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MISERERE MEI:  
PENITENTIAL PSALMS AND LYRICS  
IN ENGLISH LITERATURE, 1300-1650

presented by

Robert M. Kellerman

has been accepted towards fulfillment  
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Ph.D. degree in English

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**MISERERE MEI:  
PENITENTIAL PSALMS AND LYRICS IN ENGLISH LITERATURE, 1300–1650**

**By**

**Robert M. Kellerman**

**A DISSERTATION**

**Submitted to  
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## ABSTRACT

### MISERERE MEI: PENITENTIAL PSALMS AND LYRICS IN ENGLISH LITERATURE, 1300–1650

By

Robert M. Kellerman

Medieval and Renaissance paraphrases of the penitential psalms and lyrics based on them reveal a movement from didacticism to “self-expression”: in the Middle Ages, the poet sublimates his own voice to that of the biblical psalmist and in the Renaissance, the poet speaks through the psalmist, seeking to find his own voice in the psalmist.

Exegetes, including Augustine, Cassiodorus, Peter Lombard, Richard Rolle, Niccolò of Lyra, Luther and Calvin, argued that the psalms accommodated various “voices” as their speakers, putting them to various uses: medieval exegesis encourages the reader to see himself as well as David as the speaker of the psalm, and Reformation exegesis addresses issues of grace and election.

Poets too adapt these voices to their own ends. The medieval paraphrases of Richard Maidstone and Thomas Brampton are primarily didactic, making exegesis available to lay readers and accommodating them as speakers of the psalms in order to allow them to model their behavior on that of the psalmist.

The Reformation instigated reading the Bible as personal history, and poets paraphrase in terms of their own experiences and interests. Sir Thomas Wyatt’s paraphrase is both didactic and self-expressive as a faithful paraphrase of the psalms, as an expression of Reformation theology and possibly as a spiritual autobiography. Other English paraphrases, such as the

Sidney-Pembroke psalter, emphasize self-expression through verse technique; others, such as the Sternhold and Hopkins psalter, emphasize utility in Christian worship.

John Donne's Holy Sonnets, though not a paraphrase, adapts the rhetorical patterns of the penitential psalms in examining the Reformation theme of submitting to God's will while maintaining one's own. George Herbert's penitential lyrics in his collection The Temple explore sudden shifts in stance, tone, and argument found in the penitential psalms, and emphasize Christ's Passion as the means for man's redemption.

Adhering to the psalms and diverging from them defines each poet's stance toward the psalms. This study examines the poetic "self" in using and adapting biblical material.

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**For Judith, of course**

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## **Chapter 1**

### **THE PENITENTIAL PSALMS:**

### **THE HISTORICAL TRADITION**

When Pope Innocent III convened the Fourth Lateran Council in the year 1215, one of his goals was to address immediate pressing concerns: the spiritual well-being of the faithful, including the clergy, the religious, and the laity. The Council issued seventy canons touching on the sacraments, Church organization, ecclesiastical property and benefices, and various judicial issues (Duggan 408).

For the purposes of this work, the twenty-first canon has great importance: it laid the groundwork for important new protocols for the sacrament of penance. Though various systems of penance had been in place since the early Christian Church, the various bishops attending the Council of 1215 returned to their home countries charged with the task of requiring all Christians to make a confession at least once a year to their parish priest (Braswell 26).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Flowers Braswell translates the twenty-first canon in her study The Medieval Sinner (London, 1983): “All the faithful of both sexes, after they have reached the age of discretion, must confess all their sins at least once a year, to their own parish priest, and perform to the best of their abilities the penance imposed, reverently receiving the sacrament of the Eucharist at least on Easter Sunday, unless by chance he (the priest) should counsel their abstaining from its reception. Otherwise they shall be cut off from the



The first requirement -- making an annual confession -- seems simple enough. Confession of sin had always been part of Church doctrine, though it was originally not mandatory and, over the centuries, not strictly enforced.<sup>2</sup> Requiring confession at least once a year did not demand a great deal from the faithful. But the second clause of the edict -- confession to one's own parish priest -- was a different matter. Many parish priests were unlettered, even illiterate, but were now responsible for guiding the confessions of the faithful. The Church recognized its responsibility in providing to its faithful the means for the proper self-reflection needed to confess, and in providing to the clergy the means to provide pastoral care. The result was an outpouring of penitential manuals and treatises dealing with confession, of private devotions to prepare the sinner for confession, all designed to educate and guide both penitent and confessor.<sup>3</sup> By the time the Council of

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Church during their lifetime and shall be without a Christian burial in death. Whereupon let this salutary statute frequently be made in public in churches, lest anyone assume by blind ignorance a veil of excuse. However, if anyone with a just cause should wish to confess his sins to another parish priest, let him first seek and obtain permission from his own parish priest, since otherwise that one cannot loose or bind (the penitent)" (26).

<sup>2</sup> Braswell's brief overview of the history of penance in Europe is useful here. See her chapter "The Genealogy of a Sinner: A Study in the Background of Penance," 19-30, in The Medieval Sinner.

<sup>3</sup> Two articles, both found in The Popular Literature of Medieval England (Knoxville, 1985), examine the ramifications of the Fourth Lateran Council's twenty-first canon: Leonard P. Boyle's "The Fourth Lateran Council and Manuals of Popular Theology" (30-43) and Judith Shaw's "The Influence of Episcopal Reform on Popular Books of Instruction" (44-60). My study will not deal directly with the manuals and instruction books that these articles discuss, but both critics offer a useful overview to the events that led to this outpouring of didactic works.

Trent officially established penance as a sacrament of the Catholic Church in 1630, its *modus operandi* was firmly in place.

One small literary result of this Council was the devotional, poetic treatment of seven specific psalms, known collectively as the penitential psalms, which became one means by which Christians, both readers and poets, could meditate on their sins. This tradition -- both poetic paraphrases of these psalms and lyric poems inspired by them -- in medieval and Renaissance English devotional literature is the focus of this study.

## II

The penitential psalms are linked by their common theme of penitence, and are numbered in the Septuagint and Vulgate Bibles as psalms 7, 31, 37, 50 (the "Miserere Mei"), 101, 129 (the "De Profundis") and 142; later Protestant Bibles number them 7, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130 and 143.<sup>4</sup> The grouping together of these seven psalms did not originate with the Fourth Lateran Council, nor even in the Middle Ages, but rather in the post-classical period, going back at least as far as in the writings of the sixth-century Church

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<sup>4</sup> The numbering of the psalms in Protestant Bibles is different from that of the Vulgate and Septuagint because in the later Bibles certain psalms were split into two, and others combined, thus altering the numbering throughout. For the most thorough discussion of the numbering see Walter Drum's article, "Psalms," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* 12:534.

In this work, I will follow the numbering of the Psalms according to the time period and author. Chapters devoted to medieval poetry will follow Vulgate numbering, and chapters devoted to Renaissance poetry will follow Protestant numbering. For general discussion, as in this introductory chapter, I follow the more familiar Protestant numbering.

father Cassiodorus.<sup>5</sup> It is in the Middle Ages, however, that devotional writers begin to group them together separately from the rest of the psalter and treat them independently of it.

The tradition of paraphrasing the penitential psalms into English begins in the fourteenth century with the works of Richard Maidstone and Thomas Brampton, though there were precedents for vernacular translations and paraphrases of the psalms. The Anglo-Saxon translations of the psalter were the earliest in English;<sup>6</sup> in the fourteenth century, Richard Rolle's commentary; a fifteenth-century commentary specifically on the

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<sup>5</sup> Cassiodorus' work makes clear that he is not originating the tradition; he identifies the penitential psalms as such, assuming the reader will be familiar with them.

R. E. Murphy points out that Cassiodorus interpreted the number seven allegorically to indicate the seven means for the remission of sin: baptism, martyrdom, alms, forgiving spirit, conversion of a sinner, love, and penance (85). This concept actually originated with Origen in his homily on Leviticus (Watkins 136). However, he simply lists the seven means without mentioning any connection to the psalms. Perhaps, then, the seven means and the seven psalms were brought together by a commentator at some point between Origen and Cassiodorus, so that Cassiodorus inherited an already established tradition.

<sup>6</sup> Margaret Deanesly in The Lollard Bible and Other Medieval Biblical Versions (Cambridge, 1920) cites the tradition that King Alfred translated large parts of the Psalter (134); one might also mention the Anglo-Saxon interlinear glosses on the psalter, though technically these were not translations (136).

Other psalters include the Peterborough Psalter of 1260-70 (136); two psalters which belonged either to Worcester or Westminster (137); Eadwine's Psalterium Triplex, about 1120, in Anglo-Norman, Anglo-Saxon, and Latin (143).

For a full discussion of pre-Wycliffite biblical translations in English, see Deanesly's chapter 5, 131-155.

penitential psalms by Eleanor Hull;<sup>7</sup> and, of course, the Wyclif Bible were among the others. But Maidstone and Brampton set in motion the tradition that I will explore, the poetic paraphrasing of the penitential psalms.

In addition, I will examine penitential lyrics that are inspired in some way by the penitential psalms, certainly by the means of the penitential themes inherent in these psalms, but also by the poets' attitudes toward dealing with biblical material. My work will be to this end: to argue that the tradition of paraphrasing and using the penitential psalms underwent a fundamental change from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, one which might be most simply described as a change from didacticism to self-expression. The medieval paraphrases and lyrics function to explain to the reader how to read the Bible in terms of his own life, and the Renaissance paraphrases and lyrics function to allow the poet to read the Bible in the context of the life of the poet -- or the persona that the poet creates. To put it another way: in the Middle Ages, the poet seeks to speak through the voice of the biblical psalmist; in the Renaissance, the poet seeks to speak through his own voice as well as the voice of the biblical psalmist.

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<sup>7</sup> The Early English Text Society has recently issued an edition of Eleanor Hull's work (London, 1996) which I will discuss in chapter 2. For a discussion of her life, her work, and its literary qualities, see Alexandra Barratt's "Dame Eleanor Hull: A Fifteenth-Century Translator," in The Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages, edited by Roger Ellis et al. (Cambridge, 1989), 87-101.

## III

This work, then, will trace this poetic tradition from the late fourteenth century and into the seventeenth century, and will explore medieval Catholic attitudes, and then Renaissance Reformation attitudes toward the nature and function of sacred poetry. This first chapter will be devoted to definitions and contexts: how I characterize the penitential psalms and how they functioned in medieval culture; how I will use specific terms throughout this study; and how the developing tradition of penance created, indeed demanded, introspection on the part of the penitent.

In the second chapter, I begin by defining the function of the psalms in ancient Judaic worship, and then examine the exegetical tradition of reading the psalms from Augustine to Richard Rolle. I will pay particular attention to the divergence between personal readings, in which the reader is encouraged to “be” the psalmist, and historical readings, in which the psalm is seen as an historical document of Israelite history. This context is of utmost importance for the rest of the work. As we shall see, the tension between reading the psalms in light of one’s own experience and reading them as the experience of biblical characters is the primary issue all the poets here deal with, determining how they approach the psalms. This tension will determine if poets paraphrase and, if they do, how they paraphrase -- that is, how much they allow the psalm material to guide the paraphrase as opposed to their own experiences in light of the psalm material.

In the third chapter, I turn to the medieval paraphrases of Richard Maidstone and John Brampton. I argue that these two friars were concerned with making exegetical material available to a lay audience so that their paraphrases closely follow the psalm

commentaries made by classical and medieval exegetes. Their paraphrases are accordingly close exegetical readings with little of their own experience brought to the poetry. But simply following exegetical tradition does not entirely explain their decision to follow the psalm material very closely, however. Therefore, I will examine the larger issue of how medieval writers used the Bible as source material for their own works. I will argue two points: first, that since a great deal of medieval verse had a primarily instructional purpose, bringing one's own voice to poetry was less important to these friars than presenting both the voice of the biblical psalmist, and also his meaning -- an important function in an age where the majority of the Bible was not readily available in the vernacular, and commentary even less so. Second, I will argue that the characters in the Bible provided a basis for modelling virtuous behavior, and that the medieval Christian sought to model his own character on that of the biblical model -- that is, to align his own action as closely as possible to that of the biblical model. I will consider not only Maidstone's and Brampton's paraphrases to demonstrate these points but also other medieval penitential lyrics with corresponding functions. In addition, I will examine meditative practices and books of religious instruction, many of which will continue to be known and used into the Renaissance, though with alterations that accommodated Reformation ideals.

The fourth chapter will discuss those changes brought about by the Reformation. I synthesize a great deal of material here, from prayer books and primers to commentaries to secular rhetorical works, but generally three related developments emerge. First, the self-examination demanded by earlier penitential works undergoes changes to accommodate Reformation thinking about salvation. As the Reformation sinner can never

be assured of salvation, the self-examination generally shifts from actions -- what sins did I commit? -- to character -- what kind of person am I? This demands an even greater introspection on the part of the poet, one that existed before the Reformation but is now brought to the forefront. Second, we see the emergence of a poet seeing himself as a poet, forging a new, national, English literature. Third, the establishment of a new, national English Church gave poets the impetus to create a specifically English biblical literature, and the issues of translation and paraphrase are actively and consciously discussed by writers. These developments contribute to a creation of a self-conscious psalmist, adapting the psalms to his needs and the needs of his Church.

With this context laid out, I turn to the poets. The fifth chapter will be devoted to Sir Thomas Wyatt's paraphrase of the penitential psalms. In many respects, Wyatt operates as a "bridge" poet in that he brings together both the didactic and expressive functions of the psalms. His paraphrase is not only a faithful paraphrase of the original psalm material, but also an expression of Reformation ideals and possibly even a spiritual autobiography. Wyatt paraphrases not only with fidelity to the original psalm, but also with emerging Reformation ideas, and possibly even his own experience of what the psalm might mean.

At this point, the traditions brought together by Wyatt diverge again, and the poetry of strict paraphrase becomes loosened from the poetry of personal experience. The next three chapters explore how this happened. The sixth chapter examines other poets of the English Renaissance who paraphrased the psalms: the Sidneys, Harington, and Sternhold and Hopkins, among others. Because these poets generally did not paraphrase

only the penitential psalms, but rather the entire psalter, it is somewhat inaccurate to argue that they are part of the penitential lyric tradition. Nevertheless, the principles they use in paraphrase demonstrate the difficulty in achieving what Wyatt had done in using paraphrase to make a personal statement. Sir Philip Sidney and the Countess of Pembroke,<sup>8</sup> I argue, find self-expression in the technical marvel of their psalter, though their goal was at least in part to create a model for English poets to adapt the psalter to English verse techniques. These and the other poets in this chapter seem less concerned with using the psalter as means for expressing personal experience than for other ends -- exploring verse technique, and in the case of Sternhold and Hopkins, serving the needs of Anglican liturgy -- but it could well be argued that these other ends were the means of their self-expression; by exploring verse possibilities, Sidney and the Countess of Pembroke were defining their roles as English poets.

The two seventeenth-century Anglican priests and poets, John Donne and George Herbert, break away completely from paraphrase of the penitential psalms. Nevertheless, I will argue that Donne intended his Holy Sonnets as a personal version of the penitential psalms, but with specific Reformation themes. The struggle to submit himself to God's will while maintaining his own is the common thread of his sonnet cycle. The penitential

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<sup>8</sup> I will refer to Mary Sidney as the Countess of Pembroke and the psalter as the Sidney-Pembroke psalter in order to acknowledge clearly her contribution to it. To simply refer to it as the Sidney psalter runs the danger of assuming that Sir Philip Sidney -- certainly the more famous of the two -- alone was responsible for the paraphrase. In fact, the Countess of Pembroke did the majority of the work; Sidney paraphrased psalms 1 through 43, and she finished it with paraphrases of psalms 44 through 150.



psalms do not readily accommodate this theme, which may be the reason he chose not to paraphrase, and yet, as I will demonstrate, all the techniques and themes we have seen thus far in the penitential psalms are present here as well. In addition, by examining the complicated manuscript history of the Holy Sonnets, I will argue that in revising his work Donne clearly had the rhetorical patterns of the penitential psalms in mind.

Herbert, on the other hand, writes what has been called an entire Book of Psalms with his body of devotional poetry, The Temple. I will examine the penitential lyrics of The Temple, showing how Herbert uses various rhetorical techniques that we have seen in the penitential psalms, especially sudden shifts of tone and argument, suggesting an interest in exploring the immediacy of the moment -- the penitent in the process of being penitent, among others. I also examine carefully Herbert's poems written about the Passion, arguing that this biblical event provides the context for any discussion of penitence in The Temple, and that Herbert's poems allow the reader to consider Christ's sacrifice in light of his own experience.

Finally, like Donne, Herbert explores the tension between maintaining one's own will -- his artistic integrity, his identity as a poet -- and submitting his will and art to God. His poetry raises the questions: what kind of poetry should I write to glorify God? Or does it glorify me, the poet? Herbert raises the issues that this entire work is concerned with: how do I take biblical material and make it my own, and make it God's -- at the same time?

It is this tension between adherence to the psalms and divergence from them that defines each work, and each poet's stance toward sacred poetry. In many ways, this study

is an examination of poetic “self,” how each poet defines himself or herself in relation to the biblical source material, and even “locates” himself or herself in light of it: finds and exploits an original poetic voice or chooses not to exploit it; paraphrases closely, or loosely, or not at all. The questions this study seeks to answer are large and all-encompassing: what is it to be a poet? And accordingly, what should poetry do? I draw on Augustine and Sidney to pose some answers to these questions in my concluding chapter.

#### IV

To begin, I need to define precisely what I mean by the various terms applied to this kind of poetry and theological material. C. Hugh Holman and William Harmon define “translation” as “the rendering of a work, originally in one language, into another,” and continue:

At one extreme stands the literal translation of the work into another language, “word for word.” “Word for word” is something of a misnomer, because what is one word in one language may amount to a half-dozen in another or may have no counterpart at all . . . At the other extreme is the adaptation of the work into the other language, an attempt to communicate the spirit of the work by adopting it to the conventions and idioms of the language to which it is being rendered (482).

I begin with “translation” because much of the poetry under consideration in this work may be viewed as a translation of the Bible, the book considered literally the Word of God since antiquity, and thus demanding absolute fidelity to meaning. Closer to the poets’ sense of what they set out to accomplish, though, would be “paraphrase,” defined by Holman and Harmon as:

a restatement of an idea in such a way as to retain the meaning while changing the diction and form. A paraphrase is often an amplification of the

original for the purpose of clarity, though the term is often used for any rather general restatement of an expression or passage (343).

“Paraphrase,” in other words, is much looser than a translation: a work that is inspired and draws from a given work. It is not necessarily a translation, that is, a literal reworking -- though in specific verses, words, ideas, it may well be.<sup>9</sup> The term “amplification” is important, for it implies that the poet is free to add, bringing more to the original material than what is actually contained therein. I will have more to say about the distinctions between these terms in my discussion of the principles of Renaissance imitation in chapter 4, where English rhetoricians are deeply concerned with defining these terms accurately.

“Commentary” presents special problems. Holman and Harmon define it as “scholarly remarks specifically concerning details of substance or text, usually matters of information and not of judgment” (99). For a medieval (and Renaissance) theologian, a commentary was a verse-by-verse exposition explaining the meaning of specific biblical verse, or even specific words. To be sure, a paraphrase may be considered a kind of a

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<sup>9</sup> Though dealing with the later Renaissance versions of the psalms, Rivkah Zim’s English Metrical Psalms (Cambridge, 1987) nevertheless handles the distinction between translation and paraphrase particularly well. Both are different processes of imitation. Zim writes, “The object of translation was to provide a faithful transposition of the author’s original meaning in a form which allowed synonymity. This objective gave rise to a method of interpretation which paid scrupulous attention to the words and style of the author” (9); but “By contrast, the purpose of a paraphrase was to provide a ‘plain declaracion, exposicion or glose’ of the original author’s meaning in new words and as briefly as possible . . . since the paraphrist was not obliged to preserve the author’s meaning in the author’s words, a paraphrase could not carry the degree of authority which was held by the best translation or literal interpretation” (12). Here Zim quotes from Coverdale’s address to the reader in A Paraphrasis upon all the Psalmes of David (London, 1539), sig. A2<sup>r</sup>.

commentary on the Bible, for in taking material and expanding it in a way not necessarily found in scripture, the writer is commenting on biblical material. I will use “commentary” in the narrower sense above: it explains scripture, is concerned with its meaning -- what is the writer in the Bible trying to tell us here?

I am not convinced that Holman and Harmon are correct in asserting that commentary usually concerns itself with matters of information and not judgment. In choosing specific interpretations over others, the commentator is exercising judgment about what kind of interpretation is important as opposed to others. In fact, some commentators were fully aware of the critical issue I raise here, and accordingly gave various interpretations of specific biblical passages, not favoring any one over another but rather allowing the reader to make the final judgment.

These three means of dealing with biblical material, then, are all ways of interpreting scripture, their differences lying in amount of amplification and in fidelity to the source material. For the poet, the paraphrase is the freest form and certainly the most attractive, as commentaries and translations are inextricably tied to specific verses, words, and meanings. A paraphrase, on the other hand, may be inspired by a specific verse, but is not necessarily limited to its literal or its figurative meaning. It is with the poetry of paraphrase that this work will be primarily concerned.

None of these terms is etched in stone, and one of these genres can blend into another.<sup>10</sup> A sixteenth-century “commentary,” for example, may be based entirely on a

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<sup>10</sup> “Genre” seems the most appropriate word for these various kinds of writing, though I admit it raises questions of its own (is a commentary a genre?, for example.) It will not do

single biblical verse, and it may move far afield from the literal meaning of the verse. It might well be more of a meditation, a free reworking of the verse's content as opposed to its literal meaning. It might be simplest to say that any kind of reworking of biblical material is, at some level, a commentary. Within that wide range come both paraphrases and translations -- not to mention truly loose genres such as general devotional poetry, prayers, meditations, even religious dramas -- and so on.

## V

What makes a penitential psalm? These seven psalms all have common characteristics, and in fact other psalms which are penitential in nature (though not among the official seven penitential psalms) also have these characteristics. The first major common characteristic is that each of these psalms has a first person "I" as its speaker (a characteristic common to a great number of the psalms, in fact, including many that are not penitential in nature at all). I will examine more closely how exegetes and poets exploit that "I" in various ways, but for now I simply note it as a common characteristic. Second,

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to simply use the term "devotional" or religious writing; it can be well argued that almost any piece of medieval writing, to an extent, carries this purpose. By using "genre," I do not mean to suggest that these kinds of writing can be completely separated from others in terms of style, purpose, meaning. The fact is they cannot -- which is true for all kinds of medieval writing, to the point where a term like "genre" becomes difficult if not meaningless. I do mean to suggest, though, that each of these kinds of writing has common characteristics which I have defined, and each is recognizable as distinct -- or, as in the case of "blended" works, has the identifiable characteristics of various genres I have presented.

each of the psalms is addressed directly to God, following Jewish tradition, and not to an intermediary such as The Virgin Mary, nor to Christ, following Christian tradition in the post-classical era.

Third, each of these psalms is a statement of condition (again, true of other, but not all, psalms). That is, the sequence of all seven psalms may presuppose a narrative, but each of the psalms itself is not a narrative. A better word to describe these psalms -- indeed, all psalms -- is lyric, defined by C. Day Lewis as “a poem which expresses a single state of mind, a single mood, or sets two simple moods one against the other” (3). This is not to say that there is complete singlemindedness of purpose in the psalms and no emotional movement from verse to verse, but rather that the speaker of the poem seeks to state to God what his position is -- what his emotional and physical state is at that moment in time.

Fourth -- and this characteristic is much more specific to these seven psalms -- there are common rhetorical strategies at work in each of the penitential psalms. Not every one of these seven psalms employs each of these strategies, but each is common to at least some of them, and a loose structure which organizes the psalm emerges: first, a plea that God be merciful, or a statement that the possibility of God’s mercy exists opens each of the psalms. For example, in the opening verses of three of the penitential psalms:<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In this chapter, I quote from The Jerusalem Bible for this general discussion of the psalms. Most of the quotations from the psalms in this study will be historically based, and I will quote from the appropriate Bible -- Vulgate (and Douay-Rheims), Coverdale, and King James -- for the corresponding time period. See my notes to chapter 2 for more on this matter, but for this more general discussion of psalms and psalmody it seems most appropriate to work from a strong, general, scholarly translation of the Bible.

Yahweh, do not punish me in your rage,  
or reprove me in the heat of anger. (6:1)

Happy the man whose fault is forgiven,  
whose sin is blotted out;  
Happy the man whom Yahweh accuses of no guilt,  
whose spirit is incapable of deceit! (38:1-2)

Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness,  
in your great tenderness wash away my faults;  
Wash me clean of my guilt,  
purify me from my sin. (51:1-2)

Each of these opening verses is followed by a “statement of condition” in which the sinner lays bare his present emotional or physical state, both literally and figuratively “where he is.” This can take various forms: a description of physical ailments, an acknowledgment of enemies, an admission of personal grief.

I am worn out with groaning,  
every night I drench my pillow  
and soak my bed with tears;  
my eye is wasted with grief,  
I have grown old with enemies all around me. (6:6-7)

All the time I kept silent, my bones were wasting away  
with groans, day in, day out;  
day and night your hand  
lay heavy on me;  
my heart grew parched as stubble  
summer drought. (32:3-4)

My loins are burned up with fever,  
there is no soundness in my flesh:  
numbed and crushed and overcome,  
my heart groans, I moan aloud. (38:7-8)

Ashes are the bread I eat,  
what I drink I lace with tears,  
under your furious anger,  
since you only picked me up to throw me down;

my days dwindle away like a shadow,  
I am as dry as hay. (102:9-11)

An enemy who hounds me  
to crush me into the dust,  
forces me to dwell in darkness  
like the dead of long ago;  
my spirit fails me  
and my heart is full of fear. (143:3-4)

The speaker then makes a confession to God:

At last I admitted to you that I had sinned;  
no longer concealing my guilt,  
I said, "I will go to Yahweh  
and confess my fault." (32:5)

And now my fall is upon me,  
there is no relief from my pains;  
yes, I admit my guilt,  
I am sorry for having sinned. (38:17-18)

Following these verses is one of two responses: either the speaker is assured that God has heard him and he will be saved, or he enters into a kind of contract with God, reminding Him of His promise to save.

Away from me, all you evil men!  
For Yahweh has heard the sound of my weeping;  
Yahweh has heard my petition,  
Yahweh will answer my prayer. (6:8-9)

Many torments await the wicked,  
but grace enfolds the man who trusts in Yahweh.

Rejoice in Yahweh,  
exult, you virtuous,  
shout for joy, all upright hearts. (32:10-11)

Save me from death, God my Savior,  
and my tongue will acclaim your righteousness;  
Lord, open my lips,



and my mouth will speak out your praise. (51:14-15)

Thus the penitential psalms have a general movement from despair to an acceptance of and a commitment to God's will, one that corresponds to the threefold process of penance: contrition, confession, satisfaction. This is only a general movement, however, and each psalm handles the movement somewhat differently. A psalm might emphasize the contrition or the confession (or simply present despair without any motivating factor), and treat the satisfaction in various ways: the psalmist proclaiming what he will do if God forgives him, assuring himself that God has heard him, or entreating God to hear him.

This general movement is important to emphasize in that it offers poets a model of organization in their own paraphrases and lyrics. One poet might emphasize contrition, another satisfaction, and if the entire cycle of penitential psalms is paraphrased (as with the medieval poets and Wyatt), then the cycle of contrition-satisfaction-contrition can be exploited. Considering the structure of the penitential psalm (or psalms) can help determine why a poet chooses one model of organization over another.

## VI

The final issue of background is the place of the penitential psalms in Christian worship. They have a long history as both private and public devotions, importantly as a group rather than as individual psalms. Pope Innocent III ordered them to be prayed in Lent, and under Pope Pius X they became part of the Friday ferial (regular day -- weekday -- as opposed to festal, or holy day) office in Lent. In English monasteries from about 950 onward, the penitential psalms were recited as part of the canonical hour of Matins, and

the complete set was recited after the hour of Prime in the Divine Office. The history of their liturgical use is fairly complicated,<sup>12</sup> but given their recitation in the Divine Office, any religious in medieval England would have had daily familiarity with the penitential psalms, and doubtless this practice was familiar to laypeople as well.

Related to the issue of their use is the purpose of that use. The sacrament of penance is not directly related to the poetry under consideration, but how penance developed does have direct relevance to the kinds of poetry that devotional writers produced. To write even a small chapter of the history of penance is beyond the scope of this study.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, one feature of the development of penitential practice worth

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<sup>12</sup> As early as the eighth century, St. Benedict of Aniane established the recitation of psalms in addition to those that would already be a part of the propers of the various hours of the Divine Office. By the tenth century, this had become universal practice in European monasteries, and the psalms recited came to be the fifteen gradual psalms, if in fact they were not from the start. (The gradual psalms [Psalms 115-130] are so called because they are believed to have been recited by pilgrims processing -- or ascending, hence "gradual," from the Latin *graduus*, "ascent" -- to the temple in Jerusalem. They too are one of the major groups of psalms, along with the penitential psalms.)

In 817, a meeting called by the Emperor of Aachen established that the penitential psalms were to be said for the benefactors of a church and for the dead. This practice was already established at Benedict's monastery of Monte Cassino, where they were recited with the litany following Vespers.

In English monasteries, the penitential psalms were divided into three groups, the first three recited for the sake of themselves, "pro se ipso": the fourth and fifth for the king, queen, and other familiars; and the last two for the departed.

For a more complete history, Edmund Bishop's article "On the Origin of the Prymer," in The Prymer, or Lay Folks Prayer Book (London, 1885) should be consulted, especially xv - xxii.

<sup>13</sup> Oscar D. Watkin's highly detailed study A History of Penance (New York, 1961) would be the place to start a serious study of penance. Watkins lays out the varied and

considering is the increasing privatization of penance. Of the three steps of penance -- contrition, satisfaction, and absolution -- satisfaction was originally highly public, with the penitent publicly repenting and being brought back into the community of the faithful.<sup>14</sup> In the early Church, penance was also exceedingly harsh, so that the penitents' lives were constricted even after they had been reconciled to the community,<sup>15</sup> to the point that many faithful understandably chose to put off any penance until as close to the moment of death as possible (Watkins 752; Tentler 5-6).

As the Eastern Empire converted to Christianity, however, the rigor of the early Church's discipline gave way to a loosening of standards. This was in part because many people converted for non-religious reasons -- because it may have been politically or socially expedient to do so, whether or not they had any real interest in Christianity

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numerous documents of Scripture and the Church Fathers, and well as the practices of the many early Churches to explain the development of penitential practices from the year 450 up to 1250.

More specifically time-bound is Thomas Tentler's Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation (Princeton, 1977), focusing primarily on the fifteenth century; its introductory chapter, however, "The Historical Background" (3-27) is a concise, useful overview of penitential practices, roughly covering the same ground as Watkins.

<sup>14</sup> Tertullian (150-230), for example, describes the requisite sackcloth and ashes for penitents wishing to be reconciled and readmitted to their congregations, their restricted diets, their lamentations, their prostration before the presbyters, and their kneeling before the entire congregation. Their actual confessions also may have been public (Watkins 116).

<sup>15</sup> Tentler, for example, notes that following the third century, the reconciled penitent could not be admitted to the priesthood; could not contract marriage; could not enjoy conjugal rights if he or she were married; could not engage too actively in worldly affairs; and could not perform military service (5).

(Watkins 474). One feature of this loosening was a gradual acceptance of private confession.<sup>16</sup> Eventually the practice developed by which the penance itself became private.

In England specifically, the long-established Celtic system of private penance was officially sanctioned by Theodore, who became archbishop of Canterbury in 668. This system, developed independently from the Roman system by the churches of Ireland and Scotland, had three recurring motifs: no public penance connected with the liturgy; no evidence of any kind of public reconciliation; the administration of penance by a priest rather than a required bishop. Further evidence of the Celtic preference for private penance is the great number of penitentials that developed, guidebooks that detailed various sins and their corresponding penances, all without public censure. When the penance was completed, the penitent was absolved, without the need for a bishop to welcome officially the sinner back into the Church (Watkins 650-54).

In addition, in England the growth of a system of recurring penance took place. Regular confession had long been the tradition in monastic communities, in order for a

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<sup>16</sup> The thirty-fourth canon of St. Basil's canonical epistles (374-75) declares, for example, that there be no public confession for certain sins (in the particular case on which this canon was based, adultery) and further points out that this canon is based on already accepted practice (Watkins 323).

Likewise, both Origen (182/85-251/54) Chrysostum (c.347-404/07) allow for a number of different modes of penance, all of them sufficient for effecting forgiveness. Origen allows baptism, martyrdom, almsgiving, forgiveness of others, conversion of sinners, love, and penance, here understood to be private confession to a priest (Watkins 137); Chrysostum allows contrition, humility, almsgiving, prayer, and forgiveness of others (Watkins 336).

religious to achieve the spiritual perfection that the monasticism sought to create. But recurring confession among the laity was a new development, partly because England in the early Middle Ages was still very much a “missionary region” whose flock of faithful needed close monitoring. This system eventually spread to the rest of Europe, carried by English missionaries and scholars such as Boniface and Alcuin (Watkins 654-56).

Tentler notes that this shift from public to private penance coincided with a shift from satisfaction to contrition as the most important part of penance<sup>17</sup> -- “that pardon comes with sorrow proceeding from the love of God” -- a shift already in place as early as the tenth century, advocated by Abelard in the twelfth, and taken up by various churchmen, notably Peter Lombard (19).

This shift is extremely important for the poets under consideration here. As penance moved from its emphasis on the performance of satisfying works (an issue taken up even more strongly by Reformation theologians) to inward sorrow for sin, we find an emerging interest in the psychological state of the sinner, who is more and more expected to reflect on his sins and use them to define his relationship with God.

As it happens, this is precisely what the psalmist in the penitential psalms does as well, and in reading the medieval paraphrases, we find poets using the rhetorical strategies

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<sup>17</sup> Tentler traces this development from the acceptance of deathbed confessions which came down from the early Church. Because early penances were exceedingly harsh, many penitents naturally waited until death was imminent before confessing (6). Authorities as early as the tenth century argued for the superiority of contrition over satisfaction, because the Church, in accepting deathbed confessions, implicitly held that internal sorrow could substitute for outward penance (19).

needed to allow the reader to do the kind of self-reflection these psalms demand. Before that, however, we must consider how these psalms were read in the late classical and medieval periods. Exegetes read them in various ways, all of which helped create the rhetorical strategies that medieval and Renaissance poets employed in paraphrasing. It is to these issues that we now turn.

## **Chapter 2**

### **READING THE PENITENTIAL PSALMS:**

#### **THE CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL TRADITION**

The purpose of exegesis is to offer ways in which the Bible could be read by its many readers: the priest organizing a sermon, the monastic writing his treatise, the layperson meditating in her daily office.<sup>1</sup> The Book of Psalms posed special challenges in that the psalms first present biblical history, since the Bible itself is largely narrative and provides a context for this kind of reading. Second, the psalms present the direct communication of lyric poetry -- here, the utterance of the psalmist. Classical and medieval exegetes accordingly accepted a number of possible interpretations of the psalms. The penitential psalms specifically were Davidic history, in that their headings suggest events from his life; they were personal reflections on sin and penitence, spoken by the psalmist -- a speaker who might be David, Christ, or the reader; and in laying out

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<sup>1</sup> For brevity's sake, I will use the standard "he" in referring to the reader of the psalms, with the understanding that I also mean "she." I make this point not merely to acknowledge my awareness of gendered language (and its limitations); many medieval readers were in fact women, and many devotional treatises were aimed specifically at a female audience. See, for example, Catherine Jones' introduction to Julian of Norwich (269) in Katharine M. Wilson's anthology Medieval Women Writers (Athens, 1984).

the theology of penitence, they were a vehicle by which exegetes could explain the tenets of Christian faith, as presented in the dramatic circumstances of the psalm. In no way were these purposes exclusive of each other, and they could, and did, coincide happily in one commentary.

What kind of explication a specific commentator brings to the forefront tells us not only what he thought most important, but also what his time found most important. Peter Lombard, for example, concerns himself with the psychology of sin, in an age where penance is moving toward sacramental status; Lyra's reliance on the psalms as history reflects his knowledge of Hebrew exegesis; Luther and Calvin, in their commentaries, explain the fundamentals of their Reformation theology. These explications in turn affect how the poets paraphrase the psalms as well, offering a vehicle to explain a particular age's faith. The various paraphrases of the penitential psalms, then, are not only lyric poems, but also theological documents, suited to the tenor of their times.

For my purposes, it is most important to consider the identity of the speaker in the psalms and their paraphrases. This question of the identity of the psalmist affects all other issues in how the psalms were read, and consequently how they were paraphrased. If the paraphrase treats the speaker as David, for example, then the psalms must be concerned with the historical events in his life, whereas if the paraphrase allows the reader to place himself in the context of the speaker, then the psalms will need to be more generalized so that he might do so. (Likewise, if the paraphraser has a specific reader in mind, he might provide contexts specific to that reader.) This chapter will accordingly trace how various classical and medieval exegetes read the issue of the speaker of the psalms, and how this



reading affected what else they thought important to emphasize: concerns of penitence, fidelity to historical fact, and the accommodation of other “voices” in the psalmist’s verses.

## II

To pursue these issues, the first question to raise is: who is the original author of the psalms and why were they written? Steven Croft’s study of psalm authorship examines how the psalms were used in the historical context of ancient Judaic worship, and he argues against Davidic authorship for the psalter as a whole, but nevertheless identifies all but one of the penitential psalms as “royal” psalms, based on their style. This suggests King David as the author of these psalms, or at least their speaker, though we must remember that author and speaker are not necessarily the same. Each of Croft’s analyses fits the penitential mode of these psalms into Judaic worship practices. For example, Psalm 7 is a king’s confession of innocence, and Croft argues that the psalm was used as a preparation of the king for the akito festival in Babylon, in which the king gives an account of the stewardship of the nation, and is re-invested as the king (90). Likewise, he argues that psalm 101 was used for the festival of the kingship, in which the king, having accounted for his stewardship of the nation, promises to show righteousness for the next coming year (101). On the other hand, Croft argues that psalm 130 was one of the gradual psalms, or psalms of “ascent” (which he lists as Psalms 120-23 and 130-31), sung by pilgrims on their way to great festivals (146-7). The penitential prayer here is for the

behalf of Israel; the verse “God will redeem us from all his iniquities” is not intended to mean literally “his” as David’s iniquities, but rather those of the Israelite nation (149).

Croft’s analysis points up various possibilities: the psalmist literally as David, or speaking for him as representative of the kingship, or of the Israelite nation as a whole. Concerning the whole of the psalter, Croft argues for multiple authorship. The Catholic Church has never taken any official stand on the issue of the authorship of the psalms. Various psalms are subtitled to suggest specific authorship -- psalm 6 of the penitential psalms, for example, is subtitled “a psalm of David” and psalm 31 is even more specific in its setting of a historical context: “A psalm of David, when he was pursued by Absolon.”<sup>2</sup> R. E. Murphy shows that the early Church fathers divided among themselves on this issue. Ambrose and Augustine both wrote that all of the psalms are Davidic: that is, they all can be read as David’s personal history (though this need not necessarily mean that the psalms were written by David), and the superscribed names on individual psalms are to be taken in a prophetic spirit. Origen, St. Hilary, Eusebius and Jerome argue for multiple authorship of the psalms. The official Catholic doctrine is that the Davidic authorship of the psalms which are cited as David’s cannot be denied nor verified (Drum 537).

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<sup>2</sup> The headings are taken from the Douay translation of the Vulgate Bible.

The psalm’s headings are a difficult point, as they are not standardized. The Douay Bible adds to standard headings, for example, identifying the penitential psalms as such. In addition, because the headings are sometimes considered part of the psalm verse (or a psalm verse in itself), the numbering of verses is not standard across the centuries.

Judging from the psalms' headings, the Septuagint seems to suggest that of the penitential psalms, all but 101 and 129 are Davidic in authorship. The translation of the original Greek from which the Vulgate was taken might be "of David" rather than the Vulgate "ipsi David," "unto David himself." Moreover, the subtitle "a psalm of David" might be taken to mean that David was the most excellent of psalmists, not necessarily the author; there is a long tradition of David's poetic talent outside of the Book of Psalms in the books of Samuel and Kings (Drum 538).

The Judaic tradition, then, clearly points toward possible multiple voices in the psalms. By writing commentaries that did not always assume a specific voice, the exegetes seemed to acknowledge that there could be an additional voice, probably already (if not officially) in place: the reader himself.

### III

The well-known four means for reading the Bible -- as history, allegory, anagogue, and tropology -- come from the fourteenth conference, or religious address, of John Cassian (c.365-c.435).

History embraces the knowledge of things which are past and which are perceptible . . . What follows is allegorical, because the things which actually happened are said to have prefigured another mystery . . . Anagogue climbs up from spiritual mysteries to the higher and more august secrets of heaven . . . Tropology is moral teaching designed for the amendment of life and for instruction in asceticism.

To demonstrate this, he gives the example of Jerusalem, historically the city of the Jews; allegorically the Church of Christ; anagogically the heavenly city of God; and tropologically “as the human soul” (160).<sup>3</sup>

Likewise, Origen gives a threefold way to read Scripture, citing the biblical precedent of Solomon in the Book of Proverbs (22:20-21): “Do thou pourtray [sic] them [divine doctrines] threefold in counsel and knowledge, that thou mayest answer the words of truth to those who question thee” (275). Origen separates man into body, soul, and spirit, each with its corresponding method of interpreting Scripture: a literal interpretation, the level of historical fact;<sup>4</sup> and two allegorical interpretations, one in which, as with

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<sup>3</sup> G. R. Evans’ first volume of her two-volume study The Language and Logic of the Bible (Cambridge, 1984) offers an excellent discussion of the four senses of the Bible, particularly of the anagogical and tropological senses, where exegetes’ examples often do not clarify precisely what they mean by these senses. Of anagogue, Evans writes: “The anagogical sense looks not only upwards to heavenly things, but also onwards to the future, from this world to the world to come” (116); of tropology, she writes that it involves “a deliberate ‘bending’” of meaning to make the Bible passage instructive about human behavior -- not so much the signification of words, but rather the moral precepts to be derived from them (118-119). See Evans 114-122.

A. J. Minnis in Medieval Theory of Authorship (London, 1984) also offers a discussion of the various senses of the Bible, drawing on Gregory in Moralia in Job as well as Cassian (33-34).

<sup>4</sup> Evans points to the much later fourteenth century Hugh of St. Victor on this point, with his metaphor of the historical sense being the foundation of a house upon which other interpretations rest. She writes: “Always an advocate of sound foundations, he [Hugh] insists that his pupils put the historical or literal sense first. He draws them an elaborate picture of the ‘house’ of exposition. The foundation is laid in the earth. Its stones are not carefully cut or polished, but chosen for their solidity. Upon the foundation is raised the superstructure, where all is made level . . . The historical or literal sense remains the lowest [level], but it is the basis upon which all other interpretations must rest, for the varied stones of the spiritual sense would not fit together without it. Hugh’s description is a particularly graphic one, but this ‘architectural’ image seemed to a number of mediaeval

Cassian, the words prefigure another meaning, and the other in which Scripture specifically foreshadows the world to come.

These various ways to read the Bible essentially sort themselves out to two that need concern this study: the literal, or historical sense, and the non-literal, which would include the higher “spiritual” senses. The historical sense of the penitential psalms poses certain problems. These psalms might suggest a narrative, but they do not tell a story the way that, say, the Book of Genesis does with its narrative history of the Israelite people. Like much (but not all) lyric poetry, the psalms exist “suspended” in time -- not necessarily as part of a larger narrative, but an interlude in a narrative. The psalmist may invoke a larger history, but the psalm itself exists, not as a statement of what has happened, or what will happen, but what is happening: the psalm is a statement of condition rather than a statement of events.<sup>5</sup> How medieval commentators dealt with this issue in reading the psalms could, and did, create strikingly divergent interpretations of the penitential psalms, depending on which of the means for reading the Bible they chose to, or chose not to, develop.

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scholars to express exactly both the overall unity of the different senses and their relation to one another” (67). See chapter 5 on the historical sense of the Bible in the first volume of her two-volume study The Language and the Logic of the Bible.

<sup>5</sup> I owe the excellent concept “statement of condition” to Rumer Godden in her introduction to Carmen Bernos de Gasztold’s collection of religious lyrics The Creatures’ Choir (New York, 1976). Here, Godden writes that de Gasztold’s poems “are not prayers, in the sense that a prayer is a plea . . .”; to borrow her phrasing, the psalmist makes a statement of his situation, his circumstances -- what might be called his “problem.” See de Gasztold and Godden 66.

## IV

Augustine (354-430) laid the groundwork for all psalm exegesis with his most influential commentary, important in that it became the most cited work by later exegetes. Augustine read the psalms in terms of their Davidic history, personal utterance, and the theological points they raise, sometimes all in one verse.<sup>6</sup> By emphasizing various levels of meaning embodied in Scripture, he offered later exegetes and poets the means and encouragement to also write works of their own that operate on various levels in a similar fashion.

As Beryl Smalley points out, Augustine generally emphasizes the spiritual sense of the Word over the literal, though he makes use of both, and steers a middle course between the two (23). This is particularly noticeable in his allegorical readings, in which a psalm verse uses an image, simile, or metaphor which has in itself no apparent connection with penitence and thus demands explication. In Psalm 102, for example, "For my days are

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<sup>6</sup> In Book 2, chapter 10 of On Christian Doctrine, Augustine writes: "There are two reasons why things written [in the Bible] are not understood; they are obscured either by unknown or by ambiguous signs. For signs are either literal or figurative. They are called literal when they are used to designate those things on account of which they were instituted; thus we say bos [ox] {Augustine's addition} when we mean an animal of a herd because all men using the Latin language call it by that name just as we do. Figurative signs occur when that thing which we designate by a literal sign is used to signify something else; thus we say 'ox' and by that syllable understand that animal which is ordinarily designated by that word, but again by that animal we understand an Evangelist, as is signified in the Scripture, according to the interpretation of the Apostle, when it says, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn" (Deut. 25:4) (43). As we shall see, Augustine accepts various possible range of meanings in Biblical text, both a literal -- what the words are commonly taken to mean -- and a figurative, in which the word signifies a deeper meaning. He uses this principle throughout his psalm commentary. For a further discussion of Augustinian signs, see pp. 34-36, Book 2, chapters 1 through 4.

consumed away like smoke”<sup>7</sup> is interpreted as the puffing up of pride (5:6), and verses 6 and 7, “I am become like a pelican in the wilderness, and like an owl among ruined walls. I have watched, and am even as it were a sparrow, that sitteth alone upon the housetop” are read thus:

Behold three birds and three places; may the Lord grant us what they mean, and that ye may hear profitably what is said for your good . . . Let us see these three things from the office of his steward. Hath such a man come among those who are not Christians? He is a pelican in the wilderness. Hath he come among those who were Christians, and have relapsed? He is an owl in the ruined walls; for he forsaketh not even the darkness of those who dwell in night, he wishes to gain even these. Hath he come among such as are Christians dwelling in a house, not as if they believed not, or as if they had let go what they had believed, but walking lukewarmly in what they believe? The sparrow crieth unto them, not in the wilderness, because they are Christians; nor in the ruined walls, because they have not relapsed; but because they are within the roof; under the roof rather, because they are under the flesh (5:8-9).

Augustine explicates a specifically Christian meaning in a verse that does not readily provide one. The psalmist cannot literally be a pelican, but can be a Christian “in the wilderness” like a pelican.

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<sup>7</sup> The translators of the classical and medieval biblical commentators frequently differ in translating the individual verses and passages from the Bible. Even where different commentators clearly used the Vulgate Bible, individual biblical quotations may vary from translation to translation. I, of course, will quote directly from the translation of any individual commentator.

If I have translated the medieval commentator myself, I will render biblical passages into English from the Douay Bible, the English translation of the Vulgate.

There were a number of English late medieval and Renaissance translations of the Bible. For the sake of uniformity, I will use the Psalter from the Book of Common Prayer (taken from the Great Bible) for translations if none is given; after 1612, I will use the King James Bible if no translation is given.

Taken out of context and standing alone, many of these verses seem to demand allegorical readings, but just as often, Augustine has more context to work with than they might suggest. Several, but not all, of the penitential psalms are given headings that relate directly to David, assuming that he is the author; the psalm then proceeds to relate its content to the historical events in his life. For example, Psalm 143 was written, according to its heading, “to David himself, when his son was pursuing him.” Augustine writes:

We know from the Book of Kings that this happened: that Absolon arose in hostility to his father; that he waged war against him not only civil, but even domestic war: that David, not evilly despairing, but reverently humbled, received the discipline at the Lord’s hand, endured the medicine, not returning evil for evil; but had a heart prepared to follow the Lord’s will (6:279).

Typically, Augustine may follow this historical context closely, especially in interpreting the theme of the psalm for which it works particularly well. In Psalm 51, for example, Augustine reads the verse “For, behold, in iniquities I was conceived,” in terms of David being a son of Adam (2:374). Here Augustine uses the literal sense to point to a spiritual one (Smalley 24), and this offers a link between what is happening around the psalm with the moral interpretation which can be derived from the psalm.

And if the verse does not directly offer the life of David as a context, Augustine may create one. Psalm 38’s heading is “a Psalm to David himself, on the remembrance of the Sabbath”; with remembrance as his starting point, Augustine points out that there is no Scriptural episode in which David calls the Sabbath to remembrance.

For it is with groaning that he ‘calls it to recollection.’ You have both heard already when the Psalm was read, and you will now hear it when we shall go over it, how great is his groaning, his mourning, his tears, his misery . . . Such an one then let us understand here too, calling the sabbath



to remembrance, (viz.) some mourner or other: and would that we were ourselves that 'some one or other!' (2:70).

This passage points up an even more important point for Augustine's commentaries: starting with David, and moving outward. It is important to note here that Augustine's commentaries were intended to be sermons, as he identifies them himself, meant to be heard by an audience.<sup>8</sup> Though David may be the central figure of the psalm, the sermon's audience, the individual sinner, is also meant to be the "I" speaker of the psalms, identifying with David as a sinner; Augustine himself makes this identification in his Confessions.<sup>9</sup> Thus the psalms not only have historical but personal meaning, and Augustine freely shifts from one intended "voice" to another. Smalley (24-25) points out that the medieval scholar was, in fact, encouraged to create this kind of identification with events and historical figures in the Bible, which he shared with the laity.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> In the opening of the commentary on Psalm 38, Augustine refers to the chanting of this psalm which has just occurred, and opens with its connection to the Gospel lesson. Clearly Augustine is placing his commentary in a liturgical context.

<sup>9</sup> Reading Psalm 4, he writes: "When I called upon thee, thou heardest me, O God of my justice; thou didst enlarge me, when I was in tribulation. Have mercy upon me, O Lord, and hearken unto my prayer. I would they [the Manichees, with whom he is staying] had heard me without my knowing thereof, lest otherwise, they might have thought that I had spoken so in regard of them, because I should neither have said the same words nor in the same manner, if I had thought they either saw or heard me; not yet, if I had done so, would they have understood how I spake with myself, and to myself before thee, out of the innermost feeling of my soul. For I quaked with fear, and again I boiled high with hope and with vehement joy in thy mercy, O Father" (236).

<sup>10</sup> Smalley's examples point out how closely the medieval scholar could be encouraged to identify with biblical figures and events. The Rule of Saint Benedict, for example, forbids the reading of the Book of Kings and the Heptateuch in the evenings, lest the readers be overexcited. Likewise, Gregory felt himself to be particularly suited to

In Psalm 6, the sinner is the central figure, and with the emphasis on God as Judge in the commentary the psalm's historical context is logically the Day of Judgment. The commentary lays out the process by which a penitent may be judged favorably. One must recognize sin, and amend it, as in the verse "I have labored in my groaning; I wash each night my couch."

That is here called a couch, where the sick and weak soul rests, that is, in bodily gratification and in every worldly pleasure . . . 'I will drench my bed with tears' . . . Although, 'I will drench,' is something more than 'I will wash': since any thing may be washed superficially, but drenching penetrates to the more inward parts; which here signifies weeping of the very bottom of the heart (1:39).

Likewise, of Psalm 32 Augustine writes:

This Psalm is called a Psalm of Understanding. The first understanding then is this, to know thyself a sinner. The understanding next following is, that when through faith thou hast begun to do good works by love, thou impute not this to thine own strength, but to the grace of God (1:287).

Augustine directly addresses the listener, and everything following this offers us a model by which we can understand penitence.

Though the central figure of this commentary is clearly the general sinner,

Augustine sees Christ as a model for the sinner's own contrition as well:

See now the Lord Jesus Christ teacheth this, 'My Soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death': and 'Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from Me.' See, he sheweth the human will. But see the right heart; 'Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.' Do thou then the same . . . (1:304).

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comment on the Book of Job -- he being equally prone to sickness, fevers and indigestion. See Smalley 24.

Presenting Christ as a model is important in reading Augustine's commentary. Many verses of the psalms (and entire psalms themselves) invite Christological readings in which David is seen as a forerunner to Christ, presented as a proper model for the sinner. A. J. Minnis argues, in fact, that the prefigurative reading of Christ in the psalms is one of Augustine's main contributions to the field of exegesis, drawing on an already rich tradition of David as a forerunner of Christ (45). In Psalm 38, for example, the sinner lists afflictions which Augustine takes to be physical manifestations of spiritual sickness. At verse 9, "All my desire is before Thee," the psalm begins to turn toward hopefulness. According to Augustine, the psalmist desires to be reclaimed by God; knowing that he is not reclaimed, he adds "and my groaning is not hid from Thee." The comparison of the sinner to Christ is made most clear in the commentary on verse 11, "My lovers and neighbors drew nigh and stood over against me; and my neighbors stood far off." The neighbors are the apostles standing far off at the Crucifixion.

Do thou suffer in Christ's suffering: for Christ, as it were, sinned in thy infirmity. For just now he spoke of thy sins, as if speaking in His own Person, and called them His own. For He said 'from the face of My sins,' though they were not His sins. As therefore He willed our sins should be His own, on account of our being His Body, let us also regard His sufferings as our own, on account of His being our Head (1:85).

The rest of the verses offer clear identification with Christ -- verse 17, for example, "For I am prepared for thy scourges" recalls Christ's Passion, and also scourges as a means of penance.

Psalm 143 also invites reading the psalm on various levels. Augustine praises David for admitting his sin and subduing himself to God, but continues:

Thus praiseworthy was that David: but we must recognize here another David, truly 'strong in hand,' which is the explanation of David, even our Lord Jesus Christ.

. . . Let us seek then in this Psalm our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, announcing Himself beforehand in His prophecy, and foretelling what should happen at this time by things which were done long ago (6:279).

In psalm 38, too, Christological readings are possible. In discussing verse 6, "Neither is there any rest in my bones, from the face of my sin," Augustine writes that though Christ was without sin, "it is exceedingly harsh and inconsistent that that Psalm should not relate to Christ, where we have his Passion as clearly laid open as if it were being read to us out of the Gospel" (2:74).

This theological point occasionally poses problems: if Christ is sinless, why does he speak as a sinner? Augustine explains:

But how could He Who had no sin say, 'There is no rest in my bones, from the face of my sin.' The meaning therefore of necessity constrains us to recognize here the whole and entire person of Christ, that is, both the Head and the Body. For when Christ speaks, He speaks sometimes in the Person of the Head only; Which is the Saviour Himself, born of the Virgin Mary; sometimes in the person of His whole Body, which is the Holy Church, dispersed through all the world. And we ourselves are in His Body, if, that is, our faith be sincere in Him; and our hope be certain, and our charity fervent (2:74).

Reminding us that Christ speaks as His Head links Him to us, God as Man, who died for our sins; and reminding us Christ speaks as His Body links Him further to us -- we are His Body -- exhorting us to model ourselves after Him. In this way Augustine captures a subtle play between Christ and the individual sinner, and the listener may place several personae into the voice of the psalmist.

Finally, Augustine may set up interplay between David, Christ, and the sinner as well. In psalm 51, for example, he comments on verse 16, “Because if Thou hadst willed sacrifice, I would have given it surely”: “David was living at the time when sacrifices of victim animals were offered to God, and he saw these times that were to be. Do we not perceive ourselves in these words? Those sacrifices were figurative, foretelling the One Saving Sacrifice” (2:385) -- Christ’s crucifixion. In this way Augustine freely moves between David and Christ, the Old Testament and the New, and concludes with an admonition to the audience to model themselves after these two: “The Psalm, in the name of Christ, is ended, though not as we would, yet as we could” (2:386).

By encouraging the listener to identify with various figures in the voice of the psalmist, Augustine can use his commentary to make theological points for the listener about penitence appropriate to the psalm’s content. Sometimes he does nothing more than simply explicate a moral sense for a psalm verse. Psalm 142, for example, examines the issue of faith versus good works and its implications for our relationship with God. Reading verse 10, “I have called to mind the days of old, I have meditated upon all Thy works,” Augustine points out that Christ’s body is speaking -- metaphorically, the members of the Church -- but more specifically all those who have been “justified by His grace . . . plainly because Thou hast made all things good, and nothing would have stood fast, which was not established by Thee” (6:287-8). God’s grace makes redemption, even good works, possible; in quoting Ephesians 2:9-10, “Meditate upon the works of His hands, not of works, lest any should boast; for we are His workmanship, created in Jesus Christ unto good works,” Augustine sets up a relationship that requires God’s grace

working in us. We choose only in choosing evil. As Augustine puts it, “Think not then that thou thyself doest any thing, save in so far as thou art evil” (6:288), but more important is the fact that he is directly addressing the listener, using the psalm as a basis for his moral guidance.

At other times, he uses the historical context to point toward a moral context. The commentary on psalm 51 (“Miserere Mei”) is appropriately about the conflict between justice and mercy, and the first verse sets up this exploration: “Have pity upon me, O God, after Thy great mercy.” Augustine drives home the point that David knew his wrongdoing, and therefore is in even greater need of God’s mercy.

What then? Thou askest mercy; shall sin unpunished abide? Let David answer, let them that have fallen answer, answer with David, and say, No, Lord, no sin of mine shall be unpunished; I know the justice of Him, Whose mercy I shall ask: it shall not be unpunished, but for this reason I will not that Thou punish me, because I punish my sin: for this reason I beg Thou pardon, because I acknowledge my sin (2:371).

Note that we are invited to “answer with David,” and we too can “acknowledge our sin,” a direct quotation from the psalm itself (51:3). From here Augustine returns again to Christ, Who stands as the intermediary for God’s mercy, dying for our sins, taking them on as His own, as Augustine earlier points out. David thus faces an Old Testament Judge; we sinners face a merciful God.

The contrasts between David, and by extension all sinners, and Christ are continued in such verses as “For, behold in iniquities I was conceived; and in sins hath my mother nourished me in the womb.” David was conceived in sin, Christ was not. But the real crux of Augustine’s argument comes in his commentary on verse 6, “For, behold,

truth Thou hast loved: uncertain and hidden things of Thy wisdom, Thou hast manifested to me.” Augustine writes: “Thou pardonest one confessing, but only if he punisheth himself: so there are preserved mercy and truth: mercy because man is set free; truth, because sin is punished” (2:376). Penance, recognizing one’s sin and making satisfaction for it, is punishment that is self-inflicted, not inflicted by God. Thus Augustine is logically concerned with David’s own recognition of his adultery, and by extension our recognition of our sins. In this way the interplay between Christ and David as two models for contrition allow the sinner to consider his own relationship with God, to “enter,” as it were, into the psalms himself.

Augustine does not identify or group the seven penitential psalms together and examine penance in any organized way. Yet his commentaries do examine the appropriate issues tied to penance, and encourage the listener to consider his penitence in light of various biblical figures, especially Christ. Loosely organized, discursive, and embodying multiple levels of meaning, Augustine’s commentaries point the way for later commentators’ treatment of the same material.

## V

Cassiodorus (c.490-c.585) follows the Augustinian model fairly closely in his psalm commentary, acknowledging his debt to him, but with some important differences. Cassiodorus does not treat the seven penitential psalms as a unit, but he does acknowledge and identify them as such; clearly the tradition is in place by the sixth century. In addition, Cassiodorus’s commentary is not intended as a set of sermons, and he is much more

organized in organizing and covering the material than Augustine.<sup>11</sup> Each commentary has three parts: a “division” of the psalm, a laying out of its organization; an “explanation,” a verse-by-verse commentary; and a “conclusion,” which sums up the main themes of the psalm. Because of this careful attention to organization, Cassiodorus is able to examine the process of penance that each individual psalm presents.

Like Augustine, Cassiodorus relies on allegorical readings of specific verses, using them to address what he sees as the major themes of each psalm. This point is especially important when considering that Cassiodorus states that David is clearly the sole author of the psalms. One might then expect his readings to reflect a strong Davidic context, each one dealing with biblical history, but somewhat surprisingly they do not. Though there are appropriate Davidic references, the psalmist is assumed to be a general sinner, and his commentary is directed to the end of allowing the reader to “enter” into the psalms. Smalley suggests that Cassiodorus’s concern with preserving a dying Latin culture and patristic thought against the barbarism of the late sixth century may well have attracted him to the spiritual meaning of the psalms over the literal (31-32), which would give him more freedom in dealing with the moral and spiritual issues the psalms raise; in fact, this is

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<sup>11</sup> It is probable that Cassiodorus wrote his exegesis for his monks; the psalm commentaries were written some time between the 540s and the early 550s, and Cassiodorus established his monastery in 555 (Walsh 1.3-4). However, P. G. Walsh suggests that Cassiodorus had a larger audience as well: “Clearly his primary purpose was to encourage Christians in the west to study the significance of the psalms as the divinely prophetic proclamation of the future dispensation” (1.10).



precisely what he does. The issue Cassiodorus raises most fully in the penitential psalms is the opposition between justice and mercy.

Like Augustine, Cassiodorus uses historical context to point to a moral one. For example, Psalm 6:7, “Every night I wash my bed,” follows Augustine:

Should you seek to take this literally, he was right to wash with tears the bed which he polluted at night. But one realises the impossibility of such abundance of tears as was said to have washed not only his face but also his bed. So we should better interpret bed as the physical delights in which we relax with indolent pleasure as though in our bed (1:95).

Likewise, “bones” in verse 3 (“Heal me, Lord, for all my bones are troubled”) is interpreted to be mental courage, for “when it fails, our energy slips entirely away, just as when bones are shattered they totally cease to contain the body” (1:93).

Thus Cassiodorus may use an apparent Davidic context. More often, however, his psalmist is the general sinner, and there are Christological readings as well. The heading of Psalm 51 refers to David’s sin with Bathsheba, but Cassiodorus, like Augustine, reads the psalm as a foreshadowing of Christ’s Passion. The speaker of verse 3, “Have mercy on me, O God,” is assumed to be David, but Cassiodorus further explains that

God removed the Creator of the world from heaven, and clothed its Founder in an earthly body; He made coequal with mortal man Him who remains equal to the Father in eternity, and for us clothed the Lord of the world in the form of a servant, so that Bread itself endured hunger, the Fountain of life thirsted, Strength was weakened, and all-powerful Life suffered death. In short, what greater mercy of heart could there be than that for us the Creator should be created, the Controller should be the servant, the Redeemer sold, the Exalter humbled, the Life-giver slain? This was the great mercy of heart that the holy man [David] could not explain, but he readily believed that he was absolved through mercy which he already knew freed the human race (1:495).

Thus David is paralleled to Christ, and Cassiodorus may explore the issue of God's mercy (which David here already assumes he has) through the sacrifice of Christ.

In Psalm 37, Cassiodorus presents one unusual psalmist: Job. The patient tone of the psalm and its emphasis on the physical manifestation of spiritual sickness easily lend themselves to this interpretation, and Cassiodorus seizes upon this from the outset: "He [the psalmist] is pierced by the pain of wounds, he oozes with worms, and in addition he is wounded by reproaches. Besieged by these numerous disasters he retains total health solely by the vigor of his faith" (1:377), and states he will quote from the Book of Job throughout the commentary to show how the two texts impinge on each other.

Job may seem to be an odd choice for Cassiodorus in that he, unlike David, committed no apparent sin, unless one considers that it allows Cassiodorus to emphasize maintaining constant faith in God. First, Cassiodorus observes that anger is not attributable to God; the wrath of "Rebuke me, not, Lord, in thy wrath" (verse 1) is wholly just vengeance. Of verse 5, "For my iniquities are gone over my head: as a heavy burden they are become to me," Cassiodorus writes: "To obtain good will a third type of approach is made. He does not claim that he is afflicted unjustly, but appears to ascribe his suffering to his sins" (1:379-80). The real crux of the issue, however, comes in verse 16, "For in thee, Lord, have I hoped: thou wilt hear me Lord my God." Cassiodorus points out that though Job has numbered his physical ailments, his faith never wavered. Verse 18, "For I am ready for my scourges, and my sorrow is constantly before me" points up Job's sin of questioning God's ways, and his confession prepares him for punishment. Cassiodorus writes:

If his grief for his sin had been trifling, the radiance of this great confession would by no means have been evident. The virtue of perfect patience is revealed in two ways. First, we proclaim ourselves to the Lord as sinners; as Job says in his book, 'I have sinned. What shall I do to thee, O keeper of men?' Note the holy man's proclamation, his true confession, which did not deprive him of life but redoubled the joys of salvation. But to ensure that you would not think that this proclamation alone could suffice for our confessions, he added: 'And I will think for my own sin'; in other words, "If you grant it I shall perform the things necessary to erase my sin; that is, let me weep and give alms, and you will cleanse me from the sin I committed, if I observe your commands" (1:385).

Several elements of the penitential process are presented here: the admitting of sin, the accepting of punishment, and the resolving to actively do better, by showing forth faith by good works.

Cassiodorus emphasizes the assurance of God's mercy to a greater degree than does Augustine. Throughout the psalmist is certain of his guilt but also calm and assured of his salvation. Cassiodorus makes this point himself in his commentary on Psalm 50: the first verse, "Have mercy on me," is read thus: "What a marvellous beginning! By saying to the Judge: 'Have mercy on me,' he is seen to have removed the need for a trial. These words are not disputed, but always heard in an atmosphere of calm" (1:495). In the same commentary Cassiodorus notes the rhetorical strategy used by the psalmist throughout:

We must remember that in this psalm the status of the argument is that called 'concession'; in this the defendant does not defend his action by argument, but simply asks pardon. There is no doubt that this can be seen as a general rule in the penitential psalms (1:494).

Cassiodorus, a civil servant for much of his life, may have naturally been disposed to use terms such as "defendant" for the psalmist. In fact, Cassiodorus views the penitence laid out in the psalms as a legal proceeding, and borrows its terminology as appropriate. The

more important underlying point is that here there is no historical sense of the psalm as biblical history at all. Instead the “trial” takes place in the here and now.

Psalm 6, for example, is read in terms of a rhetorical trial of sorts. The psalmist “makes the Judge well-disposed to him” by his prayer; God “listens as Judge, is informed as Examiner, learns the facts as if they were unknown to Him” (1:89). The calm tone of the psalmist results, at least in part, because his guilt is a foregone conclusion, and though individual verses may prompt discussions of the psalmist’s emotional state, the real emphasis lies in God’s response to the verses. Like Augustine, Cassiodorus uses the psalm as a means to discuss theological issues, primarily the issue of God’s justice versus His mercy. Commenting on Psalm 6, verse 5, “Turn and deliver my soul: O save me, for thy mercy’s sake,” Cassiodorus examines how the two contrary qualities exist in God:

When God is told: ‘Turn,’ a relaxation of His vengeance is being requested, so that His judgment may not demand the punishments which we owe . . . ‘Deliver my soul,’ that is, from the imminent punishment owed to sinners; for He diverts us from us the punishment which we have incurred, when His kindly indulgence remits it . . .

