

**David the Lawyer in Wyatt's "Psalm 51"**

*or*

**A Study of Paraphrase in Wyatt's "Psalm 51"**

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Every translation is an interpretation, in some degree. How much of an interpretation varies: John Dryden, in his essay “Ovid and the Art of Translation,” marks three varieties of translation (emphasis added):

*Metaphrase*, or turning an author word by word, and line by line, from one language into another...*Paraphrase*, or translation with latitude, where the author is kept in view by the translator, so as never to be lost, but his words are not so strictly followed as his sense; and that too is admitted to be amplified, but not altered...*Imitation*, where the translator (if now he has not lost that name) assumes the liberty not only to vary from the words and sense, but to forsake them both as he sees occasion; and taking only some general hints from the original, to run division on the groundwork, as he pleases.<sup>1</sup>

What Dryden calls “metaphrase,” we would usually call simply “translation,” especially when speaking of prose translations, or academic ones. Translations of poetry usually tend more towards the realm of “paraphrase,” an example being Dryden’s own translation of Virgil’s works. “Imitation” is reminiscent of films that are “based on a true story,” or of Shakespeare’s loose use of his source material. In reality, we can see a spectrum linking these three types of translation, a spectrum with, perhaps, “literalism” on one end and “inspiration” on the other.

Of these three, paraphrase is the most intriguing, because it gives the chance to incorporate commentary into the text itself. By not being so strictly tied to the source text, it gives leeway to the translator; yet, if performed in the way Dryden intends, it still remains bound to the source. As he says, what is paraphrased is “amplified, but not altered.”

As an example, let us look at a paraphrase of Psalm 51 (or 50) by Sir Thomas Wyatt, a Tudor politician and poet most famous for introducing the Petrarchan sonnet into English poetry. As he wrote when English orthography was still in flux—he died twenty years before Shakespeare was born—the original spelling of his poems can be hard to read; in any quotes I give here, I have modernized the spelling and slightly adjusted punctuation, based on the text edited by Kenneth Muir.<sup>2</sup>

Wyatt’s paraphrase of Psalm 51 is set in the context of a poem cycle fittingly called the *Penitential Psalms*. Inspired by a similar prose work by Italian tragedian and poet Pietro Aretino (*I sette psalmi de la penitentia di David*), Wyatt’s cycle sets terza rima paraphrase of the seven penitential psalms—Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143—within a frame story, told in ottava rima interludes, about David retreating to a cave after Nathan confronts him for his sin with Bathsheba. In general, the interludes add little to the paraphrases besides reinforcing the tradi-

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<sup>1</sup> John Dryden, *Dramatic Essays* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, n.d.), 151.

<sup>2</sup> *Collected Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt*, ed. Kenneth Muir (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963). For the *Penitential Psalms*, see 201-226; Poem 207, the paraphrase of Psalm 51, is on 216-218.

tional idea that David was the author of the Psalms; the most striking portion is in the final interlude, after David recites Psalm 130, which ends “Plenteous ransom shall come with Him, I say, / And shall redeem all our iniquity” (Poem 211, ll. 31-32):

This word “redeem,” that in his mouth did sound,  
Did put David, it seemeth unto me,  
As in a trance, to stir upon the ground,  
And with his thought the height of heaven to see;  
Where he beholds the word that should confound  
The sword of death: by humble ear to be  
In mortal maid, in mortal habit made,  
Eternal life in mortal veil to shade (Poem 212, ll. 1-8).

Besides the prophecy of Christ found here, Wyatt’s cycle puts the Psalms pretty convincingly in David’s mouth. The commentary that he works into his paraphrases keep close to the text, expanding on moral themes or ideas regarding God’s mercy, without adding on a layer of allegorical or Christological interpretation, as his inspiration, Aretino, did heavily.

Yet a lack of allegory does not mean that Wyatt’s poems are simply metaphrases of the Psalms: he truly does add his own understanding into his paraphrase, as we will see in Psalm 51. Occasionally, his lines are simply metaphrases, like, “Thou shalt me wash, and more than snow, therefore, / I shall be white...Render to me joy of Thy help and rest” (Poem 207, ll. 45-46, 57; see Ps 51:7,12). But much of it is expanded.

