

FROM SPIRIT TO FLESH

Psalm 51 and the Practice of Paraphrase  
Under Henry VIII and Elizabeth Tudor

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

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by

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1994

APPROVAL SHEET

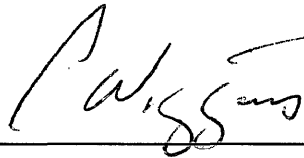
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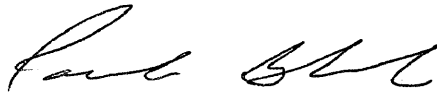


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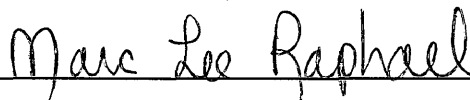
Approved, May 1994



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## ABSTRACT

Psalm paraphrase in the sixteenth century took place within a changing context. During the first half of the century, Augustinian/Lutheran rules of scriptural interpretation were dominant. The true meaning of Scripture was located outside the text, in the effect that a Psalm produced on the reader. The actual words of the text were less important than the work of the Holy Spirit on the reader during the act of reading. The second half of the century saw the rise of Calvinistic interpretation, which demanded that the literal, historical situation of the text be given greater weight. Calvin also insisted on the importance of the actual words of Scripture.

The Psalm paraphrases of Sir Thomas Wyatt and Mary Sidney, represented by Psalm 51, illustrate this shift in interpretive method. Wyatt's paraphrase, published in 1549, uses the words of the biblical psalm freely to transform Psalm 51 into the plea of a courtier for mercy; his paraphrase retains the emotional impact of the biblical psalm, but changes its meaning and context. Sidney's paraphrase, completed around 1599, shows a stricter adherence to the biblical text, along with a greater concern for the historical situation of the original psalm.

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The sixteenth century saw an explosion in the production of psalm paraphrase. Entire psalters were issued by Crowley, Sternhold and Hopkins, Theodore de Beze, and others, while numerous well-connected poets tried their hand at selected psalms (Wyatt, Surrey, Sir Thomas Smith, both Robert and John Dudley, Thomas Becon, and many others, mostly while in prison!). New translations of the Vulgate into English and French often took the liberty of expanding the biblical text with annotations, explanations, and footnotes.

Paraphrases narrowed the multiple focii of the biblical texts. One aspect of the psalm tended to serve as central theme; and the facet selected inevitably depended on the situation of the writer, political, social, and personal. An inescapable question remained: How far from the original could a paraphrase depart and still be considered as bearing Scriptural authority, conveying all the moral and spiritual benefits of the Latin text itself? The sixteenth century was still uneasy with the idea that a translation, no matter how literal, could adequately convey the meaning intended by the Holy Spirit. Paraphrases posed an even greater philosophical problem. Were such psalms still true messages of God?

Two notable writers of the sixteenth century, Sir Thomas Wyatt and Mary Sidney, the Countess of Pembroke, produced paraphrases of the psalms. Wyatt addressed himself to the traditional Penitential Psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143), while Mary Sidney completed her brother's reworking of the entire Psalter. A comparison of Wyatt's mid-century paraphrase and Mary Sidney's own work, done just before 1600, illustrates the shifting use of the psalms in this eventful century. Wyatt uses an Augustinian approach tempered by Luther's theology. His paraphrases convey the emotional and spiritual tenor of the psalms while changing their historical situation and context. Like Luther, Wyatt draws the meaning of the text away from David to focus on its later fulfillment in Christ's people. In contrast, Sidney's paraphrase shows the influence of the Calvinist literalism preached by the Reformation, which reached full stride after Wyatt's death. Where Wyatt's Psalm 51 expands 19 verses into 82 lines, Sidney restrains herself to 56 lines which adhere more closely to the biblical text. Wyatt turns the historical speaker David upside down, making his narrator not king but courtier; Sidney leaves the speaker of the psalms firmly on his throne. Wyatt spiritualizes the references to Jewish ritual; Sidney retains and then interprets them. Wyatt turns the speaker's sin into an engaging sort of weakness; Sidney sternly reveals the psalmist's total depravity.

Biblical scholars of the sixteenth century were fond of quoting the words of Athanasius on the psalms: "Whosoever take this booke in his hande, he reputeth & thinketh all the wordes he readeth to be as his very owne wordes spoken in his own person" (King 233). If this was indeed true, sixteenth-century readers and writers underwent rapid changes in their positions on man's depravity, God's grace, and the responsibility of the monarch towards the nation.

Neither Wyatt nor Sidney was an innovator in the choice of material to be paraphrased. In the early sixteenth century, psalm paraphrase had become an immensely popular pastime, due partly to the new accessibility of the biblical text in the first quarter of the century. The printing of the Gutenberg Bible in 1456 made the Latin text widely available. Although a popular English version of the New Testament achieved wide circulation in the late fifteenth century, a printed English testament did not appear until 1525, when Tyndale's New Testament was surreptitiously produced by printer Peter Quentel and bookseller Arnold Birckman. But well before 1525, the continuing debate over the proper interpretation of Scripture had prepared the way for the translation of the Latin text into English.

The prospering art of paraphrase brought the questions of translation into sharper focus. What was the exact relationship of the words of the text to meaning (in this case, spiritual truth)? Were the very words of the

Latin text -- thought in the late Middle Ages to be, themselves, inspired -- necessary for the conveyance of meaning? Or were words a conduit through which God's Spirit was able to convey meaning, regardless of their form or arrangement? If the Latin text could suffer translation into English with its power intact, could the English text then retain, even after paraphrase, divine authority and power to move men's hearts?

In the late fourteenth century, this semantic question had an odd double answer: denial that any particular combination of words could actually convey divine truth, alongside slavish adherence to every word of Scripture. Prickett observes of the linguistic authorities of the day,

Aristotle carefully warns his auditors that we cannot be more precise in our classifications than the subject and limitations of language will permit. Augustine saw all post-Babel communication as cripplingly limited by the fallen state of the human intellect which could now only communicate via the clumsy artifice of language (37-38).

Yet while language was too clumsy to express spiritual reality, the very words of Scripture were still considered essential to meaning. Sixteenth-century translators tended to follow the great father of the Vulgate itself, Jerome, who translated sense for sense rather than word for word "except in the case of the Holy Scripture where even the order of words is a mystery"; this led to the medieval concern that the earliest English versions have the same number of words as the Latin originals (Amos 56). That

attitude persisted as late as 1582, when the preface to the Rhemes New Testament shows the translators' concern not to remove meaning by removing words:

Moreover we presume not in hard places to mollifie the speches or phrases, but religiously keepe them word for word, and point for point, for fear of missing, or restraining the sense of the holy Ghost to our phantasie... (Robinson 191)

In fact, the Rhemes New Testament often used technical terms completely untranslated, giving the English language paraclete and anathema.

Certainly the notion that the divine Spirit could actually be hindered by the change of a word seems hostile to the production of paraphrase. But this theory was softened, in the sixteenth century, by the growing conviction that language itself cannot convey the truth of divinity. Sometimes both points of view affected a single work. The first version of Wycliffe's English Bible, issued in the late fifteenth century, was rigidly and literally translated word for word, preserving Latin constructions and word-order intact. F. F. Bruce suggests that this version was intended to serve as a sort of law-book; Wycliffe wanted to reveal its character as

...the codification of God's law....In the formulation of law verbal accuracy is of the utmost importance. While men of learning could still use the Latin Bible as their law-book, the less learned clerics...would have at their disposal a strictly literal rendering of that law-book (15).

The later Wycliffe version was revised by John Purvey, probably shortly after Wycliffe's death in 1384. Purvey writes of his own work:

First, it is to be known that the best translating out of Latin into English is to translate after the sentence and not only after the words, so that the sentence be as open, or opener, in English as in Latin, and go not far from the letter; and if the letter may not be followed in the translating, let the sentence ever be whole and open, for the words ought to serve to the intent and sentence, or else the words be superfluous and false (qtd. in Bruce 20).

Thus in the earliest work of translation into English, and even between master and disciple, there is disagreement over what the literal sense of Scripture entails. Wycliffe seems to have held that strict literal translation, the relationship of words to sense, took on greater importance when the words referred to material realities (theft of a cow, as in the Deuteronomic case-law) rather than spiritual realities. This resulted in a much stricter translation of the Old Testament law books and a freer rendering of the epistles and psalms. For spiritual realities -- God's grace and mercy or the repentance of a corrupt sinner, matters dealt with in the psalms -- the actual words seemed less important; the Spirit can convey, through them, truth that is independent of linguistic formulation. This latter point of view, most strongly stated in Augustine, encouraged the outpouring of psalm paraphrases.

The Reformation view of Scripture, built largely on the foundation laid by Martin Luther and John Calvin in the first half of the sixteenth century, had its major impact on biblical translation and paraphrase between the death of Wyatt and the publication of the Sidney psalter.

Wyatt's method of paraphrase belonged partly to the Middle Ages. Allegory and Augustine had ruled Scriptural interpretation for centuries. Indeed, the general medieval view of the words of Scripture had been established by Augustine, whose Platonism led him to a theory of double signifying. Scripture's literal, historical meaning was found in the meaning of the words; these words signified things; but those things themselves signified something else, some other spiritual reality. Both words and things were signs. The words pointed to things, while the things pointed to God. In this way, the actual words of Scripture lost some importance, as twice removed from meaning.

