THE SONG OF SONGS IN EUROPEAN POETRY
(TWELFTH TO SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES)

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The Song of Songs in European Poetry (Twelfth to Seventeenth Centuries)

Translations, Appropriations, Rewritings

Edited by
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Camilla Caporicci

Perugia, April 2023

TIBOR FABINY

Chapter 11. A Reading of Joseph Hall's Paraphrase of the Song of Songs (1609)

Robert Alter, in the introduction to his recent magisterial three-volume translation of *The Hebrew Bible*, demonstrates that various approaches have been employed to identify the genre of the *Shris Hasirim*, or Song of Songs, or, as the 1537 Matthew's Bible put it, *The Ballet of Ballet*:[1] wedding poems, drama, anthology, and, of course, allegory.

Undoubtedly, the allegorical reading has been the most frequent: for the Jewish people, the poem was about the love between the Holy One and Israel; for Christians, the love between Christ and the Church and/or the human soul. Alter poignantly points out that '[b]oth religious traditions, however fervently they clung to the allegorical vision, never succeeded in entirely blocking out the erotic power of the text'.[2] The biblical book is indeed a 'song', a 'Symphony of Creation' with two main voices: a female and a male voice. (I shall talk of the minor voices later on.)

Let me suggest that there are neither 'wrong' nor 'right', i.e. 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate', readings of the Song of Songs. For a secular reader, it is a beautiful erotic love song with explicit sexual allusions; for a traditional Jewish reader, it is about God and Israel; for the Catholic reader, the female voice is identified with the Virgin Mary, the Church, and the human soul; for Protestants, it articulates the biblical network of metaphors concerning the Bridegroom as Christ and the Bride as the Church or the human soul.[3]

1 *Matthew's Bible: Combining the Translations of William Tyndale and Miles Coverdale. Edited by John Rogers. A Facsimile of the 1537 Edition*, with an introduction by Joseph W. Johnson (Peabody: Maasa, 2009).

2 *The Hebrew Bible. Volume 3*, trans. by Robert Alter (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2019).

3 Douglas Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete: Biblical Interpretation and Anglo-Protestant Culture at the Edge of the Enlightenment* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 115.

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The text can be conceived of as a musical score, allowing it to be orchestrated on several registers performed by several instruments. Paraphrases and interpretations aim to recreate the text (the musical scores) according to their aesthetic or religious convictions. A literary scholar is interested in the ways in which the author manages to articulate his/her own concerns. This is the conceptual frame within which I wish to place Joseph Hall's *An Open and Plaine Paraphrase upon the Song of Songs*, a work that was published in the volume *Salamon's Divine Arts*, printed in London in 1609.[4] My thesis is that Hall's paraphrase is ultimately a highly imaginative literary text that can be compared to some of the most significant contemporary poems.

Joseph Hall (1574–1656) was a poet, a logician, an orator, and an ordained minister in the Church of England. He was called the 'English Seneca' for his style, and his ideas were said to have been influenced by the Neostoicism of Justus Lipsius.[5] Though he came from a poor family, he was educated in Emmanuel College, Cambridge, a prestigious Puritan college of his day. However, as early as 1597, he began writing biting satires, the best-known collection of which is *Virgidemiarum: Six Books* ('A Harvest of Blows', published between 1597 and 1602). These satires are considered the first written in English after Latin models. His satiric heroic couplets anticipate the works of John Dryden. Archbishop Whitgift found them so provocative that he ordered them to be burned, along with John Marston's and others' books. Hall's Latin dystopian satire *Mundus Alter et Idem* ('The World Different and the Same'), written *circa* 1605, is said to have influenced Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* a century later. It is not insignificant, as we shall see later, that he wrote his poignant satires more or less at the same time as John Donne was doing the same; Hall was only two years younger than Donne. Hall also published a book of characters in the tradition of the ancient Greek philosopher Theophrastus in his *Characters and Vertues and Vices* (1608).

In his early career, he was sent on a diplomatic mission to the Low Countries, where he is said to have debated with Jesuits. This is likely where he familiarized himself with the Ignatian tradition of spirituality. On James I's accession, he wrote the congratulatory poem *The King's Prophecie, or Weeping Joy* (1603). Hall soon earned his fame by publishing a two-volume book of *Meditations and Vows*, which impressed Henry the Prince of Wales so much that Hall was invited to preach a sermon at

4 I have consulted the facsimile edition: *Solomon's Divine Arts: Joseph Hall's Representation of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, ed. by Gerald T. Sheppard (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1991).