The main themes of Psalm 51 are, of course, confession of sins, and pleading for God’s mercy, though Wyatt’s reworking of the final portion of the Psalm emphasizes another element: describing the action of God’s mercy. In the first section of the poem, though, we have the two main themes. The confession of sins is fairly straightforward, but the pleading Wyatt’s David uses has some interesting tactics. Much of his pleading is, in a way, a series of arguments as to *why* God should have mercy. The arguments might be boiled down to three: 1) mercy is in God’s nature, 2) mercy is promised by God, 3) David still retains some good in him.

The first argument opens the poem, taking up the first three tercets:

Rue on me, Lord, for Thy goodness and grace,  
That of Thy nature art so bountiful,  
For that goodness that in the world doth brace  
Repugnant natures in quiet wonderful;  
And for Thy mercy’s number without end  
In heaven and earth perceived so plentiful  
That over all they do themselves extend:

For those mercies much more than man can sin  
Do way my sins that so Thy grace offend (ll. 1-9).

The opening verse, in the Vulgate, simply reads, “Have mercy on me, God, according to Your great kindness; and according to the multitude of Your mercies, wipe out my iniquity” (Ps 51:1). (I am assuming Wyatt used the Vulgate as his source, though it is possible he used one of the early English translations like Wycliffe, Tyndale, or Coverdale.) Wyatt latches on to that phrase, “according to the multitude of Your mercies,” expanding upon it, emphasizing how God’s mercy extends “over all,” that it is so strong that it brings an end to the strife of opponents (it “doth brace / Repugnant nature in quiet wonderful”). This latter phrase properly refers to the idea of the opposing elements, fire against water, earth against air, along with other natural oppositions: instead of allowing the chaos of ever-warring nature, God’s goodness keeps the world at peace. These mercies extend over all things; they bring peace to even the warring elements; and they are so great as to even be “much more than man can sin,” as Wyatt says in a particularly alliterative line. The argument is clear, if implicit: *if* Your mercies keeps the warring world “in quiet wonderful”; *if* Your mercies are so plentiful as to cover all things; *if* Your mercies even exceed the limit of man’s sinfulness; *therefore*, in accord with Your nature, “do way my sins.” Even if David’s sin is so great that “none can measure my fault but Thou alone” (l. 20), yet God’s mercy exceeds even that. This unexceedable mercy is part of God’s very nature, and so—David implicitly argues—He should act in accord with that nature, and forgive him.

This turns what often seems like a bare confession and plea into a kind of legal case, in which David is arguing why God should forgive him. God is not an arbitrary judge, here, He is not a being of surprises: He is an ordered being, One Who follows His own nature and (as we shall soon see) His own word. “Mercy triumphs over justice,” as the saying goes, but, here, to give mercy *is* just, it is to follow the “law,” if you will, of God’s own nature. For Wyatt’s David, mercy is not an unexpected reversal of condemnation: it is the logically necessary response to sin.

This argument from God’s own nature is not the only one David gives, though; he bolsters his case with two others. If God’s nature does not bind Him enough, then surely His word will. God forgives, “as aye [His] wont hath been” (l. 12), not simply by custom or kind, but by promise. After the mention of God’s wonted mercy, David continues:

For unto Thee no number can be laid  
For to prescribe remission of offence  
In hearts returned, as Thou Thyself hast said (ll. 13-15).

God’s previous actions show His unbounded mercy, but that is not sufficient, for custom can be changed; certainly, before seeing Bathsheba, David was not wont to commit adultery and

arrange murder (even going to far as to spare Saul, who hunted him), yet a new circumstance inspired a new course of action. If custom is not a sufficient bond, what is stronger? An oath. So David turns to God's prior promises of mercy. "If You do not have mercy upon me," he argues, "You shall be an oath-breaker, an untrustworthy God." "Pardon Thou, then, / Whereby Thou shalt keep Thy word stable, / Thy justice pure and clean" (ll. 25-27).

As the opening lines of the paraphrase incorporate Wyatt's expanded reading of "according to the multitude of Your mercies," so this argument comes to depend on a single verse, where the Vulgate translation—in accord with the Greek Septuagint—is quite different from modern translations: "Against You alone have I sinned, and evil before You have I done; so that You may be justified in Your words, and that You may conquer when You are judged" (Ps 51:4). Modern translations typically translate the last section differently, as in the RSV-CE: "So that you are justified in your sentence and blameless in your judgment." The modern translation can be seen as merely stating facts about God's condemnation of the sinner: it could be reworded, "Your sentence is just, and Your judgment is blameless." In the Vulgate, though, both of these phrases are passive verbs, describing things done to God: *He* is justified, and, perhaps more oddly, *He* is judged. God is typically seen as *the* judge, the judge of all, the "judge that comes to deal our doom," as Gerard Manley Hopkins says.<sup>3</sup> For He Himself to be judged is a strange reversal, one that brings to mind the issue of theodicy, of how to, in Milton's famous phrase, "justify the ways of God to men."<sup>4</sup>