‘Save me for thy mercy’s sake.’ How splendidly this plea unfolds in words both apt and profitable! He seeks to be saved not according to his merits but through divine mercy. Pardon is more easily obtained when hope is implanted in that mercy (1:94).

Cassiodorus’s commentary, detached and rational, seems designed to provide an intellectual basis for penance.

Together, Cassiodorus and Augustine’s exegesis served two important functions. First, it provided a basis for later penitential doctrine in that the speaker of the psalms consistently “works out” his relationship with God, examining how in his penitence he

should expect both mercy and justice, and how he should feel sorry for his sins, admit them, and make restitution for them -- the basis for the threefold penitential process of contrition, confession, and satisfaction. Second, in showing that the psalms could accommodate several voices, Augustine and Cassiodorus prepare the tradition of writing penitential lyrics whose speaker is David.

## VI

At this point, the tradition of reading in terms of the literal sense as a means for pointing to the spiritual sense is in place, and these two ways of reading diverge somewhat. But not entirely; the two other major exegetes I will discuss, Peter Lombard (c.1095-1160) and Nicolaus of Lyra (c.1270-1349), continue the tradition laid down by Augustine and Cassiodorus. Lombard is still interested in how David is the speaker of the psalms, for example, and Lyra occasionally raises the spiritual sense of the psalms. But it is striking how much Lombard reads in terms of the individual sinner, creating what I will call a “psychology of sin,” whereas Lyra’s readings focus to a far greater degree than we have seen thus far on Davidic history.

One possible reason for this focusing may be the great compilation of the Glossa Ordinaria. The Glossa, compiled under the supervision of Anselm of Laon (?-1117)<sup>12</sup>, was the standard medieval gloss on the Bible, used as a textbook of sorts for quick reference for what had been said about a specific scriptural passage; as Evans writes, it was “above

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<sup>12</sup> Anselm was, Smalley states, “certainly responsible” for the gloss on the Psalter (60). Of the glosses on other various books of the Bible she is less certain; see Smalley 60-62.

all a work of consolidation; distilling out the essence of the work of previous centuries, it provides the student with a manageable and reliable textbook of Bible study” (47). Anselm includes a wide range of exegetes, primarily Augustine and Cassiodorus but also Theodore, Jerome, Bede, Basil, Arnobius, Euthymius and Gregory. The Glossa is notable for both its brevity and its scope; it assumes various possible readings of the psalms and gives them as concisely as possible; and with its wide circulation, it was the means by which standard exegetical readings became disseminated for later biblical scholars. The fact that it pulled together various readings of the psalms may well have allowed exegetes who followed it to choose the readings they found most amenable to their needs and interests, and to develop them at the expense of other kinds of readings.

Lombard’s purpose, according to Marcia Colish, was to find “ways of opening up the text” by examining its theological content in light of earlier commentators and other relevant texts from the Bible itself (542). In doing so, Lombard followed the tradition of Gilbert of Poitiers’ commentary (written between 1110-1 and 1117) in focusing on the doctrinal issues that concern not only the head of the church, Christ, but also his body, all Christians (538-38). The psalms, then, are meant to speak not only for David (and Christ), but also the Christian sinner. Lombard develops this to a greater extent than we have seen in previous commentators, and his focus is controlled by the way he sees these psalms working. In the first of the penitential psalms he lays out a definition which would serve well for all the commentators:

His verbis dat exemplum fideliter orantes exaudiri. Et nota quod ter hic ponitur Dominus, quia sanctam Trinitatem precibus adfuisse ostendit. Incipit in lacrymis, exauditus exsultat, sicut fit et in aliis poenitentialibus psalmis.

By these words he gives as an example those praying faithfully to be heard. And mark that thrice the Lord is put here, because it reveals the Holy Trinity to have been present for the prayers. The beseecher begins in tears, and having been heard exults, as he also does in the other penitential psalms (109).

This “beginning in tears and ending in joy” is central to the psalms, and informs Lombard’s method of reading the psalms in terms of the individual: each psalm moves from one emotional state to its opposite, and the commentary lays out the psychological journey that one travels.

Continuing a long tradition, Lombard accepts that verses may have multiple meanings, and evaluates variant readings in the biblical texts and among various exegetes (Colish 544-45). For example, Psalm 31:11, “Do not become like the horse,” is presented with various, even conflicting readings.

. . . non dicit sicut bos qui est humilis, sed equus, qui erecta cervice incedit, per quam significantur superbi: sicut per mulum stolidi et pigri . . . [Hier.] Vel per equum et mulum, duo populi intelliguntur. Per equum intelligitur gentilis indomitus; per mulum Judaeus piger ad credendum. Et est, nolite fieri sicut equus et mulus, id est nolite fieri sicut gentiles, vel sicut Judaei, quibus non est intellectus . . . Vel ita, nolite fieri sicut equus. Equus sine discretione seosorem, mulus quaelibet onera accipit.

. . . He does not say, do not be like the cow, which is humble, but like the horse, which moves with his neck held high, through which the prideful are signified: as through the mule the stolid and slothful . . . [Jerome] Or, through the horse and mule is understood two peoples. Through the horse is understood the wild heathen; through the mule the Jews slow to believe . . . Or thus, do not be like the horse. The horse accepts whatever sitter, the mule accepts whatever burdens. And thus neither one has understanding, either to the horse concerning the rider, or to the mule concerning the burden (322-23).

Here an historical reading lies between two spiritual ones. More often, however, Lombard reads the psalm in terms of the psalmist actually being the speaker, with the direct

identification made possible by both the “I” of the psalm and the “I” of the commentary.

More than with any other commentator, with Lombard one gets the sense of a writer inviting a reader to “puzzle out” the meaning of the psalms with him.

For example, of Psalm 31:5, “I have made my sin known to you, and my injustices

I have not hidden,” Lombard writes:

Secunda pars, ubi commendatur confessio peccati, unde venia est, sicut supra dixit, quod de tectioe inveteratio processit. Quasi dicat: Conversus sum in aerumna, puncta est conscientia mea, et sic ego ‘feci’ per me ‘cognitum tibi’ confitendo, scilicet delictum meum, scilicet quod commisi facienda, scilicet quod tacui peccata; ‘et injustiam meam,’ scilicet quod non facienda feci, id est quod clamavi merita, ‘non abscondi,’ [Aug., Gl. int.] id est, non operui, sed aperui, ut operires tu; detexi, ut tegeres tu. Nam quando homo detegit, Deus tegit; cum homo tegit, Deus denudat; si homo agnoscit, Deus ignoscit.

The second part [of the psalm], where the confession of sin is recommended, whence forgiveness comes, as he said above that illness proceeds from covering them up. As if he were to say, I am turned around in my trouble, my conscience is pricked, and so I have made, by myself, known to you in confessing, namely my sin, namely that I committed things to be done, namely that I was silent about my sins; and my injustice, that I did what was not to be done, that is, that I cried out my merits, I have not hidden. [Aug., Gl. Int.] that is, I did not cover, but have revealed, that you might veil; I have uncovered, that you might cover. For when man uncovers, God covers; when man covers, God uncovers; if man acknowledges, God pardons (320).

By placing the phrases of the verse into a situation (albeit a very general one), Lombard is able to dramatize the psalm as well as respond to the theological issues the verse raises.

We have a sense here of a sinner analyzing his actions and their repercussions. We find this again in verse 6 of the same psalm.

. . . modo ergo confitebor adversum me, [Gl. Ord.] qui prius contra Deum. [Aug.] Multi enim confitendo iniquitatem suam, sed adversus Deum. Quando enim inveniuntur in peccatis, dicunt: Non hoc feci, aut non est hoc peccatum, sed Deus voluit. Alii dicunt: Fatum mihi fecit, stellae mihi



fecerunt. Et ita per circuitum volunt pervenire ad Deum accusandam, non de compendio ad Deum placandam. Stellas enim ipse fecit et ordinavit.

. . . now therefore I will confess against myself, [Gl. int.] I who earlier confessed against God. [Aug.] For many confess their iniquity, but against God. For when they are discovered in sins, they say: I did not do this, or this, is not a sin, but God wanted [it]. Others say: fate did it to me, the stars did it to me. And thus in a roundabout way they want to arrive at accusing God, not by a short way at pleasing God. For He himself made and arranged the stars. And so through the stars they want to show that God caused them to sin (320).

Following Augustine and Cassiodorus, Lombard's placement of the reader as the "I" of the commentary shows his concern with allowing his reader to be the psalmist and consider how he examines his conscience, with all the blame-placing, back-sliding, and eventual confession of one's sin, as in, for example, Psalm 50:7:

Ecce enim veritatem dilexisti: incerta and occulta sapientiae tuae manifesti mihi.

. . . Quasi dicat: Non in te culpam refundo, sed veritatem profiteor, quam diligis. Hic poenitens, quia in confitendo dixit in veritatem, quam Deus super sacrificia quaerit supplicat sibi subveniri. Vel ita: Ideo ita punio peccatum meum, quia, ecce in manifesto, veritatem dilexisti, qua peccatum punias, licet sis pius indultor. Sic enim misericordiam dat Deus, ut servet veritatem, ut nec peccata ejus sint impunita cui ignoscit. Ignoscit enim seipsum punienti. Misericordia ergo quod homo liberatur, veritas est quod punientur peccatum.

For behold, you have delighted in truth: uncertain and hidden things of your wisdom you have made manifest to me.

. . . As if to say: I do not pour out my sins to you, but I openly confess the truth that you esteem. Here the penitent speaks, for in confessing, he says in truth which God seeks above sacrifices that he should pray for himself to be relieved. Or thus: Therefore I punish my sins, because, behold manifestly, you delighted in truth, by which you might punish sin, although you are a benevolent forgiver of sins. For as God gives mercy, so that it might preserve truth, so that the sins of him when he pardons may not be unpunished. For he forgives the man who punishes himself. Thus it is mercy that man is liberated, it is justice that sin will be punished (488).

The logic is fairly dense, but Lombard's strategy is the important point: to consider the relationship between the sinner and God, between mercy and justice -- both self-imposed and from God. In truly acknowledging his sins, the sinner punishes himself, but still has God's mercy available, the same mercy that demands satisfaction because it is given to serve justice. The theology is always there, but it is consistently couched in terms of the inner workings of the sinner's mind.

This "working out" of what penance means for the individual sinner is the hallmark of Lombard's commentary. To be sure, there are scattered references to Christ as the speaker of the psalms: the "opportune time" in which all shall pray to God (Psalm 31, verse 6) is read as the time of Christ's coming; verse 8 in Psalm 50 ("Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow"), Lombard argues, refers to Christ's transfiguration. Always, however, Lombard uses Christ as earlier commentators do, as a model on which the reader may base his own behavior. For example, Lombard's introduction to Psalm 142 argues that the historical context of David the psalm's title suggests is really meant to signify Christ:

*David ergo Christum significat, et corpus ejus; Absolon vero Judam vel persecutores, vel pravos motus. Sicut ergo Absolon David, sic Judas persecutus est Christum, et falsi fratres persequuntur corpus ejus, quod est Ecclesia, vel ipsi illiciti motus et carnis desideria, et prava operatio unumquemque fidelem.*

Thus David signifies Christ, and His body; truly Absolon signifies Judas or the persecutors, or depraved lusts. Thus as Absolon persecuted David, so Judas persecuted Christ, and false brothers persecute His body, which is the Church, or the same illicit lusts and desires of the flesh themselves, and their depraved working, persecute every faithful soul (1247).

Even so, Lombard is careful to state that David signifies Christ and His body, the Church. This parallelism -- Absolon versus David, Judas versus Christ, fleshly desires versus every faithful soul -- opens up the psalm to include all people.

Finally, Lombard uses his commentary to explore relevant doctrinal issues related to penance, and again he interprets them in the context of a reader's own life. As I have shown, this is not a new development; Cassiodorus's emphasis on the conflict between justice and mercy has implications for David as well as the reader, for example. Lombard, however, anticipates Reformation exegetes by placing more emphasis on the issue of justification, an issue that might even have more immediate importance for the individual sinner. In opening Psalm 31, for example, Lombard writes:

Beati quorum remissae sunt iniquitates. [Aug.]

Non dicit in quibus non invenit peccatum, nam in omnibus invenit, sed quibus remittuntur. Nihil boni fecisti et datur remissio peccatorum. Tibi debebat vindictam ex culpa tua, dat indulgentiam ex gratia sua. Malis enim operibus tuis debetur damnatio, sicut bonis operibus debetur regnum coelorum. Si reddatur ergo tibi quod debetur, puniendus es, non tibi reddit Deus debitam poenam, sed donat et indebitam gratiam. Nemo ergo jactet opera sua ante fidem, nemo sit piger in operibus bonis accepta fide. Dat enim indulgentiam impiis, et eos justificat ex fide. Incipitur ergo justificatio fidei per indulgentiam. [Alcuin.] Iniquitates autem dicit, fomitem peccati, scilicet concupiscibilitatem, quae ante baptismum non tantum poena, sed et culpa est, non utique actualis sed et originalis; post baptismum vero poena est et non culpa. In baptismo enim deletur originale peccatum: non ut non ist, sed ut peccatum ultra non ist. Ideoque congrue dicit: Beati quorum remissae sunt iniquitates, id est, mitigatae per gratiam, ut non regnent in mortali corpore (Rom. VI).

Blessed are they whose sins are forgiven. [Aug.]

He does not say those in whom [God] does not find sin, for He finds it in all, but who is forgiven . . . You have done no good and yet remission is given for sins. He owed you punishment because of your sins, but He gives indulgence because of His grace. For damnation is owed for your evil

works, just as the reign of heaven is owed for good works. For if what is owed to you were to be rendered, you are to be punished. But God does not render to you the due of punishment, but rather grants unowed grace. Thus let no one boast of his works before faith, [and] let no one be slow in accepting . . . For God gives indulgence to the impious, and justifies them out of faith. Thus justification of faith is begun to the faithful through indulgence. [Alcuin.] Now he says ‘iniquities,’ the tinder of sin, namely concupiscibility, that is not only a penalty before baptism, but also is sin, not only actual but also original; indeed, after baptism it is penalty and not sin. For original sin is deleted in baptism: not as if it does not exist, but that it is no longer sin. And thus fittingly he says: Blessed are those whose sins are forgiven, that is, mitigated through grace, so that they should not reign in mortal body’ (317-18).

The penalty still owed for original sin is central to penance: despite God’s grace which forgives sins, one must still pay the penalty for them, and we can see the direct application this would have for the reader; Lombard’s use of the direct “you” underscores this point. Lombard is greatly concerned with the operation of that grace working in sinners, anticipating Reformation commentators, for whom this is an equally central, perhaps the central, issue of their works.

Lombard’s strategy, to a greater degree than the earlier commentators discussed here, is to read the psalms in personal terms, creating dramatic structures which allow the reader to consider himself not only the speaker of the psalm, but also the psychological circumstances that give rise to the psalm.

## VII

Lombard’s work made its way into the English vernacular by way of hermit and commentator Richard Rolle (c. 1300-1349), whose commentary on the psalter is far more pointed and direct than that of previous exegetes. The commentary was written, according

to its rhymed introduction (apparently not written by Rolle) for a Dame Margaret Kirkby, a religious recluse at the nunnery of Hampole in York, perhaps a friend of the hermit. Rolle follows Lombard's commentary in reading many psalm verses and particularly in focusing on one generalized sinner. Though Rolle, like others, acknowledges there may be various voices speaking in the psalms, he tends to read in terms of a generalized sinner. He states his purpose in the prologue:

The matere of this boke is crist & his spouse, that is, haly kirke, or ilk ryghtwise mannys saule. the entent is: to confourme men that ere filyd in adam til crist in newnes of lyf. the maner of lare is swilke. umstunt he spekis of crist in his godhed. umstunt in his manhed. umstunt in that that he vses the voice of his seruauntes. Alswa he spekis of haly kyrke in thre maners. umwhile in the person of perfite men. somtyme of vnperfite. som tyme of ill men, whilk er in halikyrke. by body noght by thoght; by name noght by ded, in noumbire noght in merit. In this werke .i. seke na straunge ynglis, bot lyghtest and comonest. and swilk that is mast lyke til the latin. swa that thai knawes noght latin. by the ynglis may com til mony latyn wordes (4).

The matter of the psalms is not only Christ and his Church, but also the individual sinner's soul: sometimes the perfect man, and in the case of the penitential psalms, the imperfect man as well.

As the first commentator in English writing for the English, Rolle offers the first vernacular model for paraphrasing the psalms. His rhetorical strategies follow long exegetical tradition, as John Alford shows by citing three means by which Rolle paraphrases: associating the psalm with another scriptural text, substituting equivalent words or phrases that clarify the meaning, and amplifying the text, particularly by inserting explanatory material ("Imitatio" 11-12). We see less association in Rolle's psalter

commentary, perhaps due to his brevity (though association is especially common in Lombard and Augustine), but a great deal of substitution and amplification.

Rolle, for example, paraphrases each verse of the psalm into English, assuming that his reader may not know Latin. The paraphrases are often rendered into vigorous, idiomatic English: “ffor my dayes failyd as reke: and my banys as kraghan dryid” (352; Psalm 101:4); “Thai rotyd and thai ere brokyn, myn erres: fra the face of myn unwit . . . Wretchid .i. am made and krokid .i. am in til the end: all the day sary .i. 3ede” (138-9; Psalm 37:5-6); “Thai that 3eld ill for goeds bakbitid til me: for .i. foloud godenes” (141; Psalm 37:21).

Rolle’s amplifications not only translate the psalm material, but give it a fuller context. Consider the amplification of Psalm 142:6:

6. Expandi manus meas ad te: anima mea sicut terra sine aqua tibi. I spred my hand till the: my saule as erth withouten watire til the. That is, .i. largid my willys and my werkis, that are ware narow, til thi louyinge. and my saule, that is as erth withouten grace bi it self, draghis til the. noght til the world, that may noght wete it. forthi thou rayne it ful of grace, that it bere froyt (474).

Rolle occasionally offers his English reader a richer reading of the verse than is found in Lombard: spreading his hands is turning one’s will to God. Furthermore, Rolle makes one important change: he reads the psalm’s speaker in terms of “I,” whereas Lombard reads the psalmist in the third person, usually “the penitent.” Though Rolle acknowledges David as the psalms’ author, he is more interested in the reader identifying himself as the psalmist or sinner. As the commentary presumably was written for private devotional use, Rolle

adopts strategies to help the reader effect that identification. Psalm 142: 2-3, for example, emphasizes first person pronouns to this end.

2. Et non intres in iudicium cum seruo tuo: quia non iustificabatur in conspectu tuo omnis viuens. And entire noght in dome with thi seruant: for ilkan lifand all not be nade rightwis in thi sight. That is, do not straytly with me in thi dome . . .

3. Quia persecutus est inimicus animam meam: humilitavit in terra vitam meam. ffor the enmy pursuyd my saule: he mekid in erth my life. The deuly pursuys my saule temptand. and he dos that in him to meke my life in erthly lufe. that .i. set my sauoure in erth. turnand me fra hope of heuen.

Rolle adopts this identification strategy throughout his commentary. The occasional contextual figures that occur are David, Adam and Christ, and comparisons between these figures, as representatives of the Old Testament and the New -- the old law and the new -- are especially common in the commentary on Psalm 50. Verse 5, "Til the anly .i. hafe synned, and ill .i. hafe done bifore the: that thou be rightwisid in thi wordis and ouercome when thou ert demed," offers Christ in comparison to the sinner, imploring God's mercy: "that is, thof thou ware demed vnrightwisely bifor pilat and the iwes. or that thou be rightwisid in thi wordes. that ere of heyghtynge of pardon til him that has sorow for his synn" (184-5). Likewise, Rolle's treatment of verse 19, "Wele do lord in thi goed will til syon: that edified be the waghes of ierusalem," offers the comparison between the old and new:

That is. send thi son till oure hertis. and forgif oure synnes: til syon, that is, til haly kirke, un thi goed will, noght in oure meritys: and the walles of ierusalem, that were distroyed be adam, be edified thurgh crist: that is, the warnysyngis of oure immortalite, that we sall hafe in heuen, be made in trouth and hope and charite. there defendis til vs that joy (187).

Rolle's guiding principle, then, is to make the psalms reflect the whole of human history, from Adam to Christ to the second coming. At the same time, he is equally concerned with the here and now, placing the reader into the scheme of biblical history. Of Psalm 37, for example, he explains:

The voice of him that does penance for his syn: in prayere and gretynge he bigynnis, & says. lord in thi wodnes argu me noght. that is, .i. pray the that .i. be noght amange tha til wham thou sall say. in thi dome, ga e werid in fire endles. na chasty me in thi ire. that is, be .i. noght amange tha that sall be purged in the fire of purgatory: bot here amend me.

That is, do not amend me in purgatory -- but amend me here.

Rolle's commentary is not unique in its rhetorical strategies, though he is the first exegete discussed here to consistently read the psalms in the first person. As the first commentator in English, however, he offers a model for how the psalms can be read, as the direct personal utterance of a reader who can reflect on its deeper meanings (and other "speakers") in the context of his own life.

Another English commentary recently made available in a modern edition is that of Eleanor Hull, who probably wrote her work in the 1420s (Barratt xiv). Hull's commentary, like that of Rolle, indicates the emerging availability of psalm commentary into English for a vernacular audience. Her work is a translation of a commentary originally in Old French, and in fact Hull is the first English woman translator we have by name (Barratt xiii).

Hull's commentary is thoroughly orthodox in its reading of the psalms, assuming that David is the speaker of the psalms, but also taking David's circumstances and applying them to a reader. For example, in commenting on Psalm 6, Hull writes:



Then lete ous al crye as he [David] dyd, Domine ne in furore tuo etc. 'Blessyd Lord,' seythe he, 'vnder-take me nowht so in your furor that I be conuyncte for-to soffre dampnacion. Lord, in your wretthe chastyse me not." Wodnes and anger ys o thyng, as holy wrytte determynyth and seythe that wodnes, that is called wretthe, ys a movyng of the corage that exortyth to ioyne peyne to the uengance. But suche wretthe may not fal in our Lord for he ys souereyn and uerrey ioie, fyne swetnes and sure rest-fulnes . . . þis same swetnes requeryd Dauid for he wold not be vndertake ner ateynt in wretthe, ner is angre chastysed. Ye most nedys vnderstond that in God ther is non angre. But hit semyth to the synful man that God is wrothe when he smytyth him with his rodde for his synnys with sore syknys of his body, er makyth him to suffre persecucyons er of the losse of his substance and al such he callyth the wretthe of God (10).

Sometimes Hull is even more specific about making the comparison between David and the sinner, as in Psalm 129:

Of þis reulynge and of þis styynge uppe to God spekyth þe verray repentant Dauid in þis psalme er, yf ye wyl, generalis homo, al mankynd er sum one verrey repentant, that makyth his weymentacyon to hys creatur de profundis etc. 'From þe depens y schal crye to þe, Lord; [Lord], here my voyse' (174).

Hull's translation follows the way of reading the psalms that we have already seen.

Sometimes the speaker is read as Christ, as in Psalms 101 and 142 (149; 188), but throughout she generally emphasizes that the speaker may be both David and the reader. Since the original Old French commentary she translated no longer exists (though others like it are extant) (Barratt xiii), it is impossible to know if Hull added material to the commentary, or simply translated it verbatim. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the original commentary made great use of the Church Fathers' commentaries (Barratt, "Hull" 98-100), and Hull's commentary may be seen in the tradition of that of Rolle, making commentary available to a non-Latin audience -- as we shall see, in the same way that the poetic paraphrases of the penitential psalms to be discussed in the next chapter do.

## VIII

I discuss Nicolaus of Lyra separately because his commentary sits somewhat outside the continuous tradition laid out here. Alone among the medieval exegetes I discuss, Lyra's commentary (the first to be printed, in Rome, 1471-72), emphasizes to the greatest degree a specifically historical reading of the psalms instead of spiritual meanings and the attendant placement of the reader into the psalms. Possibly as a reaction to the twelfth-century preference for allegorical reading, Lyra considered the literal meaning of Scripture to be the most important and the basis for all other interpretations; his knowledge of the Hebrew tradition of exegesis, which emphasized the literal meaning of Scripture, put him in a strong position to do this (Minnis 86)<sup>13</sup>. Nevertheless, Lyra acknowledged various possible readings, and in fact an edition of his commentary printed with the Glossa Ordinaria (Antwerp, 1617) divides his commentary into its literal and spiritual senses, each separate from the other. It is instructive to note that the literal sense is highly developed compared to the spiritual sense. Lyra primarily reads the psalms in terms of Davidic history in his life, and sometimes by extension, of the history of the Israelites.

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<sup>13</sup> Minnis's discussion of the shift from allegorical to literal readings of the Bible marks a shift from God being the sole "auctor" of the Word to a position in which the human "auctor" is equally acknowledged. The higher, mystical senses of Scripture were the work of the Holy Spirit; the literal sense, the foundation upon which the other senses were built, the product of the human speaker. See Minnis, 85-94, for a fuller discussion, particularly of this shift's effect on Lyra's work.

To be sure, Lyra points out theological truths in his psalm commentary as well, such as the issue of justice versus mercy. But the emphasis on historical truth allows him to link these abstract concepts to real historical figures and make them concrete, as in, for example, Psalm 31:

Nolite fieri. Hic consequenter, David circa alios facit monitionem ut caveant a peccatis, quia boni principis est nonsolum cogitare de se, sed etiam de sua gente. Et primo, facit suam monitionem secundo subdit retributionem, ibi: Multa flagella. Circa primum dicit: Nolite fieri sicut equus et mulus, i.e., sequentes appetitum sensitivum viventes vita brutali, quibus non est intellectus, q.d. in hoc nulla culpa est in brutis animalibus, quia non habent intellectum per quem possunt refrenare appetitum sensitivum. Sed in hominibus rationem habentibus est hoc valde culpabile; quia per rationem possunt appetitum sensitivum refrenare, et ideo hominibus appetitum sensitivum sequentibus David depraecatur Deum, dicens: In chamo et freno maxillas eorum, etc.; i.e., eos qui nolunt obedire tibi; sicut equus indomitus poenis et laboribus, eos afflige. Ita quod poena dante eis intellectum obediant tibi ad natum, sicut frequenter legitur in 2 Iudiciis, quod filii Israel Deo recalcitrantes per idolatrum tradebantur in manu affligentium eos, et sic revertebantur ad verum dei cultum.<sup>14</sup>

Do not become. And then, David makes a warning for others that they should beware of sin, for it is good for a king to not only think about himself, but also his people. And first, he makes his warning; secondly, he adds retribution, whence, Many. Concerning the first, he says: Do not become like the horse and mule, that is, following the sensual appetite, living in a brutish life, in whom there is no intellect. It is as though he said in this there is no fault in brutish animals, for they have no intellect through which they can refrain their sensual appetite. Applying this to men, who have reason, this is very blameworthy, for through reason they can refrain their sensual appetite; and thus David prayed to God concerning men

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<sup>14</sup> As with Lombard, I have provided the original Latin in the text.

There is no modern edition of Lyra's psalm commentary. There is, however, a fascimile of an early printed edition in black letter (Frankfurt, 1971) which I have used for my quotations; I have checked them against the edition of the Glossa Ordinaria which includes Lyra's commentary. Printer's marks refer to the black letter edition; punctuation is editorial.

following their sensual appetite, saying: With bit and bridle [bind fast] their jaws; that is, those who will not obey You; as an unbroken horse, afflict them with pains and labors. So that through the pain giving them understanding they may obey You in assent, as often is written in the Book of Judges, that the sons of Israel, rebellious to God, were given over into the hand of those afflicting them, and so were turned back to the true worship of God (P.iii<sup>r</sup>-v).

Lyra continues, arguing the verse is David speaking to his people, warning them that God will punish those who follow their sensual appetite, as the Israelites were punished in the Book of Judges.

Likewise, in Psalm 31, Lyra takes a standard theological point and makes it David's specifically.

Quoniam tacui. Hic consequenter ostenditur remissionis modus, et quia opposita iuxta se posita magis elucescunt, ideo describitur primo remissionis impedimentum. Secundo eiusdem factuum, ibi: Delictum meum. Circa primum, sciendum quod impedimentum remissionis culpe est eius celatio sub sanctitatis specie propter quod dicitur Proverb xxviii: Qui abscondit scelera sua non dirigetur. David autem peccatum cum Barsabee celavit, et propter eius maiorem celationem Uriam occidi fecit, et sic de peccato in peccatum in peccatum miserabiliter ruit Deo iuste permittente, et dyabolo operante; et hoc est quod dicit David: Quoniam tacui.

Because I was silent. Here following is shown the way of forgiveness and because opposites placed near each other begin to shine more, the first impediment to forgiveness is described. Secondly of his fault in that place, My transgression. Concerning the first, it is to be known that the impediment to forgiveness of sin is the hiding of it under the appearance of holiness, according to that which is said in Proverbs 28: He who hides his sin shall not prosper. Moreover, David hid his sin with Bathsheba, and because of his great hiding made Uriah to be killed, and so from sin to sin fell miserably by the just allowance of God, and by the operation of the devil; and this is why David said: Because I was silent (S.iii.r).

One must confess one's sins in order to be forgiven them, and the reader is invited to identify with David, who did not confess his sin with Bathsheba and thus fell into greater sin.

Lyra might also relate the psalm directly to David's life with no reference at all to a larger, non-historical context; that is, the psalm verse becomes testament to a historical as opposed to a theological point. For example, in reading verse 6 of Psalm 6, "Because there is no one who is mindful of thee in death," Lyra writes:

Timebat enim David ne magna pars populi que moriebatur subito in illa pestilentia trium dierum decederet in peccato mortali, et sic damnaretur, quod erat ei valde lugubre; sicut et mors filii sui absolon, quamvis ipsum persequeretur, eo quod probabiliter credebat ipsum in peccato mortali decississe, sicut dictum fuit 11 Regum xviii . . .

For David feared lest the greater part of the people which had died suddenly in that three day pestilence, might have died in mortal sin, and thus would be damned, which was deeply saddening to him; just as the death of his son Absolon was, though Absolon pursued him, in that he believed him to probably have died in mortal sin, as is found in the second Book of Kings, chapter 18 . . . (P.iii)

Here and elsewhere, this very literal approach to biblical material necessarily leads to interesting "stretches," Lyra's attempts to fit the psalm to some event, any event, in David's history. Commenting on Psalm 37, Lyra writes:

Haec dicit dominus, etc. et sequitur, Suscitabo adversum te malum de domus tua. Et propter hoc recordatur hic David persecutionem quam ab Absolon sustinuit, quia fuit in poenam peccati praedicti. Et non est sanitas in carne mea, quia ex infirmitate carnis precedit luxuria. Lumbi autem et caro ipsius David dicuntur, ut non solum pro persona, sed et pro persona filii sui Absolon, quia filius est de substantia patris. Afflictus sum de malitia, filii mei Absolon. Et humiliatus sum nimis, quia per eum fugitius factus sum de metropoli civitate regni mei, scilicet de Hierusalem, ut habetur 2 Reg. 15.

These things the Lord says, and following, I will raise up evil against thee, out of thy own house. And according to this David records here the

persecution he received, from Absolon, for it was in the punishment of the sin aforesaid. And there is no health in my flesh, for out of the infirmity of flesh comes lechery. Now David's loins and flesh are spoken of not only in respect to his own person, but also for the person of his son Absolon, for the son is of the substance of the father. I am afflicted by malice, my son Absolon. And I am humbled exceedingly, for through them I am made a fugitive from the great city of my kingdom, that is, Jerusalem, as it says in 2 Kings 15 (T.iii').

Finally, Lyra links his commentary from David to the larger concerns of the Jewish nation, as he does in Psalm 129:

De profundis, i., de terra Babylonis qui est demissa respectu Iudae. Et etiam quia in Babylone aliqui de Iudais erant positi in carceribus subterraneis.

From the depths, that is, from the land of Babylon which lies lower in comparison to the land of Judea. And also in Babylon because some of the Jews were put into underground prisons (Hh.iii<sup>v</sup>).

As one of the gradual psalms -- the psalms traditionally thought to be sung while the Israelites processed to the Temple in Jerusalem -- Psalm 129 has a long tradition of being connected to the history of Israel as opposed merely to David's personal history. This way of reading allows Lyra to make sense of verses whose meaning eludes other exegetes.

Similis factum sum pellicano solitudinis, quia quasi dictum est populus fugerat ad deserta.

Factus sum sicut nocticorax, quae non apparet de die nec clamat. Sic multi de populo absconditi in locis occultis non audebant de die comparere, nec etiam aliquem strepitum emittere ne deprehenderentur.

I am made like a pelican in the wilderness, because as it is said, the people fled into the desert.

I am made like the night raven, who does not appear nor cry by day. In this way many of the people concealed secret places dared not be visible by day, nor emit any kind of noise lest they be caught (Dd.v').

Lyra's commentary, in explicating the literal sense of the Word, stands in contrast to that of other exegetes, who make use of the literal sense but by no means in such a systematic and thorough way. Lyra's access to Hebrew exegesis not only made this possible but also contributed to later paraphrasers' attention to the historical circumstances of David in the psalms.

## IX

The issues that these psalms raise -- their speaker, their various levels of meaning, their importance in disseminating theological points, their historical and ahistorical contexts -- offer poets a number of rhetorical and theological possibilities to consider. The most important possibility for this study is the concept of poetic "self," where the poet stands in relation to his poetry. A poet could make generally one of three choices in the presenting the "self." First, the poet could paraphrase the psalm very closely, bringing little of his own personal vision of what the psalm might mean to the paraphrase. This is what the medieval paraphrasers whom I discuss in the next chapter do, drawing on the rich tradition of exegesis presented in this chapter. Their paraphrases might be called "didactic," concerned more with presenting accepted and traditional readings of the psalms rather than an original and personal sense of the psalms.

The second choice would be to paraphrase the psalm so that the poet's voice emerges through the voice of the psalmist. The paraphrase might again be very close, but the content of the psalm reflects not only traditional exegesis but also the concerns of the poet. For Wyatt, for example, this means an emphasis on the dramatic psychological

development of David as speaker of the psalms; for Sidney and the Countess of Pembroke, on the other hand, the psalms serve as a vehicle for exploring both Reformation thought and verse technique.

The third choice would be breaking away from paraphrase altogether and using the psalms as only a basis for an original poem, but still adopting and adapting the rhetorical and thematic strategies found in the penitential psalms. This is what we will find in the penitential lyrics of Donne and Herbert.

These latter poems, which demonstrate the second and third choices, are those which I call “self-expressive,” poetry in which the poet’s own voice -- the individual concerns that he brings to the reading of the psalms -- is located within the voice of the psalmist. The level of self-expressiveness determines many issues: whether or not the poet chooses to paraphrase at all; how strict or free that paraphrase will be; what kind of exegesis the poet draws on; whether or not the poet draws on exegesis at all. As I will show in the remaining chapters, each of the poets I discuss will respond to these issues in different ways, and I will account for why they answer in different ways. By turning now to the poets, I trace a tradition which might be seen as a movement from strict paraphrase to which the reader brings himself to a freer paraphrase to which the poet brings himself: in sum, a tradition examining how poets see their work, and themselves, through these psalms.



### Chapter 3

#### MEDIEVAL PARAPHRASES OF THE PENITENTIAL PSALMS:

##### THE PSALMIST AS SELF

The two complete medieval paraphrases of the penitential psalms<sup>1</sup> by the friars Richard Maidstone and Thomas Brampton have much in common. Each paraphrase presents one verse of the psalm at a time and expands, develops, or responds to it in an eight-line stanza. The paraphrases echo the spirit of the commentary discussed in Chapter 2, and might be seen as poetic versions of the exegetical tradition.

Here the psalms are not read as Davidic or Israelite history, and although there are some Christological readings the psalms become personal history, written from the first person. However, the poet is not that “first person.” Rather, I believe that the poets intend their readers to be that “first person,” so that they are invited to consider: how do the psalms speak to me and for me? In doing this, these paraphrases were above all functional

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<sup>1</sup> There is one individual paraphrase of Psalm 129, “O Mortall Man Call to Remembrance,” found in the manuscript Harley 2252.

There are also three individual paraphrases of Psalm 51. One of these paraphrases, found in the manuscript BM Addit. 31042, awaits availability in modern editions. The second, MS. Advocates 19.2.1 (the Auchinleck MS.), is available in Englische Studien 9 (1886), 49-50. Susanna Fein has written a recent article on the third, a paraphrase found in the Thornton manuscript, providing a critical text and discussion; see her “Haue Mercy of Me (Psalm 51): An Unpublished Alliterative Poem from the London Thornton Manuscript” Modern Philology 86 (1988-89): 233-41.

works, devotional texts meant to be read and used as meditations, offering the reader a means to consider his sins.

How they functioned is the subject of this chapter. It is easy to deride much medieval devotional literature (as many critics have done) for its literal-minded didacticism, particularly if it is compared to the biblical richness of a Langland, the psychological subtlety of a Chaucer, or the technical perfection of a Pearl-poet. Maidstone's and Brampton's works might well strike the modern reader as curiously static -- simply a restatement of biblical psalm material, and often not a particularly engaging reworking at that.<sup>2</sup> But to read and dismiss them on these grounds is to miss the point. These works were a starting, not a finishing, point in the reader's own meditation; the static quality of the poems, if it is that at all, is part of their rhetorical strategy.

I argue that these medieval paraphrases set out to do three things: first, to make exegesis accessible to a lay audience; second, to help the reader meditate on specific events in his life in the context of biblical history; and finally, to offer models by which the reader could shape his behavior in accordance to with biblical model by emulating the psalmist. I will examine these works in the tradition of poetry being a proper vehicle for

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the nineteenth-century editor's highly qualified comments may serve as an assessment of Thomas Brampton's poetic achievement: "The religious poetry of the Middle Ages consists, for the most part, of dull versification, ennobled with few of the lofty sentiments that pure Christianity inspires, and enlivened with few flights of imagination, except those derived from a wild and dreary superstition. That of our own language is therefore chiefly valuable for its philological data, and as constituting a part of our national literature. But it is hoped that this poem, which these pages first bring to light, will be found to contain both some sentiments of piety, and some touches of poetry, that may render it more acceptable than its contemporaries" (Black v).

didactic works in the Middle Ages, and the importance of the mendicant orders as teaching orders, charged with lay education in particular. I will use that context to demonstrate that these poems made the theology expressed by the exegetes discussed in the previous chapter accessible to a lay audience.

Then, to demonstrate the poems' rhetorical strategies, I will examine two important contexts. The first is that of the practice meditating on things past, present, and future, derived from the writings of Aelred of Riveaulx. I will show how the paraphrases make use of this in placing the reader's sin in the context of biblical history. The second is comprised of medieval discussions of the "self," showing how the self was defined in relation to biblical models. By aligning one's self with the model of virtue offered by the psalmist's words, the reader could emulate the psalmist's behavior, and thus recreate that model of the good Christian. In both cases, Maidstone and Brampton accomplish this by inviting the reader into the poem and then creating a framework for personal meditation on the biblical material. Thus the poetry emphasizes the experience of the reader, rather than that of the poet.

## II

It is important that both of these poets were in religious orders. Brampton was a Franciscan confessor -- in fact, this is virtually all we know about him. Maidstone is described by Valerie Edden in her critical edition of his work as "a Carmelite friar, an Oxford theologian and controversialist, and a public figure" (9), who, unlike Brampton,

moved in relatively wide circles.<sup>3</sup> (His paraphrase was apparently popular as well, existing in 27 surviving manuscripts.<sup>4</sup>)

The mendicant orders to which these friars belonged were established for their lay ministry, so that the intended audiences of the works would have been laypeople. Though all of the mendicant orders established in the Middle Ages were charged with the evangelization of lay people (McCaffrey 7), the Carmelites in particular educated all levels of English society, from universities, royal households and judicial courts to churches, schools and peasants' homes (118). Likewise, the primary task of the Franciscan order as envisioned by Francis was preaching (Moorman 17), and given the wealth of Franciscan commentaries on various books of the Bible in the fourteenth century (394), it is not surprising that Brampton would have chosen to paraphrase the psalms which continued to appear as a set in primers.

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<sup>3</sup> Maidstone (1340s?-1396) is probably from Maidstone in Kent, perhaps entering the order there at the Carmelite house of Ayleford, where he is buried. He was ordained a priest in 1376, gained a doctorate at Oxford some time before 1390, where he engaged in various Lollard controversies on such issues as mendicancy, the use of the vernaculars in theological debate, and the authority of various interpretations of the Scriptures. He was licensed to preach in Rochester in 1390, and appears to have been in the employ of the house of Lancaster, possibly as John of Gaunt's confessor.

<sup>4</sup> Valerie Edden has a detailed analysis of these manuscripts; see her critical edition (Heidelberg, 1990), 12-45. For this study, I have followed her use of Rawlinson a 389 (s.c.11272), Bodleian Library, Oxford, rather than Mabel Day's edition for the Early English Text Society. Edden argues that Rawlinson (the R ms.) belongs to a set of manuscripts that are likely earliest and closest to Maidstone's intent; other manuscripts are later, revised, or otherwise corrupted. Of the earliest group, the R manuscript is the least corrupt, based on presumably scribal errors that cannot be authorial revision. The Lichfield dialect of R is not Maidstone's but does not differ appreciably from the preferred South Midland dialect found in other manuscripts. See Edden 39-44.

To emphasize further these poems' didactic function, one must recall how many medieval didactic works were written in poetic form. In his anthology of medieval penitential poetry Frank Patterson gives numerous examples of other devotional works set in verse,<sup>5</sup> and as Elizabeth Salter writes, "Perhaps the hardest thing for us to accept is the integral part played by medieval verse in the ordinary business of life": not only religious verse but also narratives, love-themes, fabliaux, fables and history, medical and dietary verse, political commentary, complaint and satire were put into verse rather than prose throughout the Middle Ages (2).<sup>6</sup> Alexandra Barratt observes that verse was the dominant

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<sup>5</sup> Some medieval penitential lyrics in fact are little more than "how-to" manuals for making a good confession. Of the many examples Patterson gives, the "General Confession of Sins," from which I quote the first stanza, is typical:

I knowleche to god, with veray contricion,  
 Vn-to seynt mary, and his seyntis alle,  
 at, þorgh my frealte and wreccid condicion,  
 In-to many synnes ofte haue I falle;  
 But afir mercy now wille I calle,  
 With true confession, repentaunce,  
 (God graunt me space), and due repentaunce. (48)

The rest of the poem is devoted to how the sinner has broken the Ten Commandments, the seven deadly sins, and so on, serving didactically to reinforce these doctrines as well as giving a model for confession.

Standard prayers were also set into verse. Patterson includes among his penitential lyrics a paraphrase of the Pater Noster (108) and of the Marian prayer "Ave Maris Stella" (112-117), both of which take one line of the prayer and expand it into a full stanza, as do Maidstone and Brampton.

<sup>6</sup> It is instructive to review the chapter in volume 7 of A Manual of The Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500 (New Haven, 1986) devoted to works of religious and philosophical instruction to see what a wide range of works were available in verse in medieval England. Descriptions of works (I include here only works in verse, though the chapter also covers prose works) and their various manuscripts run 124 pages, and

medium for moral instruction until the fifteenth century (“Instruction”)<sup>7</sup>, and surely part of the reason this is so is the mnemonic value of verse. Laypeople, particularly the illiterate, could learn their theology readily by relying on the versification of religious doctrine.

In laying out moral instruction, both Maidstone and Brampton emphasize the literal meaning of the psalm rather than the spiritual, but not as Nicolaus of Lyra does with his historical context of David. They instead place the reader -- another sinner set in a historical time and place, with a specific set of circumstances -- at the center of the poem. I have shown that the tradition of reading the psalms in terms of various voices is in place from Augustine onward, but the point I wish to make here is that insofar as the reader is the speaker of the psalm, we have another “literal” sense of the Bible.

Judson Allen attests to the development of the spiritual sense of Scripture in the fourteenth century, describing it as “an allegory of things, and not simply of words. It

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include, among other entries, Handlyng Synne; Speculum Vitae; Prick of Conscience; The Lay Folks Catechism (in rhythmical prose); Cursor Mundi; various translations of the Paternoster, the Ave Maria, the Creed, the Ten Commandments, treatises on faith and reason, charity, “perfect love,” patience, the sacraments, confession, the seven deadly sins, the Beatitudes; various guides to the Christian life; various allegorical works such as The Desert of Religion, Milicia Christi, Of the Flode of the World, Templum Domini, The Charter of Christ; various treatises devoted to the Mass (including the Lay Folks Mass Book), the feasts of the Church, duties of the clergy, the pains of hell, fasting, and prayer. This chapter only covers works of religious and philosophical instruction. The range of didactic medieval works was, as Salter notes, even wider. See Raymo 2255-2378.

<sup>7</sup> This point is made elsewhere; see, for example, Janet Coleman’s discussion of the Bible in translation. Coleman argues the tradition of biblical paraphrase in verse was a holdover of earlier didactic tradition, set in motion by a larger lay audience beginning to confront the Bible; see 184-88, especially 186.

arises out of the events, personages, and settings to which the words refer" (54), which might suggest the literal sense to which I refer. But a distinction needs to be made:

The fundamentally important distinction [between the literal and spiritual sense] is that between the letter and the spirit. Here the medieval doctrine is completely clear. According to the letter, the words mean; for the spiritual sense, the things to which the words refer also have meaning . . . But this definition, the mode of meaning in a given text would be determined by an analysis of its language -- words and referents of words -- without reference to any extrinsic judgment of truth value. If, for instance, the words merely refer to the famous yellow primrose and nothing more, then we are in the area of the literal. If the flower points beyond itself to something else -- if the flower functions as a word or sign as well as a thing and has a referent other than itself -- then we have the right to suspect a spiritual sense (10).

Though critics use different terms to describe these kinds of readings, it is logical to equate the historical sense of Scripture with the literal. According to medieval belief, for example, God's creation of the world both historically happened and is literally true; He created what we call "trees," "oceans," "man and woman," and the words in Scripture refer directly to them. The historical sense of Scripture is well suited to narrative (this is what happened at this specific time and place -- the Exodus, the Crucifixion, the Nativity). But the psalms operate in two ways, both historically as the utterances of David in a specific place and time, and also tropologically as the utterance of any sinner in specific historical circumstances as well.<sup>8</sup> That sinner might be the monastic reading the appointed psalm of the day in the Divine Office, the abbess preparing a conference for her monastery, the layperson preparing to make a good confession to his parish priest. In each

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<sup>8</sup> See the first volume of Evans's two-volume study for a discussion of the four medieval senses of reading Scripture, especially 114-122.

case, the reader's personal situation allows him to use the psalm to consider his own sinfulness, just as David did.

But the psalms also function ahistorically, on a spiritual level as well. For example, Psalm 101:17, "For the Lord hath built up Sion: and he shall be seen in his glory," is traditionally read by exegetes as the building up of the Church, and the poets follow this reading.<sup>9</sup> This allegorical meaning may not have an immediate connection to the reader's life whereas a tropological meaning easily could -- somehow the despair expressed here could fit my situation, a reader might well say -- and this is perhaps why the poets choose to work from a foundation of literal sense of Scripture.

Smalley, in tracing the development and decline of the spiritual sense among the teaching orders, argues that the spiritual sense of Scripture was developed only as it applied to personal devotion. Parish priests were expected at the least to be able to expound on the literal sense of Scripture, but should have been able expound on the allegorical sense as well, not so much to instruct (which was left to the tropological sense), but to kindle devotion; thus the literal sense became more personal and descriptive (244-45). Smalley further explains that the spiritual sense declined when it no longer gave an outlet to religious feeling. Instead the literal meaning was developed, as reading Scripture gave way to using Scripture for personal devotion (284-85).

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<sup>9</sup> Cassiodorus is, for example, the most explicit on this point: "This verse is appended to the previous words: All the Gentiles shall fear the Lord, and the kings shall be in awe of His glory, because Sion which is mother Church has been built up and fashioned from living stones, and in her the Lord's worship will prevail without interruption till the end of the world" (3:12).



It is this shift from a literal sense based on Biblical history to a literal sense based on one's personal history that we see in these paraphrases. Despite this emphasis on personal history, there is no real psychological development in these poems. Or, rather, the psychological development does not happen in the text of the poems, nor to the "I" of the poems. The poems do not present the penitential process in terms of a psychological drama as does Wyatt's later paraphrase, nor do they use the psalms as do Donne and Herbert, to create something inspired by (but not a direct paraphrase of) the original psalm verses. In fact, the individual voice of the poet hardly comes through at all. Instead the paraphrases follow the psalms quite closely, translating and commenting on them, echoing the strategy of medieval psalm exegesis. But to call these paraphrases static because of a lack of the poet's personal investment presents hazards of its own, perhaps implying that the poems fail on some level, because they do not engage the psalm material in an original way.

If by "original" we mean that the poet attempts to create poetry with an individual voice, handling the material in a way that had not been done before, the paraphrases indeed "fail." But Salter points out that given the wealth of visual arts in the Middle Ages, what she calls "poverty" of verse may not indicate artlessness so much as a means to stimulate the imagination (4). This is more in line with what these paraphrases do. Originality, of course, is more difficult to achieve in paraphrase, as there is nothing radically "new" about the content of the poems (though originality is also debatable in that the two paraphrases are actually quite different from each other). But paradoxically, their very conventionality is their strength. In creating poetry that allows a reader not to hear

the individual poet, but rather place himself into the poem, both Brampton and Maidstone create poems that work admirably for meditation.

Thus most of the contexts that would make these paraphrases individual are absent: no specific sins are listed, no situations or events in a specific time and place give rise to the penitence. The poems exist “out of time,” or rather in the largest possible scope of cosmic Christian time. Only two historical events actually are referred to in the poems: one past (the Crucifixion) and one to be (the Day of Judgment). Beyond that, the poems themselves are situated in the here and now.

### III

I will discuss the poems themselves by examining first their common features, and then their differences. Technically -- by which I mean metrics, means of expansion, and so on -- they are similar, but thematically they are quite different, and these differences point to the meditative strategies and conceptions of self (particularly in Maidstone) I will examine.

First, both poets open with a narrative frame that places the paraphrases in a context. Brampton's frame is the more extensive:

In winter, whan the wedir was cold,  
 I ros at mydny3t fro my rest,  
 And prayed to Jesu that he wold,  
 Be myn helpe, for he my3t best.  
 In myn herte anon I kest  
 How I had synned, and what degre:  
 I cryed, knocking upon my brest,

"Ne reminiscaris, Domine!" (1).<sup>10</sup>

This frame is a standard commonplace in medieval lyric, the wintry weather, an outer state, reflecting the barrenness of an inner state.<sup>11</sup> Nor is the meditation prompted by anything discernible in the speaker: it is winter, he simply rises to pray, and the rest of the frame is devoted to laying out the process of his penitence. Maidstone's frame is much simpler, a stanza which introduces the psalms themselves:

To Goddes worshepe þat [dere us] bou3te,  
 To whom we owen to make oure moon  
 Of ourse synnes at we have wrou3te  
 In 3ouþe and elde, wel many oon;  
 þe seuen salmes are þour3e sou3te

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<sup>10</sup> In the Percy Society edition of Brampton, only stanzas within the frame are numbered but not actual lines of verse. In the Edden edition of Maidstone, both stanzas and lines of verse are numbered. I cite by stanzas for consistency.

In both paraphrases, the Latin psalm verses head each stanza, so that I include them; given the stanza paraphrase that follows, apparently the reader would not necessarily have had or needed to know Latin. I provide translations from the Douay-Rheims Bible.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, these poems from Luria and Hoffman's anthology of medieval English verse (New York, 1974). I give only the first stanzas:

Winter wakeneth all my care;  
 Now this leues waxeth bare;  
 Ofte I sike and mourne sare  
     When it cometh in my thoght  
     Of this worldes joy how it geth al to noght . . .  
 (13)

There blowes a colde wind todaye, todaye,  
 The wind blows cold todaye;  
 Crist suffered his passion for mannes salvacion,  
 To kepe the cold winde awaye . . . (150-51)

In each case, the weather signals the spiritual condition of the speaker -- if not necessarily barrenness, certainly despair.

In shame of alle oure goostly foon,  
 And in Englysshe þei ben brou3te  
 [For sin in man to be fordon] (1).

In both cases, the frame does not place the psalms in any truly specific context: either a sinner simply recognizes or is reminded of his need for penitence, and the reader, encouraged by the use of the first person, can easily place himself in the poem.

In his introductory frame Brampton also includes an antiphon found in medieval breviaries, placed after the penitential psalms and before the Litany (Kreuzer 366), which he immediately translates:

Ne reminiscaris, Domine, delicta nostra, vel parentum nostrorum; neque vindictam sumas de peccato nostris. Parce, Domine, parce populo tuo, quem redimisti precioso sanguine tuo; et ne in eternum irascaris nobis; et ne hereditatem tuam in perditionem.

That is to seye, “Lorde! Thynke no more  
 “[sic] Of my mysdedis that I have wrought,  
 “I or my faderys here be fore,  
 “That me in to this world have brought.  
 “Of my mysdedys venge the nought:  
 “But graunte me mercy and pyte.  
 “My woordys, my werkys, and wyked thought,  
 ““Ne reminiscaris, Domine!”

“Spare thy people that is outorage,  
 “We crye to the ful pytously;  
 “Lese no3t the ly3tly thyn herytage,  
 “That thou hast lovyd so hertily.  
 “Have mynde, Lord, how thou woldyst dy,  
 “And hange ful hye upon a tre,  
 “To save hym that wolde wilfully  
 “Sey, ‘Ne reminiscaris, Domine!’” (2-4)

The use of the “Ne reminiscaris, Domine” as a refrain, closing every stanza in the paraphrase, serves as a unifying device and helps pull the poem as a whole out of time

with its liturgical, incantatory repetition. This device occurs elsewhere in medieval lyric,<sup>12</sup> and one might think it difficult for the poet to continue repeating a phrase without running the risk of over-repetition. But Brampton creates a surprisingly various, often radically different, number of contexts in which the phrase is placed.

Of my frealnesse, gode Lord, have mynde.  
 Thyne holy spirite take no3t fro me;  
 And 3yf thou do, how schal I fynde  
 ‘Ne reminiscaris, Domine’? (Psalm 50:13; 65)

Of helthe and hele thou art the wele!  
 Fro fleschly lust thou delyvere me;  
 That ry3tfully my tunge may tell,  
 ‘Ne reminiscaris, Domine!’ (Psalm 50:17; 68)

In stanza 65, the refrain is posed as a question and direct object to the stanza, an occurrence unique to the entire poem; in stanza 68, the refrain is worked neatly into the psalm verse itself, “Libera me, de sanguinibus, Deus, Deus salutis mee! et exultabit lingua mea iusticiam tuam” (“Deliver me from blood, O God, O God of my salvation: and my tongue shall extol thy justice”).

Maidstone uses no such refrain phrase, but otherwise is technically close to Brampton. Both poets paraphrase each psalm verse into a stanza divided syntactically into two quatrains of iambic tetrameter, Brampton employing an ABAB BCBC rhyme scheme,

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<sup>12</sup> For example, in his anthology of medieval penitential verse Patterson includes “To Thee, Maist Peirlas Prince of Pece” with its refrain “Miserere mei, Deus” (89-91); “Evere More, Where So Euer I Be” with its refrain “Ye dred off deth do troble me” (100-101); “Alas, My Hart Will Brek in Thre” with its refrain “Terribilis mors conturbat me” (103); and “Timor Mortis Conturbat Me” (104-108), the title also being the refrain. The titles of the lyrics are Patterson’s.

Maidstone an ABAB ABAB rhyme scheme. The poets do differ somewhat in how they actually paraphrase. Deansley suggests that these “verse psalms” were meant to be quite loose translations, “religious ‘jeux d’esprit,’ hardly intended as translations at all” (147), and analysis of the poems bear this out. Maidstone is initially much more accurate about translating the psalm verse, and generally the first two lines of his first quatrain are a very close paraphrase of the given verse; the rest of the stanza is devoted to amplifying its meaning. Virtually any stanza in the paraphrase could demonstrate this; I choose two, those paraphrasing Psalm 50:1 and 50:9.

Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam. [Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy.]

Mercy, Lorde, of my mysdede,  
 For þi mercy þat mykel is;  
 And lat þi pite sprynge & sprede  
 Of þi mercy þat I not mys;  
 For aftur gostly grace I grede  
 Now, dere God, þou grante [me] þis,  
 þat I may lyue in loue and drede  
 And neuer more to done amys.

Asperges me, Domine, ysopo & mundabor; lauabis me, & super niuem dealbabor. [Thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop, and I shall be cleansed; thou shalt wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow.]

Wiþ holy water þou shalt me sprink,  
 And as þe snowe I shal be whyt;  
 For þou3e my soule in synne synke,  
 Wiþ wepyng watur hit may be quyt.  
 Dedly drau3tes þou3e I drynke,  
 Of repentaunce 3yue me respite,  
 Forþon þi peyne[s] whoso þenke  
 In worldly welþe, haþ no delite. (49; 56)

In Psalm 50:1, the first two lines are a literal paraphrase of the psalm verse, the second an expansion on the theme of God's mercy. Typically Maidstone makes a syntactical break at the end of the first quatrain and the second quatrain expands the theme even further. Here, the speaker asks God that he may live in "loue and drede," having obtained grace. This does not necessarily follow the first quatrain, and in fact could stand alone, but it does take up the theme presented and elaborates it. Maidstone thus is able to "open up" the psalm verse, making its meaning more generally applicable to a reader. In Psalm 50:9, there is again a fairly literal paraphrase in the first two lines, and the rest of the stanza elaborates on the image of holy water used with hyssop for cleansing. The third and fourth line changes the image of water slightly, here presented as the cleansing water of tears of penitence, "wepying watur," that does not occur in the original psalm (but has more general application to a reader than hyssop might), and the second quatrain loosely equates water with worldly wealth, the "dedly drau3tes" of the fifth line.

Brampton's strategy is close to Maidstone's, as we can see by examining his paraphrase of the same verses. Like Maidstone, he makes a syntactical break at the quatrain, but his paraphrase tends toward greater freedom.

Miserere mei, Deus! secundum magnam misericordiam tuam.  
 Mercy, Lorde, I calle and crye:  
 Thi mercy is redy in every place.  
 Thow3 I have lyved ful synfullye,  
 I putte me fully in thi grace.  
 There is no synne, before thi face,  
 So grete as mercy and pite.  
 To synfull man thou never were scape  
 Of 'Ne reminiscaris, Domine!'

Asperges me, Domine, ysopo et mundabor: lavabis me, et super nivem dealbabor.

Sprenkle me, Lord! with star of terys,  
 That myn herte be poured clene.  
 Wysse me fro my wylde gerys,  
 And wassche my synne away be dene:  
 As snow that fallyth in feldes grene,  
 Is why3t and bry3t, so schal I be;  
 Thanne schal the werkyng be ful sene  
 Of 'Ne reminiscaris, Domine!' (54; 61)

In Psalm 50:1, rather than paraphrasing literally "according to thy great mercy," Brampton chooses "Thi mercy is redy in every place," and then moves to the issues of grace and the bounty of God's mercy. Part of his strategy is his use of "Ne reminiscaris, Domine," which closes every stanza, so that thematically each stanza must lead back to the issue of God not recalling the speaker's sins. In Psalm 50:9, Brampton also uses the image of "watyr of terys" of contrition, so that he shall be as white as "snow that fallyth in feldes grene" -- and when this happens, we shall see the full working of God's not recalling his sins. Each of the stanzas themselves could stand as a self-contained lyric, generally unified in its theme.

This method of paraphrasing is also used by the poets who paraphrased individual penitential psalms instead of the entire group. The two paraphrases readily available are of Psalm 50 as well, one from the Auchinleck manuscript, the other from the London Thornton manuscript and recently edited by Susanna Greer Fein. In the Auchinleck poem, the manuscript is damaged at verse 9, but verse 1 is intact:

Miserere mei deus &c.

Lord god, to þe we calle,  
 þat þou haue merci on ous alle,  
 & for þi michel mekenisse  
 þat we mot comen to þi blisse.



The simplicity of the verse lends itself well to memorization; the first couplet simply reiterates the psalm verse, the second couplet expands it to remind the reader that his penitence is after all directed to his salvation.

The Thornton paraphrase, though fragmentary, is the more ambitious:

Miserere mei deus secundum magnam misericordiam tuam.

God, þou haue mercy of me,  
 After thi mercy mikell of mayne;  
 God, þou haue mercy on me,  
 And purge my plyghte with penance playne;  
 God, þou haue mercy on me,  
 þat sakles for my syn was slayne;  
 God, þou haue mercy on me,  
 þat wrange was gane þou gete agayne.  
 Agayne þou gete me to þi grace,  
 And gouerne euer in gude degree,  
 So þat I trewly take þi trace,  
 God þou haue mercy on me. (1-12)

The repetition of a key phrase, though it does not occur elsewhere in the poem, effectively helps point out how all these various issues -- Christ's death, the sinner's penance, and so on -- are related to God's mercy. The alliterative lines and concatenation of lines 8 and 9 show how artfully the psalms could be paraphrased; this kind of artfulness is uncommon in Maidstone and Brampton, though not in other medieval lyrics.<sup>13</sup> The Thornton manuscript

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<sup>13</sup> Fein links this poem to other northern alliterative verse, especially *Pety Job*, with "its dramatized, soul-searching address to God" (227), the other paraphrases of the penitential psalms I discuss here (228-30), and of course, *Pearl*, with its alliterative brilliance (228).

Nevertheless Fein argues that the main source for the poet's paraphrase is simply the Vulgate Bible (231), and, given that it was widely known in England's northern provinces, the Rolle psalter (229-30). As I have pointed out, Rolle's psalm commentary is nowhere near as developed as that of the other exegetes I have discussed; one does not expect to

paraphrase might be seen as a precursor to the kind of technical perfection we find later with the Sidney-Pembroke psalter of the sixteenth century.

Generally, however, artfulness is not the main goal of these poets; the goal instead is to provide a context for the psalm verse, specifically one that the reader can apply to his own life. I do not mean to suggest that artfulness is entirely absent from the poems, but rather that it is put into the service of meditation, often taking place in the thematic development of the lyrics rather than in its verse technique. Frequently stanzas present the kind of connotative thinking we have seen in the commentators, words and phrases inspiring the poet to draw on a rich tradition of Christian thought.<sup>14</sup> Brampton's paraphrase of Psalm 101:10 provides a good example of this.

find the reliance on exegesis that I will show occurs in both Maidstone and Brampton in this poem, and in fact one does not.

For a full discussion of the poem's manuscript history, see Fein 223-26 and 232-35; for a discussion of the language and dating of the poem, 235-36.

<sup>14</sup> It is worth observing that this connotative thinking works both ways: that is, a poem might well inspire an echo of biblical material as well as biblical material providing the ground for a poem.

There are a number of medieval lyrics which echo the penitential psalms. For one example (there are certainly others), consider "Ihesu, Mercy for My Misdede!" (75-80) from the Patterson anthology. Sometimes the echo is quite direct:

Turne not þi face, ihesu, fro me,  
þof I be werst in my lyfyng . . .

[Turn away thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities; Psalm 50:11]

Other times it takes the psalm verse and turns it to different ends:

Who sal loue in fynyal blyse

Quia cinerem tanquam panem manducabam: et potum meum cum fletu  
 miscebam. [For I did eat ashes as bread, and mingled my drink with  
 weeping; Psalm 101:10]

Asschys I eete in stede of brede,  
 My drynke is watyr that I wepe;  
 Whan I thynke I schal be deed,  
 Be turnyd to asschys, and lye ful depe.  
 My deth evermore in mynde I kepe;  
 I wote no3t whanne myn ende schal be:  
 In to my grave er evere I crepe,  
 'Ne reminiscaris, Domine!' (83)

Commentators read this verse simply in terms of contrition,<sup>15</sup> but Brampton goes one step further: the ashes are in fact his own ashes, suggesting his own mortality. The paraphrase becomes connotatively richer and applies more fully to the reader's life in reminding him of his own death. The sinner must not only be contrite, but must also keep his mortality in mind, not knowing "whanne his ende schal be," nor if he is in good graces when he does "crepe in to his grave."

This kind of "connotative thinking," in which a word, phrase, or verse, inspires other images or biblical passages as a means to expand the psalm verse is entirely in the traditions of medieval meditation. Jean LeClercq writes of the kinds of connotative

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bot trow mankynde and angels fre?

[For there is no one in death that is mindful of thee: and who shall confess  
 to thee in hell?; Psalm 6:6]

<sup>15</sup> Rolle's commentary on this point is the most succinct: "ffor aske .i. ete as breade; and my drynke .i. menged with gretynge. That is, thorgh penaunce .i. wastid all leuyngis of syn. the whilke is bitakynd bi askis. and my drynke. that is, solace of this life, .i. mengyd with compunccioun of hert. that my thought was na tyme sett on any erthly comforth. and this pyne is til me" (354).

reading practiced by monastics,<sup>16</sup> and the expansion of the psalm verses is a variation on a type of meditation we find in Aelred of Riveaulx's De Institutione Inclusarum. Aelred advocates a visual meditation in which the reader is to place himself into a specific biblical scene in order to create the appropriate emotional response. The technique was not original -- there are parallels in Origen and Jerome (Barratt and Ayto xiii) -- and was indeed adopted by the Franciscans as a means to meditate on Christ's human nature (Despres 25; Jeffrey 4-5).<sup>17</sup> (And of course it was even later adopted by Ignatius and eventually permeated the seventeenth century religious lyric.) We can see its connections to the kind of meditation I discuss here by considering David Jeffrey's comments on Franciscan writings in the vernacular based on Scripture. There would traditionally be

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<sup>16</sup> More specifically, Leclercq writes of the imagination that the monastic used in reading the Bible: "It is this deep impregnation with the words of Scripture that explains the extremely important phenomenon of reminiscence whereby the verbal echoes so excite the memory that a mere allusion will spontaneously evoke whole quotations and, in turn, a scriptural phrase will suggest quite naturally allusions elsewhere in the sacred books. Each word is like a hook, so to speak; it catches hold of one or several others which become linked together and make up the fabric of the expose" (73-74). Maidstone and Brampton's "reminiscences" are somewhat different but analogous, applying the scriptural source to potential real life situations in the reader's life.

<sup>17</sup> Both Denise Despres's and David Jeffrey's studies thoroughly examine the tradition of visual meditation. Despres's study Ghostly Sights: Visual Meditation in Late-Medieval Literature (Norman, 1989) focuses on the techniques and how it affected late medieval English poetry and devotional works; Jeffrey's study The Early English Lyric and Franciscan Spirituality (Lincoln, 1975) focuses more specifically on Franciscan spirituality and its relationship to the European medieval lyric. In either case, the studies acknowledge the participatory nature of the meditation, the placing of oneself in a biblical scene in order to create the proper affective response to promote penitence (Despres 26, 30-31; Jeffrey 50), in the same way that the reader here places himself into the psalm to the same end.

extra materials to corroborate and strengthen the exegetical sense [of the text] while at the same time providing a personalizing referent, thus sharpening the doctrinal point and purpose of the scriptural narrative (48).

