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"Upon the Translation of the Psalmes" at 400 (Or So): A Response

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This panel, presented at the February 2023 John Donne Society Conference, was originally scheduled for the February 2022 meeting in order to commemorate the 400th anniversary of "Upon the Translation of the Psalmes by Sir Philip Sydney, and the Countess of Pembroke his Sister." At the very least, such an occasion would have marked the 400th anniversary of the poem's *terminus a quo*, the death of Mary Sidney Herbert in September of 1621. COVID had other plans, though, and a year elapsed before JDS members could safely travel and congregate. That intervening year was an especially difficult one, marked by several grievous losses to the John Donne Society; like the year following the death of Elizabeth Drury, its passing seemed to offer proof that "there is motion in corruption."[1]

If the conference's delay introduced some awkwardness into the proceedings, which could thus only celebrate the one-year anniversary of the 400th, the pairing of the participants remained entirely harmonious—and remains so in this, the panel's translation to print. Frontain and Malpezzi, co-editors of the rich essay collection on *John Donne's Religious Imagination*, have separately, in *Renascence*, *Explorations in Renaissance Culture*, the *John Donne Journal*, and elsewhere, given us important treatments of "Upon the Translation," a particularly

[1] "The Second Anniversarie," line 22, in the *Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*, *Volume 6: The Anniversaries and the Epicedes and Obsequies*, ed. Gary A. Stringer et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 25.

confident and articulate expression of Donne's religious imagination.[2] Now the Spirit has split itself and fallen afresh on our Moses and Miriam, Phillip and Mary, despite their presumed lack of blood ties, empowering them to sing anew a poem so committed to what Frontain's essay terms "the religious paradox of two-in-one."

For Frontain, "Upon the Translation" serves as a kind of retrospective *ars poetica*, revisiting many of Donne's characteristic concerns with respect to poetic language. This "resonant orchestration" of previous motifs, in Frontain's account, takes what we might consider a negative and a positive form. The poem confronts twin obstacles to the project of religious verse and the poetic enterprise more generally. There is the threat that wit could artificially confound distinct identities; there is also the forbidding difficulty of giving the ineffable, in all of its "pulsating wonder," a local habitation and a name. "Upon the Translation" offers solutions to these conundra, at least implicitly; more positively, the poem also reaffirms Donne's conception "of a world enlivened by . . . poetry or song," his musical salvation history, as well as Donne's commitment to verse as an agent of unity. In this paper as elsewhere, Frontain poignantly captures Donne's "drive to achieve coherence," proving attuned to an emotional frequency much criticism simply fails to register.[3] Frontain's Donne labors mightily, and with a vulnerability he only sometimes disguises, to gather the scattered limbs of Truth, or God, or Love. This vision of Donne's project, appropriately enough, takes in the divine poetry, the love lyrics, and the verse epistles. It is Frontain, and not only Donne, who longs to "Make all this all."[4]

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[2] *John Donne's Religious Imagination: Essays in Honor of John T. Shawcross*, ed. Raymond-Jean Frontain and Frances M. Malpezzi (Conway, AR: UCA Press, 1995). Frances M. Malpezzi, "Christian Poetics in Donne's 'Upon the Translation of the Psalmes,'" *Renascence* 32 (1980): 221-228; Raymond-Jean Frontain, "'Translating Heavenwards': 'Upon the Translation of the Psalmes' and John Donne's Poetics of Praise," *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 22 (1996): 103-25; Raymond-Jean Frontain, "Donne's 'Upon the Translation of the Psalmes' and the Challenge to 'Make All this All," *JDJ* 27 (2008): 161-74.

[3] Frontain, "'Upon the Translation," p. 169.

[4] "Upon the Translation of the Psalmes," line 23, in the *Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*, *Volume 7.2: The Divine Poems*, ed. Jeffrey S. Johnson et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020), p. 201. Subsequent references