As a result, Augustine allowed interpretations that had very little to do with the words of Scripture. J. A. Mazzeo summarizes, "Not only was Scripture itself an endless allegory, but the world that Scripture described was itself a further silent, wordless allegory of the eternal" (10). Thus, although Augustine followed the strict rules for literal interpretation later popularized by the Reformers -- examination of grammar, historical context, and audience -- the literal sense, thus established, had no real value.

Augustine himself wrote that a clear perception of spiritual reality rendered Scripture unnecessary:

A man supported by faith, hope, and charity, with an unshaken hold upon them, does not need the Scriptures, except for the instruction of others (qtd. in Lewalski, 75).

Furthermore, interpretations that are "literally false but spiritually true" are perfectly acceptable.

When...from a single passage in Scripture not one but two or more meanings are elicited...there is no danger if any of the meanings may be seen to be congruous with the truth taught in other passages of the Holy Scriptures....Certainly the Spirit of God, who worked through that [scriptural] author, undoubtedly foresaw that this meaning would occur to the reader or listener. Rather, He provided that it might occur to him, since that meaning is dependent upon truth. For what could God have more generously and abundantly provided in the divine writings than that the same words might be understood in various ways (qtd. in Lewalski, 75).

Preus calls this the "collapse" of Scriptural language; the literal was entirely removed from consideration (176).

Nourished on Augustinian theory, many sixteenth-century scholars were able simply to eliminate the problem of the importance of the actual words of Scripture, by eliminating the importance of the literal, historical sense. A literal sense demanded that meaning be limited. Transfer of meaning from the literal sense to the emotional and spiritual effect of text on reader allowed multiple meanings, since the same passage might affect different readers in "various ways." This, again, boosted the popularity of paraphrases, especially of the psalms. If meaning lies in emotional and spiritual response, a paraphrase may do as well or better

than the text, and carry the same weight of authority. Wyatt's paraphrase of Psalm 51 follows this method; although Wyatt changes historical personage, setting, voice, and words, the appeal for mercy remains.

The Augustinian emphasis on the emotional effects of the words is well illustrated by the work of the influential humanist Lorenzo Valla. Valla (d. 1457) edited and translated the New Testament, showing a scholarly concern for grammar and context -- the literal meaning. Yet he, like Augustine, thought Scripture inadequate to convey divine truth; Scripture "enfolded" that truth, rather than conveying it. The true value of Scripture is that, in reading it, the soul is elevated, the reader experiences an "inexplicable calm" and understands God's love. Valla writes:

When I sing [Psalm 1:1] "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the impious," I do not dwell with barren imagination on the external sense -- that the man who does not walk in the counsel of the impious is blessed. Instead I refer this passage to myself; I refer it to Jesus. Christ's reverence and love so warm my heart and so inflame my will that my mind will not go unrewarded (qtd. in Bentley, 63).

The "external sense," which Valla finds "barren," is the literal meaning which Wyatt neglects, precisely so that he can refer Psalm 51 to himself.

While the influence of the Reformation on Sidney is more obvious, Wyatt's own Augustinian method appears to be tempered by a dose of Lutheran hermeneutic. Martin Luther, the earliest Reformer, began as an Augustinian, separating

the words of Scripture from its sacred meaning. From 1513-1515, Luther lectured on the psalms, emptying them of historical content by making Christ their subject and removing David from the picture altogether. This was a medieval hermeneutic, a method of interpretation that entirely bypassed the grammatical and historical sense of the Old Testament (Preus 147). Luther divided Scripture into law and gospel, roughly corresponding to the Old and New Testaments. "All the words and deeds of the law," he wrote, "are, as it were, only words and signs, whereas the words and deeds of the Gospel are works, and the very things signified" (qtd. in Preus, 159). As Old Testament, the psalms were "law." Their words had meaning only in reference to Christ, the later reality.

Although still removing the meaning of the text from the grammatical sense to its fulfillment in Christ, Luther brought the meaning one step closer to the text than did Augustine. The Old Testament word speaks of things which are themselves signs, as it did for Augustine; but for Luther, the New Testament word speaks of reality. That reality is Christ. Preus summarizes:

God...has committed himself to a future redemptive deed. His is a word whose spiritual, theological meaning is already available, because to the one who hears it, it points beyond present res, creates expectation, and arouses the petitioners of those who hear it with faith. The Old Testament time can still be called figura, as before, but it now means a real, historical time of preparation, a disposition for, and expectation of, the future... (198-199)

In other words, while for Augustine the meanings of both Testaments were located apart from the text, Luther allows the New Testament at least some real connection with the physical reality of Christ's earthly life. Christ "is"; all else "signifies" (Preus 95).

Luther's Christological interpretations were widely influential. The German reformer Urbanus Rhegius published How to Preach, a handbook on homiletics, in 1535. Like the New Testament, Rhegius declares, the Old reveals Christ; the difference is that in latter, Christ is proclaimed "through dark promises and figures as if seen from a distance," while in the New Testament Christ is revealed "through clear promises expressed in unambiguous language" (Hendrix 43). The meaning, for Rhegius, is located in the person of Christ. Although he followed the Reformed practices of approaching the text through its original language and setting, this careful exegesis did not reveal the text's meaning. For the Old Testament, prophecy, historical books, and psalms alike, the literal sense was comparatively unimportant. Spiritual meaning was found in the reality of Christ, and was divorced from the actual words of the text.

The psalms dealt with the experiences of God's people, but their primary application was not to the people of the Old Testament, but to Christ's people in the new dispensation. Thus, Wyatt is able to apply Psalm 51 to himself without changing the text's reference. The psalms

are his peculiar possession, as a Christian suffering in the sixteenth century.

While Luther's influence predominated in the first half of the sixteenth century, the foundation for a stricter adherence to the actual words of Scripture, a literalism which was to affect Mary Sidney's later paraphrases, began to be laid as early as 1518. The anti-Lutheran Erasmus, discontent with the lack of hermeneutical control over the spiritual interpretation of Scripture, systematized rules for literal interpretation in Ratio verae theologiae. He proposed that, regardless of whether the Old Testament or the New is under consideration, the student of scripture must pay attention "not only to what is said, but also by whom it is said, to whom, with which words, at what time, on what occasion it is said, what precedes and what follows it" (Bentley 180). For Erasmus, the meaning produced by this formula was paramount; he rejected the allegories of the medieval interpreters.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Waswo sees this process as the beginning of a shift from referential to relational semantics. Whereas referential semantics derives its meaning solely from the relationship of the word to a pre-existent entity in the world (either physical or spiritual), relational semantics allows meaning to also be determined by the structure of grammar, the interdependence of terms, and the historical and social realities of language. This revolution, he writes, consists in declaring semantically relevant, in bringing together and seeing as determinant of meaning, all the kinds of disparate and mundane observations made about language...observations of historical change in words, multiple referents, ability to change behavior, domination by social usage...to challenge referential semantics (17).

John Calvin's theological work followed Erasmus' guidelines. Calvin was one of the first biblical interpreters to articulate the importance of the literal meaning of the text. While Calvin looked for Christ in Scripture, this followed on an intense effort to discover the literal meaning through determination of authorial intention, grammatical meaning, and historical context. Calvin himself writes

I deny that [Scripture's] fertility consists in the various meanings which anyone may fasten to it at his pleasure. Let us know, then, that the true meaning of Scripture is the natural and simple one....Let us boldly set aside as deadly corruptions those pretended expositions which lead us away from the literal sense (Calvin, Epistles 84-85).

Such a hermeneutic, consistently applied, would have put an end to paraphrase. If the one true meaning can be discovered through careful examination of the words of Scripture, the changing of the words would result in a change of meaning as well.

However, Calvin's immensely influential hermeneutic did allow for paraphrase. Richard Muller points out that Calvin, while connecting the words of the text much more closely with the intended sense than his medieval predecessors, nevertheless develops a two-level "literalness" that allows the words of the texts to have multiple referents. Calvin does this through introducing the rhetorical term complexus as a principle of exegesis. After determining one grammatical and historical sense,

Calvin then allows the text a "connection in discourse" (uno complexu designat). Muller writes,

Calvin will not move from the grammatical and historical sensus to an allegorical sensus, but he will develop the complexus of ideas presented in a text to cover an extended meaning virtually identical in content to that covered by allegory or trope but more closely governed by the grammatical and historical sensus of the text (73).

In other words, the text has the equivalent of two literal meanings; the original meaning and the more elaborate applicational meaning built upon it.

For the psalms, Calvin's two literal meanings were based firstly in the historical situation of David and the Jewish kingdom, and secondly -- but more importantly -- in Christ and His spiritual kingdom. The Jewish kingdom was a shadow that pointed to the reality of Christ's kingdom; David's pronouncements about his kingship also apply, literally, to Christ (Muller 78).