5 For a biography: Frank Livingstone Huntley, *Bishop Joseph Hall, 1574–1656: A Biographical and Critical Study* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1979).

court. His *Arte of Meditation* (1606) established the genre in England that influenced, among others, John Donne.[6]

Hall remained one of the royal chaplains even after the death of the prince in 1613. He stood firm in the Anglican *via media* position between the radical Puritans and High Church Anglicans. In 1627 he was appointed Bishop of Exeter, and in 1641 he was appointed Bishop of Norwich, which led to his sudden demise among the Puritans.[7]

Salamon's Divine Arts is a relatively early work written the year after Hall was appointed tutor to Prince Henry.[8] Unlike his practical, schematic commentaries on the two other Wisdom books (Proverbs and Ecclesiastes), *An Open and Plaine Paraphrase* is a personal, almost lyrical Christian discourse that E. Ann Matter calls 'a text of mystical rapture'.[9] *An Open and Plaine Paraphrase* is dedicated to his patron Lord Edward Denny, Baron of Waltham. In the Preface to his commentary Hall explains why he wrote about this book of the Bible.

> When I would have withdrawn my hand from divine Salomon: the heavenly elegance of this his best Song drew me unto it; and would not suffer me to take off mine eyes, or pen. Who can read it with understanding and not be transported from the world; from himself? [...] Surely, here is nothing that savours not of ecstasy, and spiritual ravishment [...] it is well if these mysteries can be found out by searching. Two things make the Scripture hard: prophesies, allegories; both are met in this: but the latter so sensibly to the weakest eyes, that this whole Pastoral-marriage song (for such it is) is no other than one other Allegorie sweetly continued: where the deepest things of God are spoken in riddles, how can there be but obscurity and diverse construction?[10]

Hall's enthusiastic mention of 'ecstasy, and spiritual ravishment' evokes in the reader the inspired words of the famous medieval commentary of St Bernard of Clairvaux:

> It happens sometimes that the soul is so transported out of itself, and entirely detached from the bodily sense, that though conscious of the WORD, it has no consciousness of itself [...] it is rapt out of itself to

---

6 See Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth Century Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

7 E. Ann Matter, 'Joseph Hall and the Tradition of Christian Interpretation of the Song of Songs', in *Solomon's Divine Arts: Joseph Hall's Representation of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, ed. by Gerald T. Sheppard (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1991), pp. 58–66 (61).

8 Matter, 'Joseph Hall', p. 61.

9 Matter, 'Joseph Hall', p. 62.

10 I have modernized the spelling of quotations.

> enjoy the Presence of the WORD [...] Sweet is that communion; but how seldom does it occur, and how brief a time does it last.[11]

The biblical text of Hall's paraphrase is that of the Geneva Bible (1560), which summarizes the content of the book as follows: 'In this Song, Salomon by most sweet and comfortable allegories and parables describes the perfect love of Jesus Christ, the true Salomon and King of peace, and the fruitful soul or his Church, which he has sanctified and appointed to be his spouse.'

While the paraphrase structure is conventional, being it a dialogue between Christ and the Church, there are two other voices: the 'Forraine Congregations' (5. 17) and the 'Jewish Church' (8. 1, 8. 6). The famous recurring verse 'I charge you O daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and by the Hinds of the Field, that ye stir not up, nor waken by Loue, until he please' (2. 7, 3. 5, 8. 4) in Matthew's Bible is put constantly into the mouth of Christ, and in the Geneva Bible into the mouth of the Church; with Hall the refrain is first said by the Church (2. 7), second by Christ (3. 5), then by the Jewish Church (8. 4).

The table below shows how Hall 'dramatizes' the Song of Songs by correlating the verses of each book not only with Christ and the Church but shortly even with the 'Foreign Church' and, to our surprise, in the last book the dialogue is almost entirely between 'The Jewish Church' and Christ. The Jewish Church claims to be the daughter of the universal church before the call of the Church of the Gentiles.

Table 11.1. Joseph Hall's attribution of the verses of the Song of Songs.