Notably, Frontain's essay identifies the boldest, most striking ways in which "Upon the Translation" achieves or at least evokes the overcoming of isolated individuality through "the religious paradox of two-in-one." We have the poem's steady parade of doubled formulations, as well as the assertion that the Sidneys "re-reveale" (34) the songs of David, a kind of miracle of repetition and therefore unity across time almost on par with the ambitions of Pierre Menard, author of *Quixote* in the story by Jorge Luis Borges. Most of all, we have Donne's daring last couplet, the identical rhyme by which we hear the same sound while still apprehending separate meanings. In what might be my favorite of his numerous articles on Donne, Frontain sees the poet drawn to two "complementary yet antithetical" forms of ending.[5] Some of Donne's lyrics suspend closure, highlighting the speaker's dependence on the response of the superior being to whom the poem is addressed, while others come full circle in order to suggest the speaker's discovery of the coherence that God has already written into the world. The close of "Upon the Translation" belongs in the "full circle" category, as Frontain suggests briefly in this previous article and more fully explains in the present essay. I might add that the poem's *penultimate* section, apparently lamenting the preeminence of the Sternhold and Hopkins translation, voices the speaker's and the entire community's ongoing reliance on God and insists that not all "is / Already donne" (46-47). It is almost as if the poem has a double ending,

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to this and the other Divine Poems, apart from the Holy Sonnets, are to this edition and will appear in the text parenthetically. Interestingly, Kirsten Stirling finds a different, seemingly opposite pathos animating Donne's work. Rather than press for belonging to the "All," Kirsten Stirling's Donne instinctively shrinks from "the dissolution of the self" entailed both by death *and* by the prospect of joining "the collective, liturgical voice." Perhaps Donne sometimes fiercely protects the ego's own coherence, even in the face of forces that eventually promise a coherence that is greater still? "Upon the Translation" looms large in Stirling's account of Donne, as it does in that of Frontain, since it most successfully "resolves the fissure between the individual and the collective." See Kirsten Stirling, "Liturgical Poetry," in *The Oxford Handbook of John Donne*, ed. Jeanne Shami, Dennis Flynn, and M. Thomas Hester (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 233-241, 241.

[5] Raymond-Jean Frontain, "When First and Last Concur: Closure in John Donne's 'The Annuntiation and the Passion,'" *ANQ* 25.3 (2012): 176.

deploying both of Donne's modes of closure, in sequence. Only one of these endings can come last, though, and Frontain beautifully accentuates the outright triumph of the poem's true finale, a necessarily anticipatory triumph but a triumph nonetheless.

In the face of Frontain's eloquent meditation on the poem, I have a single point of hesitation: does it make grander claims for the speaker, deemed by Frontain a "poet-divine," than does the speaker himself? I tend to find Donne asserting his poetic vocation most openly at the poem's start, despite the concerns about the misuse of wit, precisely because he raises these concerns in relation to the poem at hand rather than to the Sidney Psalter. Speaking directly to "Eternall God" (1), Donne immediately places the present verse on sacred ground. I need a bit more help to see how this self-consciousness carries over into the rest of the poem to the degree Frontain indicates. Does "Upon the Translation," in its middle and closing sections, make prominent the Moses-like leadership of the poet-speaker or does it place the spotlight more fully on the Moses and Miriam who occasioned the poem?

"[H]eauens high holy muse" (31), happily cleft in two, seems to have "[w]hisperd" (32) my blasphemous quibbles to Frontain's counterpart. In "Musicum Carmen," Malpezzi proves me the victim of a false dichotomy. It is precisely in the praise for the Sidneys, or rather the blessing of God for the gift of the Sidney Psalter, that Donne underscores the salvific force of his own poem. "Upon the Translation" presents us with the artist as reader, moved by the divine verse of the Sidneys, and thereby dramatizes its own power to make others join the sacred song.[6]

This brilliant stroke would be enough to silence F.W. Brownlow, who in Malpezzi's essay stands in for all doubters of divine poetry, for all those who suspect that Donne could not have sincerely believed the writing and the hearing of verses could have any bearing on a person's eternal destiny. Malpezzi nevertheless marshals two further kinds of evidence for the seriousness with which Donne took the poetic vocation. She sets out the strong parallels between the work of the poet, as it appears in "Upon the Translation," and the work of the priest-

[6] For a different formulation of this dynamic, see Frontain, "Translating Heavenwards," especially pp. 111-113.