This is precisely what Maidstone and Brampton do in their paraphrases as well, though on first reading, one might be surprised to find how non-visual and non-contextual they are. Medieval lyrics on death, for example, could be extremely graphic,<sup>18</sup> but there is little of that here; nor are specific sins ever mentioned, nor contexts from the biblical David to give the psalm verse a historical referent. This is part of the meditative strategy; if these psalms are to apply to the reader's life, contexts need to be kept deliberately vague, so that the reader "fills in the blanks" that are already filled in in other lyrics. Neither Maidstone nor Brampton, for example, uses the ready-made context that is attached to Psalm 142, "a psalm of David, when Absolon pursued him,"<sup>19</sup> nor do they elaborate on contexts that would seem logical for specific verses.

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<sup>18</sup> For one example (though there are certainly others), consider:

When the turuf is thy tour,  
And thy put is thy bour,  
Thy wel and thy white throte  
Shulen wormes to note.  
What helpet thee thenne  
All the worilde wenne? (Luria and Hoffman 223)

These poems on death are clearly related to many of the Franciscan Passion poems with their equal emphasis on the physical pains Christ undergoes.

<sup>19</sup> In the Douay-Rheims Bible, this is not the psalm's heading, but actually verse 1 of the psalm itself. In the Vulgate, verse 1 is "David, cum esset in caverna" ("David, when he was in the cave"). In either case, some kind of historical context is provided.

Non avertas faciem tuam a me: et similis ero descendentibus in lacum.  
 [Turn not away thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down  
 into the pit; Psalm 142:7]

Turne no3t away fro me thi face,  
 But lete me have a sy3te of itt:  
 For 3yf thou withdraw thi grace,  
 My soule in synne schal sone be schytt.  
 Who so fall in that depe pytt,  
 It is so derk he schal no3t se.  
 Thanne is non helpe in mannys wytt,  
 But ‘Ne reminiscaris, Domine!’ (Brampton 118)

þi face turne [þou not me] fro,  
 I worþe like hem þat fallen in lake;  
 þe dampned man may wel say so,  
 þat is bitau3te þe fendes blake.  
 But lord, lat me be noon of þo,  
 þenke how þou de3edest for my sake,  
 And graunte me grace er þat I go,  
 Of my trespase amendes make. (Maidstone 113)

There are of course a number of obvious questions that the psalm verse presupposes:

What pit? Who is going into the pit? Who are they that go there? How is the speaker like them if he goes down there as well? What sins prompt this? Of the commentators, Lyra answers these questions the most fully in Davidic terms; other commentators generally argue that the sinner wishes to avoid hell.<sup>20</sup> Brampton and Maidstone follow this

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<sup>20</sup> Augustine is more general and other commentators follow his lead; he reads “pit” as the depth of sin (7:290-91), whereas Cassiodorus specifically identifies it as the lower depths of hell (3:409). Lombard here chooses a Christological reading for most of the psalm, though in this verse he follows Augustine and is more general:

Non avertas faciem tuam a me, jam humili. [Aug.] Avertisti olim a superbo, et factus sum conturbatus: quod ideo fecisti, ut probarem, quid erat esse a te, quod ergo abstulisti superbo, jam redde humili. Ideo non avertas. Et id est quia si avertis similis ero descendentibus in lacum, id est in profundum peccati, in quo contemnunt homines, et perit confessio (1250-51).

interpretation, simply dealing with general contexts. Brampton argues that one should rely on mercy, and Maidstone follows Rolle's reading of falling into a lake, perhaps confusing the Latin "lacum" ("abyss") for the English "lake": "Turne noght way thi face fra me: and .i. sall be like lightand in the lake" (474).

Furthermore, given the vividness a medieval lyricist could exhibit in dealing with hell,<sup>21</sup> it comes as a surprise that neither poet does anything with the image given by the commentators. But the purpose of their poetry is different: to focus on such images would

Turn not thy face away from me, now that it is humbled. [Aug.] Before I turned to the proud, and I was made troubled; whereas I did that, so that I might be thought highly of, which was yours to do; in that I therefore cast off the proud, now you restore the humbled. Thus turn not away. And, that is, because if you avert I will be like unto them that go down into the pit, that is in the depth of sin, in which men scorn, and confession is lost.

Lyra writes, after establishing that David is speaking:

3 Non avertas faciem tuam a me, tanquam offensus contra a me. Et loquitur de '[sic] Deo ad modum hominis, qui indignanter avertit faciero suam ab eo, contra quem est offensus.

4 Et similis ero descendibus in lacum, scilicet, si avertas faciem suam a me modo predicto (1545).

3 Turn not thy face from me, for my offense is before me. And he says to God as a man would [lit., in the manner of man?] who unworthily turns away I will turn from him, whose offense is before him' (?).

4 And I will be like unto them that go down into the pit, namely, if you turn your face from me in the aforementioned way.

<sup>21</sup> Dunbar's poem on the dance of the seven deadly sins ("Off Februar the fyiftene nycht") is a good example of this vividness. The poem is long, so I do not reprint it here, but each of Dunbar's personifications of the sins is striking in its sensory detail. See Luria and Hoffman 147-50.

be to redirect the attention away from the sinner's life. The general context keeps the reader at the center, so that he may reflect on his life and supply what will make the paraphrase apply to his personal life.

#### IV

From the structure of a typical stanza we can move to the larger structure of the paraphrases as a whole. Like all paraphrasers, both poets are constrained by the psalm verses and the psalms themselves, both of which occur in a specific order, determining the actual structure and the content of the works. Each of the penitential psalms alone does what Lombard aptly describes as "beginning in sorrow and ending in joy," so that if a sinner were to meditate on the entire set of penitential psalms, the process of recognition of sin, sorrow for sin, and assurance of God's mercy and grace would be repeated cyclically sevenfold. This might work against sustaining a narrative, but then neither paraphrase has any real narrative movement -- that is, the speakers do not progress from one psychological place to another in the process of the meditation. It may be rather that the reader meditated on a single verse, or a single psalm, and the stanzas are accordingly self-contained.

For example, Brampton's stanza 30, which concludes the second penitential psalm and stanza 31, which begins the third, do not present any emotional or psychological connection:

Letamini in Domino, et exultate justi: et gloriimini omnes recte cordes. [Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye just, and glory, all ye right in heart.]

In herte thei may be merye and glad,  
And ry3tfully here lyif lede,



And kepe the lawe that Cryist bad,  
 In thou3t, in woord, and eke in dede.  
 God wille qwyte hem here mede,  
 In endless blysse when thei schul be.  
 Here nedys may no thyng bettyr spade,  
 Than 'Ne reminiscaris, Domine!'

Domine, ne in furore tuo arguas me: neque in ira tua corripas me. [Rebuke me not, O Lord, in thy indignation; nor chastise me in thy wrath.]

Lord! if thou be fers and sterne,  
 As ofte tyme as thou shewyst outward,  
 And I trespass a3ens the 3erne,  
 To the I am rebell and froward.  
 Ryghtwisnesse to me is hard,  
 But with it mercy mended be:  
 To this woord, Lord, have reward,  
 'Ne reminiscaris, Domine!' (11-12)

One might expect that the "merye and glad herte" that closes the second psalm to qualify the call for mercy that opens the third psalm, but it does not. The sinner is right where he started again, rebellious and froward, unable to satisfy God's righteousness without His mercy.

Treating the psalms this way is part of the rhetorical understanding of penitence: if these paraphrases are cyclical, so then is the penitential cycle, the speaker sinning, absolved, and sinning again. Brampton shows us this in his paraphrase of the Psalm 50:12:

Cor mundum crea in me, Deus! et spiritum rectum innova viseribus meis.  
 [Create a clean heart in me, O God: and renew a right spirit within my bowels.]

Myn herte hath be dyffoyled with synne;  
 My spirit was to the untrewe.  
 Clense me, Lord! therfore with inne;  
 A ryghtful spirite in me renewe,  
 That I may evere synne esschewe.  
 And 3yf I forfete, of frealte,  
 To thi mercy I wille pursewe,

Wyth 'Ne reminiscaris, Domine!' (64)

The psalm verse itself is the plea of a sinner, and Brampton adds as an afterthought, But should I backslide and not eschew sin, I will ask instead for your mercy.

If organization is lacking -- or rather if the paraphrases are not organized around a narrative -- it is worth observing that this lack of organization is not unique to these works. In other contexts, too, critics have commented on the discursive meditative techniques medieval readers used in reading the Bible: LeClercq in the context of monastic culture<sup>22</sup>, Seigfried Wenzel in the context of sermonizing<sup>23</sup>. Furthermore, Rosemary Woolf explains that the meditative technique of medieval lyric poets was to arouse the basic emotions of fear and love; this did not require the exercise of the three faculties of memory, reason and will of the Ignatian tradition, so that logical development was not as paramount as evoking the proper emotional response (9).

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<sup>22</sup> As I have shown, LeClercq points out that any verse of the Bible could inspire a "reminiscence," one recalling another, so that a sermon (meditation, poem) is organized by allusion (73-74). Of monastic authors, LeClercq writes: ". . . they do not always compose after a logical pattern which has been definitely been fixed upon in advance. Within the literary form chosen, they make use of the utmost freedom. The plan really follows a psychological development, determined by the plan of associations, and one digression may lead to another or even to several others" (74).

<sup>23</sup> Wenzel writes that scholastic sermon technique, developed after 1200, was distinguished from earlier sermon technique in its emphasis on no more than a single verse, phrase, or even word -- the "theme" -- which was then elaborated by distinguishing several meanings of the base and developing them according to established rhetorical principles. The earlier technique consisted of the preacher retelling the gospel for the day and adding whatever moral lessons he thought appropriate (62). Though not exactly the same issue that LeClercq raises, this method does show that focusing on a single verse would create a different kind of structure, not necessarily a narrative one. (It is worth remembering, too, that sermonizing was a major task for the monastic orders to which Maidstone and Brampton belonged.)

Though none of these critics directly addresses the issue of the paraphraser's method of organization, it does seem clear that all suggest that organization of meditative lyric was generally loose, if indeed organization was an issue at all. For Maidstone and Brampton, the limits of paraphrase determine structure, but neither poet seems to have any real need (as will Wyatt) to impose any kind of structure onto the material he starts with. Instead the structure is created by the reader, who provides the contexts that the psalm verse suggests. Rosemary Woolf's perceptive comments address most fully the kinds of issues that this kind of organization suggests:

This abnegation of individuality is one of the most important differences between the medieval and the seventeenth century religious lyric. The writers of both draw upon the contemporary methods of meditation in their respective periods, meditations on the Passion and, to a lesser extent, meditation on death. But, whereas the seventeenth-century poets show the poet meditating, the medieval writers provide versified meditations which others may use: in the one the meditator is the poet; in the other the meditator is the reader (6).

Rather than the verse actually being a meditation, the poets allow the verse to point the way to personal meditation, so that the reader makes the allusive connections between the content of the verse and his own life. Providing any kind of structure beyond that would work against the reader's ability to make that kind of application. It is enough to paraphrase the psalm verse and provide an expansion which embodies the meaning. The rest is left to the reader.

## V

As the examples of stanzas embodying exegetical readings show, these paraphrases, in expanding the psalm verses according to the work of the commentators,

make exegesis in Latin available to a lay audience. (It is true that Rolle's paraphrase was available in English, but it is certainly not developed in the manner of any of the other exegetes.) On this issue the poets part company. With his use of the response "Ne reminiscaris, Domine!" Brampton emphasizes God's mercy to a far greater extent than does Maidstone; on the other hand, Maidstone emphasizes Christological readings of the psalms to a far greater extent than does Brampton. Both themes of course have their place in the exegetical tradition.

More generally, Brampton makes exegetical readings available by using them in verses which naturally lend themselves to allegorical readings. I have discussed these at some length in Chapter 2, and again return to one of the more difficult sets of verses from Psalm 101, verses 7 and 8.

*Similis factus sum pelicano solitudinis; factus sum sicut nictorinax in domicilio.* [I am become like to a pelican of the wilderness: I am like a night raven in the house.]

To dreedful deth I am dy3t,  
As a pelycan in wyldyrnesse;  
And as a backe, that flyith by ny3t,  
I am withdrawyn fro all goodnesse.  
Thou helyst my woundes more and lesse;  
With thyn herte blood thou wasschyt me:  
As often I kan fynde wytnesse,  
At 'Ne reminiscaris, Domine!'

*Vigilavi: et factus sum sicut passer solitarius in tecto.* [I have watched, and am become as a sparrow all alone on the housetop.]

I dar no3t slepe, but ever more wake,  
As a sparwe that is alone.  
The feend is busy my soule to take;  
And frendys have I fewe or none.  
Whan wordely trust away is gone,  
All hope and helpe it is in the:

To thi mercy I make my mone;  
 'Ne reminiscaris, Domine!' (80-81)

Brampton draws largely on Augustine and Cassiodorus for this interpretation of the birds as kinds of lapsed Christians and penitents<sup>24</sup>. Unlike these earlier exegetes, who simply interpret the birds as three kinds of sinners, Brampton directly applies the meaning to himself.

Brampton also makes available the exegetical tradition on the various issues concerned with penance -- recognition of sin, need for divine help, satisfaction -- if not in

<sup>24</sup> Augustine comments: "Hath such a man [a preacher of the word] come among those who are not Christians? He is a pelican in the wilderness. Hath he come among those who were Christians, and have relapsed? He is an owl in the ruined walls; for he forsaketh not even the darkness of those who dwell in the night, he wisheth to gain even these. Hath he come among such as are Christians dwelling in a house, not as if they had believed not, or as if they had let go what they had believed, but walking lukewarmly in what they believe? The sparrow crieth unto them, not because they are Christians; nor in the ruined walls, because they have not relapsed; but because they are within the roof, under the roof rather, because they are under the flesh . . ." (5:9).

Cassiodorus writes: "As I see it, by the names of these birds different kinds of patience are being announced to us . . . Pelicans do not fly in large numbers like other birds, but seek consolation in the pleasure of solitude . . . Next comes: I am become like the night-raven in the house. Another type of penitent is introduced here . . . Just as the brightness of day drives it into hiding, so the onset of night draws it forth; on contrast to the habits of other birds, it begins to be more wakeful and to seek its food when all other living creatures are settling to sleep. Likewise our penitent seeks food for the soul with anxious care in the nighttime; now attending to psalm-singing, now giving alms, now quietly visiting prisons, he wishes to have only God as witness, for His sight is not impaired by the night's darkness . . . I have watched, and as become as a sparrow unaccompanied on the house. He passes to the third type of penitent, denoted by the simile of the sparrow, so that in grieving for his worldly sins he might seem to fulfill speedily all the modes of satisfaction . . . With this sparrow is rightly compared the person in fear of the devil's deceits, who betakes himself especially to the enclosure of the Church, and continues watchful in perfect safety on its summit. The psalmist called it unaccompanied because of the charity which makes the penitent a sole figure out of many. He is on the house because of the height of his faith and the bravery of his mind" (3:6-8).

any formal progression. Each of the penitential psalms, as I have argued, shows the complete process from contrition to satisfaction, but paraphrasing verse by verse works against creating that sustained narrative. Instead Brampton raises the issues as a specific verse demands, as do other penitential lyrics which isolate the component parts.<sup>25</sup>

Brampton's descriptions of the sinner's recognition of his sin are often the most striking lines of the work, drawing on vivid imagery that remind one of Rolle:

Turbatus est a furore oculus meus: inueneravi inter omnes inimicos meos.  
[My eye is troubled through indignation: I have grown old amongst all my enemies; Psalm 6:8]

Myn eye ben wexin al derke for drede;  
My wickednes is drawyn on elde;  
My soule is wrapyd in wofull wede,  
For synne I have forsake ful selde (13).

Quoniam sagitte tue sunt michi: ut confirmasti super me manum tuam. [For thy arrows are fastened in me: and thy hand hath been strong upon me; Psalm 37:3].

Thyn arwys ben scharpe and persyn myn herte;  
Thi vengeance woundeyth me ful depe . . . (32).

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<sup>25</sup> For example, "A Resolve to Reform" succinctly lays out the tenets of satisfaction. I quote the first stanza:

No more willi wiked be;  
Forsake ich wille þis world-is fe;  
is wildis wodis, þis folen gle;  
ich wul be mild of chere:  
of cnottis scal mi girdil be,  
becomme[n] ich wil frere. (Patterson 119; Luria and Hoffman 154)

The second stanza recounts how the penitent will serve God in the church after becoming a friar, and the third how he will devote himself to good works for the sake of Christ, who died for our sins.

Quia defecerunt, sicut fumus, dies mei: et ossa mea, sicut cremium,  
aruerunt. [For my days are vanished like smoke: and my bones are grown  
dry like fuel for the fire; Psalm 101:4.]

My dayes begynne to fayle and fade;  
Thei wanyssche as smoke, whan it is hye:  
My bonyes were stronge, and myghtyly made;  
But now thei clynge, and waxe all drye. (77).

Brampton's ability to render images from the psalms themselves into vigorous English takes its cue from Rolle, who, though drawing heavily on Lombard, also paraphrases into idiomatic Middle English.

Brampton also makes the essential tenets of penance available to a lay audience by drawing on exegetical readings. This is particularly true in the paraphrase of Psalm 50, whose verses lend themselves well to the Catholic doctrine of contrition, confession, and satisfaction -- in this verse, specifically confession:

Ecce enim! veritatem dilexisti: incerta et occulta sapiencie [sic] tue  
manifestati michi. [For behold thou hast loved truth: the uncertain and  
hidden things of thy wisdom thou hast made manifest to me; Psalm 50:8]

Zyf I my synne will no3t excuse,  
But telle it trewely as it is;  
I truste thou wilt no3t me refuse,  
Thow3 I do ofte do amys.  
Thanne thi wysdam will me wis,  
To knowe so weel thi pryvyte,  
That I schal no3t fayle of this,  
'Ne reminiscaris, Domine!' (55)

In this interpretation Brampton draws especially on Lombard, whose commentary delights in applying verses to the speaker's own thought processes (unlike Augustine and Cassiodorus who read the verse as David's history). Lombard writes that even though

God values truth, He still punishes sin that a true confession reveals<sup>26</sup>; Brampton thus includes in his stanza not only the need for confession but also the mercy necessary for forgiveness. The final quatrain of the stanza is not immediately confident, for once the speaker knows God's "pryvyte," he must necessarily call on mercy.

Finally, Brampton draws on exegesis to make theological points, and then to translate those points into contemporary thought and image. The Sion of Psalm 101:14, "Thou shalt rise and have mercy on Sion: for it is time to have mercy on it, for the time is come" is generally read by the commentators as the Church (verse 17, "For the Lord hath built up Sion: and he shall be seen in his glory" continues the theme).<sup>27</sup> Brampton not only follows this interpretation but gives a particularly apt version of it.

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<sup>26</sup> Lombard writes:

. . . Ideo ita punio peccatum meum, quia, ecce in manifesto, veritatem dilexisti, qua peccatum punias, licet sis pius induldor. Sic enim misericordiam dat Deus, ut servet veritatem, ut nec peccata ejus sint impunita cui ignoscit. Ignoscit enim seipsum punienti. Misericordia ergo est quod homo liberatur, veritas est quod punientur peccatum (488).

. . . Therefore so I punish my sin, because, behold manifestly, you delighted in truth, for which you should punish sin, it follows you would be a conscientious favorer. For as God gives mercy, so that it might serve truth, so that neither will his sin be exempt from punishment from He who forgives. For He forgives the one who is also punished. Thus mercy is that by which man is liberated, truth is that by which man is punished.

<sup>27</sup> Augustine reads the stones of Sion as the Prophets spreading the ministry of the Word, and extends this to the Apostles: "Now that Thou hast pitied Sion, now that Thy servants have taken pleasure in her stones, by acknowledging the foundation of the Apostles and the Prophets . . . hence preaching hath increased among the heathen; let the heathen fear Thy Name, all the kings of the earth Thy Majesty; let another wall approach also from the heathen, let the Cornerstone be recognized, let the two who come from different regions, but who no longer differ in belief, meet in close union" (5:16-17).



Tu exurgens, Domine, misereberis Syon: quia tempus miserendi ejus, quia venit tempus.

Have mercy on Syon, Davydes towr,  
That sygnifyeth the ordre of kny3t;  
They schulde be holy churches sucour,  
Adn mayntene the feyth with al here my3t.  
Late nevere kny3thod, a3en the ryght,  
Be lost with tresoun and sotylte.  
For we pray, both day and ny3t,  
'Ne reminiscaris, Domine!'

Quoniam placuerunt servis tua lapides ejus: et terre ejus miserebuntur.  
[For the stones thereof have pleased thy servants: and they shall have pity  
on the earth thereof.]

Every kny3t is called a ston  
Of Syon, for holy cherchis defens;  
And goddys servauntys, everylkon,  
Thei schulde plese, with gret reverens.  
Thanne wratthe schulde slake, and al offens;  
And mercy on erthe shulde be so fre,  
That preyrys schulde turne all vyolens  
to 'Ne reminiscaris, Domine!' (87-88).

Sion here is not the Church, but rather a holy order of knighthood charged with maintaining the faith. Faith here is maintained by prayer; knights, the "holy stons of Syon," the fighters of the three traditional estates, are given the responsibilities of those who pray: prayers should turn the from violence on earth toward asking God not to recall sins.

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Cassiodorus follows this reading closely, and Rolle is the most pointed of all: "Thou risand to feght agayn the deuyll, sall hafe mercy of thi kirk: for now is the tyme of grace and tyme of mercy" (354).

## VI

Maidstone, in contrast to Brampton, emphasizes Christ to a far greater extent and reads the psalms in terms of the New Law fulfilling the Old Law. This is not to say that Christological readings never occur in Brampton. They do, logically enough in that the Passion is one of the central biblical events in relation to penitence: as Adam sinned, so Christ saved mankind through His death. For the most part, though, Brampton contents himself to focus on the speaker as the reader of the paraphrase. Maidstone instead makes great use of Christological readings, and in so doing offers ways in which the reader can align his behavior with that of a biblical model.

Valerie Edden argues that Maidstone's paraphrase offers a clear organization, the meditation following a scheme in which each of the psalms corresponds to a specific theme. The first psalms show the sinner's penitence; the middle psalms dramatically shift to Christ as the intermediary; the final psalms present the Final Judgment. Edden sees the organization as follows: Psalm 6, an acknowledgment of sin; 31, the penitent's need for clear conscience and true shrift; 37, confession; 50, a prayer for grace; 101, a dramatic dialogue between Christ and the sinner; 129, a contemplation on the Final Judgment; and 142, a direct address to Christ and prayer for grace ("Maidstone" 79).<sup>28</sup> Many of these

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<sup>28</sup> Edden rejects Mabel Day's claim (as do I) that the seven penitential psalms can be thematically equated with the seven deadly sins, as references to these specific sins simply do not occur in the poem (though there are a few general references to the seven deadly sins). See Edden 78; Day 104-08. For obvious reasons, Day's scheme does not work for my purposes, as I have argued elsewhere that one of the purposes of these meditative paraphrases is to keep contexts of specific sins deliberately vague so that the reader can more easily place himself in the voice of the psalmist.

elements exist in the Brampton paraphrase, but in Maidstone they logically follow one another and are developed to a greater degree. Edden does not, however, acknowledge the fact that this scheme comes from exegetical readings of the psalms. As I will show, Psalm 101 has traditionally been read in terms of Christ's voice, and Psalm 129 as a psalm presenting the Final Judgment. Specific verses of the psalms lend themselves readily to this kind of reading, so that the scheme that Maidstone adopts is part of a long exegetical tradition.

In addition, Maidstone may have had another meditative tradition in mind, that found in, again, Aelred of Riveaulx's De Institutione Inclusarum. Aelred's strategy of meditating on things past, things present, and things future consisted of three steps: first, meditating on things past, in his work particularly the life of Christ, and considering the implications of His life for one's own; second, meditating on things present, one's own life, so that knowledge of the self might lead to God; and third, meditating on things future, particularly the four last things -- death, the Final Judgment, heaven and hell.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Aelred writes: "The desire of thy soule is norsshed with holy meditacions. Than if the loue of Iesu shuld growe and encesse in thy desire, thre thinges the nedeth to haue in mynde. That is, thinges the whiche ben passed, thinges that ben present and thinge whiche ben to come" (17-18). Aelred applies the first exclusively to the life of Christ, and the rest of his exposition is devoted to the kind of visual meditation I have discussed earlier: things past include the Nativity, His Passion, and so on. He applies the second to the present state of the sinner's life, and the third to the Final Judgment (17-25). Following the organization of the psalms, Maidstone alters this pattern somewhat, and the majority of his paraphrase could be said to be devoted to the Aelred's second meditation -- the present state of the sinner.

Though Maidstone's paraphrase does not follow this scheme exactly, it does make use of past, present and future events: the penitent considering his sins, entering into dialogue with Christ, and looking forward to the Last Judgment. Maidstone is necessarily limited by the actual verses of the psalms themselves, so that the opening psalms cover the present events, the sinner's awareness and contrition for his sin, leading to past events, Christ's Passion, and finally future events, the Last Judgment. In this way, the sinner's own personal history is placed in the context of the larger whole of biblical history.

In Maidstone's paraphrase, however, Christ is not the only intermediary for man's salvation. Following the tradition of many medieval penitential lyrics,<sup>30</sup> he also calls for the intercession of the Virgin Mary and the saints:

Pro hac orabit ad te omnis sanctus in tempore oportuno. [For this shall every one that is holy pray to thee in a seasonable time; Psalm 31:6]

perfore biseke shal euery seynt  
In tyme þat is þerto conuenable,  
For þei bene trewe & I eteynt  
þei studfaste and I vnstable . . . (18)

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<sup>30</sup> A great number of the lyrics in the Patterson anthology are devoted to the intercession of the Virgin Mary; see especially 91-98. Typically they are not specific about sins committed, corroborating what I have argued about Maidstone and Brampton not using specific contexts in order to allow the reader to enter more fully into the poem. These lyrics focus instead on the intercession, as it does here:

Hayl, mari! Hic am sori:  
haf pite of me, and merci!  
mi leuedi, to þe i cri:  
for mi sinnis, dred ham hi,  
wen hi þenke hat hi sal be,  
þat hi haf mis hi-don  
in worde, in worke, in þaith, foli:  
leuedi, her mi bon! ("Hail, Mary!", 91-92)

Quoniam in te, Domine, tu exaudies me, Domine Deus meus. [For in thee,  
O Lord, have I hoped: thou wilt hear me, O Lord my God; Psalm 37:16]

Lord, for I haue trust in þe,  
My lord, my God, þou shalt me here,  
At reuerence of þat lady fre  
þat gaue þe souke & hap no pere.  
To þat lady bitake I me,  
þat woneþ aboue þe cloudes clere,  
Whil she is so ne3e þi kne,  
I hope to spede of my prayere. (41)

But it is Christ as intermediary that Maidstone develops to a far greater degree than does  
Brampton. Psalm 31:5 shows the need for intercession, and Maidstone adds Christ as an  
intermediary.

Delictum meum cognitum tibi feci, & iniusticiam meam non abscondi.  
[I have acknowledged my sin to thee, and my injustice I have not  
concealed; Psalm 31:5]

My gilt to þe I haue made knowen,  
I haue not hid fro þe my wrong;  
þour3e shrifte wol I fro me þrowen  
Al my mysdede & mourne among:  
For certis, lorde, we truste and trowen  
þe welle of grace wiþ streme strong  
Out of þi faire flesshe gan flowen,  
Whenne blood out of þi herte sprong (16).

The image of the well of grace recalls Christ's sacrifice, a well of Christ's blood. A more  
extended example of this kind of Christological reading occurs in the paraphrase of Psalm  
50.

Auditi meo dabis gaudium & leticiam, & exultabunt ossa humiliata.  
[To my hearing thou shalt give joy and gladness: and the bones that have  
been humbled shall rejoice; Psalm 50:10]

To my heryng þou shalt 3yue  
Gladnes, to glade boones meke;  
In lowenes lere me to lyue,

[Lufly] lorde I þe beseke;  
 þe þeues gilt [it] was for3yue,  
 On [rode] tre his bones breke;  
 A sorweful herte & clene ishryue  
 Seueþ soule and body eke.

By comparing his own situation with that of Christ in His Passion, the sinner is confident that his sin will be forgiven even as the sins of the thieves were. Furthermore, in an artful expansion of the psalm, he points out that the sinner's bones rejoice while Christ's break on the cross.

This comparison between the speaker and Christ is typical of Maidstone's strategy: Christ stands as a model to whom the sinner appeals. However, the sinner in his penitential suffering also seeks to make direct identification with Christ's suffering in His Passion. In the Middle Ages, the Passion became central to penitence: as Woolf points out, in medieval theology the primary issue of the Passion was the restoration of man to God rather than the defeat of the devil, as it had been according to the Church Fathers (21), and the means of effecting this restoration was penitence. Christ's suffering in the Passion surpasses any suffering of the psalmist, of course, and His death represents the supreme example of conforming to God's will constantly expressed in the penitential psalms. Maidstone accordingly offers ways in his paraphrase for the reader to identify more closely with Christ so that he can become more like Him.

For example, in Psalm 37, Maidstone draws obvious parallels between the psalmist's and Christ's situation without directly stating them.

Amici mei & proximi mei adversum me appropinquaunt & steterunt.  
 [My friends and neighbors have drawn near, and stood against me; Palm  
 37:12]

Myne nei3eborez þat my frendes were  
 Ney3ed and a3eynes me stode;  
 In welþe a man may wisdomere lere,  
 So wel were him þat vnderstode  
 How frendes flocken euerywhere,  
 As foules fleen aftir her fode;  
 But be a man deed & brou3te on bere,  
 Ful fele be feynte & fewe beþ gode. (36)

The final lines of the stanza suggest (and only suggest) a Christ figure, and the comparison between the psalmist's situation and that of Christ on the cross is obvious. Furthermore, in stanza 40, the speaker sees Christ as a model for his own behavior:

Et factus sum sicut non audiens, & non habens in ore suo redarguciones.  
 [And I became as a man that heareth not: and that hath no reproofs in his mouth; Psalm 37:15]

I bicam as man þat my3te not here,  
 Ne haþ in mouþ noon openyng,  
 Whenne I se synful men make chere,  
 I wende forþ ful soore sikyng;  
 But, lorde, þou bou3test vs so dere,  
 Lete hem in bale[s] no blisse brynge,  
 But sende hem my3te to amende hem here,  
 And graunte hem grace of vprising. (40)

According to Origen, one of the means for satisfaction for sin (his term is "retribution") is the conversion of other sinners; the psalmist here does not seek to change sinners, but instead sees Christ as the intermediary who can accomplish the conversion of sinners. Here and elsewhere, the sinner recognizes that he cannot be Christ, but he can imitate him, as in stanza 43.

Quoniam ego in flagella paratus sum, & dolor meus in conspectu meo semper. [For I am ready for scourges: and my sorrow is continually before me; Psalm 37:18]

For I [am] redy to be beten,  
 My sorwe is euer in my si3t,

To done his wille I wol good leten,  
 A3eyn my lorde wole I not fi3te.  
 Now lord, þat woldes þi blood out sweten  
 For hem þat þe to deþe di3te,  
 So sende me grace for to greten  
 Suche water as wole myn herte li3te (43).

The role of sinner and Christ meld here, so that the affective response to the Passion becomes one experience.<sup>31</sup> The sinner himself is ready to be beaten; but the rest of the stanza, recalling Christ's Passion, echoes not only the Christ's words -- "To done his wille I will good leten/ A3eyn my lored wole I not fi3te" paraphrases "Lord, be it done to Me according to Your will" -- and also the action. The sinner is to be beaten, Christ will allow His blood to be shed for those who condemned Him to death.

The sinner's modeling of his life on that of Christ is directly addressed in stanza 45.

*Inimici autem mei uiuunt, & confirmati sunt super me; & multiplicati sunt qui oderunt me inique. [But my enemies live, and are stronger than I: and they that hate me wrongfully are multiplied; Psalm 37:20]*

Myne enemyes beþ quyke and bolde  
 And strengþed aboue me mi3tily;  
 þei beþ encresed mony folde  
 þat haue me hated wrongfully;  
 But Goddes lambe þat Iudas solde  
 For þritty penyes vnri3tfully,  
 Wole I now folwe vnto his folde  
 And done his biddyng boxomly. (45)

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<sup>31</sup> For the tradition of poetry about the Passion and its goal of affective response, see Jeffrey 50, 106; Despres 24.



The reference to Judas selling Christ for thirty pennies is a specific elaboration of the theme of the surrounding enemies, and here the psalmist clearly states that he will follow Christ's example and offer his own penitential sacrifice.

This self-modeling is reminiscent of the kind found in much medieval devotional literature, and a great deal of current criticism is devoted to the conception of self that this creates. Caroline Walker Bynum writes of the discovery of the individual in the twelfth century because of this modeling:

It is possible to ask whether "the individual" is the best term for what is being discovered in these new emphases of twelfth-century religious writing . . . the Middle Ages did not have our twentieth-century concepts of the "individual" or "the personality." Their word individuum (individualis, singularis) was a technical term in the study of dialectic, what they thought they were discovering when they turned within was what they called "the soul" (anima), or "self" (seipsum), or the "inner man" (homo interior). And this self, this inner landscape on which they laid fresh and creative emphasis, was not what we mean by "the individual" . . . the twelfth century regarded the discovery of homo interior, or seipsum, as the discovery within oneself of the human nature made in the image of God -- an imago Dei that is the same for all human beings. Moreover, the twelfth-century thinker explored himself in a direction and for a purpose. The development of self was toward God (87).

Bynum's sense of the "discovery of the individual," then, is not our sense of that discovery, or for that matter, the kind of individuality we will find in the Renaissance poets to come. Though the purpose of all the poetry in this study is to align oneself to God, the method is different. Maidstone and Brampton, I have argued, remove themselves as *personae* from their poetry so that the reader may place himself within the poem. Thus the sense of the poet's individuality in the poem is subservient to the purpose of allowing the reader to "locate" his own experience in the psalmist's words. Nor is this necessarily an

individual experience: by offering models on which to base one's behavior, the reader can then align his own actions with those suggested by the psalm verses. The reader can become like the psalmist, or like David or Christ in the psalm.

Walker explores the importance of self-modeling (95-102), an issue taken up further by John Alford, who examines the process by which scriptural models provided the means for the creation of a "scriptural self," a self created by emulation of models found in the Bible. One meditated on a text in order to pattern one's own life on the models given in that text, following the medieval belief that in patterning oneself in specific actions, one could in fact will oneself to specific emotions -- here, love directed toward God (11-14).<sup>32</sup>

Medieval devotional writing abounds with examples of these kinds of modeling texts, works which, like the poetry I discuss here, explicitly or implicitly present biblical figures whose actions stand as examples of virtue to which the reader can apply his meditation and own life.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps the best known in late medieval England was Nicholas

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<sup>32</sup> This modeling went beyond the kind of poetry I examine here. Alford shows, for example, that saints' lives were often written with disregard to known chronological facts, but instead arranged so that the saint's actions conformed to known patterns of proper morality; see "The Scriptural Self," 15-21. My examination of this kind of "self-creation" will continue in subsequent chapters.

<sup>33</sup> The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Christ is clearly an explicit text; the influential Continental text The Imitation of Christ might be called an implicit text. Its title suggests the same kind of modeling I explore here. The text consists of a series of moral instructions designed to bring the reader more in alignment with God's will. The short chapter on spiritual progression may be typical: "In every matter look to thyself, as to what thou doest and thou sayest; and direct thy whole attention to this, to please me alone, and neither to desire nor to seek anything besides me" (194). Clearly this suggests altering one's behavior, though there is no "standard" such as Christ whose actions present the standards.

Love's Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ, translated from the Latin in the early fifteenth century. The term "mirror" is significant, as Alford points out: "All [various works titled Mirror -- for Monks, for Kings, and so on] purport to show the reader an unflattering view of himself or an ideal model of the self or both. The object is transformation" (10).

Love's introduction is of particular interest, where he explains his reasons for writing his spiritual treatise.

Ande more ouer þer is no synne or wikkednesse, bot that [he] schal want it & be kept fro [it] þe whiche byholdeþ inwardly and loueþ and folowe þe wordes & the dedis of that man in whome goddes sone 3aff himself to vs in to ensauple of gode leuyng . . .

And so for als miche as in þis boke bene contynede diuerse ymaginacions of cristes life, þe which life fro þe bygynnyng in to þe endyng euer blessed & withoute synne, passyng all þe lifes of oper seyntes, bot in a maner of liknes as þe ymage of mans face is shewed in þe mirroure.' þerfore as for a pertynenet name of þis boke, it may skilfully be cleped, þe Mirroure of þe blessed life of Jesu crist . . .

And as to þe þridde poynt, þat hit kepeþ fro vices & disoseþ souereynly to getyng of vertues. preueþ wele in þat þe perfection of alle vertues is fonden in cristes lif. For where salt þou fynde so open ensauple & doctrine, of souereyn charite, of perfite pouerte, of profonde mekenes of pacience & oper vertues, as in the blessed lif of Jesu crist (10-12).

Love sees Christ as the example of good living, the "perfection of virtues," that his reader can follow by meditating on the various incidents in His life, and seeing his own behavior reflected in those incidents.

Maidstone offers an example of this kind of meditative strategy in his paraphrase of Psalm 101, which Edden describes as a dramatic dialogue between the speaker and the sinner ("Maidstone" 79). The tradition of Christ as speaker of this psalm is derived from

exegetical tradition, particularly that of Lombard,<sup>34</sup> so that Maidstone's strategy is not original; but the identification of the speaker with Christ allows for a degree of modeling we have not seen before. Maidstone suggests this direct modeling in stanza 72:

Quia defecerunt sicut fumus dies mei, & ossa mea sicut cremium aruerunt.  
[For my days are vanished like smoke: and my bones are grown dry like  
fuel for the fire; Psalm 101:4]

For my lyfdayes like þe smoke  
Han fayled & awaywarde hyed,  
My boones beþ dried & al pour3e soke  
Like a þing þat is forfryed;  
Wel mi3t Crist þis word haue spoke,  
þat on þe cros was don and dried;  
For whenne his blessed breste was broke  
For drou3te and þirste ful loude he cryed. (72)

Given the physical ailments described, it is natural to see why commentators read them in terms of Christ's Passion. Maidstone take this one step further, assigning psalm verses to

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<sup>34</sup> Augustine equates the psalmist with Christ, "Let him then, who in his own body was at one time in despair, now that he is in Christ's body, say with hope, "My heart is smitten down, and withered like grass" (5:6) -- but Lombard makes the direct identification:

Titulus: Oratio pauperis cum anxiaretur, et in conspectu Domini effudit precem suam. [Cassiod., Aug.]

Iste est quintus psalmus poenitentiae, et quartus qui oratio dicitur; pauper vero de quo agit titulus Christus est, qui cum esset dives Deus ad Deum, per quem et omnia facta sunt.

The title: The cry of the poor man when he was anxious, and in the sight of the Lord made his plea. This is the fifth penitential psalm, and the fourth in which a cry is made; truly the poor man to whom the title refers is Christ, who was made a rich God from God, and through whom all things were made (905).

Christ, necessarily creating unusual readings of familiar verses (an echo of Lyra in his treatment of David), which must be fit to this new context.

The verses “I am made like a pelican, night raven, sparrow” which have allowed commentators unusually imaginative rein in making connections between the psalm verse and the context of the speaker, for example, are wholly turned to Christ’s life.

*Similis factus sum pellicano solitudinis; factus sum sicut nicticorax in domicilio.* [I am become like to a pelican of the wilderness: I am like night raven in the house; Psalm 101:7]

I was made like þe pellican  
In wildernes þat himself sleep;  
So redily to þe rode I ran  
For mannes soule to suffer deep.  
& as þe ny3t-crowe in hir hous can  
Bi ny3te see to holt and heep,  
So sauered I to saue man,  
Blessed was þat ilke breeþ.

*Vigilauit, & factus sum sicut passer solitarius in tecto.* [I have watched, and am become as a sparrow all alone on the housetop; Psalm 101:8]

I woke & was made like þe sparwe  
þat in þe roof [is] solitary;  
Vpon þe tre myn neste was narwe,  
[þeron] my3te I no briddes cary.  
As erþe is hurled vnder harwe,  
So was þe flesshe þat sprong of Mary;  
In [þis] world is noon sharper arwe  
þen was þe tene þat me can tary (75-76).

Like the pelican of the medieval commonplace, Christ slays himself for the sake of mankind; like the night raven, He “savors the saving” of man from His own home -- here, the cross -- from which He can see “the holt and heath” which he is saving. Alone on the cross, a “narrow nest,” He is like the solitary sparrow.

The rest of the verses of this psalm lend themselves to Christological readings that Maidstone exploits: as the psalmist is surrounded by enemies, so is Christ in His Passion surrounded (stanza 77), and in His death His days, like the psalmist's, decline into shadows (stanza 80). From here Maidstone, following the commentators, shifts back to the sinner and the building of the Church, of which Christ is the cornerstone.<sup>35</sup>

Quoniam placuerunt suis tuis lapides eius & terre eius miserebuntur. [For the stones thereof have pleased thy servants: and they shall have pity on the earth thereof; Psalm 101:15]

For stoones of Syon þi seruauntes liked,  
And on his grounde shul haue pite;  
Crist corner ston twelue stones piked  
His twelue apostles for to be.  
On hem twelue is a dongeoun diked  
þour3e feiþ, þat we on Syon se;  
þat whoso [be] wiþ synne entriked  
May sauely to þat strengþ fle. (83)

The choice of images is apt, as Maidstone translates the idea of the stones into a castle, using contemporary imagery to express the imagery of the psalm.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> This is indirectly derived from the commentators, who read the stones as the prophets (Augustine, 5:16; Lombard, 911; Lyra 1213). Cassiodorus reads them as the apostles and prophets, a metaphor used by Maidstone (3:11).

<sup>36</sup> As in Brampton, this use of contemporary imagery is not limited to this stanza. In stanza 12, God is the "curteys king" (9) who presides over a "court ful kouþ and kidde":

Beati quorum remisse sunt iniquitates, & quorum tecta sunt peccata.  
[Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered: Psalm 31:1]

Blessed be þei whoos werkes wronge  
Be for3e[u]en and synnes hidde;  
For þei beþ of God vnderfonge  
And in his courte ful kouþ and kidde;

## VII

If Christ's Passion is one of the important biblical events directly relevant to penitence, the Final Judgment is the other, as Aelred of Riveaulx encourages meditation on the final things. David Fowler points out the importance in medieval lyric of meditating on man's mortality in order to lead to repentance (83). Psalm 101 is where Brampton in particular raises these issues, emphasizing the cosmic in vivid idiom that effectively expands Rolle's vigorous paraphrase:

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But he þat liþ in lusted longe  
 And doþ no bettur þan beest or bridde,  
 He may be siker of stormes stronge,  
 ere wrecches beþ ful woo bitidde. (12)

The courtly imagery continues in stanza 27:

Quoniam sagitte tue infixe sunt michi, & confirmasti super me manum tuam. [For thy arrows are fastened in me: and thy hand hath been strong upon me; Psalm 37:3]

For þine arwes beþ in me pi3t,  
 þou hast set faste on me þine hande;  
 And I as man wiþouten my3te  
 Am waxen weyke so is þe wande.  
 But lorde, mayntene þou þi ri3te  
 Supporte þi man þat may not stande,  
 And sende counforte vnto þi kny3t  
 þat fer is flemed out of þi lande.

The verse of the psalm clearly states that God has fastened His arrows in the sinner, yet the sinner asks for protection -- support and comfort for his "knight" who cannot stand, even as the Lord maintains his right. The stanza sets up a lord and vassal relationship that does not occur at all in Brampton.

Inicio tu, Domine, terram fundasti: et opera, manuum tuarum sunt celi. [In the beginning, O Lord, thou foundest the earth: and the heavens are the works of thy hands; Psalm 101:26]

In begynninge thou lord growndid the erth; and the werkis of thi hend ere heuens. (Rolle, 356)

First thou madyst both earth and heven,  
Down to the lowest element;  
The sterrys, and the planetys seven,  
That meven abowtyn the firmament . . .

Ipsi peribunt; tu autem permanes: et omnes sicut vestimentum veterascent: . . . [They shall perish but thou remainest: and all of them shall grow old like a garment; Psalm 101:27]

Thai sall peryss bot thou dwellis: and as all clathynge elde sall thai. (Rolle, 356)

Whan all the planetys, that turnyn abowte,  
At the day of dome schal cese and reste;  
Alle erthely thynges schul were owte;  
Castells and towrys schul bende and breste . . .

Et sicut oportorium mutabis eos, et mutabuntur: tu autem idem ipse es, et anni tui non deficient [And as a vesture thou shalt change them, and they shall be changed; Psalm 101:27]

And as couerynge thou sall thaim chaunge and thai sall be chaungid: but thou ert he the same and thi 3eris sall noght fayle. (Rolle, 356)

Manne[e]s flesh shall bee [d]estryed,  
As clothys doth were with wedyr and wynde;  
And after ryse amd [be] gloryfyed,  
In holy scripture as we fyde (49-51).

Brampton does little more with the Last Things than that, but Maidstone's paraphrase opens up the larger picture of man's personal salvation in the context of all biblical history. Here Maidstone does achieve the narrative that Edden suggests. The suggestion of the Judgment to come begins in Psalm 129.



Sustinuit anima mea in uerbo eius; sperauit anima mea in Domino. [My soul hath relied on his word; my soul hath hoped in the Lord; Psalm 129: 4-5]

My soule hap suffred in his word,  
 In God my gost hap hade his triste;  
 For synnes is sharpe [as] knyf or sword,  
 Hit makeþ hem lame þat lyuen in [luste].  
 þefore Ihesu, my louely lorde,  
 þer I am roten, rubbe of þe ruste,  
 Or I be brou3te wipinne shippes bord  
 To sayle into þe dale of duste. (99)

Unlike Maidstone, the commentators emphasize joy. Augustine's commentary, for example, focuses on reliance and hope in God's word as the New Law fulfills the Old through the sacrifice of Christ (5:63-65), as does Cassiodorus's (3:314). Maidstone rather emphasizes sinfulness and mortality, giving the stanza a theme which does not seem to match the psalm verse well. But it does prepare the reader for the final Psalm 142, which extends the theme of the final judgment.

Again, Maidstone occasionally changes the focus of the psalm verse in order to emphasize judgment and death, as in Psalm 142.

Collocauit ne in obscuris, sicut mortuos seculi & anxius est super me spiritus meus; in me turbatum est cor meum. [He hath made me to dwell in darkness as those that have been dead of old: and my spirit is in anguish within me: my heart within me is troubled; Psalm 142:3-4]

He put me in places derke to be  
 As þo þis world ben dede;  
 My goost was greued vpon me,  
 Astoneyed was myn herte of drede.  
 In þis myscheef I may me se,  
 Whenne euer I do a dedly dede;  
 þefore, Ihesu, ful of pite  
 My life out of þis angur lede. (109)

These psalm verses are interpreted variously,<sup>37</sup> and Maidstone follows Lombard, reading it in terms of a sinner's exile, but he also amplifies the verse by adding a self-awareness: he will be in these dark places whenever he sins.

Even though Maidstone mentions the dark places, the paraphrase follows Lombard's model of ending in joy. There is no doubt in the sinner's mind that he will be saved:

Educes de tribulacione animam meam; & in misericordia tua disperses inimicos meos. [Thou wilt bring my soul out of trouble; and in thy mercy thou wilt destroy my enemies; Psalm 142:11-12]

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<sup>37</sup> Commentators read this psalm verse quite differently. Augustine sees it as Christ, but pointing toward the sinner: "For He indeed died for us, yet was He not one of the dead of the world . . . The dead of the world are those who have died of their own desert, receiving the reward of iniquity, deriving death from the sin transmitted to them . . ." (6:286). Cassiodorus also gives a historical reading: "David was indeed set in darkness, for after the high dignity of kingship he suffered the injustice of persecution" (3:409), as does Lyra:

Collacavit. quia fuit Dauid fuit compulsus se abscondere in locis desertis & cauernosis (1543).

Placed. because David was compelled to hide himself in deserted and cavernous places.

Lombard reads in terms of the sinner:

Collocavit me inimicus, [Heir., Cassiod., Gl. int.] quantum ad se, in obscuris, id est in tenebris vitiorum, sicut mortuos saeculi, it est caeteros desperatos. Et spiritus meus anxius est vicinitate periculi. Spiritus dico extensus super me visa miseria, apud Deum quaerens refugium (1249).

The enemy placed me, as near to himself, in the darkness, that is in the darkness of sins, like the dead of old, that is like those others who are despairing. And my spirit is anxious because danger is close. I say extended spirit over me, having seen misery, seeking refuge near God.

My soule þou shalt brynge out of care,  
 In mercy my foos dispartely,  
 Make þe deuel to droupe and dare,  
 þat he me drawe to no foly . . .

Et perdes omnes qui tribulant animam meam quoniam ego seruus tuus sum.  
 [And thou wilt cut off all them that afflict my soul: for I am thy servant;  
 Psalm 142:12]

And þou shalt lese hem þat disesen  
 Mi soule, for I serue þe;  
 Late no more vpon me resen  
 þe gostes þat han greved me;  
 Sende me grace þe to plesen  
 And whenne þe dredeful dome shal be,  
 In heuen kyndome me to seesen  
 Graunte, [oo] God and persones þre. (118-19)

The first quatrains of the stanzas paraphrase the verse closely, reflecting the confidence expressed in the psalm. But Maidstone's additions remind the reader that the confidence is only possible with the grace that God grants. Thus Maidstone expresses security in God's mercy while reminding the reader that security depends on his true penitence. As we shall see in later chapters, the confidence expressed at the end of Maidstone's and Brampton's paraphrases of the penitential psalms will not necessarily be present in later paraphrases.

## VIII

Part of the reason that the confidence will be more qualified in later paraphrasers is that the speakers of their paraphrases express far more insecurity about their salvation. This change was driven by two broad historical developments: first, the issues of salvation that develop because of the Reformation and second, the emergence of the sense of the poet as a poet in the literary culture of Renaissance England. These, combined with a

continued, even magnified, interest in the psalms, pave the way for Wyatt, Donne, and Herbert.

In contrast, these medieval paraphrases draw on a long tradition of classical and medieval exegesis as well as medieval meditative techniques which make them above all utilitarian poetry rather than personal expressions of faith, to be used by the reader to guide his own penitence. I do not suggest, however, that the poetry to follow in later chapters is not useful to a reader -- if it were not, there would be little point in reading it. But I do maintain that we read the poets to follow (Wyatt, Donne, Herbert among others) differently. Our interest lies in how these poets cast their own experiences into their work, or gives the impression of so doing by the means of a poetic persona who recounts his own penitential experience in the poetry, as much as our interest lies in their theology. We read for a sense of the individual poet expressing his individual feelings. In many medieval devotional works, we do not get that sense of the individual: as I have shown, the individual is absent in these paraphrases so that the reader can place himself into the poem, and the figures which do appear in the poem serve as exemplary models for the reader.

I have argued in my introductory chapter that this study traces the development of a sense of poetic self. With the next chapter devoted to the Reformation in England, those changes are brought into sharp focus.

## **Chapter 4**

### **THE REFORMATION**

#### **AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE INDIVIDUAL VOICE**

The Reformation in England made the psalms, indeed the entire Bible, available to a larger lay readership than ever before.<sup>4</sup> The tradition of psalm paraphrase reached its zenith in the English Renaissance, as a new national church demanded a vernacular Bible and liturgy, and the printing press made such material more available than it ever had been in medieval England.<sup>5</sup> Vernacular psalters abounded in England,<sup>6</sup> suited for lay readership,

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<sup>4</sup> F. F. Bruce recounts the many Bibles available in English in the sixteenth century. Tyndale completed translating the New Testament in 1525, the first five books of the Old Testament in 1530, then revised the New Testament in 1534 and again in 1535. A “Thomas Matthew” (probably a pen name) printed what is known as the Matthew Bible in 1537, which was revised by Coverdale to make it more acceptable.

In 1538 the printing of the Great Bible began, which was appointed to be in all churches by royal injunction.

Coverdale’s Bible was printed in 1535 and again in 1537. He edited the revised version of the Great Bible in 1540 (sometimes known as Cranmer’s Bible, who wrote its preface). Coverdale also helped prepare the Geneva Bible in 1560 with William Whittington and other collaborators; and he produced a bilingual version of the Psalter in 1540.

In 1604 a resolution was made for the creation of yet another new English Bible. It of course was the King James Bible of 1611.

For a more detailed overview, see Bruce 25-96.

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Steven Ozment in The Age of Reform, 1250-1550 (New Haven, 1980) suggests that the printing press helped make the Reformation possible in disseminating

congregational singing, and public worship. Never have the psalms been so widely disseminated in English culture.

More specifically, the developments of the Reformation influenced the poetry under consideration in this study by allowing deeper introspection on the part of the poets. The poets in turn treated the psalm material with greater freedom. First, the development of Reformation theology helped lead to a deeper consideration of the psychology of the sinner begun under the exegete Peter Lombard. Second, the considerable freedom of paraphrase is fully articulated in Renaissance rhetorical theory. These combined influences led to a movement toward a freer treatment of the penitential psalms within the context of the long literary history of psalm paraphrase. Renaissance poets sought to paraphrase the psalm by respecting the long tradition of exegesis, but also by adapting it to their own interests. Thus paraphrase became for the poet the means to develop one's own voice within the voice of the psalmist and the psalm tradition rather than the means to turn this responsibility over to the reader, as the medieval paraphrasers did. Eventually this paraphrasing tradition ran its course and poets used the penitential psalm tradition as a

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religious treatises widely so that the theological issues of the day were, had to be, debated openly (203): "Luther, a theologian, was fond of describing the Reformation as the work of God's Word. However true that may have been, it was certainly the deed of the printed word. As Luther also recognized, the printing press made it possible for a little mouse like Wittenburg to roar like a lion across the length and breadth of Europe" (199).

<sup>6</sup> In English Metrical Psalms: Poetry as Praise and Prayer, 1535-1601 (Cambridge, 1987), Rivkah Zim provides a provisional appendix of 90 works (85 surviving) which contained a new version of a psalm, in either prose or meter, printed between 1530 and 1601; the appendix does not include psalms in printed Bibles and primers. See 211-59.

basis, and only a basis, for their own original penitential lyrics. In sum, the age of the Reformation issued in new ways of paraphrasing the psalms: the poets took on more of the “internal” thinking which the reader was expected to do in the medieval paraphrases. The poems become less didactic and more “expressive” -- more meditative in that the poets do more of the meditating.<sup>7</sup>

The Reformation paved the way for this new rhetoric of religious poetry in various ways. First came the development of the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith alone, instead of justification by faith and good works, so that how one was to be justified, by God alone or by one’s own works required for satisfaction, became a central issue for Reformation poets. A shift of emphasis from the satisfaction for sins to the contrition for them -- the action that was still in the sinner’s control -- was already underway in the Middle Ages but thus came to the center in the Reformation. Poets accordingly emphasized the self-searching that contrition demanded.

Second, the reformers questioned and eventually repudiated the entire medieval Catholic system of penance, which offered the sinner a structural model by which to consider his sins: Lombard’s description of the penitential psalms as “beginning in tears and ending in joy” is a paraphrase of this model of the Catholic triad of contrition, confession, and satisfaction. Without it, the sinner was left to his own meditation as he

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<sup>7</sup> As I have noted in chapter 3, Rosemary Woolf makes this observation in describing the differences between medieval and seventeenth century devotional poets (6).

saw fit, and we find an increasing rhetorical freedom, to the point of abandoning paraphrase altogether, that poets adopt in crafting penitential lyric. This inward focus, already in place in the psalm commentary of Lombard, is taken even further by Martin Luther and Jean Calvin.

## II

Though he had earlier written a commentary on the entire psalter, Luther also wrote a commentary on the penitential psalms alone. Instead of following the tradition that the psalms reflect David's personal history (there is only one brief reference to David in the entire commentary), Luther makes clear that we are to recognize ourselves in these psalms, as he notes in the commentary which begins the work, Psalm 6:1:

Thus he [the sinner] implores here, not that he wants to go unpunished altogether, for this would not be a good sign, but that he be punished as a child by his father. However, that these words are spoken by a sinner follows from the fact that he mentions punishment. For God's punishment is not sent for the sake of righteousness. Therefore all saints and Christians must recognize themselves as sinners and fear God's wrath, for this psalm is general and excludes no one (141).

Luther's readings always serve to fit the meaning to a real sinner's life, so that he emphasizes the tropological sense of Scripture more consistently than the other senses. In reading Psalm 130:7, for example, Luther chooses not to pursue the allegorical readings that delighted (and occasionally perplexed) medieval exegetes.

This verse expresses the length of such waiting, just as the next shows the measure, namely, the Word. Scripture divides the night into four parts and calls them "watches" or "guards"; for the city watchmen guard, watch, and wait by night, to see if someone is coming or going. Each watch lasts three hours: the first, from six to nine; the second, from nine to twelve; the third, for twelve to three; and the fourth, the morning watch, from three to



daylight, that is, six. We shall omit profound exegesis here. It is enough to say that one must wait for the Lord from one morning to the next, namely, constantly and steadily. And if God were to delay the whole day, we should wait until the next day (193).<sup>8</sup>

Simplicity and familiar contexts are the hallmarks of Luther's commentary. He perhaps intended it to be used by the laity and, like Rolle, is simpler and more direct than other earlier commentators.

1. Hear my prayer O Lord; let my cry come unto Thee!<sup>9</sup>

The "prayer" is his desire for grace; the "cry" is his story of misery. This now follows.

2. Do not hide Thy face from me!

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<sup>8</sup> Compare this reading with earlier allegorical readings. Augustine, for example, makes heavy use of allegory: "Who then beginneth thus to hope from the morning watch? He who hopeth that from the Lord, which He began to shew from the morning watch in which He rose again," pointing out that Elias raised a dead man, and that Christ rose again, as did Lazarus (6:69). Likewise, Cassiodorus argues that the morning watch refers to the resurrection of Christ: "Night denotes the close of the world; so the universal Church must continue to hope in the Lord unto the world's end." Still, "Though this injunction is addressed to Israel in general, each and every person of the greatest fidelity is being advised of his own end" (3:315).

Even Lombard, with his emerging emphasis on the individual, follows the Augustinian tradition:

A custodia, vel vigilia, matutina usque ad noctem. [Aug.] Ideo dicit a vigilia matutina, quae est finis noctis, quia Dominus tunc surrexit, quod et in nobis speramus. Et ex tunc hoc coepit sperare anima nostra, et sperat usque ad noctem, id est usquequo non moriamur (1169).

To the watch, or vigil, to the morning. [Aug.] Thus he says to the watch, which is the end of the night, because then the Lord arose, that we should have hope. And then from this our souls took hope, and hope always through the night, that is, up to the point that we should not die.

<sup>9</sup> The verse translations are those of the editor, following Luther.

Do not be angry with me as I have deserved. To turn away the face is a sign of wrath, while to turn the face toward one is a sign of grace . . .

3. My bones burn like a furnace.

Just as a fire drains out all fatness and dries things up, so also affliction makes all the powers of the soul dry, feeble, and weary.

4. My heart is smitten like grass, and withered.

Grass that is cut off or broken loses its sources of life, that is, the inflowing sap or moisture; it dries out and becomes good fuel. Thus we are all smitten in Adam by the devil and robbed of our source of life, namely, of God, through whose inflowing we should become green and grow . . .

Again, Luther tends to the tropological rather than allegorical sense; the “grass” of verse 4 is like our hearts, cut off from the life of God’s grace, for example. Luther takes the metaphor of the psalms and applies them to the reader.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> G. R. Evans takes up the issue of late medieval and early Renaissance allegorical reading of the Bible in the second volume of her study The Language and the Logic of the Bible, this one devoted to Reformation biblical rhetoric, continuing the study begun in her first devoted to the early Middle Ages. Evans argues that the literal sense of the Bible took primacy in the twelfth century (see also Smalley), but did not preclude the figurative senses of the words in Scripture. In fact, a distinction was made between the literal sense as the conscious intention of the Bible’s human author and the other sense put there by its divine author (42–43). See her chapter, “The Literal Sense,” 42–50.

Luther distrusted the spiritual senses of the Bible. Evans quotes his Table Talk, no. 5285 (406): “When I was young I was learned, especially before I came to the study of theology. At that time I dealt with the study of allegories, tropologies, and analogies and did nothing but clever tricks with them. If somebody had them today they’d be looked upon as rare relics. I know they’re nothing but rubbish. Now I’ve let them go, and this is my last and best art, to translate Scriptures in their plain sense. The literal sense does it -- in it there is life, power, instruction and skill. The other is tomfoolery, however brilliant the impression it makes” (48–49).

As might be expected, Luther takes up the issue of grace, and gives various verses new readings to accommodate this. For example, Psalm 32:1 argues that grace is needed for forgiveness as such:

1. Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven.

This is as if he were saying: “No one is without righteousness; before all are unrighteous, even those who practice works of righteousness and imagine that they can escape from unrighteousness; for no one can rescue himself. Therefore blessed are they -- not those who have no sin or work their own way out but only those whom God forgives by grace.” But who are they? Verses six and seven will teach us who they are (148).

And so verse 6, “Therefore all those who are holy will offer prayer to Thee,” is read, “because they confess their iniquity to Thee and ask for grace; and note, to Thee! For although they may appear holy before men, they do not consider this . . .” (151).

Luther repeatedly states that reliance on God’s grace, rather than outward good works, is necessary for salvation. Occasionally this requires striking out in a new direction that previous commentators do not, as in Psalm 51:

4. Against thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight.

This is the verse from which we learn thoroughly to disregard our outward works and to put no faith in the praise and honor of them by others. They are done in uncleanness and weakness, and are not counted good in God’s sight unless we confess them as such. Hence the interpretation which takes this verse to mean outward sins is far from right (167).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Again it is instructive to see how earlier commentators read the same verse. Augustine emphasizes God’s righteousness in punishing rather than man’s deserving of the punishment: “He is a just punisher that hath nothing in Him to be punished: He is a just reprover that hath nothing in Him to be reproved” (2:373). Cassiodorus uses the Davidic context to examine the relationship of the king to God: “If one of the people errs, he is answerable only to God, for there is no man to judge his deeds. So the king rightly says

Luther takes verse 6, “Thou teachest me the ways of the wisdom which is hidden away,” to mean the wisdom to recognize one’s own sinful nature, “knowing oneself, thoroughly, and hating oneself” (169), whereas outward good works can be performed by anybody, the righteous one as well as the hypocrite. Thus in explaining verse 7, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean,” Luther differs from earlier commentators, claiming that hyssop is a false cleaner, because it is only an outward sign of cleansing and not the kind

that he has sinned to God alone, for only God could have investigated his conduct. And because he knew that God is everywhere, he rightly lamented that he had done evil before Him, and rebuked his own lunacy for not fearing to sin in the presence of so great a Judge” (1:497).

Lombard repeats this tradition, but also suggests that we may also read this verse in terms of the sinner:

Quasi dicat: Ignosce, quia ego ignosco, non dissimulo, et peccatum meum contra est me semper. Sibi fecti iste quod Deus in iudicio faciet. Unde supra: Arguam te, et statuam contra faciem tuam (Psalm XLIX). Vel secundum aliam litteram, et peccatum meum contra me est semper, non habet peccatum post tergum, ut prius habuit cum negligeret, post tergum enim peccatum habuit, cum rex sententiam in divitem, qui rapuit ovem pauperis, dedit, oblitus sui (485).

It is as if he [the sinner] were to say: Forgive, because I know, I do not dissemble, and my sin is before me always. He makes this argument to himself so that God might put him in judgment. Whence [we have] above: I will reprove thee, and set before thy face. Or according to another meaning, and my sin is before me always, he does not hold the sin behind his back, as earlier he held it when he ignored it, when the king, forgetting himself, gave a sentence to a rich man who has seized the sheep of a poor man.

Even here the emphasis is on what the sinner did, his specific sin, that would provoke the verse. In contrast, Luther assumes that the sinner’s intrinsic nature, not any of his specific sins, would provoke the verse.

of self-examination that he demands;<sup>12</sup> instead, he wishes to be cleansed in the blood of Jesus Christ (170).

In demanding a rigorous self-examination, Luther both follows the exegetical stream and then diverges from it. We have seen an interest in the psychology of sin in Lombard, who is primarily interested in the events and circumstances that cause the sinner to commit a sinful act and then require his penitence.<sup>13</sup> Luther begins from a different premise, that man is essentially sinful, and penitence is thus his natural relationship to God. Rather than focusing on the circumstances of the sin, Luther focuses on the sinner; the

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<sup>12</sup> All the exegetes follow Augustine on this reading. Augustine writes: “Hyssop we know to be a herb humble but healing: to the rock it is said to adhere with roots. Thence in a mystery the similitude of cleansing the heart has been taken. Do thou also take hold, with the root of thy love, on thy Rock: be humble in thy humble God, in order that thou mayest be exalted in thy glorified God. Thou shalt be sprinkled with hyssop, the humility of Christ shall cleanse thee” (2:377).

<sup>13</sup> John McNeill’s overview study Medieval Handbooks of Penance (New York, 1938) points out that penitentials written before the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 (and even many afterward) were particularly interested in the punishments meted out for various sins; many of the early penitentials are, in fact, little more than lists of required penances, with no or little reference to actual consideration of the sinner’s motivation or psychological state; see 28-35.

After the Fourth Lateran Council, priests were expected to help the confessing penitent consider the motivations for his sin. See in particular Braswell’s chapter devoted to the manuals priests could use in helping sinners consider the motivations, such as Robert of Flamborough’s Liber Poenitentialis and the Ancrene Wisse. Braswell writes that post-Fourth Lateran Council manuals tended less toward lists of sins and penances and more toward sets of questions by which a priest could effectively judge the sinner’s knowledge of his actions and the extent his will was involved (37-38); this dovetails nicely with Lombard’s interest in what I have called a psychology of sin. See Braswell’s chapter 2, “Educating the Audience: The Sinner Emerges,” 36-60.

question he raises is not “What kind of sin would prompt this psalm verse?” but “What is it to be in a naturally sinful state?”

For example, in Psalm 143:7 Luther describes the emotions that his Christian must endure, hoping to be saved but never knowing if he is.

Hide not Thy face from me, lest I be like those who go down to the pit.

God’s delay in granting grace and help causes the soul to fear that it is forsaken and condemned. But it is put on the rack to make it desire greater and more profound grace and thus receive more perfect grace. Now he is a truly Christ-formed man who is inwardly disconsolate and of a contrite spirit and has a constant longing for God’s grace and help. Yet when he tries to tell others of this cross and wants to teach them, he not only fails to find sympathy and a following but is repaid with ungratefulness and hatred (201).

The emotional state of the sinner is even more explicitly shown in Luther’s commentary on Psalm 130:5, where he captures the conflicting emotions his Christian faces.

5. I wait for the Lord.

Up to this point the psalmist has described the fear, the cross of the old man, and also how this is to be borne. Now he describes the hope, the life of the new man, and how one should walk in it . . . For God deals strangely with His children. He blesses them with contradictory and disharmonious things, for hope and despair are opposites. Yet His children must hope in despair; for fear is nothing else than the beginning of despair, and hope is the beginning of recovery. And these two things, direct opposites by nature, must be in us, because in us two natures are opposed to each other, the old man and the new man (191).

Luther’s commentary both lays out the principles of a Lutheran theology of sin and captures the emotional state that the theology would require. This interest in the psychology of the sinner, as opposed to the psychology of the sin, is even more prominent in the commentary of Jean Calvin.

