from Tonson’s in 1719 through Dickson’s in 2007 (excepting, of course, those that do not include the genre of Divine Poems). Until nearly the middle of the twentieth century no manuscript copy of the poem was known to exist, but with the publication of Bennett’s edition in 1942 the copy in Harvard’s O’Flahertie manuscript (H6) was brought to light (Bennett cites H6 as his copy-text, and his reliance on it is especially evident in the readings “the” [for “thy”] in line 39 and “these” [for “those”] in line 53); and in 1952 Gardner explicitly averred that B’s text derived from that in H6, a position never challenged thereafter. Except for the underlined words to which the collation is keyed, the text presented above is a typographical facsimile of the copy in B, and the collation lists all substantive variants that appear in H6 and the subsequent print tradition. The burden of the following remarks is to sketch the transmissional history of the poem, with particular attention to the relationship between B and H6, and to advance a couple of speculative conclusions about how this history might affect our reading of the poem.

Except for the question of whether B or H6 came first, the transmissional history of the poem is pretty straightforward. Among the seventeenth-century editions, the B text suffers two typographical distortions in D–F, where they mistakenly spell “square” as “squear” in

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<sup>1</sup> $\Sigma$  = all sources not otherwise specified. Note that H6’s parentheses match B’s throughout.

line 2 and turn the “n” in line 35’s “and” upside down, yielding “aud.” These errors are corrected in G and subsequently disappear from sight, but G—as part of its systematic modernization of spelling—renders the received “heare” in line 28 as “here,” making the possible pun slightly less prominent. Except for Anderson (J), who probably just made a mistake, and Alford (L), who derived his text from one of the seventeenth-century prints, “here” appears in all other modern editions. B’s unexceptionable “thy Church” in line 39 remains unquestioned until the discovery of H6, whose “the” is adopted by Bennett (T) and thereafter by Dickson (Di). H6 also gives “these” where B gives “those” in line 53, and H6’s reading is accepted by Bennett (T), Gardner (U), Shawcross (Z), and Smith (AA). The single most troublesome reading in B is “thy Moses” in line 46, where sense would seem to require “this Moses” (the poem seems to be styling Sidney and his sister as the modern Moses and Miriam at this point), and this “error” is perpetuated in C–G, but corrected—somewhat surprisingly—by Tonson (H), who effectively removes it from play except for O (the Grolier edition), which reverts to B for copy-text. Grierson points out the problem with B’s “thy” and credits Grosart (N) for his adoption of the more intelligible “this.” The other two variants listed in the collation merely point out H6’s recognition of a possible pun on “done/donne” in line 47 and B’s (probably accidental) omission of terminal punctuation in the last line of the poem.

That the text of *Sidney* in B derives from H6 has been accepted since Gardner’s assertion of this relationship in 1952 (and Bennett’s implicit acceptance of H6’s superiority even earlier), but I believe this is exactly backwards. I am going to argue, instead, that H6’s copy of the poem is transcribed from B, just as—for example—H6’s copies of the verse letters “To E. of D.” (*ED*) and “To the Countess of Bedford: Begun in France” (*BedfDead*) are copied from their appearance in the 1633 edition (A).<sup>2</sup> This argument entails comparing both the texts and certain physical features of the poem’s appearance in the two artifacts.

The first thing to notice is that *Sidney* was added to H6 after the scribe had completed his original compilation, and the initial clue to this

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<sup>2</sup>See *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne, Volume 7, Part 1: The Holy Sonnets*, ed. Gary A. Stringer et al. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), pp. xcvi–xcvii.