preacher, as described in Donne's 1618 Whitehall sermon on Ezekiel 32.32: "And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song, of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument." She also calls on the witness of Donne's poetic contemporaries who, following the paradigmatic example of Du Bartas' *Urania*, proclaimed the capacity of verse to impel writer and reader heavenwards. Or in the other direction, for Malpezzi's shrewdest maneuver in this part of the paper is to treat statements about poetry's power to save or damn as two sides of the same coin. The Paolo and Francesca allusion proves apt; with this early episode, the *Commedia* brings the high stakes of literature into frightening focus. Considering Donne's reference to the Pentecostal "cloven tongue" (9) of inspiration, readers of Dante might also naturally call to mind the anti-Pentecostal, divided flame in which Ulysses, the fraudulent counselor, finds himself with partner-in-crime Diomedes.[7] This famous scene illustrates the power of the tongue to propel others on the path to Hell, thereby demonstrating in inverted fashion the salvific potential of Dante's own rhetorical art.[8]

If the Sidneys provide a mirror for Donne's art, according to Malpezzi, they also reflect his mortality. Malpezzi sensitively detects here a concern with death that is much more explicit in Donne's other late, sacred poems, the three great hymns. On the one hand, "Upon the Translation" affirms the importance of earthly existence when, in its dead center, in lines 27 through 29 of a 56-line poem, it remarkably attributes to the terrestrial choir alone the perfect "double power" (10) of singing and being heard. On the other hand, the poem also illustrates Donne's hydroptic thirst for heaven and his talent for imparting that thirst to others, as evident in many moving perorations from the sermons. Donne's hopeful conviction is that of the Commodores: "There's going to be some sweet sounds, coming down, on the night shift."

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[7] "And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them" (Acts 2:3). All biblical references are to the Authorized Version.
[8] "And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell" (James 3:6).

In a previous JDS panel on "Upon the Translation," which like this one found its way to the pages of the *JDJ*, Hannibal Hamlin identified a "sub-genre of lyric poems that . . . address the nature of Psalms and Psalm translation, the relationship between earthly and heavenly music, and the vocational dilemma of the religious poet."[9] Besides the poem at hand, this sub-genre includes a poem by Mary Sidney Herbert herself and culminates in Milton's "At a Solemn Music."[10] Hamlin's groundbreaking work set Donne's lyric in its precise literary context. In a far looser spirit, I wish to close by bringing two more texts to bear on "Upon the Translation," contrasting it with another of Donne's divine poems and evoking yet one more extremely well-known moment from the *Divine Comedy*.

Could "Father, part of his double interest," the final Holy Sonnet in the Revised Sequence, offer a useful foil for Donne's approach in "Upon the Translation?" Like the poem about the Sidney Psalms, this sonnet places major weight on the word "part" and evinces a concern with doubles, but arguably to quite different effect. The energy of the poem, to borrow Frontain's terms, goes towards distinguishing without uniting. By addressing the Father while referring to the Son, Donne effectively divides them, even though the poem officially subscribes to the doctrine of the "knottie Trinity."[11] The sonnet's octave differentiates Donne from the Son and the Son's two wills, presumably the two Testaments, from one another:

> Father, part of his double interest
> Vnto thy kingdome, thy Sonne giues to mee,
> His Ioincture in the knottie Trinity
> Hee keeps, and giues mee his Death's Conquest.

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[9] Hannibal Hamlin, "Upon Donne's 'Upon the Translation of the Psalms,'" *JDJ* 27 (2008): 187-188. Of course, this is the same panel that yielded one of Frontain's masterful treatments of the poem, mentioned previously.

[10] According to Hamlin, Mary Sidney Herbert's poems influenced both Donne's and Francis Davison's; Donne further drew on Davison and Milton drew on Donne. See "Upon Donne's 'Upon the Translation,'" pp.187-196.

[11] "Father, part of his double interest," Revised Sequence, line 3, in the *Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*, *Volume 7.1: The Holy Sonnets*, ed. Gary A. Stringer et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), p. 26. Subsequent references are to this edition and will appear in the text parenthetically.

> This Lambe, whose Death with life the world hath blest
> Was from the worlds beginning slayne: and hee
> Hath made twoe wills, which with the Legacie
> Of his, and thy kingdome, doth thy sonnes invest. (1-8)

While "Upon the Translation" subtly interweaves allusions to the Hebrew Bible and Christian New Testament, the holy sonnet, especially with its later recourse to the Pauline letter-spirit dichotomy ("all healing grace and spirit/ Reviue againe, what lawe and letter kill" [11-12]), risks pitting the two testaments against one another.[12] Donne's metaphorical scenario does indeed interestingly attribute both covenants to the slain Lamb (Revelation 13:8), the crucified Son. With the existence of two wills for the same testator, though, the situation points more to the possibility of confusion or conflict than it does to mysterious unity.