Calvin explained that God, building a kingdom on earth, had at first selected the Jewish people. Because Israel failed to maintain purity as a nation, God turned instead to the Christian church, made up of the "elect"; those who professed faith, lived an upright life, and participated in the sacraments (Bainton 115). Calvin called for a holy community that was coterminous with a national community; in Calvin's theology, any country led by Christian rulers could become a holy country, just as Israel, led by David, was a

holy nation. The psalms made this so clear that in Calvin's Geneva, only psalm-singing was allowed (McNeill 190).

Calvin read the psalms, in the first place, literally, applying them to Israel's people and Israel's king; but he called for a second and wider fulfillment in Geneva, in Scotland, even in England under a Protestant ruler. In England, the Calvinistic ideal was most closely realized under Cromwell; but Elizabeth was not ignorant of it, and the Sidneys were decidedly Calvinistic in orientation. Mary Sidney's paraphrase clearly reveals this latter application of the psalms to a national kingdom, combined with close attention to the historical details of the original text.

It is worth noting that only Calvin's literal hermeneutic allowed the psalms to be applied to England and England's ruler in this way. Augustinian and Lutheran readings of the psalms bypassed any real, earthly kingdoms entirely and applied the psalms directly to the realm of the spirit, as realized in the individual soul. This contrast distinguishes the paraphrases of Mary Sidney and Sir Thomas Wyatt, as will be seen later.

By the end of the sixteenth century, the hermeneutical principles of the Reformers had not reformed biblical semantics but merely complicated it. No natural connection had been established between the literal and spiritual meanings of Scripture. While humanistic methods of literary scholarship were slowly bringing order into the chaos of

biblical interpretation, another century of work was necessary before Augustinian allegory, unconnected to the words of the text, fell completely from favor.

But although the turn of the century saw disarray in biblical studies, literary production thrived. Both Mary Sidney and Sir Thomas Wyatt found themselves with two horizons on which to work. The historical situation of David, now recognized as author of the psalms, could be used as commentary on contemporary England, while the paraphrases, although not in the very words of Scripture, nevertheless still carried a borrowed, Augustinian authority due to their spiritual and emotional effects on the readers.

Wyatt's Penitential Psalms were printed in 1549, seven years after the poet's death from fever. Wyatt's court career stretched from 1516, when as a thirteen-year-old he served Henry VIII as ewerer extraordinary, until the year of his death, when he was awarded several offices previously belonging to the unfortunate Thomas Culpeper.

Wyatt's Penitential Psalms are set in a historical context; Wyatt used Pietro Aretino as a source for the narrative framework that surrounds the psalms. However, the paraphrases themselves depart significantly from the words of the biblical text, exploring instead the spiritual and emotional depths of the psalms.

Wyatt had a narrow choice of sources. He most probably used Johann Gutenberg's printing of the Latin Gutenberg

Bible, produced in 1456; the Latin psalter had been printed separately two years earlier. He may have seen John Wycliffe's English version, completed between 1380 and 1384, although the banning of the Wycliffe Bible in England (Sir Thomas More called the translation a "corruption" in 1528) makes this uncertain.

Wycliffe's influence, however, was inescapable. Miles Coverdale produced Coverdale's Bible in 1535 and edited the Great Bible of 1539, as well as issuing a Latin-English version of the psalter in 1540. Coverdale's translations were, in effect, idiomatic reworkings of Wycliffe's extremely literal English text. It is impossible to date Wyatt's Penitential Psalms with assurance, but if, as Alexandra Halasz suggests, they were produced between 1534 and Wyatt's death in 1542, the poet would have had access to both Coverdale's Bible and the Great Bible.

The historical voice in Wyatt's Penitential Psalms is David, the traditional author of the entire psalter. In England, Henry VIII was closely identified with David; both were kings by divine right, establishing strong dynasties to lead God's chosen people. Henry himself had a psalter with illustrations showing him as David -- although none of his characteristically thorough marginal notes appear on the pages of Psalm 51, David's repentance from adultery (Prescott, "Evil Tongues" 173).

Wyatt's treatment of Psalm 51 is illustrative of his method with all seven Penitentials. Despite Henry's identification with David, the David in Wyatt's paraphrase of Psalm 51 appears to be Wyatt himself, the disgraced courtier asking for reinstatement in terms most flattering to the king. This was not a novel position; Anne Prescott points out that a tradition already existed which cast David himself as the wronged courtier. Such psalms as 52, which immediately follows the central Penitential Psalm, relate the hurt suffered by the psalmist from the tongues of wicked men; David constantly laments the damage done to him by malicious gossip (Prescott, "Evil Tongues" 177). Wyatt seems to borrow this tradition while leaving David on the throne. He, speaking with the psalmist's voice, is the wronged courtier, while the king remains on the throne.

Wyatt's transformation of David's voice into his own follows on the Augustinian tradition of reading Scripture, especially the psalms, for its emotional and spiritual impact, while dismissing the historical context as secondary. Despite the historical setting, the emotion in Wyatt's paraphrase of Psalm 51 -- its "meaning" -- is Wyatt's own.

John N. King agrees with Halasz in dating the Penitential Psalms to Wyatt's 1536 or 1541 imprisonment, pointing to the repeated references to betrayal and danger

of death, as well as the growing tradition of using the Penitential Psalms in this manner. He writes

At one time or other almost every Reformation courtier poet found himself in the Tower of London. when in extremis they tended to abandon love poetry and turned to the Bible for consolation. . . .Their handling of the scriptures during periods of personal distress, especially when they faced death at the headsman's block, led to the emergence of a recognizable mid-Tudor genre of the prison paraphrase. Protestant courtiers adopted the medieval convention of meditation on Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130 and 143...

(232-233)

King uses the similar paraphrases produced by Surrey and Sir Thomas Smith during their own imprisonments for additional examples.

When Wyatt transforms David's voice into the voice of the imprisoned courtier, he sets God on the royal throne in this psalm. The narrator calls him "heaven's king" (l. 410); David refers to his "majesty" (l. 450). Wyatt manages to separate the voices of king and penitent. He is David, wronged courtier; the David who remains on the throne becomes another figure entirely, a divine king: by analogy, God Himself. Wyatt and his monarch are both David, in face; Wyatt is David, the penitent courtier, and Henry VIII's parallel in the poem is David -- metaphorically, God the heavenly king.

This is not a difficult deduction. Henry VIII's multi-faceted power of prophet, priest and king gave him a position not far below divinity. According to Lutheran interpretation, the New Testament reveals that David, the

first God-approved king of Israel, had prophetic importance. As king he foreshadowed the ultimate King, the Son of God who was also the son of David. David's kingship was imperfect, because he required a prophet and a priest to help him run Israel; the kingship of Christ perfected the incomplete pattern. Christ was kingship made complete, power and justice and mercy all emanating from one throne. For Henry to compare himself with King David was to draw an implicit parallel to David's Son.

Alexandra Halasz suggests that Wyatt's penitent David is indeed intended to stand for Henry VIII. This David is "wilful," confusing the "worldly and transcendent." In Psalm 51, she suggests,

the biblical half-verse "restore unto me the joy of thy salvation" (v. 12) becomes "render to me joy of thy help and rest" (483)...."Render"...suggests a sense of obligation of duty, as the meaning associated with Christ's words in Mark 12:12: "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." The distinction between the tribute due worldly power and the tribute due heavenly power is precisely the distinction that eludes Wyatt's David (332).

In other words, David's imperfection lies in his inability to allow God to be God. Halasz suggests that, by portraying David as grasping at divine power, Wyatt is making a case against Henry's Act of Supremacy, in which "Henry claimed absolute spiritual and temporal jurisdiction" (335).

Yet a close reading of the psalm reveals another dynamic at work. The words David uses are the words of a banished or imprisoned courtier, addressing a king. David

walks a fine line between sincere repentance and minimizing his own sin, like a courtier attempting to regain favor without actually admitting the extent of his trespass. The narrative framework reminds the reader that, although David is king, there is yet a higher king. In Wyatt's Penitential Psalms, the speaker is David the royal courtier, begging for mercy and favor from the King.

The narrator records that when David entangled himself with the wife of Uriah and had to seek absolution from God, he found

Measureless mercies to measureless fault,  
To prodigal sinners infinite treasure,  
Treasure termless that never shall default (ll. 526-  
528)

Wyatt, entangled with Ann Boleyn, got from his sovereign lodging in the Tower and mistrust for the rest of his life. The paraphrase of the psalms itself implies -- all the time preserving deniability -- that Henry VIII does not live up to the standard of his divine Model.

Wyatt's free hand with the original text is shown in his expansion of the 19 English verses of Psalm 51 (the Hebrew text has 21 verses) into 82 lines. For most of the poem, rhymes occur in sets of three lines. A two-rhyme set in the opening four lines allows Wyatt to offset the alternation of rhymes, so that it follows the pattern

ababc bcdcd edefefg fghghihijijkjk...

The pattern resists the reader's impulse to divide the poem into four-line stanzas. Unlike the biblical psalm, neatly

divided into verses, Wyatt's poem is not easily separated into sections. Often, it is difficult to identify the exact verses Wyatt is paraphrasing. David's repentance moves fluidly from one idea to the next, mingling concepts without clear lines of division.

