Music for a King

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TWO

Some Metrical Psalm Styles

I. SIR THOMAS WYATT

In chapter 2 of his essay on the Sublime, or the Peri Hupsous, Longinus used the term bathos, or “depth,” to describe exaltation or elevation in writing. In his parody of Longinus, the Peri Bathos, Alexander Pope borrowed the term and inverted its usage, applying it to sublimely bad poetry that revealed “the true Profound; the Bottom, the End, the Central Point; Vivacité de pesanteur, or (as an English Author calls it) an ‘Alacrity of sinking.’” Pope was interested more in the narrative and logical qualities of “sinking” than in its stylistic qualities (in the sense of technical performance), but the two are related. We might see the connection by looking at some notorious lines from Wordsworth’s “Vaudracour and Julia”:

To a lodge that stood
Deep in a forest, with leave given, at the age
Of four-and twenty summers he withdrew;
And thither took with him his motherless Babe,
And one domestic for their common needs,
An aged woman. It consoled him here
To attend upon the orphan, and perform
Obsequious service to the precious child,

Which, after a short time, by some mistake
Or indiscretion of the Father, died.²

This is a masterly fusion of narrative and stylistic bathos. The last line is alarming for a number of reasons connected with its prose logic, such as the offhand dismissal of a character who had seemed important, and the vagueness as to the cause of death, compared with the precision of detail above ("with leave given," "four-and-twenty summers," and so forth). However, its stylistic features are equally responsible for this effect of bathos. If we can pass over the low burlesque of "some mistake or indiscretion," we might see that the final verb is surprising largely because of its distance from its grammatical subject. This long suspension is increased logically by the use of a less emphatic subordinate clause for the announcement of the death and rhythmically by the presence of the two parallel and dependent phrases between the pronoun and its verb. Without the numerous pauses within the lines, the verb would not have its impact. Finally, we should note the contrast between the polysyllabic abstractions dominating the second half of the passage and the monosyllabic final verb, which is not abstract and which has an emphasis of its own because of the repeated consonant. In all, the lines have a self-canceling quality because of the contrast between the calm and serious tone Wordsworth desires and the disconcerting and pert tone he finally achieves.

In a poetry more strictly formal than this, poetry that is rhymed or stanzaic or both, the poet can create effects of bathos merely by abusing the form. The form itself, apart from the narrative line, can provide a structure for him to sink in. Sir Thomas Wyatt's psalms show him to be an artist with a taste for this sort of bathos, which is perhaps more fascinating intellectually than its counterpart of bathos in narration, because it is freed from the restraints of a coherent sequence of action. This bathos is first evident in Wyatt's rhyming. His terza and ottava rima stanzas, in a language not comparatively rich in rhymes, force him to adopt a number of desperate expedients, of which the most obvious is his closing a line with an exclamation or qualifier, usually one ending in a vowel and consonant for which rhymes are common. (The italics are mine.)

Thus drye I upp among my foes in woe,
That with my fall do rise and grow with all,
And me bysett evin now, I am so,
With secrett trapps to troble my penaunce,
Sum do present to my weping yes, lo,
The chere, the manere, bealte and countenaunce
Off her whose loke, alas, did mak my blynd.

(Ps. 6:79–86)

My hert, my mynd is wytherd up like haye,
By cawse I have forgot to take my brede,
My brede off lyff, the word of trowth, I saye . . . .

(Ps. 102:13–15)

Let Israell trust unto the lord alway,
For grace and favour arn his propertie;
Plenteous rannzome shall com with hym, I say. . . .

(Ps. 130:28–30)

In each case, the bathetic effect is the same: the exclamations of emo­tional tension conflict with the manifestly practical function of the phrases. Thus the phrases have, on the stylistic level, a self-cancelling quality that is analagous to the narrative self-cancelling we noticed in the Wordsworth passage. Wyatt has two contradictory impulses, in trying to drum up emotions while killing time. Fortunately, Wyatt’s amatory verse does not rely so heavily on the los and I says; the size of the design, or incomplete revision, might be responsible for his carelessness in the psalms.

Wyatt as often twists a poem’s logic in order to supply his needed rhyme words. Consider the start of Psalm 6:

O Lord, sins in my mowght thy myghty name
Sufferth it sellff my lord to name and call,
Here hath my hert hope taken by the same;

All references to Wyatt’s psalms and lyrics are from Collected Poems, which is fully identified on p. 17, n. 42. Psalm and line numbers appear in the text. I was able to obtain the more recent Collected Poems, ed. Kenneth Muir and Patricia Thom­son (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1969), only after this book was in press. However, this newer edition makes virtually no significant changes in the passages I quote, although the psalms are now numbered consecutively. There is also a complete editorial apparatus which is quite helpful.
That the repentance wych I have and shall
May at thi hand seke marcy as the thing,
Only confort of wrecchid synners all;
Wherby I dare with humble bymonyng
By thy goodnes of the this thing require:
Chastyse me not for my deserving,
According to thy just conceyvid Ire.

(1–10)

In order to find the rhymes he needs here, Wyatt creates a great
tangle of language in which most of the important nouns and verbs
have their own shadows, vague forms moving along with the real
things. As nearly as I can puzzle out the first three lines, David says
that his heart has taken hope because God’s Name has allowed Itself
to be uttered from his, David’s, mouth. The first two lines are gram­
matically dependent upon the third, which makes a nice contrast
between the true heart and the (formerly) false mouth. But when, at
the end of the third line, the poet forgets he began with sins (since)
and creates an anacoluthon by adding by the same, he seems less to
be emphasizing the relation between the Name and his own mouth
than he is making a convenient rhyme. This suspicion is confirmed
by the fact that Wyatt usually employs conventional grammar. Thing
brings the fifth line to a lame stop with a vague appositive that con­
veniently rhymes with bymonyng. One manuscript reads, “May at
thi hand seke in the same thing,” which makes the next line a more
coherent direct object for seke but which still has a clumsy repetition
in the phrase "in the same thing."4 Thing, one of Wyatt’s favorite
fillers, returns in line eight to push require out to the end and seems
to be unnecessary since require, in the obsolete sense of “ask or re­
quest one to do something,” indicates that another statement, speci­
fically a question, will follow. Finally, if chastisement is what David
deserves, then clearly it is just conceyvid.

One could claim that Wyatt is only indicating in his syntax the
agonized confusion of a sinner receiving his just deserts, but Wyatt’s
David talks this way even when he is hopeful or exultant. Ultimately

4 Collected Poems, p. 276, n. 201. Wyatt’s use of thing as a metrical filler is so
consistent in his psalms that I would be reluctant to agree with Donald M. Fried­
mam’s view that the term denotes a specific state or attitude (see “The ‘Thing’ in
Wyatt’s Mind,” EJC, 16 [1966], 375–81). In his psalms at least, Wyatt’s thing seems
to have about as much meaning as his I say, lo, or eke.
the padding seems to have no purpose beyond filling out the *terza rima*, and if one reads hurriedly or, like Wyatt's audience, with an eye turned to the moral sentence and subdued sensuality (neither of which is likely to invite the modern reader), most of the stuffing goes on quietly enough. Yet even an inattentive reader is awakened when Wyatt takes more desperate measures:

> He dare importune the lord on every syde;
> (For he knowth well to mercy is ascrybid
> Respectles labour) Importune crye and call:
> And thus begynth his song therwithall.

(Prol. 102:29–32)

As William Carlos Williams says in his poem "When Structure Fails Rhyme Attempts to Come to the Rescue."

> He
> does what he can, with
> unabated phlegm,
> ahem!

The abruptness and patent convenience of Wyatt's last modifier, and its virtual failure to add anything to the sense of the passage, would be more typical of the deliberate flounderings of Ogden Nash.

Two observations conclude these remarks on padding and rhyme in Wyatt's psalms. To position his rhymes, Wyatt is especially fond of padding with particles, conjunctive adverbs, and relatives in particular. In addition to these colorless terms, he uses in the middle of lines the same stock emotive phrases he uses at the ends, the *lo, alas, I say*, and so forth. Since examples of both of these may be seen readily in the quotations above and below, there is no need for fuller illustration here. These techniques of padding for the sake of rhyme may have recommended themselves to later psalmists and poets—Sackville, for example—although there is no reason to suspect that as techniques they are so sophisticated that later poets could not have discovered them for themselves.⁵

⁵ To Wyatt's credit, his psalms may be (as Kenneth Muir suggests, in *Life and Letters of Sir Thomas Wyatt* [Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1963], p. 257) only a first draft; but this fact (if it is) does not seem to have qualified their reception or imitation. Muir also prints (pp. 257–58, n. 9) some of Wyatt's revisions for
It would be an oversimplification to say that Wyatt's filler is present only to satisfy the rhymes of his *terza rima*, for it also helps satisfy a metrical pattern. I have chosen to focus on rhyme rather than meter as the chief benefit because of the difficulty of the rhyme scheme and the regularity of the meter. But one could make out a case for the filler as a purely metrical necessity, particularly when it is used in the middle of lines, where Wyatt is struggling to keep the accent. Perhaps because of this filler, Wyatt's management of the pentameter line is fumbling, and nowhere in his psalms do his rhythms have the control, clarity, and flexibility that they have in his satires.

With all their visible signs of hammering and patching necessary to stay close to the limits of five stresses and ten syllables, the Penitential Psalms should lend some strength to the idea that the erratic rhythms of Wyatt's lyrics are probably intentional. As the psalms demonstrate, only a poet who had a fairly clear conception of iambic pentameter could perform such obvious tricks to get it. The result is a set of prologues and psalms almost entirely iambic, with the conventional substitution of trochees. Occasionally these will come two deep: "Whereby I dare with humble bymonynge/ By thy goodnesse off the this thing require..." (Ps. 6:7–8). But the accentual rhythms of Wyatt's lyrics, the cadences that modern readers find so intriguing metrically—"Wherewithall, unto the hertes forrest he flieth"—give way in the psalms to rhythms that are based upon the syllable-stress meters that dominate the poetry of the coming generation. Although Wyatt's psalms are not usually brought into the definition of his role in the rise of English meter, they do suggest a crucial turning toward foot prosody, or to designate it more accurately, pedestrian meters. Recall-

Psalm 38, which show Wyatt casting for rhymes and inserting words to get metrically complete lines. In *Humanism and Poetry in the Early Tudor Period* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), H. A. Mason also discusses the possibility of revision in Wyatt's psalms; and makes in addition many valuable comments on the literary and spiritual background of the psalms. Mason finds much to praise, but points out that Wyatt's psalms are often incoherent, drastically limited, and technically clumsy.

For example, "To my mind it is impossible to believe that Wyatt could not quite easily have made his irregular lines regular had he wished."—D. W. Harding, "The Rhythmical Intention in Wyatt's Poetry," *Scrutiny*, 14 (December 1946): 98. Robert O. Evans, in "Some Aspects of Wyatt's Metrical Technique," *JEGP*, 53 (1954): 197–213, argues with some logic that through study of Wyatt's technique of elision we must conclude that Wyatt was working for regular iambic lines.
ing the popularity of Wyatt’s psalms, we shall have to admit that they could have had a shaping force very nearly as great as his lyrics, even though these are admittedly more attractive to the modern historian of English prosody. In Wyatt’s psalms the relation of prosodical regularity to meaning is especially evident in the lines which are logically redundant; here Wyatt rarely varies his iambic pattern. The rest of the time his variations are quite conventional. (Even if his psalms might have a metric full of sophisticated innovations that we simply are not hearing—an unlikely hypothesis, I think—the literary influence of those novelties would have been obliterated by the metrical primitivism of later psalters, the Old Version in particular.)

Whatever his metrical practices, Wyatt is most closely related to later psalmodists in his use of rhyme and syntax. It is immediately apparent that the padding Wyatt adds for rhyme’s sake has a shaping effect on his syntax. Several paragraphs above, I noted that Wyatt frequently stuffs a line with relative pronouns, relative clauses, and various redundant verb structures. By suspending the predication of his sentences, this padding creates many periodic rhythms, most of them handled with a heavy competence: “let by graunt apere/ That to my voyce thin eres do well entend” (Ps. 130:7–8).

Hardly Elizabethan grace; but the emphatic close on the verb does make the tone more serious. What the padding does more often, however, is create something like a periodic structure in reverse, in which the logical bulk of an idea, usually the predication, is given early in a group of lines, and its force then allowed to drain off in weak modifiers. This method can yield powerful effects in meditative passages, for it lends itself well to a slow and trailing motion of thought:

Oh dyverse ar the chastysinges off syn!
In mete, in drynk, in breth that man doth blow,
In slepe, in wach, in fretying styll within,
That never soffer rest unto the mynd;
Filld with offence, that new and new begyn
With thowsand £eris the hert to strayne and bynd.

(Ps. 32:65–70)

7 Of course, one could maintain that Wyatt’s ineptitude was his sophistication, rough meters being a familiar item in the Renaissance poetic toolbox. Thus one would expect them in Wyatt’s satires; but they are fairly smooth. Making a case for their sophisticated use in his psalms seems rather a modern line of reasoning, only possible through our historical hindsight.
A rambling motion is created by the prepositional modifiers that conclude the lines in the middle of this passage, and the lines show a happy fusion of poetic technique and slow reasoning. The method is less successful when Wyatt tries to become more intense. At the close of Psalm 102, when David comes to accept God's final power, there is a shift from lines of heavy strength into two final lines of turgid and sluggish movement:

But thou thy selff the selff remaynist well
That thou wast erst, and shalt thi yeres extend.
Then sins to this there may nothing rebell,
The greatest comfort that I can pretend
Is that the childerne off thy servantes dere
That in thy word ar gott shall withoutw end
Byfore thy face be stablisht all in fere.

(85–91)

The syntax of the last three lines, each pieced out with the modifiers at the ends, establishes more limpness than submission. It is notable that although these modifiers may be placed as they are for their rhymes, the lines are run-on, and there are no necessary stops to emphasize the rhymes. Even without the effect of forced rhymes, the modifiers allow the lines to sink from within, as from a leak.