## III

Calvin's psalm commentary does assume that David is the author and that the psalms are at some level historical documents, so that he refers to David's personal history and by extension to the history of the Israelite people. However, Calvin is also following exegetical tradition by arguing that this is not the only way to read the psalms, as in his preface he writes:

Moreover, though The Psalms are replete with all the precepts which serve to frame our life to every bit of holiness, piety, and righteousness, yet they will principally teach and train us to bear the cross; and the bearing of the cross is a genuine proof of our obedience, since by doing this, we renounce the guidance of our own affections, and submit ourselves entirely to God, leaving him to govern us, and to dispose of our life according to his will . . . (1:xxxix).

The crux of Calvin's commentary is that the Psalms teach us to do God's will rather than our own, a concept central to penitence.<sup>14</sup>

Calvin uses David's life in order to apply it to that of his reader. His commentary on Psalm 6:1 makes this clear, in which he explains that though David's punishment was

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<sup>14</sup> The tradition of reading the psalms in various ways continued to puzzle readers, and in Calvin's case, editors. Arthur Golding, writing in his epistle dedicatory of the original English translation made in 1571, writes: "The thing that is peculiar to it, is the maner of the handling of the matters whereof it treateth. For whereas other parts of holy writ (whether they be historicall, morall, iudiciall, ceremoniall, or propheticall) do commonly set down their treatizes in open and plaine declarations; this parte consisting of them, wrappeth vp things in types and figures, describing them vnder borrowed personages, and oftentimes winding in matters by preuention, speaking of thinges too come as if they were past or present, and of things past as if they were in dooing . . ." (1:xxxii). Golding does concede, though, that the difficulties are not so insurmountable that they cannot be overcome, with the help of meditation and prayer.

inflicted by man (Calvin does not specifically connect this to any event in David's life), "he wisely considers that he has to deal with God."

From whatever quarter, therefore, our afflictions come, let us learn to turn our thoughts instantly to God, and to acknowledge him as the Judge who summons us as guilty before his tribunal, since we, of our own accord, do not anticipate his judgment (1:66).

In turning to the reader, then, Calvin is in line with the long exegetical tradition, but with the same shift of emphasis we find in Luther, an interest in the psychology of the sinner.

Calvin limits himself mostly to the literal sense of the verse.<sup>15</sup> For example, in Psalm 38:7 ("For my reins are filled with burning; and there is no soundness in my flesh"<sup>16</sup>), Calvin gives a very literal reading. Where commentators take this physical ailment to represent the sinner's inner state,<sup>17</sup> this is for Calvin "too forced," and he

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<sup>15</sup> Calvin argues against the traditional understanding of 2 Corinthians 3:6-10: "Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life . . . " Paul means to suggest that in preaching one need pay attention to the spirit of the meaning of scripture rather than to what a Renaissance rhetorician might call direct translation of scripture. Calvin, on the other hand, takes "letter" to mean preaching that does not touch the heart and "spirit" preaching that does (Evans 48).

<sup>16</sup> As with Luther, the translations are from the edition of Calvin, following the editor and translator of his commentary.

<sup>17</sup> Augustine's reading does not initially explain the cause of the ailment, but suggests it is a physical manifestation of sin by emphasizing God's anger at the sinner (2:76), and then finally does make the analogy clear: "Let mourning be our portion, until our soul be divested of its illusions; and our body be clothed with soundness" (2:78). Cassiodorus is even more explicit: "The devil, who had taken in hand his bodily affliction, sought also to weary his soul unremittingly with empty fancies" (1:381). Lombard, too, suggests physical decay because of sin:



argues, “I am, however, not inclined to limit it [the word which he translates as “burning”] to a sore. In my opinion, the sense simply is, that his reins, or flanks, or thighs, were filled with an inflammatory disease . . .” (2:60). Likewise, in Psalm 102:9, Calvin gives a literal reading of the difficult “For I have eaten ashes like bread.” Calvin considers the allegorical argument that the speaker (in this psalm alone, the Israelite people) finds no more relish than he does in ashes; however, he continues, “But the simpler meaning is, that lying prostrate on the ground, they licked, as it were, the earth, and so did eat ashes as bread,” or possibly that the prophet meant that his bread was thrown on the ground so that he had no table from which to eat it (4:104-5). This focus on reading the psalms in terms of what is historically possible is reminiscent of the exegesis of Nicolaus of Lyra, but Calvin seeks to create plausible readings of the psalms; the metaphors lead not to the kinds of logical stretches that Lyra made but instead to realistic possibilities. This literalism in Calvin denotes a shift in emphasis: the events that happen in the psalm are made to be not only historically possible but even plausible, and could easily fall within the realm of the reader’s experience.

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Quoniam lumbi mei impleti sunt. (Aug.) Vel anima mea impleta est illusionibus, et quoniam non est sanitas in carne mea. Et ita non est toto homine, unde sit plena laetitia, donec anima exuatur illusionibus, et corpus induatur sanitate.

For my loins are full. (Aug.) Or my soul is full of illusions, because there is no health in my flesh. And so there is none in all mankind, whence there will be plenteous joy, unless the soul lay aside its illusions, and body take on health (383).

Furthermore, Calvin also uses the psalms to support his own theology. Like Luther, Calvin develops the concept of justification by faith as opposed to good works as in, for example, Psalm 142:2.

[1. Hear my prayer, O Jehovah! give ear to my supplication, in thy truth answer men, in thy righteousness.]<sup>18</sup>

2. And enter not into judgment, &c. [with thy servant, for in thy sight no man living shall be justified].

. . . The passage before us clearly proves that the man who is justified, is he who is judged and reckoned just before God, or whom the heavenly Judge himself acquits as innocent. Now, in denying that any amongst men can claim this innocence, David intimates that any righteousness which the saints have is not perfect enough to abide God's scrutiny and thus he declares that all are guilty before God, and can only be absolved . . .

But though not abrogating to themselves righteousness in the whole extent of it, they [sinners] show, by observing their merits and satisfactions, that they are very far from following the example of David. They are always ready to acknowledge some defect in their works, and so, in seeking God's favour, they plead for the assistance of his mercy. But there is nothing intermediate between these two things, which are represented in the Scripture as opposites -- being justified by faith and justified by works. It is absurd for the Papists to invent a third species of righteousness, which is partly wrought out by works of their own, and partly imputed to them by God in his mercy (5:249-51).

In arguing that righteousness comes not from one's works of righteousness but only from faith in God, Calvin takes the opportunity (as he often does in his commentary) to criticize Catholic teaching on this matter. For Calvin, the Catholic doctrine of satisfaction is

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<sup>18</sup> Bracketed verses are left out of the text where that specific verse is explicated and are provided from elsewhere in the commentary.

irrelevant, as he writes in his commentary on Psalm 32:2: "Blessed is the man to whom Jehovah imputeth no sin, and in whose spirit there is no guile":

Certainly the remission which is here treated of does not agree with satisfactions. God, in his lifting off or taking away of sins, and likewise in the covering and not imputing them, freely pardons them. On this account the Papists by thrusting in their satisfactions and works of supererogation as they call them, bereave themselves of this blessedness. Besides, David applies these words to complete forgiveness. The distinction, therefore, which the Papists here make between the remission of the punishment and of the fault, by which they make only half a pardon, is not at all to the purpose (1:525).

God alone controls the remission of sin; nothing man can do of himself can change that.<sup>19</sup>

Calvin deals with the seeming paradox, why then should man strive to do good? by explaining that the blessed man is, in being blessed, predisposed to do so. This kind of Reformation thinking sets up a specific kind of psychological state. If man can do nothing in his own power to assure his salvation, then he has no way of knowing whether or not he

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<sup>19</sup> Augustine chooses not to comment in any extensive way on this verse, and Cassiodorus emphasizes satisfaction: "Since he is a sinner, he does not proclaim himself to be most holy, a sickness to which human nature is especially addicted, but acknowledges his sins and continually perseveres in making humble satisfaction" (1:306). Lombard, however, points the way to Calvin:

Vel iniquitatem dicit peccata quae ante fidem vel baptismum sunt. Et est, Beati quorum remissae sunt iniquitates, et quorum tecta sunt peccata, id est quibus Deus peccata ante fidem remittit (318).

Or he calls iniquity the sins which are before faith or baptism. And this is, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered, that is whose sins God forgives before faith.

Lombard, in distinguishing between sins before faith and baptism and after, clearly suggests God releases only original sin -- man, being man, is still sinful.

is saved. A Reformation sinner does not necessarily have the serene assurance that we find in the closing of Maidstone's and Brampton's work. Though both of these earlier paraphrases take the reader through the entire process of penitence, including the sinner's own sense of unworthiness, there is no doubt at the end that salvation is possible and freely given, if one repents. Not so here; the self-assurance is lacking, and we find instead an uneasiness, even an undercurrent of real fear. Calvin invites his reader to ask: Where do I stand?

Calvin captures that uneasiness in, for example, the extended commentary on Psalm 51:9, "Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities." According to Calvin, David had at this point been assured by Nathan that he was pardoned (2 Samuel 12:13). Why, then, does he need to beg God for pardon? Calvin first suggests that Nathan did not make David immediately aware that God was willing to be reconciled to him, for Scripture does not always follow exact chronological order.

Let us take another supposition, however, and it by no means follows that a person may not be assured of the favour of God, and yet show great earnestness and importunity in praying for pardon. David might be much relieved by the announcement of the prophet, and yet be visited occasionally with fresh convictions, influencing him to have recourse to the throne of grace . . .

The truth is, we cannot properly pray for the pardon of sin until we have come to a persuasion that God will be reconciled to us. Who can venture to open his mouth in God's presence unless he be assured of his fatherly favour? (2:296-7).

David is never quite assured, both "agitated with fears, and yet rests in the persuasion that, being a child of God, he would not be deprived of what he indeed had forfeited" (2:300).

This psychology is further developed in psalm 130:4, “But with thee there is forgiveness.” Calvin acknowledges that there is indeed forgiveness, but is it freely given? Calvin’s God is a God of love Who cannot strike hearts with fear, and the man who is given grace submits cheerfully to his will. “Papists” (Calvin’s term), on the other hand, put great store in the wrath of God, but

It is no doubt true, that the sinner, who, alarmed at the Divine threatenings, is tormented in himself, does not despise God, but yet he shuns him; and this shunning of him is downright apostasy and rebellion (5:132).

This Reformation sinner’s fear is not imposed by God but rather is self-imposed. The psychological state of the Reformation sinner lies within himself, generating his awareness of his worthiness by his own self-examination.<sup>20</sup>

It is this more pronounced self-examination that attracts Renaissance poets to these psalms and allows them a different psychological penetration than that of their medieval forbears. From here on, poets working with the penitential psalms will submit themselves to rigorous self-examination, and the assurance that they will be saved will never be as firmly in place as it had been. Certainly the medieval paraphrasers and may

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<sup>20</sup> Compare this attitude with that of Augustine, who reads in terms of the Old Law versus the New: “A law was given that should terrify us and bind us into guiltiness; and the law doth not release from sins, but sheweth sins, and placed beneath this law, he observeth in the deep how great transgressions he hath been guilty of against the law, and crieth out thus, If Thou, Lord, wilt be extreme to mark what is amiss, O Lord, who may abide it? There is therefore a law of the mercy of God, a law of the propitiation of God. The one was a law of fear, the other a law of love” (6:64).

have subjected themselves to self-examination as well, but for the Renaissance paraphrasers, the examination becomes the very subject of the paraphrase.

#### IV

This self-examination, an emphasis on contrition, becomes central to the penitential poetry of the Renaissance at the expense of consideration of confession or satisfaction; poetry about satisfaction, as I will show in later chapters, will focus instead on Christ's Passion and how the sinner cannot possibly exceed the satisfaction that the Redemption made possible. Part of the reason contrition becomes central is the greater emphasis on self-examination, but it is also due to the abolition of the sacrament of penance itself in the Reformation churches, which allowed the sinner greater freedom in examining his conscience.

Of the many reasons that Protestant churches abolished penance,<sup>21</sup> the most important for my purposes is an emerging Reformation view on grace and justification by faith. The issues are well documented in contemporary theological works, many of which were available in English translation. Luther's A Treatise Touching The Libertie of a Christian, originally printed in Wittenburg in 1520, argues against the Catholic tradition of

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<sup>21</sup> Refuting Thomas Tentler's argument in Sin and Confession On the Eve of the Reformation (Princeton, 1977) that late medieval penitential practices served the religious needs of the laity, Steven Ozment in The Age of Reform argues instead that the Church's attempt to impose clerical ideals on a secular laity was its greatest failing; penitential practice, in fact, did not serve the needs of the laity well at all, with the constant grading of sins (particularly sexual sins) and excessively harsh punishments found in various penitential manuals. See Ozment 218-19; Tentler 140.

penance, maintaining that faith alone provides salvation, for even the wicked can perform outward acts of satisfaction as penance demanded by Catholic tradition. Luther argues instead that if we have faith, then we will necessarily perform acts of charity:

Our faith which doth work in us, not to be idlers, nor to give ourselves to lust and evill life, but that we not be tyed to a necessity of observing the law, or doing works, to the end to obtain righteousnesse, or salvation thereby . . . this man yeeldeth himselfe ready to execute all his will: the man doth sanctifie his name: this man suffereth himselfe to be exercised, according to the will and pleasure of God . . . but is not such a soule by the same his faith most humbly obedient to God in all things? (10).

Works, then, only glorify God if they are “joyned with faith” (14).

Calvin is even more explicit on the valid points of penance in his The Institution of Christian Religion, taking immediate issue with the Catholic threefold process of penance. Of contrition, he argues that it is impossible to know how much contrition is sufficient for a specific sin. Of confession, to assume that it is scripturally mandated by the Law of Moses is to read the Bible allegorically,<sup>22</sup> which he, like Luther, was resistant to do. Confession, argues Calvin, is specifically a law of the Fourth Lateran Council, derived from the bishops of the Church rather than from any scriptural authority.

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<sup>22</sup> The biblical passage in question is Deuteronomy 17:8, in which the priests of the Law discern between both a “physical” and “spiritual” leprosy. Calvin argues that Catholic theologians “flie to Allegories” (253r) in thinking that priests can “read” spiritual leprosy; only Christ can do that; and furthermore, if the power were given to priests, it would follow that it were also given to all people, which it is not. See Calvin 253r.

For Calvin, confession ought to be made to God, as David did; or made to fellow Christians, a point supported by James (here Calvin suggests to a pastor, or whomever in the church would be most appropriate); and should be made freely:

. . . not to be required of all men, but to be commended to those onely that shall understand themselves to have need of it (257r).

If Scripture holds that sin is forgiven, and forgiveness is received by Christ's name, then it cannot be absolved by satisfaction. Thus Calvin calls for the abolition of the sacrament of penance:

First, because there is no speciall promise to it, which is the only substance of a Sacrament. Againe, because whatsoever ceremony is here shewed forth, it is the mere invention of menne: wheras we have already proved that the ceremonie of Sacraments can not be ordained but of God. Therefore it was a lye and deceite which they have invented of the Sacrament of penance (612r).

Calvin is clear, though, that even if penance itself were abolished, the contrition for sins was to remain.

How the abolition of penance, and in the larger sense, how the Reformation affected the English Church and liturgy specifically is ground that has been thoroughly plowed,<sup>23</sup> but generally the theological changes were neither as immediate nor as profound as on the Continent. Since Henry VIII established the English Church for political as much as theological reasons, much of the pre-Reformation liturgy continued as it had. Here, too,

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<sup>23</sup> A useful, highly readable overview is J. R. H. Moorman's A History of the Church in England, third edition (London, 1973), especially chapters 11 through 13, devoted to the Church under Henry VIII, Mary, Queen of Scots, and Elizabeth I.



the English Protestant Reformers railed against the abuses of medieval Catholic penitential practices: the issue of breaking the seal of the confessional, the power it consolidated in the priesthood, the questioning of its scriptural basis. Nevertheless, there was never any question of the value of confession and penance. Luther wrote that it was useful, perhaps necessary, and Calvin believed that pastors were still best suited to hear confessions (Rowell 92).

The English reformers strove to find a via media, not to do away with confession, but to free it from the abuses of medieval Catholicism. It was generally recognized that confession had some kind of scriptural basis and was valuable as a means whereby the Christian sinner could align himself more to the commands and love of God.<sup>24</sup> There was

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<sup>24</sup> One example of the moderate position taken in England is Henry VIII's Assertio Septem Sacramentum: or, An Assertion of the Seven Sacraments, Against Martin Luther, reprinted in a second edition in 1688, which argues for the necessity of the traditional seven sacraments. Concerning penance, the work states that Luther stresses God's punishment, rather than His love and mercy. He stresses that "God is believ'd to supply the Sacrament, what is wanting to man in the Sorrow for his Sins, when 'tis less vehement" (57), so that forgiveness is due to all, not only those truly sorry for their sins.

On confession, Henry argues that it is scripturally based, citing to Ecclesiastes 38 to support his point: "Turn thyself from thy sins, lift up thine Head, and Cleanse thy heart from all sin" lays out the traditional threefold process (59-60). Henry also accepts the tradition of priestly confessors, as God mandated the various Degrees and Orders so that the Church could follow this example.

As for satisfaction, Henry cites Paul, "What is not of Faith is Sin" (68) to support the importance of works coupled with faith; furthermore, if God did not care what we did, he would not command and forbid certain things -- thus God does care for our works.

Perhaps the work has a political agenda: if the Church follows the pattern of "degrees and orders" instituted by God (as does the royal government), then perhaps the two are meant to be equated -- and joined.

less agreement on the value of private as opposed to general confession. Hugh Latimer wrote that those who were satisfied with a general absolution need not confess privately; other reformers (including Coverdale, Edmund Grindal, James Pilkington, Thomas Becon), if not arguing for private confession, argued for its consoling value.<sup>25</sup>

The Articles About Religion, a treatise published under Henry VIII in 1536 and devised to settle various theological disagreements in the newly formed Church of England, accepted the tradition of penance as a sacrament necessary for humankind's salvation, and that it consisted of the three parts, "contrition, confession, and the amendment of the former life" (Lloyd xxi). Not, notice, "satisfaction": though amendment of one's former life may take the form of outward works, the change in wording is again indicative of the inward focus that the Reformation demanded. The work that one is to do is to change oneself rather than perform a specific action that earlier penitentials demanded.

The treatise also makes the point that contrition needs to be joined to a second part,

that is to wit, a certain faith, trust, and confidence of the mercy and goodness of God, whereby the penitent must conceive certain hope and faith that God will forgive him his sins, and repute him justified, and of the number of his elect children, not for the worthiness of any merit or work done by the penitent, but for the only merits of the blood and passion of our Saviour Jesu Christ (Lloyd xxi-xxii).

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<sup>25</sup> A good overview of these various views can be found in Geoffrey Rowell's article "The Anglican Tradition from the Reformation to the Oxford Movement" in Confession and Absolution, edited by Martin Dudley and Geoffrey Rowell (Collegeville, 1990), in particular 93-95.

This treatise on penance was reprinted verbatim in The Institution of a Christian Man, printed in 1537. This work includes as well a treatise on justification which argues that penance

signifieth remission of our sins, and acceptation or reconciliation into the grace and favour of God, that is to say, our perfect renovation in Christ.

Item, That sinners attain this justification by contrition and faith, joined with charity, after such sort and manner as is before mentioned and declared in the sacrament of penance (Lloyd 209).

Confession, then, was still ingrained in English Renaissance culture, though the emphasis on contrition and justification by faith alone suggests that Reformation ideas were taking hold and penance was becoming less institutionalized, more a matter of individual conscience.<sup>26</sup> Poets thus were given a continued emphasis on contrition which helped contribute to the heightened emphasis on the sinner's state of mind. Without the liturgical form to cast that contrition in, however, poets felt considerable freedom in adapting contrition to their own specific circumstances, so that the abolition of penance also helped contribute to the rhetorical freedom we find in later penitential lyric. Furthermore, the shift away from the clergy administering the sacrament of confession to an emphasis on individual self-examination of conscience may well have contributed to the

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<sup>26</sup> Further evidence of this occurs in the 1549 Prayer Book, which included a form for private confession, not set off separately, but as part of the order for the Visitation of the Sick. This suggests that private confession was becoming optional, its necessity determined by the individual conscience (and here specifically, the immediate health) of the penitent. Even more evidence of this shift from institution to option is the later Prayer Book of 1552, which includes the same form, altogether omitting the instruction that it be used for private confessions. See Rowell 94-95.

freedom we find later penitential lyric. If Maidstone and Brampton help direct their reader's penitence, then Wyatt, Donne, Herbert and others felt free to direct their own, or to create the fiction of a persona directing his own.

The most detailed examination of penance in Reformation England comes in Richard Hooker's Of The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity (first printed in 1593; first complete edition of all eight books, 1665), a compilation of the various, and by that time, established practices of the English Church. Hooker's analysis of the issues of faith and grace reveal the *via media* that the English Church preferred:

Remission of sins is grace, because it is God's own free gift; faith, which qualifieth our minds to receive it is also grace, because it is an effect of his gracious Spirit in us; we are therefore justified by faith without works, and grace without merit. Neither is it, as [St. Robert] Bellarmine imagineth, a thing impossible, that we should attribute any justifying grace to Sacraments, except we first renounce the doctrine of justification by faith only. To the imputation of Christ's death for the remission of sins, we teach faith alone is necessary: wherein it is not our meaning, to separate thereby faith from any other quality or duty, which God requireth to be matched therewith, but from faith to seclude in justification the fellowship of worth through precedent works as the Apostle St. Paul doth (2:36).

Hooker's "We are by repentance to appease whom we offend by sin" opens his discussion of penance which moves quickly to the English practice of private penance, a matter between the penitent and God. Showing that the Church has traditionally been concerned with outward penance, and God with inner penance, he distinguishes between that inner penance ("Virtue") and the outer ("Discipline of Repentance").

Repentance being therefore either in the sight of God alone, or else with the notice also of men: without the one, sometimes thoroughly performing, but always practiced more or less, in our daily devotions and prayers, we have no remedy for any fault; whereas the other is only required in sins of a certain degree and quality: the one necessary for ever, the other so far forth

as the laws and orders of God's Church shall make it requisite: the nature, parts, and effects of the one always the same; the other limited, extended, varied by infinite occasions (2:69).

There is certainly an inward turn here, penitence to God "necessary for ever" and then to the Church as circumstances dictate. Hooker points out that fear cannot be the motivator in penance, but faith alone, "because by faith are discovered the principles of this action, whereunto unless the understanding do first assent, there can follow in the will towards penitency no inclination at all," whereas "fear is impotent and unable to advise itself" (2:70). To introduce a discussion of David, Hooker argues that penitence must start with a consideration of sins (2:71), which he then applies to the psychology of these psalms.

Fulgentius<sup>27</sup> asking the question, why David's confession should be held for effectual penitence, and not Saul's; answereth, that the one hated sin, and the other feared only punishment in this world: Saul's acknowledgement of sin was fear, David's both fear and also love. This was the fountain of Peter's tears, this the life and spirit of David's eloquence, in those admirable hymns entitled Penitential, where the words of sorrow for sin do melt the very bowels of God remitting it, and the comforts of grace in remitting sin carry him which sorrowed rapt as it were into heaven with ecstasies of joy and gladness (2:71).

Note the emphasis on both fear and love, sorrow and gladness -- the very mixed emotions that accompany penitence. It comes as no surprise that these emphases are those found in Wyatt's paraphrase.

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<sup>27</sup> The question is raised in Fulgentius' De Remissionis Peccatorum, Book 2, chapter 15. See Keble's note (71) of his edition of Hooker for the actual Latin quotation.

## VI

It is fitting that Hooker mentions the penitential psalms in his work; they certainly continued to be ingrained in English religious culture. They remained in the English primers: they were one of the regular features of the pre-authorized versions of the primers (Butterworth 3), and appeared in the authorized version as well, which was reprinted six times from 1545 to 1559<sup>28</sup>. In these primers we again see a steady move toward the tenets of the Reformation, such as, for example, the eventual omission of orisons to the Virgin Mary. In the authorized version, the seven psalms followed the office of Compline though were clearly not part of any of the formal hours, suggesting that they were intended for private, rather than public, devotion. Most important is the fact that their headings also suggest that they were intended to be read in personal terms, applying them to one's own life:

Psalm 6: A fervent prayer of the sinner, desiring to be cured, and his enemies to be vanquished.

Psalm 31: How the penitent person should bewail his sins, pray unto God and rejoice in him.

Psalm 37: the penitent person, sore grieved with the burden of sin, calleth upon God for aid, and betaketh himself to his mercy.

Psalm 51: A prayer of the penitent, earnestly acknowledging and lamenting his ungodly life and crying for mercy to be cleansed from sin, and calling for the Spirit of God to be confirmed in grace.

Psalm 101: A sore complaint of the godly man, being grievously handled of the wicked people, and making his moan to almighty God.

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<sup>28</sup> For the purposes of this work, I will quote from the 1559 copy of the primer in the Cambridge University Library. The Rev. William Keating Clay argues in his edition that this text is preferred because it is complete, unlike the others. See his introduction to his edition for a history of the relationship of the various primers, especially vii-xii.

Psalm 129: the sinner being punished for his sins desireth to be delivered both from sin and punishment.

Psalm 41 [sic]: the just man, being in adversities, prayeth to be delivered from all evil (Lloyd 45-50).

These readings, of course, follow long exegetical tradition, but Helen White points out that English psalters were designed to encourage the reader's identification with the psalmist. Psalters were printed with headings pointing out a particular psalm's importance and suggested uses for particular needs; late sixteenth century editions even included indices calling attention to specific psalms for specific occasions; and some psalters included private prayers as well as psalms.

This personalizing of the psalms was coupled with an emphasis on the creation of private prayers, and many critics have examined the emergence of private prayer collections, made possible on a wide scale by the printing press (White 8).<sup>29</sup> Many of these prayers were occasional, written for specific situations throughout the day, applying to individual circumstances as did the psalms in the primers (White 33).<sup>30</sup> Like the psalms,

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<sup>29</sup> For example, Helen White's study The Tudor Books of Private Devotion (Madison, 1951) examines the history and development of Renaissance books of private prayer. Philip McGuire examines the rhetorical models and attitudes that private prayer collections provided for seventeenth-century poets; see especially 64-67.

Importantly, Philip McGuire points out that Renaissance devotionalists divided private prayers into a tripartite structure: a confession, an invocation and a thanksgiving (65). The organization is not unlike that of a penitential psalm.

<sup>30</sup> Some prayerbooks, in fact, offered prayers for the most specific events of the day: upon getting out of bed, going out the door, putting on one's clothes, and so on.

Other prayers were clearly inspired by the penitential psalms. Book of Christian Prayers, printed in 1590, offered these echoes:

these prayers emphasized individual experience: rather than helping a reader align himself to a biblical model, these prayers seem designed to help the reader align the Bible to himself.<sup>31</sup>

## VII

Coupled with an emerging interest in reading the psalms in personal terms came an English self-consciousness in creating a truly national literature. The English Renaissance poets saw themselves not only as the forgers of that literature but also as the forgers of the language appropriate to it. Sidney writes in A Defense of Poesy (1595)

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I acknowledge and confesse before thy holie and high Maiestie, that I was  
bred in sinne and corruption . . .

(55<sup>v</sup>)

I am sicke, my life is brought weake with miserie, my bones are bruised as  
in a mortar, and therefore I flie to thee (Lord) as to my Physition . . . (66<sup>r</sup>)

For thou hast promised me that in what hour soever a sinner doth sigh for  
his sinnes, he shالل be safe. I am sorie, I acknowledge mine iniquities, and  
mine offenses are always in my sight. Of a truth I am not worthie to be  
called thy sonne, because I sinned against heaven and against thee (67<sup>v</sup>).

<sup>31</sup> John N. King in English Reformation Literature: The Tudor Origins of the Protestant Tradition (Princeton, 1982) makes this point in slightly different terms, arguing that instead of adapting the Bible to contemporary circumstances as did medieval writers -- with an emphasis on sacred legend, books of hours, dream visions and allegories -- the Protestant Reformers used the Bible "as a paradigm of the present life," so that the Bible became the central touchstone for the Christian's experience in the world (16).



. . . that Poesy, thus embraced in all other places, should only find in our time a hard welcome in England, I think the very earth lamenteth it, and therefore decketh our soil with fewer laurels than it was accustomed. For heretofore poets have in England also flourished, and which is to be noted, even in those times when the trumpet of Mars did sound the loudest (131).

He writes, not to castigate his fellow poets, but to encourage them to create a greater literature.

This demonstrated versus declared self-awareness of a poet as a poet is a crucial break from the medieval poets I have already discussed, who were content simply to provide the framework for the reader's meditation. Not so in the later paraphrases: a poetic self-awareness -- by which I mean a consciousness of the poet as a poet, presenting his personal vision to the world -- pervades Sidney's work, which presents English poetry as a continuation of the classical tradition's feeder stream, from the Greek and Roman poets through Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarch, Chaucer and Gower (Sidney 96-7).

Critics have been paying attention to this development. Steven Greenblatt's study Renaissance Self-Fashioning examines the rise of Renaissance self-awareness, taking as its thesis "quite simply that in sixteenth-century England there were both selves and a sense that they could be fashioned." This suggests to Greenblatt a consciousness that the "I" of a given work of literature and the writer creating that "I" could be two different social entities, and that writing could be the means for creating, and controlling, that social entity (1). Approaching the issue from the perspective of historical continuity, the thesis of Thomas Greene's study The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry is that the extraordinary flowering of imitation in the European Renaissance occurred as

poets saw themselves heirs to a superior classical culture. Imitation then was the means by which poets could align their own work into a greater historical tradition. Both studies suggest the poet recognizing and exploiting his sense of self; Greenblatt's poet does this quite consciously, Greene's poet less so in that he is imitating an earlier work and attempting to read it on both its own cultural terms and his own cultural terms.<sup>32</sup>

The thesis Greene proposes is particularly important for the poets dealing with the psalms. Using the psalms as a basis for poetry requires fidelity not only to the psalm verses themselves, but also to the tradition that went with them. English reformers were adamant that Scripture hold centrality in the Anglican Church, judging by the sixth article of the 1553 Forty-Two Articles:

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whosoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite necessary to salvation (Gibson 1:230).

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<sup>32</sup> Greene's dense study argues that the best imitation occurred when poets chose to 're-create' a text from a non-native past culture, "a gesture that signals the intent of reanimating an earlier text or texts situated on the far side of a rupture" (37). He continues, "Thus the imitative poem sketches, far more explicitly than most historically conscious texts, its own etiological derivation; it acts out its own coming into being . . . Imitation of this type is heuristic because it can come about only through a double process of discovery: on the one hand through a tentative and experimental groping for the subtext in its specificity and otherness, and on the other hand through a groping for the modern poet's own appropriate voice and idiom" (41-2). Imitation, then, is a means by which a poet pays respect to an literary artifact from a past culture by attempting to read it on its own historical and in the poet's own historical terms. See chapter 2, "Imitation and Anachronism," in particular 37-48.

The reformers likewise demanded that literature inspired by the Bible be faithful to its meaning.<sup>33</sup> A poet seeking originality would need to seek it within fidelity to biblical text if he were paraphrasing the psalms.

A partial solution to this issue may be found in examining Renaissance concepts of imitatio. Reflecting the literary self-awareness of the time, there were considerable materials the subject. Roger Ascham in The Schoolemaster (1570) writes that

Imitation is a faculty to express lively and perfectly that example which ye go about to follow. And of itself it is large and wide, for all the works of nature in a mannner be examples for art to follow (114).

Likewise, Sidney writes that

Poesy therefore is the art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in his word mimesis, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth -- to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture -- with this end, to teach and delight (101).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> King shows the various ways that the emphasis on the primacy of scripture affected literature: the development of a variety of “aids” designed to help readers read the Bible such as maps, concordances, indices (127-8), which in turn encouraged people to read the Bible in their own personal terms; the development of a Protestant plain style, suited for lay reading (138-44); the emergence of visual arts, woodcuts in particular, that were expressly tied to scripture, to “represent the Word visibly” (152). See his chapter 3, “Vox Populi, Vox Dei,” 122-60.

Evans in her second volume of The Language and Logic of the Bible also shows the Protestant insistence on the primacy of scripture, it alone being sufficient for the faithful without the need for Church interpretation; see her chapter 4, “Sola Scriptura,” 31-2.

For a full discussion of theological background of Article 6 of the Articles of Faith, see The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, introduced by Edgar C. Gibson, D.D. (London, 1896), 1:233-48.

<sup>34</sup> For Sidney, the concept “to teach and delight” cannot be emphasized enough: “. . . I think it may be manifest that the poet, with the same kind of delight [as the philosopher gives in the use of examples and reasons], doth draw the mind more effectually than any

Both Ascham and Sidney have in mind here a very broad concept of imitation. Ascham, writing a treatise on the learning of Latin, argues that imitation is the best means to learn a language, by which he means learning to write a language. He makes it clear that imitation is not meant to be slavish, as in his discussion of Tully's imitations (the text is not clear whom he is imitating).

1. Tully retaineth thus much of the matter, these sentences, these words.
2. This and that he leaveth out, which he doth wittily to this end and purpose.
3. This he addeth he here.
4. This he diminisheth there.
5. This he ordereth thus, with placing that here, not there.
6. This he altereth and changeth either in property of words, in form of sentence, in substance of the matter, or in one or other convenient circumstance of the author's present purpose. In these few rude English words are wrapped up all the necessary tools and instruments wherewith true imitation is rightly wrought withal in any tongue . . .

This foresaid order and doctrine of imitation would bring forth more learning and breed up truer judgment than any other exercise that can be used, but not for young beginners, because they shall not be able to consider duly thereof (118-19).

Ascham sees imitation primarily as a pedagogical tool, though he makes clear that in a skilled writer, it can become a means for self-expression that does justice to both the original and the present author, provided it "retaineth much of the matter."

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other art doth. And so a conclusion not unfitly ensueth: that, as virtue is the most excellent resting place for all worldly learning to make his end of, so Poetry, being the most familiar to teach it, and most princely to move toward it, in the most excellent work is the most excellent workman" (115); poetry is a moral, and well as pleasurable, force.

Sidney, writing specifically about literature, argues that poetry is a representation of nature:

Nature never set forth the earth in so rich a tapestry as divers poets have done; neither with pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, nor sweet-smelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too much loved earth more lovely. Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden (100).

Poetry can not only represent the natural world, but improve upon it, presenting a “golden” vision of that world. Again, imitation is not slavish but rather a product of what both nature and the poet bring to fruition, “freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit” (100).

Sidney distinguishes three kinds of imitation: first, the imitation of the “inconceivable excellencies of God” (101) (incidentally, David’s psalms are cited as an example); second, that dealing with philosophical matters; and third, “right poets” (102).

Betwixt whom and these second is such a kind of difference as betwixt the meaner sort of painters, who counterfeit only such faces as are set before them, and the more excellent, who having no law but wit, bestow that in colours upon you which is fittest for the eye to see . . . For these third be they which most properly imitate to teach and delight, and to imitate borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be; but range, only reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be and should be (102).

Sidney uses the term “wit” for what rhetoricians might call inventio, the creation of new material from the raw material of the old, and declares that these poets imitate in the best sense, bringing their own selves to their work, not recreating “what is,” but what “may be.”

Rivkah Zim examines more thoroughly the distinctions among rhetorical terms used in the Renaissance, and they too reflect an awareness of the fusion of not only source material but also a poet's vision of that material. The broad term "imitation"<sup>35</sup> encompassed both the more specific translation and paraphrase, which were seen as different processes.

The object of translation was to provide a faithful transposition of the original author's meaning in a form which allowed synonymity. This objective gave rise to a method of interpretation which paid scrupulous attention to the words and style of the author (9).

By contrast, the object of paraphrase was to provide a 'plain declaracion, exposicion or glose' of the author's original meaning in new words and as briefly as possible (12).<sup>36</sup>

Paraphrase obviously allowed the writer greater freedom, but this freedom was somewhat curtailed for poets modeling their work on the Bible. A translation, of course, had to be scrupulous about modeling itself to the style and context of Scripture,<sup>37</sup> whereas a paraphrase did not. Even then, the poet inherited a tradition of how psalms were meant to

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<sup>35</sup> Zim observes, in fact, that the term "imitatio" could encompass a wide variety of literary activities. Translation exercises of schoolboys; imitation of an entire text or only part of it; imitation of the stylistic features of a specific author or genre; the use of phrases, verse forms, allusions: all of these could fall under the broad term "imitatio" (13).

<sup>36</sup> Zim quotes Coverdale in his address to the reader in his translation A Paraphrasis upon all the Psalmes of David, made by Johannes Campensis (London: 1539), sig. A2<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>37</sup> Even then, the translation was recognized as a new work. Zim writes that "... a translation, however viable, was always a provisional representation of the meaning of the original author. The primary requirement of any translation was fidelity to the sense of the original" (11). See Zim 10-11 for an overview of contemporary approaches to biblical translation.

be read and understood: they did not simply mean whatever the poet wanted them to, even if the multiple “voices” of the psalmist did allow the poet some freedom in creating a persona -- David, Christ, a penitent, the penitent poet -- within the contexts of the psalm material.

## VII

It is this tension between adherence to the psalm material and the poet’s individual voice that can make the Renaissance paraphrases both deeply personal and universal at the same time. We see this in the English Renaissance commentaries written on the penitential psalms. These works tended to explicate the psalms differently than did earlier commentators, not to provide material for a sermon, not to explicate meaning for a reader, but to allow for personal reflection on the psalms themselves. “Commentary,” as I have used the term thus far, might be inappropriate for these works, and it is significant that the authors themselves do not use this term at all; “meditation” might be a better word for these works.

The shift between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance can be best seen by examining an early sixteenth-century work and two early seventeenth-century ones. The early work, the Bishop of Rochester John Fisher’s This Treatise Concernynge the Fruitfull Saynges of Davyd the Kynge and Prophete in the Seuen Penytentiall Psalmes (printed in 1509), is wholly in the spirit of medieval Catholic teaching. Fisher accepts the long tradition of David’s authorship of these psalms, as the title suggests, and the reader is invited to use David’s experience to mirror his own. This may be partly because Fisher

identifies his commentaries as sermons, and like Augustine, uses the traditional historical context to illuminate the present lives of his listeners. This occasionally leads to interpretative difficulties; in reading Psalm 37, Fisher writes that the psalm falls on the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, and tailors the commentary to that day:

For or euer we toke vpon vs to declare the two fyrst penitencyal psalmes our promyse was somewhat to speke of the natyuyte of our blyssed lady at the daye, whiche purpose wyllynge to kepe, also desyred of our frendes to folowe thordre of the psalmes, though it semed to be harde for us to do. Notwithstandynge by the helpe of out blyssed lady, we haue attempted the mater & made the fyrste parte of this psalme to agre with our fyrst purpose (44).

And so Fisher does, interpreting Mary as the morning because she stands between the darkness of sin and the brightness of Christ.

More typical, though, is Fisher's use of David's experience to reflect on that of his listeners. In this same psalm:

Et dolor meus in conspectu tuo semper. My sorowe for my synnes was alway in the syghte of myne vnderstandynge. Sorowe & inwarde penaunce is not only sufficyent, but also we muste make confessyon, and shewe to an able preest our synnes when tyme shal requyre, elles all our sorowe & penaunce be it neuer so greuouse shall be but in vayne & of non effecte, in the whiche confessyon we may not tell fables and other mennes fautes but onlye our owne . . . (85).

The Catholic Fisher emphasizes the debate of faith versus good works as Calvin and Luther will, but upholds traditional Catholic teaching about the necessity of the tripartite penance, and various verses support this. In Psalm 50, Fisher invites the comparison between God's mercy in "curing" us of sin and our own good works in demonstrating our



faith. As a doctor may be moved by a man's sores, argues Fisher, so must he also cure him.

He is misericors that is moued with some mercy inwardly. Miserator is he that dooth and perfourmeth outwardly the dede of mercy. Therfore our lord is not onely mercyfull inwardly, but also excersyseth outwardly the werke of it. And yf he executed not mercy in dede what sholde it profyte us. . . . It is notte therfore ynough that almyghty god haue mercy on vs but yf he do the dede of mercy. And what other thyng is to gyve and shewe on vs the werk of mercy but to doo away our wretchednesse, that is to say out synne wherby we be made wretched . . .

There thre thynges that we haue spoken of cometh without doubte of the gracyous pyte of god. Thou art sory for thy synne, it is a gyfte of almyghty god. Thou makest knowledge of thy synne wepyng and waylyng for it, it is a gyft of almyghty god. Thou art besy in good werkes to do satysffaccyon, whiche also is a gyfte of almyghty god (97-8).

Likewise, Fisher uses the verses about the three birds in Psalm 101 to discuss the threefold process of penance. The pelican is like contrition in that when she finds her birds slain by the serpent, she sheds her own blood in order to revive them, and the contrite do the same:

For whan they serche theyr consyence & fynde theyr chyldren, that is to saye theyr good werkes slayne and destroyed by the serpent deedly synne, than they mourne & wayle sore, they smyte themselfe upon the breste with the byll of bytter sorowe, to thentent the corrupte blode of synne may flowe out (<sup>1</sup>52).

In drawing on Jerome, Fisher argues that the night crow, in her mournful crying, is like the penitent confessing his sins to his priest (153).

As with the medieval commentators, there is a lack of real personal reflection. We do not get a sense of what the psalms might have meant to Fisher himself, but comparing his work with later penitential psalm commentaries points up the differences Reformation

thought made on how personally one could read the psalms. Dauids Teares, written by Sir John Hayward and printed in 1632, also accepts the tradition of Davidic authorship, as its title also suggests, but reads very little in terms of David's experience. Hayward instead chooses a personal affective response to the verses in the first person, laying out highly elaborate rhetorical divisions of the psalms so that the reader sees exactly how he intends to discuss the psalm. (One indication of Hayward's detailed elaboration is the fact that in a work of 554 pages, Hayward is only able to comment on the first three psalms.) For example, in Psalm 6:

Vers. 1 O LORD rebuke me not in thy wrath, neither chastise me in thy displeasure.

Every sinne is infinite, and wherefore.  
 2 Punishments in this life not to be found and wherefore.  
 3 Eternal wrath how fearful it is.  
 4 The pain of losse.  
 5 The pain of sense.  
 6 The fearfull representation of a guilty conscience.  
 7 Which turneth the trembling soule to GOD (9).

That Hayward's work is so situational is striking; each verse of the psalm points up a set of specific circumstances. Hayward clearly wants his commentary to be read verse by verse, and each verse is a complete meditation in itself, some of them concluding with appropriate prayers.

Hayward's commentary also allows for an affective response to the psalm material. For example, the commentary on Psalm 130:1, "Out of the deepe have I called unto thee, O Lord: Lord heare my voice" is divided into 24 separate meditations which collectively

build an argument: a discussion of the depths of sin, and the various reasons for it (impure thoughts, words, actions); the kinds of depths (of affliction, of fear, of humility and sorrow); who the sinner offends (God; other men; angels and saints; all creatures; his own soul); followed by an “intisement to teares” (345-6). And though the commentary is nominally about David, the reader is instead encouraged to read the psalms personally, as in Psalm 32:3, “Whilest I held my tongue, my bones consumed through my dayly complaining.”

I My selfe have heretofore been either negligent, or ashamed to confesse my sins. I could not altogether be ignorant; the cheek of mine own conscience did often advertise me, that my soule was drenched in two Stygian streames of corruption, originall and actual: threw one deceived to me by descent, the other proceeding from my proper will. For, by reason of the fall of our first parent, his blood was affeint, & corruption was so fast fixed in his nature, that hee transmitted that leprosie to all that ever descended from him. This is the seede of all actual sinnes, this is in power all sinnes in the world. Not onely if wee art the wicked motions thereat, but if we yeeld consent unto them, if without consent we take pleasures in thinking of them, then they turne to actual sins. But these delights have so swarmed my soul, that I cold but feelee the viperous brood within me . . . (160-1).

The use of the first person, the development of an argument, the way in which a single psalm verse opens up what amounts to an extended personal meditation all point to a very different way of reading the penitential psalms.

Sir Richard Baker’s Meditations and Disquisitions Upon the Seven Psalmes of David, printed in 1639, also treats the psalm verse in a more personal, meditative way, with very little historical reference to the Bible. Baker captures the sense of the psychology of the sinner, his very thought processes, as in the opening verse of Psalm 6.

O My Soule, what is it thou hast done? hast thou been striving with the Angell, about the bodie of Moses? For why else shouldst thou bee afraid of the Angels imprecation to Sathan, when hee strove with him about it, the Lord rebuke thee? Certainly the Angel was very milde in his imprecation, or thou art very sharp in thy deprecation. But O wretch that I am! If Sathan deserved rebuking for striving with an Angel, how much more do I deserve it, for striving with the Creator of Angels? and not about taking away the body of Moses, but about taking away the glory of his holy Name? For such and so execrable are my sinnes, that through them, the holinesse of Gods glorious name be blasphemed among the Gentiles. And have I not just cause then to feare that he will, and therefore just cause to pray, that he will not. Rebuke me in his anger, nor chasten me in his heavy displeasure (3).

Note the sudden rhetorical shifts (“O wretch that I am”), the sense of a mind working out its guilt, and especially the sense of a personal conversation with one’s soul. The reading invites introspection, perhaps because Baker wrote the meditation for specific people (the initial psalms for Mary, Countess of Dorset, Psalm 51 for Edward, Earl of Dorset, and the remaining psalms for Henry, Earl of Manchester). Unlike the necessarily communal nature of Fisher’s sermons, Baker’s work seems intended for private devotion, and the “I” is accordingly brought to the forefront.<sup>38</sup>

## VIII

The literary development of the poet’s increasing awareness of himself as a poet, not as, say, a medieval friar using poetry to educate or guide a reader’s spiritual

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<sup>38</sup> It is worth observing, however, that the commentary on the penitential psalms was written at the behest of Lady Margaret, Countess of Richmond and Derby, the Queen Mother. They were originally based on sermons on the penitential psalms, were preached to her, and put into writing at her request (ix). The fact that they had a public life as a set of sermons may account for their necessarily impersonal nature.

development, and the theological development of a Reformation focus on the individual sinner allowed for more pronounced voices to emerge from the penitential psalms. The medieval paraphraser was content to explicate the psalm, where the Renaissance paraphraser not only explicates, but also brings himself to, the psalm. As I put it in chapter 2, the Renaissance paraphraser finds his poetic voice through the voice of the psalmist. I use the phrase “speak through the psalmist” because I believe it to be precise: it both honors the original psalmist and allows a poetic voice to emerge from that psalmist. The poet may well paraphrase content accurately, as did the medieval poets, but he may also use the psalm to make an individual statement about penitence. Speaking of the penitential psalms, Barbara Keifer Lewalski frames the issue with typical clarity:

Of particular interest here, however, are those paraphrases [of the penitential psalms] in which the modern poet subsumes without obliterating the voice and stance of the Psalmist, and in doing so creates strikingly original psalm versions with a complex persona . . .

From such works it is an easy step to others which break away from the mold of even the freest paraphrase, but which are nevertheless closely modelled upon biblical poems (237-38).

She argues much of what I have argued about how the various voices of the psalms provide inspiration for those complex personae of which she writes (232-35), but also observes that “the Protestant conception of prophetic inspiration, which envisions the prophet as a spectator in a theatre, viewing by divine favor the events he foretells or foreshadows, permitted the prophet-poet considerable artistic freedom in shaping his materials” (236).

Renaissance poets, then, inherited a long tradition of psalm exegesis that allowed for further development of various voices located in the psalms. However, there was also an emphasis on individual experience that allowed for shaping the psalms to specific contexts, and Lewalski's use of the term "prophet-poet" suggests individual experience; the poet not only received a set of materials or inspiration, but was also required to interpret them in order to present it to other Christians.

The poets exploit the tension between the psalmist's general experience and the individual sinner's specific experience in various ways. The matter might be framed as how to present one's own voice in a tradition of psalm paraphrase, the subject matter of which has a predetermined content. Remaining faithful to that content but also using it for one's own purposes was the issue that every Renaissance poet who worked with the psalms had to consider.

My next chapter is devoted to Sir Thomas Wyatt, who both adhered to the tradition of David as psalmist and also allowed his own voice to emerge through the psalm. He creates a paraphrase in which the seven psalms function as a narrative which truly makes both dramatic and psychological sense. Other poets, Sir Philip Sidney and the Countess of Pembroke in particular, find their poetic voices through the psalmist by experimenting with technical aspects of poetry, such as rhythm and meter. Their paraphrase of the entire psalter matches the content of the psalm to poetic form: the manner is the matter. Other Renaissance poets struck out in various different ways in regard to technique, and chapter 6 will deal the Sidneys and these other writers.

A final option for a poet interested in paraphrase was to break loose from the psalm content altogether. We have seen the freedom that this allowed various medieval lyricists, their poems far less rigorous and personal than Maidstone's and Brampton's work, and the lyricists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries follow this tradition. Of these lyricists, Donne and Herbert stand out in constructing larger works, collections of poems, that break free from the penitential psalms and yet still use their construct of a penitential process carried out by an individual sinner. Chapters 7 and 8 will be devoted to these poets.

Thus the tradition of psalm paraphrase continued but took new forms and directions. One might in fact argue "for the better." It comes as no surprise that the final two poets are among the best-loved in English literature, and that the Sidneys and Wyatt are deeply admired by scholars (though my sense is that they are unknown generally outside the realm of specialists). On the other hand, Maidstone and Brampton are practically unknown, even within the realm of specialists. My final chapter will examine the relationship of poet to poetry to audience; for now, it suffices to say that the Reformation made possible poetry of increasing rhetorical -- and equally increasing theological -- interest.

**Chapter 5**  
**WYATT AND THE EMERGENCE**  
**OF THE POETIC VOICE**

In speaking in their own poetic voices through the voice of the psalmist, English Renaissance poets handled the penitential psalms in two divergent ways. They either subsumed their voice to that of the psalmist, paraphrasing closely and accurately with few additions of their own; or they subsumed the voice of the psalmist to their own voice, as we have seen in the various prose meditations of the previous chapter. The tension between adherence to the content of the psalm and freedom in the range of meanings found in psalm exegesis created poetry that not only paid respect to the original psalmist but also to the contemporary poet.

Some poets paraphrased only one or two of the penitential psalms, as did Gascoigne, with his version of Psalm 130; some paraphrased the entire psalter, as did Sir Philip Sidney and Mary Sidney, the Countess of Pembroke; some paraphrased the penitential psalms only, as did Sir John Harington and Sir Thomas Wyatt. Deciding what psalms to paraphrase affected the freedom of the paraphrase. A single psalm, for example, has the potential (not always realized) to be freer in paraphrase because it is self-contained and not part of a larger context. A paraphrase of the entire psalter, on the other hand, might suggest a utilitarian purpose ranging



from private meditation to communal worship, and might demand less freedom and more adherence to biblical tradition in paraphrase. Not surprisingly, there were numerous paraphrases of this sort, some with tune settings for congregational singing.<sup>1</sup>

A paraphrase of only the penitential psalms had the potential to strike the strongest balance between, in a variation of Jan Lawson Hinely's useful phrase in reference to Wyatt, "freedom and bondage."<sup>2</sup> The poet had certain limits in approximating the matter of the psalm, but also certain freedom by the rich tradition of meanings found in the voice of the psalmist from which he could choose. In the case of the penitential psalms, there was also a tradition of narrative and movement through the penitential process, which might be used freely or not at all, as the poet wished. This balance of freedom and bondage is what Sir Thomas Wyatt achieved in his paraphrase.

## II

Most critical study of Sir Thomas Wyatt's work centers on the secular lyrics, and his paraphrase of the penitential psalms has been comparatively, and unfortunately, neglected. The

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<sup>1</sup> See Zim's appendix for a list of psalters consulted for study, 211-259. Some 90 paraphrases are listed, each including a new English psalm version in prose or meter and printed between 1530-1601 (211). Even so, as Zim notes, the list is provisional.

<sup>2</sup> I take the phrase from the title of her essay on Wyatt's paraphrase, "Freedom through Bondage": Wyatt's Appropriation of the Penitential Psalms of David," in the collection *The Works of Dissimilitude* (Newark, 1992). Hinely also uses the term "appropriation" to describe Wyatt's treatment of the penitential psalms, suggesting that he found in them something that could be turned to his own ends. I will discuss these possible uses at the end of this chapter -- Hinely's interpretation as well as those of other critics.

same principles which make his secular lyrics (particularly his translations from Petrarch) so successful, such as his masterful manipulation of tone, inform the psalms as well.<sup>3</sup> As many critics have noted, Wyatt's paraphrase is the first to create a psychological drama out of the penitential psalms,<sup>4</sup> using the traditional narrative of David atoning for his sin with Bathsheba and including a narrative lyric before, between, and after each the psalms. The psalms, then, are not isolated but are rather set into the context of a narrative structure.

This differs markedly from the medieval paraphrases, each of which had only one introductory stanza (or set of stanzas, as in the case of Maidstone) for all seven psalms to

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<sup>3</sup> Hinely reads Wyatt's penitential psalm paraphrase in light of his secular lyrics, arguing that in the psalms, the same introspection that gives the anguish of the poet/lover such power is transferred to the poet/penitent: "The lover's lute becomes the psalmist's harp" (149). Stephen Greenblatt argues much the same, seeing the penitent's plight as a triumph over sexuality and creating what he terms an "inwardness," whereas in the lyrics the lover has not achieved such triumph; see his chapter 3, "Power, Sexuality and Inwardness in Wyatt's Poetry," 115-56, especially 118-28. Douglas Peterson does the same, arguing that sixteenth-century religious verse would not have been possible without Petrarchanism, which offered various means by which to examine states of mind and handle paradoxical feelings which are part of a devout Anglican's religious experience (175-76).

Thomas Greene does not deal with Wyatt's penitential psalms at all; however, his chapter on Wyatt is an excellent study of the differences in tone and stance toward subject matter in Wyatt's paraphrases of Petrarch's sonnets. See chapter 12, "Wyatt: Erosion and Stabilization," 242-63.

<sup>4</sup> Lily B. Campbell cites Pietro Aretino's prose model of the psalms in Italian, printed in 1536, that inspired Wyatt's arrangement, and further suggests that his ambassadorial visit to the papal court in 1527 put him in touch with the Italian models of ottava rima and terza rima which he uses in the psalms (35-36). Likewise, H. A. Mason takes the argument further, analyzing how the psalms, and the narratives between them, create that drama; in particular, he examines the changes in tone that Wyatt makes from his model Aretino. See his chapter "Wyatt: 'Great Translateur': The Relation of Wyatt to the Humanists," 179-236.

explain what was to come. Wyatt differs further in creating a psychology of sin that is particularly Protestant. The earlier paraphrases presented penitence as a never-ending cycle of sin and repentance, each psalm “beginning in sorrow and ending in joy,” to paraphrase Lombard, so that the process is repeated over and over. Wyatt instead examines a very specific sinner and tracks the development of his conscience, so that we find real progression in David’s awareness. He begins in one psychological place, and he ends in another.

By shifting from a generalized sinner to a specific one, Wyatt shifts from a focus on the general concepts of sin and penitence to a Reformation focus on the sinner’s psychological state, and this allows him to develop his own poetic voice through that of the psalmist. Wyatt’s psalms are situational in two ways: first, they recount David’s history (which had a long exegetical tradition), and second, they present David as a very specific kind of David, a Reformation sinner.

I argue that Wyatt is a “bridge” poet between the poets I have discussed and the poets I will discuss. He is a bridge in three different ways. First, in providing a narrative context for the penitential psalms, he creates a narrative drama out of them, reflecting a Reformation belief in the Bible providing a pattern for a Christian’s life. Second, the movement through the psalms, with its cycle of joy and despair, is presented here as Protestant, the sinner never knowing whether or not he is saved; Wyatt introduces to the psalms Reformation theology on election and salvation that will be taken up by later poets. Finally, Wyatt raises the question of the psalms as personal autobiography: David in the psalms may well mirror Wyatt in his life, an issue I will address at the end of this chapter. Where earlier poets read the “I” of the psalm as

the reader and the psalmist, Wyatt very possibly reads the “I” as the psalmist as both David and himself – and later poets will completely take over the voice of the psalmist.

To examine these issues I will follow Wyatt’s narrative of the psalms. This has the disadvantage of not allowing a formal and organized presentation of Protestant themes because Wyatt is of course as constrained by the actual ordering of the psalms and verses as the medieval poets were. But it does have the advantage of examining David’s real psychological development, and that is certainly part of the point. If joy and despair are David’s lot, and if the psalms do not allow for a clear-cut pattern of salvation, this too is the lot of any Christian. It is testament to Wyatt’s ability as a poet to take the ordering of the psalms and verses and use it to create such keen psychological development.

### III

Wyatt’s metrical originality is important to the reading of his paraphrase. The use of ottava rima (ABABABCC rhymed stanzas in iambic pentameter) in the narrative stanzas which surround the psalms themselves both sets off the stanzas from the smooth flow of the actual psalms and also emphasizes that flow. To create a sustained narrative, Wyatt might well have chosen to interlink the quatrains by continuing the rhymes of the first quatrain into the second. Instead he chooses not to, as the final couplet of any quatrain closes off such progression. Wyatt’s purpose is to place our focus properly where it belongs, on the psalms, which are written in the more complex terza rima, with its ABABCBCDCDED . . . rhyme scheme. This metrical scheme was probably inspired by the Italian poet Luigi Alamanni in his Opere

Toscane, printed in 1532 (Mason 157; Twombly 349).<sup>5</sup> The psalms might then be seen as breaks in the narrative, meditative pauses in the story that allow David to reflect on where he is psychologically in his penitential process.

Wyatt's metrical choices reflect that psychological interest. The narrative might be where one would expect the progression -- this is, after all, where one finds the plot moving -- rather than the psalms. But *terza rima*, with its continuous chain of rhymes, allows for developing and sustaining an argument, whereas *ottava rima* is better suited to presenting the narrative interruptions in that argument. There are two kinds of narrative discourse here -- first, what David does, and second, what he thinks -- and his progression occurs in both places.

#### IV

The progression of the plot, however, occurs primarily in the *ottava rima* prologues to the psalms. They are derived from Pietro Aretino's A Paraphrase Vpon the Seaven Penitentiall Psalms of the Kingly Prophet, printed in 1532 in Italian, and in an English translation by John

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<sup>5</sup> Robert G. Twombly also shows that Alammani's own paraphrase of the penitential psalms does not appreciably influence Wyatt's; rather than using the narrative structure of David, Alammani instead reads each psalm in terms of the one of the seven deadly sins (349), a reading reminiscent of Mabel Day's reading of Maidstone; see chapter 3.

Twombly, however, suggests that the use of the seven deadly sins may have inspired the use of Davidic narrative. Early printed editions of the psalter included woodcuts of the seven deadly sins to accompany the psalms. Psalm 51 ("Miserere Mei") was originally presented with an woodcut of David spying on Bathsheba, suggesting that the narrative context was that of lust; by the mid-sixteenth century, this woodcut was moved to the beginning of the psalter. At the very least, this suggested that the psalms told some kind of a story, or at least were set into a context as such (350).

Hawkins in 1632.<sup>6</sup> Robert Twombly argues that Wyatt was attracted to the prologues rather than the actual paraphrases because Aretino's work is "a vehicle for the display of piety in the first person" which does not attempt to recreate David's voice nor his tone, "but simply the 'line' of external plot running through the prologues and centered from the outset on David's concupiscence," whereas Aretino's most original contribution was the narrative structure (355). Here Wyatt draws most heavily on Aretino.

Wyatt opens with an admonition which reminds one of Elyot's The Governor, in its insistence on the need for good government in a king. Elyot writes:

This blessed companye of vertues in this wyse assembled, foloweth temperaunce, as a sad and discrete matrone and reuerent gouernesse, awaitinge diligently that in any wyse voluptie or concupiscence haue no preeminence in the soule of man (2:235).

Elyot also argues that the temperate man "deliteth in nothyng contrarye to reason" (2:327).

From the outset of the poem, Wyatt's David fails on both counts.

Love to gyve law vnto his subiect hearts,  
Stode in the Iyes off Barsabe the bryght;  
And in a look anon himsellff converts,  
Cruelly plesant byfore kyng David syght;  
First dased his Iyes and forder forth he stertes  
With venemed breth as sofftly as he myght  
Towcht his sensis and ouer runnis his bonis  
With creping fyre, sparplid for the nonis.

And when he saw that kendlid was the flame,  
The moyst poyson in his hert he launcyd,

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<sup>6</sup> There is no critical agreement on what to call the narrative breaks in the paraphrase. I use the term "prologues" following Hawkins' translation of Aretino, though "prologue" suggests that the breaks only introduce the psalm to follow, though they of course summarize the action of preceding psalm as well.

So that the sowle did tremble in the same;  
 And in this brawle as he stode and trauncyd,  
 Yelding vnto the figure and the frame  
 That those fayre Iyes had in his presens glauncid,  
 The forme that love had printyd in his brest  
 He honorth it as thing off thinges best.

So that forgott the wisdom and fore-cast,  
 (Whych wo to Remes when that thes kyngs doth lakk)  
 Forgettyng eke goddes maiestie as fast,  
 Ye and his own, forthwith he doth to mak  
 Yrye to go into the feld in hast,  
 Yrye I say, that was his Idolles mak,  
 Vnder pretence off certen victorye  
 For enmys swordes a redy pray to dye. (1-24)<sup>7</sup>

Though David is clearly responsible for forgetting his wisdom and sending Uriah to his death, Alexandra Halasz points out that it is less clear where to place the initial blame, as Wyatt creates ambiguity in the opening: love here might be “a first cause, a divine Love upon which a moral order could be predicated, or simply a force that imposes control on its ‘subject hearts’.” Furthermore, the syntax of the third line leaves the agency unclear. Is this David’s look that converts, or Bathsheba’s (326-27)? Though the third stanza reminds us that David forgets his own majesty – and God’s – by sending Uriah to his death, love which “stood in the eyes” of Bathsheba in stanza 1 and kindles the flame of stanza 2 is equally responsible.

However, I would also consider recalling the tradition of defining penitence as being the will to align oneself to the will of God. Wyatt is not only using a Renaissance commonplace of Love as an instigator of passion, but is also reminding us that our will ought to be God’s,

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<sup>7</sup> All quotations from Wyatt’s Penitential Psalms are from the Kenneth Muir and Patricia Thomson edition of Wyatt’s poetry (Liverpool, 1969).

regardless of blame. The issue should not be primarily what agency caused a specific sin, but rather how we submit ourselves to God's will, no matter what the circumstances. That the opening of the paraphrase insists on trying to place some kind of blame underscores the progress that David needs to make.

In the rest of the prologue, Wyatt vividly presents the difference between David, the regal Israelite king, and David the humble penitent.

Lyke him that metes with horroure and with fere,  
 The hete doth straye forsake the lymes cold,  
 The colour eke drowpith down from his chere,  
 So doth he fele the fyer maynifold.  
 His hete, his lust and plesur all in fere  
 Consume and wast, and strayt his crown of gold,  
 His purpirll pall, his sceptre he letts fall,  
 And to the ground he throwth hym sellff withall.  
 (41-48)<sup>8</sup>

Already we have a description of the kinds of physical infirmities which occur so frequently in the penitential psalms, and so David withdraws to a cave, takes his harp up and begins the first psalm.

Here the differences between Wyatt's and Aretino's paraphrases are clearest. Aretino focuses on the emotional aspects of David's plight, and his paraphrase consistently borders on

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<sup>8</sup> Halasz argues that as David assumes the role of the penitent as quickly as he sent Uriah to his death, so here he "knows not only how to get what he wants but also knows his part in a penitential performance" (329). That David is performing is further indicated by the line "The pompous pride and state of dignity/ Forthwith rebates repentant humbleness": "rebates" may mean diminish, or, as used in a hawking metaphor, pride calls back humbleness as it pleases; it wishes to control and not be subjugated. Pride, in essence, dominates, and David's penitence may not be sincere.



the excessive; as H. A. Mason argues, Wyatt got rid of Aretino's extravagance and limited himself only to only the telling phrases that he could use (212).<sup>9</sup> More unusual, and quite different from Aretino, is that fact that Wyatt begins with an argument. In the first psalm, David demonstrates the shifting emotional states between despairing of his plight and attempting to reason his way out of it.

[O Lord, rebuke me not in thine indignation: neither chasten me in thy displeasure; Psalm 6:1]<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Aretino's paraphrase instead goes for overblown emotional effect and rhetorical excess. After pleading his case in verse 1 (which continues for four pages), he paraphrases, for example, verse 2: "Pacifie thine ire good Lord, with which my grevious trespasses haue inflamed thee, for the good that I am ready to worke; & by thy pittie haue mercy on me, for that I, alas! am wounded by that selfsame arrow, which the bow of feare and damnation hath shott at it: my soule bewailing languisheth, for that my infirme body giueth it an inkling, yea it were a notable signe of estrangeing it selfe from it, not ought regarding the state of my disgrace with thee. My senses are not sensible, my tast hath no tast, mine eyes see not, my sense of feeling doth not apprehend it's object, my smelling doth not distinguish odors, nay smell at all, my hearing heareth not, my infirmity is such, as that it is not content with the help of plants, nor the force of charmes: Earthly physick cannot be a salve to my sores, in it there is validity to cure my such heavy suffrances, for thou only canst cure them, and if thou composest not remedies for my maladies, I cannot recover my health, hence lament I, and with the teares which euen come form my heartes veines, I beseech thee my Lord, that thou deign to heale me fully and compleatly" (9-10). I have not transcribed all of the paraphrase; it continues for two and a half more pages before proceeding to verse 3.

<sup>10</sup> I will provide psalm verses where they are appropriate to indicate what verse Wyatt is paraphrasing. Unlike the medieval paraphrasers, Wyatt does not include them himself.

In this chapter, I will quote the psalms from the Great Bible translation, also known as the Prayer Book version of the psalms. There were a number of English Bibles available in sixteenth-century England, as I have shown in chapter 4; see Bruce's study. It seems likely, though, that the Great Bible is the one which Wyatt would have known (as it would have been most familiar, indeed, to the English Christian in general). It was appointed to be used in all churches, and its psalter was adopted by The Book of Common Prayer (not the later King James version), an adoption which continues to this day, at least among the prayer books which include the psalms in the older, traditional language.

O Lord, sins in my mowght thy myghty name  
 Sufferth it selff, my lord to name and call,  
 Here hath my hert hope taken by the same;  
 That the repentance wych I have and shall  
 May at thi hand seke marcy as the thing,  
 Only confort of wrechid synners all.  
 Wherby I dare with humble bymonyng  
 By thy goodnes off the this thing require:  
 Chastyse me not for my deserving,  
 According to thy just conceyvid ire. (73-82)

To paraphrase the poetry, Wyatt begins with "That I might have mercy (as I am repenting and am after all calling on you), Lord, rebuke me not in thy indignation . . .," so that the original psalm verse is not paraphrased until the ninth line. David creates a relationship with God we have not seen before in paraphrases of the penitential psalms, one based on reasoning with Him. He continues the argument:

O lord, I dred, and that I did not dred  
 I me repent, and euermore desyre  
 The, The to dread. I open here and spread  
 My fawte to the, but thou, for thi goodnes,  
 Measure it not in largenes nor in bred . . . (83-87)

The emjambment here is more pronounced, contrasting with the deliberate rhythms of the opening of the paraphrase and suggesting a more impassioned urgency. The argument continues: "Judge me not, in that I repent and want to desire thee," and unlike the original psalm verse ("Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am weak: O Lord, heal me, for my bones are vexed"; verse 2) which simply presents a plea, Wyatt's David strikes a bargain:

Tempre, O lord, the harme of my excesse  
 With mendyng will, that I for recompense  
 Prepare agayne; and rather pite me,  
 For I ame weke and clene withowt defence . . . (90-94)

The contrast between David the logical, reasonable prince and the contrite penitent who realizes his own limits gives Wyatt's paraphrase a psychological realism in its constant shifting of emotional states, something we have already seen in Luther's and Calvin's commentaries on these psalms. At verse 4 ("Turn thee, O Lord, and deliver my soul: O save me for thy mercy's sake") David returns to the reasoning with which he began.