Wyatt begins

Rue on me, Lord, for thy goodness and grace,  
That of thy nature art so bountiful,

Wyatt's David bases his hope of forgiveness on God's character. "Rue on," meaning "to have mercy" or "to feel compassion for," recalls the "have mercy" which begins the psalm in both the Great Bible and Coverdale's Bible. Since "rue" carried a secondary meaning of repentance and remorse, Wyatt manages in the first two lines to bring both the mental state of the penitent and the responding reaction of the sovereign into view; in this he follows the Vulgate's miserere, which can mean either an exercise of compassion or that which excites compassion. The use of a single phrase to encompass both suggests that God's response will follow instantly and inevitably on the sinner's plea.

Wyatt then inserts two lines which have no parallel in the biblical psalm:

For that goodness in the world doth brace  
Repugnant natures in quiet wonderful.

"Brace" would seem to have here its old meaning of "surround" or "restrain." David's point, then, is that God's goodness restrains even unrepentant sinners (a

"repugnant" nature is one inclined to hostility and resistance) from exercising the full evil of their nature; this "common grace" was a widely taught theological concept in the sixteenth century.

David's sudden departure here from anguished repentance to calm moralizing over the nature of God's rule in the world at large drastically reduces the personal character of the poem. This is the first instance of the minimizing of David's sin which becomes more explicit later in the paraphrase; David's repentance may be heartfelt, but it does not consume his entire attention.

Wyatt then returns to the second half of the first verse,

According to the greatness of your compassions, wipe  
out my transgression.

Again, in David's mouth this becomes oddly impersonal. The man is, after all, asking forgiveness for a dreadful personal sin. But in Wyatt's paraphrase, David spends four lines reflecting on the way God's mercy works in the world, and only returns to his own sin in the fifth.

And for thy mercies' number without end,  
In heaven and earth perceived so plentiful  
That over all they do themselves extend,  
For those mercies much more than man can sin,  
Do way my sins that so thy grace offend.

Here, the poem first implies that, since God is just, His mercy is inevitable, given the proper conditions. The mercies are numberless, far outnumbering all of man's sins,

including David's; the last point, it seems, could almost go unstated.

Verse two, the Great Bible's "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquitie: and clense me from my sinne" (a very literal rendering of the Hebrew text) then becomes

Again wash me, but wash me well within,  
And from my sin that thus mak'th me afraid  
Make thou me clean as ay thy wont hath been.

Wyatt's choice of "again" is interesting here. Coverdale's contemporary English translations clearly express the sense "thoroughly," and the Vulgate uses "impleo" to convey "completely." Wyatt's use of "again" may suggest that he was actually using the Hebrew text, since the adverb translated "thoroughly" is derived from the root "ravah," which can also express multiplicity and repetition. Its use to mean "thoroughly" is an idiomatic one which an amateur student of Hebrew might not have recognized.

However, the presence of "again" may simply recall to Wyatt that this is not his first fall from favor. Earlier in his diplomatic career, Wyatt had been reproved by Henry VIII for carelessness in allowing others to see his letters. His service in Calais from 1528-30 may have been a form of exile; and he was imprisoned in the Tower in both 1536 and 1541, in addition to undergoing investigation in 1538 for misconduct as an ambassador. Significantly, Wyatt's David then immediately repeats his earlier point, that of God's guaranteed forgiveness:

For unto thee no number can be laid  
 For to prescribe remissions of offence  
 In hearts returned, as thou thyself hath said.

This has no parallel in the original, which moves directly on to David's acknowledgment of his sin. In Wyatt's version, God's capacity for unlimited forgiveness is repeatedly stressed. In fact, God's forgiving nature appears as a refrain throughout lines 1-15: Lines 1-2 state that God's nature is one of forgiveness. Lines 3-4 treat God's action towards all sinners, and lines 5-9 move immediately back to God's forgiving nature. Lines 10-12 parallel 3-4; the plea for second cleansing again treats God's actions towards sinners, this time in a specific case. Wyatt returns a final time to God's forgiving nature, in lines 13-15.

Only after this certainty of forgiveness has been driven home does Wyatt's David proceed to describe his sin specifically. Verse 3 of the psalm continues with an acknowledgment of sin; Coverdale's Bible translates, "For I acknowledge my faults, and my sinne is ever before me," and the Great Bible reads, "For I do acknowledge my wickedness, and my sin is ever before me." Wyatt's David specifies the sin as "negligence," and adds that the result of this contemplation is "more perfect penitence":

And I beknow my fault, my negligence,  
 And in my sight my sin is fixed fast,  
 Thereof to have more perfect penitence.

Wyatt's conception of the sin as "negligence" seems to reduce it in severity; negligence is a failure to exercise care, not an act of malice. Wyatt's David confirms this view of his sin in ll. 38-39, when he explains that

...wilful malice led me not the way  
So much as hath the flesh drawn me apart.

In addition, the sin, being fixed in his sight, actually becomes an instrument for good, since it leads to a more perfect penitence.

By this devaluation of the sin's seriousness, Wyatt's David has led neatly up to verse 4, which is somewhat perplexing in the biblical text. Coverdale's Bible, following Wycliffe, reads

Against thee only, against thee have I sinned, and done  
evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified in  
thy sayings, and shalt best overcome when thou art  
judged.

The notion that David's sin, which compromised Bathsheba, killed Uriah, and eventually brought death on Bathsheba's infant, was in fact "only" (Vulgate solu) against God, comes strangely into the original psalm. Wyatt's David, having already made his offense lighter, is ready for it.

To thee alone, to thee have I trespassed  
For none can measure my fault but thou alone.

The couplet suggests not only that the sin involved only David and God, but also that justice requires a full appreciation of the conditions of the offense. "None can measure" David's fault except God; therefore, only God can truly pass judgment on David. Perhaps Wyatt was suggesting

that Henry VIII ignore the many slandering tongues arrayed against him.

The biblical text goes on to explain that, since the sin was against God, God's judgment is thus warranted ("justified"). The Great Bible clears up Coverdale's obscurity in phrasing in the last half of the verse, reading

That thou mightest be justified in thy saying, and  
found pure when thou art judged.

This idea -- that God, the heavenly king, must also be held to account for his actions -- is entirely missing in Wyatt's paraphrase. Between the two halves of verse 3, he inserts an exact explanation of David's greater sin:

For in thy sight I have not been aghast  
For to offend, judging thy sight as none  
So that my fault were hid from sight of man,  
Thy majesty so from my mind was gone.  
This know I and repent. Pardon thou then...

The original sin, reduced to negligence and frailty, is outweighed by the greater sin; David failed to give God's majesty and omniscience its proper due, neglecting to appreciate properly the seriousness of an offence that only God sees. Only now does Wyatt's David explicitly repent.

Wyatt then returns to the second half of verse 3. He transforms the biblical idea, that God's actions are justified because David's sins are indeed evil, into a plea for mercy. If God shows mercy, that gracious act will demonstrate the purity of God's justice.

Pardon thou then,  
Whereby thou shalt keep still thy word stable,  
Thy justice pure and clean; because that when

I pardoned am, then forthwith justly able,  
 Just I am judged by justice of thy grace.

Henry's leniency towards Wyatt would, perhaps, demonstrate the righteous king's justice. Now, recommendations of leniency towards the sinner's weakness begin to appear as the psalm's continuing refrain. Lines 30-32 describe the weak nature of the sinner, while 33-37 point out that the sinner's nature calls for mercy. Again, lines 38-39 return to the weak nature of the sinner. Mercy is again recommended in 40-42, this time on the basis of the sinner's remaining faith; the section ends with lines 43-50, which record the results of mercy. The king's mercy is available for Wyatt's David partly because his sin is consistently portrayed as mere weakness, rather than evil intent. Treachery and malice should be judged, but mercy towards weakness is a laudable act.

Wyatt's David protests his lack of strength repeatedly. The biblical text of verse 5 says nothing of weakness, merely of origins: Coverdale's Bible reads, "Behold, I was borne in wickedness, and in sinne hath my mother conceived." For Wyatt's David, this causes "instability," an offense which goes nicely with negligence as a sin less serious than true iniquity:

For I myself, lo, thing most unstable,  
 Formed in offence, conceived in like case,  
 Am naught but sin from my nativity.

Immediately he protests that this is not an excuse, but another reason why God should exercise mercy:

Be not this said for my excuse, alas,  
But of thy help to show necessity.

The biblical text then describes God's requirements, which the narrator has failed to fulfill. Coverdale's Bible reads, "But lo, thou hast a pleasure in the truth, and hast shewed me secrete wisdom." The Hebrew particle hen, which introduces the verse, in poetry generally has simply the sense of "behold," which Wyatt captures in his use of "For, lo." Interestingly, the Great Bible uses "nevertheless":

Nevertheless, lo thou requirest truth in the inward partes (of me)...

suggesting that original sin is no excuse for not living up to God's standards. Wyatt's David avoids this stern translation, instead inserting a reason why he should be shown mercy; despite the original corruption, there is some good still in him.

For, lo, thou loves the truth of inwardd heart  
Which yet doth live in my fidelity  
Though I have fallen, by frailty overthwart;  
For wilful malice led me not the way  
So much as hath the flesh drawn me apart.