Book of the Song of Songs	Verses	Voice
1	1–6	Church
	7–10	Christ
	11–13	Church
	14	Christ
	15–16	Church
2	1–2	Christ
	3–16	Church
3	1–4	Church
	5–6	Christ
	7–11	Church

11 Quoted in Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics*, p. 62.

Book of the Song of Songs	Verses	Voice
4	1–14	Christ
	15	Church
5	1	Christ
	2–16	Church
	17	Foreign Church
6	1–2	Church
	3–12	Christ
7	1–10	Christ
	11–13	Church
8	1–4	The Jewish Church
	5	Christ
	6–8	The Jewish Church
	9	Christ
	10	The Jewish Church
	11–13	Christ
	14	Church

These paraphrases, unlike the marginal notes of the Geneva Bible, are always different. The following table illustrates how the same text is given to different personae in various editions.

Table 11.2. Attribution of verses of the Song of Songs in different editions of the text.

'I charge thee…'	Voice of	Matthew's (1537)	Geneva (1560)	Hall (1609)
2. 7		Christ	Christ	Church
3. 5		Christ	Church	Christ
8. 4		Christ	Church	Jewish Church

Let us have a closer look at how Hall's paraphrases of the same text vary in three different loci.

Table 11.3. Joseph Hall's paraphrases of the same text in three loci.

Hall	2. 7 Church	3. 5 Christ	8. 4 Jewish Church
I charge you O daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and by the Hinds of the Field, that you stir not up, nor waken by Love, vtntil he please	In the meantime, I charge you (all you that professes any friendship and affinity with me) I charge you by whatsoever is comely, dear, and pleasant unto you, as you will avoid my utmost centres, take heed how you wax and disquiet my merciful saviour, and grieve his spirit, and wrong his name, with your vain and loud conversations and do not there by the least provocation of your sin to interrupt his peace.	Now, that my distressed Church has been all the night long of my seeming absent, toiled in seeking me, I charge you (oh all that profess any friendship with me) I charge you that whatsoever is comely, and pleasant unto you, that (as you will answer it) you trouble not her peace with any unjust and unseasonable suggestions; with uncharitable conscientious with any novelties of doctrine, but suffer her to rest sweetly, in that divine truth which she has received, and this true apprehension of me wherein she rejoices.	I charge you (all you) that profess any friendship to me, I charge you deeply to avoid my uttermost centres; take heed how you vex and disquiet my merciful saviour and grieve his spirit: and do not dare by the least provocation of him to interrupt his peace.

An Open and Plaine Paraphrase is a recreation of the 'musical scores' of the Song of Songs by a seventeenth-century Protestant clergyman. Hall was undoubtedly inspired by the Song of Songs, and his paraphrase was a means to perform it according to his own faith.

In the following pages I shall confine myself to a reading of Hall's paraphrase of chapters 1 and 2 of the Song of Songs. A close reading of Hall's commentary on the next six chapters of the Song exceeds the limits of the present chapter.

Hall divides the dialogues of chapter 1 as follows: 1. The Church (verses 1–6); 2. Christ (verses 7–10); 3. Church (verses 11–13); 4. Christ (verse 14); 5. Church (verses 15–17). The famous beginning of earthly, sensual love: 'Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy loue is better then [*sic*] wine' was given a 'meaning' by the Geneva Bible translation which Hall used: 'This is spoken in the person of the Church, or of the faithful soul inflamed with the desire of Christ, whom she loves.'

Hall's Paraphrases of Chapter 1

In Hall's paraphrase, the 'Dialogue' begins with the words of the Church: 'Oh that he would bestow upon me the comfortable testimonies of his love, and that he would vouchsafe me yet a nearer conjunction with himself'. Verse 2 is paraphrased as follows: 'Because of the sauour of thy good ointments thy name is as an ointment poured out: therefore the virgins loue thee.' In the Geneva Bible, the 'ointment' is explained as 'the feeling of your great benefits', and in Hall it becomes the 'savours of graces' and 'high and dear account of thy Gospel, whereby they are wrought, of some precious ointment, or perfume'. The virgins in Geneva are 'pure in heart and conversation', and in Hall they are 'the pure and holy souls of the faithful, [who] place their whole affection, upon thee.' (The similarity of 'pure in heart and conversation' and 'the pure and holy souls of the faithful' suggests Hall's reliance on the marginalia of the Geneva Bible.)

Perhaps the first exciting paraphrase is that of chapter 1, verse 3 (verse 4 in the Geneva Bible). The text is: 'Draw me, we will run after thee: the king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine: the upright love thee.' The marginalia of 'Draw me' notes that 'The faithful confess that they cannot come to Christ unless they are drawn', and the 'chambers' is explained as 'the secret joy that is not known to the world'.