Heare hath thie mercye matter for the nones,  
 Ffor if thie rightwise hand that is so iuste  
 Suffer no Synne nor stryke with dampnacion,  
 Thie infynite marcye want nedes it must  
 Subjecte matter for his operacion:  
 For that in deth there is no memorie  
 Amonge the Dampnyd, nor yet no mencion  
 Of thie great name, grownd of all glorie.  
 Then if I dye and goe wheare as I feare  
 To thinck thearon, how shall thie great marcye  
 Sownde in my mowth vnto the worldes eare? (126-36)

The highly irregular metrics of lines 128 and 130, breaking the iambic pentameter -- "suffer" and "damnation" stand out strikingly because they break meter at both the beginning and end of their lines, and "Subject matter for his operation" is regularly trochaic rather than iambic<sup>11</sup> -- match some highly irregular reasoning. David argues that God's mercy will mean nothing if He relies on justice; that is, His mercy cannot operate if He chooses justice. Both Luther and

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<sup>11</sup> It might be argued, though, that "mention" is meant to be pronounced over three syllables, "men-ti-on." English words ending in "-tion" are often syllabically pronounced this way in English Renaissance music; see, for example, the Tudor anthem "Let thy Merciful Ears" and its handling of "their pet-TI-ti-ons," in *The Oxford Book of Tudor Anthems*, compiled by Christopher Morris (Oxford, 1978), 149. Renaissance composers clearly could choose to have this suffix to be pronounced on two syllables; as each voice part was printed on a separate manuscript, it is highly unlikely that this text underlay could be the work of a modern editor.

Calvin emphasize God's mercy in reading this verse, but the argument that God should need to choose mercy is Wyatt's.<sup>12</sup> In paraphrasing verse 5, "For in death no man remembereth thee," Wyatt offers a new argument: no one can be mindful of God without His mercy – that is, if You don't offer it, how will we sinners be able to glorify Your name? This is again a very different reading than that of Luther or Calvin, who present David with more humility and self-knowledge.<sup>13</sup> David's rationalizing falls apart as much as the metrics do.

The narrative that incorporates David's history recounts his various foes and what they have presented him with: Bathsheba's beauty, her "pleasant words now bitter to my mind," his own power. None of this is in the original psalm, nor is his statement:

To thes marmaydes and theyre baytes of errour  
 I stopp myn eris with help of Thy goodnes;  
 And for I fele it comith alone of the  
 That to my hert thes foes have non acces,  
 I dare them bid: 'avoyd wreches and fle! . . .'

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<sup>12</sup> Luther comments: "[Turn thee, O Lord, and deliver my soul:] Not because of any merit or worthiness in me but on account of Thy mercy, that it may be extolled, loved, and praised; for Thou hast sent it to help the unworthy. For he whom God helps according to his own merit is more highly honored and praised than God's goodness. That would be a great dishonour; hence God's grace is to be praised, and worthiness brought to naught" (142-43). Luther, too, emphasizes that David does not plea according to his merits: "Men will never find a remedy for their own miseries, until, forgetting their own merits, by trusting to which they only deceive themselves, they have learned to betake themselves to the mercy of God" (1:70). Luther's David seems to recognize his own unworthiness; Wyatt's David, arguing with God and trying to persuade him to his favor, seems unwilling to acknowledge his unworthiness.

<sup>13</sup> Luther simply argues that David is spiritually dead at this point (143), but Calvin argues rather that this verse should be read in terms of gratefulness for God's mercy: "His meaning is, that if, by the grace of God, he shall be delivered from death, he will be grateful for it, and keep it in remembrance" (1:70).

(166-69)

The mermaids and the baits of error to which he refers -- Bathsheba's beauty, his powers as a great military king, his crown -- are external enemies. David calls out for God to prevent these foes from entering his heart, not accepting that he must face his internal enemies, his own acknowledgement of his sin. That he has not yet acknowledged this is indicated by the self-confidence which closes the psalm.

[The Lord hath heard my petition; the Lord will receive my prayer; Psalm 6:9]

' . . . The lord hath hard the voyce off my complaint;  
Your engins take no more effect in me.  
The lord hath herd, I say, and sen me faynt  
Vnder your hand, and pitith my distres.  
He shall do mak my sensis by constraint  
Obbey the rule that reson shall expres,  
Wher the deceyt of yowr glosing baite  
Made then vsurp a powre in all excres.' (170-77)

This confidence is suggested by the original psalm verse, as each of the penitential psalms, as Lombard says, "begins in sorrow and ends in joy." But there is nothing yet to show that David has done anything to deserve this joy. He has not yet acknowledged his sin in any way, but has preferred to reason and bargain with God rather than take responsibility for his guilt as well as admit it; He "shal do make my sensis by retrain" rather than David himself. David essentially leaves repentance up to God.

It was central to Reformation thinking that all the power of salvation resided in God alone, and that the sinner could do nothing at all to effect his salvation. In a state of penitence, the sinner was not deciding his salvation, moving God to judge him one way or another; he was

instead realizing that he was powerless to effect his own salvation and had to rely solely on God's help. In leaving his repentance up to God, then, it might seem that David in this first psalm has taken the correct stance, but in refusing to acknowledge his sin, however – by bargaining with God – he has actually attempted to retain power, as if he can in some way effect his own salvation. In the second psalm, he progresses to a new level of self-awareness.

## V

Mason observes that the opening of Psalm 32 makes clear that Wyatt is interested in creating a process of repentance (Wyatt 213); David must “backslide” in order to accommodate the psalm's beginning in awareness of sin, without the assurance of salvation that ended Psalm 6. Wyatt considers this in the prologue as David gains some self-awareness:

It semid now that of his fawt the horroure  
 Did mak aferd no more his hope of grace . . .  
 Hym selff accusing, beknowing his cace,  
 Thinking so best his lord for to apese,  
 Easd, not yet heled, he felith his dise.  
 (193-4; 198-200)

This “easd, not yet heled” is important in two ways. First, it shows that each of the psalms is operating in a different emotional way, one confident and another despairing, rather than the same essential process of contrition and repentance working its way over and over. Second, it points to the psychological truth that David cannot hope with confidence for God's favor without God's grace. He is eased in that he can hope to appease God, but that in itself cannot heal him.

In fact, whether or not David even recognizes this is debatable:

Semyth horrible no more the dark Cave

That erst did make his fault for to tremble,  
 A place devout or refuge for to save;  
 The sucourles it rather doth resemble;  
 For who had sene so knele within the grave  
 The chieff pastor of thebrewes assemble  
 Wold juge it made by terys of penitence  
 A sacrid place worthi off reuerence. (201-08)

Wyatt frames the observation in terms of an onlooker, who might judge the cave to be a worthy place of penitence on account of David's tears. There is yet no sense of David's awareness; he is certainly penitent but assumes that his penitence alone should assure his holiness.

Psalm 32 begins by considering God's grace, as David wrestles with the question: who exactly is forgiven his sins?

[Blessed is he whose unrighteousness is forgiven: and whose sin is covered;  
 Psalm 32:1]

Oh happy ar they that have forgiffnes gott  
 Off their offence (not by theire penitence  
 As by meryt wych recompensyth not  
 Altho that yet pardone hath none offence  
 Withowte the same) but by the goodnes  
 Off hym that hath perfect intelligens  
 Off hert contrite, and coverth the grettnes  
 Off syn within a marcifful discharge. (217-24)

The syntax is difficult in these initial lines. A paraphrase might be, "Blessed are they whose offence is forgiven, not because they are penitent as much as by their merit, even though merit does not recompense them, even though pardon needs to be based somehow on merit . . ."

Wyatt wrestles with the concept of justification here, inviting us to do the same in our reading.

The original psalm opens in the third person rather than the first, a fact which Wyatt can exploit. His David does not exactly admit his sins here but instead explores the theme of justification from the distance of the third person plural. The lines do not clarify who decides who has merit -- is it man himself or God? Furthermore, the pronoun reference to which "hym that hath perfect intelligens/ Off hert contrite" is initially unclear -- again, is it God or David who has this perfect intelligence? The rest of the verse clarifies that it is God ("and coverth the grettnes/ Off syn within a marcifful discharge") and not the psalmist, but the pains Wyatt takes in making the psalmist wrestle with the themes here seems to suggest that he is trying to convince himself that this is indeed so, that God will forgive him his sins. Luther comments on the verse:

Nor is anyone without transgression, as God clearly sees in all of us.  
 Blessed, however, are those whose sin He covers, does not see, does not remember, does not want to know about, but completely forgives by grace.  
 They are those who do not cover, remit, forgive, and forget their sins themselves. They look at, recognize, remember, and judge them (148).

Luther sets up the logical argument that those who undergo self-scrutiny align themselves with those whose sins are covered. Calvin takes a somewhat different angle:

Thus in all ages it has been everywhere a prevailing opinion, that although all men are infected with sin, they are at the same time adorned with merits which are calculated to procure for them the favour of God, and that although they provoke his wrath by their crimes, they have expiations and satisfactions in readiness to obtain their absolution . . . David, however, prescribes a very different order, namely, that in seeking happiness, all should begin with the principle, that God cannot be reconciled to those who are worthy to eternal destruction in any way than by freely pardoning them, and bestowing upon them their favour. (1:522-24)



Calvin emphasizes man's delusion that his merits and actions, even admitting his own sinfulness, can save him. David thus should not be trying to get God's favor as much as admitting his powerlessness to do anything about his salvation.

He has not yet done so. He rather fears God's wrath:

And happy are they that have the willfullnes  
Off lust restrayned, afore it went at large,  
Provokyd by the dred of goddes furour . . .

Or he assumes that acknowledging his sin should suffice for his salvation:

[Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth no sin: and in whose spirit there is no guile; Psalm 32:2]

And happi is he to whom god doth impute  
No more his faut by knoleging his syn  
But clensid now the lord doth hym repute  
As adder freshe new stryppid from his skin;  
Nor in his sprite is owght and vndiscovered.

"By knoleging his sin" is Wyatt's addition, and it seems reasonable that God would impute those who acknowledge their sin. But the image of being cleansed as an adder being stripped of its skin is curious. The only image for cleansing in the penitential psalms comes from Psalm 51: "Thou shalt purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: thou shalt wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Psalm 51:7). Instead we have a poisonous snake, a painful stripping, and most important, an essentially unchanged inner core. David is correct in acknowledging his sin, but incorrect in assuming that this alone changes him, or will necessarily change God.

Still, there is real progression in this psalm. Wyatt uses the physical infirmities of verse 3 and 4 as a way to explain David's actions in verse 5:

[For thy hand was heavy upon me day and night: and my moisture is like the drought in summer.

I will acknowledge my sin unto thee: and mine unrighteousness I have not hid;  
 I said, I will confess my sins unto the Lord; and so thou forgavest the wickedness of my sin; Psalm 32:4-6]

Thy hevy hand on me was so encrest  
 Both day and nyght, and held my hert in presse  
 With priking thoughtes byreving me my rest,  
 That wytherd is my lustyness away  
 As somer hettes that hath the grene oprest;  
 Wherefore I did an othr way assay,  
 And sowght forthwith to opin in thi syght  
 My fawt, my fere, my filthines, I say,  
 And not to hide from the my gret vnryght.  
 I shall, quod I, agaynst my sellff confesse  
 Vnto the lord all my synfull plyght;  
 And thou forthwith didst washe the wikkednes  
 Off myn offence, of trowght ryght thus it is. (245-57)

Wyatt makes clear that David confesses his sin precisely because of his physical condition, a connection only assumed by the psalm itself. He has not yet quite acknowledged his dependence on God's grace, but begins to do so. In setting himself up as an exemplar for the Israelite people, David says:

[For this shall every one that is godly make his prayer unto thee, in a time when thou mayest be found: but in the great water-floods they shall not come nigh him; Psalm 32:7]

Wherfor they that have tastid thi goodnes  
 At me shall take example as of this,  
 And pray and seke in tyme for tyme of grace.  
 Than shall the stormes and fluddes of harme him mis,  
 And hym to reche shall neuer have the space. (258-62)

In reading these verses, Calvin stresses that prayer is necessary for grace in addition to confessing one's sins (1:532), and Wyatt's addition of "time of grace" for "time when thou

mayest be found" is derived from Luther (151). David suggests that time of grace, as he realizes at the end of the psalm that God's mercy is possible:

But for all this he that in god doth trust  
With mercy shall hym self defendid fynd. (287-88)

This makes possible the new emotional state found in the prologue to Psalm 38.

## VI

In the prologue to Psalm 38, the voice of God addresses David and provides a level of comfort.

This song endid, David did stint his voyce,  
And in that while abowt he with his iye  
Did seke the Cave with wiche withowten noyce  
His sylence semid to argew and reple  
Apon this pees, this pees that did reioyce  
The sowle with mercy, that mercy so did Crye,  
And fownd mercy at mercyes plentiful hand,  
Never denid but where it was withstand. (293-300)

David feels so assured of mercy at this point that his tears are tears of comfort:

Ryght so David that semid in that place  
Marble ymage off singuler reuerence  
Carffd in a rokk with Iyes and hands on hygh,  
Made as by crafft to plaine, to sobbe, to sygh.

This while a beme that bryght sonne forth sendes,  
That sonne the wych was never clowd coud hide,  
Percyth the cave and on the harpe discendes,  
Whose glauncyng light the cordes did overglyde;  
And such luystre apon the harpe extendes  
As lyght off lampe upon the gold clenn tryed:  
The torne wheroff into his Iyes did sterte,  
Surprisd with Joye, by penance off the hert. (305-16)

Hinely notes the iconography of the image of the harp. The harp has figured prominently in each of the prologues, serving to underscore where David has been thus far; the descriptions of David and his harp throughout “seem to imply that David, in seeking to achieve the harmony of music, is seeking, by transference, to attain harmony of self,” and here David wins God’s approval (152-53).<sup>14</sup> Having reached a point of calm and believing that mercy is possible, he now can admit his wrong in the hopes of obtaining mercy. (It is important to note that the ending of Psalm 32 does not make clear that David realizes mercy will be given necessarily to him, and that is where the progression of this psalm takes place.) Psalm 38 accordingly presents calm and careful deliberation rather than extreme emotion. David addresses God with “sober voice”:

[Put me not to rebuke, O Lord, in thine anger: neither chasten me in thy heavy displeasure: Psalm 38:1]

O Lord, as I the have both prayd and pray,  
 (Altho in the be no alteration  
 But that we men, like as our sellffes we say,  
 Mesuryng thy Justice by our mutation)  
 Chastice me not, O lord, in thy furour,  
 Nor me correct in wrathfull castigation. (325-30)

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<sup>14</sup> Hinely argues further that in this third narrative, the light touches not David but his harp, “a clear sign of God’s approval . . . the gilding of the harp occurs at this moment, indicating that David has earned and God has granted him the right to transform his pain and sin by art into a kind of holy poetry, his sin almost justified by the art that God allows him to use for the salvation of others” (153). Hinely thus argues that David shifts from private sinner to public sinner at this point of the narrative, observing that David takes up the sins of Israel in the fourth penitential psalm (see especially 154-56).

The key line is “mesuryng thy Justice by our mutation.” David realizes that man hopes, “like as our sellffes we say,” that God’s justice will be measured by man’s changing. This is not necessarily true, so that the plea that God’s fury and castigation be tempered with mercy is all the more urgent.

The following lines are heavily enjambed:

[For thine arrows stick fast in me: and thy hand presseth me sore.  
There is no health in my flesh, because of thy displeasure: neither is there  
any rest in my bones, by reason of my sin; Psalm 38:2-3]

Ffor that thi arrows off fere, off terroure  
Of sword, of sekenes, off famine and fyre  
Stikkes diepe in me. I, lo, from myn errour  
Ame plongid vp, as horse owt of myre  
With strok of spurr: such is thi hand on me  
That in my fleshe for terroure of thy yre  
Is not on poynt of ferme stabilite,  
Nor in my bonis there is no stedfastnes:  
Such is my drede of mutabilite,  
Ffor that I know my frailefull wykednes. (331-40)

The effect is poetry that reads nearly like prose, so that the reader loses the sense of the regularity of the end rhymes and gets little sense of regular rhythm in the lines. Suited to the gravity of David’s psychological state, the lines are deliberately grave and metrically irregular. The curious, powerful image of David paradoxically “plunged up” vividly suggests his will being yoked to God’s. It recalls Psalm 32:10 (“Be ye not like to horse and mule, which have no understanding”) emphasizing the horse’s need to be held with bit and bridle, and as Greenblatt correctly argues, it also suggests the “ascent through the acceptance of domination from on

high" (123). Only by yoking himself to God's will can David achieve freedom.<sup>15</sup> But the image here is not the yoking of Psalm 32, but instead a spurring: rather than being forced to obey, David is given the impetus to obey. Wyatt subtly suggests a free will acceptance of domination.

This passage leads to a first great turning point of the poem.

Such is my drede of mutabilite,  
Ffor that I know my frailefull wykednes. (339-40)

It is not that God knows his wickedness, but that David does himself. This self-knowledge leads to David's "drede of mutabilite": not knowing how God will deal with him, he cannot be at peace. Wyatt brings "mutability" to the original psalm verse, paraphrasing Psalm 38:3 with a new emphasis on the real fear a Reformation sinner had in defining a relationship with God based on his own unworthiness.

When David moves to his physical afflictions, Wyatt chooses to exploit the rhythms and rhyme scheme he has set up:

[For my wickednesses are gone over my head: and are like a sore burden,  
too heavy for me to bear.  
My wounds stick, and are corrupt: through my foolishness.  
For my bones are filled with a sore disease: and there is no whole part in  
my flesh; Psalm 38:4-5; 38:7]

For why? My sinns above my hed ar bownd,

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<sup>15</sup> The issue of acceptance of dominance is crucial to Greenblatt's analysis. He reads the psalm's "inwardness" in terms of the interplay between desire and power: the psalms represent a movement from transferring desire from an earthly mistress to God (122), which has implications for both the dramatized David and the historical Wyatt. Greenblatt argues that submission to domination is, of course, central to Lutheran doctrine, but the psalms also have a more personal meaning: one of the themes of Greenblatt's entire study is that "power over sexuality produces inwardness" (125) – again, with implications for both the fictional psalmist and the historical poet.

Like hevi wheyght that doth my force oppresse  
 Vnder the wych I stopp and bowe to grownd,  
 As whilow plant haled by vyolence;  
 And off my fleshe ech not well curyd wound,  
 That festred is by foly and neclegens,  
 By secrete lust hath ranklyd vnder skin,  
 Not duly Curyd by my penitens . . .  
 So ar myn entrayls infect with fervent sore,  
 Fedyng the harme that hath my welth oprest,  
 That in my fleshe is lefft no healt therfore.  
 So wondrus gret hath bene my vexation  
 That it hath forst my hart to crye and rore.  
 (341-48; 353-57)

With the near metrical regularity of these lines, the list of physical ailments pile on each other, as does the alliteration here and elsewhere: “my force I fele it quaile” (362), for example.

In the psalm, David calls on the Lord, and Wyatt makes one important change:

[Lord, thou knowest all my desire: and my groaning is not hid from thee;  
 Psalm 38:9]

O lord thow knowst the inward contemplation  
 Off my desire; thou knowst my syghes and plaintes;  
 Thou knowst the teres of my lamentation  
 Can not expresse my hertes inward restraints. (358-61)

The “inward contemplation” shows that David realizes that not only can God see his inward state, but also that he begins to do so as well. However, the fact that God knows the David’s tears cannot express his “inward restraints” is puzzling. David may cry tears of penitence, but he has not yet expressed the inwardness that they represent, and at any rate, his heart is as yet restrained. David is surely moving toward self-awareness, but not arrived at it.

But that arrival is suggested again in verses 12 through 15.

[They also that sought after my life laid snares for me: and they that went about to do me veil talked of wickedness, and imagined deceit all the day long.

As for me I was like a deaf man, and heard not: and as one who is dumb, who doth not open his mouth.

I became even as a man that heareth not: and in whose mouth are no reproofs.

For in thee, Lord, have I put my trust: thou shalt answer for me, O Lord;  
Psalm 38:12-15]

Theire tonges reproche, their wittes did fraude aplye,  
And I like deffh and domme forth my way yede,  
Lyk one that heris not, nor hath to repleye  
One word agayne, knowyng that from thi hand  
Thes thinges procede and thow o lord shalt supplye  
My trust in the wherin I stikk and stand. (371-76)

David begins to place himself in God's power. The psalmist puts his trust in God, but Wyatt's David recognizes that God will even supply that trust, and importantly the action which the trust requires is inaction, that is, turning his will over to God. By calling on God to even provide the trust which will save him, David can "stick and stand" up to his enemies by, paradoxically, becoming as a deaf and dumb man.

## VII

At the end of this paraphrase, the confidence in God's assurance of mercy is absent, and the prologue to Psalm 51 begins with David falling back into despair, his assurance no foregone conclusion. As Psalm 51 is the best known and the centerpiece of the penitential psalms, it would make a certain sense to build to a crescendo of despair. But its great theme is God's mercy, as in, for example, Calvin's commentary: "In the commencement of the psalm, having his eyes directed to the heinousness of his guilt, he [David] encourages himself to hope



for pardon by considering the infinite mercy of God" (2:281). In this paraphrase David lays out his argument for justification, and here it has a dramatic sense imbedded in the narrative. David has reached the point where he can begin to not only admit his sin but also his powerlessness before God, and can consider God's response to that acknowledgement. The issue is not so much, can I admit my wrong? as it is, what will you do about it? Appropriately, the psalm's prologue sets up that despair:

Off wych some part, when he upp supplyd hade,  
 Like as he whom his owne thowght affrays,  
 He torns his look; hym semith that the shade  
 Off his offence agayne his force assays  
 By violence dispaire on hym to lade;  
 Sterting like hym whom sodeyne fere dismays,  
 His voyce he strains, and from his hert owt bringes  
 This song that I not wyther he crys or singes. (419-26)

In the psalm itself, however, David undergoes another emotional transformation. The paraphrase follows the psalm verses quite closely but the additions are telling, emphasizing the difference between man's sins and God's mercy in covering them; the shift from despair to joy is captured in that David both "crys and singes."

Critics have noted that Wyatt's Psalm 51 draws on various sources other than Aretino: Luther's prologue to Paul's Epistle to the Romans for the concept of justification (Mason Wyatt 213-4); Savonarola's meditation on Psalm 51, which emphasizes the poem's inward-turning self-reflection (Mason 186-7); and perhaps most interestingly, John Fisher's meditation I have discussed in Chapter 3. The Catholic Fisher reads the psalms not as the expiation of

lechery, but of pride (Twombly 358-9).<sup>16</sup> David, then, is not asking for forgiveness for his sin with Bathsheba, but for his presumption that he can expect, even demand, that God forgive him. In Psalm 51, we find the most extended discussion of the relationship between man's sinfulness and God's grace which covers that sinfulness.

[Have mercy on me, Lord, after thy great goodness: according to the multitude of thy mercies do away mine offences; Psalm 51:1]

Rew on me, lord, for Thy goodnes and grace,  
That off thy nature art so bountefull,  
Ffor that goodnes that in the world doth brace  
Repugnant natures in quiete wonderfull;  
And for thi mercys number withowt end  
In heven and yerth perceyvid so plentefull  
That ouer all they do them sellffes extend:  
Ffor those marcys much more than man can synn  
Do way my synns that so Thy grace offend. (427-35)

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<sup>16</sup> Fisher's prologue to his treatise (his own wording) on the penitential psalms make this clear. After commenting that David sinned with Bathsheba and in having Uriah killed, Fisher elaborates:

Yet notwithstandinge for all this, anone he forgate thge goodnes of almyghty god & agayn fell to synne in the synne fo pryde, beyng proude of the grete nombre and multytude of his people ayenst the commaundement of the lawe of god, wherby all his grete vnkyndenesse before was renewed more and more. What thynghe myght he than trust to haue but onely the punysshement of god whiche he gretely ferynge was meruaylously penytet and knowleged hymselfe greuously to haue offended our lorde god askyng hym mercy, made this psalme with grete contrycyon & sorowe in his soule, whereby agayne he obteyned forgeuenes. (7)

Twombly further notes that of all the seven deadly sins, pride is the only one that is not self-correcting. David in the Penitential Psalms accordingly does not move from stage to stage of holiness, but rather in cycles of despair and doubt (358-9), giving the work a dramatic structure, a "psychological sequence" (359) not seen in earlier paraphrases -- nor, indeed, in Fisher.

Wyatt adds the bounty of God's graces to the psalm verse, bound up in the tremendous lines, "Doth brace/ Repugnant natures in quiete wonderfull," and by comparing the weight of God's mercies to David's sin.

Wyatt suggests the quiet acknowledgement of guilt with the metrical regularity and balance of the following lines:

[For I acknowledge my faults: and my sin is ever before me.  
Against thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou  
mightest by justified in thy saying, and clear when thou art judged; Psalm  
51:3-4]

And I beknow my ffawt, my neclegence,  
And in my syght my synn is fixid fast,  
Thereoff to have more perfett penitence.  
To the alone, to the have I trespass,  
Ffor none can mesure my fawte but thou alone;  
For in thy syght I had not bene agast  
For to offend, juging thi syght as none,  
So that my fawt were hid from syght of man,  
Thy maiestie so from my mynd was gone:  
This know I and repent; . . . (442-51)

David closes this syntactical unit with the quiet "This know I and repent," calling attention to it with its mid-line break. He continues, however:

pardon thow than,  
Wherby thow shalt kepe still thi word stable,  
Thy justice pure and clene; by cawse that whan  
I pardond ame, then forthwith Justly able,  
Just I ame jugd by justice off thy grace. (451-55)

David's confidence builds so that he is able to say, when, not if he is pardoned. Still, with the constant wordplay on both "just" and "judge," the emphasis is not on mercy yet, but on God's justice. Wyatt stresses that David will be pardoned by the justice of grace, not the mercy of

grace. It will not be freely given, but justly given, when David aligns himself to God's will,<sup>17</sup> as shown by Wyatt's paraphrase of verse 12:

[O give me the comfort of thy help again: and stablish me with thy free spirit.  
Then shall I teach thy ways unto the wicked: and sinners shall be converted to thee; Psalm 51:12-13]

My wille conferme with spryte off stedfastnesse:  
And by this shall thes goodly thinges ensue.  
Sinners I shall in to thy ways adresse:  
They shall retorne to the and thy grace sue.  
My tong shall prayse thy justification  
My mowgh shall spred thy gloryus prayis true. (484-89)

God's "free spirit" may well mean a spirit freely given, but Wyatt's change to a spirit of steadfastness indicates how he sees it as a spirit which conforms David's will to the will of God.

To conform, David must have God's grace, and the additions to verse 7 make that need clear.

[For behold I was conceived in iniquities; and in sins did my mother conceive me; Psalm 51:7]

Ffor I my sellff, lo thing most vnstable,  
Fformed in offence, conceyvid in like case,  
Ame nowght but synn from my natyvite;

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<sup>17</sup> Luther, in reading this psalm verse, emphasizes God's own free will, as opposed to man's, in justifying. His translation reads, "So that thou art justified in Thy sentence and blameless in Thy judgment," and he responds: "What is this? Can God not be justified unless we are sinners? Or who will judge God? It is obvious that God in himself and in His nature is not judged or justified by anyone . . . But in his words and works He is constantly resisted, opposed, judged, and condemned by self-righteous and self-satisfied men. There is a constant legal war between Him and them over His words and works" (168). Luther develops a point that Wyatt makes here: David cannot presume to know God's mind, and assumes that his pardon is contingent on God's justice rather than His mercy.

Be not this sayd for my excuse, alase,  
 But off thy help to shew necessite;  
 Ffor lo thou loves the trowgh off inward hert,  
 Wich yet doth lyve in my fydelite . . . (456-62)

These lines again demonstrate Wyatt's ability to create smooth narrative from unrelated psalm verses. Being conceived in sin does not excuse David but simply points to his need for God's help. But though he sinned in the flesh, David now lays bare his heart: verse 7 to logically leads to the point of verse 8.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, David examines the proper kind of tribute he can make. As I have shown in chapter 4, the Reformers rejected the Catholic requirement of satisfaction for sin, and Wyatt reiterates this point.

[Thou shalt open my lips, O Lord: and my mouth shall shew thy praise.  
 For thou desirest no sacrifice, else would I give it thee: but thou delightest  
 not in burnt-offerings.  
 The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit: a boken and contrite heart, O God,  
 thou shalt not despise: Psalm 51:15-17]

And off thy lawdes for to let owt the flood,  
 Thow must, o lord, my lypps furst vnlose:  
 Ffor if thou hadst estemid plesant good  
 The owtward dedes that owtward men disclose,  
 I wold have offerd vnto the sacryfice.  
 But thou delyghtes not in no such glose  
 Off owtward dede, as men dreame and devyse.  
 The sacryfice that the lord lykyth most  
 Is spryte contrite . . . (493-501)

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<sup>18</sup> Twombly (361) suggests that Wyatt's ability to achieve "tautness" is indebted to Johannes Campensis's translation of the psalms. Wyatt borrows a word or a line and leaps to the next line to a dramatic implication that is not exploited by the other, as he does here.

David acknowledges that outward deeds are important, for he calls on the Lord in verse to unloose his lips so that he may praise him. But he also admits that deeds must be made from a contrite heart, not from fear of punishment, nor from pride that “outward” men make in order to be esteemed – an important change from the psalm’s original “burnt-offering.” David focuses rather on the inward man in a reading of verse 18 not found in either Luther nor Calvin.<sup>19</sup> His Sion is not a city of God, but rather a city of the heart:

[O be favourable and gracious unto Sion: build up the walls of Jerusalem;  
Psalm 51:18]

Make, Syon, lord, accordyng to thy will,  
Inward Syon, the Syon of the ghost:  
Off hertes Hierusalem strength the walles still.  
Then shalt thou take for good these vttward dedes,  
As sacryfice thy plesure to fullfyll.  
Off the alone thus all our good procedes. (503-08)

The inward Sion must be built first, and built in accordance with God’s will; then will David’s outward deeds be pleasing to God.

## VIII

The prologue to Psalm 102 is self-reflective, emphasizing the process of meditation itself. This psalm paraphrase is perhaps the most important of all seven: so far David only moves toward self-knowledge and giving his will up entirely to God, but in this paraphrase he expresses giving up his will directly. He can do so because this psalm presents David for the

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<sup>19</sup> Both Luther and Calvin follow traditional exegesis in reading Sion as the Holy Church. See Luther 174; Calvin 2:306-07.

first time in Wyatt's work as a precursor of Christ, whose sacrifice in His Passion makes God's mercy available.

Off diepe secretes that David here did sing,  
 Off mercy, off fayth, off frailte, off grace,  
 Off goddes goodnes and off Justyfying,  
 The grettnes dyd so astonne hymselff a space,  
 As who myght say who hath exprest this thing?  
 I synner, I, what have I sayd alas?  
 That goddes goodnes wold within my song entrete,  
 Let me agayne considre and repete. (509-16)

Wyatt puts David's statement in very general terms: "as who myght say" is not the same "as he myght say": David realizes mercy exists, but not necessarily that it is given to him. "Who hath exprest this thing?" continues this theme. David has expressed it, of course, but does he realize it? Only in meditating does David come to be assured of grace.<sup>20</sup>

Here hath he comfort when he doth mesure  
 Measureles marcys to mesureles fawte,  
 To prodigall sinners Infinite tresure,  
 Treusre termeles that neuer shall defawte.  
 Ye, when that sinn shall fayle and may not dure,  
 Mercy shall reygne; gaine whome shall no assaute  
 Off hell prevaile: by whome, lo, at this day,  
 Off hevin gattes Remission is the kay. (525-532)

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<sup>20</sup> Hinely reads these lines somewhat differently, arguing that David's shift from private sinner to public mediator to God is evidenced here. The lines are a "stunned realization that his songs are now, in part, the expression of a power outside of and greater than himself . . . Accepting his desired role as example and interpreter, David discovers with his double role a new self-consciousness about his art. His songs are not now the personal outcries of the isolated sinner, which inadvertantly mirror the emotions of all, but the deliberate expressions of one who sees himself speaking for and to humanity" (154-55).

I sense that David becomes public mediator most fully in Psalm 102 -- I will discuss this later in the psalm -- but acknowledge that the Hinely's analysis of the shift between David's private and public personae is correct.

Realizing that mercy is made possible by he who made remission for sins, David begins Psalm 102 in a more hopeful state.

Wyatt follows the psalm quite closely in his paraphrase, and, as I have shown in previous chapters, the final verses of the psalm in which the Lord looks down upon Sion have been read to include a larger context, so that they become not only the utterance of the psalmist for himself, but also for the entire nation.<sup>21</sup> This is entirely appropriate with David as speaker, for he is the king and intermediary for Israel. Given the dramatic context of this character, Wyatt follows this tradition but also distinguishes between the Old Law of justice and the New Law of mercy. David here prefigures Christ as an intermediary between man and God. This is clear from the first lines:

[Hear my prayer, O Lord: and let my crying come unto thee.  
Hide not thy face from me in the time of my trouble: incline thine ear to me  
when I call; O hear me, and that right soon; Psalm 102: 1-2]

Lord here my prayre and let my crye passe  
Vnto the lord without impediment.  
Do not from me torne thy mercifull face,  
Vnto my selfe leving my government.

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<sup>21</sup> Luther prefers, rather, to read the verse even more broadly in terms of all Christians. He writes of verse 13 (“Thou wilt arise and have pity on Zion”), “At that time Jerusalem was prosperous; therefore such doleful crying and begging should be understood as referring, not to temporal help but to Christ and His kingdom. He came that He might raise us to Himself. He had pity on Zion, namely, His people” (183). Calvin, too, reads in terms of the Church rather than Israel (110-11), but this reading has long tradition in commentary as well; see, for example, Augustine’s commentary: “And where is Sion? To redeem them that were under the Law. First then were the Jews: for thence were the Apostles, thence more than five hundred brethren, thence that later multitude, who had but one heart and one soul toward God” (5:15).



In tyme of troble and aduersitye  
 Inclyne to me thyn ere and thyn Intent;  
 And when I call help of necessitye;  
 Redely graunt th'effect of my desyre.  
 Thes bold demaundes do plesse thy maiestye,  
 And ek my Case such hast doth well require. (541-48)

It is curious that "Lord" be repeated twice in the first sentence, but perhaps David refers first to an intermediary who will "let his cry pass" to a second Lord, the Judge. David's differentiating between a Lord of mercy and a Lord of judgment continues throughout the psalm: "Do not from me torne thy mercyfull fase" is contrasted with the later "By cawse I know the wrath off thy furor."

Also important, as Hinely notes, is the control that David wants God to assume, which is absent in Aretino and in the original psalm (160-61);<sup>22</sup> only in giving up control can David reassume it. I have commented on how David moves toward this giving up of control in the earlier psalms, but in this psalm paraphrase it is explicit.

[And that because of thine indignation and wrath: for thou hast taken me  
 up, and cast me down; Psalm 102:10]

By cause I know the wrath off thy furour  
 Provokt by ryght had off my pride disdayne;  
 For thow didst lyfft me vp to throw me downe,  
 To tech me how to know my sellff agayne. (573-76)

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<sup>22</sup> Even more indicative of the relation between submission and self-awareness -- of giving up power in order to regain it -- is Hinely's point that David transforms the act of submission into an almost aggressive act, his giving up power self-described as "bold demands," which she depicts as an "assault on God's mercy . . . He or she will win, not merely submit to, God's mercy, seeing in that mastery the only chance for the integrated self that will bring peace" (161). This addition, Hinely notices, is wholly Wyatt's original thinking.

This passage is perhaps the center of the entire work. David admits his sin -- not his adultery with Bathsheba, but pride in thinking he can be independent of God's justice and mercy; and he also sees the rationale for God's response to him. Acting as little more than a pawn in God's hands, David is able paradoxically to "know my selff agayne." This self-knowledge is central to the entire meaning of the psalms. By this self-knowledge, not only knowledge of his sin, but also of his powerlessness to make any kind of amends for them, can David be worthy of mercy.

From here, Wyatt moves from a personal situation to a public one.

[For he hath looked down from his sanctuary: out of heaven did the Lord  
behold the earth;  
That he might hear the mornings of such as are in captivity: and deliver the  
children appointed to death.  
That they may declare the Name of the Lord in Sion: and his worship at  
Jerusalem; Psalm 102:20-22]

Ffor he hath lokt from the heyght off his astate,  
The lord from hevyn in yerth hath lokt on vs,  
To here the mone off them that ar algate  
In fowle bondage, to lose and to discus  
The sonns off death owt from their dedly bond,  
To gyve therby occasion gracijs,  
In this Syon hys holy name to stond  
And in Hierusalem hys laudes lastyng ay. (601-08)

The passage closely paraphrases the original psalm, but the context of the lines which follow makes clear that we are to read them in terms of the conflict between the Old Law and the New. David sees the emergence of the New Law in an unspecified future:

Rue on Syon, Syon that as I ffynd  
Is the peple that lyve vnder thy law;  
For now is tyme, the tyme at hand assynd,  
The tyme so long that doth thy servantes draw  
In gret desyre to se that plesant day,  
Day off redeming Syon ffrom sins Aw. (583-88)

There is nothing like this in the original psalm. The addition is entirely Wyatt's.

David returns to his own time at the end of the psalm, and though he can foresee a New Law, he also knows he will not live to see it. Wyatt's paraphrase thus applies verse 23 and 24 to the theme of the New Law versus the Old.

[He brought down my strength in my journey: and shortened my days.  
But I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of age: as for thy  
years, they endure throughout all generations; Psalm 102:23-24]

But to this samble runnyng in the way  
My strength faylyth to rech it at the full.  
He hath abrigd my days, they may not dure,  
To se that terme, that terme so wonderfull.  
Altho I have with herty will and Cure  
Prayd to the lord, take me not, lord, away  
In myddes off my yeres, tho thyn euer sure  
Remayne eterne, whom tyme can not deokay. (612-19)

David never specifically sees a Christ as the embodiment of the New Law, as he indeed would not, but it is clear that he does see the New Law itself. In a close paraphrase of the final verse of the psalm, he is comforted by the prospect of his progeny living to see that New Law:

[The children of thy seed shall continue: and their seed shall stand fast in  
thy sight; Psalm 102:28]

Then sins to this there may nothing rebell,  
The gretest confort that I can pretend  
Is that the childerne off thy servantes dere  
That in thy word ar gott shall withowt end  
Byfore thy face be stablisht all in fere. (627-31)

Thus in the prologue to Psalm 130 "the sprite of confort" is revived in David. Because of his assurance, he "makyth argument" that he has received God's grace:

Although sometime to prophecy hath lent  
Both brute beasts and wicked hearts a place. (642-43)

## IX

Exegesis has traditionally read the conclusion of Psalm 102 in terms of prophecy, that there will be a New Zion.<sup>23</sup> The sudden shift back to despair that begins Psalm 130 seems forced on a first reading, but is psychologically sound. There will be a new Zion, but David will not be part of it. Judging that he “hath remission off offense,” David can allow “his payne and penitence.” But finding his outward deeds -- such as the reciting of the penitential psalms that Wyatt presents -- inadequate to “bere the name of ryghtfull penitence,” he again moves into despair, as he weighs his sin and “his owne merytt he fyndyth in deffault.”

It is important that David judges his own merit rather than God; he has acquired the self-knowledge needed to find his own merit in default. Though this shift to self-judgment

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<sup>23</sup> Augustine refers to Moses, who like David, was unable to enter into the Promised Land: “How much did Moses bear, what revilings did he hear, for the sake of men who were never to enter into the land of promise? Their children entered, what signifieth this? New men entered: the old men entered not yet; of these, two did enter, One and Unity, Head as it were and body, Christ and the Church, with all the youth, I mean, the children. Therefore, the children of Thy servants shall dwell therein” (5:34-35).

Luther and Calvin both continue the theme. Luther writes that “the children of The servants” are all those baptised and taught by the apostles, and that they shall have posterity: “These children are the same children, the believers in Christ. They are a spiritual posterity and heirs, yes, joint heirs with their fathers, prepared eternally before God, although rejected in time before the world. Christ’s kingdom has no end” (187). Calvin also sees blessings for posterity: “By the seed and children of the godly, is to be understood not all their descendants without exception -- for many who spring from them according to their flesh become degenerate -- but those who do not turn aside the faith of their parents. Successive generations are expressly pointed out, because the covenant extends even to future ages, as we shall again find in the subsequent psalm” (4:125).

occurs in part to accommodate the tone of despair that opens Psalm 130, the “De Profundis,” it also reflected the ambivalence English Protestants had in knowing that one was elected by grace. The Thirty-Nine Articles state that one is elected if one felt God’s grace working within himself, especially Article XVII, “Of Predestination and Election”:

As the godly consideration of Predestination, and our election in Christ, is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh, and their earthly members, and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things, as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith in the eternal Salvation to be enjoyed through Christ, as because it doth fervently kindle their love towards God: So, for curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God’s predestination, is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the Devil doth thrust them unto desperation, or into wretchedness of most unclean living, no less perilous than desperation (BCP [1979], 871).

The article is not at all clear about how one would know for certain that God’s grace was indeed working within himself, and that is the theme Wyatt takes up in this paraphrase.

[Out of the depth have I called unto thee, O Lord: Lord, hear my voice.  
Oh let thine ears consider well: the voice of my complaint; Psalm 130:1-2]

Ffrom depth off sinn and from a diepe dispaire,  
Ffrom depth off deth, from depth off hertes sorow,  
Ffrom this diepe Cave off darknes diepe repayre,  
The have I cald o lord to be my borow;  
Thow in my voyce o lord perceyve and here  
My hert, my hope, my plaint, my ouerthrow,  
My will to ryse, and let my graunt apere  
That to my voyce, thin eres do well entend. (664-71)

In a close paraphrase, David simply states the facts without elaboration, the power of the lines rising from the strong alliteration. He attempts to find himself in God: “Thow in my voyce” suggests both that God should hear his heart, but also that David find God in his own voice;

and to hear “my ouerthrow,/ My will to ryse” is a further elaboration on the earlier lines in which God throws David down to raise him up. David seeks that his will become the will of God. And in another echo of his earlier strategy, David again argues with God:

[If thou, Lord, wilt be extreme to mark what is amiss: O Lord, who may abide it?  
For there is mercy with thee: therefore shalt thou be feared: Psalm 130:3-4]

Ffor, lord, if thou do observe what men offend  
And putt thi natyff mercy in restraint,  
If just exaction demaund recompense,  
Who may endure o lord? who shall not faynt  
At such acompt? dred, and not reuerence  
Shold so rain large. But thou sekis rather love,  
Ffor in thi hand is mercys resedence,  
By hope whereoff thou dost our hertes move. (675-82)

The argument is not so much an addition of Wyatt's as a close paraphrase of the psalm. David reiterates one of the issues the Protestant Reformers took with the medieval Catholic system of penance -- that it relied more on fear of the Lord than reverence of Him -- and reminds God that mercy is, after all, what makes man hope for salvation.

This satisfies David, and the psalm again moves into the larger context of the Israelite nation.

[O Israel, trust in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy: and with him is plenteous redemption.  
And he shall redeem Israel: from all his sins; Psalm 130:7-8]

Let Israell trust vnto the lord alway,  
Ffor grace and favour arn his propertie;  
Plenteus rannzome shall com with hym, I say,  
And shall redeme all our iniquitie. (691-94)

David thus trusts in mercy, Wyatt following the psalm closely, using the word “redeem” for the first time. The final prologue to Psalm 143 builds on this, hinting at the prefigurative typology found in Augustine, so that for the first time Wyatt directly raises the issue of a Savior who will make the redemption possible. Thus the conclusion of the penitential psalms has a dramatic sense we have not seen worked out in a narrative way. The exegetes, of course, often give the psalms Christological readings, but Wyatt directly raises this issue (though he has alluded to it earlier) at the very end so that the paraphrase has a dramatic thrust: this is what David is hoping for.

## X

The prologue to Psalm 143 directly picks up on the word “redeem”:

This word redeme that in his mowght did sownd,  
 Did put David, it semyth vnto me,  
 As in a traunce to starre apon the grownd,  
 And with his thowght the heyght of hevin to se;  
 Where he beholdes the word that shold confownd  
 The sword off deth, by humble ere to be  
 In mortall made, in mortall habitt made,  
 Eternall lyff in mortall vaile to shade. (695-702)

This redemption is of course the bridge between the mercy and justice with which David opens the psalm paraphrase. The one “immortal made, in mortal habit made” clearly refers to Christ,<sup>24</sup> or himself, if he is indeed redeemed.

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<sup>24</sup> The version of Wyatt’s paraphrase included in Robert Bender’s Five Courtier Poets of the English Renaissance (New York, 1967) modernizes the line from “in mortall mayd, in mortall habitt made” to “immortal made, in mortal habit made” (175). This clearly makes sense; “in mortal made, in mortal habit made” is redundant and grammatically incorrect, as the first “mortal” requires an object.

Wherby he frames this reson in his hert:  
 That goodnes wych doth not forbere his sonne  
 From deth for me and can therby convert  
 My deth to lyff, my synn to salvation,  
 Both can and woll a smaller grace depert  
 To hym that suyth by humble supplication;  
 And sins I have his larger grace assayd,  
 To aske this thing whi ame I than affrayd? (711-18)

This is the first indication that David does foretell a Christ. Given that, his salvation is assured in a way that we have not yet seen. Interestingly, though, David contrasts the situation of God and His Son with himself and his son Absolon. It has been tradition to title this psalm, as does Augustine, "To David himself, when his son was pursuing him" (6:279), though exegetes are not consistent about including the title or using the context it provides. Furthermore, a Christological reading of this psalm is consistent from Augustine onward as well,<sup>25</sup> and with this context, David begins the psalm with sure confidence.

He grauntyth most to them that most do crave,  
 And He delyghtes in suyte withowt respect;  
 Alas my sonne, poursuys me to the grave,  
 Sufferd by god my sinne for to correct:  
 But of my sinne sins I may pardonne have,  
 My sonnis poursuyt will shortly be reiect;  
 Then woll I crave with suryd confidence.  
 And thus begynns the suyt off his pretense. (719-26)

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<sup>25</sup> Augustine writes: "Thus praiseworthy was that David: but we must recognize here another David, truly 'strong in hand,' which is the explanation of David, even our Lord Jesus Christ" (6:279). Neither Luther nor Calvin makes explicit use of Christological readings of Psalm 143 in their commentaries, perhaps to emphasize the sinner's need for Christ's grace -- Christ who was sinless could not call out in the distress of a sinner that Psalm 143 presents. Luther does raise Christ as the intermediary between the psalmist and God, however, writing, "Christ is God's grace, mercy, righteousness, truth, wisdom, power, comfort, and salvation, given to us by God without any merit on our part . . . Yes, it is not given at all [righteousness] unless Christ himself is present" (204).



It is worth noting, though, that even if David has sure confidence, it comes at a cost. His son will still pursue him to death, and he may, not will, have pardon. At the very least, David ends his psalms with an self-awareness that he does not begin with.

The tone of the opening is appropriately subdued and matter-of-fact. "Here my prayer o lord, here my request,/ Complyshe my bone, answeare to my desire" (727-28) opens the paraphrase, and again, there is no addition of David's rationalization or explanation of what he has done.

[Hear my prayer, O Lord, and consider my desire: hearken unto me for thy truth and righteousness' sake; Psalm 143:1]

Here my prayer, O Lord, here my request,  
Complyshe my bone; answeare to my desire,  
Not by desert but for thyn own byhest,  
In whose ferme trowgh thou promest myn empyre  
To stond stable: And, after thy Justyse,  
Performe, O lord, the thing that I require. (727-32)

How much self-knowledge David has acquired is seen in the paraphrase of the following verse.

The verse itself is straightforward, but note Wyatt's elaboration:

[And enter not into judgement with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man be justified; Psalm 143:2]

But not off law after the forme and guyse,  
To entre judgement with thy thrall bond slave,  
To plede his ryght, for in such maner wyse  
By fore thy syght no man his ryght shall save.  
Ffor off my sellff lo this my ryght wisenes,  
By skourge and whipp and prykyng spurrs I have  
Skante rysen up, such is my bestlynes . . . (733-39)

The meter of the opening lines is somewhat irregular, but in this passage begins to sort itself out into near regularity, indicating a new emotional state. David now knows he cannot reason with God, and no longer tries. Instead, he admits his “bestlynes” by which he has “skante rysen up” (Wyatt’s addition) indicating he is still in the process of rising, being found worthy of God’s favor.

According to its subtitle, the historical situation of Psalm 143 is that of Absolon’s pursuit, and accordingly Wyatt paraphrases closely, but with some important additions.

[Yet do I remember the time past; I muse upon all thy works: yea, I exercise myself in the works of thy hands; Psalm 143:5]

I had recourse to tymes that have ben past,  
And did remembre thy dedes in all my dred;  
And did peruse thi workes that euer last,  
Whereby I knew above those wondres all  
Thy mercys were. (746-50)

The addition of “mercy” here is important, as is the addition of “grace” in the following verse:

[I stretch forth my hands to thee: my soul {gaspeth} unto thee as a thirsty land; Psalm 143:6]

My sowle to the did call,  
Like bareyne soyle for moystre off thy grace (751-52).

This emphasis on mercy and grace fittingly closes the poem, and Wyatt’s wholly original paraphrase of verse 8 makes the point again.

[O let me hear thy loving-kindness betimes in the morning, for in thee is my trust: shew thou me the way that I should walk in, for I lift up my soul unto thee: Psalm 143:8]

Shew me by tymes thin Ayde,  
Ffor on thy grace I holly do depend.  
And in thi hand sins all my helth is stayde,

Do me to know what way Thou wilt I bend,  
Ffor vnto the I have reyd vp my mynd. (758-61)

The changes here are theologically interesting. In paraphrasing “Shew me the way that I should walk in” Wyatt chooses to emphasize bending to God’s will. Furthermore, choosing “mind” for “soul” suggests that it is as much an intellectual as a spiritual decision, one made by turning over one’s mind and body to God’s will. David no longer tries to argue or reason. He accepts:

[Teach me to do the thing that pleaseth thee, for thou art my God: let thy loving Spirit lead me forth into the land of righteousness; Psalm 143:10]

Tech me thy will, that I by the may fynd  
The way to work the same in affection.  
Ffor thou my God, thy blyssyd spryte vp right,  
In lond off trowght shalbe my dyrection. (765-68)

Wyatt substitutes land of “truth” for “righteousness” in order to emphasize bending to God’s will: David cannot be made righteous by his own accord, but can be truthful, if he subjects himself to God’s will. Furthermore, God’s spirit will only be the direction rather than actively lead David to the land of truth. This David is far more responsible for his own actions -- paradoxically, action that means giving up his power and placing it in God’s hands.

Wyatt emphasizes acceptance in the final lines of the paraphrase:

[And of thy goodness slay mine enemies: and destroy all of them that vex my soul; for I am thy servant; Psalm 143:12]

Thow hast fordon their grete Iniquite  
That vext my sowle: thou shalt also confownd  
My foos, o lord, for thy benignite,  
Ffor thyn ame I, thy servant aye most bownd. (772-5)

It is not “confound my foes and I will be bound to you” but rather “confound them because I am bound to you.” The tone is calm and deliberate; Wyatt has no vision of the heavenly city. He has, however, achieved a degree of self-awareness.

## XI

One final point needs to be addressed. There is a long scholarly debate on the issue, first raised by Mason, that Wyatt’s psalms are meant to be read personally, that is, that they reflect his own life history.<sup>26</sup> Mason argues that the psalms might well date from when Wyatt was imprisoned, both in 1536 and 1541; if so, then paraphrasing the penitential psalms might have been a natural choice for Wyatt.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The best purely biographical work on Sir Thomas Wyatt is still probably the introductory chapters of Patricia Thomson’s Sir Thomas Wyatt and His Background (Stanford, 1964). The first chapter gives biographical information (3-9); for an extended discussion of his life and the events at court, see her chapters 2 and 3, “Courtly Love” and “Courtly Wisdom,” 10-46. Her analysis of his literary output does not include the psalms, as her interest lies primarily in Wyatt’s Petrarchanism.

<sup>27</sup> Mason gives substantial, though circumstantial, evidence for his claim of the dating of the psalms, pointing out that the Aretino paraphrase on which Wyatt based his narrative was not printed in England until 1534 (203). Support for the 1541 date comes from the arguments that toward the end of his life, Wyatt might well have been more inclined to turn toward religion (204); the position of the psalms in the Egerton MS come after poems that can be dated from 1537-8 (204) – though there is no other record of any other writing he did in prison, and the psalms are clearly a separate entry in the book, with at least one blank page before their start (204-5).

Support for the 1536 date comes from evidence that suggests Surrey borrowed phrasing from the psalms for some of his poems which purportedly are dated 1537, though it must be remembered that the borrowing may have gone the other way. See Mason, 205-6, for a discussion of these similarities.

Modern criticism is divided on this point. Stephen Greenblatt argues against reading too much of Wyatt's own history into the psalms: any despair Wyatt may have wished to express is, after all, built into the poems themselves (116).<sup>28</sup> Rivkah Zim argues much the same, adding that there is no external evidence to suggest that the psalms reflect Wyatt's personal anxiety, and to read them so undermines their larger patterns of significance (47).<sup>29</sup> Other critics, including Hinely and Raymond Southall, relate the penitential psalms indirectly to Wyatt's life, noting the connections the psalms have with the rest of his body of poetry.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Elsewhere, Greenblatt argues that perhaps Wyatt intended that David should be read as Henry VIII, who, like David, should properly have repented his own abuse of power and lust. If this is so, then the penitential psalms would have provided Wyatt with a "mask" behind which to criticize the king, yet deny that he had done so (121). Even so, Greenblatt arguing that these interests "seem to me subordinated to interests at once more personal and more general" -- the psalms are a Renaissance sexualization of the original sinful state of the sinner (122). Greenblatt's analysis rests on his assertion (correctly, I believe) that the psalms are inextricably linked to Wyatt's secular lyrics, in which sexuality and the abuse of power -- here, at the court -- are key themes.

<sup>29</sup> More specifically, Zim argues that the poem "resembles a sermon on selected texts," and Wyatt's structure may have given readers a way to read the psalms, as the themes and style found in the poem were appropriate for penitential exercises (47).

Furthermore, the role of the narrator creates a distance between David and the reader, controlling his responses to the meditations that are the psalms. The narrator, then, preaches an audience beyond the poem -- the reader. Given the strong emphasis in late fifteenth and early sixteenth century spirituality on creating a personal relationship with God, Zim sees the poem working as an exemplum for the reader's instruction. See 69-70.

<sup>30</sup> Hinely's argument is typical, that the penitent is an alter ego for Wyatt's Petrarchan lover, because the historical context of the psalms is David's enslavement by love; the source material from Aretino thus works in the Petrarchan love tradition: "Wyatt's psalms both fulfill and transform the thematic concerns of the preceding poems of the Egerton manuscript. The confident trust he could not grant courtly mistress or earthly ruler he can place in God, expressing in David's voice a transference of 'hot affect' from carnal love to the love of God, a disdain for human 'beastliness,' self-division and instability, and a forsaking of the enfeebling

Alexandra Halasz argues that poem's narrator actually presents an "unregenerate" David, one who has not realized his sin, and uses this to suggest that "the historical context of the Paraphrase suggests that the narrator's case against David is, in fact, Wyatt's case against Henry VIII" (334-5).

If the psalms cannot be definitively dated, I would err on the side of caution and not read them too much as autobiography. But I say "too much" deliberately to acknowledge that we can. I would further argue that this may be the point. Wyatt's turbulent life makes it deeply tempting to read the psalms in terms of his personal experience, even though the psalms themselves are dramatic enough, as any commentary, particularly Augustine's or Lombard's, makes clear. Perhaps Wyatt's great achievement is that he understands how the psalms operate, both as universal and personal utterances.<sup>31</sup> Medieval paraphrases allow the reader to

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illusion of the 'foul bondage' of earthly power for the liberty and true power found in submission to God" (157). If this is so, then Lawton implies that the psalmist David may indeed speak as a voice for Wyatt, provided, of course, that the lover in the earlier Egerton lyrics does so as well.

Southall examines the psalms in the context of both the love poetry and the satires, suggesting that the psalms and satires are a further development of the themes of the love poetry that not only comment on court life, but pass judgment on it (103). The psalms specifically turn away from the love poems in tone; where the lover poet is disillusioned and bitter, the psalmist is steadier, calmer, and self-aware (96). See chapter 8, "The Reformation," 92-107.

<sup>31</sup> Zim's argument may be useful in this light, stating that reducing Aretino's verbosity to "terse and vivid biblical metaphor" (55) serves to increase the reader's understanding of the psalms without particularizing the experience, that is, contextualizing it as David's story only (59).

enter into the psalm more fully. Wyatt still allows this, and yet manages to infuse the cycle with a dramatic movement and finds his own voice through the discipline of paraphrasing biblical material, by using the voice to the psalmist and discovering the room he has in which to maneuver within it -- in the phrase I have used elsewhere, by speaking through the psalmist. Whether Wyatt intended his penitential psalms to be read as his own personal history is not the point. That the Renaissance poet could find his own voice by, paradoxically, giving it up -- that is the point.





THESIS

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## Chapter 6

### SIXTEENTH-CENTURY PENITENTIAL LYRICS:

#### PSALTERS, PSALMS, AND THE SINNER

The interest in psalm paraphrase continued throughout the sixteenth century with psalm paraphrases appearing not only in psalters and hymnbooks, but also in collections better known for secular poetry. The Harington manuscript at Arundel Castle, for example, included paraphrases of Psalms 98; 73; 55 (by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey); seven psalms by Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke; and paraphrases of the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments. There are occasional penitential lyrics as well in the Tudor collection Tottell's Miscellany.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This list is not exclusive. Rivkah Zim also notes the figure of the sleepless penitent of Psalm 6 appearing in a poem in the collection A Gorgeous Gallery of Gallant Inventions, and an allusion to Psalm 130 in Daniel's "Complaint of Rosamund"; see Zim 38-39. John N. King notes Sir Thomas Smith's paraphrase of an apparently self-chosen cycle of Psalms 102, 141, 142, 119, 85, 30, 40, 70, 54, 144, and 145 (Vulgate numbering) following his imprisonment, tracing the course of his despair to joy at his release; see 233-34.

See also Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey's paraphrase of Psalm 55. Psalm 55 is not one of the official seven penitential psalms, but, like many other psalms, is penitential in theme and structure as I have defined them in Chapter 1.

Douglas Peterson has shown that the printing of Tottel's Miscellany has been traditionally (and erroneously) cited as the birth of modern English poetry. Rather, the poets included in it "imitate stylistic characteristics which best exemplify elocutio," in that the initial influence of Renaissance humanism on the English lyric was primarily stylistic.

Wyatt used the Davidic tradition of the penitential psalms as a means to speak as a poet through the psalms, though of course this was not the only way to paraphrase. Other poets chose to paraphrase without the benefit of the dramatic narrative, and this lack of narrative could lead to more emphasis on the technical aspects of the poetry -- rhyme, meter, stanzaic form, and so on -- in order to effectively paraphrase the psalms. This chapter is devoted to various experiments in form in which poets use form to contribute to meaning.

As with Wyatt, which psalms the poet chose to paraphrase helped create form and meaning. Sir Philip Sidney and Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke, for example, also speak through the psalmist as did Wyatt, with equally masterful but radically different results. This very different poetic voice comes about in part because they paraphrased the entire psalter rather than only the seven penitential psalms. Accordingly, there is no real Davidic context, each psalm instead independent of a dramatic sequence. Thomas Sternhold and John Hopkins also paraphrased the entire psalter, using a very specific metrical form for a very specific purpose -- congregational singing -- and the utilitarian nature of the psalter is reflected in the choices of diction and form that they make.

I will discuss other poets here, but the focus of the chapter will not be specific poets as much as it will be specific methods of paraphrasing. If Wyatt found one solution

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See his study The English Lyric from Wyatt to Donne (Princeton, 1967), 3-5, and his chapter 2 devoted to the anthology, 39-86.

for locating “voice” in the context of the psalms, the question that this chapter asks is: what other solutions were there?

One way of approaching the question is examining studies of English Renaissance lyric. Douglas Peterson’s classic study The English Lyric From Wyatt to Donne examines the field in terms what he calls the “plain” and “eloquent” styles that emerged in the English Renaissance. According to Peterson, the difference between the two is attributed to their purposes, “the plain style having a contemplative or didactic purpose, and the literary, a stylistic or eloquent one” (39); to define them more simply, the plain style emphasized the matter, the eloquent style the manner (6). It would seem that the plain style would be better suited to psalm paraphrase, for as the Bible was considered to be literally the Word of God, poets needed to take great care that the matter was accurately presented. At the same time, paraphrasers clearly recognized that the paraphrasing the Bible was in part a question of style -- in Peterson’s term, the “manner.” Calvin, for example, assumed that the speech and language of the psalms needed to be analyzed, but was also careful to point out that the poetry contained in the psalms was not merely stylistic; the psalms were spiritual documents, and any style found in them had to serve those ends (Smith 252-53).<sup>2</sup> In other words, one could not divorce matter from manner.

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<sup>2</sup> Smith also quotes the preface to The Forme of prayers [sic], with Ministrations of the Sacraments, used in the English Congregation at Geneva (1556) to show the keen awareness of the stylistic issues concerned with the psalms: “. . . there are no songes more meete, then the psalmes of the Prophete Dauid, which the holy ghoste hath framed to the same use, and commended to the churche, as conteynynge the effect of the whole scriptures, that hereby our heartes might be more lyuelie touched, as appereth by Moses, Ezechias, Iudith, Debora, Marie, Zacharie and others, who by songes and metre, rather

A more recent study, Jane Hedley's Power in Verse: Metaphor and Metonymy in the Renaissance Lyric, examines the lyric tradition over roughly the same time period as does Peterson, but from the perspective of the semiotic theory of Roman Jakobson. Hedley defines metaphor in lyric as a "set toward a context" (9) -- that is, the poem presupposes a context around it, provided by the reader in the act of reading, which in turn informs the reading of the poem. In terms of my study, the obvious example would be Wyatt's paraphrase, the psalms deriving their power from the context of David's dramatic situation. Metonymy, on the other hand, seeks to set the lyric out of context -- that is, the poem exists as an entity unto itself, without reference to a specific time and place, the reader not necessarily having to presuppose a context around the poem in order to make sense of it -- a poem with what Hedley calls a "self-focus" (9).<sup>3</sup> The medieval paraphrases I discussed would be metonymic, existing, as I have argued, without specific contexts so that the penitent may supply them himself.

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then in their commune speache, and prose, gaue thanks to god, for suche comfort as he sent them. Here it were to longe to intreate of the meter, but forasmuch as the learned dout not therof, and it is playnly prouen that the psalmes are not only meter, and conteyne just Cesures: but also have grace and majestie in the verse more then in any other places of the scriptures, we nede not enter into any probation" (253). The author not only sees the inherent poetry of the psalms but also their power as poetry.

<sup>3</sup> In her excellent introduction, Hedley gives an example of her methodology with William Carlos Williams' poem "This Is Just to Say": "I have eaten/ the plums/ that were in/ the icebox . . ." Hedley writes: "In order to make sense of the poem's message, we must infer a highly specific context from its language: a kitchen; a certain time-frame; a conventional husband-wife relation. It stands for a larger situation that must be produced by our reading" (8-9).

Most of the poems I discuss in this chapter are metonymic, created by an age which saw the emergence of English as a viable literary language coupled with the development of a new, national, English Church which demanded biblical material in its own language. As I will argue for these poets, especially the Sidneys, creating poems that existed as “literary monuments,” both in a specific time and transcending that time, was of the utmost importance.

Thus I will examine paraphrases which stand outside the seven penitential psalm sequence, which can (but do not necessarily have to) provide the metaphoric context that Hedley describes. First, I will examine lyrics which are not strictly paraphrases but use structure, imagery, or even verses from penitential psalms in order to show how a penitential psalm could serve as a model for organizing a poem’s argument. I will then move to the paraphrases of penitential psalms treated independent of the psalm sequence, then to paraphrases of the penitential psalms as a sequence, then to paraphrases of the entire psalter. Each different choice of psalms to paraphrase would necessarily present a different content. Psalm 130, for example, standing alone is likely (but not required) to be more metonymic than Psalm 130 in the context of the seven penitential psalms, which could provide a metaphoric context, and in the the context of the entire psalter could easily move back to metonymy, each psalm standing with its own “self-focus.”

The best paraphrases suit the form and technical aspects of the poem to the content of the psalm itself (the issues Peterson raises), and to the psalm context in which it appears (the issues Hedley raises). In other words -- though it is an obvious point, it is

worth stating -- psalm paraphrase works best when the form reflects the content: to borrow Peterson's terms, the manner becomes the matter. This chapter will examine how various poets met this challenge.

## II

As I have argued elsewhere, paraphrase necessarily limits the poet to specific images, themes, and in the case of the psalms, narrative progression. Though he or she has some flexibility in adding, deleting, and altering the original material, the poet cannot move too far from the material lest he risk abandoning paraphrase altogether.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, paraphrase need not be seen as unoriginal poetry, either, simply reiterating the original material, but rather poetry which demands that the poet be willing to work within its limits.

Examining early Renaissance penitential lyric proves this point in a roundabout way, showing how using the psalms could be used to organize a poem, offer original and arresting images rather than stock ones, and sustain a thematic coherence. These lyrics show this precisely because they are not psalm paraphrases. Using the penitential psalms only tangentially, they fall short of the power that could have been presented in the situation of the psalmist had the poet chosen to paraphrase.

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<sup>4</sup> I discussed my use of "he" in chapter 1, assuming of course that I also mean "she." In this chapter, the issue of gendered pronoun reference becomes important, in that I will discuss a woman paraphraser: Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke.



The lone penitential lyric in Tottel's Miscellany (1557), titled "The repentant sinner in durance and adversitie" (no. 184, author unknown) clearly uses the penitential psalms as a model, going as far as echoing specific verses. At 43 lines, it is far longer than it needs to be for what it has to say.<sup>5</sup> The poem is generally unorganized, simply recounting a stock collection of aphorisms set for the most part in two line couplets. There are echoes of the penitential psalms:

But thee o Lorde alone, I haue offended so,  
That this small scourge is much too scant for mine offence I know  
(136:332-33)

But these echoes do not serve to organize the poem effectively with the kind of dramatic movement we have seen thus far, from acknowledgement of sin, to confession, to satisfaction.<sup>6</sup> The development is hindered partly because of the poulter's measure.

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<sup>5</sup> The editor of the Tottel edition I use has chosen to cite line numbers by folio page rather than by poem, regardless whether or not a poem appears on two or more folio pages or whether more than one poem appears on one folio page; that is, lines numbers correspond to the page instead of to the poem. (The page numbers are provided by the editor and do not appear in the original collection.) I accordingly will cite folio page number first, then the poem's line number for clarity.