These qualities of bathos or sinking in Wyatt's poetic style correspond to a bathos in his picture of the relations between man and God. Piety for Wyatt most often takes the form of self-pity, and that is the quality of the Psalms that he has chosen to stress most heavily, just as Sternhold and Hopkins have chosen to stress violence. (Actually, the decision to emphasize self-pity was Aretino's rather than Wyatt's, but clearly Wyatt concurred in it.)

Wyatt's self-pity is complex, working on several levels. To illustrate this, we might explore his Psalm 6, as a coherent dramatic entity, and see how Wyatt relates David's self-pity to his sense of righteousness:

I stopp myn eris with help of thy goodness;
And for I fele it comith alone of the
That to my hert these foes have non acces . . . .

(94–96)
But this David is not entirely confident of his rectitude, for accompanying it is an equally strong sense of culpability:

Chastise me not for my deserving,  
Accordyng to thy just conceyvید ore.  
O Lord, I dred; and that I did not dred  
I me repent and evermore desyre  
The, the to dred.  

(9–13)

At first it would seem that simultaneous convictions of one’s righteousness and guilt do not go together, but Wyatt can reconcile them. David can ask God to make him stop his self-mortification:

Reduce, revyve my sowle: be thow the Leche,  
And reconcyle the great hatred and sryfe  
That it hath tane agaynste the flesshe . . . .  

(46–48)

By doing this, God would conveniently affirm both David’s guilt and righteousness. Wyatt also suggests that David’s righteousness is a product of his guilt by having him say in effect to God, “Rather than chastise me for my crimes, you should pity me, because my repentance is so severe.” (The argument is not unfamiliar to any teacher who has discovered a student cheating on an examination.) As Wyatt handles it, this plea often sounds like a threat: “But thow, O Lord, how longe after this sorte/ Fforbearest thou to see my myserye?” (40–41). It is not the self-consciousness of this statement that undermines the repentance and desire for reconciliation, but the fact that the speaker has made his suffering an end in itself. His suffering alone, or his awareness of it, presumably justifies God’s mercy. The whole question has a lurking bathos in the direct object, my myserye.

If we step back from the immediate context of the Psalms, we can see that much of this pattern of rejection and self-pity also manifests itself in Wyatt’s lyrics. As Wyatt frequently tells his mistress, “It is only my love for you that causes this pain”:

I love an othre, and thus I hate my self.  
(“I fynde no peace,” l. 11)

. . . with good will I lost my librentye  
To followe her wiche causith all my payne.  
(“My love toke scorne,” ll. 3–4)
In Wyatt's psalms this sort of conflict can work on two levels. It applies to David the lover of Bathsheba: "My love for you has made me hate myself, insofar as I have abandoned my masculine integrity." And it applies as well to David the lover of God: "My love for You has made me hate myself, at least insofar as I have abandoned Your laws to satisfy my gross appetites." The bathos sets in as we move from these attitudes to the complaints that come out of them. The profane lover's complaint of his misery has a pleasing inconsequence, but in the sacred lover's mouth the same complaint—"I have forgotten part of my human nature!"—is only bathetic. The offenses and complaints are hardly similar.

To conclude these remarks on Wyatt's psalms, I would like to offer a proposal relating Wyatt's style and his self-pity. The difficulties that Wyatt faces in controlling the technical features of his verse are related to his chief theme, the outcast and imperfect soul seeking reconciliation, which is also one of Herbert's chief themes. Yet in his psalms Wyatt often forgets the subject of his address, that is, his God, and begins talking instead to himself, with all the hums and haws of most talkers-aloud. Similarly, he often forgets the object of his address and instead begins talking about himself or, rarely without ill effect, begins chewing on a metaphor for its own or the rhyme's sake, regardless of the dramatic context. Either way, he is liable to drop into the bathos we noted earlier. In short, it is Wyatt's dubious achievement to have devised a way by which his psalms could demonstrate, in their fumbling techniques, the enfeebled emotional state they describe.8

II. THE OLD VERSION

Although Sternhold and Hopkins (and the other contributors to the Anglo-Genevan psalter) may have won all the plumes for bathos in

8 Wyatt's psalms were probably read by his contemporaries just for that self-pity. Surrey, for example, praised the way that Wyatt

dothe paynte the lyvely faythe and pure,
The stedfast hope, the swete returne to grace
Of just Davyd by parfite penytence,
Where Rewlers may se in a myrour clere
The bitter frewte of false concupiscence.

("The great Macedon," II. 7–11, in Surrey, Poems.)
lyric poetry, they still have their own strengths which are different from those of Wyatt's poetry or any other English poetry until Herbert's. Yet the weaknesses crowd them offstage; from the start the Sternhold-Hopkins psalter was a public joke as poetry. Forced rhyme and meter and wrenched syntax are not the least of the poets' offenses, and in these they show much greater ingenuity than Wyatt, who by comparison seems almost inhibited. One could exhume whole pages of examples like the following to show how bathos can be produced by careless technique:

So I supprese and wound my foes,
    that they can rise no more:
For at my feete they fall downe flat,
    I strike them all so sore.⁹

(Ps. 18:37–38)

Some of the flatness of this comes from narrative anticlimax and confusion of sequence, but the alliteration in the last two lines has a good deal of comic potential itself. Although the repetition between the second and third lines is perhaps occasioned by the mechanical necessity of the rhyme in line four, the alliteration is inspired beyond the call of necessity. The chief problem in discussing the Old Version may be to keep the psalter from seeming a comic anthology.

As for rhyming in general, the poets of the Old Version employ the same exclamations and qualifiers that Wyatt used, in perhaps greater profusion:

The rich men of his goodly gifts,
    shall feed and tast also:
And in his presence worship him
    and bow their knees full low.

(Ps. 22:29)

The stock also in the second line and the weak adverb it rhymes with are typical of Wyatt's practice, although the rhyme scheme itself is not. Rhyming on fillers at least has expediency to recommend it, but the Old Version poets can even abandon the rhyme for the expedient:

⁹ In citations from the Old Version, psalm and verse numbers (separated by a colon) appear in the text.
And many dogs do compass me,
and wicked counsel eke:
Conspire against me cursedly,
they pierce my handes and feete.

(Ps. 22:16)

As Thomas Nashe says, "a leake of indesinence, as a leake in a shippe, must needly bee stopt with what matter soever."

The above examples are taken from Sternhold, but as noted earlier, the level of poetic competence throughout the whole psalter is so remarkably even, in spite of the multiple authorship, that one could find examples of flagrantly forced rhyme by any of the contributors. Norton, for instance, begins Psalm 108:

Oh God my heart prepared is,
and eke my tongue is so:
I will advance my voyce in song,
and gevying prayse also.

Or as Kethe's God says:

As for his enemies I will clothe,
with shame for evermore:
But I will cause his crowne to shine,
more fresh then heretofore.

(Ps. 132:18)

Although the poets of the Old Version rhymed in the manner of many poets before them, including Wyatt, they also made some regressive stylistic contributions of their own. Most noticeable is their lack of awareness that the poetic line is a unit in itself. Individual lines often jump out of their stanzas because of the peculiar suggestions they make by themselves.

our God
which is exalted hie:
As with a buckler doth defend,
The earth continually.

(Ps. 47:8)

And as an Owle in desert is,
loe I am such a one:
I watch, and as a sparrow on
the house top am alone.

(Ps. 102:7)

In both cases the last lines form syntactic units that are very nearly viable on their own; they are the syntactic equivalent of dead metaphors suddenly brought to life by the context. Part of this carelessness with the lines themselves might be smoothed over by musical settings, but still we cannot disregard the lines as parts of poems. And there is ample evidence that contemporary criticism assumed that the Old Version psalms were, or should have been, poems in their own right.

Naturally it is easier to give a poetic line some unexpected syntactic life of its own if the line is not end-stopped. Thus, when the line that is not intended to stand alone syntactically suddenly does just that, the reader is left trying to balance the small phrase within the larger:

And from the Lions mouth, that would
me all in sunder shiver:
And from the horns of Unicorns
Lord safely me deliver.

(Ps. 22:21)

It is the ballad stanza, as Sternhold and Hopkins handle it, that is responsible for their peculiar and bathetic lines. There is no question that the Old Version stanzas do resemble the Child ballad stanzas, at least in the number of lines, syllables, and stresses; but here the resemblance ends, for the two conceptions of the form are entirely different. The anonymous masters of the ballad stanza conceive of their form as four separate lines, each line with something of its own to do:

Four and twenty ladies fair
Were playing at the chess,
And out then came the fair Janet,
As green as onie glass.11

The Old Version poets, on the other hand, persistently conceive of their form as a rearranged heptameter couplet. Here, too, each line has a function, each heptameter line, that is, and thus most of the quatrains logically split in two instead of in four. The syntactic consequences of this we have seen already, with the strange second and fourth lines left to hobble by themselves.

Difficulties for these poets enter when their lines are not end-stopped. This is most evident in Sternhold’s stanzas, which have only one rhyme \((a a a a)\) and are often not end-stopped, and less evident in Hopkins’s stanzas, most of which employ end-stops and alternating rhymes. We would therefore expect Sternhold to generate the greater proportion of bathetic single lines, and this he does; but Hopkins, not to be outdone, achieves his own sort of bathos in the trimeter lines by repeating the idea of the tetrameter line above and adding a rhyme:

By him I have succour at neede,
against allayne and griefe:
He is my God, with which all speede,
will hast to send reliefe.

(Ps. 42:5)

This stanza is somewhat atypical of Hopkins, who is more likely to come to a stop with his a rhyme, but it does show—I believe typically—how the habit of thinking in heptameter couplets could be retained in the ballad stanza, even with two rhymes in the middle. Although the rhymes give the stanza a greater unity than it might otherwise have, they cannot hide the fact that the trimeter lines involve duplication and often fail to advance the thought of the stanza.

The close relationship between Common Meter and the fourteener is indicated by the many versions of the Psalms (printed during and after the development of the Old Version) which were translated entirely in fourteener;\(^{12}\) and at least one version—Sir Edwin Sandys’s—used both fourteener and Common Meter. Another close relative to clumsily used Common Meter is Poulter’s Measure. Like the fourteener, this stanza was greatly popular, and although it seems to have been used for relatively few psalms it may have had some influence upon the way the poets of the Old Version regarded stanza structure.

\(^{12}\) Probably the best known was that by George Sandys.
Surrey's four translations are probably the best specimens, and his practice shows how the techniques of Poulter's Measure might have been adapted for use in Common Meter. When Surrey is not deliberately varying caesurae for emphasis, his Poulter's Measure resembles Common Meter manqué, or lacking one foot, as tinkering with his line divisions will quickly show. Here are rearrangements of the opening lines of the three psalms he completed:

Thie name, O Lorde, howe greate
is fownd before our sight!
Yt fills the earthe and spreades the ayre,
the greate workes of thie might.

Though, Lorde, to Israel
thy graces plentuous be:
I meane to such with pure intent
as fixe their trust in the . . . .

Oh Lorde, uppon whose will
dependeth my welfare,
To call uppon thy hollye name
syns daye nor night I spare . . . . 13

Many of Surrey's lines are more varied than these, but in the hands of poets less gifted, Poulter's Measure regularly falls into four short phrasal groups; and its light tail carrying the rhyme corresponds to the flimsy rhyming trimeter lines in, for example, the Common Meter stanzas of Hopkins. Both Poulter's Measure and Common Meter, for all their apparent brevity when printed in short ballad stanzas, are forms designed, as it were, for padding. They are to be distinguished from Wyatt's terza rima, which uses the padding only when necessary. Although Wyatt’s plan commits him to extraordinary limitations in rhyming, it does not commit him to a stanza structure which openly invites ugly or incoherent lines. 14 As we shall see in a moment, how-

13 As before, my text is Surrey, Poems.
14 This use of syntactic movement across line-ends is not accounted for by most statistical studies of syntax in English poetry. Josephine Miles's Eras and Modes in English Poetry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), for example, does not consider the line as a syntactic unit in relation to other syntactic units; nor for that matter do I see how the syntactic coherence of a line could be satisfactorily estimated for statistical purposes, much less the relation of a line's particular syntax to a larger syntactic pattern. There are, however, some helpful comments on this problem by William E. Baker in Syntax in English Poetry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), especially chapters 3 and 4.
However, there are several ways in which the rhythmic structure of the Common Meter differs from that of Poulter's Measure.

Consideration of stanza structure from the standpoint of syntax leads naturally to consideration of rhythmic structure within the stanza. For the ballad stanza of the Old Version, rhythmic analysis seems simple indeed, at least at first. If we read the Old Version as poetry, we find—not surprisingly—few if any variations from the prevailing iambic pattern. To stop the discussion here, however, would be premature, for the metric of the Old Version (unlike that of the psalms by Wyatt, for example, or the Sidneys) cannot be isolated satisfactorily from the context of congregational performance. The attempt to do so would, I think, be quite risky, for Englishmen of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries would not have been likely (or easily able) to ignore the sort of metrical conditioning that any long-familiar tune can give to a poem.

The exact form which that conditioning might have taken is not beyond all conjecture. Although the metric of the Old Version psalms was in fact quite simple, it was not as a consequence so dull as modern readers at times imagine. Such evidence as exists shows that even though the psalms were, unlike contemporary art songs, unvaried in tempi, they were still sung quite rapidly, as fast as hornpipes, according to the Clown in *The Winter's Tale* (IV. iii). Further, it was customary to sing one psalm to the tune of another: since most of the psalms were in Common Meter, the switching posed no difficulties. It was an art form based, like the Model T, on interchangeable parts.