This 'Draw me' verse associates Hall with the bondage of his sins, from which he wants to be delivered by God. The passionate speech evokes Donne's famous Holy Sonnet, 'Batter my heart'.[12]

The Protestant idea of the bondage of the will, the imagery of captivity and the desperate cry 'deliver me' on one hand and 'batter my heart' on the other, as well as the passion of imploring God 'do thou powerfully incline my will, and affection toward thee' and Donne's 'That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow mee', are similar. Hall's 'in spite of all temptations, give me strength to cleave unto thee' can once be compared to Donne's 'I, like an usurpt towne, to'another due, | Labour to'admit you'. However,

12 John Donne, *The Complete English Poems*, ed. by A. J. Smith (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 315.

Table 11.4. Comparison between Joseph Hall's paraphrase of the Song of Songs (3.1) and John Donne's Holy Sonnet 14.

Hall (1609)	Donne, Holy Sonnet 14 (1609–1611)
Pull me therefore out of the bondage	Batter my heart, three personed God; for, you
of my sins: deliver me from the world,	As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
and do thou powerfully incline my will,	That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
and affection toward thee:	Your force, to breake, blow, burn and make me new.
and in spite of all temptations,	I, like an usurped town, to'another due,
give me strength to cleave unto thee;	Labour to admit you, but oh, to no end,
and then both I and all those faithful children	Reason your viceroy in me, mee should defend,
thou hast given me,	But is captived, and proves weak or untrue.
shall all at once with speed	Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain,
and earnestness walk to thee,	But am betrothed unto your enemy:
and with thee:	Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again;
yea, when once my royal	Take me to you, imprison me, for I
and glorious husband	Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
has brought me both	Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.
in these lower rooms and	
of his spiritual treasure on earth,	
and into heaven and be glad in heavenly	
chambers of glory	
then will we rejoice	
and be glad in none, but thee but thee;	
which shalt be all in all in us:	
then we celebrate and magnify thy love, above	
all the pleasure we found upon earth; for, all	
of us thy righteous ones, both Angels and	
Saints, are inflamed with the love of thee.	

while in the provocative last couplet 'Except you'enthrall mee, never shall be free, | Nor ever chast, except you ravish mee' Donne remains on the level of the individual, in Hall's 'poem' the narrative 'I' becomes 'we', the vision of the individual expands to embrace the whole community of the redeemed catholic church: 'we rejoice', 'we celebrate', 'we found upon earth', 'thy righteous ones', 'both Angels and Saints'.

Why do we place Hall's paraphrase and Donne's poem next to each other? Is it not a naive idea to compare the lines of this hardly known clergyman with a long celebrated and widely known sonnet by Donne? Is it not an exaggeration to attribute to Hall a poetic talent similar to the genius of Donne? We may conjecture that they personally met. However, a shred of more powerful evidence is gained when we recognize that the introductory lines of the *First Anniversary* of the *Anatomy of the World* and *The Harbinger to the Progress* as a prelude to the *Second Anniversary* in *The Progress of the Soul* were written by Joseph Hall. A. J. Smith, in his edition of *The Complete English Poems*, confirms this in the footnote to *The Harbinger to the Progress*: 'Ben Jonson told Drummond of Hawthornden that Joseph Hall wrote the Harbinger to Donne's Anniversary (*Conversations* 149). Hall was a former rector of Hawstead, the Drury's family church, and must have known the dead girl well.'[13]

'Black' in verse 1. 4: 'I [am] black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon' is ambiguous. In the Geneva marginalia 'black' refers to how 'the Church confesses her spots and sin, but has confidence in the favour of Christ'. Kedar 'was Ishmael's son, of whom came the Arabians that dwelt in tents'; 'curtains of Solomon' are 'which within were all set with precious stones and jewels'. The 'Black lady', as some commentators find, could be an allusion either to the daughter of Pharaoh or to the Queen of Sheba. In Hall's paraphrase, it is the Church's apology for her 'discoloured' 'appearance', but she claims that she is 'inwardly well savoured' in the eyes of he whom she seeks to praise: Christ. One should not be misled, she suggests, by the discrepancy between appearance and reality. The apology continues in the 'Regard me' verse (1. 5), where she says that her black colour (i.e. her 'sinful appearance') is caused by her being scorched by 'the rage and envy of [her] false brethren', by 'their idolatrous religion, superstitious impieties [and] wicked importunity'.