appears in the front matter of the manuscript, which contains a “Table” consisting of an alphabetized first-line index of the artifact’s contents. It is evident from fig. 1 (see appendix) that *Sidney*’s first line was entered in the “E.” section of this index at some time after the list was originally compiled—both because the handwriting of *Sidney*’s first line—“Eternall God (for whome”—is slightly smaller than the following entry for “Epigrams” (as if crowded into a cramped space) and—more definitively—because the line from *Sidney* is written *on top of* the horizontal rule that the scribe originally drew in to separate the section heading “E” from the entries that follow (this formatting feature is evident under the capital letters that head each section of the “Table”).<sup>3</sup> Then, when we follow this index entry to page 51 to look at the text of the poem, we see that it is the very last item in the section of “Diuine Poems,” occupying pages 51–52, and is followed by 4 blank pages before the section of “Satyres” begins on page 57. These combined details leave no doubt that *Sidney* was a late addition to the artifact—and the last Divine Poem so added.

Additional information about the relationship of the B and H6 texts of *Sidney* is found in a comparison of the typographical features of the poem’s embodiment in the two artifacts. As figs. 2 and 3 (see appendix) show, for instance, each artifact divides the long heading on the poem into three segments, centering each successive segment beneath the one before to create the shape of an inverted triangle (admittedly, this is a logical and artful arrangement that either the scribe or the compositor might well have instituted on his own), and—as noted above—the two artifacts deploy parentheses in exactly the same way throughout the poem. In lines 18, 22, and 45, moreover, both use italics in strikingly similar ways. The edition, of course, follows the common practice of seventeenth-century printers in italicizing proper names (*John Baptist*, *David*, *Moses*, and *Miriam*), as the manuscript does not, but in two instances italics are used to mark vocal emphases that are necessary for

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<sup>3</sup>Similar evidence betrays the late entry into the artifact of *ED*, whose first line (“See S . . .”) is entered out of alphabetical order as the last item under the “S” heading, and of *BedfDead*, whose first line (“Though I bee dead”) is crammed into its correct alphabetical place, but is written on top of the bordering line drawn across the bottom of the page on which the “T” entries begin.

the line is to make the best sense: "They tell us *why*, and teach us *how* to sing" (22) and "For *that* we pray, we praise thy name for *this*" (45). Rather than trying to slant his letters to simulate the appearance of italic type, the H6 scribe flags these stress points by enclosing the words in question between a pair of slanted lines (see fig. 2 in the appendix), and other examples of this idiosyncratic practice are scattered throughout the artifact. What is not found elsewhere in the manuscript, however, and what marks H6 as the copy rather than the original of B, is the scribe's handling of the psalm title in line 18. Whereas B sets "*Now let the Isles rejoyce*" in italic type, H6 encloses the clause within square brackets: "[Now let the Isles reioyce]." This unique instance shows the scribe's *ad-hoc* reaction to a typographical feature in B for which his repertoire contained no standard indicator—because he nowhere else italicizes/stresses more than a single word at a time.

The texts presented in the two artifacts are remarkably similar, differing substantively only in lines 39, 46, and 53. In B, line 53 reads "Who hath translated those translators," where H6 reads ". . . these translators," and to me it seems slightly more likely that Donne wrote "those" than "these"—as a way of distancing the now-remote (because already "translated") Sidneys from their "sweet learned labours," which remain vitally present. If this is so, then H6's "these" is either a careless or a deliberate alteration. The situation is almost the same in line 39, where B reads "thy Church" as against H6's "the Church": I think it slightly more likely that "the" is H6's careless trivialization of "thy" than that "thy" represents B's attempt to strengthen the manuscript's "the." In line 46, however, we have a clear case of right *versus* wrong, at least in my judgment: H6's "this Moses and this Miriam" makes a kind of sense in this context that is destroyed by B's rendering of the first "this" as "thy" (giving "thy *Moses* and this *Miriam*"). If my understanding of the relationship between these two texts is correct, then we have to assume that the H6 scribe recognized the problem with "thy" in the line and deliberately altered it to "this" as he transcribed B's text into his manuscript. Since, as our work on the *Variorum* has shown, the H6 scribe frequently alters the text in the interests of both metrical smoothness and sense, I have no trouble imagining that "thy"-to-"this" is his deliberate change; and this scenario seems even more plausible in light of the fact that Tonson (H), who inherited his text from G,

also—quite uncharacteristically—recognized “thy” as a mistake and corrected it.