For these reasons, it is not difficult to describe a matrix for the metric rhythm of the Common Meter stanza:

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15 Following the system initially set out by George L. Trager and Henry Lee Smith, Jr., in their *Outline of English Structure*, Studies in Linguistics Occasional Papers #3 (Norman, Okla., 1951; repr. Washington, D.C.: ACLS, 1956), I recognize four levels of stress and mark them as follows: primary (\*), secondary (\^), tertiary (\\), and weak (\~). Of course pitch and juncture (roughly, pause: long, #, and short, \_\_) are also factors of meaning, but ordinarily it is difficult to find poems in which these factors are the sole determinants of meaning. As a general
The third and fourth lines are, of course, identical with the first and second, and although the pattern seems, in its bare bones, susceptible of an infinite monotony, we have to recall that variations in tune and the use of rapid tempi could keep the pattern from becoming offensively dull—at least to the true believer.

The paradigm can clarify several characteristics of Old Version poetic style. First, since the settings do not always place the notes of longer time value upon the syllables receiving the metrical stress, the nominally unstressed syllables (often articles, relatives, and the like) frequently bear a weight that works against the metrical paradigm and the literal sense of the lines. Second, the usual omission of caesurae in the six-syllable lines necessarily makes it difficult for these lines to establish contrasts, antitheses, or even distinctions within their bounds. (Even Dryden and Pope, in the second lines of their couplets, rarely manage to set up balancing or opposing ideas without the use of caesurae.) Without an enforced or demanded rhythmic pause within the lines to invite a break in the thought, it is inevitable that these lines should frequently be mere fillers, stretching out the matter of the preceding eight-syllable lines. Third, the eight-syllable lines, in which all the real work of the stanza gets done, usually consist of shorter phrasal units than do the six-syllable lines. This, like the previous two points, is an important reason why the Old Version's Common Meter, though derived from "fourteeners," still differs from them considerably. Even Poulter's Measure has more flexibility in its phrasal patterns. The Old Version's Common Meter is nearly always committed

guide I have found extremely helpful the monograph by Edmund L. Epstein and Terence Hawkes, *Linguistics and English Prosody*, Studies in Linguistics Occasional Papers #7 (Buffalo: University of Buffalo Department of Anthropology and Linguistics, 1959). Needless to say these writers are hardly responsible for my scansions. Often I shall juxtapose "linguistic" scansions with "traditional" scansions as a way of showing how poets can set up tensions within the called-for meter. Herbert himself recognized at least three components of verse rhythm in "measure, tune, and time" ("Grief," I. 18).

The general distinction between meter and rhythm has received much attention; it is studied neatly and above all practically in Harvey Cross's *Sound and Form in Modern Poetry* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964) and in the same author's collection of basic essays, *The Structure of Verse* (New York: Fawcett Books, 1966). Valuable linguistic studies in meter and style are too numerous to list here; but most of these, such as the various essays of Morris Halle, or most impressively, Roman Jakobson on Shakespeare, have seemed somewhat tangential to the historical task at hand.
to establishing contrasts or distinctions either within the long line or between the long line and the short line and almost never within the short line itself. Much of the monotony of the Old Version thus lies in the constant coincidence of metric, syntax, and meaning, just as much of it also lies in the unremitting repetition of the stanza pattern itself.

We cannot leave the Old Version without noting that its figurative language is one of its great strengths, although the terms health or muscle might better be used to imply the robust crudity of the psalter. This particular aspect of the Old Version is one that has been most consistently criticized from its own time; the reader is reminded of Wither’s long reference to gross “improprieties” in many of its expressions. But even some of the most infamous of these often have a crude vigor. For example, Hopkins asks God

Why doest thou draw thy hand abacke,
   and hide it in thy lap?
Oh plucke it out, and be not slacke,
   to geve thy foes a rap.

(Ps. 74:12)

Probably the modern reader would object first to the imperial tone of the passage, but sixteenth- and seventeenth-century hymnodists (and modern commentators on hymns as well) would probably object more to the breach of decorum in rap. There is a heroic disproportion here: a view of God through the wrong end of a telescope. The gesture seems more impatient than punitive. But if we have been reading the poetry of Herbert we may find in that rap a familiar note of whimsy; certainly Herbert describes exchanges no less startling or informal.

I am not arguing, however, for anything like direct correspondences in metaphor between Herbert and Sternhold and Hopkins, for the stanza immediately preceding the one above establishes a distinctly un-Herbertian context:

When wilt thou, lord, once end this shame,
   and cease thine enemies strong?
Shall they always blaspheme thy name,
   and raile on thee so long?

(Ps. 74:11)
In this context, the rap that follows in the next stanza may be somewhat less than whimsical; it may in fact be only a handy rhyme for *lap*. The tone of the passage as a whole thus would seem to rule out any deliberate whimsy in the rap itself. The whimsy is apparent only out of context, as passionate demands for punishment of blasphemers are not likely to be satisfied (except in bad poetry) with a rap.

Perhaps the most absurd passages in the Old Version are those in which God speaks (here, through Hopkins):

```
But to the wicked trayne,
    which talke of God each day:
    And yet their workes are foule and vayne,
    to them the Lord will say.

    With what a face darest thou,
        my word once speake or name?
    Why doth thy talke my law allow,
        thy deeds deny the same?

    Whereas for to amend,
        thy selfe thou art so slacke:
    My word the which thou doest pretend,
        is cast behind thy backe.
```

(Ps. 50:16–18)

With his vision of God as a Big Stick, Hopkins has a sort of insidious mastery of the genre:

```
Leave off therfore (saythe he) and know,
    I am a God most stout:
    Among the heathen hye and low,
    and all the earth throughout.
```

(Ps. 46:10)

And critics complain about the way God speaks in *Paradise Lost*. Here the poetry rises to no occasion at all, with the result that the tone of the passages is surprisingly jaunty. Herbert’s intimacy with the speech of God is always the result of skill and daring, as he realizes: Hopkins’s is the result of incompetence and insensitivity, as he fails to realize. Yet in spite of these obvious dissimilarities, the “Old Version attitude” toward God has much in common with Herbert’s, as we shall see later.
The unconscious whimsy in Sternhold and Hopkins' Godtalk is evident also in their use of imagery. Homely, abrupt, and intense, their metaphors seem to "happen" rather than grow naturally out of the logic or emotions. This perplexing spontaneity is emphasized by the violence of many of the comparisons:

But flattering and deceitful lips,
    and tongues that be so stout:
To speak proud words, & make great brags,
    the Lord soone cut them out.

(Ps. 12:3)

And still like dust before the wind,
    I drive them under feete:
And sweep them out like filthy clay
    that stinketh in the streete.

(Ps. 18:41)

O God breake thou their teeth at once,
    within their mouth throughout:
The tusks that in their great chaw bones,
    like Lions whelps hang out.

(Ps. 58:6)

a cup of mighty wine,
    is in the hand of God:
And all the mighty wine therein,
    himselfe doth pour abroad.

As for the lees and filthy dregs,
    that do remain of it:
The wicked of the earth shall drinke,
    and sucke them every whit.

(Ps. 75:7–8)

The relish with which this violence and vulgarity is brought in is not to be found in the Prayer Book psalter, and unlike the tone of Herbert's violent or homely images, it appears to be unqualified by any ironic or humorous qualities, at least none that are deliberate. Occasionally, the abruptness with which a metaphor is introduced will be intensified by the casual introduction of a second metaphor.
The following has a mixture of metaphors that is not to be found in any source or contemporary version: "Thy tongue untrue in forging lies,/ is like a razor sharp" (Ps. 52:2).

When the crudity and abruptness are properly tempered and directed toward the *persona* of the psalms, the result is an apparent self-mockery which, although it may be unintentional, is nonetheless effective:

Unto thy house such zeale I beare,
that it doth pine me much:
Their checks and taunts to thee to hear,
my very hart doth grutch.

(Ps. 69:10)

There are some praiseworthy effects here; in this sober context the colloquial energy of *pine* and *checks* and *grutch* creates some human warmth, although the *much/grutch* rhyme looks suspiciously convenient. This sort of surprising energy is achieved the same way the sudden vapid line is achieved. When the rhetorical movement of a line or stanza prepares the reader for an important statement that never comes, the reader is almost as astonished as he would be by an image of violence:

The seas that are so deepe and dead,
thy might did make them dry:
And thou didst breake the serpents head,
that he therein did die.

(Ps. 74:14)

They shall heape sorowes on their heds,
which run as they were mad:
To offer to the Idoll Gods,
alas it is to bad.

(Ps. 16:3)

The airiest abstractions are reserved for the figure of God, and He often enters a poem in something like the emperor's new clothes:

The voyce of God is of great force,
and wondrous excellent:
It is most mighty in effect,
and much magnificent.

(Ps. 29:4)
We should not leave the Old Version without remarking that although it was ridiculed for its inaccuracies of translation, it is more accurate than the poetized paraphrases of Wyatt, Surrey, Hunnis, and others. Sternhold and Hopkins, for all their poetic shortcomings, do keep the psalms down near their original subjects and lengths, as Wyatt did not. But it is easier to compress a lyric than a romance; their design naturally demanded compression, just as Wyatt’s demanded expansion.

It is difficult to make any short but accurate summary of the Old Version. As verse it is full of incompetence of every sort, on every level of poetic language, ranging from the abrupt non sequiturs of its violent imagery to the monotony of its forms. Nonetheless, the great popularity of the psalter decisively turned psalm paraphrase toward the grouping of independent lyrics; after the Old Version, attempts to integrate narrative groups of the psalms were neither numerous nor influential. (It is also likely that the Old Version was a major factor in the rise of the self-contained lyric as a genre, but there is hardly the space to show that here.) The Old Version also increased the number of tools available to psalmists and, by extension, all poets. The commonplace imagery, the colloquial familiarity of diction, the emphasis on the handy ballad line, and indeed the very bathos of the psalter were all present in English poetry before, but by recombining these elements in a form for which there was an irresistible social demand, Sternhold and Hopkins made them a permanent part of English verse. As the most popular single work of poetry in sixteenth-century England, the psalter had an influence that would be hard to overestimate, even (or especially) for the poets who disliked it.

As we look back, Wyatt neatly balances the Old Version: the weight of each is best revealed by the other. Sternhold himself was almost exactly Wyatt’s contemporary, and since the later contributors to the psalter worked in the poetic modes of Sternhold’s generation, the whole production is in a sense contemporary with Wyatt. It is not surprising, then, that despite their working in different genres, Wyatt and the Old Version poets should employ similar poetic styles. Most of the differences between the two versions come down to the intentions of their authors, Wyatt having written his for reading and Sternhold having written his for singing. The secular concern of Wyatt’s psalms, with their emphasis on the parfite penyntence of the lover-worshipper, balances the churchly and congregational emphasis
of the Old Version, just as Wyatt's narrative design is counterbalanced by the Old Version's commitment to the self-contained lyric. Some of these differences in turn come back to the differences in sources, Wyatt directly copying from European models and the Old Version using native English forms. In both Wyatt's psalms and the Old Version, though, there is a collocation of stylistic fumbling and emotional bathos that is not peculiarly "Drab" but is characteristic of the popular English psalm.

III. SIR PHILIP SIDNEY AND THE COUNTESS OF PEMBROKE

The Sidneyan psalms resemble Wyatt's in their use of Continental verse forms, but this is perhaps the only resemblance, for Sidney and Mary Herbert abandoned the whole modish idea of narrative structure in favor of self-contained lyrics. Their model, the Marot-Béze psalter, was like the Old Version a congregational manual. But this loose family relationship is all the Old Version and the Sidney psalter share. Once we begin looking for precise points of comparison between the two, the Sidney psalter seems the result of a conscious reaction to the technical practices and even the ideas of the Old Version, so far as the latter may be said to embody any. The distance between them is great. One version relies almost exclusively on one staple stanza; the other uses 148 different stanzas, the only similarly varied collection of English verse to this time being that in the Arcadia. One version often stretches a short psalm stanza with words alone, while the other moves toward condensation; one is violent and vulgar, while the other has the restrained singing strength of Dorus and Zelmane; and so on. But the Sidney psalter is not merely "original" in that it departs from the conventions of the Old Version. It has a freshness that remains startling not only because of the variety of forms but also because of the way these forms are suited to David's varied emotions.

Yet Sidney has always received little or poor notice for his translation of the Psalms. In 1619, only thirty-three years after Sidney's death, Ben Jonson had to assure Drummond of Hawthornden that "Sir P. Sidney had translated some of the Psalmes, which went abroad under
the name of the Countess of Pembroke." In modern times, ever since Grosart’s edition of Sidney’s poetry (1873), most critics have either rejected or ignored his psalms. There may be some reasons for this; since the bulk of Sidney’s poetry usually receives critical approval, the psalms may come in for keener “discrimination”; anyone who has heard of metrical psalms at all can safely follow Warton and condemn the whole lot as fanaticism. However, I propose to show that although Sidney’s psalms are not a faultless collection, they do reveal a considerable skill in suitin g form to meaning. In this, it seems to me, he far surpasses his sister. He also has a subtler musical sense; she is satisfied with coarser effects of rhythm and sound. Finally, there is an integration of rhythm, stanza, and idea which resembles that in the poetry of The Temple. Thus the psalms are important for the study of Sidney’s poetry and Herbert’s as well. Above all, they comprise a varied and brilliant collection in their own right, one of the best but most underrated achievements in the Renaissance lyric.