In the Vulgate form of the Scriptural verse, the argument still, generally, follows the modern translations: God is justified in His words (or decrees, in a less literal translation), and He conquers when He is judged, *because* of the psalmist's sin, admitted right before. Thus the verse could be reworded: "evil before You have I done; therefore, You are justified in Your decrees of punishment, and You will prevail when You are judged for condemning me." God is justified in His condemnation, because the psalmist's sin is real and worthy of it.

In Wyatt's form, though, the meaning is quite shifted. His David, too, affirms his sinfulness: "To Thee alone, to Thee have I trespassed. . . For in Thy sight I have not been aghast / For to offend, judging Thy sight as none" (ll. 19,21-22). Yet this David does not say, "Judge Thou, then, / Whereby Thou shalt keep still Thy word stable"; instead, the command is, "Pardon, Thou, then" (ll. 25-26). "Keeping His word stable" seems to be Wyatt's form of, "that You may be justified in Your words," but, here, God's justification comes not as a result of His rightful condemnation of the sinner, but from His pardon. This can be understood in connection with what was said ear-

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<sup>3</sup> See *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. W.H. Gardner and N.H. Mackenzie, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 316. This phrase comes from a fragment written on the bottom of the draft of "Thee, God, I come from, to thee go."

<sup>4</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost* l.26.

lier, when Wyatt's David asserts that God's forgiveness has no limits, "as Thou Thyself hast said" (l. 15). The following lines, still connected to this same Scriptural verse, are a bit more confusing, and the whole passage is worth quoting in full:

...Pardon Thou, then,  
Whereby Thou shalt keep still Thy word stable,  
Thy justice pure and clean; by cause that when  
I pardoned am, then forthwith justly able,  
Just I am judged by justice of Thy grace (ll. 25-29).

The "judgment" in that final, wonderfully alliterative, line, is not "condemnation," but justification, that "being declared righteous" that is key in traditional Protestant theology: "Just I am judged." This justification is "of Thy grace," that is, it is not from man's effort, but from God. This hints to the theme that will dominate the final section of the poem. The line just before this—"I pardoned am, then forthwith justly able"—seems to mean that pardon leads to the ability to act justly. While still in sin, man cannot act justly, but, being justified by God's grace and pardon, he is "forthwith justly able." The following lines, following the Scriptural verse closely, are easily read to imply the doctrine of original sin, though they could, perhaps, be taken otherwise:

For I myself, lo! thing most unstable,  
Formed in offence, conceived in like case,  
Am naught but sin from my nativity (ll. 30-32).

To sum up this argument before moving on, Wyatt's David argues that God's mercy is required by the promise He has previously given, as well as by His nature. Pardoning is necessary so that God may "keep still [His] word stable, / [His] justice pure and clean" (ll. 25-26). The first phrase is quite strongly connected to the idea of promise; the second could, perhaps, refer to the justice inherent in God's nature instead, a justice that is inextricably tied to mercy, which, as the first argument declared, is part of God's nature.

Alongside these arguments from God's nature and promise, Wyatt's David keeps declaring his utter sinfulness, even, in the latest lines covered, stating that he is sinful from birth. All of this, he declares, is not exculpatory: "Be not this said for my excuse, alas, / But of Thy help to shew necessity" (ll. 33-34). Yet, immediately after this, in a whiplash turnabout, he begins to argue for some good in himself. First, after stating that God "loves the truth of inward heart," he affirms that this "yet doth live in my fidelity" (ll. 35-36). He is saying, "Though I have sinned, it is not *that* bad: inwardly, I am still true to You." He then minimizes his sin by blaming it on circumstances, on passions that he failed to resist:

Though I have fallen by frailty overthwart,  
For willful malice led me not the way,  
So much as hath the flesh drawn me apart (ll. 37-39).