The upshot of this analysis is to suggest that copies of the *Sidney* text are even scarcer than we previously thought, that in fact B is our sole authoritative source for the poem. This recognition, in turn, prompts the conclusion that Donne likely never distributed more than a single copy of the poem—if, indeed, he distributed it at all. That *Sidney* was not printed until the second edition of the collected *Poems* appeared in 1635 (B) means either that no copy had been discovered when the first edition (A) was compiled in 1633 or that it was deliberately withheld from that volume. If the former is true, then either Henry King (Donne’s literary executor) or someone else found it among Donne’s papers before the second edition went to press, or the copy from which B was set must have been provided by some person—perhaps the *only* person—to whom Donne had given a copy. We can only speculate about who that person might have been (if there was such a person) and why Donne kept this poem so tightly under wraps. In one of the few conjectures on this matter David Novarr, noting that the Sidnean translations must have been completed by 1599, dates *Sidney* between Lady Pembroke’s death on 25 September 1621 and Donne’s installation as Dean of St. Paul’s on 22 November, and suggests that it was addressed to William Herbert, Third Earl of Pembroke and eldest son to the Countess, whose support Donne sought in his quest for the deanship. “[M]ore than in any other poem that he wrote after his ordination,” says Novarr, “Donne’s motive was the motive behind his earlier poetry of patronage—self-advancement.”<sup>4</sup> This judgment, of course, amounts to nothing less than accusing Donne of blasphemy, of invoking the name of the “Eternal God” in a cynical careerist ploy; and that Donne would have sought ecclesiastical advancement in 1621 by extolling the Sidney psalms is rendered unlikely by facts pointed out by James Doelman: King James himself “maintained throughout both his reigns the ideal of producing a new metrical version of the Psalter, that would be his legacy for the churches,” and “any

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<sup>4</sup>Novarr, *The Disinterred Muse: Donne’s Texts and Contexts* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 150–157; quotation from p. 157. On the 1599 date for Mary Sidney’s completion of the translations see Margaret P. Hannay, Noel J. Kinnamon, and Michael G. Brennan, eds., *The Collected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 2:340.

attempt at the same task might be perceived as disrespectful.”<sup>5</sup> Neither Donne nor Pembroke (if he was involved at all) can have been insensitive to the situation Doelman describes.

A far more opportune—not to say safer—time for Donne to have written *Sidney* would have been after James’s death, and a nobler purpose for the poem can be imagined—that of sincerely praising the Sidneys and their achievement. As Doelman demonstrates, around 1624, “James recognized that he himself would not complete a psalter, and became more open to others . . . attempting to do so” (147). Without being able to prove it, I would like to conjecture that this poem was written about 1625 and that it was intended (and probably written upon request) as preface to a projected edition, an edition that—perhaps because Charles’s appointment of Alexander to complete James’s project closed the window of opportunity—never materialized.<sup>6</sup> Its title is formally elaborate and descriptive in the manner appropriate to the commendatory genre. “*Vpon the translation of the Psalmes by Sir Philip Sydney, and the Countesse of Pembroke his Sister*” is in the vein of “To the

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<sup>5</sup>Doelman, *King James I and the Religious Culture of England* (D. S. Brewer: Cambridge, 2000), pp. 136, 139. Doelman’s seventh chapter, “The Songs of David: King James and the Psalter,” pp. 135–157, treats of this subject at length, including King Charles’s commissioning William Alexander to complete his father’s psalm translations after James’s death (this work was published in 1631 and reissued in 1636) and his efforts to impose this psalter upon the church for public worship.