This idea is entirely missing in the original, as is the additional emphasis on the sinner's weakness. Wyatt's David then transforms the concluding statement of verse 6, "Thou wilt make me learn wisdom in the secret (part of mine heart)" (Great Bible) into a request, again based partially on the good that exists within him:

Wherefore, O Lord, as thou hast done alway,  
Teach me the hidden wisdom of thy lore  
Since that my faith doth not yet decay.

Wyatt's David, in essence, has transformed the biblical plea for mercy and the biblical assertion of complete iniquity into a subtle devaluation of the offending sin. It was caused by weakness, and the good that remains in the sinner deserves better than condemnation.

This is the courtly version of total depravity -- innate nobility infused with uncontrollable weakness. Gary F. Waller observes that the courtly ideal was dependent on a view of man as being innately noble (24), a view at odds with the complete corruption and dependency portrayed in Psalm 51. As we will see, Calvin's growing influence produces a much stricter paraphrase from Mary Sidney.

The paraphrase continues by listing God's actions of forgiveness. Wyatt again shows the Lutheran influence on his interpretation when he distances the psalm from its original context and finds a more real fulfillment in his own spiritual life. Wyatt's David observes,

And as the Jews to heal the leper sore  
With hyssop cleanse, cleanse me and I am clean.

"The Jews" are distanced from the English narrator, and the cleansing of the leper is merely the figure for spiritual renewal:

Then shall for joy upspring  
The bones that were afore consumed to dust.

God will also do away with the deeds that were unjust, averting His eyes from offensive acts, and cleansing the sinner's heart.

The biblical narrator concludes his specific suggestions to God by begging for the continuation of God's presence. "Take me not away from thy presence," Coverdale's Bible reads; the Great Bible renders the sentence, "Cast me not away," giving a stronger suggestion of punishment. Wyatt turns this into, "From thine eyes' cure cast me not in unrest," suggesting that the presence of the sovereign will cure the malady that has caused his bones to be "consumed." This presence would take away the shame of banishment. Wyatt once warned his young son that shame was the "greatest punishment on earth; yea! greater than death" (qtd. in Smith 73). The approving glance of the sovereign's eye removes this shame and "unrest."

The benefit is not one-sided. The biblical text observes that, after God has restored his aid, "Then shall I teach thy ways unto the wicked" (Great Bible). Wyatt makes the causal connection more explicit:

Render to my joy of thy help and rest;  
My will confirm with sprite of steadfastness.  
And by this shall these goodly things ensue...

Two "goodly things" will ensue; sinners will return to God and "sue" for his grace, a term generally addressed to royalty; and David's mouth will "spread thy glorious praises true." God, in other words, will find his power and reputation greatly increased.

There are certain conditions, Wyatt's David points out. God must first purge him from blood, so that he can take his

place again "among the just." This idea of restoration into human society appears nowhere in the original. The Great Bible renders verse 14:

Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou that are the God of my health; and my tongue shall sing of thy righteousness.

Wyatt makes the removal of guilt into a condition necessary for his own reputation. The plea for social rehabilitation is yet another instance of Wyatt's transformation of the text into the request of a courtier to his king..

Wyatt's David then returns to close adherence to the text:

And of thy lauds for to let out the flood  
Thou must, O Lord, my lips first unloose.

"Unloose" is Wyatt's rendition of Coverdale's "open" and the Vulgate's aperies ("open up"), and carries a strong sense of release from imprisonment. The courtier must be declared innocent so that he can reassume his rank in society, escape from imprisonment, and return to the king's service, while praising the king's justice all the way home..

Lines 69-82 conclude the paraphrase by assuring the pardoning monarch of the courtier's lasting change of heart. The biblical text contrasts sacrifices with what God truly desires, a "troubled spirit...a broken and a contrite heart." Wyatt's David makes his contrast between "outward deeds that outward men disclose" (the "sacrifices," of little value) and "low heart in humble wise." This

Christianizing of the Jewish sacrificial system continues through the next lines,

Make Zion, Lord, according to thy will,  
Inward Zion, the Zion of the ghost,  
Of heart's Jerusalem strength the walls still.

In approved Augustinian/Lutheran fashion, Wyatt transforms sacrifices into good works, Zion into a spiritual realm, "Zion of the ghost." As will be seen, the influence of Calvin's literalism keeps Sidney from this wholesale allegorization of the sacrifice/attitude contrast. Rather than linking the king's repentance to the good of the nation -- as Calvin emphasizes later in the century, and as Sidney incorporates into her own paraphrase -- Wyatt links it to the good of the church, particularly significant for Henry VIII, the head of a new ecclesiastical system.

The paraphrase ends by laying out the conditions under which good works are pleasing to God -- when they are accompanied by right attitude of heart. Coverdale's translations call this the "sacrifice of righteousness," a sacrifice rising from proper motives; Wyatt's David concludes,

Then shalt thou take for good these outward deeds  
As sacrifice thy pleasure to fulfil.  
Of thee alone thus all our good proceeds.

Wyatt has transformed this psalm. He began by admitting the sinner's guilt but minimizing the sin; by begging for forgiveness tactfully, pointing out how much the action will benefit the sovereign; by asking for release

from imprisonment; and by finally assuring the monarch that his future good deeds will be accompanied by a corresponding goodness of heart.

Throughout the paraphrase runs the subtle suggestion that Henry's kingship compares unfavorably to that of the divine sovereign. God, in Wyatt's Penitential Psalms, is immutable; when approached properly, in persistent and sincere repentance, his mercy is inevitable. This steadfastness is most necessary for a king, since his subjects are in Wyatt's predicament, dependent on him for health and prosperity. God values openness; his Word is truth, and complete honest confession is rewarded.

This almost mathematical certainty of forgiveness is very Lutheran, but not very Henrician. Henry's mercy depended very much on whim, family connections, or the mood of the king. In Psalm 102 Wyatt points out, rather dangerously, that the steadfast justice and mercy of the King of Kings will be praised by the "one church" of the "people of the land" (609). Henry may have been the Supreme Head of the English church, but his capriciousness did not earn him such undivided praise.

Wyatt's paraphrase emphasizes that, when the King of Kings is offended, complete confession of fault is the surest way to absolution, and a guaranteed path to mercy. Confession in Henry's court hardly had this salutary effect. Witness Catherine Howard, determined on telling the exact

truth about her early relationship with Francis Dereham, or any of the unfortunate Tower residents who made full (if extorted) confession and immediately were rewarded with execution. In a proper scheme of things, a repentant and forgiven man would serve as an example for others to do the same. In Henry's court, those most emulated were those who had managed to lie, finagle, and maneuver their way out of trouble.

Henry might claim to reign as prophet, priest, and king, but his court was a place where truth was dangerous and words twisted. Quite apart from issues of reward and punishment, Henry's method of governing seems to have depended heavily upon elaborate deceptions and concealments. He consulted each counselor separately, implying to each that the king's trust was settled only on him (Smith 24); he managed to array himself on both sides of the issue when Cranmer was to be condemned for heresy, and again when Catherine Parr was to be arrested by Wriothesley (Scarisbrick 480-481); and Wyatt himself felt the king's displeasure when the ambassador did not preserve as strict a secrecy as Henry felt necessary (Smith 25). This was hardly close adherence to Henry's heavenly model, the Word and truth incarnate (prologue to Psalm 143, ll. 699, 703).

The "Paraphrase" echoes, now and then, Wyatt's discontent with this life. As an ambassador he practiced perhaps even more deceit than most, and as a poet he used

deceit as a literary convention. But in the Penitential Psalms, Wyatt praises openness, nonconcealment, and truth. Truth is his "bread of life" (Psalm 102, l. 555), without which he withers and declines.

It is ironic that Wyatt, praising truth and openness, was driven to such an indirect and deniable appeal for mercy. Had he been content only to beg for forgiveness, rather than implicitly passing judgment on Henry's capriciousness, perhaps he could have indulged a little more in the truth which he claims to crave. Perhaps he could even have adhered more literally to the words of Psalm 51, rather than employing the Augustinian/Lutheran method of finding his meaning outside the exact words of Scripture.

Mary Sidney's end-of-the-century paraphrase uses the David persona of the psalms to a different end. Her David is not a courtier appealing to the king, but a monarch on whose personal righteousness the fate of a nation depends.

The children who succeeded Henry on the throne had to be content with lesser labels than that of "England's David." Edward was Josiah, the boy king who "returned Israel to pure faith" (King 161); Mary, at least from the point of view of the Protestants involved in making these biblical comparisons, was Jezebel, determined to wipe out God's true prophets.

Elizabeth herself was called Deborah at least twice, once by the Puritan Duchess of Suffolk (Erickson 168) and

again publicly at her coronation, where the final pageant presented the queen as Deborah "apparelled in Parliament robes, with a scepter in her hand, as a queen, crowned with an open crown" (Erickson 179). Certainly Deborah outranked Jezebel, but the identification involved Elizabeth in a certain amount of compromise. Deborah, according to medieval tradition, was raised up to lead Israel because the men of Israel had neglected to govern the country properly. Her prowess as a military leader was a reproach to Israelite men. This interpretation was familiar to Tudor England, as clergyman Thomas Becon's exasperated prayer makes clear:

Ah, Lord! To take away the empire from a man, and give it to a woman, seemeth to be an evident token of thine anger towards us Englishmen (Hibbert 66).