Yet if we could speak with some confidence of the uniform manner and quality of the Old Version, we cannot begin to do so with the Sidney psalter. In this case the collaborators have two different poetic styles, although the difference is not immediately apparent because of problems connected with the text. Sidney wrote only the first forty-three psalms, and none of his manuscripts have survived; for his texts

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17 Attitudes range from disgust—“There is no excuse for these absurdities” (Percy Addleshaw, Sir Philip Sidney [London: Methuen, 1909], p. 343)—to seeming evasiveness—“There is more poetry in any one complete passage of the Psalms in the inspired, unmetrical original [the critic apparently refers to an English edition, or does not remember that the originals were poems] than in all Sir Philip’s ingenious versions” (C. Henry Warren, Sir Philip Sidney [London: Nelson and Sons, 1936], p. 161). More recently, Sidney’s psalms have been ignored by David Kalstone, in Sidney’s Poetry (Cambridge: Howard University Press, 1965), and Kenneth Muir, in Sir Philip Sidney, no. 120 in Writers and Their Work (London: The British Council, 1960). Robert L. Montgomery, Jr., in Symmetry and Sense (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961), regards the psalms as a useful failure, “more primitive than the general run of poems in the Arcadia” (p. 23). Neil Rudenstine’s recent Sidney’s Poetic Development (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967) comments only on the dating of the psalms, apparently to justify their exclusion from his critical study (see pp. 284–86). The most important appreciations are those by Theodore Spencer, “The Poetry of Sir Philip Sidney,” ELH, 12 (1945): 251–78, and by William A. Ringler, Jr., who regards the psalms as an “exhibition of virtuosity” (Sidney, Poems, p. 501).
we have to rely on his sister, who had them copied into her own manuscript.\textsuperscript{18} Unfortunately for students of Sidney, the Countess was, to use William A. Ringler's appropriately finical-sounding phrase, "an inveterate tinkerer," who repeatedly revised not only her own psalms but Sidney's as well, and thus Sidney's versions have to be obtained by working backward through her revisions. The process is not as tentative as it may sound, and Ringler's patient efforts have produced a text that would seem to be as near Sidney's as possible.

The Countess's psalms present almost the opposite problem, for they exist in a great scramble of fourteen manuscripts which provide innumerable variant readings. Clearly, the present time may not be ripe for a fully annotated edition—although if we are to have Walpole why not the Countess of Pembroke?—and in editing the only modern text of the psalter, J. C. A. Rathmell elected to follow what is apparently the final manuscript and not give variants. The edition is not definitive, but there is some consolation in the fact that the Countess herself seems to have been congenitally incapable of leaving a poem alone long enough to produce a definitive copy.

As we have noted before, several scholars have proposed that the Sidney psalter probably was the greatest single influence on George Herbert's poetic style. An obvious similarity lies in the immense range of stanza forms, but there are subtle differences in the ways that all three poets attempt to tailor a unique form to a unique experience. Yet the two Sidneys have their own characters. Sir Philip has a remarkable ear for song, which often leads him into brilliant interplay of rhythm and stanza but also occasionally into vapid lines; the dancing motion of a stanza sometimes seems of more interest than the idea. The Countess is careful of observed detail and rigorously logical, and as a result has a keen eye for metaphor; her figures are apt to seem more "metaphysical" than those of her brother. She has a cruder conception of form, notwithstanding the great variety in the number of lines in her stanzas and the number of feet in her lines. The press of her ideas occasionally leads her to mangle a form, and by coincidence, she often falls into the bathos of Sternhold and Hopkins.

\textsuperscript{18} Ringler describes the manuscripts exhaustively in Sidney, \textit{Poems}, pp. 501-5; there is a summary account by J. C. A. Rathmell in \textit{The Psalms}, pp. xxvi-xxviii. The Countess completed the psalter before 1600; she died in 1621. It is a curious irony that she—with several other Countesses and Earls of Pembroke—is buried near the famous Lady Chapel in Salisbury Cathedral, where Herbert often went to play music with his friends. See Gleeson White, \textit{The Cathedral Church of Salisbury} (London: Bell, 1908), p. 67.
They sink because they do not know any better, but she sinks because she has her eye on a metaphor. They are clumsy and lack ideas; she is clumsy almost because of them. All this is not to imply a qualitative distinction between her style and Sidney's; they are simply different, and Herbert, it seems, resembles both Sidney and the Countess. He has a lyric grace, much finer than Sidney's, and some of the muscular logic of the Countess at her best. Further, and it is on this level that I find the resemblances most interesting, Herbert can employ a simplicity, a near vapidity, like Sidney's, and a bathos like the Countess's.

Since it was Sidney who began the family psalm project, we might begin by looking at his contribution, first observing its relationship to previous English psalmody, the Old Version in particular. (Specific points of comparison with Herbert will be noted later; here our concern is more with the general characteristics of Sidney's style in itself.) We have already mentioned stanzaic variety. Stanza shape is not all there is to form, however, and we could narrow our focus even further, working down to the line and below. If we compare Sidney's psalms with contemporary lyrics and psalms, we soon notice that they avoid the monotony of the regular end-stopping which is characteristic of Tudor verse. Their enjambment has more than a negative virtue. Often two enjambed lines, with an advanced caesura in the second, can create a roll or flourish in emphatic statements:

And so thereafter He, and all his Mates
Do works which earth corrupt and Heaven hates,
Not One||that good remaineth.
(Ps. 14:4–6)

The Voice of that lord ruling us
Is strong||though he be gracious.
(Ps. 32:7–12)

Thus I prest down with weight of pain,
Whether I silent did remain,
Or roar'd, my bones still wasted;
For so both day and night did stand
On wretched mee thy heavy hand,
My life||hott torments tasted.19
(Ps. 32:7–12)

19 The text is that of Sidney, Poems; psalm and line numbers are given in the text after each quotation. I have silently supplied some end punctuation.
If we wish to overlook the apparently light logical pointing at the end of line eight in the last example, we have even another illustration. By running on only to pick up a few syllables before the pause, Sidney's lines have an elasticity that cannot be found in many lyrics of this kind, and certainly not in the Old Version. In either public or private song, in the early eighties, this practice is somewhat adventuresome, and Sidney can carry it still further. Often he will combine the long enjambed line with shorter phrases and more emphatic caesurae to set up an aggressive driving motion:

Nay if I wrought not for his Freedome's sake
Who causeless now, yeelds me a hatefull heart,
Then let my Foe chase me, and chasing take:
Then let his foot upon my neck be set:
Then in the Dust let him my honour rake.

(Ps. 7:11–15)

The long phrase crossing over the line end (ll. 11–12) emphasizes the series of three verbs, turning around each other in their grammar, and the stanza closes with two direct shakes that contrast with the circular movement above. The lines animate the prose statement of the stanza, with respect to both the physical action it describes and the process of losing freedom.

This sort of line control is typical of the ingenuity and simplicity with which Sidney countered the practices of "Drab" verse and popular church song.20 And counter must surely be the term, for Sidney writes as if he were searching for new and plain solutions to old problems: how to create an effect of expansion in a relatively short line; how to vary the tempo within a stanza, while still preserving the meter; or to state the whole lyric-psalm issue more broadly, how to achieve enough rhythmic variety to satisfy the mind, while writing lines that are uniform enough to be sung. Sidney's handling of the

20 This at least was the way Donne regarded the Sidney psalms, which
In formes of joy and art do re-reveale
To us so sweetly and sincerely too,
That I must not rejoyce as I would doe
When I behold that these Psalms are become
So well attyr'd abroad, so ill at home,
So well in Chambers, in thy Church so ill.

("Upon the translation of the Psalms by Sir Philip Sidney, and the Countesse of Pembroke his Sister," ll. 34–39, in Donne, Divine Poems.)
run-on line is one simple and ingenious solution, and his use of feminine rhyme is another.

Sidney's critical attitude toward feminine rhyme is well known: one of the chief advantages of English, as a poetic medium, was that unlike the Romance languages it could place the rhyme on the last, next-to-last, or antepenultimate syllable. Sidney himself never assigned any particular uses to the last two types of rhymes, but his contemporaries did, finding them too light, cloying, or trivial for serious poetry. This may be why Sidney usually saves the feminine rhyme for emphasis among masculine rhymes. In this way the rhyme can be unobtrusive but emphatic in retarding the motion of an end-stopped iambic line, as here, for example, in suggesting the extent of God's dominion: "The earth is God's, and what the Globe of earth containeth, And all who in that Globe do dwell" (Ps. 24:1–2).

Somewhat more rarely, Sidney places the feminine rhyme at the end of an enjambed line, using it to drive the dead syllables before it and speed the reader along:

Even multitudes be they
That to my soul do say,
No help for you remaineth
In God on whom you build,
Yet lord thou art my shield,
In thee my glory raigneth.

(Ps. 3:7–12)

The slight speeding up between the third and fourth lines emphasizes the crowd's peremptory dismissal; the connection between form and meaning is typical of Sidney's attention to detail.

But as Sidney says in his own concluding remarks on feminine rhyme, "already the triflingnes of this discourse is too much enlarged," and we must shift to more complex studies of motion within groups of lines. One of Sidney's particularly important contributions to psalmody is his use of syntax and stanza form to control the more

\[21\text{ See the } \textit{Defence of Poetry}, \text{ in Smith, } \textit{Elizabethan Critical Essays}, 1: 205.\]

\[22\text{ See the comments by Sir John Harington and Samuel Daniel in Smith, } \textit{Elizabethan Critical Essays}, 2: 221, 383. \text{ See also Puttenham, } \textit{Arte of English Poesie}, \text{ p. 80.}\]

\[23\text{ In Smith, } \textit{Elizabethan Critical Essays}, 1: 205.\]
militant and aggressive impulses in the Psalms themselves. Much of the violence and abruptness of the Sternhold-Hopkins Old Version is, as we have seen, a direct product of the style. The very construction of the stanzas and periods seems designed to emphasize the aggression of the statement. The method in Sidney's psalms is distinctly different, for here the syntax often places the violence of the subject matter at a distance. Periodic structures, for example, can retard the effect of the violence:

No sooner said, but (lo) myne Enemyes sink
   Down in the pitt, which they themselves had wrought:
   And in that nett, which they well hidden think,
   Is their own foot, ledd by their own ill thought,
   Most surely caught.

(Ps. 9:46–50)

Like a slow-motion film of a knockout punch, the leisurely predicate makes the action seem more like a gallant dance than a struggle. The motion of the syntax itself supplies an element of meaning, and this is the sort of integrity we do not often sense in the Old Version. And Sidney is not limited to the use of periodic syntax in order to soften the violence of his subject matter. Just as often he will employ simple grammatic dependency and parallel structures, although with these the motion seems rather more jerky:

O madness of these folks, thus loosely led,
   These Canibals, who as if they were bread
   God's people do devower,
   Nor ever call on God, but they shall quake
   More then they now do bragg, when He shall take
   The just into his power.

(Ps. 14:13–18)

Abruptness and confusion are evident not only in the action but also in the grammatic style itself, in the verbs that hustle over one another in the parallels and the comparative. “These folks” are “loosely led” in more ways than one.

Sidney's rhythms provide an equally important element of meaning. It should be noted first that his rhythms are not based on exactly the same principles as the common psalter. When Sternhold and Hopkins
and their fellows produced their psalter, they proceeded under the Lutheran principle of one syllable, one note. Considering their congregations, this was only sensible, but it meant ironing the verse entirely flat; no substitutions could be tolerated, and there could be no experiments in timing, as with a shifted caesura. Sidney expects a greater sophistication than this, although he does not require as much as one might expect. The rhythms themselves are not daring metrically compared with those of the *Arcadia*, and although there are some simple metrical substitutions, no halfway cultivated voice would have trouble with a shifted accent now and then:

He did himself to me ward bend,
And hearkned how, and why that I did cry,
And me from pitt bemyred,
From dungeon he retired
Where I in horrors lay,
Setting my feet upon
A steadfast rocky stone,
And my weake steps did stay.

(Ps. 40:3–10)

For vocal performance, Sidney rarely offers any greater difficulties than that in line eight above. The stanzaic variety of the psalter as a whole would have presented more of a problem to contemporary congregations, since there are more tunes to memorize, after thumping along so easily with Sternhold.

However, Sidney's songs are more than song in this simple sense. Verse, he reminds us in his *Defence of Poetry*, is “the onely fit speech for Musick.”24 Further, the Psalms are first of all in his view “a divine Poem”; the fact that they have been sung he only considers as part of his proof that they are preeminently poems offering an “unspeakable and everlasting beautie to be seene by the eyes of the minde.”25 The consequences of this distinction are extremely significant when applied to matters of rhythm. For if we failed to grasp the essentially literary nature of Sidney's psalms, if we took them on a simpler level, as tunes for congregational performance, we would miss the cross-rhythms and overtones that hold them together and distinguish them

from other metrical psalms. Sidney's psalms have rhythms too elaborate to be expressed completely in musical settings. They carry their own music with them, and it is not the subtlety of instrumental music—even if it is more complex than the instrumental music of the Old Version. A good illustration of this is Psalm 6:

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.

The verb phrase of the last line provides much of the logic or rationale for the stanza. Further, as it is employed in subsequent stanzas, it develops a gradual tension in the rhythms. That is, besides the activity of the verb phrase there is also a source of strength in the disposition of stresses. However, this would be difficult for us to note by means of ordinary metrical notation, and thus I shall employ once again a simplified Trager-Smith notation for four levels of stress. The advantage of this system is that it allows us to see how in each stanza Sidney gradually drops the secondary and tertiary stresses, giving the stanza its sense of gathering motion for the final phrase:

\[
\text{\underline{Lord, let not me a worme by thee be shent,}}  \\
\text{\underline{While Thou art in the heat of thy displeasure:}}  \\
\text{\underline{Ne let thy rage, of my due punishment}}  \\
\text{\underline{Become the measure.}}
\]

This tension in the meter does not violate the essentially iambic pattern; in fact it depends upon that pattern for its strength. All of the stanzas follow this rhythmic pattern, except the third, in which the speaker's direct appeal to God reaches a peak, and the last line of the stanza is accordingly more strained:

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Nay even my soul fell troubles do appall;

Alas, how long, my God, wilt Thou delay me?

Turne Thee, sweet lord, and from this Ugly fall

My Deare God stay me.

(9–12)

It is pertinent here that the poem as a whole has only ten run-on lines, and eight of them introduce the short final lines at the ends of the quatrains. This accords with what we have observed earlier about Sidney’s enjambment; here the speed of the movement across the line end, up to the caesura that is only two or three syllables into the last line, emphasizes the rapid meter and the spasm of anguish in the short final line.