The voice of Christ is first heard in 1. 7. He gently affirms the Church's beauty and sanctification but exhorts her to stray away from false worshippers. He encourages her to follow the community of the blessed patriarchs and apostles. This image evokes the famous Ghent altarpiece of Hubert and Jan van Eyck, the 'Adoration of the Lamb' (1432). One could wonder

13 Donne, *Complete English Poems*, p. 607.

whether Hall, perhaps, saw it on one of his diplomatic missions to the Continent (including the Low Countries).

In 1. 11 the Church laments that her Christ is missing: 'Whiles the King was at his repast, my spikenard gave the smells thereof' (1. 11). The Geneva Bible interprets this in a positive sense: 'the Church rejoices that she is admitted to the company of Christ.' In Hall, however, the Church first expresses her sadness: 'my lord and king seemeth far distant from me', but she consoles herself by experiencing the 'scent of the spikenard', which is the Holy Spirit: 'yet now I do find him present with me in spirit [...] right to some precious ointment spread itself over my soul, and returns a pleasant savour to his own nostrils'. All these images evoke the biblical trope of prayer being smell (e.g. Psalms 141. 2, Rev. 8. 4); in Hall, 'sweet savour'.

The Song of Songs' image of 'My welbeloued is as a bundle of myrrhe vnto me: he shall lie between my breasts' (1. 12) in Hall's paraphrase is a continuation of the previous comment: 'as some fragrant pomander of myrthe, layde between the breasts, sends up a most comfortable scent for, his love laid close unto my heart still give me continual and unspeakable refreshing'. This is indeed a strong, erotic, if not sexual, association. The scent of their love with Christ laying between her breasts is like a smell going up to heaven, which is 'unspeakable' and 'extremely refreshing'. Christ speaks again in just one verse: 'My welbeloued is as a cluster of camphire vnto me in the vines of Engedi'. This is once again a reciprocal praise of the Church; her 'eyes' are 'inward', identical with the procession of the saints: 'Thine eyes (which are my seers, prophets, apostles, ministers) and those inward eyes, whereby thou seest him that is invisible'. The 'dove' image is not appropriated by Hall.

Hall's Paraphrases of Chapter 2

In chapter 2, the words 'I am the rose of the fielde, and the lilie of the valleys' become Christ's exaltation of Himself: 'Thou hast not without just cause magnified me, oh my church [...] so thus my grace, to all them that have felt the sweetnes thereof, surpass all worldy contentments' (2. 1). Christ calls his Church '[t]he a lilie among the thornes', which means, according to the Geneva marginalia, that 'Christ prefers his Church above all other things'. Its meaning in Hall is that she is a 'fit match' to Christ as she is far superior to the thorns (aliens or the unregenerate), but this is because she receives her glory from Christ (2. 2).

In return, the Church identifies her Christ with the 'apple tree' under whose shadow she can always rest. The fruit of the apple tree that is given to the Church is, of course, the word of God (2. 3). The wine cellar is the mystery of godliness, where the Holy Spirit leads her. The sweet

wines are Scripture and the Sacraments (2. 4). She says 'I am sick of love', meaning that she desires to be cheered up only by the 'full flagons of that spiritual wine' as she is 'overcome with a longing expectation and desire of [her] delayed glory' (2. 5). In her spiritual agony the Church's head, heart, judgement, and affection are comforted by Christ, with the heat of the embrace of an imaginative spiritual union that has nothing to do with carnal desire. In her imagination, they sweetly rest together, her personal tension is eased, and her anxiety is calmed (2. 6).

As earlier, the first 'I charge you' refrain is first said by the Church: 'I charge you, O daughters of Ierusalem, by the roes and by the hindes of the fielde, that ye stirre not vp, nor waken my loue, vntill she please' (2. 7). In the Geneva text, it is Christ who speaks in 2. 7: 'Christ charges them who have to do in the Church as it were by a solemn oath, that they trouble not the quietness of it.' In Hall, the Church passionately wants to protect from those who 'vex and disquiet [Christ] [and] grieve his spirit, and wrong his name, with [...] vain and loud conversations', and warns them 'do not there by the least provocation of your sin [...] interrupt his peace.' The gentle, mystical union (*unio mystica*), the mystery of love, cannot tolerate 'loud conversations'. The least sense of the ineffable or the Holy excludes all voices, gestures, movements that are human.