<sup>6</sup> Peterson writes of the medieval lyric: "Occasionally the poet uses allegory, personification, simile, and simple antithesis, devices advocated by the rhetoricians for teaching those upon whom logical distinctions and elaborate arguments would be wasted; but by and large he relies chiefly on the aphoristic phrase and homely proverb. The only significant difference between commonplace and doctrinal verse is structural. In the former, structure depends ultimately on the principle of classification, whereas in the latter it depends on the logic implicit in the doctrine being paraphrased . . . The chief function of structure, however, is always determined by the simple pedagogical principles of repetition and dilation" (10). Though the lyrics here might well be considered doctrinal, laying out the basic tenets of penitence, they also make great use of repetition and dilation; the logic implicit in the penitential process is for the most part underplayed.

Though this need not inhibit development beyond the couplet, in this poem the lines do fall too neatly into sing-song rhymes which distances the feeling, as does the tyranny of the end-stopped couplet which has none of the flexibility that expressive enjambment might allow.

The only suggestion of rhetorical development is expressed in the structure of the poem itself: the speaker moves from penitence to acceptance of God's will to an assurance that he will be forgiven. But here the poet makes no attempt to create a sense of a dramatic coherence from couplet to couplet, but instead presents a set of aphorisms that sum up the doctrinal truths of the poem. Furthermore, though the poem does acknowledge the basic elements of contrition, there is no real sense of psychological progression from one step to the next. One reason that Wyatt's paraphrase is successful is that he "fills in the blanks," as it were, making the connections between succeeding verses of the psalms that are not readily apparent. There are no such connections here:

My soule shall neuer cease with an assured faith  
 To knock, to craue, to call to cry to thee for helpe which sayth  
 Knocke and it shalbe heard, but aske and geuen it is  
 And all that like to kepe this course, of mercy shall not misse (137:9-12)

From this sharpe shower me shilde which threatened is at hand,  
 Wherby thou shalt great power declare & I the storme withstand.  
 Not my will lord but thyne, fulfild be in ech case,  
 To whose gret wil & mighty power al powers shal once geue place  
 My fayth my hope my trust, my God and eke my guide  
 Stretch forth thy hand to saue the soule, what so the body bide  
 (137:21-26)

A shorter poem that takes on one element of the penitential process, a poem that is deeply “situated” in a moment of the sinner’s experience, might be more rhetorically successful.<sup>7</sup> This is what we will see in the penitential poetry of Donne and Herbert in the chapters to follow.

A more successful poem is one found in the Arundel Harington manuscript, followed in the manuscript by the name “Walter Devereaux, Count d’Essex.” Devereux’s poem works in part because it does not attempt to recount the entire penitential process, but rather only the contrition that the sinner expresses. It does not explicitly paraphrase any of the penitential psalms, other than this couplet:

[Thou shalt open my lips, O Lord: and my mouth shall shew thy praise:  
Psalm 51:15]<sup>8</sup>

Restore to lyfe this wretched soule, whyche else is lyke to dye  
So shall my voice vnto thye name singe prayse eternallye (19-20)

Yet its themes of admission of sinfulness and pleading for mercy are common to both:

My sinful soule suppressed sore withe Carfull clogge of synn  
In humble sorte submyttes yt selfe thie mercies for to wynn  
Graunt mercye then o savioure sweete to me moste wretched thrall  
whose mornefull Cryes to the o lorde do styll fro mercy call

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<sup>7</sup> In other words, a metonymic poem might be more successful. Hinely argues that the general orientation of the poems in *Tottel’s Miscellany* is metaphoric, and that this was in part due to the advent of printing: “Lyric poetry remained for them [Elizabethan poets] a social pastime [and thus contextualized into specific social contexts, with specific audiences] but it had also come to be seen as a publishable art form, an enduring literary ‘monument’” (19-20).

<sup>8</sup> As with the Wyatt chapter, I quote psalms from the Great Bible. The exception to this will be my discussion of Sidney, and I will address the issue of choice of Bible in my discussion.

The fourteenner metrical scheme works against this poem as the poulter's measure worked against the one in the Miscellany, making the lines fall into an easy sing-song rhythm. On the other hand, the poem attempts to be nothing more than the cry of a penitent. The opening stanza calls for God to "cast downe thie tender eye" to hear the sinner, and the following stanzas actually present a development. Stanza 4 logically follows 3, for example:

forgetting heaven and heavenly powre wheare god and saynctes do dwell  
My life had lyke to walke the pathes that lead the Waye to helle

But o my Lorde and Lodestar bryght I will no more do soe  
To thinke vppon my former lyfe my harte dothe melt for woe . . . (11-14)

And it logically leads to stanza 5, in which the speaker says he will praise God eternally if he is restored by grace. The call for grace is presented with imagery of considerable beauty, recalling the holy oil of Aaron in Psalm 133:<sup>9</sup>

O powre thie precyouse oyle of grace into my wounded harte  
O let the dropps of mercye swadge the rygor of my smarte. (3-4)

Two even more successful penitential lyrics, however, occur in Fulke Greville's much later Caelica (begun between 1577 and 1580; printed in the Warwick manuscript 1633)<sup>10</sup>, the lyrics numbered 98 and 99. Both lyrics paraphrase verse from the penitential

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<sup>9</sup> Psalm 133:1-2: "Behold, how good and joyful a thing it is: brethren, to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down unto the beard: even unto Aaron's beard, and went down to the skirts of his clothing."

<sup>10</sup> For a full discussion of the dating of Caelica, see Bullough's introduction to his edition of Greville's poems and dramas (New York, 1945), 34-42.

psalms; both take one moment in the penitential process, rather than the entire process, so that the poem can thematically be of a whole; and both organize the material by the use of a stanza refrain with variations. Peterson cites the use of a stanza refrain in medieval lyric as a means for establishing unity in a long poem and as a pedagogical device (16-18), but Greville's use of the stanza refrain is more sophisticated than these basic uses (though it certainly has these functions as well).

Greville's lyrics also anticipate the penitential psalms in their sequencing,<sup>11</sup> both beginning with a poem that prepares one for penance,<sup>12</sup> and both explore the various steps of penance in separate poems devoted to those steps. Greville begins with an address to truth in sonnet 97, observing that:

Thou bidd'st us pray, and we do pray to thee,  
But as to power and God without us plac'd,  
Thinking a wish may wear out vanity,  
Or habits be by miracles defac'd.  
One thought to God we give, the rest to sin,

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<sup>11</sup> This sequencing is not only limited to the penitential lyrics in and of themselves. These poems occur in a sequence of poems devoted to various women, in the manner of a typical love sonnet sequence. Bullough writes: "... although there is no break in the background of thought (for political and religious ideas are often implied in the earlier poems [especially after XXXV] while such pieces as LXVII actually anticipate the later mood), there is a marked change in emphasis and interest. Whereas previously he used his political and religious ideas as subsidiary to the elucidation of amatory moods, he now goes over entirely to problems of state, of morality, and of personal salvation" (49), attributing this development, perhaps, to his reaction to the death of Sir Philip Sidney (49-50).

<sup>12</sup> This short sequence within a sequence is similar to that found in Herbert's collection of devotional lyrics The Temple, with his long poem "The Church Porch" preparing the reader for the lyrics of "The Temple." See my chapter 8 for a brief discussion of Herbert's sequencing.

Quickly unbent is all desire of good,  
 True words pass out, but have no being within,  
 We pray to Christ, yet help to shed his blood;  
     For while we say Believe, and feel it not,  
 Promise amends, and yet despair in it,  
 Hear Sodom judg'd, and go not out with Lot,  
 Make Law and Gospel riddles of the wit:  
     We with the Jews even Christ still crucify,  
     As yet not come to our impiety.

The speaker is aware of his sin, the first step in penitence, but takes his awareness no further. He addresses Eternal Truth, not God as he properly should, and we have little more than a statement of fact. Greville does effectively use the quatrain structure: each one examines one of the ways that sinners sin, and the concluding couplet summarizes the point of the poem. In that couplet, the speaker comes to awareness of the seriousness of his sin, and that leads to his contrition in the next poem, where he addresses God.

Greville uses a couplet refrain which aptly sums up the penitent's sinful experience:

Lord, I have sinn'd, and mine iniquity,  
 Deserves this hell; yet Lord deliver me.

In this couplet we have Protestant doctrine in its entirety:<sup>13</sup> man is sinful, deserves no better than this hell of living "in man's degeneration," yet calls on God to save him. The rest of the stanzas provide the specifics of the sinner's state:

Wrapp'd up, O Lord, in man's degeneration;  
 The glories of thy truth, thy joys eternal,  
 Reflect upon my soul dark desolation,  
 And ugly prospects o'er the sprites infernal . . .

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<sup>13</sup> Many critics have commented on the Greville's Calvinism and have provided the essentials of Calvinist doctrine in discussing this poem; see, for example, Lawson 126; Richard Waswo 125-26; Peterson 279-80.

(1-4)

The power and mercy never comprehended,  
 Rest lively-imag'd in my conscience wounded;  
 Mercy to grace, and power to fear extended,  
 Both infinite, and I in both confounded . . .  
 (7-10)

But in the final stanza, the poem turns, and the rest of the Protestant doctrine is provided.

If from the depth of sin, this hellish grave,  
 And fatal absence from my Saviour's glory,  
 I could implore his mercy, who can save,  
 And for my sins, not pains of sin, be sorry:  
     Lord, from this horror of iniquity,  
     And hellish grave, thou would'st deliver me.  
 (13-18)

Protestant contrition is presented here: first, the speaker recognizes that mercy exists, and that his sorrow must arise from his sins, rather than from fear of punishment for those sins. However, Greville does not present the contrition as a given, as the stanza, beginning with an extended "if" clause, seems to be set up as a conditional: "If I could implore his mercy, then Thou would'st deliver me." The mercy is not assured yet, as there is still an intermediary to whom appeal must be made. The lyric thus sets the stage for the next poem, Greville's version of Psalm 130, the "De Profundis," using as its starting point a paraphrase of this psalm's first verse.

[Out of the depth I have called unto thee, O Lord: Lord, hear my voice;  
 Psalm 130:1]

Down in the depth of mine iniquity,  
 That ugly centre of infernal spirits;  
 Where each sin feels her own deformity,  
 In those peculiar torments she inherits,  
     Depriv'd of human graces, and divine,  
     Even there appears this saving God of mine. (1-6)

The speaker's assurance that God's grace is given parallels the penitential psalms' movement to assurance at the end of each psalm. Charles Lawson, quoting Gunn, points out that the feminine rhymes so prevalent here are calculated to convey a sense of self-imposed difficulty (Lawson 128; Gunn 37), that the speaker is working to find his way out of the depths of his inquiry. Each stanza builds on this theme more powerfully, perhaps most effectively in the third:

In power and truth, almighty and eternal,  
Which on the sin reflects strange desolation,  
With glory scourging all the sprites infernal,  
And uncreated hell with unprivation;  
    Depriv'd of human graces, not divine,  
    Even there appears this saving God of mine.  
(13-18)

The peculiar, difficult line "uncreated hell with unprivation" suggests that glory's scourging can reverse, literally undo, what man has done: hell -- here seemingly the sinner's creation -- becomes, oddly, uncreated, by glory's un-withholding of its power.<sup>14</sup>

The final stanza moves to Christ's Passion most explicitly with the line "I see my Saviour for the same sins dying," and as in the last poem, Greville alters the last refrain couplet to sum up the theological point the stanza makes.

Depriv'd of human graces, not divine,  
Thus hath his death rais'd up this soul of mine.  
(23-24)

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Waswo also notes that this verse makes clear that the origin of hell is in man, not in God: "It states the reason why God's glory causes suffering and embraces that suffering as an effect of his grace (now introduced in the refrain), which can turn evil, the nothing which God has not made, into good" (130).



Note in the refrain how the speaker is no longer deprived of divine graces, but only human ones. Greville does not suggest that human graces can be sufficient for salvation, but rather acknowledges that they cannot help in any way; that is, being deprived of human graces simply does not matter if one has divine graces. The final verse of the poem identifies Christ's Passion as the means for salvation, as the refrain changes from "Even there appears this saving God of mine," a change from only the appearance or possibility of salvation to the action which actually guarantees it: "Thus hath his death rais'd up this soul of mine."

The poems which follow this in Caelica continue the themes of sin. I do not include them here because they do not strike me as using the psalms as a model. In them, Greville, for the most part, pulls the speaker out of the poem; there is no first person reflection on sins. But the poems I do discuss work in a way that the poems from the Arundel Harington manuscript and Tottel's Miscellany do not because of their focus -- they do not carry more themes than can be adequately treated in a short lyric -- and because of the organization centering around a refrain that changes as the poem develops, controlling the development. Perhaps Greville recognized that direct paraphrase of the penitential psalms would be necessarily limiting, and this led him to use Psalm 130 as a starting point, and only a starting point. By focusing on one verse and developing it independently of where the psalm takes it leads to a short, moving poem on the single theme of redemption.

## III

These poems make clear that if the poet rejects the set of images and controlled rhetorical development that a paraphrase of a psalm demands, he or she might well lose focus and the ability to control the development of the poem, Greville of course excepted. Direct paraphrases, on the other hand, give the poet a ready-made set of images, rhetorical development, even a speaker. Working within these limits could produce original and moving poetry.

It is not that it automatically would, however. George Gascoigne's paraphrase of the same Psalm 130, the "De Profundis," also uses the repetition of key phrases to organize the poem, but the result is a poem that is far more unfocused than is Greville's.

The first and sixth stanzas I give here are typical:

From depth of doole wherin my soule doth dwell,  
 From heavy heart which harbors in my brest,  
 From hope of heaven, from dreade of darksome hell.  
 O gracious God, to thee I crye and yell.  
 My God, my Lorde, my lovely Lord aloane,  
 To thee I call, to thee I make my moane.  
 And thou (good God) vouchsafe in gree to take,  
 This woefull plaint,  
 Wherein I faint.  
 Oh heare me then for thy great mercies sake . . .

[My soul fleeth unto the Lord: before the morning watch, I say, before the morning watch; Psalm 130:6]

Before the breake or dawning of the daye,  
 Before the lyght be seene in loftye Skyes,  
 Before the Sunne appeare in pleasaunt wyse,  
 Before the watch (before the watch I saye)  
 Before the warde that waites therefore alwaye:  
 My soule, my sense, my secreete thought, my sprite,  
 My wyll, my wishe, my joye, and my delight:

Unto the Lord that sittes in heaven on highe,  
 With hasty wing,  
 From me doeth fling,  
 And stryveth styll, unto the Lorde to flye.  
 (1-11; 56-66)

Occasionally, in order to sustain the meter, Gascoigne relies on filler phrases: "(Before the watche I saye)" does not add anything to the line that is not already there, nor does "my lovely Lord alone/ To thee I calle . . ." "My soule, my sense, my secrete thought, my sprite,/ My wyll, my wishe, my joye, and my delighte" is for the most part unnecessary extravagance, and there are infelicities in diction as well: "To thee I crye and yell" strikes exactly the wrong note of pleading.

The repetitive phrase that opens and organizes the first four lines of each stanza ("From depth of doole . . . from heavy heart . . . From troubled sprite . . . From hope of heaven") may serve sometimes to distance the reader from feeling the emotional intensity of the poem, as the repetition tends to carry the same emotional stance over several lines of poetry without the sense of progression that a closer, verse-by-verse paraphrase of the psalms would offer. Peterson says succinctly that parallelism is observed to a fault, and that the heavy caesura and alliteration of the lines produce stiff regularity (159). But Gascoigne also shows his poetic skill with the short couplet before the concluding line of each stanza. Its simplicity is deceptive, certainly breaking the monotony of the meter, but also giving the poem an emotional intensity: in stanza 6, the soul attempts to "fling" itself from the speaker's self, underscoring the deep longing of the psalmist to "fly to the Lord." Likewise, in stanza 2, Gascoigne writes:

Bende wylling eare: and pittie therewithall,

My wayling voyce,  
Which hath no choyce.  
But evermore upon thy name to call. (19-22)

This passage subtly underscores the Protestant belief that God's grace effects even the recognition of sin and its removal; we believe the sincerity of the lines because Gascoigne chooses not to use extravagant rhetoric to make the point.

The final stanza most clearly shows the contrast between extravagance and simplicity. As the psalmist is now assured of his salvation, he pours forth with confidence:

Hee wyll redeeme our deadly drowping state,  
He wyll bring home the sheepe that goe astraye,  
He wyll helpe them that hope in him always:  
He wyll appease our discorde and debate,  
He wyll soone save, that we repent us late.  
He wyll be ours if we continewe his,  
He wyll bring bale to joye and perfect blisse.  
He wyll redeeme the flocke of his electe,  
From all that is,  
Or was amiss.  
Since Abrahams heyres dyd first his lawes reject.  
(78-88)

The repetition of "He will" throughout the stanza expresses the psalmist's assurance again and again. If this final stanza just skirts being overwrought, Gascoigne controls the extravagance by paring the verse down to the simple couplet "from all that is/ or was amiss." This is the essence of the psalmist's confidence: all that is, or was wrong, does not matter. God does indeed redeem His chosen people.

Gascoigne's paraphrase is an experiment, each stanza taking on one verse of the psalm, in a manner similar to the medieval poets. But Gascoigne's interest is more in form than in theology, as he attempts to match his rhetorical skill to the content of the verses. It

is not a completely successful experiment -- the poem seems belabored in its insistence on fitting a specific form -- but it does pave the way for the Sidneys' much bolder experiments with the entire psalter.

#### IV

Paraphrases of the seven penitential psalms could use the context of some kind of penitential exercise that was established for their use in the Middle Ages, or the dramatic context that Wyatt uses in his paraphrase. It comes as a surprise, however, that the other Renaissance paraphrasers of these seven psalms use none of these contexts whatsoever, until one considers that the point may well have been to present the psalms as standing in the long tradition of the psalter, ready made for any use.

Sir John Harington's paraphrase of the penitential psalms<sup>15</sup> is fairly pedantic, for example. Harington uses traditional metrical forms -- sixian stanza for the first four (iambic pentameter sextets in ABABCC DEDEFF rhyme scheme); rime royal for Psalm 102; and variations of ottava rima for Psalms 130 and 143 (May 212) -- and he paraphrases the psalm material closely, rarely adding original material to the basic verse.

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<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of Harington's paraphrase of the entire psalter, see Kinney, 105-11. Kinney shows that it has far more metrical variety than his paraphrase of the penitential psalms alone (105), but draws the same conclusion that I do: "At their worst, Harington's psalms are mere hack-work, the words of the original obviously filled out and rearranged to fit the verse forms. At their best, in jaunty or muted celebration, in railing or heartsick lament, they create a distinctive and energetic voice" (105).

May argues that the translation of the seven penitential psalms alone represent a beginning of the translation of the entire psalter; see 329.

The paraphrases in fact might serve well as models for hymns, with their regular, ordered rhymes and rhythms. May also argues that Harington's fondness for feminine rhymes shows his extensive work in Italian translation (212-13); unlike Greville, they do not seem to contribute to meaning in his paraphrase.

Harington does provide the contexts "between the lines," that is, the context around the verses to show how they relate to one another. A good example of this is the opening of Psalm 32.

[Blessed is he whose unrighteousness is forgiven: and whose sin is covered.  
Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth no sin: and in whose  
spirit there is no guile.  
For while I held my tongue: my bones consumed away through my daily  
complaining.  
For thy hand is heavy upon me day and night: and my moisture is like the  
drought in summer; Psalm 32:1-4]

Thrice blessed hee whose faults such favor wynn  
Hee that by grace conceale his known demerit;  
Thrice blest to whome the Lord imputes no sinne  
Nor fynds no fraud nor falshood in his spirit;  
My selfe had once a sore that inward festerd  
But since I found how sore yt sore me pester'd.

For daies and nights this heavie hand did presse mee  
And waste my strength like flowrs with summer's heate  
Till half inforst I said I would confesse mee  
And lay open my fault both foul and greate . . .  
(1-10; May 332)

Though the "thrice blessed" is original, the first two clauses paraphrase the first two psalm verses closely, and the fourth line paraphrases the third psalm verse. The fifth and sixth

line provide the context that allow the reader to move to the new idea “Your hand was heavy upon me” of the fourth psalm verse.

The play on the word “sore” may present Harington the stylist, but he is nevertheless an uneven poet. “Pestered,” for example, fulfills the rhyme scheme of its couplet but hardly seems strong enough for the context. In enumerating the speaker’s ailments in Psalm 102, Harington writes:

[Hear my prayer, O Lord: and let my crying come unto thee.  
Hide not thy face from em in the time of my trouble: incline thine ear unto  
me when I call; O hear me, and that right soon.  
For my days are consumed away like smoke: and my bones are burnt up as  
it were a fire-brand.  
My heart is so smitten down, and withered like grass: so that I forget to eat  
my bread; Psalm 102:1-3]

1.      Lorde lend thine eare unto my pray’r and crying  
Nor hide thy face when hasty help I need;  
            I waste as smoke, my bones within are frying,  
My stomack faynts, I ev’n forget to feed,  
My hart is wither’d like a fading weed,  
            My gutts so grypp’d with greivance [sic] of my grones  
            That ev’n my skinn doth cleave unto my bones.  
            (1-7; May 334-35)

The clumsy “My bones within are frying” does not make a great deal of sense. Where Harington is capable of a vivid line such as “My hart is wither’d like a fading weed,” he just as often falls into the overwrought “My gutts so gryp’d with grievance of my grones.”

Harington is in fact fond of alliteration, perhaps overfond, as is shown in the couplet which opens Psalm 130: “From horror huge of darke despay’r and deepe/ My soule hath cride with seas of sin surrounded” (1-2), but here as well the alliteration seems

overwrought. As a poet, perhaps it is fairest to say that he tries too hard to bring something new to what must have been very familiar texts.

#### IV

Quite the opposite is the case with perhaps the best-known psalm paraphrases in English, those of the Thomas Sternhold and John Hopkins psalter of metrical psalm paraphrases.<sup>16</sup> Sternhold and Hopkins seem determined to bring nothing new to the psalms, and this is one of the reasons, I suspect, that their psalm paraphrases are generally agreed to be bad poetry.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas Sternhold, a Member of Parliament for Plymouth and a groom of the Royal Wardrobe, printed thirteen psalm paraphrases “drawen into English metre” in 1547; Edward VI encouraged him to publish them for a wider audience, and in 1549 a new edition came out with thirty-seven psalms. John Hopkins, a Suffolk clergyman and schoolmaster, added seven more paraphrases to a third edition in 1557. The rest of the psalm paraphrases are uncredited and added to later printings. See Chappell 40–41, and 46–47 for a discussion of the rise of other metrical psalm paraphrases, including those of John Day (1562), Nahum Tate and Nicholas Brady (1696), and Thomas Este (1592).

Hallett Smith’s crediting is different; he writes that Sternhold paraphrased 40 psalms, Hopkins 60, and the rest are from different hands (264). In either case, the corporate nature of the work is acknowledged.

<sup>17</sup> This opinion is so taken for granted that Hallett Smith assumes it in his now fairly old article on metrical psalmody. He argues that the psalter is unjustly criticized. In an age where English prosody was chaotic, Smith argues, the regularization of meter found in this psalter was in the best interest of poetry (266).

Zim is also fairly charitable to Sternhold and Hopkins. Though citing their “occasional stylistic ineptitudes,” Zim offers praise in that their “literal conservatism” and “regular metrical regularity and simple rhyme schemes” are in service to musical setting and singability (117).



This strikes me as entirely unfair, and a better way of examining Sternhold and Hopkins is to consider what they set out to do. Their psalter was not intended primarily as lyric poetry, but rather as, literally, lyrics: paraphrases for congregational singing. In that respect they succeed admirably.

Before addressing these paraphrases, it is necessary to consider English Renaissance attitudes toward church music. It is common knowledge that the new Reformed English church demanded music for the congregation as well as for the trained cathedral choir, and the English tradition of singing rather than reciting the psalms is important as well. A royal injunction to the dean and chapter of Lincoln Cathedral, for example, stated that:

[The congregation] shall from henceforth sing and say no anthems of Our Lady or of other Saints, but only of our Lord, and them not in Latin; but choosing the best and most sounding to Christian religion they shall turn the same to English, setting thereunto a plain and distinct note for every syllable one: they shall sing them and none other (Chappell 32).

Cranmer, too, expressed much the same opinion in a letter addressed to the King: "In mine opinion, the song that shall be made thereunto would not be full of notes, but, as near as may be, for every syllable a note . . ." (Chappell 33). The underlying attitude is that the lyrics of church music must be understandable and understood by the congregation, and if Sternhold and Hopkins are to be faulted for their simple metrical scheme and fidelity to the psalm's meaning -- and nothing more -- one can also defend them on the grounds that their paraphrases are eminently singable.

Their use of common meter is more a matter of practicality than anything else. Any psalm could be sung to any psalm tune if the meter of the psalms were regularized throughout, and the English insistence on the clarity of words, one note to one syllable, required that the meter of the verse be extremely regular. Sternhold and Hopkins' paraphrase, then, is not experimental in any way, but rather entirely functional, suited to the needs of Anglican churchmen only recently turned to the needs of their congregations.

Since the paraphrases are so technically alike, I will only examine one of them. Sternhold and Hopkins give their psalms short headings (and occasional tunes for singing) which tend to be of both a general and Davidic nature. Psalm 130, for example, is titled "An effectual prayer to obtaine mercy and forgiueness of his sinne, and at length deliverance from all euills" (81), where "he" could refer equally to David or a general psalmist.<sup>18</sup> Each psalm verse is paraphrased in a quatrain, and any additions to the verse do not add to the meaning of the verse, nor do they add any Reformation ideas, as we have seen in Wyatt:

[Out of the deep I have called unto thee, O Lord: Lord, hear my voice.  
O let thine ears consider well: the voice of my complaint; Psalm 130:1-2]

1 Lord to thee I make my mone,  
when dangers me oppresse:

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<sup>18</sup> Sternhold and Hopkins' penitential psalms are not consistent in this respect. Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, and 143 are clearly identified as psalms of David, whereas Psalm 102 is titled "It seemeth that this Prayer was appointed [sic] to the faithfull to pray in the captiuitie of Babylon. A consolation for the building of the Church, whereof followeth the praise of God to bee published unto all posterities. The conversion of the Gentiles, and the stabilitie of the Church" (60). Clearly, this psalter follows long tradition in acknowledging the various voices present in the psalms.

I call, I sigh, plaine and grone,  
trusting to finde release.

2 Heare now (O Lord) my request,  
for it is due full time:  
And let thine eares aye be prest  
unto this prayer mine.

This particular psalm has a tune printed with it, and the number of syllables per line requires the slight adjustment from ballad meter in order to make the syllables fit the notes. Hence in the first stanza, there is no “I call, I sigh, [I] plaine and grone,” and in the second stanza, the one syllable “aye” is substituted for a two syllable “always” which would regularize the meter. In all cases, the musical lines determine the poetry, rather than the other way around. When we normally speak of a text being set to music, we assume the text setting exists before the music does. Here it appears to be the other way around.

Here it is worth mentioning William Hunnis’s Seuen Sobs of A Sorrowfull Soule for Sinne (1583), which also uses the ballad meter that Sternhold and Hopkins employ. Written for Lady Frances, Countess of Sussex, Hunnis’s paraphrase is different from the Sternhold and Hopkins psalter in that he adds a great deal of Davidic material which expands and explains the psalm verses:

[Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin; Psalm 51:2]

But wash me from my wickednesse,  
and clense me from my sin.

20 The Israelites being defil’d  
durst not approach thee nie,  
Till they their garments and themselues  
had washed decentlie.

21 The priests also eke clensed were  
ere they thy face would see,

Else had they perisht in their sinne;  
 such, Lord, was thy decree.  
 22 Alas how much more need I then  
 to craue while I am heere,  
 To wash my soule and spotted soule  
 that it may cleane appeere? (38)

Hunnis's paraphrase, then, is based on the tradition of Davidic context. Given its audience, it was possibly intended for private devotion, even though Hunnis is consistent about explaining the psalms in terms of Davidic history and not allowing the reader to enter the psalm by keeping the contexts general. The paraphrase was apparently intended to be sung as well, in that Hunnis includes tunes appropriate for the psalms, though the work is far too long to be committed to memory, or sung even in a reasonably long liturgy. Perhaps it is fairest to say that Hunnis's work attempts to pull together a number of different, even conflicting, agenda.

## V

If this kind of strict adherence to metrical regularity proved to be a hindrance, the poet could choose the freedom of metrical variety. This is exactly what the Sir Philip Sidney and his sister, Mary, Countess of Pembroke chose. Moreover, the verse forms are not simply a product of the poets' ingenuity; they serve to strengthen and underline the meanings of the poems.

The Sidney-Pembroke psalter is an achievement of considerable poetic interest. The Sidneys found the means to speak through the psalms by experimenting with rhythm, meter, and rhyme scheme. These psalms "work," not because of their psychological

interest or dramatic diction (as Wyatt's do), but because of their perfection of form. I do not mean to suggest that Sir Philip and Mary Sidney are merely expert stylists, concerned with little more than exhibiting their ingenuity in paraphrase. Far from it, in fact; their psalms are also deeply felt religious works, as many critics have noted. As J. C. A. Rathnell puts it, their psalter was "an attempt to answer the need, both voiced within and outside the church, for a more adequate and expressive form of psalmody" (xiv).

Writing only of Sir Philip Sidney, Rivkah Zim goes beyond the traditional view that he was attempting to provide English poetry with a school of versification. Instead Zim argues that Sidney viewed the psalms as vehicles for both religious instruction and devotion, and, judging from his Defense of Poesy, believed the purpose of poetry was to win men from vice to virtue. Thus the psalms had a religious, didactic function, and the seriousness with which Sidney took his responsibility is evidenced by the commentaries, translations, and paraphrases he consulted in his own work (155-56).<sup>19</sup> In this light, the

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<sup>19</sup> Sidney writes in A Defence of Poesy that there are three kinds of poetry: "The chief, both in antiquity and excellency, were they that did imitate the unconceivable excellencies of God. Such were David in his Psalms; Solomon in his Song of Songs, in his Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs; Moses and Deborah in their Hymns; and the writer of Job: which, beside other, the learned Emanuel Tremellius and Franciscus Junius do entitle the poetical part of the Scripture" (80).

He also examines the etymology of the Roman vates, "poet," writing: "And may I not presume a little further, to show the reasonableness of this word vates, and say that the holy David's Psalms are a divine poem? If I do, I shall not do it without the testimony of great learned men, both ancient and modern. But even the name of Psalms will speak for me, which being interpreted, is nothing but songs; then that it is fully written in metre, as all learned hebricians agree, although the rules be not yet fully found; lastly and principally, his handling of prophecy, which is merely poetical . . ." (77). Sidney's admiration for the

perfection of form that Sidney (and later the Countess of Pembroke) strove for was always in service to expressive and didactic meaning of the psalm.

Consider, for example, the metrical scheme of Psalm 6.

- j. Lord, let not me a worme by thee be shent,  
     While Thou art in the heat of thy displeasure:  
     Ne let thy rage, of my due punishment  
     Become the measure.
- 2 But mercy, lord, let Mercy thyne descend  
     For I am weake, and in my weakness languish;  
     Lord help, for ev'en my bones their marrow spend  
     With cruel anguish.
- 3 Nay ev'n my soul fell troubles do appall;  
     Alas, how long, my God, wilt Thou delay me?
- 4 Turne Thee, sweet lord, and from this Ougly fall  
     My deare God stay me.<sup>20</sup>

The smooth rhythms create a sense of reasoned calm, but the verses read utterly unlike Sternhold and Hopkins. Sidney consistently uses a feminine end rhyme in the second and fourth lines of each stanza for metrical variety, and the shortening of the fourth line pulls each stanza to a close which sums up the meaning.<sup>21</sup>

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psalms as poetry may well have provided the impetus for his own paraphrase of the psalter.

<sup>20</sup> Quotations from Sir Philip Sidney's psalms (Psalms 6, 31, and 38) are from the Oxford edition of his Poems. Quotations from the Countess of Pembroke's penitential psalms (those remaining) are from The Psalms of Sir Philip Sidney and the Countess of Pembroke.

Critics generally agree that the Geneva Bible was a primary source for the Sidney psalter; I quote psalm verses from this translation.

<sup>21</sup> Coburn Freer goes further, and in a complicated analysis of Sidney's rhythm, argues that the shortened line emphasizes the rapid meter and anguish in the first stanza. In the

In Psalm 38, too, we find Sidney's careful attention to meter. The paraphrase has a Herbertesque simplicity with its extremely short lines and strict formalism: each stanza expands two of the psalm verses, and following the bipartite structure of each verse, each stanza divides neatly into two halves.

- 1 Lord while that thy rage doth bide,  
Do not chide  
Nor in anger chastise me;
- 2 For thy shafts have pierced me sore,  
And yet more,  
Still thy hands upon me be.

The effect is again one of reasoned calm, the sinner simply giving the statement of his condition, and the clear balanced structure reinforcing the feel of simple statement of fact. The tone, then, is the quiet, subdued tone of a Job figure. There is no evidence in the psalm that the sinner has done anything to deserve this punishment, so that his faith in God is all the more convincing:

- 21 Do not, Lord, then me forsake,  
Do not take  
Thy deare presence farre from me:
- 22 Hast o Lord, that I be stayd  
By thy aid;  
My salvation is in thee.

In addition, there are the usual felicitous touches of Sidney's sure craftsmanship: the light pun in the line "In my reines hot torment raignes," the helplessness expressed in the heavy weight of the rhythms and caesura in the line "My heart pants, gon is my might,"

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third stanza, the direct appeal to God reaches its peak, and the last shortened line is more strained. See Freer 431-32.

breaking almost perfectly regular stresses in the rest of the poem and suggesting the sinner's inability to do anything in his own power. And in paraphrasing verses 19 and 20, Sidney draws on the Geneva Bible's syntax in verse 20:

19 But the while they live and grow  
     In great show,  
 20 Many mighty wrongfull foes,  
     Who do ev'ill for good, to me  
     Enemys be--  
     Why? Because I virtue chose.

The Geneva Bible reads: "They also, that reward euil for good, are mine aduersaries, because I followe goodnes." Sidney achieves a greater abruptness, though, with the direct question following the pause, underscoring that the sinner suffers by choice. This is also underscored by the fact that Sidney changes "following goodness" to "choosing goodness," making the final line address the issue of free will. In this psalm, then, Sidney uses poetic technique in order to highlight the unfairness of the psalmist's situation.

Sidney also paraphrases felicitously, bringing themes and images from other sources to the psalm that are not in the original verse in order to strengthen the point of the verse. For example, he paraphrases Psalm 6:7:

Woe, lyke a moth, my face's beauty eates  
     And age pull'd on with paines all freshness fretteth;  
 The while a swarm of foes with vexing feates  
     My life besetteth.

The Geneva Bible reads, "Mine eye is dimmed for despite, & sunke in because of all mine enemies." Sidney's images are more startling, not merely "enemies" but a "swarm of foes" with "vexing feats," while woe eats the beauty of his face. Zim traces the sources for this



new material, and in fact it is not original. The image of the moth is derived from Psalm 39:11: "When thou with rebukes dost chastise man for iniquitie, thou as a moth makest his beautie to consume"; and Beza's paraphrase of Psalm 6 was the probable source for the theme of aging in the subsequent lines (161). Sidney is saying nothing new here -- the meaning of the psalm is intact -- but he also understands how to take a useful image or theme and recast it to his own ends.

Because they paraphrased the entire psalter and had a didactic purpose, one would expect the Sidneys' psalter to be metaphoric, each psalm standing as, to use Hedley's phrase, a "literary monument." Therefore there are no sorts of contexts that we have seen with Wyatt, and the paraphrases tend to derive their content directly from the psalms or from long commentary tradition. Nevertheless, Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke, who completed the psalter beginning at Psalm 43, following her brother's death, tends, if not to contextualize her psalms to any great degree, to bring in more contemporary thought. It has been long acknowledged that the Countess of Pembroke's contribution to the psalter is more rigorously Calvinist, and she also makes more use of imagery and themes derived from the court.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> May, for example, notes that the Countess of Pembroke felt much freer to venture beyond the literal boundaries of Scripture, emphasizing "devotional force instead of the line-by-line recreation" (210), and often reading the heavenly court in terms of the Tudor court (208).

For one example of the Countess of Pembroke's Calvinism, J. C. A. Rathnell cites her treatment of Psalm 139, using Calvin's commentary on the weaving metaphor in verse 15: "My strength which thou hast made in secret is not hid from thee, I was woven together in the lowest parts of the earth." Calvin compares the mother's womb to the "dark denne" of

For example, she casts Psalm 51 into a particularly Protestant mold. Though she is not the first to raise issues of righteousness in this psalm, she is the first to frame the issue immediately in terms of grace:

O Lord, whose grace no limits comprehend;  
 Sweet Lord, whose mercies stand from measure free;  
 To mee that grace, to mee that mercy send,  
 And wipe O Lord, my sinnes from sinfull mee  
 O clense, O wash my foul iniquitie:  
 Clense still my spotts, still wash awaie my staynings,  
 Till staines and spottes in me leave no remaynings.

For I, alas, acknowledginge doe know  
 My filthie fault, my faultie filthinesse  
 To my soules eye uncessantly doth show.  
 Which done to thee, to thee I doe confesse,  
 Just judge, true witness; for that righteousness,  
 Thy doome may passe against my guilt awarded,  
 Thy evidence for truth maye be regarded. (1-14)

As the original psalm states, the speaker needs not only mercy but also grace, and the Countess equates the two effectively. Both mercy and grace are limitless, but whereas mercy can wash away sin, only grace can justify the sinner. This theme is carried into the second stanza, with its emphasis on judgment. The psalmist emphasizes self-knowledge:

the tailor's workroom, giving rise to the metaphors of embroidery and workshop in her paraphrase:

Thou, how my back was beam-wise laid,  
 And rafting of my ribbs, dost know:  
 Know'st ev'ry point  
 Of bone and joynt,  
 How to this whole these parts did grow,  
 In brave embrod'ry faire araid,  
 Though wrought in shopp both dark and low. (xx)

the Geneva Bible gives “my sinne is euer before me,” but the Countess of Pembroke paraphrases more strongly that her fault is unceasingly presented before her soul’s eye. And it is equally clear that the Countess does not overstep her bounds, challenging God, as if to say, “I have acknowledged my sin, so you must forgive me.” She instead confesses in the hopes that God’s righteousness may surpass her guilt, and that His evidence may be regarded for truth, not only in the sense of the legal proceedings Pembroke suggests, but also for her own personal truth, a self-knowledge.

If the Countess of Pembroke is more Protestant in her paraphrase, she is every bit Sidney’s equal in original, arresting phrasing. There are several examples of this in Psalm 51:

To eare and hart send soundes and thoughts of gladness,  
That brused bones maie daunce awaie their sadness.  
(27-28)

Ah! cast me not from thee: take not againe  
Thy breathing grace! againe thy comfort send me,  
And let the guard of thy free sp’rite attend me.  
(34-35)

The Countess’s mastery of form is evident in her paraphrase of Psalm 130, the “De Profundis.”

From depth of grief  
Where droun’d I ly,  
Lord for relief  
To thee I cry:  
My earnest, vehement, cryeing, prayeing,  
Graunt quick, attentive, hearing, waighing.

O Lord, if thou  
Offenses mark,  
Who shall not bow

To beare the cark?  
 But with thy justice mercy dwelleth,  
 Whereby thy worshipp more excelleth.

A quatrain of short lines is paired off with a couplet of longer lines in both stanzas. In the first stanza, the parallelism of the couplet does not seem overdone as it did in Gascoigne's paraphrase of the same psalm, as it is balanced by the quatrain, and by the fact that the second line responds to the first rather than reiterating it: to this praying, grant your weighing. In the second stanza, the quatrain poses a question to which the couplet responds, again unlike Gascoigne's more reiterative strategy. Finally, the Countess avoids metrical monotony by ending every couplet of the paraphrase with a feminine rhyme. One might note that each stanza is essentially a tetrameter quatrain with internal rhymes in the first couplet, had Pembroke not set up metrical variety within each stanza.

## VI

This psalter perhaps represented the culmination of the long tradition of psalm paraphrase in English literature. Of course, metrical psalms continued to be written, and individual poets, Herbert and Milton among them, continued paraphrasing psalms. But for the purposes of this study, that of the penitential psalms in specifically, the tradition had essentially ended with the poets discussed in this chapter.

Why did the tradition exhaust itself? There are several possibilities. The obvious answer is that the tradition could not be sustained after the bold psalm experiments of the Sidney-Pembroke psalter and the great Wyatt paraphrase of the penitential psalms; at this

point, the tradition reached its zenith and subsequent poets do nothing to match Wyatt's and the Sidneys' achievements.

But perhaps a more accurate answer would be the emphasis in Reformation theology on personal experience: that is, the emphasis on reading the Bible in light of one's own life. Since Augustine's commentary onward, the psalms have lent themselves to being read as both biblical and personal history, but the Reformation placed even more emphasis on taking biblical material and applying it to one's personal circumstances. Though a psalm paraphrase allows for a level of flexibility, it is necessarily locked into subject matter of the psalm verse, a poet might well find it difficult to "do" anything with the subject matter, to make that application to his own (or a poetic persona's) set of specifics. "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding" (Psalm 32:9), for example, necessarily lends itself to a limited set of questions: why is this specific comparison made? How am I like an horse or mule? why am I to not be like them? How does this relate to my life -- if indeed it does at all? Poets solved this rhetorical issue in various ways, Wyatt perhaps the most successfully with his Davidic narrative (and, accordingly, its possible personal connections).

The poets I discuss from this point onward use the penitential psalms as a starting point, and only a starting point, for their own penitential lyrics. It is to Donne's Holy Sonnets and Herbert's The Temple that we now turn.

## Chapter 7

### JOHN DONNE'S HOLY SONNETS:

#### TOWARD A PROTESTANT PENITENCE

Donne's Holy Sonnets are not paraphrases of the penitential psalms, though critics have long recognized their affinities with the psalms, and the penitential psalms in particular.<sup>1</sup> However, Donne uses the penitential psalms as a starting point. Some of his Holy Sonnets might be seen as a commentary on a psalm verse, Donne drawing out the theological implications of its theme, often with a distinctly Protestant cast. In other sonnets, he develops Protestant themes, such as election, grace, free will, that are not directly present in but can be extrapolated from the penitential psalms, following the long exegetical tradition that I have traced in chapters 2 and 4.

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<sup>1</sup> See Robin Dubinski, 201, for a brief overview of various critics' responses to this issue. Lewalski's comments are typically illuminating: "The speaker of the 'Holy Sonnets' makes no such overt claims of relation to a biblical poet, yet he seems for all that to associate himself here with the same two figures he claims closest kinship to in the sermons -- David in the Penitential Psalms and the anguished Paul testifying to the conflicts within him" (245).

On the sonnets' connections with the penitential psalms, see especially Dubinski's article "Donne's Holy Sonnets and the Seven Penitential Psalms," Renaissance and Reformation 22 (1986): 202-16.

At the very least, Donne sees in these psalms a model for his own petitions to God. In commenting on Terence Cave's study of French Renaissance lyric poetry, Dubinski points out that in France, verse paraphrases of the penitential psalms inspired psalm-like lyrics and sonnets on penitential themes:

These paraphrases, along with other penitential material from the Old Testament, provided poets with a particular pattern of themes, a certain cast of language, and a roomy and flexible form that could cope with all the modulations of penitential devotion -- lament, self-deprecation, and prayer. Cave further observes that because of the popularity of the sonnet form, it was virtually inevitable that poets would seek to transform the equivalent of a Penitential Psalm into a sonnet.<sup>2</sup>

It would be inaccurate, though, to call the Holy Sonnets a sonnet cycle modeled on the cycle of the penitential psalms. There are two ways which such a cycle can work: the structure of any single penitential psalm with its movement from contrition to confession to assurance, or the structure of the entire sequence of the seven psalms with its cyclical repetition of this pattern. Neither pattern directly affects the Holy Sonnets. In fact, it is difficult to argue for any kind of spiritual progression in the Holy Sonnets. Instead of

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<sup>2</sup> The work to which he refers is Terence Cave's Devotional Poetry in France, c. 1570-1630 (Cambridge, 1969). For relevant passages on this point, see 95-103; 135-36.

Robin Dubinski also points out that Donne's sermons as well as his poem upon the Sidneys' translation of the Psalms ("Upon the Translation of the Psalmes by Sir Philip Sidney, and the Countesse of Pembroke his Sister") makes it clear that he saw the Psalms as the proper model for one's own prayer; see 203-4.

In a related article, William L. Stull shows that there were many other English Renaissance sonneteers who wrote religious sonnets; this largely unexplored field is the focus of his "'Why Are Not Sonnets Made of Thee?' A new Context for the 'Holy Sonnets' of Donne, Herbert, and Milton," Modern Philology 80 (1982): 129-35.

presenting a movement from sorrow to assurance or a cycle of sorrow and assurance, the entire sequence is filled with spiritual uneasiness. The speaker of Donne's poems, begging for mercy throughout all of the sonnets, is never sure exactly where he stands, no more at the ending than at the beginning.

Donne, then, brings a new focus to the penitential psalm tradition: a Reformation interest in the relationship of contrition to free will and to grace. In order to apply this focus to the poems, it is necessary to discuss two important issues. First, I will discuss the textual manuscript history of the Holy Sonnets in detail. This textual history is complicated, but establishing the canon of which sonnets constitute the Holy Sonnets and their ordering is central to my argument of influence of the penitential psalms. Second, I will consider Donne's own views of the relationship of free will and grace to penitence by examining his sermons, especially those written on the penitential psalms. Finally, I will turn to the poems themselves, arguing that their power comes from the contradictions among the poems. Donne presents a sinner who outwardly seems penitent but inwardly fights a battle between maintaining his free will and submitting it to God. These poems very often say one thing and mean another, shot through with, in Donne's words, "holy discontent."

## II

The very complicated manuscript history of the Holy Sonnets has direct bearing on the organization of the poems themselves and hence the organization of their themes. There are three major versions of the Holy Sonnets in manuscript, two of which I believe



have authority, the former reflecting the speaker's insecurity about his own worthiness of being saved, the latter attempting to find some kind of security. Helen Gardner has carried out the difficult work of the history of the manuscripts which contain the Holy Sonnets (and often include other poems as well) in her critical edition of The Divine Poems.<sup>3</sup> Among these manuscripts, however, the ordering of the Holy Sonnets differs markedly. Gardner organizes the various manuscripts into what she terms Groups I, II, and III, in that each group carries common characteristics: Group I contains essentially the same collection of poems, all depending on a common manuscript which Gardner calls "X." Altogether, there are twelve sonnets in the cycle (lvii-lxii). The Group II manuscripts include even more of the Donne's "divine" (religious) poems, some of which are not found in Group I (lxvi-lxviii), but the numbering and order of the twelve Holy Sonnets is the same as in Group I manuscripts. It is this cycle of twelve sonnets which was used for the first printed edition of Donne's poetry in 1633 (lxvi-lxviii). The poems in this sequence are sonnet 1, "As due by many titles I resigne"; 2, "Oh my blacke soule! Now thou art summoned"; 3, "This is my playes last scene"; 4, "At the earths round imagin'd corners"; 5, "If poysonous mineralls, and if that tree"; 6, "Death be not proud"; 7, "Spit in my face yee Jewes, and pierce my side"; 8, "Why are wee by all creatures waited on?"; 9, "What if

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<sup>3</sup> See in particular lvii-lxxxii of her second edition of Donne's Divine Poems (1978, first edition 1952; Oxford, 1978). The second edition brings to light much recent research in the manuscript history of Donne's work. Whenever I refer to Gardner or to the poems I am referring to this second edition.

this present were the worlds last night?"; 10, "Batter my heart, three-person'd God"; 11, "Wilt thou love God, as he thee!"; and 12, "Father, part of his double interest."

The Group III manuscripts (the most important of which are Bridgewater, Dobell, Luttrell, O'Flaherty, Stowe 961) include many variants having some, most, or none of the "divine poems"; in the manuscripts that do contain the Holy Sonnets the ordering of the poems is different. First, sonnets 7 through 10 are omitted. Second, four new sonnets are interpolated into the remaining cycle: sonnet (1), "Thou hast made me, and shall thy work decay?"; (2), "I am a little world made cunningly"; (3) "O might those sighes and teares returne againe"; and (4), "If faithfull soules be alike glorifi'd." Third, sonnet 12 is moved to the fourth position in the cycle. In addition, two of the manuscripts, Luttrell and O'Flaherty, not only follow the Group II numbering, but also add Sonnets 7 through 10 at the end of the sequence, for a total of sixteen sonnets (lxix-lxxviii).

The question of ordering is even further complicated by one unique manuscript of Group III, Westmoreland, that follows the ordering of Group II, and then adds three new sonnets at the end of the sixteen: sonnet [1], "Since she whom I lov'd, hath payd her last debt"; [2], "Show me deare Christ, thy spouse, so bright and cleare"; and [3], "Oh, to vex me, contraries meete in one." These three sonnets occur nowhere else in manuscripts of the Holy Sonnets, and thus create a total of nineteen sonnets (lxxviii-lxxxix). Furthermore, the second edition of Donne's poetry (printed in 1635) is a conflation of the 1633 order

and Group III, and is not found in any manuscript (xxxix).<sup>4</sup> The relationship of the various manuscripts can be shown schematically, the parenthetical numbers indicating interpolated sonnets in the Group III manuscripts and the bracketed numbers indicating the unique sonnets from the Westmoreland manuscript:

Groups I and II, first edition (1633):

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

Group III:

(1), 1, (3), 12, 2, 3, (2), 4, 5, (4), 6, 11

Luttrell, O'Flaherty Mss:

(1), 1, (3), 12, 2, 3, (2), 4, 5, (4), 6, 11, 7, 8, 9, 10

Westmoreland Ms:

(1), 1, (3), 12, 2, 3, (2), 4, 5, (4), 6, 11, 7, 8, 9, 10,

[1], [2], [3]

second edition (1635):

(1), 1, (3), 2, (2), 3, 4, (4), 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

(Gardner xxxix)

Gardner argues that the Group I and II sonnet order is closest to Donne's intentions in the Holy Sonnets, in that they form two groups of six sonnets which are

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<sup>4</sup> Gardner argues further that as this ordering obviously does not have Donne's authority, it can be dismissed from this discussion.

thematically related: the first six are on the theme of death and the Last Things, the second six on the theme of the Atonement and man's response to it (xlvi; liii). She further identifies the four interpolated sonnets of Group III as penitential, and argues that the Group III ordering is incorrect in they break the two groups of six.<sup>5</sup>

Though many critics have accepted this ordering and analysis, there is not unanimous agreement. Lewalski, for example, believes that given the complicated manuscript history of the Holy Sonnets, it may well be pointless to argue for any kind of specific ordering of the poems:

Obviously, the sonnets may not have been intended as a sequence. Donne may have wished simply to examine various discrete moments in the speaker's spiritual drama. And in some sense, from the Protestant perspective the question of sequence is irrelevant. As the Protestant emblem books and lyric collections make plain, except for a beginning with effectual calling, and an ending with the longing for final glorification, the various states are not so much sequential as concomitant: we may recall Calvin's insistence that God's graces come not singly but together. As topics to be considered in the Protestant meditative exercise of self-examination, such spiritual states as election, calling, conviction of sin, repentance, faith, justification, adoption, may and should be experienced and relived at any time, to provide matter for meditative exercise (265).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Gardner continues her argument by demonstrating that the first six sonnets of Groups I and II, and to a lesser extent the final six, show the influence of Ignatian meditative practice; the four penitential sonnets, which she believes to have been written in the same time period but not as a group, do not show the Ignatian meditative influence nearly as readily. See her thorough discussion of this tradition, pp. l-lv.

<sup>6</sup> In her analysis, Lewalski follows the 1635 ordering of the sonnets, criticizing Gardner's ordering: "Dame Helen takes them [the four interpolated sonnets] to have been originally intended as a rather loosely organized sequence on the topic of penitence (though the first of them has virtually nothing to do with that matter) . . . Since Donne left no holographs of these poems, and did not prepare them for publication, and since we cannot even be certain about the dates of composition, it is well-nigh impossible to argue conclusively about questions of sequence" (264-65). Lewalski believes the four additional

Though Lewalski speaks for many critics in saying that the matter cannot be settled conclusively, a provocative article by Patrick F. O'Connell may do just that. Basing his theory on a thorough study of the Westmoreland manuscript, O'Connell argues that the ordering of the Group III manuscripts is an earlier draft of the later Group II manuscripts -- that is, the penitential sonnets were dropped out of the original set of twelve sonnets, so that the Group I and II ordering reflects a later version of Donne's work.

Examining Gardner's evidence, O'Connell points out what he sees as its flaws<sup>7</sup>: the four penitential sonnets are not a group in any manuscript, and thus should not be grouped

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sonnets expand on the fundamental terms of the original twelve sonnets, inserted where they would most thematically suitable (265).

<sup>7</sup> Nor is he alone. Many critics argue against Gardner's ordering when their literary analysis depends on the sequencing (as does, for example, Peterson's application of the Anglican doctrine of contrition to the sequence.) Other than O'Connell, though, fewer critics examine the sequencing of the sonnets extraneous to literary analysis. One who does is Dennis Flynn, whose article "'Awry and Squint': The Dating of Donne's Holy Sonnets" examines the sequence in terms of its probable date of composition. Gardner bases her probable dating of the Holy Sonnets on a poem addressed "to E. of D. with six holy Sonnets" in the Westmoreland manuscript, assuming that these six sonnets were the six meditating on the Last Things, as she argues in her critical edition of the Divine Poems. Further assuming that "E. of D." is the Earl of Dorset, who succeeded to his title in 1609, these six of the Holy Sonnets must antedate 1609, and since other sonnets in the sequence follow these six, then the whole of the Holy Sonnets must antedate 1609 and were thus written in Donne's maturity.

Flynn argues instead that Donne would hardly have sent poems for approval to a young man with no reputation as a poet, when he himself had by 1609 established himself as a poet; the "to E. of D." poem more closely resembles Donne's poetry from the 1590s in style. Finally, "E. of D." may well have been William Stanley, who became sixth Earl of

together (327); her evidence for how they got into Group III is questionable;<sup>8</sup> the Westmoreland manuscript, which follows Group III (and adds three new sonnets) was

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Derby in 1594, who was admitted to Lincoln's Inn when Donne and Rowland Woodward (who copied the Westmoreland manuscript) were students there; the "six holy sonnets" may have been verse epistles rather than the poems under consideration here. See 35-46.

<sup>8</sup> O'Connell writes: "She [Gardner] notes that the core of the two arrangements is the set of the six sonnets on the Last Things, the first six of Groups I-II, which are found in the same order, though not consecutively, in Group III and W [Westmoreland]. Sonnets 11 and 12 of the Group I-II order are also found in both arrangements, and she considers them a pendant to the first six. Now comes the explanation of Group III, which she admits can only be hypothetical:

'These eight sonnets appear to have been given by Donne to someone as a set of six, written out consecutively, and two separate sonnets, and to have been accompanied, or followed, by four quite distinct sonnets on a different topic, sin, also on loose sheets. The two which should have been added at the close of the sequence on the Last Things, as well as the four penitential sonnets, have been, in error, interpolated into the sequence, thus giving us the Group III set' (Gardner [1952 ed.], xl, n.2).

There had to have been, in other words, two instances of erroneous interpolation, either at the same time or consecutively, the second of which involved four sonnets written, according to Gardner, later than the four which do not appear in Group III at all" (327).

Concerning Westmoreland, Gardner put forth another theory in her second edition (1978):

'We can either regard W as preserving Donne's first version and the Group III manuscripts as descending from a corrupt copy of it, or, if we think of the differences between W and Group III, though trivial, are sufficiently numerous to be impressive, we could regard W as having a slightly different version from the version in Group III, containing minor alterations that Donne retained in the revision that gives us the Group I text. The second view does not account of the coincidence in order between the

copied by Rowland Woodward, a close friend of Donne's, who would hardly have organized sonnets against a misarranged manuscript (328).

O'Connell offers a much simpler explanation for the arrangement of the Group III manuscripts, and it has the advantage of having Donne's authority:

According to this theory, Donne first grouped twelve sonnets together in the order found in Group III and W [Westmoreland] 1-12. These sonnets were copied into the original manuscript or manuscripts which eventually descended into Group III collections, and were later sent, somewhat revised, to Rowland Woodward. Some time later Donne wrote four more sonnets which he substituted for four of the original set: he inserted the four new sonnets before the original last sonnet, removed the first, third, seventh and tenth original sonnets altogether, and moved the original fourth sonnet to the twelfth position, giving us the arrangement of Groups I-II and [the] 1633 [edition]. Such a conclusion supports Gardner's theory that this latter order represents Donne's definitive arrangement, but does not accept her grouping of the four "additional" sonnets, which has no manuscript support (329).

This still leaves the problem of why the Westmoreland manuscript exists as it does, following the ordering of the Group III manuscripts and adding three new sonnets which appear nowhere else. One of these sonnets is explicitly about the death of Donne's wife, so that it must date from around 1620. If Woodward were intimate enough to receive

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sonnets in Group III and the first twelve in W. On balance this seems to me to be greater than the differences in readings' (Gardner [1978 ed.], lxxx-lxxxi).

Gardner's whole theory of the arrangement of the 'Holy Sonnets' is on the line here. Since Woodward would hardly be dependent for his order on a Group III text, Group III must have taken its order from W. In the process, two traditions which differed 'substantially' in 1952 have only 'trivial' differences in 1978 . . . The very fact that Gardner presents two alternative theories concerning the relationship of Group III to W suggest her own awareness that neither one is convincing or satisfactory" (328).

three additional sonnets from Donne, he surely would have known that the group I-II ordering (which Gardner follows) was not definitive. O'Connell, however, continues:

If however it can be shown that Woodward had copied the first twelve sonnets into his manuscript, and only later added the four from Groups I-II, and the three unique sonnets, the legitimacy both of the original ordering (Group III) and of the revised order (Group I-II) would receive powerful support. A careful examination of the manuscript does in fact yield this conclusion (331).

Pointing out that the thirteenth sonnet (number 7 of Groups I-II) is transcribed in a different hand from the preceding twelve strongly suggests that some time passed between the transcribing of the first twelve sonnets and the final seven. There is also a slash line beneath the number "17" (the first of the new sonnets), and the final seven sonnets appear to be written with a much sharper stroke, like the stroke of the penmanship of the sonnets of La Corona, which follow the Holy Sonnets in the manuscript. O'Connell's argument is that "the last seven 'Holy Sonnets' and the seven 'La Corona' sonnets are written on the innermost pages of the gathering, ff. D5-D8v":

If these leaves are folded in reverse, D7, the page on which "La Corona" begins, would immediately follow the twelfth "Holy Sonnet," and ff. D5-D6v, on which sonnets 13-19 are now written, would come between "La Corona" and the prose [which follows it in the manuscript]. In other words, the pages on which "La Corona" appears (D7-D8v) would originally have been ff. D5-D6v, and the present D5-D6v would have been the blank pages D7-D8v. When the four new sonnets appeared, presumably in the Group I-II arrangement, Woodward did not have to copy them after "La Corona" and thus separate them from the twelve, but by reversing the fold of the two new sheets could use the blank pages which now would come immediately after no. 12. Later on, when nos. 17-19 were given by Donne to Woodward, they were copied onto the remaining blank leaf. This would probably not have entailed any tampering with the binding, since it is likely that the pages existed in an unbound state for some time after copying: all the pages of the manuscript have three vertical folds, one in the



center of each page, and two, in the opposite direction, half-way between this fold and the extremities of the page (333).

O'Connell proves his argument by noting a vertical wrinkle and tear in f. D6-D6v, which does not appear on the subsequent pages containing La Corona sonnets (D7-D7v; D8-D8v), but does appear on f. D9 -- indicating that at one time La Corona immediately followed the Holy Sonnets, and the two succeeding leaves were still blank. He further speculates that the final three sonnets which Donne sent later to Woodward do not belong in the sequence at all, given the symbolic importance of the number "12" (and the fact that they were sent separately from the rest).<sup>9</sup>

Given that evidence, we can see that there are two definitive arrangements of the Holy Sonnets, that of the Group III manuscripts, and a later revision that follows the Group I-II manuscripts; Gardner correctly identifies the initial four sonnets from the

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<sup>9</sup> O'Connell discusses the importance of "12" by citing the Jesuit Pontano's comment on the number of books in the Aeneid which he compares with Scripture: the twelve tribes of Israel, twelve gates of the New Jerusalem, twelve apostles; and the tradition of the twelve degrees of humility from Bernard's The Steps of Humility and Pride, which may have even more bearing on a set of penitential sonnets. See 337-38.

The final three sonnets from the Westmoreland manuscript pose a puzzle. Most critics (with the exception of Peterson) ignore them completely; I suggest instead that they do not belong to the sequence, at least as Donne envisioned it. Thematically, only one of the sonnets -- "Oh, to vex me, contraries meet in one" -- seems to fit the penitential mode Donne has created. "Since she whome I have lovd, hath payd her debt," it could be argued, follows the emphasis on the "I," but the reflection is on an external event, not internal state; "Show me deare Christ, thy spouse, so bright and cleare" simply breaks away from any focus the sonnets have previously had. I follow Lewalski in her comments: "The final three are assumed to be separate occasional meditations, written later and available only in the Westmoreland manuscript until their late first printing in 1899" (264).

Group III ordering as penitential in tone and linked by their emphasis on sin and the accompanying tears for sin (xli), so that these sonnets begin a process that continues throughout the Holy Sonnets by which Donne's speaker realizes his own sinfulness,<sup>10</sup> makes attempts at contrition, and discovers God's mercy through Christ's Redemption. The fact that they are interspersed among the sonnets rather than brought together as a group can be explained by the Reformation sense of various emotional states as concomitant rather than sequential -- or, rather, that the varying emotional states constitute a spiritual sequence in itself, exemplifying the despair and joy that the Reformation sinner faces in his relationship with God. It is thus entirely appropriate that poems about contrition jostle up against poems about fear of God's punishment for sin. The ordering of the Holy Sonnets, then, may be Donne's way of creating a spiritual diary for the speaker of the poems.

The poems added in the later revision, on the other hand, generally emphasize Christ's Redemption.<sup>11</sup> As it happens, this roughly follows the pattern we have seen thus

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<sup>10</sup> Nowhere is the issue of biographical interpretation of the Holy Sonnets more evident than in how critics refer to poet's voice: is it a "speaker," or is it actually Donne? As this study so far has demonstrated, it need not be one at the expense of the other, as commentators on the psalms have long held that the psalms can and do accommodate more than one voice. I thus use the term "speaker," aware of course that the speaker may include Donne himself.

<sup>11</sup> These poems are 7-10 in the Group I arrangement: "Spit in my face yee Jewes, and pierce my side," "Why are we by all creatures waited on?," "What if this present were the worlds last night?" Sonnet 10, "Batter my heart, three-personed God," seems to me to be an exception, with its emphasis more on man's passivity in order to effect penitence. Sonnet 12, "Father, part of his double interest," and 11, "Wilt thou love God, as he thee! then digest," both found in the Group II manuscripts, also recall the Redemption directly.

far in the penitential psalm cycles: a movement from a recognition of and sorrow for sinfulness to an awareness of Christ's Redemption as the means for man's salvation.<sup>12</sup>

Donne may well have had the thematic organization of the penitential psalms in mind when he wrote his two versions of the Holy Sonnets. I suggest that the revision of the collection might be Donne's attempt to rethink his themes and create a new spiritual diary for his speaker. Donne altered his views on the main theme of the sonnets, de-emphasizing penitence by removing the four "penitential" sonnets and focusing more closely on the theme of salvation by adding the final four sonnets concerned with Christ's Redemption. In the early version of the Holy Sonnets, then, Donne asks the question, How can I be saved? and in the later version, he answers it: by means of Christ's death and resurrection.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Following Gardner's ordering, Peterson is the first critic to argue for a unifying principle for all nineteen of the Holy Sonnets, showing that they are sequenced to present the Anglican doctrine of contrition, leading the sinner to experience the concomitant states of feeling arising from the process: fear rising from the threat of divine punishment transformed into true sorrow for sin (506-8). (Peterson includes in the sequence the three sonnets that only appear in the Westmoreland manuscript as well.) Given O'Connell's ordering, however, the penitential sonnets that occur at the end of the sequence (numbers 13 through 16) are instead interspersed in the beginning of the sequence, so that Gardner's and Peterson's ordering follows Donne's later sequencing but not his initial one. This may very well reflect a later deepening of Donne's thinking that the sequence would be more appropriately focused on redemption than on penitence.

<sup>13</sup> I will refer to the poems by their titles (their first lines) rather than by their numbers, as some critics do, following Gardner's work.

## III

This is not to say that the usual movement we have seen in the penitential psalms from fear to joy is fully achieved. Donne, a product of the Reformation as a Catholic-turned-Anglican, might well be expected to be read as a “hinge” poet on which we can trace the development of Reformation themes. Much recent criticism of the Holy Sonnets seeks to place Donne on, as it were, the Anglican “map” -- what kind of an Anglican is he? -- from John Stachniewski’s staunch Calvinist to Richard Strier’s unwilling Calvinist to R. V. Young’s Anglo-Catholic. Criticism might also seek to identify the controlling principle or source of the Holy Sonnets and examine how he brought it into line with Reformation thinking, as in Douglas Peterson’s examination of the Anglican doctrine of contrition, Roman Dubinski’s examination of the penitential psalms, and Stephenie Yearwood’s consideration of the doctrine of conversion.<sup>14</sup>

I go to his sermons to examine what I believe to be the central issue of the Holy Sonnets: grace and free will. I have looked specifically at the twenty-one sermons on verses from the penitential psalms, and here, as we might expect (as well as elsewhere in

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<sup>14</sup> The articles cited here are Stachniewski’s “John Donne: The Despair of the ‘Holy Sonnets,’” English Literary History 48 (1981): 667-705; Strier’s “John Donne Awry and Squint: The ‘Holy Sonnets,’ 1608-1610,” Modern Philology 1989: 357-84; R. V. Young’s “Donne’s Holy Sonnets and the Theology of Grace” in “Bright Shootes of Everlastingnesse”: The Seventeenth Century Religious Lyric, 20-39; Peterson’s John Donne’s Holy Sonnets and the Anglican Doctrine of Contrition,” Studies in Philology 56 (1959): 504-18; Dubinski’s “Donne’s Holy Sonnets and the Seven Penitential Psalms,” Renaissance and Reformation 22 (1986): 201-16; Yearwood’s “Donne’s Holy Sonnets: The Theology of Conversion,” Texas Studies in Language and Literature 24 (1982): 208-21.

the sermons), we find Donne's views on issues of Reformation theology: election, satisfaction, grace. Renaissance sermons were commonly written on a single verse of Scripture rather than on an entire chapter, letter, or book, and in this respect Donne's sermons serve as companion pieces to the psalm commentaries I have already discussed, each explication of a single psalm verse a discrete rhetorical unit. Of course, the sermons were intended for a public audience, and whether they reflect a personal theology or not is debatable. The Holy Sonnets, on the other hand, may be closer to Donne's personal feelings.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless the sermons do reflect his views on penitence, particularly if we

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<sup>15</sup> There is a great deal of critical interest in how "autobiographical" the Holy Sonnets should be read. Some critics (notably Stachniewski and Strier) argue that they are deeply autobiographical, reflecting Donne's personal feelings at low points in his troubled life. Others, such as Yearwood here, argue:

Although critics have chiefly identified that voice as Donne's own and read the poems as Donne's personal expressions, the series gives us no basis for making that identification. Not only does it lack any external marker (like the title "Goodfriday, 1613, Riding Westward") which would ground it in Donne's own experience, but it also steers clear of the idiosyncratic turns of mind and of form which mark such poems as "La Corona" and "A Litany." Instead, it maintains a careful generality of reference; the experiences it describes are the common stuff of seventeenth-century religious experience (220).