<sup>6</sup>Since originally writing this article I have learned—through Hannibal Hamlin’s essay that is included in this forum—that Michael G. Brennan offered a similar suggestion in “The Queen’s Proposed Visit to Wilton House in 1599 and the ‘Sidney Psalms,’” *Sidney Journal* 20.1 (2002): 27–53. The occasion to which Brennan links Mary Sidney’s possible plans to publish the Sidney Psalter is a visit that Queen Elizabeth made to Wilton House in 1599, and this required him to date Donne’s poem from the late 1590s, a problematic date in that Donne’s poem describes the Countess as one who has already been “translated.” I am happy to clear away this obstacle and resurrect Brennan’s suggestion. That Alexander’s completion of James’s psalter appeared in 1631 might prompt stronger consideration of a possibility that I seemed to dismiss above—that Donne’s editor in 1633 actually had in hand a copy of *Sidney*, but withheld it from the volume for fear of giving offense. If so, he obviously felt more confidence—both in the viability of the edition and in the security of Donne’s reputation—after another two years had passed.



memory of my beloved, The AUTHOR, Mr. William Shakespeare: And what he hath left us," and I think Donne's poem compares favorably with Jonson's great prefatory poem in the First Folio. *Sidney* seems to me to have the scope and intent of such a work, and in it Donne's "we" speaks with the authority of someone officially qualified to ordain the "Sydnean Psalmes" as an instrument of public worship and praise. This postulated purpose has the added benefit of explaining why Donne withheld such a thoroughly praiseworthy poem from circulation.

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## Appendix

A. A.		D. D.	
Alas! howe thin my	309	Daigne at my hands	21
Alas! howe thin my	220	Deare Love continue mine	309
Alas! howe thin my	125	Death be not proud	16
Alas! howe thin my	187	Death I reant	161
Alas! howe thin my	198	Deare Love for nothing	27
Alas! howe thin my	298	Deare Love consider this	270
Alas! howe thin my	113		
Alas! howe thin my	245		
Alas! howe thin my	214		
Alas! howe thin my	61	Eternall God (for a while)	51
		Epigrams	337
B. B.		F. F.	
Be leene not him whoe	148	Flayre Soules: Horrifying	
Be first I sigh my last	267	Flayre Soules: Horrifying	
Blest are ye Northparts	220	Flayre Soules: Horrifying	
Blasted with sighs	250	Flayre Soules: Horrifying	
Busy old foole	260	Flayre Soules: Horrifying	
By our first strange	127	Flayre Soules: Horrifying	
C. C.		G. G.	
Chaste Love	151	Go and catch a	
Chaste Madam Come	123	Good rose mist lone	
Chaste Love with mee	301	Good rose mist lone	
Chaste Love	152	Good rose mist lone	

Fig. 1. O'Flahertie ms., table of contents. By permission of Houghton Library, Harvard University.