John Knox's The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women takes the same view of the Deborah story; and although the tract was directed against Mary, it was published in 1558, the year of Mary's death, thus being "just in time to offend Elizabeth" (McNeill 296).

For Elizabeth to accept the Deborah identification meant a tacit acceptance of her status as a second-rate ruler. Worse, it might even imply that she would do as Deborah did in the book of Judges; call in a man on the scene as quickly as possible. Deborah chose Barak and allowed him to take most of her glory, and plenty of English nobles would have been happy to do the same for the Queen. King Philip of Spain pointed out that it would be better for

England if Elizabeth "would take a consort who might relieve her of those labors which are only fit for men" (Hibbert 66). John Knox, promptly reversing himself, labelled Elizabeth's reign an "extraordinary dispensation" (Hibbert 176) from God, but still thought it best that a man aid the divinely appointed queen.

Elizabeth apparently had no such intent. She consistently rejected every offer of a consort, and she never presented herself as a stop-gap measure. Rather than searching for another biblical parallel, she shrewdly claimed Henry's own favorite identification: the David of England. The first hint of this comes surprisingly early, in Elizabeth's translation of Psalm 13, done while she was still in her teens. The psalm identifies her with David in his call for revenge against his enemies (Hannay, "'Doo What Men May Sing'" 160).

Elizabeth had plenty of help. In "'Princes You as Men Must Dy'" Margaret P. Hannay points out that in the Huguenot commentaries on the psalms, the parallels between Elizabeth and David and the Catholics and the Philistines were standard (30), used by almost every commentator with political interests. Elizabeth strengthened the identification later in her life, when she began to refer to herself by the masculine pronoun.

Mary Sidney herself uses the David parallel in her dedication of the psalms. The paraphrase includes Mary's

revision of Sir Philip Sidney's psalms, 1-43, and Mary Sidney's own completion of the work, Psalms 44-150. The psalter was intended to be presented to Queen Elizabeth when she visited Pembroke in 1599, but the visit never materialized. The dedication, "To the Thrice Sacred Queen Elizabeth," is not included in modern collections of the psalms but is quoted by Hannay in Silent But For The Word. The ninth stanza of the dedication reads, following on a reference to David the psalmist:

For ev'n thy Rule is painted in his Raigne:  
 both cleer in right: both nigh in wrong opprest:  
 And each at length (man crossing God in vaine)  
 Possest of place, and each in peace possest.  
 Proud Philistines did interrupt his rest,  
 The foes of heav'n no lesse have beene thy foes;  
 Hee with great conquest, thou with greater blest;  
 Thou sure to winn, and hee secure to lose. (160)

Both David and Elizabeth were oppressed by their enemies; both were victorious; both were divinely appointed to the throne.

Mary Sidney's paraphrases of the psalms reflect the differing emphases of the originals. The more political of the psalms boost divine rule, point out the continuing triumph of right over wrong, and exhort the monarch to continue in God's ways. The more personal psalms, such as the traditional Penitential Psalms (Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 144), deal with the sinner's relationship to God and God's answering grace.

Recent criticism of Mary Sidney's work has dealt with the two types of psalms separately. Margaret Hannay's work

on Mary Sidney's dedication and on martial psalms such as 82, 83 and 101 emphasize Sidney's political commentary. These psalms, presented to Elizabeth along with the admonitory dedication, lay out the duties of the monarch uncompromisingly; the psalter was clearly a gift with a purpose. In her biography of Mary Sidney, Philip's Phoenix, Hannay writes:

The Sidneian Psalms were more important artistically than politically; nevertheless, they carry a subtle but highly charged political statement -- as did their Genevan models -- giving advice to the monarch about the means necessary to maintain the one true faith. In the late 1590s, Mary Sidney planned to speak for the nearly defunct alliance [the Dudley/Sidney connection] through a handsome volume of the Psalmes prepared for the queen's visit. . .  
(85)

Hannay's political criticism neglects even to mention any of the Penitential Psalms.

Under Protestant reign and in the absence of Roman Catholic penance, meditation on the psalms became the recommended road to forgiveness<sup>2</sup>. The theology of the Reformation, growing in popularity throughout the second half of the sixteenth century, made grace available without

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<sup>2</sup> "In the field of psalm-meditation. . .the Calvinists were predominant. For them, as for their model Savonarola, meditation is an adaptation to private devotion of sermon technique -- text, debate, apostrophe, and prayer. . . . If the Calvinists did not believe in the sacrament of penitence, they nonetheless encouraged the admission of personal sins and of man's fallen nature." Terence C. Cave, Devotional Poetry in France, c. 1570-1613. Cambridge: The University Press (1969), p. 39.

recourse to works, on the condition that repentance was sincere; so the sincerity of repentance became immensely important, a matter of much examination.<sup>3</sup> Luther's later writings remark that "no one is sure of the integrity of his own contrition" (Pelikan 131). What better way to assure sincerity than to use the very words of Scripture?

Since use of the Holy Spirit's own words promised true repentance, it is not surprising that paraphrases of the Penitential Psalms multiplied in the sixteenth century. The paraphrases also became more exact. Calvinistic hermeneutics emphasized the importance of the biblical text; and paraphrasers such as Mary Sidney retained a closer relationship with the actual words of the psalms.

Recent examinations of Mary Sidney's Penitential Psalms have treated them as Sidney's own penitential voice, speaking to herself. The psalms are Sidney's "exercises in private meditation, teaching herself not only how to write poetry, but ultimately, how to speak to God" (Fisken 166).

Yet it seems unlikely that, in the psalter prepared for presentation to Queen Elizabeth, the Penitential Psalms would have this purely private application. Greenblatt, in

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen J. Greenblatt writes, "Contrition becomes for Luther still more the essence of repentance, precisely because the institutional role in absolution -- the power of the keys -- has been cast away. . . . At stake, as Luther suggested in his commentary on the 51st psalm, was virtually the whole doctrine of the Reformed faith: the nature of sin, repentance, grace, justification, and worship." Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1980), p. 119.

his discussion of the nature of the Penitential Psalms, has noted that personal repentance could not be separated from public duty in the sixteenth-century mind. While "the concerns of the whole society are reached only by way of the individual" (Greenblatt 116), that arrival in society was inevitable. Proper repentance inevitably led to social action, as the Protestant martyr John Hooper made clear, using Penitential Psalm 51 for illustration:

For it is no profit to say sole faith  
justifieth, except godliness of life  
follow, as Paul saith: Si secundum  
carnem vixeritis, moriemini. He that  
hath obtained the remission of sin must  
diligently pray for the preservation of  
God's favor, as David giveth example  
unto the whole church, saying Cor mundum  
crea in me, Deus. . . (57)

For no one was this more true than for the Queen.

Elizabeth's eternal soul was at risk in her reign. Hannay points out that the Genevan exiles were "not above telling her that the dissemination of Scriptures in English and the rebuilding of the Protestant church in England are necessary for the saving of her own soul as well as her kingdom" (Philip's Phoenix 86). Elizabeth herself often referred to the divine providence that had set her on the throne, adopting as her motto "This is the Lord's doing, it is marvelous in our eyes." Such a ruler had a great responsibility to guard her own spiritual state. After all, the private pride of David, her model, had led to the punishment of all Israel. When David disobeyed God by

taking a census of his fighting men, he was given the choices of chastisement by famine, attack, or plague; but all three affected the whole land (II Samuel 24). Divine right carried with it overwhelming responsibility. Mary Sidney's Penitential Psalms, like war-psalms such as 82 and 101, should be read as advice to the monarch, a pattern for the queen's personal repentance.

Mary Sidney had access to a much wider range of translations than did Wyatt. In 1543, the year after Wyatt's death, Parliament banned the translations of both Tyndale and Coverdale; the Great Bible, oddly, remained untouched in parish churches all over England (Bruce 79). Under Edward VI, the Great Bible was reprinted twice. Cranmer's 1549 Booke of the Common Prayer was issued containing the Great Bible psalter. The Great Bible even survived Queen Mary's purge, still present in parish churches although no new printings were made. Meanwhile, outside England, the Reformers were at work on the Geneva Bible. This translation, published in 1560 and dedicated to Queen Elizabeth, superseded all others; over seventy printings were made during Elizabeth's reign, and both its language and its political sentiments echo in Mary Sidney's work. The Geneva Bible, a revision of the Great Bible based on the Hebrew texts, replaces the Latinized English of the latter with an English abounding in Hebrew idioms.

The "outspoken Calvinism of its annotations" (Bruce 93) made the Geneva Bible, despite its popularity, unsuitable for church use under Elizabeth's rule. By 1568, Archbishop Matthew Parker had finished the oversight of yet another revision of the Great Bible, improving the translation while eliminating the offensive Calvinism of the Geneva Bible. Unlike the Geneva Bible, the so-called Bishop's Bible did not refer back to the Hebrew text, using instead new Latin translations of the Hebrew. For the Psalter, however, this was a moot point. The Great Bible psalter was already so familiar to parishioners from its use in the Prayer Book that it was printed in parallel columns along with the psalms of the Bishop's Bible; by 1572, the Great Bible psalter had simply replaced the later translation in printings of the Bishop's Bible.