The implication seems to be that his sin is not as bad as it could have been. A man can sin through malice, directly opposing God, willfully uprooting “the truth of inward heart,” but, says Wyatt’s David, “I sinned only in the flesh; it was a crime of passion, not a premeditated offence.” Perhaps such an argument could be applied to the first instance of adultery, but it is not very strong: after seeing Bathsheba bathing—and Scripture does not even speak of David being amazed or astounded by her, only saying that “the woman was very beautiful”—David takes the time to ask about who her husband is before having her brought to his room, in order to sleep with her (2 Sam 11:2-4). Even if one could claim that as a crime of passion—though it is a stretch—there is no one could do so regarding the murder of Uriah. After his efforts to trick Uriah fail, David writes a letter and—as an extra wicked trick—places it in Uriah’s hand, to order Uriah’s commander to purposefully put him on the frontlines, and then abandon him, that he might be killed (2 Sam 11:14-15). This is no crime of passion: this is a calculated, complicated means of assassination. Yes, the origin of all of this is the flesh that has “drawn [him] apart,” but, at a certain point, this switched into a form of “willful malice,” a deliberate attempt to deceive, and then to kill. It goes beyond simple “frailty,” and, even if the “willful malice” is not directed at God *per se*, it is far from being a simple crime of passion. This argument—which does not even have any roots in the Scriptural text of the Psalm—is the self-justification of a man who does not know the true depth of his sin. “The truth of inward heart” still “doth live in my fidelity,” he claims, and “my faith doth not yet decay,” but can these really make up for such heinous sins (ll. 35-36,42)? And this is supposed to be the same man who declared, in Psalm 38, that he had an

...eke not well cured wound,  
That festered is by folly and negligence,  
By secret lust hath rankled under skin,  
Not duly cured by my penitence (Poem 205, ll. 21-24).

The dishonest argument David gives here is a striking piece of characterization, showing the Psalmist’s imperfection, whether that was Wyatt’s view or not. Perhaps he thought his David was speaking truly here, and that his inward truth, fidelity, and faith could stand unshaken even amidst such grave sins. It is not that there can be no good left in the sinner—I would not agree with a doctrine of “total depravity”—yet it cannot be used as an argument for mercy for such grave misdeeds. Mercy for such foulness cannot be demanded, merely freely given.

So Wyatt’s David has argued his cause from these three points: from the mercy inherent in God’s nature, from the mercy He has promised, and from the good remaining in David de-

spite his sin. Yet, after these arguments, Wyatt's David becomes stricter to the Scriptural text, and turns to simply begging for mercy in a variety of ways. Before coming to the final portion of the poem, it is worth noting one interesting passage in this section, where Wyatt's David gives a rare bit of subdued prophecy, hinting at the more explicit vision that comes at the end of the poem cycle, quoted above:

Thou of my health shalt gladsome tidings bring,  
When from above remission shall be seen  
Descend on earth: then shall for joy upspring  
The bones that were afore consumed to dust (ll. 47-50).

The remission that descends on earth could be taken to mean simply the fact that, as God dwells in heaven and man on earth, any forgiveness He gives can be said to descend from heaven to earth. Yet I don't think this passage can be truthfully read without seeing the Christological hints. "Gladsome tidings" is, of course, another way of saying, "good news," one of the literal translations of the word "Gospel." Christ is the One Who descends to earth, bringing those gladsome tidings. "The bones that were afore consumed to dust" may simply be taken as a hyperbolic description of a man crushed by sorrow for sin, who will receive back his joy through forgiveness; but it is also easy to read as a hint of the Resurrection, brought about by "the word"—or, better, Word—"that should confound / The sword of death" (Poem 212, ll. 5-6).

Whether that passage be taken as a prophecy of Christ or not, it certainly declares trust in God to act mercifully. And so it comes amid a chain of pleas for God to have mercy, pleas that give way to promises:

Sinners I shall into Thy ways address:  
They shall return to Thee and Thy grace sue,  
My tongue shall praise Thy justification,  
My mouth shall spread Thy glorious praises true (ll. 60-63).

Here, though, we come to the crux. Is Wyatt's David trying to make a deal with God? "If You forgive me, I will teach others to praise You; let's have a *quid pro quo*. Judge me rightly, and I shall give You aid, through converted sinners and through praise." David cannot fulfill his part of the deal, though, without God's prior action:

But of Thyself, O God, this operation  
It must proceed by purging me from blood,  
Among the just that I may have relation;  
And of Thy lauds for to let out the flood,  
Thou must, O Lord, my lips first unloose (ll. 64-68).