The next image I wish to look at is 2. 9: 'My welbeloued is like a roe, or a yong hart: loe, he standeth behinde our wall, looking forth of the windowes, shewing him selfe through the grates' (2. 9). In Geneva 'standeth behind our wall' means 'his divinity was hidden under the cloak of our flesh', while 'through the grates' is explained as meaning 'So that we cannot have full knowledge of him in this life'. In Hall's paraphrase, it is explained as follows:

> So swiftly, that no roe or hind can fully resemble him in this his speed, and nimbleness: and lo, even now, before I can speak it, is he come near unto me, close to the door and wall of my heart. And though this wall of my flesh will hinder my full fruition of him: yet lo, I see him by the eye of faith, looking upon me; I see him as in a glass; I see him shining gloriously, through the grates and windows of his word and sacraments, upon my soul.

For us this image first evokes Revelation 3. 20, 'Behold, I stand at the door, and knock', but for Hall it is much more complex. Christ is patient. He stands at the door, which is the wall of the Church's heart. Her heart has a door but is still a 'wall' (i.e. too hard to let Christ in). Here is a double metaphor (animal, military). The roe looking through the wall (in Matthew's Bible, 'peeping through the grate') is Christ, but though he is looking at her, she can see Christ 'as in a glass through the window of his word and sacrament', not (yet) face to face.

In 2. 11–12 we read 'For beholde, winter is past: the raine is changed, and is gone away | The flowers appeare in the earth: the time of the singing of birdes is come, and the voyce of the turtle is heard in our land.' Geneva identifies winter with sin: 'That is, sin and error is driven back by the coming of Christ, who is here described by the springtime, when all things flourish.' Hall's paraphrase has a special prose rhythm: 'For behold, all the cloudy winter of thy afflictions past, all the temples of temptations are blown over; the heaven is clear, and now there is nothing that may not give thee cause of delight'. Strangely, Geneva does not comment on 2. 12. However, Hall's spring is a beautiful Chaucerian image of the rebirth of life:

> Everything now resembles the face of a spiritual spring; all the sweet flowers and blossoms of holy procession put forth, and show themselves in their opportunities: now is the time of that heavenly melody which the cheerful saints and angels make in my ear; while they sing songs of deliverance and praise me, with their alleluias and say, glory to God on high in earth peace and goodwill towards men.

In 2. 15, the foxes both in Geneva and Hall are identified with heretics: 'Take for us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines [have] tender grapes.' Geneva says: 'Suppress the heretics while they are young, that is when they begin to show their malice, and destroy the vine of the Lord.' In Hall:

> And in the meantime (oh, all yea that wish well to my name and church) do your utmost endeavour, to deliver her from her secret enemies (not spearing the least) who either by heretical doctrine or profane conversation, hinder the course of the gospel; and pervert the faith of many; especially of those that have newly given up their names to me, and are but newly entered into the profession of godliness.

Conclusion

I could go on reading the text, but here I must stop. I hope to have recreated the flavour of Joseph Hall's text. I am not entirely convinced by E. Ann Matter's statement that 'Joseph Hall's paraphrase reflects the portrait of the church in which he lived and wrote',[14] as I cannot recognize any reference to contemporary events in Hall's paraphrase. However, I am happy to endorse her remark that this 'paraphrase of the Song of Songs is […] a very complicated text'.[15] It is unique insofar as it quotes the

14 Matter, 'Joseph Hall', p. 64.
15 Matter, 'Joseph Hall', p. 64.

text of the 1560 Geneva Bible but bravely replaces its marginalia with his own imaginative dialogue between Christ, the Church, and the Foreign Church (briefly), and then, in the last book almost entirely, with the Jewish Church.

Hall's paraphrase is a text of poetic intensity. Perhaps this is the reason why readers of John Donne hardly ever notice that 'The Praise of the Dead' preceding the *First Anniversary* of *The Anatomy of the World* and *The Harbinger to the Progress* before *The Second Anniversary* were written not by Donne but by Joseph Hall. (Re)discovering long forgotten biblical commentaries such as Hall's can help us broaden our knowledge of the poetic and religious imagination of the seventeenth century.[16]

16 I dedicate this essay to the memory of the editor of this facsimile, Gerald T. Sheppard (1946–2003) who generously gave me a copy of Joseph Hall's book.