As I have argued in my Wyatt chapter, I am cautious of making autobiographical interpretations of the psalms unless we could know precisely when they were written. Though I might argue with Yearwood's assessment of "idiosyncratic turns of mind," I would essentially agree with her.

However, I would again point out that biblical commentators have long argued that the psalms can and do accommodate a number of voices. If these are indeed Donne's "penitential psalms," then there is no reason they cannot be both personal and general utterances.

compare them to earlier exegetes' commentaries on the same psalm verses. Donne follows the Anglican "via media" on the issue of the relationship of God's and man's work in salvation, preserving both God's power and man's freedom under that power (Mueller 178-9).<sup>16</sup>

I argue that the speaker of the Holy Sonnets is caught in that difficult place between maintaining his own free will and submitting to the will of God, one of the issues which, if one is to judge from his sermons, fascinated Donne. This issue also raised difficult Reformation questions: if man can do nothing of his own accord without God's help, then how does free will figure into the patterning of redemption? If God supplies the impetus for the sinner's awareness of his sin through grace, and then inspires the repentance as well, how does the sinner exercise any control at all over his own salvation? Is salvation thus truly only for a predetermined elect?

Importantly, as many critics have noticed, Donne did not agree with Calvin on the issue of free will, arguing rather that God did not simply predestine some to salvation and others to damnation. R. V. Young points out that in Essays in Divinitie, Donne argues instead that

In our repentances and reconciliations, though the first grace proceed only from God, yet we concurr so, as there is a union of two hypostates, Grace

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<sup>16</sup> For a full account of William R. Mueller's analysis of Donne's views on grace and free will, see especially 178-90. My analysis focuses primarily on the sermons based on the penitential psalms, but arrives at much the same conclusions as does Mueller. For a discussion of the development of the Anglican via media drawing on both Protestant and Catholic sources, see Joseph Summers 52-53; for a discussion of Reformation themes in Donne's sermons, see William H. Halewood, especially 58-63.

and Nature. Which, (as the incarnation of our Blessed Saviour himself was) is conceived in us of the Holy Ghost, without father; but fed and produced by us; that is, by our will first enabled and illumined. For neither God nor man determine mans will; (for that must either imply a necessitating thereof from God, or else Pelagianisme) but they condetermine it (80, emphasis mine; quoted in Young 25).

His sermons specifically on verses of the penitential psalms also make this point, and not surprisingly, the issues the psalms raise, especially in light of Reformation exegesis -- election, salvation, free will, grace -- are central to his readings.

Donne makes clear that in order to assure salvation, both repentance, which is in man's control, and grace, which is not, are necessary. From his sermon on Psalm 38:4, "For mine iniquities are gone over my head, as a heavy burden, they are too heavy for mee":

He [Christ] takes off the burden, of Irremediableness, of irrecoverableness, and he reaches out his hand, in his Ordinances, in his Word, and Sacraments, by which we may be disburdened of all our sins; but then he lays upon us, Onus resipiscentiae, the burden of Repentance for our selves, and Onus gratitudinis, the burden of retribution, and thankfulness to him, in them who are his, by our relieving of them, in whom he suffers . . .  
(2:142).

Donne places equal emphasis on man's need for Christ's redemption as well as "the burden of repentance," and in examining the burden of repentance more fully in reading Psalm 6:2-3: "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am weake; O Lord, heale me, for my bones are vexed; my soule is also sore vexed; but Thou, O Lord, how long?" he considers what causes the impetus to this deprecatory prayer.

First then, how imperfect, how weak soever our prayers be, yet still if it be a prayer, it hath a Quia, a Reason upon which it is grounded. It hath in it, some implied, some interpretive consideration of our selves, how it

becomes us to aske that, which wee doe ask at Gods hand, and it hath come implied, and interpretive consideration of God, how it conduces Gods glory to grant it: for, that prayer is very farre from faith, which is not made with so much reason; with a consideration of some possibility, and some conveniency in it (2:345).

God supplies the reason, but man must make use of it in order to approach the proper kind of prayer. Donne suggests a reciprocity in penitence: God must provide the grace, but man has to recognize the grace and then be willing to submit himself to God's will. In reading Psalm 51:7, "Purge me with hyssope, and I shall be cleane; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow," Donne writes:

In the words we shall consider the Person, and the Action, who petitions, and what he asks. Both are twofold; for, the persons are two, the Physitian and the Patient, God and David, Doe thou purge me, doe thou wash me; and the Action is twofold, Purgabis, doe thou purge me, and Lavabis, doe thou wash me . . .

And then we shall conclude all [of this sermon] with that consideration, That though in the first part, we finde two persons in action; for God works, but man prayes that God worke; yet in the other part, the worke it selfe, though the workes bee divers, a purging, and then a washing of the soule, the whole work is Gods alone: David doth not say, no man can say, Doe thou purge me, and then, I will wash my selfe; nor doe thou make the Medicine, and I will bring the Hyssope; nor doe thou but wash mee, begin the worke, and I will go forward with it, and perfit it, and make my selfe whiter then snow; but the intire worke is his, who onely can infuse the desire, and onely accomplish that desire, who onely gives the will, and the ability to second, and execute that will, He, He purges me, or I am still a vessell of peccant humors . . . (5:298).

"God works, but man prays that God works." Donne readily grants that God infuses (but not, note, completes) the desire to repentance and then executes the response to it, but it is also important the psalm, the cry of the sinner, the desire itself is made by the sinner.



This point is clarified further by Donne's sermon on Psalm 38:9, "Lord all my desire is before Thee, and my groning is not hid from Thee":

But this phrase of David heere, that all this is ante te, imports not only Gods seeing of it, but implies our bringing of our desires and groanings into his sight. Lord thou hast heard the desires of the poore, says David, but howe? Thou preparest their heart, and thou bendest thine eare to heere them; first Gods preventing grace prepares, enables us, and then bends downe with a further supply of concurring grace, but that is to heere us. For yf wee do nothinge then, yf we speake not then, he departs from us. He hath looked downe from the height of his sanctuary, sayth he in another place, heer's his first grace, that he lookes toward us, and then he heares the mourninge of the prisoner, and he delivers the child of Death. But first the prisoner must knowe himselfe to be in prison, and send forth a voyce of mourninge (2:157).

I belabor Donne's point because it is central: penitence is inspired by God but not completed by him. Just as man has free will to turn away from God, so must he have free will to turn back, to which God will respond with another infusion of grace.

It is in this difficult place -- the sinner caught between his own desire and his desire for God, between his reason and his submission -- that we find the speaker of the Holy Sonnets. Donne demonstrates this rhetorically by a constant tension between what a poem outwardly says and what it inwardly means, constantly undercutting his own arguments to suggest that the psalmist is unsure of his stand. Though the speaker is confident that salvation is available to all sinners, that salvation may -- or may not -- be granted to him.

## III

“I am a little world made cunningly,” in its conflation of verses from Psalm 51, “Wash me thoroughly [sic] from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin” (51:2)<sup>17</sup> and Psalm 6, “I am weary with my groaning; all the night I make my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears” (6:6) recalls the psalmist’s plea for God to cleanse and purify him:

You which beyond that heaven which was most high  
Have found new spears, and of new lands can write,  
Powre new seas in mine eyes, that so I might  
Drowne my world with my weeping earnestly,  
Or wash it, if it must be drown’d no more:  
But oh it must be burnt . . . (5-11)<sup>18</sup>

In line 7, the speaker calls on God to pour seas into his eyes, so that his penitential weeping can begin and his world can be drowned. But in line 8, he asks instead that his world be washed, and then alludes to the New Covenant, in realizing that the world cannot

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<sup>17</sup> Dubinski notes this parallel, the fire and water imagery from the sonnet suggesting the purifying element of Psalm 51; see 212.

Biblical quotations are from the King James Bible (or, the Authorized Version [AV]).

Quoting Biblical passages poses a problem in dealing with Donne (and later Herbert) in that the psalms found in the Book of Common Prayer were not from the Authorized Version but rather from the Great Bible. Any priest and parishioner would have known two versions of the psalms, and both would have had authority in Anglican worship.

My choice of the AV is not arbitrary. Since Donne and Herbert both collate texts so much, drawing not only on the psalms but all other parts of the Bible, it seems appropriate to quote the psalm versions that would have been found in the entire Bible, rather than the psalter (and only the psalter) found in the Book of Common Prayer.

<sup>18</sup> All quotations are from Helen Gardner’s second edition of Donne’s Divine Poems (Oxford, 1978).

be destroyed again by a flood. Thus in line 11, he calls for purging fire. This is fair enough; but what is less obvious, and more important, is the impetus for the flood. First, the speaker may well be contrite, but what he says suggests something quite different:

I am a little world made cunningly  
Of Elements, and an Angelike spright,  
But blacke sinne hath betraid to endlesse night  
My worlds both parts and (oh) both parts must die.  
(1-4)

The “oh” is more than the usual filler for a weak syllable (and in fact falls on a strong one); it indicates a fear of death. The speaker is sorry, but for the wrong reasons. We don’t hear contrition for sin as much as a real fear that his soul will be as dead as his body will be.

But oh it must be burnt; alas the fore  
Of lust and envie’have burnt it heretofore,  
And made it fouler; Let their flames retire,  
And burn me O Lord, with a fiery zeale  
Of thee’and thy house, which doth in eating heale.  
(10-14)

As we have seen thus far, Donne’s vehicles in this sonnet are the elements, and again these conceits do not quite work in the context of the sonnet. Peterson points out Donne’s use of the medieval debate of the body and soul in another context (the sonnet “Oh my blacke Soule! Now thou art summoned”; 509), and it applies here as well: the speaker is made up of elements, so he asks to be purged by elements. But he is also made up of “an angelike sprite.” He calls on elements that purge the body but not the soul. There is an echo of this cleansing of the soul in Psalm 51:

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be made clean:  
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. (51:7)

But by calling on earthly means to become sinless, the speaker misses the point, especially in light of his calling attention to his two natures. The sinner calls on earthly means for purification when he really needs heavenly grace.

“If faithfull soules alike be glorifi’d” also takes up the theme of the distinction between the mind and the soul, and it too only seems to reach a conclusive resolution. The speaker does not doubt that his soul will be seen “o’erstriding hell’s wide mouth”:

If faithfull soules be alike glorifi’d  
 As Angels, then my fathers soule doth see,  
 And adds this even to full felicitie,  
 That valiantly I hels wide mouth o’rstride;  
 But if our mindes to these soules be descry’d  
 By circumstances, and by signes that be  
 Apparent in us, not immediately,  
 How shall my mindes white truth to them be try’d? (1-8)

Gardner remarks that the poem arises from the distinction between the modes of knowing of angels and of men; angels know intuitively, where men must use reason in order to know. Therein lies the conflict -- angels can instinctively know which souls will be saved, but the speaker of the sonnet cannot (77). Accordingly, critics are divided on the confidence expressed here,<sup>19</sup> and the resolution to call on God is not the confident resolution it ought to be:

Then turne  
 O pensive soule, to God, for he knowes best  
 Thy true grieve, for he put it in thy breast. (12-14)

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<sup>19</sup> For example, Peterson sees the speaker as fully confident (514). On the other hand, Stachniewski writes: “Even in poems which, like this one, manifest a degree of composure, Donne’s condition is expressed in negative ways. His conception of the state of grace as not going to hell is not a sign of spiritual health” (693).

Even if the angels and Donne do not know his fate, God must. But the problem remains that again the speaker calls on God to supply the grief which would help him begin his penitence, when he ought to properly feel it for his sins himself.

Likewise, the penitential sonnet "O might those sighes and teares return again" begins with the central metaphor of "holy discontent," an ambiguous phrase suggesting both the troubled sinner and the holiness of being troubled, presenting a highly qualified penitence. The speaker desires that "sighes and teares returne again" not because of any real penitence, but so that he might "mourne with some fruit, as I have mourned in vaine." Thus the speaker argues his suffering is wasted because he has gotten no ease from it:

Th'hydroptique drunkard, and night-scouting thiefe,  
 The itchy lecher, and selfe tickling proud  
 Have the remembrance of past joyes, for reliefe  
 Of comming ills. To (poore) me is allow'd  
 No ease; for, long, yet vehement grieve hath beene  
 Th'effect and cause, the punishment and sinne. (9-14)

He decries his current grief because his sin has caused his past grief as well. Either way, he loses. Note too how the poem loses its sense of formality with the runover lines 10, 11, 12 and 13, giving the lines a gravity and, in Donne's own words, "no ease." But the speaker is right in one point: he acknowledges both the sin and the punishment, realizing that the grief of one has caused the grief for the other. There is at least a recognition of his own sin.

The final penitential sonnet also explores not how the speaker of the poems expresses contrition, but rather how he doesn't. "Thou hast made me, and shall thy work decay?" takes as its starting point any of the enumerating of physical afflictions that we

have seen in the penitential psalms. Lines 3 through 8 closely correspond to those of the psalmist's:

I runne to death, and death meets me as fast,  
And all my pleasures are like yesterday,  
I dare not move my dimme eyes any way,  
Despaire behind, and death before doth cast  
Such terrour, and my feebled flesh doth waste  
By sinne in it, which it t'wards hell doth weigh . . . (3-8)

My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness.

I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long.

For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease: and there is no soundness  
in my flesh. (Psalm 38:5-7)

Following these lines, however, the speaker breaks with the psalm tradition of expressing penitence. Line 9, a direct question to God, shows how the speaker struggles with where responsibility lies for his salvation and so begins with a peculiar line of logic, that he should not be allowed to suffer because he is, after all, God's handiwork. Furthermore, he deflects acknowledging his sin, first by seeking sympathy in enumerating his afflictions, and second by fearing his impending death more than his sin. Though he acknowledges the necessity of God's intervention and the hopelessness of his own position --

Onely thou art above, and when towards thee  
By thy leave I can looke, I rise againe (9-10)

-- this is not his starting point but rather the opening of the sestet. He begins to acknowledge his guilt in lines 11 and 12, but attributes it as much to "our old subtle foe" as to himself:

But our old subtle foe so tempteth me,  
That not one houre I can my selfe sustaine . . . (11-12)

So far, then, the sinner has done everything except completely acknowledge his own guilt.

The final couplet has been argued as the resolution of the entire sonnet (Booty 35;

Dubinski 211):

Thy Grace may wing me to prevent his art  
And thou like Adamant draw mine iron heart. (13-14)

I am not so sure. The verb “may” is possibly subjunctive, meaning it is possible that God’s grace will draw the speaker’s heart. But, as Stachniewski points out, the verb “may” might also be provisional, meaning that the speaker may be saved -- or that he may not (700).

I also question the image of the iron heart that Donne uses here. Lewalski devotes a chapter of her study to emblematic art and its influence on the seventeenth century religious lyric, and the image is a variation on the familiar emblem of God hammering a heart,<sup>20</sup> one which significantly does not work here. God draws the iron heart like a magnet, not suggesting the usual changing of heart (the emblem normally presents God literally beating on the heart with a hammer, suggesting its malleability), but simply drawing the heart closer. Donne suggests his own figurative iron will, as he is drawn closer to God, but not yet ready to turn over his will.

These initial sonnets are not grouped together in the manuscripts of the Holy Sonnets, and discussing them as a group is an artificially imposed construct. I do so in

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<sup>20</sup> See her chapter 6, “Protestant Emblematics: Sacred Emblems and Religious Lyrics,” 179-212; on the emblem of the Christian heart in particular, see especially 193-196. This particular emblem is derived from a book of emblems by Georgette de Montenay (266).

order to show how they take the penitential psalm tradition and subvert it, the speaker questioning God's motives and attempting to justify his own actions. The rest of the Holy Sonnets continue this, but also move toward an acknowledgement of sin, and finally a recognition of Christ's Redemption. I do not mean to argue that Donne presents any kind of "solution" or assurance in the rest of the sonnets, but rather that the power of the rest of the poems lies in the fact that the speaker is never really assured.

#### IV

The difficulty the speaker has in maintaining his own will while submitting to God's continues in the sonnet "As due by many titles I resigne." Donne's purpose is to create a sense of prose argument with short phrases and clauses that pile upon each other (especially in lines 2 through 5) and with the runover lines 1 through 3 and 7 to 8. The first seven lines set up an extended clause, and finally poses a question which is answered only in the sestet:

As due by many titles I resigne  
 My selfe to thee, O God, first I was made  
 By thee, and for thee, and when I was decay'd  
 Thy blood bought that, the which before was thine,  
 I am thy sonne, made with thy selfe to shine,  
 Thy servant, whose paines thou hast still repaid,  
 Thy sheepe, thine Image, and till I betray'd  
 My selfe, a temple of thy spirit divine;  
 Why doth the devill then usurpe in mee? (1-9)

The extremely long series of run-on sentences is balanced by the final question: "Why doth the devill then usurpe in mee?" There is a modest allusion to Christ ("I am thy sonne"), suggesting, and only suggesting, an identification with Christ that often occurs in the



penitential psalms. Nothing is made of it here yet, however, and instead this initial long sentence stops abruptly at the sestet. The speaker emphasizes his passivity:

Why doth he steale, nay ravish that's thy right?  
 Except thou rise and for thine owne worke fight,  
 Oh soone I shall despaire, when I doe see  
 That thou lov'st mankind well, yet wilt not chuse me,  
 And Satan hates mee, yet is loth to lose me. (10-14)

This passivity is actually present from the beginning of the poem, as the speaker resigns himself to God, but finds its strongest expression here.<sup>21</sup> Paradoxically, the speaker takes to despair, but only when he realizes that he is torn between two opposing forces, one which won't choose him and the other which won't give him up.

What can the speaker do? As he presents his case, the answer seems to be nothing. Deeper analysis, though, reveals the speaker's tension between passivity and responsibility for his own actions.<sup>22</sup> The key phrase is "till I betray'd/ My selfe . . .," the speaker

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<sup>21</sup> Strier examines the uneasy balancing between passivity and action here, noting that the first two quatrains move from Donne explaining an action of his own to seeking to move God to action. Thus the octave has, in his words, an "oddity": "It seems theologically odd that as the self is presented as more passive, its value is asserted more strongly" -- which is why the devil would want to usurp in him in the first place. Donne cannot thus help claiming his own merit -- note the emphasis on "me" in the final four lines (369-70).

<sup>22</sup> Young describes the speaker as "an unreliable debtor who tries to cancel his debts by inviting God to foreclose on his hopelessly overmortgaged self" and points out that the poem shows the speaker's uncertainty in how he should approach God; note the many metaphors he uses to describe the relationship. Thus the sestet "dwells queasily on the prospect that the proffered self may not be worth the cost of refurbishing, that only the devil is still interested" (27). Though Young's analysis emphasizes the transactional rather than my emphasis on blame and responsibility, we agree in emphasizing the issues of election and grace in this poem -- indeed, in all of the Holy Sonnets.

acknowledging his defiling of the “temple of thy Spirit divine.” This is put into the first person, not necessarily as a reference to original sin, which defiles all people (though it may, of course, carry a personal meaning as well), but to the speaker’s own sin. The speaker, then, acknowledges his sin, but still demands to know why God will not fight for him.<sup>23</sup>

These sonnets, then, are quite different from their biblical psalm predecessors. The psalmist consistently begins with his suffering, expresses his contrition, and exults in God’s mercy. Donne does everything except that. He begins with his suffering and then argues why he should have to suffer. He expresses contrition only because it is motivated by fear or to rid himself of that fear, and has not come to a point where he can even acknowledge God’s mercy. For example, “If poysonous mineralls, and if that tree” asks a question: if other creatures cannot be damned, why should I be? In one sense, the sonnet plays on the penitential psalm verse “Be not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding” (32:9), taking “no understanding” literally. This is precisely the point, of course, in that as the horse and mule have no self-awareness they cannot consciously sin. But the speaker tries to underplay his own sin because he can reason:

Why should intent or reason, borne in mee,  
Make sinnes, else equall, in mee, more heinous?  
And mercy being easie, and glorious

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<sup>23</sup> Stachniewski points out that this sonnet reverses the usual order of an emotional state of fear leading to hope (700). This is of particular interest in light of the penitential psalms, which follow the pattern of fear leading to hope. Donne’s theology reverses completely the psalmist’s pattern, though it must be noted that Wyatt’s pattern -- indeed, his entire conclusion -- was equally qualified in tone.

To God, in his sterne wrath, why threatens hee? (5-8)

Because the speaker acknowledges his reason, one might expect him to understand that his sins simply aren't equal because of his intent or reason, and thus God rightly threatens him. The sestet, then, might have posed the answer to the questions raised in the octave. Instead, Donne begins the sestet with a sudden question:

But who am I, that dare dispute with thee? (9)

Critics have read this line as either a logical awareness that the speaker cannot possibly dispute with God or as his failure to truly engage the issues he has raised.<sup>24</sup> I side with the latter view, as the rest of the sonnet supports that reading.

O God, Oh! of thine onely worthy blood,  
And my teares, make a heavenly Lethean flood,  
And drowne in it my sinnes black memorie.  
That thou remember them, some claime as debt,  
I think it mercy, if thou wilt forget. (10-14)

The crux here is who is expected to forget the sins, and Donne does not make this issue clear: "My sinnes blacke memorie" could be either God's memory of the sin, or the

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<sup>24</sup> Peterson, for example, argues that the speaker willingly accepts God's mercy: "To argue such questions -- to dispute the paradoxical concept of a deity who is at once absolutely just and infinitely merciful -- is pointless" (510). Lewalski feels that the speaker realizes in his cry that his argument is specious, and so too accepts God's mercy (269). Stachniewski, on the other hand, retorts that this reading has no textual warrant: "Donne only recognizes that he should not advance any argument against God, not that he sees this argument is unfounded, nor even that it must, objectively, be false" (695). Yearwood has it both ways: the sestet of the sonnet may finish the first part of the conversion she addresses -- "a complete confession" (215) -- but she argues that the speaker reaches this point by illogic and doctrinal misconception. That is, as she argues about many of the sonnets, the speaker reaches the right place spiritually, but gets there the wrong way theologically (214).

speaker's -- the flood which drowns the memory is composed of both Christ's blood and the speaker's tears. It is not theologically correct to plead that God forget one's sins and think that this is "mercy"; mercy, rather, would be in forgiving the sins precisely because they have been remembered. Nor is it understandable to ask that He drown the speaker's memory of them as well. The point of penitence, after all, is to recall one's sins so that one may be forgiven them, as the penitential psalms stress.<sup>25</sup> In asking God to drown the memory of his sins, the speaker attempts to circumvent the painful steps of repentance, and instead simply pleads that he be offered mercy, again sidestepping his own acknowledgment of those sins. I cannot agree with Yearwood, then, in arguing that this sonnet presents a speaker reaching his first full confession (215). If anything, he seems instead to avoid making the confession and simply asks God to forgive him anyway.

However, the sonnet does begin to hint at the Redemption that offers the means by which the speaker can be forgiven in that "some claim as debt" God's remembrance of the sin. The rest of the Holy Sonnets, especially those added when the four penitential sonnets were removed, emphasize in various ways Christ's sacrifice which makes man's

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<sup>25</sup> The pattern of the penitential psalms shows this, with their careful presentation of a plea for or confidence in God's mercy always following the psalmist's declaration of his sorrow for his sin. For example, in Psalm 38, "Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee . . . For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin" is followed by "Forsake me not, O Lord: O my God, be not far from me" (9, 18, 21). Likewise, in Psalm 32, "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity I have not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (5) precedes the joyous "Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart" (11) which concludes the psalm.

redemption possible. As the speaker examines this issue, his tone becomes more self-aware, and a resolution begins to emerge: the speaker is still unworthy of God's grace, but through Christ's Redemption may be able to receive it nonetheless. Thus the remaining sonnets present a spiritual progression which emerges more fully with the removal of the four penitential sonnets.

# V

Similar to "As due by many titles," which is premised on the paradox that Satan hates the speaker but wants to keep him, "Oh my blacke soule! now thou art summoned" is premised on paradox as well. A meditation on the Last Judgment, the soul in the poem both wishes to be released from prison and to remain there, should the judgment be fierce:

Thou'art like a pilgrim, which abroad hath done  
 Treason, and durst not turne to whence hee's feld,  
 Or like a thiefe, which till deaths doome be read,  
 Wisheth himselfe delivered from prison;  
 But damn'd and hal'd to execution,  
 Wisheth that he still might be imprisoned . . . (3-8)

The speaker's evasion of his own acknowledgement of sin is still here, but the poem turns on the sestet, with its rhythmically odd lines:

Yet grace, if thou repent, thou canst not lacke;  
 But who shall give thee that grace to beginne? (9-10)

Line 10, with its stumbling trip on "that," heightens the accent on "grace" and punctuates it. The question posed is left unanswered -- obviously, the answer is God<sup>26</sup> -- but the rest

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<sup>26</sup> Stachniewski examines Donne's Calvinism in this couplet, arguing that the speaker implies that grace may be withheld. According to the doctrine of prevenient grace, God

of the sestet alludes to an answer, recasting verse 7 of Psalm 51, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow":

Oh make thy selfe with holy mourning blacke,  
And red with blushing, as thou art with sinne;  
Or wash thee in Christs blood, which hath this might  
That being red, it dyes red soules to white. (11-14)

The speaker commands his soul to take on the black of mourning, the first acknowledgement of his own contrition, and then commands it to be washed in Christ's blood, the red dying and purifying the soul that it be made whiter than snow. Donne takes the psalm verse and gives it a specific context under the New Law: Christ's redemptive act makes the grace possible.

This is of course familiar theology, but the lines remain troubling. Peterson argues that in this sonnet the speaker is properly showing sorrow for his sin rather than for his fear of punishment (509), and the sonnet does in fact suggest a resolution founded in Christ's Redemption -- but not quite a satisfying one. The speaker remains aloof from the process: note that he distances himself by addressing his soul as a separate entity rather than addressing himself. And though mourning and shame are appropriate responses for sin, he offers it as only one alternative with the use of a telltale "or." Properly the

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must "dispose man to repentance before he can enact it," and the Calvinist implication is that because of God's predetermination to not save most men, God may well refuse to grant grace at all (699). I disagree with Stachniewski here since in reading Donne's sermons, it seems clear that Donne rather believed in man's cooperation with God's grace, and thus I read the couplet as the speaker realizing that need for cooperation. The following lines make this clear, as the speaker calls for both his soul's contrition and its washing in Christ's blood.

conjunction between the alternatives should be “and,” as Christ’s sacrifice makes grace possible, but only when the sinner is willing to repent for his sins. Donne makes clear in his sermons that the sinner must instigate the contrition, to which God will respond. Simply relying on God’s grace is in itself not enough, only the speaker does not seem to be aware of this.

“At the earth’s round imagined corners,” another sonnet on the Final Judgment, begins gloriously:

At the earths round imagin’d corners, blow  
Your trumpets, Angells, and arise, arise  
From death, you numberlesse infinities  
Of soules, and to your scattred bodies goe,  
All whom the flood did, and fire o’erthrow,  
All whom warre, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,  
Despaire, law, chance, hath slaine, and you whose eyes,  
Shall behold God, and never tast deaths woe. (1-8)

When the speaker applies the Final Judgment to his own life, however, the issue of his role and the role of God in his penitence becomes unclear:

But let them sleepe, Lord, and mee mourne a space,  
For, if above all these, my sinnes abound,  
‘Tis late to aske abundance of thy grace,  
When wee are there; here on this lowly ground,  
Teach mee to repent; for that’s as good  
As if thou’hadst seal’d my pardon, with thy blood.  
(9-14)

The speaker is correct in asking God to teach him to repent, as he is correct in assuming that asking for grace will not guarantee getting it. He is not quite correct, however, in assuming that repenting is as good as, or is a substitute for, Christ’s Redemption; according to Strier, “Personal repentance and atonement are again alternatives; again they

are not coordinated but equated in value and efficacy” (372). Actually it would be most accurate to say that the sinner’s repentance and God’s grace are complementary: one does not function without the other, and neither alone can guarantee the sinner’s salvation. As Donne writes in his sermons, here a sermon based on Psalm 32:5, “I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I will confesse my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin”:

Therefore do we speake of the mystery of Confession; for it is not delivered in one Rule, nor practiced in one Act.

In this confession of Dauids, (I acknowledge my sin unto thee, &c.) We shall see more then so; for, though our two Parts be but the two Acts, Dauids Act, and Gods Act, Confession and Absolution, yet there is more then one single action to be considered in each of them. For first, there is a reflected Act, that David doth upon himself, before he come to his Confession to God; Something David had done, before he came to say, I will confesse, As he did confesse, before God forgave the iniquity of his sin. Now that which he did himselfe, and which proceeded his Confession to God, was the Notum feci, I acknowledged my sin; which was not his bringing it to the knowledge of God by way of Confession, for (as you see by the Method of the Holy Ghost, in the frame of the Text) it preceded his purpose of confessing, but it was the taking of knowledge of sin in himselfe, It was his first quickning, and inanimation, that grace gave to his soul, as the soule gives the child in his mothers wombe. And then in Dauids act upon himselfe, followes the Non operui, I have not hid my iniquity, none of mine owne iniquities from mine own sight: I have displayed to my selfe, anatomized mine own conscience, left no corner unsearched, I am come to a perfect understanding of mine own case, Non operui, This is Dauids act upon himselfe, the recalling, the recollecting of his sins, in his own memory (9:297).

In the other, which is Gods Act toward David, the Absolution, the Remission, the Forgivenessse, we shall consider first the fulnesse . . . (9:298)

Donne does not exactly clarify the process of penitence in this passage. It is clear that David’s confession, and even more so his self-examination, must precede the grace of



God's remission of sin. It is not necessarily clear, however, where the initial impetus for sorrow lies; it seems to be in the "first quickning . . . that grace gave his soul," and thus it is inspired by God. But Donne then continues, "as the soule gives the child in the Mothers wombe," suggesting that this is in no way a conscious quickening of the soul. Yet Donne's comments on the sinner's self-awareness make it clear that the recollecting of sins is a conscious, thorough self-examination: "I have displayed to my selfe, anatomized mine own conscience, left no corner unturned," and so on.

It seems that Donne is suggesting the complementary roles of God's grace and the sinner's self-awareness here: each make the other possible. In both of these poems, the speaker comes up short in that realization. Calling on Christ to "Teach mee to repent" acknowledges the sinner's need for grace, but also could be read as absolving the sinner of the responsibility of examining his own conscience, and in that sense is not as good as if "thou'hadst seal'd my pardon, with thy blood."

"This is my playes last scene, here heavens appoint" also presents a qualified assurance. Initially Donne writes short clauses with a great deal of enjambment to suggest the running toward death that the poem articulates:

This is my playes last scene, here heavens appoint  
My pilgrimages last mile; and my race,  
Idly, yet quickly runne, hath at this pace  
My spans last inch, my minutes last point . . . (1-4)

Donne regularizes the lines at lines 5 and 6, when he discusses the body and soul:

And gluttonous death will instantly unjoynt  
My body, 'and soule, and I shall sleepe a pace,  
But my'ever-waking part shall see that face,  
Whose feare already shakes my every joynt . . . (5-8)

The lines read more slowly, perhaps more calmly, but the calm is deceptive. The rest of the poem takes up the split between the mind and body, the speaker attempting to assure himself that the sinful body will indeed stay on earth while the soul will by necessity move toward heaven. The assurance is jarred, though, in the line “Whose feare already shakes my every joynt” -- the soul will face God, but the body is already in fear of this event.

The first four lines of the sestet, on the other hand, are more confident. They might be paraphrased, “Then, as my soul shall go to heaven, so my sins shall stay on earth with the body.” Note that Donne does not set up the octave as a conditional clause -- if my soul goes to heaven, then my sins ought to fall to earth -- but rather that this will happen, and then this will result:

Then, as my soule to' heaven her first seate, takes flight . . .  
 So fall my sinnes, that all may have their right . . .  
 (9; 11)

The speaker is in effect circumventing judgment:

Impute me righteous, thus purg'd of evill,  
 For thus I leave the world, the flesh, the devill.  
 (13-14)

Thus he argues that he is to be imputed righteous because he has been purged of evil simply by virtue of having died. The separation of the body and soul seems to have instigated the purging of evil rather than any kind of real penitence, and Peterson rightly points out that the argument the speaker makes is fallacious (509). The fear that the

speaker feels is perfectly appropriate, but he should fear just as much at the end of the sestet as at the beginning; his attempt to assuage his fear simply does not work.<sup>27</sup>

The justly famous “Batter my heart, three-person’d God; for, you” presents most successfully the theme of submission and independence I have been pursuing here. The speaker thus far has sought to maintain some kind of control over his circumstances: he argues with God, he tries to force God’s hand (with, for example, his command “Impute me righteous . . .”), he presents spurious doctrine in order to show why he is deserving of salvation. What he does not do is actually acknowledge full responsibility for his sin. Even in this sonnet he doesn’t do that, yet hints at his guilt more fully than in anything we have seen thus far:

Reason your viceroy in mee, mee should defend,  
But is captiv’d, and proves weake or untrue . . . (7-8)

The reasoning here parallels God’s initial inspiring which prompts the speaker’s penitence and to which in turn God responds with an infusion of grace. Here, the speaker acknowledges God’s gift of reason which “proves weake or untrue”; that is, God gives the

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<sup>27</sup> Yearwood, in commenting on “At the round earths imagined corners,” perceptively notes that in its ending, as is in the ending of this sonnet, “The speaker is proceeding in the right direction, but almost by mistake. He achieves the necessary spiritual posture; he humbly seeks repentance. But he gets to that point by doctrinal misconception and systematic illogic” (214). This proceeding to the right place by the wrong way, in fact, is one of the recurring themes of the Holy Sonnets as a whole.

Young argues that “it is quite as likely Donne is playing with a theological concept in a dramatic and witty fashion as it is that he is writing bad verse theology” ((32). For his useful discussion of other instances of the concept of imputation in Donne’s poetry, see 32-34.

gift of reason, the speaker misuses it, and in admitting this he is able to call on God in his state of utter dependence.

In fact, the poem works so successfully because of the intensity of that utter dependence.<sup>28</sup> Here the speaker has no pretension in having any kind of control over his own salvation, and more important, does not seek to maintain any, but rather submits himself to God's will, using violent imagery to make the point:

Batter my heart, three person'd God; for, you  
As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend;  
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow mee' and bend  
Your force, to breake, blowe, burn and make me new. (1-4)

The spondaic feet in lines 2 and 4 (the verbs "knock, breathe, shine, and seeke" all are given the same heavy accent, as are "breake, blow, burn") serve to punctuate the lines with force, expressively showing how much the speaker wishes to be made new. More important is that he is utterly helpless. He is like a "usurpt town, to another due" which "labors to admit you," again underlining the speaker's willingness to submit; in a witty reversal on the metaphor of a siege, he fights to let one happen, rather than resisting.

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<sup>28</sup> Peterson argues that the poem is a prayer for the grace necessary for contrition, identical to the petition made in "As due my many titles I resigne," but more intensely felt here: "The penitent has experienced the full implications of what in the earlier poem was stated simply as truism:

Oh shall I soone despaire, when I do see  
That thou lov'st mankind well, yet wilt'not chuse me,  
And Satan hates me, yet is loth to lose mee" (512-13).

Even here, though, the speaker maintains some control. Stachniewski notes that “Donne’s problem . . . lies in his fundamental inability to forfeit, as Augustine wills to do, his independent identity” (689)<sup>29</sup>, and the lines of the poem do suggest an ambivalent attitude toward submitting to God.

Reason your viceroy in mee, mee should defend,  
But is captiv’d, and proves weake or untrue,  
Yet dearely I love you, and would lov’d be faine,  
But am betroth’d unto your enemy . . . (7-10)

Though his reason is captive, it also proves weak or untrue, circumstances over which he does have control. In addition, being “betrothed” to the enemy could suggest a level of willingness to marry, as it were, the enemy and being stolen by God would amount to infidelity:

Divorce mee, ’untie, or breake that knot againe,  
Take mee to you, imprison mee, for I  
Except you’enthral mee, never shall be free,  
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish mee. (11-14)

The rich paradoxes here show the difficulties the speaker has in attempting to be faithful to God and in accepting responsibility for his own actions. He is imprisoned in his sin, but never admits to it. Instead, he suggests that Satan is holding him prisoner rather take

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<sup>29</sup> Stachniewski points out that Calvin departed with Augustine on the point of the irresistibility of grace, believing it to be “God’s simultaneous and irresistible seizure of all his faculties,” so that “While embracing God’s action, he [Donne] intimates the loss of integrity which would be involved in the gain (evidently not yet secured) of salvation” (689-90). I agree with Stachniewski that, given the imagery used, the poem points up a very paradoxical attitude toward penitence (690) -- not a statement of quiet submission but a call for brutal conquest.

action to do something about his sins himself. The poem is complex, not so much because its images are violent, but because they are so violent. The speaker does not submit himself to God as much as order God to conquer him with a holy rape, suggesting the intensity of his own will and the difficulty he has submitting to God's.

## VI

The rest of the poems of the Holy Sonnets are not perhaps as theologically interesting as those that precede them, because they avoid the paradoxes we have seen thus far and present the theme of Christ's Redemption. As the focus moves more to Christ than to the speaker, the complex interplay between the speaker's passivity and independence tends to be placed further in the background. Even so, however, the focus of the poems is not Christ for His own sake. There is no development of an emphasis on Christ's personality, as we often find in Catholic poetry, but rather the Redemption as it concerns the speaker (Halewood 31). These final poems, then, examine the Redemption in terms of its meaning for the speaker in the here and now, often placing themselves into the immediate present.

"Death be not proud, though some have called thee" manages to avoid all doctrinal conflict. A meditation on death, it recounts man's triumph over death by the fact that his soul lives on:

From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures bee,  
 Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,  
 And soonest our best men with thee doth goe,  
 Rest of their bones, and soules deliverie . . . (5-8)

One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally,

And death shall be no more, Death thou shalt die.  
(13-14)

But there is one jarring unspoken note that undercuts the confidence.<sup>30</sup> Surprisingly, given the rest of the sonnets, the speaker makes no mention of the judgment or the fear that might accompany that death. We wake eternally, yes, but we do not know here what we will awake to. It is possible, then, that Donne intended the Holy Sonnets in his revision to focus more on Christ's sacrifice because this is the one constant which the sinner can depend on. He may not go to heaven because of his sins, but he will never be saved at all without Christ's sacrifice.

This point is made in another way in "Why are wee by all creatures waited on?" The sonnet asks the question, why are we humans rulers over all, if we are the farthest from purity? Here, the sestet does not answer the question directly, but is altogether more satisfying. After the statement of the dilemma, the speaker shifts to Christ's redemption.

Weaker I am, woe's mee, and worse then you,  
You have not sinn'd, nor need be timorous.  
But wonder at a greater wonder, for to us  
Created nature doth these things subdue,  
But their Creator, whom sin, nor nature tyed,  
For us, his creatures, and his foes, hath dyed. (9-14)

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<sup>30</sup> Stachniewski is one of the few critics who examines this particular sonnet, arguing the tone is "one of bravado rather than assurance." Donne must need to personify Death in order to feel that he can dominate Him, but the ending -- "Death thou shalt die," with its rhetorical flourish does not diminish Death but rather accentuates Him: "The conclusion, then, confirms the fear which is the basis of the poem" (691-92). I see no evidence that the poem is based on fear, but I do agree that the poem is somewhat troubling for different reasons, one that the poet may not even be aware of: the question, but am I saved? is left unanswered.

We sinners are closer to purity (or rather the possibility of purity) because of Christ's redemption, the "greater wonder." Though not directly answering the question the octave poses, the sestet nonetheless does provide the answer to that question.

In "Spit in my face yee Jewes, and pierce my side," the speaker directly identifies with Christ in order to heighten the differences between the two. Like the penitential psalms which have been read to be Christ speaking, the speaker here imitates Christ's own voice to the point that it is not immediately clear at the beginning of the sonnet that Christ is not speaking. The direct identification is set up only to be torn back down:

Spit in my face yee Jewes, and pierce my side  
 Buffet, and scoffe, and scourge, and crucifie mee,  
 For I have sinn'd, and sinn'd, and only hee,  
 Who could do no iniquitie, hath dyed . . . (1-4)

The speaker continues this identification, deliberately blurring the lines between sinner and sinless. The lines

They kill'd once an inglorious man, but I  
 Crucifie him daily, being now glorified (7-8)

does not make clear who exactly is being glorified -- the speaker because he is now presumably dead, or Christ, because of His Crucifixion. The paradoxes continue throughout: "Kings pardon," yet Christ the King "bore our punishment," and the final comparison between Christ and Jacob is particularly effective; Jacob is "cloth'd in vile harsh attire" with the intention of stealing Esau's birthright, while Christ, in "vile man's flesh," comes to regain man's birthright.



“What if this present were the worlds last night?” has an immediacy often found in the “Redemption” poems in that it poses a question that must be answered. The question of the first line sets the scene as if the present moment were the Doomsday, but rather than focusing on man’s sinfulness, the poem moves instead immediately to the Crucifixion:

Marke in my heart, O Soule, where thou doest dwell,  
 The picture of Christ crucified, and tell  
 Whether that countenance can thee affright,  
 Teares in his eyes quench the amasing light,  
 Blood fills his frownes, from which his pierc’d head fell,  
 And can that tongue adjudge thee unto hell,  
 Which pray’d forgivenessse for his foes fierce spight?  
 (2-8)

The graphic, gruesome physical details do suggest, as Louis Martz argues, that Donne was familiar with Ignatian meditative practices<sup>31</sup>, but I agree with Lewalski in that the use of these details is not so that the speaker can place himself physically and emotionally in the Crucifixion scene, but rather that the importance of the Crucifixion can be applied to his own life.<sup>32</sup> This sonnet, after all, opens with the strongest sense of immediacy that we have seen thus far -- suppose Doomsday were to occur in a matter of hours? -- and from this

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<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Louis Martz’s chapter 1 of his study *The Poetry of Meditation* (New Haven, 1954) for a general discussion of Ignatian meditative practice, especially 46-50 for its application to the *Holy Sonnets*; Martz’s discussion of the sonnet “Spit in my face you Jewes, and pierce my side” is a good example of the meditative practice being applied to the composition of a poem, 49-50.

<sup>32</sup> Lewalski writes that this sonnet “briefly recalls the Apocalypse, but it is now devoid of terror. The speaker now has ‘in my heart . . . / The picture of Christ crucified,’ and contemplation of that picture reinforces his faith that the suffering, loving Christ will save him” (271).

point the speaker takes the picture of the Crucifixion and uses it, applying it to his own life circumstances in the question: can this countenance affright you, my soul?

The octave poses yet another question as well: can that tongue -- Christ's, which prayed forgiveness for his foes -- adjudge you to hell? The sestet provides the answer:

No, no; but as in my idolatrie  
I said to all my profane mistresses,  
Beauty, of pitty, foulnesse onely is  
A signe of rigour: so I say to thee,  
To wicked spirits are horrid shapes assign'd,  
This beauteous forme assures a pitious minde.

The speaker explains that to all his profane mistresses he would argue that "foulness only is a sign of rigour; beauty a sign of pity." The peculiar syntax seems to undercut this, however, bringing "beauty," "pity," and "foulness" close together, so that it is difficult to figure out precisely what the speaker is saying. In addition, the argument would seem to be that Christ is compassionate because of his beauteous form, even though the Christ presented in the poem is anything but beauteous.

Carey calls the argument "blustering sophistry," the speaker's desperate attempt to find any argument to assure his salvation (32-33). Though I think this reading could make sense, it makes more sense that the speaker does see Christ crucified as beauteous, when one considers that the Crucifixion serves as a reminder of Christ's sacrifice, and makes possible the speaker's salvation. Thus Christ's "beautous forme" assures his "pitious minde," so that He will be merciful to the sinner.

## VII

The two remaining sonnets both return to the theme Donne has presented before: a sinner who presents himself as penitent, but appears to be saying something quite different in the poem.

"Wilt thou love God, and he thee!" presents the great paradox of the Redemption in its concluding couplet:

'Twas much, that man was made like God before,  
But, that God should be made like man, much more.  
(13-14)

This is orthodox theology, as is the conceit of the treasure lost and found again, which here emphasizes man's passivity. He is "as a robb'd man," who, finding his "stolne stuff sold, must lose or buy it again," so that Christ comes to unbind that which Satan has stolen. The sinner is presented as little more than some kind of goods in a transaction. Properly, however, this is precisely the stance that the speaker must take. Only by his passivity, his recognition of his utter dependence on Christ's Redemption and God's grace, can the speaker begin his own penitence.

The stance, however, is not that straightforward. Note the equivocation of the opening line: "Wilt thou love God, as he thee!" as if the speaker is trying to convince his soul which he is addressing that such a love is possible. The sonnet presents itself as a meditation, but in fact only appears to be one. Donne writes: ". . . then digest,/ My Soule, this wholesome meditation" (1-2), calling attention to the very act of meditating. The speaker is in the process of being able to admit his passivity, but only that. Calling

attention to his act of meditation -- the fact that the speaker is so self-conscious about his very act of meditating -- undercuts the sense that he has actually arrived at the point in which he can admit his passivity.

“Father, part of his double interest” continues the theme of passivity and responsibility we have seen thus far in the Holy Sonnets, but suggests the working out of man’s part in the scheme of his redemption more fully than any other sonnet. The metaphor of a financial transaction is used to explain the role of the members of the Trinity: the Father creates a Kingdom, the Son’s “double interest/ Unto thy kingdom” (1-2) -- His place in the kingdom and His death to secure man’s place -- is given to man; in this way, the Spirit can “revive again what law and letter kill” (12). The speaker seeks to find his place in this scheme:

Yet such are those laws, that men argue yet  
Whether a man those statutes can fulfill;  
None doth, but all-healing grace and Spirit,  
Revive again what law and letter kill.  
Thy lawes abridgement, and thy last command  
Is all but love; oh let that last Will stand! (9-14)

Accepting that he cannot fulfill the statutes by himself but only with grace, he pleads that God’s second Will, the debt given to mankind under the New Law, stand before the first. Where does the sinner fit into this? God’s last command is “all but love.” This curious phrase, suggesting that the last command is all except love, warrants attention; in Mark 28:19-20, Christ’s last words to the apostles are:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Teaching them to observe whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Mark's is the only Gospel that ends with a direct command, and Donne may be suggesting that the command simply to "love" is not enough. One must act on one's faith in response to God's gift of grace as well as love.

## VIII

Donne's Holy Sonnets get their power from their refusal to make simple the issues of man's role in his own salvation. As I have shown, even the sonnets which are seemingly straightforward subtly contradict themselves,<sup>33</sup> often saying one thing and meaning another. As a theologian, the speaker of the sonnets constantly comes up short in his arguments against God, and even when he submits to God's will, he is unable to subsume completely his own sense of identity. Seemingly pliant, Donne's speaker manages to maintain his own integrity throughout the sonnets. He is at turns accusatory, fearful, confident -- all the emotional range we have seen thus far in the penitential psalms -- but in his contradictions, all the more human: fearful and defiant.

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<sup>33</sup> Many critics have commented on Donne's argumentative strategy throughout his work -- the search for answers, if not necessarily the arrival at an answer. See, for example, Winny's A Preface to Donne 141; Cathcart's study Doubting Conscience, a study of Donne's casuistry, especially 157-58.

## Chapter 8

### GEORGE HERBERT'S THE TEMPLE:

#### PENITENCE IN THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION

I have thus far written about penitential psalms and lyrics as self-contained sets of poems, such as the seven penitential psalms or Donne's set of Holy Sonnets. With the poems of George Herbert's The Temple, I come to something quite different -- a set of poems in which penitential lyrics are only part of a much larger whole. Furthermore, these lyrics cannot be discussed easily as a self-contained set. The Temple resists any attempt to pull one lyric, penitential or otherwise, out of the whole and analyze it alone. Each individual lyric thematically prepares the reader for other lyrics, informs other lyrics, responds to other lyrics. To lift any one out of the whole means to lift ten, twenty, fifty, all of the other lyrics from the whole with it. To write about the penitential lyric in The Temple is to write potentially about every lyric in The Temple.

A set of lyrics within a larger set, however, has precedent in this study: the penitential psalms are a set within the larger Book of Psalms (and self-contained when taken out of the context of the psalter). The Book of Psalms serves as Herbert's model for The Temple, with its penitential psalms, like the penitential lyrics in The Temple,

interspersed among the others. It has in fact become a critical commonplace to call The Temple Herbert's book of psalms.<sup>1</sup> Actually there is only one direct psalm paraphrase in the entire work (that of Psalm 23), but all the concerns of the Book of Psalms are here: praise, contrition, longing, confidence, all exploring man's relationship with God.

I argue two points in this chapter: first, that Herbert continues the tradition of the penitential psalms, not by paraphrasing them, but by situating his poems in the emotional states that give rise to the psalm verses. Herbert perhaps realized that paraphrase, no matter how successfully done, necessarily limits a poem to specific themes, metaphors, and the like, so that he instead chose not to be fettered to the actual verses of the psalm. The Temple might well be called a paraphrase of the Book of Psalms, but excepting one lyric, it is not a book of paraphrases.

I argue instead that Herbert does not paraphrase the psalms so much as fill in the blanks within the paraphrases. That is, his lyrics do not simply state the condition and actions of the psalmist that we have seen in various psalm verses ("I am weary," "My mouth will show forth thy praise") but instead show us how the psalmist comes to and

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<sup>1</sup> Lewalski best sums up this observation, though she is certainly not alone in doing so: "An even more important generic resource for the lyrics of 'The Church' [than other books of the Old Testament, in particular Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs] is the Book of Psalms. "In fact, Herbert seems to have conceived his book of lyrics as a book of Christian psalms, and his speaker as a new David, a Christian psalmist" (300). The lyrics encompass the entire range of spiritual emotions: grief, joy, sorrow, hope, and so on. In addition, Herbert's lyrics exemplify the types of lyrics seventeenth century critics found in the psalms: psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (300).

See also Kinnamon; Johnson; Freer.

arrives at that condition or action. Instead of being paraphrases of the psalm verses, Herbert's lyrics are situated between the psalm verses, where the sinner's self-examination occurs, carrying him from one statement of condition to another.

Second, I argue that for Herbert, the primary grounding for Anglican penitence is the Passion of Christ. Penitential lyrics throughout The Temple allude to the Passion, sometimes overtly, sometimes covertly. In focusing on the Passion, Herbert presents himself clearly as a Protestant poet -- not in that he uses the Passion as a theme (so did the medieval Catholic paraphrasers, after all), but in that he uses it in order to show how Christ redeemed and redeems in the sinner's life. His lyrics about the Passion are focused not on Christ, but Christ as He impinges on the speaker's life. I thus will examine the much-discussed set of lyrics on the Passion that open "The Church," showing how the focus of the poem is only tangentially Christ; the real focus is on the internal state of the speaker as he applies the Passion to his own life.

In this chapter I will analyze first a set of lyrics concerned with confession and satisfaction, and then will devote a great deal of the chapter to lyrics which examine only the first step of the penitential process, contrition: here we find how Herbert's poems situate themselves between the psalm verses of the penitential psalms.

## II

I begin with a few preliminary comments about Herbert's theology. In the previous chapter, I wrote about Donne's rejection of the Calvinist doctrine of the irresistibility of God's grace, because he instead acknowledged the role of man's free will, either in



cooperating or rejecting that given grace. By examining his writings, one finds that Donne lends himself well to literary criticism that seeks to place him on the Anglican “map.”

Herbert does not lend himself to such classification nearly as well as does Donne. As Diana Benet argues, “it is impossible to abstract Herbert’s detailed personal creed from his work,” because as an Anglican priest, he may have felt no need to defend Anglican doctrine publicly; and, judging from his comments in the poem “Church-Rents and Schismes,” he had no taste for theological controversy (15-16). I would also suggest that The Temple is not designed to be a personal creed but rather a communal one -- to borrow John Bunyan’s phrase, the experiences of a “Christian” -- and as such is designed to accommodate the broad outlines of English Protestantism rather than the theological differences among English Protestants.

Many critics have examined these broad outlines, beginning with Lewalski’s 1979 study of Protestant poetics. Lewalski writes that The Temple

has as its primary subject the whole, lifelong process of sanctification, presented under the metaphor of building the Temple in the Heart. The speaker is devoted to the visible Church -- its ritual, architecture, sacraments -- but his theology is Calvinist: he affirms the double predestination . . . and he struggles hard throughout the volume to relinquish any claim to any good thing as emanating from himself: all is from God (25).

Richard Strier, in his study of Herbert, focuses more specifically on the Calvinist doctrine of justification by faith as it is exemplified in Herbert’s poetry.<sup>2</sup>

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2 Strier’s first sentence makes this clear: “This book argues for the centrality of a single doctrine to George Herbert’s poetry and theology: the doctrine of justification by faith” (xi).

These doctrines are fully in accord with general Anglican theology, as the 1549 Thirty-Nine Articles make clear.<sup>3</sup> I will focus on those issues directly related to penitence; I devote the first half of this study to showing how poems which are most indebted to the penitential psalms lay out basic concepts of the sinner's need for grace and his inability to do anything to guarantee his redemption. In the second half I will examine Herbert's central concept of Christ's Passion serving for man's Redemption.

### III

I begin with Herbert's only psalm paraphrase in The Temple, that of Psalm 23,<sup>4</sup> which exemplifies the simplicity, colloquialism, and directness that is one way to define what Leah Sinanoglou Marcus has called an "Anglican plain style": the use of "simple, reductive language" which "becomes a demonstration of simple obedience to the 'goode

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<sup>3</sup> Article XI, "Of the Justification of Man," reads: "We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by Faith only, is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification." Article XII, "Of Good Works," reads, "Albeit that Good Works, which are the fruits of Faith, and follow after Justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's judgment; yet they are pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and so spring out necessarily of a true and lively Faith; insomuch that by them a lively Faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit" (BCP 870).

<sup>4</sup> In his critical edition of Herbert's works (Oxford, 1941), Hutchinson also lists paraphrases of Psalms 1 through 7 under the heading "Doubtful Poems" (214-22). (Perhaps Herbert intended, like Sidney and Pembroke, to versify the entire psalter.) These do not appear in The Temple, and at any rate exemplify the point that I make here: that all the paraphrases are very close to original psalm material, and all are in the relative simplicity of ballad measure.

order' and 'frame' of the church" (183).<sup>5</sup> For all the variety of meters in *The Temple*, here Herbert chooses the simple and common ballad meter, as would be found in any number of psalters.

The God of love my shepherd is,  
 And he that doth me feed:  
 While he is mine, and I am his,  
 What can I want or need?

He leads me to the tender grass,  
 Where I both feed and rest;  
 Then to the streams that gently pass:  
 In both I have the best. (1-8)

For all Herbert's poetic ability this is a most plain paraphrase, following the psalm material very closely, with highly regular meter; Lewalski points out the almost wholly monosyllabic diction (304).<sup>6</sup> The plainness reflects Herbert's views on translating biblical

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<sup>5</sup> Marcus argues further that this style could imitate the state of the soul. Herbert's views on rhetoric paralleled the Anglican Church's views on liturgy: not "a thing indifferent, nor necessary for salvation but to be used in humble submission to God, according to the pattern of the established Church. His [Herbert's] style, like the liturgy, must reflect an ideal of beauty and order yet not lose touch with the the struggles and vicissitudes of the individual soul" (191). It comes as no surprise, then, that we find an array of different kinds of styles and rhetorical techniques in Herbert's work, paraphrase reflecting one, but not the only, approach to the issue of the proper style for devotional lyric.

<sup>6</sup> She also comments that the psalm occurs late in "The Church," indicating how Herbert has completely merged his voice with that of the psalmist, adding a typically Herbertian emphasis, not present in the original psalm, on the issue of fit praise:

Surely thy sweet and wondrous love  
 Shall measure all my dayes;  
 And as it never shall remove,

material. As Coburn Freer argues, Herbert may well have viewed an overly “graceful” translation (Freer’s term) as a trap, a source of pride which would call attention to the poet as a poet and defeat his primary purpose of praising God.<sup>7</sup> His solution is thus “artlessness” -- paraphrase which seeks to be, foremost, true to the meaning of the psalm (45-47),<sup>8</sup> and is so through simple diction and phrasing.

The proper kind of rhetoric with which to praise God is in fact the subject of several lyrics of The Temple. In “Jordan (II),” for example, Herbert writes:

When first my lines of heav’nly joyes made mention,  
Such was their lustre, they did so excell,  
That I sought out quaint words, and trim invention,  
My thoughts began to burnish, sprout, and swell,  
Curling with metaphors a plain intention,  
Decking the sense, as it it were to sell . . .

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So neither shall my praise (21-24).

See 304-05.

<sup>7</sup> Freer explains that translating biblical poetry had two dangers. First, the paraphraser needed to clarify his own feelings in order to prevent them from coloring his translation. Second, if the poet’s aim was to praise God through His word, “literary” grace was not that far removed from imminent grace -- and thus a trap, a source of spiritual pride. Thus most translators avoid overly graceful translations (44-45).

<sup>8</sup> Freer’s analysis of Herbert’s appropriation of Psalm 23 exemplifies his point. Lines 13 through 16, “Yea, in deaths shadie blacke abode/ Well may I walk, not fear:/ For thou art with me; and thy rod/ To guide, thy staffe to bear” maintains the clumsiness, even rusticity, of the traditional psalm verse (130). On the other hand, Herbert introduces a personal cast in lines 21 through 24, “Surely thy sweet and wondrous love/ Shall measure all my days:/ And so it never shall remove,/ And never shall my praise,” that does not exist in the original psalm, giving the psalm a personal weight while maintaining the integrity of the text (132). It is this tension between fidelity and originality that we have already seen particularly in Wyatt’s paraphrase.

As flames do worke and winde, when they ascend,  
 So did I weave my self into a sense.  
 But while I bustled, I might heare a friend  
 Whisper, How wide is all this long pretense!  
 There is in love a sweetnesse readie penn'd:  
 Copie out onely that, and save expense. (1-6; 13-18)

Herbert is concerned with the sincerity of his poetry, whether or not rhetorical “bustle” serves to glorify God more than the poet.

Many poems in The Temple have that same kind of simple diction that we find in the paraphrase of Psalm 23, especially those whose theme is obedience to God’s will. The steps of penitential process that most emphasize obedience are confession and satisfaction, in which the sinner must make good on his contrition. These steps do not lend themselves readily to the dramatic immediacy of the contrition; presumably, the sinner has put himself through the self-awareness that contrition demands and is ready to submit to God’s will. These poems tend to be directed at the community of Christians at large: they are didactic, often placed into the first person plural rather than the singular, and their style exemplifies Marcus’s description of “obedience to the ‘goode order’ and ‘frame’ of the church.” Indeed, confession is communal in the Renaissance liturgies of The Book of Common Prayer and is clearly not intended for private devotion;<sup>9</sup> here Herbert addresses the Anglican communion.

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<sup>9</sup> In fact, the more modern liturgy for the reconciliation of a penitent -- the Anglican equivalent of the Catholic (and private) sacrament of penance -- does not appear in the Book of Common Prayer 1559 at all. Instead, there is a liturgy for the commination against sinners, which is clearly intended to be congregational; see 316-23.

This communal address is evident in such a poem as “The Method,” which as its title suggests, is aphoristic and methodical. The poem reads like a “how-to” manual for confession.

Poore heart, lament.  
For since thy God refuseth still,  
There is some rub, some discontent,  
Which cools his will . . .

Go search this thing,  
Tumble thy breast, and turn thy book.  
For if thou hadst lost a glove or ring,  
Wouldst thou not look? . . .

Then once more pray:  
Down with thy knees, up with thy voice.  
Seek pardon first, and God will say,  
Glad heart rejoice. (1-4;9-12; 29-32)

The threefold steps of contrition, confession, and amendment are all here, but the speaker addresses a heart (not necessarily his own) rather than recounting his own experience. The poem begins with the sinner’s awareness of his distance from God, then a self-evaluation - here, as Wall argues, the “book” is the sinner’s book of life (256), and only then a plea to God, which is assured of being answered.

But the poem also does recount the speaker’s personal experience, as in these stanzas devoted to the sinner’s sudden realization of his sin which are interspersed among the ones just quoted:

What do I see  
Written above there? Yesterday  
I did behave me carelessly,  
When I did pray.  
  
And should Gods eare

To such indifferents chained be,  
 Who do not their own motions heare?  
 Is God lesse free?

But stay! What's there?  
 Late when I would have something done,  
 I had a motion to forbear,  
 Yet I went on. (17-24)

The poem, then, is not only a “how-to manual” but also a recounting of that “how-to” in practice as the poem works itself through. As the speaker recites the traditional method of looking inward, it becomes personal for him, as his prayer is interrupted by an analysis of that very prayer. Simply reiterating the method, as in this poem, is ultimately false, as one has to live the method and subject oneself to God’s will -- not merely being aware of sin, but also acting upon this awareness. Not surprisingly, the poem’s verbs all urge some kind of action: “search,” “tumble,” “turn,” “pray,” “seek.”

Herbert’s style is equally simple in the next two poems I discuss. They are generally monosyllabic, lines are generally short, there are no sudden shifts in tone or narrative, and there is again an aphoristic quality that reminds one of his collection Outlandish Proverbs. Herbert seeks, I think, to subject his poetic technique to God’s will as much as the poems do, to practice what Freer calls “artlessness.” Where, as we shall see, many of the poems devoted to contrition, pull out the rhetorical stops, Herbert’s poems devoted to submission are subdued and controlled.

“Bitter-Sweet,” for example, follows the poem “Self-Condensation.” There the speaker says

Thus we prevent the last great day,  
 And judge our selves (19-20)

and “Bitter-Sweet” does just that. The self-judgment and acceptance of God’s will are couched in paradoxical terms which remind one of Donne.

Ah my deare angrie Lord,  
 Since thou dost love, yet strike;  
 Cast down, yet help afford;  
 Sure I will do the like.

I will complain, yet praise;  
 I will bewail, approve:  
 And all my sowre-sweet dayes  
 I will lament, and love.

The paradoxes that the poem is built on, praising and complaining, bewailing and approving, sum up the kinds of emotional stances found in the penitential psalms. The poet sees in the model of God’s love, both casting down and offering succor, a model for his own relationship in return: “Sure I will do the like.”

The simplicity of the diction makes the poem read as if it is not necessarily summing up a specific, personal Christian experience. Herbert instead is offering a model for the more generalized experience of the conflicting emotional states that we have seen thus far in Reformation theology. Note that, unlike other poems in The Temple, Herbert does not analyze these conflicting states, but rather simply acknowledges them.

Even more indicative of that acceptance of God’s will is the poem “Discipline.” As is “Bitter-Sweet,” the poem itself is highly disciplined: no line has more than five syllables, there are no trisyllabic words throughout, and the simple ABAB rhyme scheme uses end rhymes which are exclusively masculine.

Throw away thy rod,  
 Throw away thy wrath:



Oh my God,  
Take the gentle path.

For my hearts desire  
Unto thine is bent:  
I aspire  
To a full consent. (1-8)

Here the speaker fully accepts God's will, and in so doing, asks that God be gentle, provided that he bend himself to God's will through God's Word: "But by book,/ and by thy book alone." If this is done, even the admitted sinner can reach the state of grace:

Though I fail, I weep:  
Though I halt in pace,  
Yet I creep  
To the throne of grace.

Then let wrath remove;  
Love will do the deed:  
For with love  
Stonie hearts will bleed. (13-20)

The speaker could not speak more simply, and this poem echoes the psalters as much as his paraphrase of Psalm 23. Yet Herbert's craftsmanship is still evident: the shortened third line of each stanza creates a significant pause which aurally heightens the point of the stanza. (The third line, in fact, is always where the stanza turns.)

#### IV

These poems present one aspect of an Anglican "plain style," but not the only one. Though Herbert cautions against "trim invention," many of the penitential poems of The Temple do present trim invention, and they exemplify another facet of a Protestant plain style. According to Frank Manley, the Protestant plain style could also reflect the ways in

which the language of the poem attempts to capture the process of the mind working its way through the meaning of penitence. Manley argues that for Herbert, the plain style is not about external form (as in, say, "The Twenty-third Psalm," with its rhythmic regularity and close adherence to the psalm) but in internal form:

... the language mirrors the way the mind works. These poems and others like them in The Temple proceed not according to a fixed, predetermined form like a pair of wings, an altar, a circle . . . but according to the mind's own patterning, and the result is a kind of poem that is not neat -- not in essentials, anyway -- not orderly or highly polished, but jagged, with great logical gaps the reader must bridge himself if he is to follow the surge and rapidity of the thought (210).

Thus many of the penitential lyrics of The Temple are not about the entire process of penitence, nor even one specific part of the process -- contrition, confession, satisfaction. Many lyrics within The Temple are about the individual moment within that process: the moments of self-reflection that occur between verses of the penitential psalms rather than in them. Because Herbert is interested in the immediacy of that moment, not a logical, self-contained process from one step to another within a poem, he examines that immediacy by examining the particulars: one poem may be about confession, one about the recognition of contrition, one about the psychological implications of satisfaction. Or he might deal with any combination of these essential facets of the penitential experience, not necessarily in any progressive way. There may be sudden shifts in tone and mood, leaps of logic, all within the confines of a brief lyric.

In this way Herbert takes the tradition of the penitential psalms further. By not paraphrasing the psalms directly, he is able to examine those moments without being

confined to the actual content of the original psalm, and by examining the moments in the process rather than the entire process itself, he is able to trace more closely the psychological development of the sinner while he progresses in becoming penitent.

In so doing, Herbert appropriates various rhetorical techniques of the penitential psalms in presenting the various “states of condition” which the speaker goes through in his penitence. The most obvious one is the use of the first person “I,” but it is certainly not the only one. I have written, for example, about how the medieval paraphraser and Wyatt create a “cyclical” process of penitence based on the entire cycle of the penitential psalms, the speakers of their poems moving from contrition to confidence to contrition, the sequence as a whole repeating that recurring pattern. Herbert adapts this cyclical structure as well in the confines of a single poem.

Sorrie I am, my God, sorrie I am,  
That my offenses course it in a ring.  
My thoughts are working like a busie flame,  
Until their cockatrice they hatch and bring:  
And when they once have perfected their draughts,  
My words take fire from my inflamed thoughts.

My words take fire from my inflamed thoughts,  
Which spit it forth like the Sicilian Hill.  
They vent the wares, and passe them with their faults,  
And by their breathing ventilate the ill.  
But words suffice not, where are lewd intentions:  
My hands do joyn to finish the inventions.

My hands do joyn to finish the inventions:  
And so my sinnes ascend three stories high,  
As Babel grew, before there were dissensions.  
Yet ill deeds loyter not: for they supplie  
New thoughts of sinning: wherefore, to my shame,  
Sorrie I am, my God, sorrie I am.  
 (“Sinnes Round”)

An entire cycle of penitence is skillfully expressed in one poem. Each stanza takes on one part of the process of sin: first thoughts of sin, which turn to words of sin, then to the action of sin -- an echo of the penitential order: sinning in thought, word, and deed. These in turn inspire "new thoughts of sinning," and echo the Herbert's bold imagery -- thoughts hatching a cockatrice, words spitting forth like a volcano, sins ascending like Babel -- as well as contrasting sharply with the very simple rhetoric he adopts for the actual penitential mode of the poem: "Sorry I am, my Lord, sorry I am." To organize the poem Herbert adopts the rhetorical device of gradatio, each stanza's final line becoming the first line of the next, and the final line of the poem repeating the first, so that the poem returns to its beginning: the penitential cycle is completed by the speaker ending where he started, and starting over again.