Sidney’s skill in relating syntax, stanza, and idea is evident even in more conventional forms. In some respects, Psalm 33 is similar to Psalm 6:

Rejoice in God, O ye
That righteous be;
For that cherfull thankfulness,
It is a comely part
In them whose heart
Doth cherish rightfulness.

O prayse with harp the lord,
O now accord
Viols with singing Voice,
Let ten-stringed instrument
O now be bent
To witness you rejoice.

A new, sing a new song
To him most strong,
Sing Lowd and merrily,
Because that word of his
Most righteous is
And his deeds faithfull bee.
He righteousness approves
And judgment loves,
God’s goodness fills all lands,
His Word made heavnly Coast,
And all that Host
By breath of his mouth stands.

(Ps. 33:1–24)

Partly by placing the verbs in the final lines of the stanzas, as in Psalm 6, and partly by repeating key ideas, Sidney has created an expanding motion at the end of each stanza. In every case, the second tercet provides a broad rationale for the first tercet: Rejoice, for it is comely; play instruments, because you rejoice; sing joyfully, because God is true; and God so loves righteousness on earth that he has made the universe righteous. The repeated shape of the ideas and the technical features of the last lines create much of the psalm’s rhythm. This point is important, for in the remainder of the psalm—ten more stanzas—Sidney alters the pattern entirely, by separating the two tercets grammatically and making each a distinct and different thought. The fifth stanza clearly shows the break:

The waters of the seas
In heapes he layes,
And depths in treasure his.
Let all the earth feare God,
And who abroad
Of world a dweller is.

(25–30)

The abrupt change in manner rather signals the end of the invocation to praise, and the beginning of a catalogue. The psalm shows conveniently the extent to which Sidney’s stanza depends on relations between syntax and idea.

Somewhat more integrated in style is Psalm 16; but here, although the stanza is not particularly ingenious in form, it is still remarkably suited to the rhythms and the ideas. As a personal psalm that focuses on the relations of man to God, it necessarily involves some repetition of God’s name and attributes. The stanza form is designed to emphasize this repetition by its arrangement of couplet and quatrain and its seven-syllable line:
Save me lord, for why Thou art
All the hope of all my heart,
Witness Thou my soule with me
That to God my God I say
Thou my lord, Thou art my stay,
Though my Works reach not to Thee.

(1–6)

The heavy repetition on Lord-God-Thou-Though-Thee becomes almost incantational. Almost; but Sidney is not a hypnotist, and the dominant drive of the poem seems rather more playful, the repetition of the Name Itself as a part of the description of God. It is the identity of God that is saving, and the repetition to this effect is used in other psalms of Sidney's, such as the Tenth, where the theme is even more explicit. Sidney is describing the pride of the wicked man:

For he himself doth prayse,
When he his lust doth ease,
Extolling ravenous gain:
But doth God' self disdain.
Nay so proud is his puffed thought
That after God he never sought,
But rather much he fancys this
That Name of God a fable is.

(9–16)

As in Psalm 16, the repetition of the pronouns plays an important part in the speaker's persuasive argument, although the points of view are of course very different. Psalm 16 is less concerned with the Name, as a holy object, than with the name in the sense of "to whom do I appeal." The repetition is the speaker's way of focusing his attention, and it is important that among all the pronouns and names floating through that first stanza, only once does the first person pronoun take a conventional metrical stress:

Witness Thou my soule with me.

The rhetoric of this is rather bold: Sidney is introducing the last tercet, affirming God's name, by asking God to witness the speaker's soul, to witness his witnessing. The syntax and the heavy stress on me
ultimately turn the logic of the line back to God, as is clarified in the fourth line, "That to God my God I say," in which the I say is not merely a convenient rhyme, as it would be say, in Wyatt's psalms. The delicate overlapping of rhythm and meaning, and the wholly subordinate me, is typical of both Sidney's tact and craftsmanship. (The technical practice itself is rather like that of Herbert, although Herbert does not often indulge in wordplay as elaborate as this.) And if we have failed to notice the coincidence of rhythm and meaning, Sidney neatly informs us of it in stanza 2, with a sally that is as grim as it is witty:

This all the best I prove,
   Good and godly men I love
   And foresee their wretched paine
Who to other Gods do run,
   Their blood offrings I do shun,
   Nay to name their names I disdain.

(7–12)

In a tactic as subtle as that of stanza 1, the stress finally comes down on I only to identify the speaker as one of the Lord's, and to introduce the wry last line rejecting other gods' names.

Many of Sidney's other psalms have similar rhyme schemes handled very differently. Psalm 38 has the same tercet foundation and odd-syllable-count meter, now with the so-called counterpointed rhyme:

Lord while that thy rage doth bide,
   Do not chide
Nor in anger chastise me;
   For thy shafts have pierc't me sore,
   And yet more,
Still Thy hands upon me be.

(1–6)

The value of this apparently arbitrary stanza becomes obvious when Sidney begins to employ a mixture of high- and low-key language, which is strangely emphasized by the enjambed stresses of his meter:

My wounds putrify and stink,
   In the sinck
Of my filthy folly lai'd;
Earthly I do bow and crooke,
With a look
Still in mourning chear arayd.

(13–18)

The first tercet is at once like and unlike the overstated and violent manner of Sternhold and Hopkins; the metrical effects are sophisticated, although the imagery seems rather coarse for Sidney. However, the violence of the Psalms themselves seemed to remain attractive long after Sternhold and Hopkins, and it is almost certain that Sidney is restraining himself here. The violent manner survived well past Sidney in fact, and even as late as 1636, when George Sandys published his psalter, the same passage is rendered with even more relish:

My Ulcers swell,
Corrupt and smell;
Of Folly the sad end.27

Perhaps more passages of this sort should be resurrected to suggest Sidney’s control. The reader who can separate himself from Sandys’s subject matter will notice that Sidney’s version turns the wounds into metaphor by means of the copula in the third line, while Sandys is content to let the ulcers remain real.

Sidney’s tercets, on the other hand, are more subtle in their effects; the tone is lower, and the syntax expresses many of the psalm’s ironies. There is a distinct drop from the “sinck” into the “filthy folly,” because Sidney has used one phrase across two lines. Similarly, the speaker’s bent posture points him toward earth rather than heaven. In the first two lines of the second tercet, the syntax and line ends suggest that the speaker is looking for knowledge in the earth he came from; but by the last line, we see that he “looks” only in the sense that he has an appearance. By these subtle means rather than a frontal attack like Sandys’s, Sidney has suggested the bathos in the speaker’s attitude.

The rest of the psalm continues this static enumeration of bathetic ironies, all or most of them dependent upon the stanza with its short centers, where Sidney usually makes an abrupt change or turn in

thought. The speaker’s perspective shifts from time to time, as the stanza shape isolates small currents within the larger flow of the syntax:

In my reines hot torment raignes.
   There remains
Nothing in my body sound . . . .

(19–21)

My God Thou wilt heare my voice;
   For I sayd, heare, least they be
      Glad on me . . . .

(45–47)

Sure I do but halting go,
   And my woe
Still my orethwart neighbor is.

(49–51)

To shift briefly to considerations of meter, we can see that trochaic lines that are run-on in this way are not without some dangers of their own, particularly in their movement between a singsong and a heavy clumping at the start of the line. To capitalize on this tendency, Sidney occasionally attempts iambic substitutions in order to move closer to the speed of speech:

   But I like a man become,
      Deaf and dumb . . . .

(37–38)

For on Thee, lord, without end
   I attend,
My God Thou wilt heare my voice.

(43–45)

One valuable resource here is the monosyllable, an important part of Sidney’s program for other reasons, too, according to Ringler.28 The ability of several monosyllables to take a greater range of stresses than

28 Sidney, Poems, p. liii.
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a polysyllabic word allows the poet more freedom to set up cross-rhythms. But as the above examples show, the rhythms still remain difficult to control; and several of the psalms (numbers 28, 42, and 43, for example) show a strain between the meter and the voice or dramatic situation.

After picking through this assortment of psalms, we might conclude with what is probably the most impressive in the group, the Thirteenth. The psalm's distinctive form is derived from the opening words of the Prayer Book version: "Howe long wylt thou forget me (O Lorde) for ever: howe long wylt thou hyde thy face from mee."

How long, O Lord, shall I forgotten be?
What? ever?
How long wilt Thou Thy hidden face from me
Dissever?

(Ps. 13:1-4)

The few changes that Sidney makes create a work with its own character. Sidney is not just versifying or metaphrasing his source, and this is immediately evident in the form of the psalm. As the stanza shape displays the questions and answers, it imposes a new pattern on its original: in Sidney's version, the questions imply their answers in the rhymes. There is a rising and falling of hope which the original does not have, and this is depicted in the form itself. Successive stanzas repeat the mental and visual pattern:

How long shall I consult with carefull sprite
In anguish?
How long shall I with foes' triumphant might
Thus languish?

Behold, lord, let to Thy hearing creep
My crying:
Nay, give me eyes, and light, least that I sleep
In dying.

Least my Foe bragg, that in my ruin hee
Prevailed,
And at my fall they joy that, troublous, me
Assailed.
No, No I trust on thee, and joy in Thy
Great Pity.
Still therfore of Thy Graces shall be my
Song's Ditty.

(5–20)

There are some affinities here, in form and movement of idea, with
Sidney's experiments in the "echo" form, as in the Second Eclogues
of the Arcadia:

What do lovers seeke for, long seeking for to
enjoy?
What be the joyes for which to enjoy they went
to the paines?
Then to an earnest Love what doth best victorie
lend?
End? but I can never end, love will not give me
the leave.
How be the minds dispos'd that can not tast thy
physick?
Joy.
Paines.
Ende.
Leave.
Sick.

("Philsides, Echo," ll. 13–17)

This sort of harmless amusement rises to some dignity in Psalm 13,
where the narrative pretext that requires the echo is abandoned, and
the repetition is (with one exception) limited to the feminine rhyme.
The design is thus more complex than that of the usual echo poem,
and the intricacy is enhanced by Sidney's having the echo lines answer
each other. The centered lines almost comprise the poem in them­selves: God is ever dissevered; I languish in anguish; I cry as I die;
my foes assail and prevail; and pity is my ditty. This loose pattern
stands out because of the rhyme and because the "refrains" often take
two unexpectedly strong stresses:

What? ever?
Dissever?

In Anguish
Thus languish
Like the echo poems, the psalm registers the strain of the speaker's situation in the tentativeness of the rhyme. But unlike the echo poems, the psalm has a stanza shape that emphasizes the unsure and groping logic. The exposed skeleton of its central lines makes it easier to see that the psalm is an expanded conditional argument: if the first stanza is true, then the next three are true, and if they are true, then the last must be true. Thus stanza 5 is not a *deus ex machina* ending, although it may seem to be one at first. The speaker's joy in God's pity, even though he is in agony, is a result of the way that agony is imposed. To give in to the foes, as other psalms make clear, would be to acknowledge the strength of their gods, or worse yet, the strength of their false idols. These adversities are a test of faith, but as the speaker realizes, even in making his song of complaint he has acknowledged God and His power. The fitness of the last stanza in particular is evident in the half rhymes between the *a*'s and *b*'s and the meaningful relations they suggest. Thine is pity, which is mine; my ditty, of your pity, is thine. Over the course of the psalm, a trade has taken place, and it is related to the psalm's central purpose of shifting a burden.

I have mentioned that Sidney's sister went on to revise many of his psalms, and it is possible that he left them to her in an unfinished state, expecting her to revise them. During the initial stages of the work, the two poets were probably in touch with each other, for in her dedicatory poem to Sidney, Mary Herbert does refer to the psalter as "this coupled worke." But how far Sidney's inspiration or direct planning had extended we do not know. What is certain is that Mary Herbert continued to rely on the French psalter and maintained Sidney's principle of stanzaic variety.
Yet the differences between their poetic manners are great, although there have been only two main lines of approach to the question of what, in fact, the Countess achieved in her own psalms. The older approach, after Grosart, sidesteps the whole problem by saying, in effect, that whatever the Countess's psalms may be, they are better than her brother's. But in the absence of any sustained analysis this claim is not convincing, and it has been only recently that a different approach has been made in an effort to secure the Countess as a poet worth study. Louis Martz proposed several years ago that the Countess's psalms are not far from metaphysical poetry, to which the Countess's modern editor, J. C. A. Rathmell, has added that although her psalms "are not, in any useful sense of the term, 'metaphysical,' " nonetheless "their strong, energetic rhythms, the expressive stanza forms, the insistent verbal play, and the preference for a packed, concise line immediately differentiate them from conventional Elizabethan psalmody." Despite the differences in their aims, Martz and Rathmell both admire the same qualities in the Countess and wish to have her considered as a figure of importance and ability. About her importance there is agreement, quite properly, I think, but about her ability there should be more discussion. As helpful as Rathmell in particular has been, through his editorial work and criticism, he and the few others who have commented on the Countess's psalms have avoided some serious problems, for example, her struggle with metaphors, and in the process have missed some of the Countess's very real individuality and poetic achievements. We can approach these problems by discussing some of the ways in which the Countess is not a metaphysical poet and from there move on to a study of her technical skills and the role of technique as metaphor in the psalms. Although the Countess is not a particularly good poet, she is historically important; her poems are uneven, but rarely ragged, and in some measure they are important because of the way they fail to attain the level of the truly second- or third-rate poems written in the nineties.