Things take something of a turn in the closing couplet, however: "Thy Lawes Abridgment, and thy last command/ Is all but Loue, Oh lett that last will stand" (13-14). As Susannah Brietz Monta keenly observes, "Donne alludes to" passages from "the synoptic gospels" which identify love as the essence of the Torah: "Importantly, the commandment to love is not only from one of God's wills."[13] If the phrase "thy last command" alludes to the words of Jesus in John 13:34 ("A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another"), Donne's double "thy" in line 13 might also at last encompass Father and Son in a single address.[14] This ending, in other words, begins to

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[12] The Pauline reference is to 2 Corinthians 3:6. In "Upon the Translation," Donne applies the cloven tongue imagery from Acts to David's prior inspiration, while also making an allusion to "Iohn Baptists holy voice" (17) serve as forerunner to a climactic allusion to Psalm 97: "And who that Psalme *Now let the Isles reioyce*/ Haue both translated, and applyd it too" (18-19). These quiet touches, arguably, downplay the possible opposition between the testaments.

[13] Susannah Brietz Monta, "'Oh lett that last will stand': Reading Religion in Donne's *Holy Sonnets*," in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Religion*, ed. Mark Knight (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 396.

[14] Jeremy Maule offers the same observation, noting that the "thy" of line 13 "determinedly elides the persons of the Trinity." See "Donne and the Words of the Law," in *John Donne's Professional Lives*, ed. David Colclough (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003), p. 30. My own argument simply makes more of the fussy

dissolve some of the stark separations established at the start of the sonnet. If the first will can be abridged, though, it seems possible that the abridgment itself could prove susceptible to further reinterpretation or reconfiguration. There is room for ongoing anxiety about the terms governing salvation.

The contrast between "Father, part of his double interest" and "Upon the Translation" may primarily reflect differences of genre and occasion; to sketch a fraught salvation history would hardly befit Donne's celebration of the Sidneyan Psalter. Even so, attending to the sonnet's more troubled version of doubling perhaps enables us to hear more clearly the harmonies of "Upon the Translation" and to appreciate its comparatively seamless account of revelation and re-revelation.

Finally, with respect to squaring the circle, it is worth noting that Donne is not the first poet to evoke this futile pursuit.[15] Famously, at the conclusion of the *Commedia*, Dante likens the Pilgrim's struggle to comprehend the presence of the human form within the Godhead to the doomed struggle of "the geometer":

> As the geometer intently seeks
> to square the circle, but he cannot reach,
> through thought on thought, the principle he needs,
> so I searched that strange sight: I wished to see
> the way in which our human effigy
> suited the circle and found place in it—
> and my own wings were far too weak for that.
> But then my mind was struck by light that flashed

distinctions at the poem's outset. In an e-mail exchange (2/14/23), Monta proposed to me that the "and" in line 13 "receives at least some middle stress if not a bit more," thereby calling attention to the element of unity-within division. I would add that "and" rhymes with "command" and "stand." Might Donne, with this possibly stressed "and," implicitly ask how the law of love could be new (as it is declared to be by the Johannine Jesus) if the Torah boils down to love of God and neighbor (as affirmed by the synoptic Jesus)?

[15] As Robin Robbins explains, to square the circle is, more precisely, "find the ratio of the radius of a circle to the side of a square of the same area." The impossibility of this task was demonstrated definitively in 1882. See *The Complete Poems of John Donne*, rev. ed., ed. Robin Robbins (Harlow, England, and New York: Longman, 2010), p. 580, note for line 2.

And, with this light, received what it had asked.[16]

To my knowledge, no one has cited this passage in connection with "Upon the Translation," perhaps because the notion of "squaring the circle" seems too proverbial to require a source.[17]

It is especially appropriate to do so in the context of this panel, however; after all, it is Frontain himself who has urged us most forcefully to take Donne's "familiarity with the *Divine Comedy*" as more than a "curiosity of literary history."[18] In a classic article deeming Donne's *Second Anniversary* a "Protestant *Paradiso*," Frontain assembles Donne's scattered references to the *Commedia*—perhaps the most memorable a letter to Henry Wotton in which he claims to have "flung away Dante the Italian"—and skillfully interprets their blend of admiration and frustration.[19] To pursue a parallel between the opening

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[16] *Paradiso* 33: 133-41 in Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum, Everyman's Library (New York, London, and Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), pp. 540-541. Subsequent references to the *Commedia* are to this edition and will appear in the text parenthetically.