Mary Sidney had access not only to the Calvinistic Geneva Bible but to a number of psalters: the psalter found in the Book of Common Prayer; the metered English psalters of both Sternhold and Hopkins and Robert Crowley; the Latin psalter of Buchanan; and Anthony Gilby's English translation of Theodore de Beze's paraphrase. Both Sidneys also show the influence of Calvin's commentary on the psalms. According to William Ringler, the Sidneys made extensive use of de Beze and Coverdale's prayer book psalter, in addition to the Geneva and Bishop's Bibles (505).

Mary Sidney's paraphrase of Psalm 51, following Calvin's rules for literal interpretation, takes the historical situation of David seriously. Unlike Wyatt, Sidney leaves God firmly in the heavens and addresses Elizabeth as both monarch and penitent; and the 56-line paraphrase remains much closer to the biblical psalm than do Wyatt's 82 lines. The poem begins by giving Elizabeth a very Reformed model of God's grace:

O Lord, whose grace no limits comprehend;  
     Sweet Lord, whose mercies stand from measure free  
 To me that grace, to me that mercy send...

This limitless and free grace is much more explicitly Protestant even than the Geneva Bible's "multitude of compassions" (51:1) or the Bishop's Bible rendering, "great goodness." Mary Sidney follows it with a Calvinistic statement of complete corruption, not softening the confession of the original text as Wyatt does:

And wipe O Lord, my sins from sinful me  
     O cleanse, O wash my foul iniquity:  
 Cleanse still my spots, still wash away my stainings,  
 Till stains and spots in me leave no remainings.

The next stanza of the paraphrase drives the point home; no minimizing of sin for Elizabeth:

For I, alas, acknowledging do know  
     My filthy fault, my faulty filthiness  
 To my soul's eye uncessantly doth show.

Not only is the corruption complete, but the conscience has an unblocked and constant view of it.

Although this may not seem as comforting as Wyatt's minimization of fault, both Sidneys were familiar with the

commentaries of Calvin; and Calvin observes, in his commentary on Psalm 51:1-3:

...since [David] layeth his wickedness open, and expresseth flatly that they cannot otherwise be done away but if God succour him with the immeasurable store of his compassions, he not a little increaseth the heinousness of his own fault. For there is a covert matching of contraries between them and the multitude of his offenses (199).

In other words, the worse the sin, the better the grace. Both paraphrases, Wyatt's and Sidney's, seek for forgiveness, but in entirely different ways: Wyatt in the courtly manner, minimizing sin and making excuses; Sidney, with the ironclad theological assurance of Calvin that taking full responsibility for sin will result in the disbursement of God's limitless grace. Wyatt was addressing a fickle monarch who had to be convinced that his fault was not serious; Elizabeth, as penitent, is addressing the God of mercy and grace, who delights to pour out forgiveness on the truly repentant.

It is notable that, unlike Wyatt, Sidney transforms the "sinne" (singular) of verse 3 in a generalized guilt and filthiness. Elizabeth had no single outstanding sin; Sidney highlights a general sort of depravity instead, a Calvinistic pessimism over the natural state of the soul which contrasts to Wyatt's more Catholic focus on specific acts.

It may also be the Calvinistic influence that eliminates from Sidney's paraphrase the idea that the

penitent's sin was against God only. Wyatt retains "To thee alone, to thee have I trespassed"; Sidney eliminates the Geneva Bible's "onely" altogether. Out of

Against thee, against thee onely have I sinned, & done  
evil in thy sight (vs. 4)

she makes

Which done to thee, to thee I doe confesse,  
Just judge, true witness...

Wyatt, as we have seen, declined to draw, from the last verses of Psalm 51, any conclusion about the effect of a ruler's sin on the entire nation. Sidney expands those very verses, preparing the way for her own conclusions by refusing to state that any sin of the ruler could be against God alone. Indeed, the rest of the stanza supports her stern view of the monarch's responsibility:

...that for righteousness,  
Thy doom may pass against my guilt awarded,  
Thy evidence for truth may be regarded.

Sidney shifts the focus of the biblical text -- God's action must be justified -- and centers on a national concern. When the monarch admits complete original corruption, the nation will follow in respecting God's truth. This is a matter of national well-being, not merely of private repentance.

With this as background, Sidney goes on to turn David's brief statement of original sin into another entire stanza on complete corruption. Wyatt's paraphrase used God's forgiveness as a refrain; Sidney's, seeking that same

forgiveness, uses the penitent's total unworthiness. Where the Geneva Bible reads, concisely, "Beholde, I was borne in iniquitie, and in sinne hathe my mother conceiued me" (51:5), the Sidneian Psalter says

My mother, lo! when I began to be,  
 Conceiving me, with me did sin conceive:  
 And as with living heat she cherished me,  
 Corruption did like cherishing receive.

Fisken calls this a "striking portrait of frustrated maternal energy that is not only helpless to save the child from sin, but actually generates the child's fate" (178). When the child is Elizabeth and Anne Boleyn the mother, the stanza takes on political dimensions as well. Anne Boleyn was executed for her lust, a possible interpretation of "living heat." Perhaps Mary Sidney is warning her sovereign to take extra care for her spiritual state, considering her tarnished ancestry. A child born of such a reputedly lascivious mother should be scrupulous in pursuing "inward truth." In addition, since questions over Elizabeth's paternity persisted throughout her reign, she was forced to prove herself worthy of the crown in a way unusual for hereditary princes.

This stanza has extreme "deniability." David's meaning in the 51st Psalm is preserved, even if Mary Sidney has paraphrased it pointedly for presentation to Elizabeth. It is interesting to note that Sir Thomas Wyatt simply writes

For I myself, lo, thing most unstable,  
 Formed in offence, conceived in like case,  
 Am naught but sin from my nativity. (ll. 456-459)

in an echo of the Geneva Bible.

Gary F. Waller finds, in an analysis of the psalms paraphrased by Philip Sidney, a "tension between the moral and theological drives of Calvinist piety and the aesthetic doctrines of courtly philosophy, doctrines which ultimately rest on anti-Calvinist principles" (24). In Mary Sidney, this tension is lacking. Unlike the courtly Wyatt, she does not mitigate the complete corruption implied by this image; her Calvinism, already made clear by her use of the Geneva annotations, allows her to portray complete corruption and inability as well as unlimited free grace.

Sidney even emphasizes her statement of total corruption by drawing, as a contrast, a picture of God's holy demands:

But lo, thy love to purest good doth cleave,  
And inward truth which hardly else discerned,  
My trewand soul in thy hid school hath learned.

Here Sidney changes the emphasis of the Geneva Bible considerably. The Geneva text of verse 6 reads,

Behold, thou lovest truth in the inward affections:  
therefore has thou taught me wisdom in the secret of  
mine heart.

The accompanying annotation turns this from a statement of fact into yet another admission of culpability:

He confesseth that God, who loveth pureness of heart,  
may justly destroy man, who of nature is a sinner, much  
more him, whom he had instructed in his heavenly  
wisdom.

Sidney phrases it more as a solution; a return to that inward truth and purest good can compensate for natural

corruption. In this she follows the Sternhold and Hopkins psalter, which calls the "heavenly wisdom" an instrument of conversion:

It is too manifest alas,  
     that first I was conceived in sin:  
 Yea of my mother so borne was,  
     and yet vile wretch remain therein.  
 Also behold Lord thou dost love,  
     the inward truth of a pure heart:  
 Therefore thy wisdom from above,  
     thou hast revealed me to convert.

Like Sternhold and Hopkins, Sidney focuses on remedies for sin, not on minimizing the offense.

The plea for cleansing which follows, introduced by "then," seems dependent on the truth revealed in the previous stanza. Once the sinner has understood this wisdom, God can cleanse her; light leads to more light.

Then as self to lepers hast assign'd,  
     With hyssop, Lord, thy Hyssop, purge me so:  
 And that shall cleanse the lepr'y of my mind;  
     Make over me thy mercy's streams to flow,  
     So shall my whiteness scorn the whitest snow.

The reference to sin as a fatal disease (Sidney has obviously read the Geneva Bible footnote, which refers the reader back to Leviticus 4:6) appears not only in Calvin but in the more strictly Calvinistic Puritans. A disease cannot be healed by the sufferer; it requires the aid of a physician, just as the sinner is unable to repent without the aid of the Holy Spirit, or as Sidney puts it, "thy Hyssop."

In the next stanza, Sidney introduces the idea of a "register" of sins, a New Testament idea (Col. 2:14) also

emphasized by Calvin. The Geneva Bible's "Hide thy face from my sinnes, and put away all my iniquities" becomes

Thy ill-pleas'd eye from my misdeeds avert:  
 Cancell the registers my sins contain:

with its unmistakable legal overtones. This is most appropriate for a ruler's repentance, reminiscent of Jesus' parables in Matt. 18:21-35; as the ruler enforces law, she must also remember the law that is over her. The point is emphasized by the regal overtones of the next couplet:

Create in me a pure, clean, spotless heart:  
 Inspire a spirit where love of right may reign.

"Love of right" is a kingly virtue that parallels the "study on vertue" in Psalm 101, the portrait of the ideal ruler. The introduction of "reign" to expand the Geneva Bible's "within me" brings this ideal ruler into view again. Love of right must reign in the ruler, as the ruler reigns justly over the people.