Certainly many of the Countess's psalms resemble metaphysical lyrics,

29 There is a good summary and analysis of older criticism in Rathmell, The Psalms, pp. xi–xxxii. I have used this text for all quotations from the Countess; psalm and line numbers appear after each quotation.
whether we define the metaphysical poem in terms of the metaphysical conceit:\textsuperscript{31}

\begin{center}
\begin{verbatim}
How fisses die, what should I stand to tell?
Or how of noisome froggs the earth-bred race
Croake where their princes sleepe, not only dwell?
How lice and vermyn heav'nyly voice attending
Doe swarming fall, what quarter not offending?
\end{verbatim}
\end{center}

(Ps. 105:60–64)

or the \textit{discordia concors}:

\begin{center}
\begin{verbatim}
his sonnes, whom fathers love enderes,
Shall find like blisse for legacie bequeathed;
A steadfast throne, I say, till heav'nyly Spheares
Shall faint in course, where yet they never breathed.
\end{verbatim}
\end{center}

(Ps. 89:77–80)

or the dark wit of “strong lines”:

\begin{center}
\begin{verbatim}
The vulgar grasse, whereof the beast is faine,
The rarer hearb man for him self hath chose:
All things in breef, that life in life maintaine,
From Earths old Bowells fresh and yongly grows.
\end{verbatim}
\end{center}

(Ps. 104:45–48)

Perhaps the strength of all these figures lies in one of the Countess’s contributions to psalmody in general, that is, her emphasis on the literal level of meaning, her tendency to view requests to God in terms of specific tasks on a specific earth. And she has had to work for this, for often she has clarified or elaborated, by means of secondary sources, what was only feebly imaged in the original. Rathmell has pointed out that in her Psalm 139, for example, the Countess has

borrowed a metaphor from Calvin's commentary on the psalm, re-shaping and modeling it enough to fashion her own stanza. Indeed, by working with Calvin, Bèze, and the Geneva and Bishops' Bibles, on one hand, and the Countess, on the other, we may verify Rathmell's suggestion that in psalm after psalm the Countess has borrowed a gloss from a commentary, or a phrase from a prose or verse translation, and adapted it to her own purposes. She seems to have worked deliberately for clarity in prose meaning, even going so far as to unite the frequently mixed metaphors of the originals. In a sense, therefore, the "metaphysical" lines quoted above are somewhat misleading, for generally the Countess's wit is bright rather than dark. She would not think that she belonged in Joseph Duncan's book, for her effort throughout is toward a prose clarity that can hold up her complex figures and intricate meters.

Yet even the most penetrating exegesis cannot of itself make a good poem, and in spite of the Countess's reliance on Calvin and the two Bibles, she still has lapses, and they are hardly infrequent. Source study in the Countess's psalms may reveal her admirable, even exhaustive work on single poems; but in spite of her diligence, her style is often dissipated in conveying prose meaning or sinks into Elizabethan clichés. This generalization may be tested by comparing some of her translations with the contemporary prose of the Prayer-Book version.

Psalms 90, for example, lays out the lines of a synesthetic metaphor, relating time and sound: "For when thou art angry all our days are gone: we bring our years to an end, as it were a tale that is told" (Ps. 90:9). From this the Countess extracts a metaphor that seems to suggest a smoking lamp making a noise which stops twice. It is very uncertain:

Therefore in thy angry fuming,
Our life of daies his measure spends:
All our yeares in death consuming,
Right like a sound that, sounded, ends.

(Ps. 90:33–36)

This groping after metaphor also produces a strain that is more Cowleyan and ornamental, as in Psalm 104. First, the Prayer-Book version:

Some Metrical Psalm Styles

All beasts of the field drink thereof: and the wild asses quench their thirst.
Beside them shall the fowls of the air have their habitation: and sing among the branches.\(^{33}\)

(Ps. 104:11–12)

Now the Countess's version:

Of these the beasts which on the planes doe feede
All drinck their fill: with these their thirst allay
The Asses wild and all that wildly breede:
By these in their self-chosen stations stay

The free-borne fowls, which through the empty way
Of yeelding aire wafted with winged speed,
To art-like notes of nature-tuned lay
Make earelesse bushes give attentive heed.

(Ps. 104:33–40)

Here the elaboration of metaphors, apparently intended to gratify a taste for embellishment, and the desire to see one relationship within another, only succeed in creating a busy picture with many ambiguous gestures and static epithets. At times the Countess is like Aldous Huxley's Mr. Barbecue Smith, who is very adept at drawing out a metaphor but often unable to understand why he has done it.

These details of metaphor have larger implications for stanzas as wholes. As I have mentioned before, when the Countess becomes preoccupied with the details of a metaphor, her thought will wander much in the manner of Sternhold and Hopkins: she searches for additional relationships to draw out; Sternhold and Hopkins search for rhymes. As a result, their psalms are often surprisingly similar. The Countess's Psalm 59:

Now thus they fare: when sunn doth sett,
Retorn'd againe,
As hounds that howle their food to gett,
They runne amayne
The city through from street to street
With hungry mawes some prey to meet.

Abroad they range and hunt apace
   Now that, now this,
As famine trailes a hungry trace;
   And though they miss,
Yet will they not to kennell hye,
   But all the night at bay do lye.

(Ps. 59:67–78)

The same psalm in the Old Version:

At evening they returne apace,
   as dogs they grenne and cry:
Throughout the streets in every place,
   they run about and spie.
They seeke about for meat, I say,
   But let them not be fed:
Nor find an house wherin they may,
   be bold to put their hed.

(Ps. 59:14–15)

Hopkins’s Double Common Meter (the above passage is split between two stanzas) creates a rhythmic monotony which the Countess has partially avoided by using the dimeter lines. Yet her version is longer, to no great effect, and in this instance I believe the Old Version may be preferred to hers, for it creates a good deal more terror by having the “dogs” descend upon the houses. The Countess’s search for metaphoric resemblances has led her to mix metaphors from the city and the field, with a resultant dilution of visual image. In neither case does the texture of the lines provide much interest in itself.

In short, the Countess’s lines are extremely uneven, and she can shift abruptly from the weak to the strong: “God of his enimies the heads shall wound/ And those proud lookes that stiff in mischief go” (Ps. 68: 57–58). The syntactic awkwardness of the second line is a felt sign of the rigidity of pride (the Countess’s addition—the Prayer-Book version reads simply “such as goeth on still in his wickedness”); it forms a curious contrast with the sluggish first line. Contrasts of this sort are by no means unusual with the Countess, and they seem to show a mind drawn on by metaphor itself. Unlike Wyatt at psalms, she is not a ruminant who will sustain a metaphor over a number of
lines. Hers is an appetite that demands constant satisfaction, and in this she is more in the line of the later devotional poets. For the Countess, a psalm is very nearly an emblem, which can stimulate and control the imagination and sometimes constrict it.

Perhaps because of her concern for the broad development of metaphor, syntax is the chief sensuous element in the Countess's psalms. She does not incline to easy mellifluousness, unlike Sidney at his worst, or to deliberate strain, unlike Wyatt at his best. Unlike her brother she favors frequent repetition, using parallel structures, possessives, and adjectival modifiers. These can create the sense of a mind working by distinct stages—

Mark what thou hear'st, and what thou mark' st obey
(Ps. 45:38)

Thie beautie shall both breed, and bredd, maintaine
(Ps. 45:42)

If I weep, and weeping fast—
(Ps. 69:33)

but when used only for repetition itself, rather than for logical linking, they become confusing or trite:

For I, alas, acknowledging doe know
My filthie fault, my faultie filthiness . . .
(Ps. 51: 8–9)

if they thinck on ought,
Their thought they have, yea have beyond their thought.
(Ps. 73: 20–21)

How long, O God, how long
Wilt thou winck at the wrong
Of thy reviling railing foe?
Shall he that hates thy name,
And hatred paintes with shame,
So do, and do for ever soe?
(Ps. 74:49–54)

And so him self most terrible doth verify
In terrifying kings, that earth do terrify.
(Ps. 76:29–30)
To thee my crying call,
To thee my calling cry
I did, O God, adresse . . .

(Ps. 77:1–3)

Yea, God to mind I cal'd,
Yet calling God to mynde . . .

(Ps. 77:10–12)

Some of this repetition is of course present for the rhyme, and some of it for the meter, as in the invocation to God in Psalm 65:

The fertile yeare is with thy bounty crown'd:
And where thou go'st, thy goings fatt the ground.

(Ps. 65:41–42)

Perhaps if this God sounds rather like Falstaff, "larding the lean earth as he walks along," that is a tribute to Shakespeare, who has shown that the clumsiness of "go'st, goings" might have been avoided. The point is that because she has a taste for convoluted syntax to begin with, the Countess is readier to employ the most complex inversions for a rhyme or stanza form. Indeed at times it would be hard to say whether she or Thomas Sternhold was more capable of puzzling inversions:

O sound her ruptures make,
Her quaking bring to stay.

(Ps. 60:7–8)

How oft againe his gratious hand,
To watry pooles doth deserties change!
And on the fields that fruitless stand,
Makes trickling springs unhoped range!

(Ps. 107:93–96)

I sometime straitned lay in thrall:
So lying I on God did call,
God answere gave me, when I called,
And me unlarging, me unthralled.

(Ps. 118:17–20)
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Soe never slide
   Shall I from what thy statutes do ordayne.
   (Ps. 119R:17–18)

The purpose of some of the inversions in the Old Version is equally suspect:

   They are so fed, that even for fat,
   their eyes oft times outstart:
   And as for worldly goods they have,
   more then can wish their hart.

   Their life is most licentious,
   boasting much of their wrong:
   Which they have done to simple men,
   and ever pride among.

   (Ps. 73:7–8)

Yet sometimes the Countess can use this inversion to create a spontaneous and gracious movement: "O how in her shall sprowt and spring/ The scepter Davids hand did beare!" (132:67–68). To repeat, the Countess is uneven; she is not incompetent but only indifferent. When she strikes on a natural phrasing in her psalms, it is as much by accident as by design.

Strangely enough, many of her smaller revisions in Sidney's psalms show her moving toward a more colloquial syntax;\(^{34}\) for instance, in Psalm 32, she has changed "For so both day and night did stand/ On wretched mee thy heavy hand" to the more direct "On wretched me thy heauie hand/ Both day and night did sorely stand." However, the Countess seems to have admired both the energy of spoken language and the cunning of literary rhetoric. Thus her frequent interjections and exclamations. Rathmell points to an example in Psalm 58:

   And call yee this to utter what is just,
   You that of justice hold the sov'raign throne?
   And call yee this to yield, O sonnes of dust,
   To wronged brethren ev'ry man his own?
   O no: it is your long malicious will . . . .

   (1–5)

\(^{34}\) My text is that of Sidney, Poems. In this edition, Ringler also offers what appear to be the Countess's revisions of Sidney's psalms, cited later in this chapter.
As Rathmell shows, contemporary prose versions begin the rebuttal with a bland “Nay,” but “the insertion of the exclamatory ‘O’ gives a characteristically personal weight” to that mere connective. But many of her other additions are characteristically personal in that they are only padding:

Play, sing, and daunce. Then unto him, I say,
Unto our God, nam’d of eternal essence,
Present your selves with song, and daunce, and play.

(Ps. 68:6–8)

To endlesse whom be endlesse praise assign’d,
Be this, againe I saie, be this effected.

(Ps. 89:127–128)

Which when I say, thus said I, loe,
These men are madd,
And too too bad . . . .

(Ps. 95:33–35)

In these examples the Countess is filling out her meter or stanza by using terms that attempt to be emotive. But the terms themselves, I say, lo, and the equally common alas denote little. The context must invest them with emotion, but in these cases, the contexts are empty and the syntactic repetition does not supply an emotive statement.

Psalm 103 could be a model of all these techniques; the elements of bathos combine almost symphonically as the structure of the stanza slowly sinks:

His way and trade
He knowne to Moses made,
His wonders to the sonnes of Israel
The Lorde, I meane,
Jehova; who doth leane
With mildest will . . . .

(Ps. 103:25–30)

The casual tone of “I meane” is at sorts with the wrenched syntax of the second line, and the distinction itself seems pointless inasmuch

35 Rathmell, Psalms, p. xxi.
as the psalm has been using the two names interchangeably prior to this; the interjection is probably present for its rhyme with *leane*, which here has an unintentionally humorous aptness. As before, many of the Countess's personal additions fit her contexts, but many more are merely facile fillers. Properly speaking, they are not personal but anonymous, for they blur her individual expression.

Our movement now from stanza structure to stanza form is a natural one, and here we shall find the Countess at home. The metrical variety of her forms has been greatly but not overly praised. Her one hundred and seven psalms contain seventy-one different stanza forms. And I am reasonably positive that no one poem is virtually identical with another in both stanza and metric. When the Countess uses the same rhyme scheme in two or more poems, she invariably changes the meter or the stress on the rhyme, often producing as she does the so-called counterpointed rhyme. This variety is no accident, and in places the psalms show signs of deliberate experimentation. Psalms 81 and 84, for example, have an *a b a b c c d d* rhyme scheme, but in 81 the *d* rhymes are feminine, and in 84 all the rhymes are feminine except the *d* rhymes. Occasionally the same stanza will appear in iambic pentameter, tetrameter, trimeter, and counterpointed forms (as in 80, 107, 60, and 64). More rarely, a consecutively numbered group may comprise something like a theme and variations. The Countess's three opening psalms have this quality: all have an *a b a b b c b c* rhyme scheme, although 44 is in trochaic tetrameter, 45 in iambic pentameter, and 46 in mixed iambic tetrameter and trimeter. There are also smaller signs of experimentation, as in 130 and 132, which use an *a b a b c c* rhyme scheme but have metrical schemes that nearly mirror each other, with 2 2 2 2 4 4 and 4 4 4 4 2 3 feet respectively. Or one could point to 119B and 119C, which use an *a b a c b c*

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37 Miss Ostriker, in "Song and Speech," has pointed out (p. 64, n. 10) that six pairs of the Countess's psalms are identical except for the feminine rhymes; but these exceptions are important, for the Countess has gone to some effort to write poems that depend, for their contrasts, on these shifts of stress in rhyme.