[17] In a monograph published just after I originally submitted this response, Kirsten Stirling proposes a different source for Donne's "squaring the circle" references in "Upon the Translation" and in two sermons. According to Stirling, Donne takes this notion from German thinker Nicholas Cusanus (1401-1464). See *Picturing Divinity in John Donne's Writings* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2024), pp. 97-99. While Stirling is persuasive, the *poetic* precedent offered by the *Commedia* also warrants consideration, especially given Donne's apparent interest in Dante. As Stirling herself notes, "Donne is a magpie in his acquisition of images and metaphors from a wide range of sources" (19). In another recent monograph, moreover, Timothy M. Harrison and Elizabeth D. Harvey take an earlier passage from *Paradiso* 33 to lie behind an important passage in Donne's *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*. See *John Donne's Physics* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2024), pp. 136-143.

[18] Raymond-Jean Frontain, "Donne's Protestant *Paradiso*: The Johannine Vision of the *Second Anniversary*," in *John Donne and the Protestant Reformation*," ed. Mary Arshagouni Papazian (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003), p. 113. Regrettably, I did not deliver this portion of the paper at the JDS Conference, because the parallel between Donne and Dante first occurred to me a month later when I was teaching the *Paradiso* in a survey class.

[19] See John Donne, *Selected Letters*, ed. P.M. Oliver (Great Britain: Fyfield Books, 2002), p. 7. Donne apparently refers to the *Inferno* in "Satyre 4" and, as

of Donne's short encomiastic poem and the close of Donne's esteemed epic is, one hopes, to proceed in the spirit of Frontain.

By alluding to the geometer's impossible quest, Dante does not indicate that the Pilgrim's efforts to understand the Incarnation are either wrong-headed or blasphemous. Indeed, the Pilgrim succeeds in his undertaking, albeit not on the strength of his "own wings" (*Par*. 33.39). His efforts are framed for the reader, are in a sense authorized in advance, by Bernard's petition to the Blessed Virgin at the start of the Canto: "Lady, / you are so high, you can so intercede,/ that he who would have grace but does not seek/ your aid, may long to fly but has no wings" (*Par*. 33.12-15). According to Frontain, it is precisely this "reliance on the machinery of mediation," including the mediating fiction that Dante actually experienced the events he describes, to which Donne objects in the *Second Anniversary* and elsewhere.[20] One recalls Donne's wry comment, in a letter to Henry Goodyer, that while "the Roman profession seems to exhale and refine our wills from earthly drugs and lees more than the Reformed, and so seems to bring us nearer to heaven," that same Roman faith also "carries heaven farther from us by making us pass so many courts and offices of saints in this life in all

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part of his own depiction of Hell in the satiric *Ignatius his Conclave* (1611), loosely renders a short passage from the *Inferno* into Latin. See Robbins, p. 561 for both the Latin verses and what is probably Donne's own subsequent English translation of them. Anne Lake Prescott ("Menippean Donne," in *The Oxford Handbook*, p. 171), it should perhaps be noted, proposes that the allusion in "Satyre 4" actually may be to Caelio Curione's *Pasquine in a Trance* rather than to the *Commedia*. According to Harrison and Harvey, "Donne's copy of the *Commedia* is currently housed at the Princeton University Library" (*John Donne's Physics*, p. 125, n.44). Donne also owned a copy of Dante's *Convivio*, as Nick Havely observes. Havely briefly discusses Donne in his attempt to complicate, without quite contradicting, the common view that the early 17th-century is something of a blank space when it comes to English awareness and reception of Dante. See *Dante's British Public: Readers and Texts, from the Fourteenth Century to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 78-79. Previous scholarship addressing knowledge of Dante in Donne's period includes F.P Wilson, "A Supplement to Toynbee's *Dante in English Literature*," *Italian Studies* 3 (1946): 50-64 and J.B. Boswell, *Dante's Fame in England: References in Printed British Books 1477-1640* (Newark, N.J. and London: University of Delaware Press and Associated University Presses, 1999).