He cannot even sit among the just without being forgiven; he cannot do any good for God before being forgiven. God's action must come first. David seems to have given up his earlier claims to have some good still within himself: here he can do nothing without God.

Yet could not a deal still be seen here? Perhaps, after laying out his arguments, David the lawyer is offering his settlement: "For all the aforesaid reasons, it is incumbent upon You, Lord, that You have mercy upon me; but, instead of bringing this to the Judge"—though who could lay a sentence upon God?—"let us have a settlement: forgive me, and I will bring You more followers." Such a transactional model of relationship with God is not wholly unthinkable: certainly many have thought of religion this way. But this is all undermined by what David says next:

For if Thou hadst esteemed pleasant good  
The outward deeds that outward men disclose,  
I would have offered unto Thee sacrifice.  
But Thou delights not in no such gloss  
Of outward deed, as men dream and devise (ll. 69-73).

The implication is that David *could* perform outward deeds before being forgiven; he says he *would* have offered, with no implication that he would be unable to. In that sense, the settlement could be reversed: David could perform some good deeds for the Lord—though the converting of sinners, he affirmed, could only happen if God first unloosed his lips—and be rewarded with forgiveness. But, here, we see that such deeds are worthless before the Lord. Would that not mean that the outward praise of God and the conversion of sinners would not be acceptable? If so, then David could not have been offering a settlement before: he was not suggesting a *quid pro quo*, but simply stating the results of mercy. "My will confirm with sprite of steadfastness: / And by this these goodly things ensue" (ll. 58-59). It is the necessary causal order from God's renewal of David through mercy.

And this inward renewal is what God truly desires:

The sacrifice that the Lord liketh most  
Is sprite contrite. Low heart in humble wise  
Thou dost accept, O God, for pleasant host (ll. 74-76).

Any good deeds David might offer are insufficient; what God desires, instead, as His "host," His sacrificial victim, is a contrite heart. This heart, it might seem, David already has: he certainly has penitence, as he declared before. But he begged God to "make a clean heart in the midst of [his] breast" (l. 53). Whatever repentance and contrition David offers, it can never make his heart a sufficient offering to God, and his good deeds are no delight to God. Then what can David offer? Nothing at all. He can offer no settlement: he can offer the reasons for mercy, but

then all is in God's hands. His final plea he describes in a striking reinterpretation of the Scriptural text:

Make Sion, Lord, according to Thy will,  
Inward Sion, the Sion of the ghost:  
Of heart's Jerusalem strength the walls still (ll. 77-79).

First, this Wyatt here reinterprets the grammar of the Scriptural verse. Whereas the Vulgate says, "Do good, O Lord, in Your good will, to Sion," Wyatt drops the "good," makes "Sion" the direct object instead of the indirect, and changes "in" to "according" (Ps 51:18). Instead of doing good to Sion, here God is called to re-make Sion—the Latin command used here, *fāc*, can mean both "make" and "do"—and to make it according to His will. That is the first reinterpretation; second, Wyatt's David is not extending his plea to cover all of Israel, his kingdom; he is not pleading for strength for the earthly Jerusalem: he is pleading for the fortification of his heart. He claimed earlier that he still had "truth of inward heart," that he had fidelity, that he had faith, and it seemed that those were arguments why he should be forgiven: but here we see that it was not enough, for he begs God to make his heart true. It is God Himself Who must make the heart proper; when this is done, then He will "take for good these outward deeds, / As sacrifice [His] pleasure to fulfill" (ll. 80-81). The outward deeds are not acceptable as payment; they are not acceptable at all without inner holiness. A holy, humble heart is acceptable to God, yet the heart cannot be holy without God's action. Thus, no payment can be offered God, outwardly or inwardly. All depends, first, on God. David the lawyer can offer no settlement, no payment of misdeeds; he even undermined one of his arguments; instead, all is laid at God's own feet:

Of Thee alone thus all our good proceeds (l. 82).

David can offer all the arguments he wants, but, in the end, they come to naught: there is no judge to judge the Judge. All, in the end, depends upon God. Yet, whatever effect his lawyerly arguments have on God, they work wonders on David, as the subsequent poem in the cycle shows, when David is so struck by his Psalm that he repeats it again and

He points, he pauseth, he wonders, he praiseth  
The mercy that hides of justice the sword,  
The justice that so His promise completeth,  
For His word's sake, to worthless desert,  
That gratis His graces to men doth allot.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Two of these words are the only ones I have actually changed from Wyatt's text, outside simple orthographic correction, as the words he uses are too close to Middle English and are unused today. First, he uses the word *complysythe*, which—per Muir's glossary (p. 284)—means "completed." Second, he uses the word *depert*,

Here hath he comfort when he doth measure  
Measureless mercies to measureless fault,  
To prodigal sinners Infinite treasure,  
Treasure termless that never shall default (Poem 208, ll. 12-20).