The term *counterpoint* was first used by Albert McHarg Hayes, in "Counterpoint in Herbert," *SP*, 35 (1938): 49–60; the misleading aspects of the term are well noted by Summers, *George Herbert*, pp. 228–29, nn. 4–5.
rhyme scheme with two different counterpoint schemes of 3 5 4 3 5 4 and 2 3 4 2 3 4 feet.

But as these comments suggest, the Countess's experimentation is chiefly in the direction of mathematical ingenuity and not in the exercise of a good "ear." Her metrical substitutions are rarely more inventive than a reversed initial foot, and in all her psalms there is none of the colloquially stressed metric that we may find in *Astrophil and Stella*, and in fact little of the whole pull and push between form and meaning at which Sidney excels, even in his forty-three psalms.

There is an opportunity to verify these claims, for in the process of revising her brother’s psalms, the Countess impoverished Sidney’s rich metrical textures. Psalm 42, for example, is curiously revised, and the revisions show a surprising lack of concern for Sidney’s rhythms. Sidney’s version had been syntactically awkward but rhythmically quite emphatic:

To him my thanks shall be said
Who is still my present aid;
And in fine my soul be rayered,
God is my God, by mepraysed.

(53–56)

The first line of this disturbs the falling rhythms that have dominated the psalm up to this point, and signals the start of the psalm’s closing movement. The next two lines return to the dominant rhythm, which the last line accentuates by means of the caesura, setting up two large blocks. To indicate the tensions in the meter by a four-stress scansion:

\[ \overline{\text{God is my God, || by me praysed.}} \]

For these four lines the Countess has attempted four revisions. She may have been disturbed by that final passive verb; her revisions all end with more emphatic verbs. More important, Sidney’s rhythms seem to have perplexed her, and each of her revisions systematically simplifies the rhythms of the lines, by using only slightly varied falling rhythms:

Trust in him, on him relie
Yeeld him praise contynuallie
Who hath beene (thee failing never)
Thy true God, & wilbe ever.
Some Metrical Psalm Styles

To him my thankfull hart singe
Who is still my god and kinge
& with ayde me neare attendeth
When my foes my thrall entendeth.

Unto him a songe of praise
Still my thankfull heart shall raise
He who helps my case distressed
Even my God for ever blessed.

He it is who hath and will
Beene my comfort reddy still
He it is who faild me neuer
God my blessed God for euer.

Each of these has grotesque touches of its own, as the Countess must have realized, for in what is evidently her final copy she restores Sidney's wording. We may infer from her revisions that she was more concerned with the sense of the original than with its rhythmic balance, and this generalization may apply to most of her other revisions. Her concern with form is somewhat mechanical. For example, Sidney ends six psalms with extra couplets or tercets, which in every case the Countess has removed. Some of the mutilation is serious, as in Psalm 16. This is the final stanza as Sidney wrote it:

Thou the path wilt make me tread
Which to life true life doth lead:
Where who may contemplate Thee
Shall feel in Thy face's sight
All the fulness of delight,
And whose bodys placed be
On thy blessed making hand
Shall in endlessse pleasures stand!

(16:37–44)

The first two lines begin the stanza with a fairly even trochaic pattern; there is a slight metric disturbance in the third line, then still more in the fourth, as the poet thinks of sensing God's face directly. At this point one steady metric current takes over the stanza; the run-on lines, by abutting the stresses at the ends and starts of lines, keep up the pressure on the periodic syntax; and the stanza as a whole
seems designed to emphasize the exultation and plenitude of the true life.

In the Countess’s revision, this time preserved in her final copy, the stanza loses this surging movement and doggedly grinds to a halt. The lines are more weary and resigned than joyful:

Thou lifes path wilt make me knowe,
    In whose view doth plenty growe
All delights that soules can crave;
And whose bodies placed stand
On thy blessed-making hand,
They all joies, like-endless, have.

(16:37–42)

The stanza now matches the others, at least in number of lines, but at the expense of Sidney’s interplay between meter and meaning.

The Countess’s revisions of Sidney’s psalms, along with the sheer numerical variety of her own poetic forms, might seem to imply that she is a gifted versifier but not necessarily a poet. This would be a premature conclusion, however, for her gift for experiment seems beyond that of the mere versifier who is adept at tinkering with pre-existing forms. Her study and care in versification as a creative discipline is nowhere more evident than in her Psalms 120 through 127. This extraordinary sequence shows the Countess attempting assonantal and consonantal rhyme, mixed feet, and intricate forms that seem daring even when set beside her brother’s experiments. These are not especially attractive poems, but their technical care and thought are remarkable for their time. I would like to look at two of these, 123 and 124, which show well the Countess’s peculiar gifts.

Psalm 124, to begin with the simpler of the two, initially appears to be written in conventional iambic pentameter and hexameter lines:

Say Israel, doe not conceal a verity
    Had not the Lord assisted us,
Had not the Lord assisted us what tyme arose
    Against us our fierce enimies .
    .
(Ps. 124:1–4)

To describe these lines as iambic, however, would be to ignore both the problem of rhyme in the poem and the peculiar rising and falling
of the meter. As another possibility, it may be that the Countess was listening for a paeneonic meter, because this particular foot (the second paeon, \( x / x x \)) places stresses on syllables that rhyme, at least better than an iambic foot would do. This foot also accounts for the numerous unstressed syllables and accords with the poem’s phrasal groupings. Any scansion would be risky, but I would offer one like this (the rhyme notation will seem less mysterious in a moment):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Say Israel, } & \quad \text{do not conceale } \quad \text{a verity} \\
\text{Had not the Lord } & \quad \text{assisted us,} \\
\text{Had not the Lord } & \quad \text{assisted us } \quad \text{what tyme arose} \\
\text{Against us our } & \quad \text{fierce enimies:} \\
\text{Us all at once } & \quad \text{long since they had } \quad \text{devoured up,} \\
\text{They were soe fell, } & \quad \text{soe furious.} \\
\text{If not, the an} & \quad \text{angry gulphes, the streames } \quad \text{most horrible} \\
\text{Had drowned us: } & \quad \text{soe drowned us,} \\
\text{That in the deepe } & \quad \text{bene tombed, at } \quad \text{least on the deepe} \\
\text{Had tumbled, our } & \quad \text{dead Carcasses.} \\
\text{But Lord, what ho} & \quad \text{nor shall thy peolple yeeld to thee,} \\
\text{From greedy teeth } & \quad \text{delivered?} \\
\text{Escaped as } & \quad \text{the fowle, that oft } \quad \text{breaking the ginn,} \\
\text{Beguiles the fow} & \quad \text{lers wilynesse.} \\
\text{For sure this is } & \quad \text{thy work, thy name } \quad \text{protecteth us,} \\
\text{Who heav’n, who earth } & \quad \text{hast fashioned.}
\end{align*}
\]

Of course the meter may be heard as iambic rather than paeneonic; two is a multiple of four. In that case, though, the last foot would not
take the rhyme; with the paemonic scansion it does, and furthermore, puts it on the stressed syllable where it belongs. The rhyme scheme appears to consist of an alternately rhymed quatrains followed by three couplets each in the two rhymes; and the rhymes are generally back vowels, the a-rhyme (air-ur-ore-are-ow, and so forth), and front vowels, the b-rhyme (eh-ee-ih-ay, and so forth). It is not a flexible meter, and yet within its bounds the Countess does manage some expressive variation; in the thirteenth line, the substitution of a first paean, for the usual second paean, is quite appropriate. (A somewhat less expressive variation is the use of the diphthong ai ["eye"] in the third and fourteenth lines, in order to make the needed rhyme.) This sort of scansion is not likely to satisfy many readers, and yet I think it more satisfactory than one cobbled together by other means. Whatever the reader may make of this analysis, I trust that my main point is clear enough: the psalm is essentially a theoretical exercise, and it is easier to admire the Countess's ingenuity than her ability to suit form to meaning.

Psalm 123 shows a similar literary craft. On a first reading, the whole poem seems to be in a state of rhythmic and rhymic chaos. As in Coverdale's psalms, which usually relied on tunes for their "meter," the meters seem to be in a radical state of deterioration.

Unto thee, oppressed, thou greate commander of heaven
Heav'nly good attending, lift I my earthy seeing
Right as a waiters eye on a graceful master is holden;
As the look of waitresse fix'd on a lady lieth:
Soe with erected face, untill by thy mercy relieved,
O Lord, expecting, begg we thy frendly favour.
Scorn of proud scorners, reproach of mighty reprochers,
Our sprights cleane ruined, fills with an inly dolor.
Then frend us, favour us, Lord then with mercy relieve us,
Whose scornfull miseries greatly thy mercy needeth.

The rhymes are clearer than those in Psalm 124, for they seem to fall into couplets, formed by rhymes in the penultimate syllables. Again there are puzzles, though, as in lines 5 and 6 (apparently a half-rhyme), and 3 and 4 (the "rhyme" here not even a legal fiction). The metric appears to consist of five hexameter lines followed by five pentameter lines, each line made up of trochees and amphibrachs:
In principle the meter resembles that of Sidney’s “Asclepiadickes” in the *Arcadia*, which use three different feet in a pentameter line; as Theodore Spencer says of these, “the ‘versifying’ experiments reinforced one very important metrical lesson, namely that the same kind of foot did not necessarily have to be repeated throughout the line.” Yet like her rhymes, the Countess’s meter smells of the lamp. This may be the sort of “massy cadence” that Ruskin found in the Countess’s psalms, but its pleasures are more theoretical than auditory.

If we return to stanza form, we may tie together these diverse comments on the Countess’s style. It is obvious that the Countess, more than Sidney, is responsible for the technical variety in the psalter as a whole, and not merely because she translated the larger number of psalms. Sidney used stanzas of four, five, six and sometimes eight lines, and experimented by adjusting meter and line length. The Countess

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39 Quoted by Rathmell, ed., *Psalms*, p. xxv.
40 Louis Martz is one of the few critics who have noticed Sidney’s really narrow limits in stanza length (*Poetry of Meditation*, pp. 273–74). My own tally of the Countess’s longer stanzas is as follows: eight lines, forty-four (including parts, G, K, M, Q, and T of Psalm 119; nine lines, three; ten lines, three; and twelve lines, two. There is also one sonnet (Psalm 100).
wrote in short stanzas as well as long stanzas of eight, nine, ten, and twelve lines. At times the Countess's stanza variations seem to have become ends in themselves, as in the examples above, where the form is more decorative than functional. Of course every psalm must be judged on its own merits; any generalization is dangerous when applied to one hundred and seven poems. But I believe that integrity of form in the individual poems was of less concern to the Countess than total variety. Reading her poetry, I cannot avoid feeling that the variety itself is a long pretence, that the forms may not be doing all the work they could in determining poetic meaning.

As I mentioned earlier though, technique for the Countess may function as metaphor. For her, formal variety signifies something more than the statistics, more even than the sum of relationships with literal meanings. Her psalmody is a devotional act: to her brother more than to God. As the opening lines of her dedicatory poem state emphatically,

To thee pure sprite, to thee alone's address't
this coupled worke, by double int'rest thine:
First rais'de by thy blest hand, and what is mine
inspird by thee . . .

(1-4)

This note is repeated several times throughout the ninety-one lines of the poem, and it is important to realize that it is not idolatrous. For the Countess, Sidney was literally an expression of the divine. He was dazzling enough to ordinary sensual man, say, Thomas Nashe, and infinitely more so to a younger sister. When in her "obsequies" (85) she speaks of his "Angell's soule with highest Angells plac't" (59), she implies that worshipping Sidney is not far from worshipping God. Donne describes their relationship rather more decorously, but they are still a heavenly pair:

as thy blessed Spirit fell upon
These Psalms first Author in a cloven tongue;
(For 'twas a double power by which he sung
The highest matter in the noblest forme;)

41 These lines and the following come from Rathmell's text of the poem in Psalms, pp. xxxv–xxxvii.
So thou has cleft that spirit, to performe
That worke againe, and shed it, here, upon
Two, by their bloods, and by thy Spirit one;
A Brother and a Sister, made by thee
The Organ, where thou art the Harmony.

As the Countess says, Sidney gave the Psalms lustrous garments ("superficial tire/ by thee put on" [9–10]) and now her job is to finish his "half-maim'd peece" (18). Thus the formal variety with which Sidney inaugurated the psalter is, for the Countess, a real part of its consecrated purpose. That variety is an end in itself and a meaningful end. We should not overlook the psalter's devotional purpose; but we should remember that part of that purpose is to create, as the Countess calls it, a "world of words" (28). Thus the ingenuity, the analysis, the arrangement, in short, the criticism which underlies the psalter, finally merges with her own loving purpose. Indeed, the Countess misses the second or third rank of Elizabethan lyricists for this reason, because her failure in individual poems is almost the result of her critical and devotional success. Her preoccupation with sorting, testing, and renovating must have displaced or become a substitute for the writing of poems in which form and meaning are stated one in the other. In this respect her failures, such as they are, are quite unlike those of her contemporaries in the multitudinous miscellanies. Most of these poems, when they fail, accomplish nothing; the Countess's psalms, on the contrary, are like those works in every art that we value for all they accomplish in the process of missing a working or lasting unity.