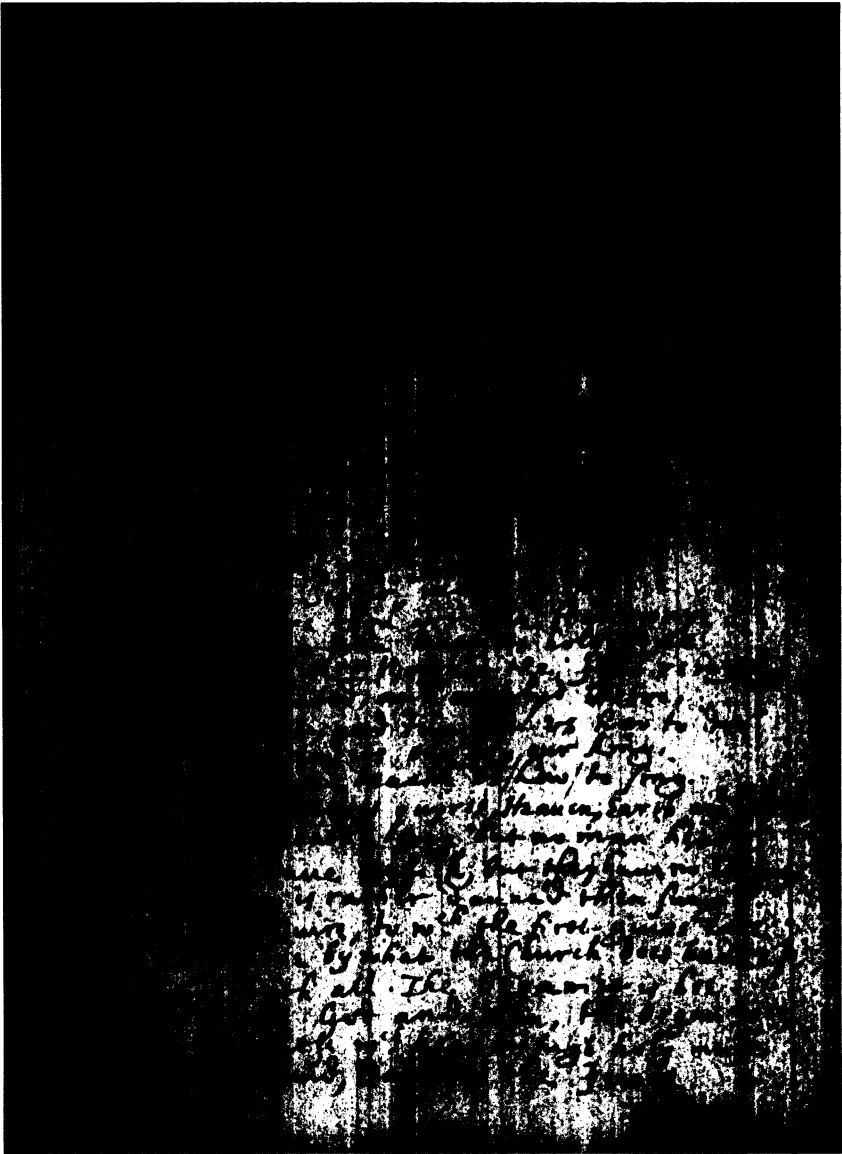


Fig. 2. O'Flahertie ms., p. 51. By permission of Houghton Library, Harvard University.

and finally to  
 as I would be,  
 these Psalms are from  
 ill at home,  
 in the Church so ill,  
 call that reform, untill  
 Would a whole State present  
 then some one man hath sent.  
 Shall our Church unto our spouse and King  
 more harsh, then any other, sing,  
 we pray, we praise thy name for this,  
 by this Moses and this Myriam, is  
 And as those Psalms we call  
 some have other Authors) Davids all.  
 though some have some may some Psalms translate  
 thy Syrian Psalms shall celebrate.  
 will we come th, extemporall song to sing  
 can't the first corner that we see the King  
 these translated these translations) may  
 their poets learned labours, all the way  
 as our tuning, that when hence we part  
 we may fall in with them, and sing our part.

Fig. 2 (continued). O'Flahertie ms., p. 52. By permission of Houghton Library, Harvard University.