The reasons for mercy that David gave—those from God’s nature and from His promise—are strong enough to firmly convince him that he is forgiven. It is his own arguments, the logic of mercy, that convinces him, it seems, not any express act on God’s part, no message from Him: the arguments in his Psalm are enough so that he “seeth himself not utterly deprived / From light of grace that dark of sin did hide” (Poem 208, ll. 26-27). This confidence then inspires him to “dare importune the Lord on every side,” which then leads into Psalm 102 (Poem 208, l. 29). There was already some such importuning in Psalm 51, though, in the pleas for God to correct David’s inner spirit, unless we view that as simply the logical result of the grace of forgiveness, in which case David’s request was all one, a request of the pure of heart, following Kierkegaard’s dictum: “Purity of heart is to will one thing.”<sup>6</sup> Interpreting it this way, David was willing grace, grace which would both grant him forgiveness and renew his inner man, “the Sion of the ghost.” But the unity or disunity of his request is a quibble; what truly matters is that, in enunciating the arguments that are joined to his pleas in Psalm 51, Wyatt’s David becomes firmly convinced that he has received from the Lord what he requested most: forgiveness and grace. He argued as a lawyer, and passed the sentence as a judge: to the defendant is granted forgiveness of sins. Thus God is judged rightly, He has “kept [His] word stable, / [His] justice pure and clean.” The prosecution rests and yields, and the case is settled. And truly it is, as the rest of the poem cycle shows: for, following Psalm 102, David has “perceived in his breast / The sprite of God returned that was exiled” (Poem 210, ll. 1-2). After this comes Psalm 130, and then the final interlude, quoted above, where he has a prophesying vision of Christ, after which the cycle ends with David chanting Psalm 143, which concludes:

Thou hast foredone their great Iniquity  
That vexed my soul: Thou shalt also confound  
My foes, O Lord, for Thy benignity,  
For Thine am I, Thy servant aye most bowed (Poem 213, ll. 46-49).

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which—again, per Muir (p. 284)—means “divide, separate, allot.”

<sup>6</sup> See Søren Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing: Spiritual Preparation for the Office of Confession*, tr. Douglas V. Steere (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1956). The Danish original had a much less impressive title: “An Occasional Discourse” (“En Leiligheds-Tale”), the first section of Kierkegaard’s 1847 *Edifying Discourses in Diverse Spirits* (*Opbyggelige Taler i forskjellig Aand*). I think “Upbuilding” is a snappier and more literal translation of *Opbyggelige*, but “Edifying” is what is commonly used in English translations.

In conclusion, then, in Wyatt's paraphrase of Psalm 51, we see commentary mixed in with translation. In particular, Wyatt expands upon a few Scriptural phrases, such as "according to Your great mercy" and "that You may be justified in Your words, and that You may conquer when You are judged" (Ps 51:1,4). He also reinterprets the plea that the Lord "do good, in Your good will, to Sion" as applying to the heart, "Inward Sion, the Sion of the ghost," instead of the physical city or the nation that dwelt therein (Ps 51:18). Additional elements were added into the Psalm, such as David's claims that there is still some good in his heart, elements which are not found in the Scriptural text itself. The conceit of David as lawyer may be simply fanciful eisegesis, but I think the general concept has some merit, especially because Wyatt shows David, in the interlude following the Psalm, as being convinced of his forgiveness. In short, Wyatt provides an example of the use of paraphrase—as opposed to metaphrase and imitation, in Dryden's trichotomy—to follow the source material while still being free, to present both the original content and a commentary on it all at once. When wrapped in prosody, in poetic meter and rhyme, it also becomes a work of art on its own. That is how Wyatt's paraphrase has been studied here, and I think it is the correct way to view it, for it is not aiming to be a strict translation, and so it should not be treated as one. Yet, since it is still a paraphrase and not simply an imitation, analysis of it must needs have constant reference to the source material. That, in the end, is the distinctive quality of a paraphrase: it is a dependent work of art, one that must be studied both on its own merits *and* in reference to its material. When this is done properly, then the work truly opens up the treasures of its merits, and it teaches the artist how better to craft his own work, paraphrase or not, so that he can say with Wyatt, "But note I well this text, / To draw better the next" (Poem 118, ll. 47-48).