[20] Frontain, "Donne's Protestant *Paradiso*," p. 117.

our petitions and [lie] in a painful prison in the next."[21] Enabled by what Frontain calls "a relay team" of guides and mediators "commanded by the Virgin Mary," Dante at last gains "the good of the intellect" (*Inf.* 3.18). In the *Commedia*, the squared circle reference thus underscores a natural human limitation and its transcendence.[22]

In "Upon the Translation," by contrast, the squared circle reference does not mark a final obstacle on the path to fulfillment but rather serves as a kind of warning at the threshold. Only two words into the poem, Donne cautions that to "[s]eeke new expressions" for God is to "thrust into strayt Corners of poore witt" the One "who [is] cornerlesse and infinite" (2-4), drawing a line between reverent and perverse poetic praise. This distinction is also implied in *La Corona*. There, Donne hopes that in writing the poem he imitates the receptivity of Mary, who held "Immensitye cloystred in" her "deare wombe" (*Corona* 2, ll.13-14), but also acknowledges the danger that he instead imitates those whose crucifying of Jesus "[m]easur[ed] Self-life's Infinitye to a span / Nay to an Inch" (*Corona* 5, ll.8-9). Although the tone at the start of "Upon the Translation" is not deadly serious, the bold geometer who would "the circle square" (2) nevertheless suggests the possibility of offense to the "Eternall God" (1).

Once we pass the gate and enter the temple of the poem, so to speak, the level of concern seems to diminish. While "Upon the Translation" never comes around to endorse poetic idiosyncrasy, which may be all that the initial warning intends to target, the poem also proceeds with an air of freedom, as if the need for pious fretting has already been satisfied.[23] By imagining translation as re-revelation, for instance, Donne complicates the dichotomy between "new expressions" and old ones. In perhaps its last paradox, "Upon the Translation" also indicates that the time-bound process of singing the Sidneyan Psalms, themselves the result of "learned labours" (54), can prepare us for

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[21] *Selected Letters*, p. 44. Oliver dates the letter to May/June 1609.

[22] Frontain, "Donne's Protestant Paradiso," p.117. To be sure, these mediators and guides also, on some level, allegorize the distinct but complementary roles of natural human reason, supernatural grace, and mystical devotion in the journey towards beatitude.

[23] For the poem's rejection of idiosyncrasy, see Frontain, "Donne's 'Upon the Translation,'" p. 168.

"th'extemporall song" (51), a song that we will know all at once. The sequential and the simultaneous meet.

The alternative to Dante's "machinery of mediation" in this poem is not the act of meditation, as Frontain contends is the case for the *Second Anniversary*; it is, rather, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Biblical writers, their translators, and any divine poet whose "Muse" the "holy Spirritt . . . [does] rayse" (*Corona* 7, line 13), to repeat the crucial line cited by Malpezzi, can praise the eternal God without restraint.[24] As in the *Second Anniversary*, Donne's poetic authority is both less dramatic and more direct than that of his Italian predecessor.

But the poets share much, and the end of Donne's encomiastic lyric dovetails with the *very* ending of Dante's epic: "Here force failed my high fantasy; but my/ desire and will were moved already—like/ a wheel revolving uniformly—by / the Love that moves the sun and the other stars" (*Par*. 33.142-145). "Upon the Translation" and *Paradiso* both conclude with the experience of joining, whether in anticipation (Donne) or in recollection (Dante).[25] The joy of falling in replaces the fear of falling; heavenly participation swallows up the pain of departure.

Perhaps we have not heeded Frontain's eloquent insistence, in "Protestant *Paradiso*," on the depth of Donne's engagement with Dante. At 400 (or so), "Upon the Translation" might invite us to revisit its author's responses to the then-300-year-old *Commedia*—and in so doing to find fresh purchase on his own ambitions and accomplishments in divine song.

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[24] There is also, almost as an aside, the claim that Christ "hath tun'd God and man" (30). As in the *Paradiso* and in "La Corona," the Incarnation conveys God's own desire to surpass the barriers separating divinity and humanity. Interestingly, this is the only allusion to Christ in the poem, and indeed Robbins (p. 582), for one, takes the line as a reference to David instead.

[25] With reference also to Pseudo-Dionysius' commentary on Ezekiel, John Freccero suggests that Plato's *Timaeus* offers precedent for these lines, which convey both the satisfaction of Dante's individual quest and his "integration into a harmonious cosmic order." See the collection of Freccero's essays, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge, Ma and London: Harvard University Press, 1986), p.251. Freccero's classic article on "Donne's 'Valediction: Forbidding Mourning,'" *ELH* 30 (1963): 355-376, begins with a circle image from Dante's *Vita Nuova*.