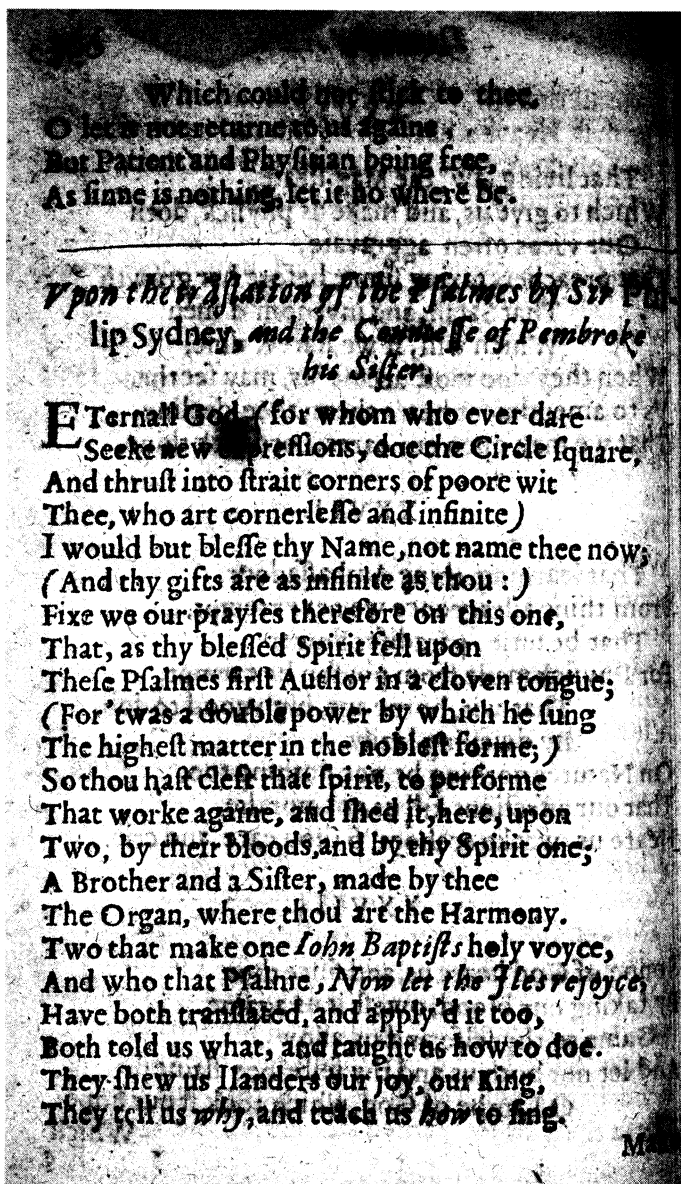


Fig. 3. 1635 *Poems*, p. 366. By permission of Cushing Memorial Library, Texas A & M University.