## Appendix

Sir Thomas Wyatt, Poem 207: "Psalm 51, *Miserere mei, Domine*"

*Collected Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt*, ed. Kenneth Muir (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 216-218.

*Spelling has been modernized, along with slight changes in punctuation.*

Rue on me, Lord, for Thy goodness and grace,  
That of Thy nature art so bountiful,  
For that goodness that in the world doth brace  
Repugnant natures in quiet wonderful;  
And for Thy mercy's number without end  
In heaven and earth perceived so plentiful  
That over all they do themselves extend:  
For those mercies much more than man can sin  
Do way my sins that so Thy grace offend.  
Again wash me, but wash me well within,  
And from my sin that thus maketh me afraid  
Make Thou me clean, as aye Thy wont hath been.  
For unto Thee no number can be laid  
For to prescribe remissions of offence  
In hearts returned, as Thou Thyself hast said.  
And I beknow my fault, my negligence,  
And in my sight my sin is fixed fast,  
Thereof to have more perfect penitence.  
To Thee alone, to Thee have I trespassed,  
For none can measure my fault but Thou alone;  
For in Thy sight I have not been aghast  
For to offend, judging Thy sight as none,  
So that my fault were hid from sight of man,  
Thy majesty so from my mind was gone:  
This know I and repent. Pardon Thou then,  
Whereby Thou shalt keep still Thy word stable,  
Thy justice pure and clean; by cause that when  
I pardoned am, then forthwith justly able,  
Just I am judged by justice of Thy grace.  
For I myself, lo! thing most unstable,  
Formed in offence, conceived in like case,

Am naught but sin from my nativity.  
 Be not this said for my excuse, alas,  
 But of Thy help to shew necessity:  
 For lo! Thou loves the truth of inward heart,  
 Which yet doth live in my fidelity;  
 Though I have fallen by frailty overthwart,  
 For willful malice led me not the way,  
 So much as hath the flesh drawn me apart.  
 Wherefore, O Lord, as Thou has done alway,  
 Teach me the hidden wisdom of Thy lore,  
 Since that my faith doth not yet decay;  
 And as the Jews do heal the leper sore  
 With hyssop clean, cleanse me, and I am clean.  
 Thou shalt me wash, and more than snow, therefore,  
 I shall be white. How foul my fault hath been!  
 Thou of my health shalt gladsome tidings bring,  
 When from above remission shall be seen  
 Descend on earth: then shall for joy upspring  
 The bones that were afore consumed to dust.  
 Look not, O Lord, upon mine offending,  
 But do away my deeds that are unjust.  
 Make a clean heart in the midst of my breast  
 With sprite upright, voided from filthy lust.  
 From Thine eye's cure cast me not in unrest,  
 Nor take from me Thy sprite of holiness.  
 Render to me joy of Thy help and rest;  
 My will confirm with sprite of steadfastness:  
 And by this shall these goodly things ensue.  
 Sinners I shall into Thy ways address:  
 They shall return to Thee and Thy grace sue.  
 My tongue shall praise Thy justification,  
 My mouth shall spread Thy glorious praises true.  
 But of Thyself, O God, this operation,  
 It must proceed by purging me from blood,  
 Among the just that I may have relation;  
 And of Thy lauds for to let out the flood,  
 Thou must, O Lord, my lips first unloose:  
 For if Thou hadst esteemed pleasant good

The outward deeds that outward men disclose,  
I would have offered unto Thee sacrifice.  
But Thou delights not in no such gloss<sup>7</sup>  
Of outward deed, as men dream and devise.  
The sacrifice that the Lord liketh most  
Is sprite contrite. Low heart in humble wise  
Thou dost accept, O God, for pleasant host.  
Make Sion, Lord, according to Thy will,  
Inward Sion, the Sion of the ghost:  
Of heart's Jerusalem strength the walls still.  
Then shalt Thou take for good these outward deeds,  
As sacrifice Thy pleasure to fulfill.  
Of Thee alone thus all our good proceeds.

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<sup>7</sup> These three rhymes completely fail in Modern English, but they probably matched in Wyatt's time: he spells these words *unlose*, *disclose*, and *glose*.