The biblical David promises that as a result of God's forgiveness, he will "teach thy ways unto the wicked," with the result that "sinners shall be converted unto thee" (51:13). Mary Sidney again puts this into terms of rulership:

So I to them a guiding hand will be,  
 Whose faulty feet have wandered from thy way  
 And turn'd from sin will make return to thee,  
 Whom, turn'd from thee, sin erst had led astray.

The royal "guiding hand" is, in this stanza, not guiding the wicked or sinners -- the godless -- but rather those who "have wandered" and "turn'd." Mary Sidney seems to have in

mind heretics, rather than sinners. In the sixteenth century, heretics were by definition "wanderers," those who had once seen the truth and then drifted away from it. It could be that Sidney is here encouraging Elizabeth to take a stronger hand in "guiding" Catholics back to the church; the Sidneys were strongly pro-Protestant, and reportedly did not think Elizabeth's efforts at reformation comprehensive enough (Hannay, Philip's Phoenix 90).

In any case, the stanza differs tremendously from Wyatt's paraphrase of the same verses. Rather than emphasizing the benefits to God, Sidney emphasizes the effects of the penitent's action on other sinners. In keeping with this, the praise of God is transformed into the praise of truth:

So shall my tongue be raised  
To praise thy truth, enough can not be praised.

The praise of God's law, here as in the second stanza, will encourage those under this penitent's rule to adhere to it.

Where Wyatt continued by emphasizing the uselessness of outward actions unaccompanied by a loyal heart, Sidney takes the opportunity for an anti-Catholic note:

For bleeding fuel for thy altar's flame,  
To gain thy grace what boots it me to bring?  
Burnt-offerings are to thee no pleasant thing.  
The sacrifice that God will hold respected,  
Is the heart-broken soul, the spir't dejected.

The Geneva Bible simply observes, "For thou desirest no sacrifice, though I would give it; thou delightest not in burnt offering." Sidney's juxtaposition of "bleeding," a

common adjective used to describe Christ's justifying sacrifice, with "gain thy grace" suggests the Catholic insistence on transubstantiation, the actual partaking of Christ's body in order to obtain grace. In contrast is Calvin's faith-alone, the "heart-broken soul" that God will respect.

In her last stanza, Mary Sidney makes explicit the link between the ruler's penitence and the fate of the nation. Verse 18 in the Geneva Bible reads, "Be favourable unto Zion for thy good pleasure: build the walls of Jerusalem." The biblical David here recognizes the link between his own fate and the fate of his city. Because he is contrite and repentant, Jerusalem can prosper. Anthony Gilby's popular translation of de Beza's paraphrase spells out the causal connection:

Finally my God, let not these my sins too much  
displease thee, that they should hinder the course of  
thy free mercy towards Sion, but continue  
notwithstanding to build the walls of thy city  
Jerusalem.

This, like Wyatt's version of Psalm 51, adheres to Augustinian and Lutheran systems of doctrine, in which Zion and Jerusalem were interpreted spiritually as the church. The Geneva Bible follows Wyatt in spiritualizing the text; the annotation reads, "He prayeth for the whole Church, because through his sin it was in danger of God's judgment."

However, Calvin's principles of literal interpretation demanded that David's situation as head of a real nation be

given proper weight. Israel under David, once taken literally, became the pattern of England, Scotland, or Geneva under a godly ruler. The parallel to Elizabeth and England is direct. As a result, Mary Sidney writes,

Lastly, O Lord, how so I stand or fall,  
 Leave not thy loved Sion to embrace:  
 But with thy favor build up Salem's wall,  
 And still in peace, maintain that peaceful place.

Sidney makes good use of the literal meaning of "Jerusalem," "city of peace." England was the "peaceful place" which Elizabeth was to maintain. Yet Sidney's faith in Elizabeth's sincere repentance seems to be even smaller than a mustard seed, for the idea of England dependent on the Queen's "standing or falling" seems definitely distasteful to her. Rather, the penitent ruler should implore God to overlook her faults when deciding on the fate of her country. God's final acceptance of the people's sacrifices, glossed in the Geneva Bible as "just and lawful, applied to their right end, with the exercise of faith and repentance," occurs when Salem is at peace, regardless of the ruler's repentance:

Then shalt thou turn a well-accepting face  
 To sacred fires with offered gifts perfumed:  
 Till ev'n whole calves on altars be consumed.

Again, where Wyatt eliminates the "whole bullocks" of the last line of the psalm and turns the sacrifices entirely into good deeds, Sidney follows Calvin's rules by allowing the literal sense to stand.

Mary Sidney uses Psalm 51 to admonish Queen Elizabeth, just as she gives the psalms of kingship as a model for the queen to follow. Elizabeth's spiritual state was not a private affair; it was of immense importance to all her subjects. Elizabeth's righteousness would avert God's wrath from England, while her sin might well invoke it.

Elizabeth's repentance was a model which the country would follow. And the psalm makes clear to the Queen that, if she does not intend to repent, she should at least pray that her country will be spared the judgment she herself will suffer.

The Penitential Psalms cannot be divided from the others in the psalter and labelled as Mary Sidney's private experience. Rather, they instruct Queen Elizabeth in yet another area of politics: presenting herself spotless before the heavenly monarch. In this way at least, Sidney and Wyatt are not so far apart; the words of faith and the words of politics still mingle.

Throughout the sixteenth century, the psalms retained their character as guides to repentance. The act of paraphrasing recognized the personal impact of the psalms, especially the seven traditionally used for penitence.

Yet during the sixteenth century a major shift occurred. The Augustinian/Lutheran view of the effects of Scripture, where Scripture has no literal meaning but rather meanings brought to each individual by the work of the Spirit, was largely replaced by a Reformed, Calvinistic

hermeneutic that insisted on the importance of the literal setting and original meaning of each biblical text. At the same time, the use of Scripture became immeasurably more important, since man, depraved and unable to repent without God's aid, was in vital need of the Word to draw him to righteousness.

So while paraphrases flourished, they became less paraphrastic. Versions of the psalms were now available for everyone's hands, but they retained much more closely the sense of the original text. References to Zion, Jerusalem, and burnt offerings were not automatically spiritualized, and man's corruption was given its full weight. Placing the paraphrases of Wyatt and Sidney within this framework clearly illustrates not only the linguistic shift -- the growing importance of the actual words of the text -- but also a shift in use of the psalms, from courtly appeal to Calvinistic admonition.

## APPENDIX A

## TIME CHART

	POLITICAL	THEOLOGICAL	PHILOSOPHICAL & LITERARY
1415	Henry V wins Agincourt		
1422	Accession of Henry VI		
1456		Printing of the Gutenberg Bible	
1457		Death of Valla	
1461	Edward IV wins throne from Henry VI		
1470	Henry VI regains throne		
1471	Edward IV regains throne		
1476			Caxton's printing press set up at Westminster
1483	Accession of Richard III		
1485	Accession of Henry VII		
1509	Accession of Henry VIII		
1513		Luther begins Lectures on the Psalms	
1516		Erasmus' Greek NT	
1517		Luther's 95 Theses	

- 1518 Erasmus' Ratio verae theologicae
- 1522 Luther's German NT
- 1525 Tyndale's English NT
- 1528 Sir Thomas More attacks Tyndale NT
- 1529 Removal of Cardinal Wolsey
- 1534 Great Schism
- 1535 More executed Coverdale's Bible  
Urbanus Rhegius' How to Preach...
- 1536 England and Wales united Death of Erasmus  
First edition of Calvin's  
Institutes
- 1539 Great Bible
- 1541 Death of Urbanus Rhegius  
French edition of Calvin's  
Institutes
- 1549 Thomas Wyatt's  
Penitential  
Psalms
- 1550 Henry Smith born
- 1551 Council of Trent (second session)
- 1552 Second Act of Uniformity Spenser born
- 1553 Accession of Mary  
Act repealed
- 1555 Lancelot Andrewes born
- 1558 Accession of Elizabeth I
- 1559 Expanded edition of Calvin's  
Institutes
- 1560 Great Bible
- 1562 Council of Trent (third session)

- 1564 Term "Puritan"  
first used Shakespeare and  
Galileo born.  
Deaths of Calvin,  
Michelangelo.
- 1575 Puritan failure in  
Parliament to reform  
Church of England
- 1582 Gregory Martin attacks English  
translations  
Rhemes New Testament
- 1587 Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots
- 1588 Defeat of Spanish Armada
- 1589 William Fulke's Defense
- 1590 Spenser, The  
Faerie Queen
- 1591 Death of Henry Smith
- 1593 Probable beginning  
of composition, Mary  
Sidney's Psalms
- 1595 Sir Philip Sidney,  
Defense of Poesie
- 1597 Frances Bacon,  
Essays,  
Civil and Moral.
- 1599 Probable completion,  
Mary Sidney's Psalms
- 1600 Benjamin Keckerman  
"Rhetoricae Ecclesiasticae..."
- 1601 Essex's unsuccessful  
revolt against Elizabeth I
- 1602 William Perkins, Workes
- 1603 Accession of James I/VI

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