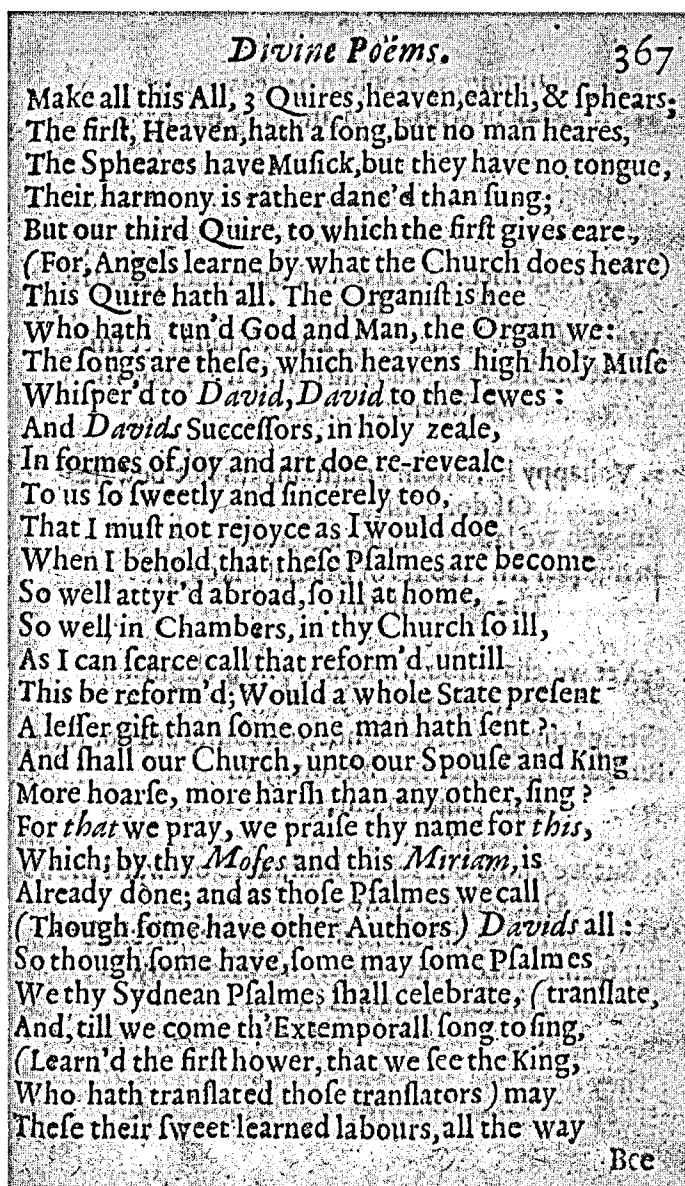


Fig. 3 (continued). 1635 *Poems*, p. 367. By permission of Cushing Memorial Library, Texas A & M University.

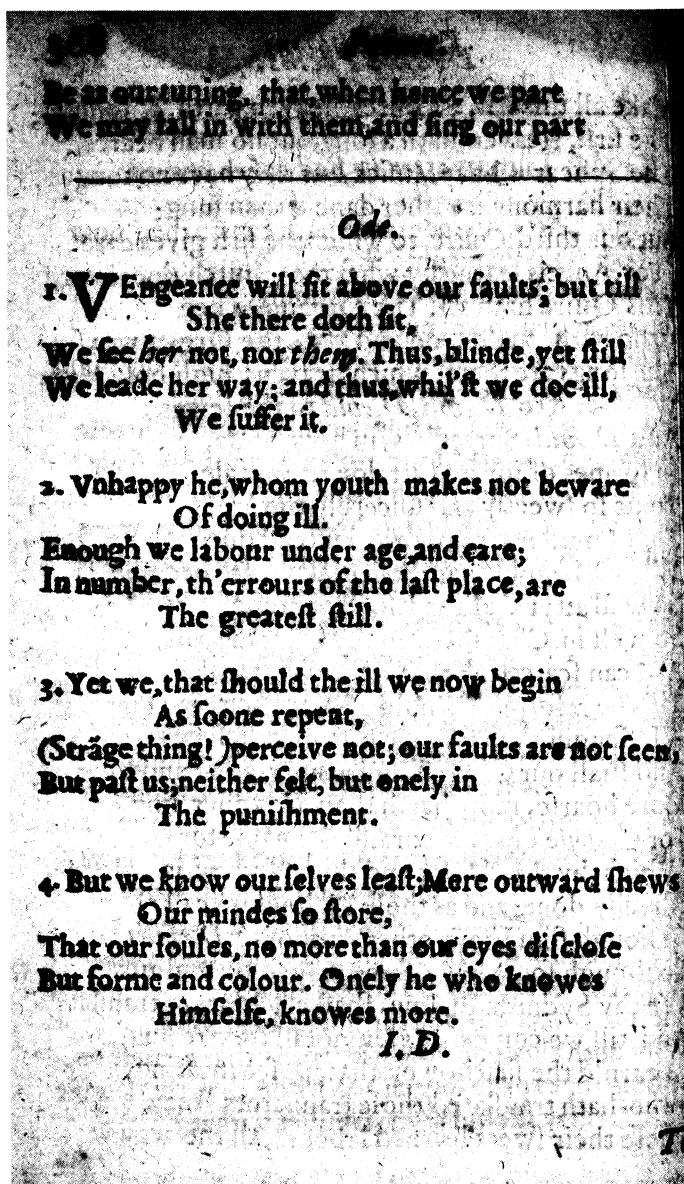


Fig. 3 (continued). 1635 *Poems*, p. 368. By permission of Cushing Memorial Library, Texas A & M University.