In this sense it is helpful to say, as does Hallett Smith, that the Sidneyan psalms as a whole "might be regarded as a School of English Versification." They do constitute a school in that the psalter is a self-contained body or system of models. But the term school may exaggerate the psalter's importance. Only a few poets attempted to take advantage of or even imitate the stanzaic and metrical variety of the psalter, and to credit the Sidneys (even by implication, by use of the term) with the founding of a school might be even more of a distortion than to refer to Donne's school. Yet as one attempt to
arrange and renovate, the psalter is extremely important. Theodore Spencer, speaking of Sidney's poetry as a whole, located some of the fundamental assumptions behind Sidney's art and, I would argue, the Countess's as well:

If English poetry were ever to have any music in it, if the rhythm of the lines were rightly to echo the rhythm of the thought, if there were ever to be any of that essential drama in English verse technique, by which a resolved conflict occurs between the basic metrical pattern and the necessary rhythm of the meaning—if all this were to happen, the situation which existed before 1576 [that is, the start of the Arcadia] had drastically to be changed. The practice of verse technique needed a violent wrench to get it out of its dusty rut. And this wrench, this virtual dislocation, was largely accomplished by the experiments in classical meters.... [Sidney and his circle] tried to make people think about words; in order to "versify," words had to be broken up, each syllable had to be weighed and considered, and new rhythmical combinations had to be found which were as far as possible from the unthinking jog-trot of the prevalent iambic habit.44

And the changing stanza patterns are, as Spencer showed elsewhere in his valuable article, an integral part of this weighing and testing and checking. Even if Herbert never saw the psalter, these critical acts make it important because they indicate a particularly advanced poetic consciousness for the time. The psalter is more important as a critical work than as a poetic work. It selects and discriminates; it presents a theory. T. S. Eliot has remarked on this discriminating process in his "Apology for the Countess of Pembroke," and although his main concern is with poetics and drama, his remarks also apply to the Sidney psalter, which demonstrates "the intimacy of the creative and the critical mind."45 To adapt Eliot's thesis, the psalter is one manifestation of "the Elizabethan critical mind expressing itself before the greater part of the great literature of the age had been written."46 This surely is no small accomplishment; and that in the process Sidney and the Countess each wrote some dozen psalms of permanent value, in their own right, testifies to their capacity for this important critical office.

46 Ibid., p. 53.
IV. GEORGE WITHER

To shift from the Sidneys to Wither is inevitably disappointing. By the time his psalter appeared, approximately thirty-three years after Mary Herbert had finished the Sidneyan psalter, enough battles in poetic technique had been fought that, given Wither's talent (or lack of it, rather), his chances of surprising us are few. By this time the triumph of Sternhold and Hopkins was complete, as it was not in the eighties and nineties; in 1631 alone, the year before the publication of Wither's *Psalmes*, the Old Version had gone through eight different editions. When the Sidneys were writing, the supremacy of the Old Version was still open to challenge; but so far had it succeeded in Wither's time that he was practically forced to adopt its poetic forms if his own psalter were to be used widely, and apparently Wither did want this sort of success. His *Psalmes* thus have a compromise character; his aim is to remove the vulgarity and sheer bad writing of the Old Version, while still retaining its static structures. The literary dangers of Wither's task are obvious. There would be a tendency to "translate," that is, to clean up or revise the Old Version's errors, rather than work out from a fresh conception; and there would be a tendency to work toward mere inoffensiveness. Wither seems to have been aware of these dangers, for his two earlier books on the psalter are full of observations on the beauty of language and justness of sentiment in the originals.

It is hard to assess how far Wither's concern for these beauties and sentiments went before it shaded into his Protestant capitalism, but it did not result in especially attractive or edifying psalms. The decision to "fit," as he called it, every psalm to one already in the Old Version committed him to a rhythmic and stanzaic monotony. On the level of prose meaning, Wither's primary concern, as I noted in the Introduction, is with the figures of the psalter and the supposed breaches of decorum the Old Version had introduced. But as critics have always pointed out, many of the effects of bathos or sinking are also those of rising: the abrupt introduction of a metaphor, the unexpected shift in rhythm, and the more subtle effects of syntax moving across line ends and cross-rhythms rising and falling across the main current of the meter. By removing the potential for weakness, Wither also removed the potential for strength. Even the most dignified figures, clothed in a blanched and insipid rhythm, become only statues, or worse, ghosts.
Although Wither's language has much of the toughness and casual violence of Sternhold and Hopkins, the figures are introduced more carefully and the clashing metaphors are harmonized. The result is a great gain in immediate coherence:

For, lo; with mischeeves being bigg,  
They first conceive a sinn;  
Next, bring forth lies; then pit-falls digg.  
Where, they themselves fal in.  
Thus, on their heads, their mischeeve all  
Do justly tumble down;  
And wicked mens devises fall  
On their devizors crowne.\(^\text{47}\)

(Ps. 7, p. 11)

Sidney's version is much more energetic rhythmically, which is appropriate considering the subject matter, and his syntactic confusion is equally appropriate:

A pitt was digg'd by this man, vainly strong;  
But in the pitt he, ruin'd, first did fall,  
Which fall he made, to doe his neighbour wrong.  

He against me doth throw, but down it shall  
Upon his pate; his paine, emploied thus,  
And his own ill, his own head shall appall.

(Ps. 7:40–45)

Sidney's syntax is mimetic, tripping over itself like the vain man, and this is usually the sort of effect that Wither avoids. He smooths over the roughest passages, in which one hopes for excitement:

But, God shall cut their lipps that gloze,  
And, pluck away the tongues of those  
Who proudly make their vaunting, thus:  
Wee of our tongues will masters be;  
Our lipps are ours, & who is he  
That shall have Lord-ship over us?

(Ps. 12, p. 20)

\(^{47}\) All references are to Wither, *Psalmes*. Psalm and page numbers are given in the text.
From greeds like ours, they seemed free,
    Their pride & Cruelties,
To them as clothes or bracelets be;
    And, fatt stuffs out their eyes.

(Ps. 73, p. 133)

Clearly some substantial gains have been made. The metaphors have a sharper visual basis than they have had most of the time before, with most of the psalmodists; the logical contrasts are crisper; and there is some knowledge of the proud heart. The verse is very tidy but very dull, for the lines have a rhythmic banality that the figures do not conceal. Wither’s psalms form an interesting contrast with Mary Herbert’s, for while her rhythms are also rarely exciting, her figures often have a novel insight that at least secures our attention.

When Wither’s figures are thin, or absent altogether, he, like his predecessors, resorts to wordy inversions and fillers to satisfy his forms. His steady iambic rhythms almost succeed in covering them up:

Unheard of thee, I crye whole daies;
    Whole nights the same I doe;
Yet, thou art Isr’els cheefest praise,
    And, thou art holy to.

(Ps. 22, pp. 38–39)

They seek not Peace, but Projects lay
    For them that peaceful be:
With gaping mouthes, AH! HA, say they,
    Our wish, we now do see.

(Ps. 35, p. 67)

Who, resteth in the shade of God most high,
Within his privy-Chambers is reposed:
And, therfor, in my selfe, thus mused I;
Thee, as a Fort, thy God hath round enclosed . . .

(Ps. 91, p. 172)

In many ways this is worse than the craftsmanship of Sternhold and Hopkins. Their work had some naive energy, inflicting itself on the medium in unexpected ways; but Wither’s verse is just enough closer to an ideal of “correctness” that it has lost energy without finding sophistication. To that extent, even these examples, by stressing his
flaws, may create a misleading picture of him as a refined Sternhold. Most of the time his art is competently dull. I would suggest as an analogy the architecture of the typical modern state college, always correct and well finished and often having surface interest, but static in its masses and imitative in conception. Even on an occasion that calls for life and energy, Wither maintains his dull movement. His Psalm 150, the *Laudate Dominum*, will quicken no pulse:

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Come praise the Lord, come praise him,
With in his holy-seat:
In all his glories, praise him,
And his great Acts repeat.
As he excelleth, praise him,
With Trumpet, and with Flute;
With Harp and Psaltry, praise him,
With Viol, & with Lute.
Upon the Timbrel praise him,
In Song, his praise advance:
Upon the Organs praise him,
And, praise him in the Dance.
On tingling Cimballs praise him,
On Cymballs loud that sound;
And, let all creatures praise him,
In whom, life-breath is found.
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(pp. 294–95)

Something has gone out of the verse since Sidney. The reader may recall Sidney's Psalm Thirty-three, a similar song of praise by music which has a corresponding music in its sounds and rhythms. These qualities are lacking in Wither's psalm; there is a gap between the ideas and the style. Much of the style seems to point ahead to some of the worst aspects of Restoration verse: the triteness of the rhythm (there is not even a tentative modulation); the heavy stamp of the rhymes; the stanza that is formal but not functional (note the redundancy in the first two lines of the last quatrain). It is true that the Countess of Pembroke is often capable of writing nonfunctional stanzas; but those forms themselves, in their great variety, still have intrinsic interest. In Wither, the last of our psalmodists, we have reached perhaps a low point in lyric form, for the verse is merely inoffensive and monotonous.
It is fitting that Wither should be the last psalmist in this study, for his *Psalmes* are one of the last attempts in the century, by a literary figure of any consequence, to provide a public or singing psalter. The Old Version, maintaining its position and not to be replaced in the church service until 1696, actually may have encouraged the growth of a literary and private psalmody. Wither's conspicuous failure to dislodge Sternhold and Hopkins, even though he had the blessings of the King, may have provided a sufficient example of how *not* to use the psalms. Another factor in the general decline of psalmody is the rise of the hymn, and in this, ironically enough, Wither is a key figure. That subject is another essay; but it is likely that the very fixity of the Old Version promoted the devising of lyrics that would eventually replace the psalm in popular Protestant devotion. And finally, the complex of rising problems in church and state must have precluded the comparatively sweet freedom that encouraged psalmody in the eighties and nineties.

V. CONCLUSION

The history of the metrical psalm can be seen, without great oversimplification, as the course of tensions between a variety of elements: the tension between high and low church elements over the use and significance of the psalter, between the courtly expression of repentant passion and the vulgar expression of "enthusiasm," between elegance and variety and bathos and monotony, or between the narrative and the lyric. Of course these tensions were not unique to the metrical psalm but were felt in other genres as well. However, one effect of these conflicts within psalmody was the increasing stabilization of the iambic line. The Old Version in particular established this rhythmic norm as a part of the English consciousness; it presented a metric, indeed, an aesthetic, which a poet could accept, modify, or reject almost wholly. In fact, the Old Version's negative example may have been one of its best aspects, for it may have demonstrated to the Sidneys and to Herbert the difficulties of using one limited form to express a variety of emotions. We should not forget to add, too, that the Sidney psalter itself, though not the commercial success of the Old Version, provided the right people with a whole cluster of ideas that the theoreticians had not yet described.
In reading *The Temple*, we shall see how Herbert found something of value in the poetic forms of the metrical psalms; we shall see also how he found value in the content of these psalms, with their recurrent theme of weakness becoming strength. This study will involve looking at Herbert’s personal resolution of those tensions which affected sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century poetry but were most boldly displayed in the metrical psalm. When Herbert says that “affliction shall advance the flight in me,” he is referring to the physical and spiritual suffering by which he is strengthened, and a similar process of amalgamation takes place in his poetic form. In *The Temple*, the devices of the Old Version obtain new energy and provide a wing on which to fly; and the sheer, sometimes arbitrary variety of the Sidney psalter becomes functional. Courtly and common aspects of religious song meet in Herbert, and though he is usually considered only a minor psalmodist himself, he has a clearer idea than the major psalmists of the interrelations and separate prerogatives of lyric poetry and music. Herbert is able to exploit the clumsy musical sense of his predecessors (excepting Sidney), sometimes in a satiric context by directing its bathos at himself, and sometimes in the highest and most serious contexts by diverting it into painful self-knowledge. The self-pity into which psalmody can sink so quickly—*vide* Wyatt—with its attendant stylistic messiness, gives way in Herbert to self-respect and a restrained yet vigorous style. In every case, Herbert gives dignity and value to what he borrows.

Has the metrical psalm had an active influence on us, outside the poetry of Herbert? The absorption of its poetic modes—particularly those of the Old Version—has been so complete that we are inclined to look rather at the poets who absorbed it than at its innovators. The rise of Protestant hymnody in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries consolidated the positive achievements of the versified psalms but had in turn its own problems. Isaac Watts, Charles Wesley, and William Cowper, to name only three of the best-known writers of hymns within this period, achieved their own styles and yet wrote verse which, though often pedestrian, at least made good prose sense, was not repetitious or padded, and demonstrated the poet’s ability to think through metaphor. More dubious accomplishments in this period included Common Meter “translations” of Herbert’s poems (many, alas, still to be found in hymnals) and the poetically incompetent hymns of the mob of Methodists who wrote with ease.
Significantly enough, many religious lyrics of the later nineteenth century seem to have been written in reaction to the progressively more sentimentalized Protestant hymns, just as many religious lyrics of the early seventeenth century had shown a reaction to the clumsy technique and naive faith of the metrical psalms. Browning, Tennyson, and especially Hardy were aware of the effects to be gained by countering the conditioned response to the themes and forms of religious song; Hardy possessed a gift for serious parody along these lines which would be hard to underrate. Yet there is no question that their own religious verse owes much to the vigor of the eighteenth-century hymn, just as the hymn in turn had gained much from the controversy over the “poetic” of the Old Version. Even modern religious verse has been the inheritor of that reassessment.

In our time the metrical psalm has been of interest chiefly to scholars, and there has been no rush on the part of modern poets to revive it for its salutary effect on our sensibilities. Among modern poets there has been only one, as far as I know, both voracious and perverse enough to have read and seriously used the metrical psalm. Writing of her early friendship with W. H. Auden, the novelist Naomi Mitchison has recalled that he was “fascinated by the metrical versions of the Psalms with their curious inversions. The poem that begins ‘Not father, further do prolong’ is directly influenced by the metrical psalms.”48 The poem itself, the last ode in The Orators, is an important illustration of an idea Herbert would have understood, criticism by original composition. Auden is also the only editor of a popular poetry anthology who has stressed the historical importance of the metrical psalms, and he has mentioned elsewhere that the earliest poems he recalls include The English Hymnal, the Psalms, and Struwwelpeter.49 There is a curious fitness in all this, that the metrical psalms should have found a modern reader who, in spite of some evident dissimilarities to Herbert in other respects, possesses a keen musical sense and a faultless ear.

48 “Young Auden,” Shenandoah, 18 (Winter 1967): 13. Unfortunately it was not possible to reprint the poem here.