Herbert also makes use of the same first person "I" to present the sinner's self-awareness which we find in the penitential psalms. Herbert makes one important change, however; his sinner does not necessarily begin at that point of self-awareness that the psalmist does in the penitential psalms.<sup>10</sup> Many poems dramatize that sudden recognition

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<sup>10</sup> Generally, the psalmist always begins aware of his own sinfulness, as we can see by examining the first verses of the penitential psalms: "O Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chastise me in thy hot displeasure" (Psalm 6:1) -- Psalm 38's opening verse is almost exactly the same; "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions" (Psalm 51:1).

Other psalms make it clear that God's punishment is prompted by the speaker's sin: "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity I have not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord: and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (Psalm 32:5);

of sin that the psalmist has already assumed in the penitential psalms; thus these poems might be said to precede the psalms. A most dramatic example is the much-discussed “The Collar.” Its theme, submission to God’s will, is certainly related to contrition, the first part of the penitential process; to be contrite is to submit to God’s will. The poem begins with the abrupt

I struck the board, and cry’d, No more.  
   I will abroad.  
 What? shall I ever sigh and pine?  
 My lines and life are free; free as the roe,  
 Loose as the winde, as large as store (1-5)

and moves through the speaker’s insistence on his own way. The shifts in line length and rhyme scheme as the poem progresses lead Summers to aptly describe the poem as “a formalized picture of chaos” (90), its form corroborating the speaker’s emotional state. Though the meter remains constant throughout, reading the poem gives the impression of the chaos of which Summers speaks because of the shifting line lengths. But the final lines become more regular:

But as I rav’d and grew more fierce and wilde  
   At every word,  
 Me thoughts I heard one calling, Child!

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“Out of the depths I have cried unto thee, O Lord” is followed by “If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who should stand?” (Psalm 130:1,3);

Psalms 102 and 143 do not make any explicit mention of the speaker’s sins at all, though the physical ailments and anguish he expresses strongly suggest that it is prompted by his sin; if this were not the case, there would be no reason for early exegetes to bring these two psalms into the canon of the penitential psalms.

And I replied, My Lord. (33-36)

Whitlock notes that not only do the line lengths finally regularize to iambic heptameter (though the lines are not set to scan that way) (40), the final two words reveal the speaker's sudden reversal -- if not to submission just yet, at least a recognition of an external power. That the single word "Child" completely reverses the balance of power in the poem only heightens the differences between the states of God and man: one word and God establishes His supremacy.

The poem "Miserie" explores that contrast between these differences even more fully.

My God, Man cannot praise thy name:  
Thou art all brightnesse, perfect puritie;  
The sunne holds down his head for shame,  
Dead with eclipses, when we speak of thee:  
How shall infection  
Presume on thy perfection? . . .

Man cannot serve thee; let him go,  
And serve the swine: there, there is his delight:  
He doth not like this vertue, no;  
Give him his dirt to wallow in all night:  
These preachers make  
His head to shoot and ake . . .

Indeed first Man was a treasure,  
A box of jewels, shop of rarities,  
A ring, whose posey was, My pleasure:  
He was a garden in a Paradise:  
Glorie and grace  
Did crown him heart to face.

But sin hath fool'd him. Now he is  
A lump of flesh, without a foot or wing  
To raise him to the glimpse of blisse:  
A sick toss'd vessel, dashing on each thing:

Nay, his own shelf:  
My God, I mean myself. (31-36; 43-48; 67-78)

By using conventional images throughout the poem and describing a non-committal "Man" as opposed to himself, Herbert depersonalizes the poem, centering on a generalized Christian. Joseph Summers argues that the poem is effective precisely because it is so generalized:

The expression of individual experience was valued not for the sake of self-expression but for its didactic effectiveness; not because of its uniqueness but because of its universal applicability; not because a particular experience unfalsified by moral and rational generalizations was intrinsically valuable but because the particular furnished the most effective vehicle for such generalizations (102-03).

This argument could also be made for the penitential psalms -- indeed, for all the psalms -- with the long tradition of exegetes insisting that the generalized sinner is the voice of the psalmist as well as David (Job, Christ, and so on).

But the final two lines bring the poem into the immediacy of the individual's experience. "His own shelf" suggests that the speaker is truly responsible for his own fate. The shelves of fate are here self-created, and in the last line the speaker brings the meaning of the poem, quite literally, home. He himself is the sinner.

This poem and "Sin (I)" are good examples of Herbert's ability to change a poem's direction, or to zero in on a specific theme from a general one, often in its very final lines. Chana Bloch calls these kinds of lyrics poems of discovery, which are often organized on a word or phrase which turns the whole poem (148); here, they point to the sudden recognition the sinner has in becoming aware of his own sin which begins the penitential

psalms. In one of the most astute comments on Herbert, Helen Vendler describes this virtue (her term) as one version of his “provisional quality”:

His poems are at any moment ready to change directions or modify attitudes. Even between the title and the first line, Herbert may rethink his position (25).<sup>11</sup>

I think it more accurate to say that Herbert writes a poem to give the impression of changing direction or modifying an attitude; that is, Herbert plans his poem to turn in his process of writing rather than at the point at which the poem actually does turn. (In other words, Herbert is in complete control of the poem, more than Vendler’s otherwise astute comment might suggest.) He is particularly apt at using this control to capture those moments of sudden recognition in the sinner’s penitential process. The penitential psalms themselves seem to downplay these sudden moments of recognition, and if they actually do occur they do so between the verses rather than in the verses. As I have argued, Herbert’s lyrics fill in the emotional and psychological gaps that the psalm verses leave out, and in this way he draws on the tradition of the exegetes (Lombard in particular), who also develop the meaning of the psalms by supplying the psalmist’s motivations for speaking a particular verse.

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<sup>11</sup> Vendler continues, arguing that an “expressive” theory of poetry best suits a discussion of The Temple, as any poem “seems usually to have begun in experience, and aims at recreating or recalling that experience” (5). The refining and analyzing goes on while the poem is in process; “intellectual” is the wrong descriptive title for this process, “since it aims not at speculative truth but at a fidelity to experience” (7).



A particularly good example of a poem with this provisional quality (to use Vendler's term) is "The Reprisall," with its sudden shifts of emotional states in a single brief lyric. Herbert captures the sinner in the sudden realization of what it is to be a sinner, and his relationship with God. The initial tone is matter-of-fact:

I have consider'd it, and finde  
There is no dealing with thy mighty passion:  
For though I die for thee, I am behinde;  
My sins deserve the condemnation. (1-4)

The speaker then moves to pleading,

Oh make me innocent, that I  
May give a disentangled state and free:  
And yet by thy wounds still my attempts defie,  
For by thy death I die for thee (5-8),

realizing that Christ's Passion exceeds any possible suffering on his part. But he dies for Christ in that Christ died for him, not of his own accord. This leads to anger in that Christ is, after all, outdoing him:

Ah! was it not enough that thou  
By thy eternall glory didst outgo me?  
Couldst thou not grief's sad conquests me allow,  
But in all vict'ries overthrow me? (9-12)

The speaker suddenly comes around to a new-found humility, realizing his presumption and willingly accepting the sacrifice by means of recognizing and confessing his sin.

Yet by confession will I come  
Into the conquest: though I can do nought  
Against thee, in thee will I overcome  
The man, who once against thee fought. (13-16)

The shift back to humility and acceptance is striking in its suddenness, and the sinner realizes the battle he might fight is internal; the man fighting Christ is himself.

These poems initially present the sinner's sudden recognition of his sin, and in presenting the very specific moment in that recognition, have an immediacy that generally does not occur in the penitential psalms. Herbert takes the general experience that that psalms present and pinpoints a very specific moment of recognition. Other poems examine the next step in the penitential process, contrition, and in these poems he most clearly echoes the penitential psalms. Everything we have seen thus far -- complaint, sorrow, remorse, confidence -- permeates these poems. However, Herbert rarely if ever includes all of these elements in a single poem as the psalms do. Again, Herbert is the poet of the moment, his interest lying in the pinpoints of the sinner's self-awareness.<sup>12</sup>

His pleas for mercy often echo the opening verse of the penitential psalms. For example, the poem "Repentance" evokes Renaissance psalm paraphrase, its first stanza recalling the great rhythmic and metrical ingenuity of Sidney or the Countess of Pembroke.

Lord, I confesse my sinne is great;  
Great is my sinne. Oh! gently treat

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<sup>12</sup> Bruce Johnson argues that there are actually many penitential voices in Herbert's poetry, each corresponding to one part of that spiritual journey. Some poems use the voice of self-abasement, as the sinner recalls his worthlessness (2-3); some use the voice of self-examination, as the sinner makes an honest attempt to didactically articulate his relationship to God (4-5), and most of the poems I discuss here fall under this category. Finally, Johnson examines poems of "correction," in which the speaker's movement from "an inappropriate attitude is dramatically reconstructed" (6); here are the poems I discuss as poems of immediate recognition of sin, such as "The Collar."

With thy quick flow'r, thy momentarie bloom  
     Whose life still pressing  
     Is one undressing,  
 A steadie aiming at the tombe. (1-6)

With his shortening and lengthening of lines, Herbert follows metrical patterns here developed by secular songwriters,<sup>13</sup> but his ingenuity is in service of the poem's meaning. Herbert recreates the tone of the penitent who realizes his life is "momentarie": the first line states the fact, the second line intensifies it, leading to the sudden "oh!" and a plea for mercy.

O let thy height of mercie then  
 Compassionate short-breathed men.  
 Cut me not off for my most foul transgression:  
     I do confesse  
     My foolishnesse;  
 Oh God, accept of my confession. (13-18)

The confession is put into the simplest lines of the poem, made all the more striking because of the bold images around them; Freer argues the dimeter lines are, in effect, a "short-breathed" confession (157).

The sinner's pleading in "Sighs and Groans" recalls the psalmist's pleading, though Herbert's sinner is rhetorically more interesting, with his repetition of key phrases:

O do not use me  
 After my sinnes! look not on my desert,  
 But on thy glorie! Then thou wilt reform

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<sup>13</sup> In his classic study of English madrigal composers, Edmund Fellowes speculates that madrigalists preferred differing line lengths in their texts in that they would lend themselves more readily to being divided into shorter phrases, which in turn lent themselves to more effective settings of imitative voice parts. See Fellowes, 148-153, especially 149.

And not refuse me: for thou onely art  
 The mightie God, but I a sillie worm;  
 O do not bruise me! . . .

But O reprieve me!  
 For thou hast both life and death and thy command:  
 Thou art both Judge and Saviour, feast and rod,  
 Cordiall and Corrosive: put not thy hand  
 Into the bitter box; but O my God,  
 My God, relieve me! (1-6; 25-30)

Finally, like the psalmist, Herbert recounts his physical ailments. For example,

“Longing” begins:

With sick and famisht eyes,  
 With doubling knees and weary bones,  
 To thee my cries,  
 To thee my grones,  
 To thee my sighes, my teares ascend:  
 No end? (1-6)

Compare this with Psalm 6:2: “Have mercy on me, O Lord; for I am weak: O Lord, heal me; for my bones are vexed” and Psalm 130:1: “Out of the depths I have cried unto thee, O Lord.” The difference here is that the recounting goes somewhere. It is not simply that the speaker recounts his agony, but he also recognizes his agony means something:

Thou tarriest, while I die,  
 And fall to nothing: thou dost reigne,  
 And rule on high,  
 While I remain  
 In bitter grief: yet I am stil’d  
 Thy child.

Lord, didst thou leave thy throne,  
 Not to relieve? how can it be,  
 That thou art grown  
 Thus hard to me?  
 Were sinne alive, good cause there were  
 To bear.

But now bothe sinne is dead,  
 And all thy promises live and bide.  
     That wants his head;  
     These speak and chide,  
 And in thy bosome poure my tears,  
     As theirs. (54-72)

The agony leads to questioning God's will, reminding Him that he still is God's child, and arguing that if Christ's death is to mean anything, it should serve to redeem him; his penitential tears, then, should "chide" God into relieving him.

The same kind of bargaining and arguing with God occurs in the poem "Nature." Its title suggests that it will be about the basic nature of man's relationship to God, and indeed the speaker admits his rebellion and urges God to do something about it.

Full of rebellion, I would die,  
 Or fight, or travell, or denie  
 That thou hast ought to do with me.  
     Oh tame my heart;  
     It is the highest art  
 To captivate strong holds to thee.

If thou shalt let this venome lurk,  
 And in suggestions fume and work,  
 My soul will turn to bubbles straight,  
     And thence by kinde  
     Vanish into a winde,  
 Making thy worksmanship deceit.

Oh smooth my rugged heart, and there  
 Engrave thy rev'rend law and fear;  
 Or make a new heart, since the old  
     Is saplesse grown,  
     And a much fitter stone  
 To hide my dust, than thee to hold.

Echoing Donne's speaker in "Batter my heart, three-person'd God," the speaker admits that he would deny God has anything to do with him because he is rebellious, suggesting that he has a complete self-knowledge of his own rebelliousness. Because of this, he calls on God to "take my heart" in terms of "captivation" which are reminiscent of Donne. In the second stanza, however, the speaker's stance turns (again reminiscent of Donne). He claims that God allows the venom of sin to lurk, tempting the speaker, and then he berates God for doing so -- if He allows the venom to lurk, His workmanship will be deceitful in that it will capture and dissolve the sinner's soul. The speaker now is true to nature, "full of rebellion," looking for excuses, placing blame, calling on God to do all the hard work of repentance.

But even if he is rebellious, his stance is essentially correct -- he can't do anything without God, and so he returns again to his original stance in third stanza. He paraphrases Psalm 51:10 ("Create a clean heart in me, O God; and renew a right spirit within me"), but not directly; instead, the speaker asks that God "smooth" his heart, or make it new. Where the psalmist asks that the heart be made clean, Herbert asks that it be literally re-created in God's image, again pointing up man's incapacity to effect change without God's grace.

The kind of self-analysis we see in this and the other poems in this section generally does not occur in the penitential psalms themselves, but is instead explicated by commentators and poets working with the psalms. These poems lie between the psalm verses, where the real work of self-examination does as well.

## V

There has been nothing particularly new in the theology presented in the poems discussed thus far: the sinner needs grace, will be forgiven his sins if he repents, and so on. But Herbert's emphasis on Christ's Passion as the means by which man is saved places him squarely in the Reformation tradition. Reformation theologians emphasized (though did not originally create) the concept of the need for grace. They also emphasized to a great degree the sinner's inability to do anything to earn, or even deserve, grace, and the point that Christ's Redemption was the only means by which man could receive grace. These essential tenets of Reformation thinking find Anglican expression in the 1549 *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion*, which were clear on these points:

**Article XI, "Of the Justification of Man":**

We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, we are justified by Faith only, a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification.

**Article XII, "Of Good Works":**

Albeit that Good Works, which are the Fruits of Faith, and follow after Justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's judgment; yet they are pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively Faith; insomuch that by them a lively Faith be as evidently known as a tree discerned by fruit. (BCP 870)

**Article XXXI, "Of the One Oblation of Christ finished [sic] upon the Cross":**

The Offering of Christ once made is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction, for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual; and there is none other satisfaction for sin, but that alone. (BCP 874)

Herbert of course accepts these tenets. In the poem "Sin (I)" he explores the nature of free will. The poem opens with a listing of the various ways that God has prevented man's license:

Lord, with what care thou hast begirt us round!  
 Parents first season us: then schoolmasters  
 Deliver us to laws; they send us bound  
 To rules of reason, holy messengers,  
 Pulpits and Sundays, sorrow dogging sin,  
 Afflictions sorted, anguish of all sizes  
 Fine nets and strategems to catch us in . . .  
 (1-6)

But in the concluding couplet Herbert sums up and subverts the entire poem:

Yet all these fences and their whole array  
 One cunning bosom-sin blows all away. (13-14)

The images that begin the poem suggest that it is virtue that reins in, binds, entraps. Sin is defined as giving freedom -- though "license" would be a better word here -- by blowing away all the fences with which God has "begirt us round." Man has the choice here to be willingly bound to virtue and work within the freedom that is given there, or to choose the license of sin.

"Submission" explores in more personal terms the issue of how one maintains one's own will while submitting to the will of God, the issue that so vexed Donne.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Anglicans did not necessarily agree with Calvin on the issue of free will. Article X of the Thirty-Nine Articles, "Of Free-Will," is essentially Calvinist: "The condition of Man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith, and calling upon God. Wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will" (BCP 869). But Diana Benet shows that not all Anglicans agreed with this



But that thou art my wisdom, Lord,  
 And both mine eyes are thine,  
 My minde would be extreemly stirr'd  
 For missing my designe.

Were it not better to bestow  
 Some place and power on me?  
 Then should thy praises with me grow,  
 And share in my degree.

But when I thus dispute and grieve,  
 I so resume my sight,  
 And pilftring what I once did give,  
 Disseize me of thy right.

How know I, if thou shouldst me raise,  
 That I should then raise thee?  
 Perhaps great places and thy praise  
 Do not so well agree.

Wherefore unto my gift I stand:  
 I will no more advise;  
 Onely do thou lend me a hand,

position, preferring instead to follow Augustine's insistence on freedom of will, and even Herbert seems to suggest that free will was a gift made possible by God's grace, as in his poem "Providence":

We all acknowledge both thy power and love  
 To be exact, transcendent, and divine;  
 Who dost so strongly and so sweetly move,  
 While all things have their will, and none but thine.  
 (29-32)

Hooker's comments also allows for free will: "Out of liberty wherewith God by creation endued reasonable creatures, angels and men, there ensued sin through their own voluntary choice of evil, neither by the appointment of God, nor yet without his permission" (2:43).

For further discussion, see Benet 20-27; see my own Donne chapter for his elaboration of this concept in his sermons.

My stock lies dead, and no increase  
Doth my dull husbandrie improve:  
O let thy graces without cease  
Drop from above!

If still the sunne should hide his face,  
Thy house would but a dungeon prove,  
Thy works nights captives: Oh let grace  
Drop from above! (1-8)

Grace is associated with regeneration, and the final shortened line of each stanza which emphasizes grace is striking in that it is set off, breaking the 4.4.4 stanza; the usual pun “sunne/Son” recalls Christ. Herbert further hints at the means of God’s grace in the fourth stanza:

**Sinne is still hammering my heart  
Unto a hardnesse, void of love:  
Let suppling grace, to crosse his art,  
Drop from above. (16-20)**

Again Herbert uses the image of God remaking a heart -- here, softening a heart hardened by sin. As an emblem, the image is traditional, and grace is the healing oil which will make the heart supple. "Cross" here has a double meaning, of course meaning to vex Sin's art, but also alluding to the cross of Christ, the means by which grace will be obtained for mankind.

## VI

Poems throughout The Temple allude to Christ and his Redemption, and this event is absolutely central to understanding Herbert's Reformation theology. The poems I will discuss here emphasize to a greater degree than we have seen before Christ redeeming mankind through His Passion. Of course, it is not a specifically Reformation way of thinking to view Christ's Passion serving as the means for humankind's redemption. We have seen this as early as Augustine's commentary, with its emphasis on the merging voices of the psalmist and Christ in Psalm 102. By no means is this a new development in the poetic use of penitential psalms. What is new is how much Christ's Passion comes to

the forefront in Herbert's work. Unlike the psalmist, the speaker in these poems no longer seeks to identify with David, but rather with Christ.

Allusions to the Passion appear in dozens of poems, but I limit my discussion here to a group of five, all entitled "Affliction." I group these poems together because they all in different ways emphasize not only the sinner's affliction, of course, but also how that affliction defines his relationship with God. As might be expected, the recounting of physical ailments is prominent in these poems (though, of course, not exclusive to them); Lewalski has noted the long tradition of Protestant poets using the metaphor of sickness for sin (306), though I would add, as I have in previous chapters, that the penitential psalms serve as the model for this metaphor:

My flesh began unto my soul in pain,  
                     Sicknesses cleave unto my bones;  
 Consuming agues dwell in ev'ry vein,  
                     And tune my breath to groans.  
 Sorrow was all my soul; I scarce beleaved,  
 Till grief did tell me roundly, that I lived.  
 ("Affliction [I]," 25-30)

Broken in pieces all asunder,  
                     Lord, hunt me not,  
                     A thing forgot,  
 Once a poore creature, now a wonder,  
                     A wonder tortur'd in the space  
                     Betwixt this world and that of grace.  
 ("Affliction [IV]," 1-6)

In neither poem does Herbert directly present the physical afflictions as a direct manifestation of sin, but it is always suggested in the same way the psalms suggest the relationship without ever explicitly stating it. In "Affliction (I)," for example, the speaker

narrates his shifting moods, and as Lewalski shows, these shifting moods were a typical pattern of Reformation poetry.<sup>15</sup> Herbert actually reverses the conversion from sorrow to joy that Lombard presented as the model for the penitential psalms' narrative movement. In the first stanza, the speaker cannot praise God enough:

When first thou didst entice thee to my heart,  
I thought it service brave:  
So many joyes I writ down for my part,  
Besides what I might have  
Out of my stock of naturall delights,  
Augmented by thy gracious benefits. (1-6)

**But when God sends affliction, the speaker does not know what to do. He carefully words his choices to suggest that they are not choices, so that he has no real control over his own life:**

**When I got health, thou took'st away my life,  
And more; for my friends die:  
My mirth and edge was lost; a blunted knife  
Was of more use then I.  
Thus thinne and lean without a fence or friend,  
I was blown through with ev'ry storm and wind.**

Whereas my birth and spirit rather took  
The way that takes to town;  
Thou didst betray me to a lingring book  
And wrap me in a gown.

<sup>15</sup> She cites Richard Rogers' Seven Treatises (1603), which presents the emotions which accompany sanctification to be "uneven and fluctuating, like the process itself, though over the long term the Christian experiences growth in holiness and perfection" (23). Rogers exhorts the Christian "to expect great vacillations in his emotional temper" (23), and this is not new to the tradition I have been tracing here. Donne's speaker covers the full gamut of emotions as much as Augustine's, though the vacillations of emotional states are more pronounced in a brief lyric than in several hundred pages of psalm commentary.



at cross purposes with God, and second on a connotative level, recalling Christ on the cross.

The speaker tries to answer the questions: what will You do with me? What do You want to do with me? We might recall the Gospels' Agony in the Garden, in which Christ asks the same questions: "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42), and in this way the poem distantly alludes to the Passion. The speaker is in the same dilemma as was Christ.

But if Herbert's resolution is matter-of-fact, it is far more elusive than the Gospel's resolution. Vendler rightly suggests that the poem is not resolved as much as just ended (46).<sup>16</sup>

Now I am here, what thou wilt do with me  
   None of my books will show:  
 I reade, I sigh, I wish I were a tree;  
   For sure then I should grow  
 To fruit or shade: at least some bird would trust  
 Her houshold to me, and I should be just.

Yet, though thou troublest me, I must be meek;  
   In weaknesse must be stout.  
 Well, I will change the service, and go seek  
   Some other master out.  
 Ah my dear God! though I am clean forgot,  
 Let me not love thee, if I love thee not. (53-66)

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<sup>16</sup> Vendler admires this poem for Herbert's insistence on truth to the experience; even with the precedent of the Psalms, he is free from censoring his true feelings: "Herbert shows his absolute willingness to say how things were, to choose the accurate verb, to follow the truth of the feeling" (43).

The speaker wishes to be of use to God, but does not know how. The poem concludes with a great deal of ambivalence: he must be meek yet stout; he must seek another master, though he does not know whom. The tone seems to me to be one of resignation. “Being stout” is little more than a platitude if the speaker doesn’t know why.

The final and paradoxical line “Let me not love thee, if I love thee not” reveals the deep difficulty the Christian must face in giving oneself up to God’s service. The speaker feels abandoned (though, like the psalmist, he is not; he is after all addressing someone) and seeks the correct reason for loving God and doing His will. The final line is utterly ambivalent: is he sincere or, given what has come before in the poem, simply resigned? The poem is a complex, very honest version of a penitential psalm. Where the psalms simply assume that doing God’s will naturally follows contrition, here doing God’s will is hard-earned as it was hard bought. Here a speaker asks: why should I suffer?

“Affliction (IV)” also presents physical affliction, but its tone is far more penitential. Joel Kinnamon argues that the entire poem is in fact structured on the model of the penitential psalms (12), starting with contrition and ending in acceptance of God’s will:

Broken in pieces all asunder,  
                                   Lord, hunt me not,  
                                   A thing forgot,  
 Once a poore creature, now a wonder,  
                                   A wonder tortur’d in the space  
                                   Betwixt this world and that of grace. (1-6)

Not surprisingly the speaker admits that he needs grace, but unlike the psalmist, he also admits that his enemies are internal rather than external forces:



My thoughts are all a case of knives,  
     Wounding my heart  
     With scatter'd smart . . .

All my attendants are at strife,  
     Quitting their place  
     Unto my face:  
 Nothing performs the task of life:  
     The elements are let loose to fight,  
     And while I live, try out their right.  
 (7-9; 13-18)

The dilemma in which the speaker finds himself in the previous poem finds fuller expression here: how does one give due service to God? The first step is admitting that the grief is internal -- blame cannot be placed here, though the speaker has not yet admitted to his sin. Second, the speaker recognizes that he cannot change his state by his own means:

Oh help, my God! let not their plot  
     Kill them and me,  
     And also thee,  
 Who art my life: dissolve the knot,  
     As the sunne scatters by his light  
     All the rebellions of the night. (19-24)

"They" in line 19 refers to the elements of line 17 ("The elements are loose to fight,/ And while I live, try out their right" [17-18]) that seek supremacy within the speaker. In calling on God (and on the "sunne," and with the usual pun, calling on "Sonne" as well), the speaker recognizes that his ability to serve God is expressed by God's grace working through those same abilities:

Then shall those powers, which work for grief,  
     Enter thy pay,  
     And day by day  
 Labour thy praise, and my relief,  
     With care and courage building me,  
     Till I reach heav'n, and much more, thee. (25-30)

Two other “Affliction” poems focus more fully on the intercession of Christ whose Passion provides the means by which the speaker can reach heaven. Christ’s intercession is absolutely central to Herbert’s understanding of penitence, and like the penitential psalm commentators, he compares the Passion and the sinner’s repentance in order to exploit the dramatic circumstances between them. In “Affliction (II)” the speaker compares himself to Christ:

If all men’s tears were let  
Into one common sewer, sea, and brine;  
What were they all, compar’d to thine?  
Wherein if they were set,  
They would discolour thy most bloody sweat.

Thou art my grief alone,  
Thou Lord conceal it not: and as thou art  
All my delight, so all my smart:  
Thy cross took up in one,  
By way of imprest, all my future mone. (6-15)

Ultimately the comparison cannot work, as Christ’s sacrifice exceeds any that man could possibly make, so that the paradox remains that the sinner finds in Christ both his “joy” and “smart.” To follow Christ is to suffer -- not to the level of Christ, but to suffer nonetheless -- and the speaker is not yet willing to do so: his first line is “Kill me not ev’ry day,/ Thou Lord of life” (1-2).

Likewise, in “Affliction (III)” the speaker goes farther than in the previous poem, now willing to accept the affliction of the title. The poem apparently is occasioned by a sigh:

My heart did heave, and there came forth, Oh God!  
By that I knew that thou wast in the grief,

To guide and govern it to my relief,  
 Making a scepter of thy rod:  
     Hadst thou not had thy part,  
 Sure the unruly sigh had broke my heart. (1-6)

The sigh sets up a relationship between the speaker and God; it is not only is a call to God, but one that is also directed by God. That is, God sends the sigh to signal some kind of release, not of grief necessarily, but of resignation. God comes here not to punish but to rule by scepter rather than rod.

But since thy breath gave me both life and shape,  
 Thou knowst my tallies; and when there's assign'd  
 So much breath to a sigh, what's then behinde?  
     Or if some yeares with it escape,  
     The sigh then onely is  
 A gale to bring me sooner to my blisse. (7-12)

The sigh is both the breath of God that created man, and the mark of a human span, one more breath closer to death. Herbert then moves to the final point, his acceptance of his own grief -- again, because it compares so little with Christ's -- and here willingly accepts both the grief and the sigh that manifests that grief.

Thy life on earth was grief, and thou art still  
 Constant unto it, making it to be  
 A point of honour, now to grieve in me,  
 And in thy members suffer ill.  
     They who lament one crosse,  
 Thou dying dayly, praise thee to thy losse. (13-18)

The speaker sees grief as a "point of honor" in that Christ is still constant to his grief, because man still sins. Explicitly identifying with Christ, he grieves in all sinners, and all who grieve ought to praise him in His loss, which is paradoxically a gain of eternal life.

“Affliction (V)” presents affliction as a given condition, and as such is close to the spirit of the penitential psalms. There are differences, however; rather than being the plea of an individual sinner, the speaker distances himself by setting the poem into the plural, acknowledging that affliction is mankind’s given state in order to have a relationship with God. Again the tone is one of resignation -- man does not have much choice in this matter, as the images of the line and the baits might suggest in the next stanza -- and affliction is not recounted as much as it is accepted as a foregone conclusion.

There is but joy and grief;  
If either will convert us, we are thine:  
Some Angels us’d the first; if our relief  
Take up the second, then thy double line  
And sev’rall baits in either kinde  
Furnish thy table to thy minde.

Affliction then is ours:  
We are the trees, whom shaking fastens more,  
While blustering windes destroy the wanton bowres,  
And ruffle all their curious knots and store.  
My God, so temper joy and wo,  
That thy bright beams may tame thy bow.  
(13-24)

The speaker thus accepts affliction, arguing that it may convert the sinner as much as grief will in that it may create fortitude. Yet even here there is a plea that God temper his bow, the rainbow both as a sign of His covenant with man and also as a weapon of punishment. The tone is deeply ambivalent: the speaker asks that affliction be tempered, and joy as well, perhaps so that he can know affliction, as in the second stanza:

At first we liv’d in pleasure;  
Thine own delights thou didst to us impart:  
When we grew wanton, thou didst use displeasure  
To make us thine: yet that we might not part,

As we at first did board with thee,  
Now thou wouldst taste our miserie. (7-12)

The speaker implies a reciprocal agreement in place: as Christ took on human body, so the sinner must take on Christ's body, so that "affliction then is ours."

Heather Asals argues that the "Affliction" poems show the speaker's "steady advance toward becoming a member and spokesman for the suffering Body of Christ," the Church at large, and thus the move toward impersonality is necessary, from a merging of Christ's and the speaker's voice in "Affliction (III)" to the use of the first person plural in "Affliction (V)" (400-03). I agree, but would qualify her comments by calling attention to the tone of resignation. The sinner calls out for subjection to God's will, but in very human terms: bring me into subjection, but not so that I must suffer too much. Again, in these poems Herbert explores the more difficult aspects of the penitential psalms that the psalmist glosses over: the speaker arrives at submission, but not easily, not necessarily willingly.

## VII

As in the penitential psalms, the speaker of Herbert's poems is able to arrive at submission, if not easily, because he is assured of redemption through the Passion of Christ. The Passion is central to understanding Herbert's views on penitence, and a series of poems based on the Passion occur at the beginning of "The Church" section of The Temple. It is not my intention to discuss at length the placement of particular poems in Herbert's work -- to do so would be a book-length study in itself -- but I do think it

important that a series of poems based on the Passion opens “The Church.”<sup>17</sup> The long tradition of the penitential psalms being recited and used in Lent may underly Herbert’s design here; as the liturgical year demands penitential psalms in the liturgies of Lent and Passion Week, so The Temple demands that the Herbert’s poems on the Passion begin with poems that immediately raise the issue of penitence.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The placement and functions of the three sections of The Temple has been noticed by critics, however, though most have long acknowledged that the overall structure of the work defies simple explanation. A few things may be said: the invitatory “The Church Porch” prepares the reader for entry into the temple, and the final “The Church Militant” prepares the reader to enter back into the world, armed with the Christian faith.

Louis Martz reads the unity of The Temple in terms of the threefold division of the Christian life, according to pseudo-Bonaventure, for whom the Christian life has a threefold division: first, a purging of vices, leading to a contemplative life, then an attention to works toward the salvation of others. The first and third steps are active, the second contemplative, and this is reflected in the threefold structure of The Temple: “The Church-Porch” with its aphoristic attention toward proverbial wisdom, “The Church” with its lyrics focusing on individual experience, and “The Church Militant,” with its emphasis on taking one’s faith into the world (289). In this chapter Martz carefully considers the placement of specific poems in “The Church”; see especially 295-309.

Lewalski, on the other hand, reads the division of The Temple in terms of the Church at large: “The Church-Porch” prepares the reader for entering into “The Church,” then returning to the Church in the world as “The Church Militant”; in other words, Lewalski draws on the Protestant metaphor of the Church as a temple within oneself to one without. See especially 285-89.

<sup>18</sup> It is important to note as well that Herbert’s penitential psalms do not cluster around a central theme such as the Passion as they do in the beginning of “The Church,” but rather are interspersed throughout the body of work. I do not believe this is random. Now that the reader has been brought into the temple, realizing his Redemption through Christ’s Passion, his penitence will be an ongoing struggle that will be repeated throughout the rest of the Christian life: the sinner will stumble, repent, feel he has earned God’s grace, and sin again. Bloch points out that there is precedent for this randomness in the liturgical use of the Book of Psalms. Not only were the Psalms read through once a month, but they would be appointed independently of the appointed lessons; that is to say,

This is quite different from earlier paraphrases, and even Donne's Holy Sonnets.

Where earlier poets use the penitential psalms in order to lead up to Christ's Passion, Herbert begins with a set of penitential lyrics.<sup>19</sup> Christ's Redemption is Herbert's starting point rather than an ending point as it is for Donne because Herbert's sinner works from a different premise than Donne's; because of the Redemption, he is assured of his salvation, and attempts to live up to it.<sup>20</sup> The sinner's struggle in The Temple is not knowing

the appointment of specific psalms for the day had no bearing on the appointment of specific lessons -- they simply rub shoulders together randomly. (This may well be the reason for the Renaissance preference for sermons based on a single line of Scripture; it may have been far too difficult to pull together a sermon involving two lessons, a Gospel reading, and a psalm which could well have no thematic connection with them.)

Arguing from a different premise, Elizabeth Stambler sees courtly love poetry as the model for dramatic narrative in The Temple. A volume of love lyrics has a double form: it is both lyric and narrative. Lyrics need to be able to be read independently, but the sequence allows each presented mood to be equal to all others, as in the cycles by Dante, Petrarch, and Sidney. This certainly occurs in The Temple -- emotional states contradict each other, in fact -- but no one state gets primacy. See Stambler 330-35.

My sense is that penitential lyrics are interspersed throughout The Temple in order to recreate the struggles of Christian life. The poets discussed thus far follow the verses of the given psalm in order to impose a structure on a lyric; use the structural tradition of contrition, confession, and absolution in order to rhetorically organize a lyric; or couch a set of penitential lyrics in some kind of larger dramatic structure. However, for Herbert penitence is not a process unto itself or a brief dramatic conflict confined to the limits of a poem, but a constant throughout all of Christian life, one that the Christian repeats, struggles to understand, repeats again. Though arguing for the placement of specific poems in The Temple is far beyond the scope of this study, these patterns of placement warrant further study.

<sup>19</sup> It is worth remembering that the point in the medieval commentaries and paraphrases where Christ takes on the voice of the psalmist occurs in Psalm 102, the fifth of the seven penitential psalms, relatively late in the cycle.

<sup>20</sup> Bloch comments on this in her discussion of the typological poems (which all these initial poems centering on the Passion are) arguing that Herbert is drawn to the "modal

whether or not he is saved. The struggle instead lies in the sinner's attempt to create a relationship with God that from the start acknowledges such a great debt which was not owed and cannot be repaid. Herbert's sinner is never in the throes of anxiety that Donne's sinner (or Calvin's or Luther's, for that matter) is. Donne's sinner never knows if he has been saved. Herbert's sinner knows from the beginning that he has; what he does not know is whether or not he can ever live up to the sacrifice and become a worthy recipient of grace.

Herbert thus depicts all the suffering the sinner must go through in order to define his relationship with God. Booty argues that the first poem in the entire work, "Church-Porch," invites self-examination (78) with its exhortatory tone, preparing the reader to enter "The Church," and the first poem there, "The Altar," functions as a penitential invitational. Both Lewalski and Vendler point that the poem echoes the penitential lyrics that immediately follow it in "The Church," arguing that it in particular alludes to Psalm

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point in history as it is recorded in Scripture, the juncture between Old and New," finding in it the biblical paradigm of his own spiritual struggles: the new man has learned to aim for heaven, while the old man is still wrapped in the flesh (114). Perhaps Herbert's realization that the new man can aim for heaven leads him to begin with the Passion poems, the redemptive act by which he can gain access to heaven, rather than finishing with it.

Summers reads this in terms of the covenant of grace: man must realize that he cannot effect his own salvation, but once he experiences an understanding of Christ's sacrifice and the accompanying overwhelming sense of love, he could be assured of being destined for salvation (60-62). This benevolent view perhaps helps explain why we never find the tortured anxiety that we do in the Holy Sonnets.



51:7: "A broken and contrite heart, Lord, thou wilt not despise" (Lewalski 302; Vendler 63).<sup>21</sup> Herbert does paraphrase this verse fairly closely:

A broken ALTAR, Lord, thy servant reares  
Made of a heart, and cemented with teares . . . (1-2)

is the speaker's offering to be sanctified by God:

O let thy blessed SACRIFICE be mine,  
And sanctifie this ALTAR to be thine. (15-16)

The second poem in "The Church" is "The Sacrifice," recounting the major events of Passion Week. Herbert underscores his starting point as the Redemption by using the voice of Christ as the speaker, an occurrence that happens nowhere else in The Temple. Christ's refrain echoes Jeremiah's lamentation with its repetition of "Was ever grief like mine?"<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Another echo of the penitential psalms would be lines 13-14:

That, if I chance to hold my peace,  
These stones to praise thee may not cease.

Psalm 51:15: "O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise."

<sup>22</sup> Herbert's lyric begins:

Oh, all ye, who pass by, whose eye and mind  
To worldly things are sharp, but to me blind;  
To me, who took eyes that I might you find:  
Was ever grief like mine?

Jeremiah's lamentation, from the King James Bible: "Is it nothing to you, all ye who pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me . . ." (Lamentations 1:12).

It is worth noting, too, that this echo demonstrates the Protestant typology of Christ, bringer of the New Law, as fulfillment of an Old Testament figure, and the Old Law.

The grief in the poem is an emotional response to the events of the Passion, but Herbert also makes it clear that man's sin is the primary reason for this grief:

Lo, here I hang, charg'd with a world of sinne,  
The greater world o'th'two; for that came in  
By words, but by this sorrow I must win:  
Was ever grief like mine? . . .

In healing not my self, there doth consist  
All that salvation, which ye now resist;  
Your safetie in my sickness doth subsist:  
Was ever grief like mine? (205-208; 225-28)

The poems which follow are all in various ways responses to Christ's voice, as in, for example, the opening of "The Thanksgiving."<sup>23</sup>

But now I die; nowe all is finished.  
My woe, man's weal: and now I bow my head.  
Only let others say, when I am dead,  
Never was grief like mine.  
("The Sacrifice," 249-52))

Oh King of grief! (A tittle strange, yet true,  
To thee of all kings only due)  
Oh King of wounds! how shall I grieve for thee,  
Who in all grief preventest me?  
("The Thanksgiving," 1-4)

The dialogue that emerges echoes that of Psalm 32 (verses 8 and 9) in which God responds to the psalmist, but the roles are reversed; where the psalmist lays out his grief in order to elicit a response, Christ recounts His Passion in order to help the speaker reflect

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<sup>23</sup> Booty notes that "The Sacrifice" is a "lengthy, detailed meditation on the Passion and on one's life in relation to it" ("Contrition" 38). The fact that the poem is put into Christ's voice undercuts this, but I would argue that the poems of "The Church" which immediately follow "The Sacrifice" are responses to Christ's sacrifice.

on his sins. Ilona Bell argues that “The Sacrifice” is an important poem for this very reason, in that it signals a shift from Christ the sufferer to Christ the Redeemer that begins with the following poems of “The Church” (83).

The manner of the sinner’s reflection on his sins has been of considerable critical interest. In a poem such as “The Agony,” for example, Herbert’s speaker initially sets himself from the action of the poem, a passive observer:

Who would know Sinne, let him repair  
Unto Mount Olivet; there he shall see  
A man so wrung with pains, that all his hair,  
His skinne, his garments bloudie be.  
Sinne is that presse and vice, which forceth pain  
To hunt his cruell food through ev’ry vein. (7-12)

The speaker invites one “Who knows not Love,” on the other hand, to taste the juice drawn by the pike, an image which alludes to the sacrament of Communion:

Who knows not love, let him assay  
And taste the juice, which on the crosse a pike  
Did set abroach; then let him say  
If he did ever taste the like.  
Love is that liquour, sweet and most divine,  
Which my God feels as bloud: but I, as wine. (17-18)

It would appear that the “I” enters the poem only in the last line, but this is not quite true. The speaker argues that whoever witnesses the Crucifixion would know sin as that “press and vice,” but it is the speaker’s sins which cause that press, as “The Sacrifice” made clear. Herbert presents man’s responsibility for the Crucifixion without overtly doing so, keeping the narrative largely in the third person. Rosemond Tuve rightly argues that the

agony of the poem is the mind's agony as well as Christ's (118).<sup>24</sup> The speaker comes to participate fully in the Passion, and not simply to observe it.

"Good Friday" also presents the speaker as a fully active participant in the sorrow. The speaker poses a series of questions: How can I measure out your blood? How can I tell your grief? Unable to live up to these sacrifices, he answers the questions with an implied, unstated "no":

Then let each houre  
Of my whole life one grief devoure;  
That thy distresse through all may runne,  
And be my sunne.

Or rather let  
My several sinnes their sorrows get;  
That each beast his cure doth know,  
Each sinne may so. (13-20)

Rather than simply observing and identifying Christ's sorrows, the speaker calls upon his own life to devour Christ's griefs, so that His distresses become his light. He then rejects the rather fanciful image of Christ's distress as his sun for a more realistic one: may the remembrance of your sorrows remind me of my sins (implying that they number equally) and the sorrow that I should feel for them, as part of my penitential cure.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Tuve continues, however, arguing that the image of the speaker drinking Christ's blood as wine is joyous, according to the tradition of medieval iconography: Christ is the "potus laetitiae" (133). The poem, in her reading, is much richer than its immediate tone might suggest.

<sup>25</sup> Vendler notes that at the the third stanza, Herbert realizes his self-aggrandizement. His original intent was to meditate on the sufferings of Christ, not by means of participatory glorification, but rather with a sense of remorse: he, after all, caused these sufferings (149).

“Redemption” presents a Bunyanesque allegory in sonnet form, using the metaphor of a tenant and lord, again to present active participation.

Having been tenant long to a rich Lord,  
 Not thriving, I resolved to be bold,  
 And make a suit unto him, to afford  
 A new small-rented lease, and cancell th’ old. (1-4)

The speaker is even more active here, actually instigating the terms of the bargain. Christ owes nothing back -- the whole point of grace, according to the Reformers, was that it was freely given and man did nothing to deserve it -- but Herbert plays with the idea of the exchange of the Old Law with the New as a transaction. The drama of the poem arises out of Herbert’s handling of the dramatic situation which underscores this point. The speaker hunts for Christ and is told at the manor that he has gone to some land he had “dearly bought.”

I straight return’d, and knowing his great birth,  
 Sought him accordingly in great resorts;  
 In cities, theatres, gardens, parks, and courts:  
 At length I heard a ragged noise and mirth  
     Of thieves and murderers: there I him espied,  
 Who straight, Your suit is granted, said, & died. (9-14)

Herbert suggests that the sacrifice is freely given; the speaker, after all, looks in all the wrong places for Christ, not understanding the terms of the bargain. The final line, too, with its abruptness and odd syntax suggests that the understanding still is not achieved. Christ’s death, the terms of the bargain, ends the poem and we have no sense of how the speaker responds.

These poems have all garnered considerable interest, but most important is how they exemplify the reader entering into the Bible. Chana Bloch has said it well: “Herbert’s poems . . . are constructed in the space between the Bible and the believer,” and that Herbert’s goal is to bring the Bible to life, not simply as doctrine but doctrine and life (30-31). That is, in reflecting on Biblical material, the reader should apply that material to his own life, not simply to bring up the emotions appropriate to the specific material but also to consider how those emotions ought to inspire his own motivations and actions. Thus Herbert’s speaker does not only feel sorrow for Christ on the cross, but also considers what that sorrow ought to do for him: make him strive to sin no more, reflect on the meaning of Communion, allow the sorrow to inspire his own suffering.

I think it more accurate to argue that all the poetry I have discussed in this study has been constructed somewhere between the Bible and the believer, so that the reader might be encouraged to place himself into the poem, as in the medieval paraphrases, or alongside the poet in the poem, as in the later paraphrases. But Bloch is certainly on the right path: a more Protestant-centered way to consider this poetry is to take up Martin Elsky’s argument that Herbert’s technique of reflecting on Biblical material as active participant in order to apply it to one’s life exemplifies anamnesis. He argues that Protestant poetry is shaped by liturgy by attempting to create anamnesis, or “remembrance”; that is, making a past event present such as (in terms of the liturgy) the Last Supper (60), or (in terms of poetry) a biblical narrative event.

Importantly, the Reformers differed on the issue of anamnesis from Catholics. For Protestants, the Eucharist was not a real sacrifice of Christ, but rather an anamnesis, a “represented” one. The Eucharist thus was an offering for the communicant, so that its meaning was derived from the communicant’s experience of the anamnesis (70; emphasis mine). Anglican theologian Richard Hooker elaborates on this point: “The very letter of the word of Christ giveth plain security that these mysteries do as nails fasten us to his very Cross” (Hooker, quoted in Elsky 71). Elsky writes:

Very often in Protestant devotional poetry the focus of attention shifts from the object to the perceiving subject. The center of the reformed meditative verse is not just Christ, but Christ as experienced by the meditator (72).

This is an important point to bear in mind throughout The Temple, for Herbert returns to Christ’s Passion and sacrifice again and again, but always in the context of how Christ’s Passion affects him in the here and now: not how He suffered, but how He redeemed, and redeems. This shift from Christ as Sufferer to Christ the Redeemer is the shift from a sensory response to an intellectual one, or as Bell puts it, a desire for Christ’s spiritual presence in the speaker’s life rather than the speaker’s devotional presence in Christ’s life (80).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Bloch, in a different context (an analysis of the poem “The Quip”), makes the same point:

What we have in “The Quip” is not simply a “literary” echo of the Psalms. The rhetorical strategy of the poem reflects an actual situation from life: the believer in distress repeating verses of the Psalms in order to invoke their saving power. We may be certain that Herbert and his readers turned to the Bible in exactly the same way (16-17).

It is only through this spiritual presence that the sinner is in fact able to embrace the suffering that repentance requires, as in the closure of the poem "Repentance," for example:

Sweeten at length this bitter bowl,  
Which thou hast pour'd into my soul;  
Thy wormwood turn to health, winds to fair weather:  
For if thou stay,  
I and this day,  
As we did rise, we die together.

When thou for sinne rebukest man,  
Forthwith he waxeth wo and wan:  
Bitterness fills our bowels; all our hearts  
Pine, and decay,  
And drop away,  
And carry with them th'other parts.

But thou wilt sin and grief destroy;  
That so the broken bones may joy,  
And tune together in a well-set song,  
Full of his praises,  
Who dead man raises.  
Fractures well cur'd make us more strong. (19-36)

The speaker echoes Christ's Agony in the Garden. First he asks that the bitter bowl be sweetened, but, identifying with Christ, then accepts his sin and the pain that must accompany contrition. He acknowledges that sin will make him "wax and wane," and also that his heart will "pine, and decay"; but through this suffering he understands that God

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The Bible is meant to be used, invoked and applied to one's life. In his appropriation of the Psalms, Herbert does just this; he does not echo the psalms, but creates anew the psalmist in his own voice.



will be able to destroy both the sin and the necessary grief. The speaker, then, unlike the psalmist, willingly takes on the “fractures well-cur’d” in order to be made “more strong.”

The experience of suffering as the means to God’s grace is even more explicit in the poem “The Passion.”<sup>27</sup>

Since bloud is fittest, Lord, to write  
Thy sorrows in, and bloudie fight;  
My heart hath store, write there, where in  
One box doth lie both ink and sinne:

That when sinne spies so many foes,  
Thy whips, thy nails, thy wounds, thy woes,  
All come to lodge there, sinne may say,  
No room for me, and flie away.

Sinne being gone, oh fill the place,  
And keep possession with thy grace;  
Lest sinne take courage and return,  
And all the writings blot or burn.

Inviting God to write His sorrows with the blood of Christ’s Passion in his heart indicates how far the speaker is willing to embrace the suffering of the Passion: his heart will match Christ’s, and paradoxically the whips, nails and wounds will drive the sin away -- great suffering driven out by greater suffering. Only then can grace fill the now empty space, and even then the speaker is not entirely assured that sin will not return.

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<sup>27</sup> “The Passion” in Hutchinson’s edition is actually a continuation of the poem “Good Friday,” but it begins with a capital letter, suggesting that it was originally intended as a separate poem (39). Wall restores the original title from the W manuscript (153).

## VIII

In calling on Christ, the speaker sums up a tradition that I have been tracing in this study. In these poems, Christ, rather than David, becomes the model whose suffering the sinner gladly takes on in order to be made more in the image of God. To be sure, this tradition has been in place as early as the medieval paraphrasers, but it finds its fullest expression in Herbert's poetry.

Herbert sums up the tradition in yet another way. I have written how the psalms function both individually and communally; that is, the psalmist might be a sinner speaking for himself or for a whole community (as David spoke for the Israelite nation). There are certainly lyrics in The Temple in which Herbert chooses the plural "we" to the singular "I," but I refer here more to his ability to place penitence into a larger Anglican context. The vast majority of poems in The Temple concerned with penitence allude to the penitential psalms or to Christ's Passion, but there are other contexts as well. Penitence is presented in the context of the various feasts of the Anglican church year ("Trinity Sunday" and "Lent," for example) and of the sacraments ("H. Communion" and "Love [III]," for example). To carry out a full study of penitence as a theme in all of Herbert's poetry lies outside the range of this work, for as I stated when I began this chapter, to write about any one poem in The Temple is potentially to write about every poem. But it is worth observing that penitence as a theme in Herbert mirrors penitence as a theme in the Anglican communion.

Penitence figures prominently in the seventeenth-century Book of Common Prayer, far more than it does in its contemporary counterpart. There are penitential rites in both morning and evening prayer; a penitential rite precedes the celebration of the Eucharist, as well in the liturgies for the visitation of the sick; the liturgy for the “communion of sinners” is a communal penitential rite.<sup>28</sup> Given that Herbert weaves penitence into the entire context of The Temple, from the penitential and Passion lyrics I discuss here to lyrics about other feasts and sacraments in the Anglican rite, it would be well worth further exploring Herbert as a specifically Anglican poet, placing penitence into as many contexts in The Temple as possible. Herbert’s speaker thus takes the stance of the psalmist in yet another way, speaking for the individual sinner as well as the community of Anglicans. The psalms were meant to be read in varied liturgical contexts throughout the liturgical year, according to the Book of Common Prayer.<sup>29</sup> May not, perhaps, the same be said of Herbert’s great body of religious verse?

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<sup>28</sup> See Keeling’s side-by-side edition of the five sixteenth and seventeenth century BCPs (1549, 1552, 1559, 1604, and 1662). Sometimes the penitential rites shift places within a liturgy, but they are generally consistent in all of the BCPs. See 6-9; 26; 198-203; 314-17; 346-57. Other liturgies, such as that of holy matrimony, do not have penitential rites, but would include one because they would be part of a celebration of the Eucharist, which does have one.

<sup>29</sup> The BCP 1559 states: “The Psalter shall be read through once every month” in the offices of morning and evening prayer (22) and includes a table for the appointment of psalms throughout the month (24).

## **Chapter 9**

### **CONCLUSION:**

#### **THE FUNCTION OF SACRED POETRY**

I proposed in my first chapter that this study would raise questions about the purpose of sacred poetry: what is it for? One answer is obvious: it is for God. The poet writes poetry with the same intention that Johann Sebastian Bach had when he inscribed his musical scores with “Soli Dei Gloria” -- “To God alone be the glory.” But sacred poetry is also for the poet who defines his relationship with God by means of his poetry. The psalms in particular function in this way. As direct utterances to God, the psalms offer praise, lament, acceptance, each of these defining the spiritual relation of the psalmist to God; in terms of the penitential psalms, the process of recounting the physical ailments and calling on God for help and mercy allows the psalmist to come to the acceptance of God’s will.

As for the psalmist, so for the poet. The poets of this study cast themselves as psalmists, each seeking self-definition through the process of writing poetry. Sir Thomas Wyatt, for example, may have been attracted to paraphrasing the penitential psalms because they perhaps spoke to his own life, and Donne’s Holy Sonnets may well reflect the kinds of spiritual crises that he himself underwent. Herbert too defines himself in

relation to God when he writes in “The Quiddity” that his verse is “not a crown,/ no point of honor, or gay suit” (1-2),

But it is that which while I use  
I am with thee, and Most take all. (11-12)

Nevertheless, the fact that all these lyrics were written down at all also suggests, at the very least, that these poets had some kind of outside readership in mind as well. The psalms too have a second audience beyond God: us, the readers, who are in turn invited with the psalmist to define our relationship with God by giving our reading or speaking to the psalms. And again, as for the psalms, so for the poems: when we read, for example, Herbert’s “The Collar,” we are invited into considering how our stubbornness and unwillingness to submit ourselves to God’s will matches that of the speaker of the poem -- or how it does not, as the case may be.

So, then, this poetry exists to glorify God, to define the relationship of the speaker-poet of the poem to God, and to invite the reader to define his relationship in turn. Much of this study has been concerned with this outside reader, the second audience of the poem after God, whom the speaker of the poem generally addresses. More specifically, I have examined how this poetry is intended for the reader, from the invitation into the paraphrase by the medieval paraphasers to the individual voices that emerge in the later Renaissance poems, where both reader and poet take center stage. But addressing even these issues begs a larger question: what is the purpose of devotional poetry?

## II

Augustine's rhetorical work On Christian Doctrine answers this question in Book

4. Paraphrasing Cicero, he writes:

Therefore a certain eloquent man [Cicero] said, and said truly, that he who is eloquent should speak in such a way that he teaches, delights, and moves. Then he added, "To teach is a necessity, to please is a sweetness, to persuade is a victory." Of the three, that which is given first place, that is, the necessity of teaching, resides in the things which we have to say, the other two in the manner in which we say it (136).

Writing more generally about all poetry, Sir Philip Sidney also defines its function in the same terms:

Poesy therefore is an art of imitation -- that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth -- to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture -- with this end, to teach and delight (79-80).

It is important that Augustine paraphrases Cicero, in that this classical view of the function of literature is given a theological basis as well. It is also important that Sidney returns to the classical view (his definition follows a discussion of the Greek origins of the words "poet" and "poetry"). Classical writers argued that literature had a moral function; Jews and Christians assumed that the Bible and biblical literature did as well. Augustine and Sidney both fuse these two purposes of literature into one set of functions.

"To teach first, but also to delight": I have argued that the medieval poetry of chapter 3 has a primarily didactic function, designed to teach the laity about the sacrament of penance and to make exegesis available to a reading public. But I stress the word "primarily" because, to be fair to the later poets, all of the poetry in this study has a didactic function. Didacticism may be balanced with what I have termed a more expressive

function in the later Renaissance poetry, but certainly we as readers are able to learn from Donne as readily as from Maidstone; we presumably learn a great deal about Reformation thinking on grace, election, and salvation, and the Renaissance poets implicitly (and perhaps even quite consciously) make the exegesis of Luther and Calvin available to their audience as well.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the Renaissance poetry “reads” differently than do the earlier medieval paraphrases because of its more expressive function: we hear the voice of an individual poet. The way we, as modern readers, value expressiveness says something about the way in which we value poetry (or, more accurately, poets). The “individual voice” -- being able to identify a Donne lyric as specifically Donneian, for example -- is perhaps why this later poetry is considered “good” poetry, at least by standards of what might be called “artfulness”: greater and more deliberate manipulation of tone and rhetorical stance; the greater and more deliberate use of imagery, conceit, rhythm, rhyme scheme; and so on. It comes as no surprise that we expect Wyatt, the Sidneys, Donne and Herbert to appear in anthologies and to be well known to specialists (and, to an extent, even to non-specialists). Likewise, it comes as no surprise that Maidstone and Brampton are virtual unknowns, even among medievalists, certainly not known in the way that Chaucer, Langland and Gower are.

But it is not fair to Maidstone and Brampton simply to discount them as “didactic” poets. I do not mean to suggest that their poetry does not delight and move, or that it only teaches. I would suggest instead that how it “delights and moves” is a much more

subjective issue than how it teaches. Whether Wyatt, the Sidney's, Donne and Herbert are "better" poets than Maidstone and Brampton is not the point. "Better" is itself a subjective term: better at what? Presenting the principles of penitence to a lay audience? Involving the reader?

If Brampton and Maidstone de-emphasize an expressive function in their poetry, I cannot say fairly that an expressive function is entirely absent but have argued rather that it is supplied by the reader. Take, for example, a stanza from Maidstone's paraphrase:

Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam. [Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy: Psalm 50:1]

Mercy, lorde, of my mysdede,  
 For þi mercy þat mykel is;  
 And lat þi pite sprynge and sprede  
 Of þi mercy þat I not mys;  
 For aftur gostly grace I grede  
 Now, dere God, þou grante [me] þis,  
 þat I may lyue in loue and drede  
 And neuer more to done amys (49).<sup>1</sup>

The paraphrase does not add anything particularly new to the psalm verse, but it does offer a reader a strategy for considering his own sin. After asking for mercy borne of God's pity, the reader can call for grace and the means to live in love and dread of the Lord. But the final line invites the reader into the psalm verse: what exactly has he "done amiss," and hence, why would he need to call for God's mercy at all?

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<sup>1</sup> As in chapter 3, I cite by stanza number. The psalm verse translation is that of the Douay-Rheims Bible.



Compare this to a Herbert lyric (again, "The Collar") with its context of a very specific sinner in a very specific emotional state:

I struck the board, and cried, No more.  
 I will abroad.  
 What? Shall I ever sigh and pine?  
 My lines and life are free; free as the roe,  
 Loose as the wind, as large in store.  
 Shall I still be in suit? (1-6)

The experience presented is clearly not that of the reader, but rather that of the speaker of the poem. The reader is still invited into the poem, but in a very different way. On my first reading of this poem, my first question was, logically enough, what exactly is going on here? Who is the "I"? Why is he (she?) striking a board? "No more" what? But as I got further into the poem and understood that how the immediate questions that the poem raises -- the extreme "set toward a context," to use Jane Hedley's useful phrase, that I, the reader, must provide -- reflect the chaos of the speaker's mind, I was in a better position to reflect on myself: have I been in this same position? Was my experience like this? How was it different? In other words, in this and other poems with a more expressive function, the reader's experience parallels that of the poem's speaker; in giving our reading to the speaker's experience, we are able reflect on how it is the same, or different, from our own.

If we delight in this poetry, it is because the poet has enabled us to place ourselves in the poetry or to see ourselves reflected in the poet's presentation of experience. But it must be made very clear that delighting is the secondary function of this, and all, devotional poetry. Teaching comes first, as Augustine makes clear; and if this is so, it is so in part because the poets are treating biblical material in their paraphrases and lyrics. In

discussing how to treat biblical material, Augustine writes in book 4 of On Christian

Doctrine:

For a man speaks more or less wisely to the extent that he has become more or less proficient in the Holy Scriptures. I do not speak of the man who has read widely and understood much, but of the man who has well understood and has diligently sought out the sense of the Scriptures. . . .

For one who wishes to speak wisely, therefore, even though he cannot speak eloquently, it is above all necessary to remember the words of Scripture. The poorer he sees himself to be in his own speech, the more he should make use of Scripture so that what he says in his own words he may support with the words of Scripture. In this way he who is inferior in his own words may grow in a certain sense through the testimony of the great. He shall give delight with his own words. Indeed, he who wishes to speak not only wisely but also eloquently, since he can be of more worth if he can do both, should the more eagerly engage in reading or hearing the works of the eloquent and in imitating them in practice than in setting himself to learn from the masters of rhetoric . . . For he who speaks eloquently is heard with pleasure; he who speaks wisely is heard with profit (122).

There are several important points to note. First, if wisdom is the goal of reading and understanding Scripture, then poets must necessarily take care that their poetry serves that goal; that is, the meaning of the Scripture takes primacy over all other considerations. This may be the reason that Maidstone and Brampton bring so little of themselves to their poetry; they, after all, are not the proper subject of the poetry. It may also be why Wyatt chooses to frame his paraphrase in terms of David's experience. The long tradition of the Davidic narrative was already in place, and his context of a Reformation psychological drama, David undergoing both joy and despair, lent itself naturally to this tradition. Likewise, Sir Philip Sidney and the Countess of Pembroke take deliberate care in their

paraphrases, using the poetic technique not to draw attention to their own mastery of form, but rather to clarify what they believed to be the meaning embodied in the psalm.

This issue of how to speak through biblical material in order to achieve wisdom is made easier by the fact that paraphrase gives the poet a ready-made structure in which to cast his work. When we arrive at the poetry of Donne and Herbert, however, the issue becomes more difficult. These poets create their own lyrics based on the model of penitential psalms, and in doing face the difficulty of allowing their own verse technique to take primacy over their purpose of teaching the wisdom of Scripture. Herbert addresses this issue in various lyrics of The Temple devoted to the proper rhetoric with which to express the Christian's relationship with God, as in, for example, his lyric "Jordan [I]":

Who says that fictions only and false hair  
Become a verse? Is there no truth in beauty?  
Is all good structure in a winding stair?  
May no lines pass, except they do their duty  
Not to a true, but painted chair?

Is it no verse, except enchanted groves  
And sudden arbors shadow coarse-spun lines?  
Must purling streams refresh a lover's loves?  
Must all be veil'd, while he that reads, divines,  
Catching the sense at two removes?

Shepherds are honest people; let them sing:  
Riddle who list, for me, and pull for Prime:  
I envy no man's nightingale or spring;  
Nor let them punish me with loss of rhyme,  
Who plainly say, My God, my King.

Obviously, Herbert distrusts "fictions" that place the sense "at two removes," but more important, he defines beauty not as "coarse-spun lines," but as "truth." "Truth" could be

taken here to mean simplicity and directness, as I have discussed in chapter 8 -- poems which “plainly say, my God, my King.”

But I would also add that truth should be defined as “fidelity to experience,” honestly attempting to record what happened or is presented as having happened in a poem, attempting to make the poem reflect an experience that a Christian could go through. The fact remains that for all of Herbert’s emphasis on simplicity and directness, a great number of Herbert’s lyrics (and to an equal extent, Donne’s lyrics) are anything but simple. How, then, to reconcile this paradox?

One way would be to consider Herbert’s comments on how to teach, in the chapter of his treatise The Country Parson concerning catechizing:

Yet the skill [of catechizing] consists but in these three points: First, an aim and mark of the whole discourse, whither to drive the Answerer, which the Questionist must have in mind before any question be propounded, upon which and to which the questions are to be chained. Secondly, a most plain and easy framing the question, even containing in the virtue the answer also, especially to the more ignorant. Thirdly, when an answerer sticks, an illustrating of the thing by something else, which he knows, making what he knows to serve him in that which he knows not . . . This is a skill, and doubtless the Holy Scripture intends thus much, when it condescends the naming of a plow, a hatchet, a bushel, leaven, boys piping and dancing; showing that things of ordinary use are not only to serve in the way of drudgery, but to be washed, and cleansed, and serve for lights even of Heavenly Truths (84).

In other words, one can illuminate the meaning of the Bible by translating Scripture into what is common and understood. Though this might suggest simplicity for Herbert (and it certainly would have for the benefit of his Bemerton parishioners), I think it can also be taken to mean that “things of ordinary use” also include one’s experience, and by

recounting that experience, one teaches by means of illustrating. If Herbert presents a sinner who is frustrated because his will cannot prevail over God's in the poem "The Collar," so then does the reader in reading the poem have a model with which he can compare his own situation. In this light, it becomes paramount that Herbert record the experience as faithfully and as accurately as he can, even if it is not simple (and with the shifting emotional stances and striking imagery throughout, it certainly is not simple).

In this sense, it becomes difficult if not impossible to separate the Augustinian functions of teaching and delighting that devotional literature is meant to carry out. If a poem delights because its speaker recounts his experience and we in turn are invited into analyzing that experience in light of our own, we are also being taught. Donne's "Batter my heart, three-person'd God" might well be startling to read because of his use of the experience of ravishment to describe the speaker's relationship with God, but there is a great pleasure in finally figuring out that the use of ravishment is not there simply for shock value -- it in fact defines the relationship in such a way that any Reformation theologian would understand, even if the speaker puts the giving up of his will in the most extreme example possible. The sinner needs to be taken by God -- and knows it -- and must give up entirely his own control of the relationship.

### III

Finally, this poetry must also move the reader. Sidney's comments on this function are illuminating, and have the virtue of discussing this issue in terms of the psalms:

The other [example of "infinite proofs of the strange effects of . . . poetical invention"] is of Nathan the prophet, who, when the holy David had so far

forsaken God as to conform adultery with murder, when he was to do the tenderest office of a friend in laying his own shame before his eyes, sent by God to call again so chosen a servant, how doth he it but by telling of a man whose beloved lamb was ungratefully taken from his bosom: the application most divinely true, but the discourse itself feigned; which made David, (I speak of the second and instrumental cause) as in a glass see his own filthiness, as that heavenly psalm of mercy well testifieth.

By these, therefore, examples and reasons, I think it may be manifest that the poet, with that same hand of delight, doth draw the mind more effectually than any other art doth. And so a conclusion not unfitly ensue: that, as a virtue is the most excellent resting place for all worldly learning to make his end of, so poetry, being the most familiar to teach it, and most princely to move toward, in the most excellent work is the most excellent craftsman (93-94).

David is inspired by Nathan's story to penitence, in turn inspiring his own penitential psalm: he is moved to action, and to virtue by that action.

For the penitential psalms are not recited simply to define the present relationship a speaker has with God in the present, but also to create a new relationship for the future. One must remember that the psalms (and the poems based on the psalms) are prayers. They may teach and delight us in our reading, but Augustine and Sidney both add a third function as well: Christian literature must also move, that is, to persuade the reader to do something about his situation. These psalms may help us to consider our own penitence and by extension the relationship of our will to that of God; it may give us the means, as one Renaissance lyricist puts it, "to decline from sin and incline to virtue, that we may walk in a perfect heart before Thee, now and evermore"<sup>2</sup> by helping us see how to

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<sup>2</sup> The text is from J. Bull's Christian Prayers and Holy Meditations (1568), set by Richard Farrant and/or John Hilton. See The Oxford Book of Tudor Anthems, 152-56.

conform our will to that of God. Or they may inspire our own poetry, as the story of Nathan did for David, as the psalms of David did for Wyatt -- as the psalms did for many poets -- so that the tradition of psalm-making as prayer continues beyond the limits of this study, off the page, and into our own lives.

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