

**Recovering Women's Canonical Voices:
Sixteenth-Century Women Psalmists' Shaping of English Literature**

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Honors Thesis in English
Washington and Lee University
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Completed Spring 2020

Acknowledgements

Professor Genelle Gertz advised me in the writing of this thesis. Her literary knowledge and expertise, paired with her kind-heartedness and patience, sharpened my understanding, writing, and ability as a student. I cherish our weekly lunches and meaningful conversations.

For the time and dedication of *Professor Marc Conner*, both in his role as second reader and as professor of “The Bible as Literature,” a course that deeply impacted the trajectory of my thesis, my reading of the Bible as literature, and my perspective. I am grateful for his commitment to all aspects of my thesis and to my advancement as an English student.

This year’s English Honors thesis course, fearlessly led by *Professor Holly Pickett*. I thank her for encouraging, inspiring, and positioning me in our weekly meetings.

Professor Matt Chalmers who provided rich insight regarding the intersection of the New Testament, the Psalms, and early-Christian communities. I thank him for his perspective.

Alice Chambers, Mary Page Welch, Gabriella Miggins, Peyton Powers, and Sierra Terrana for their constant encouragement, thoughtful edits, and willingness to engage in conversation about the Psalms. Additionally, I thank my parents, *Patty Latour* and *Jonathan Latour*, for their steadfast support during this process and for initiating my love of the Psalms.

I thank the *Washington and Lee English Department* for the opportunity to write a thesis and the deep impact the Department has had on my time at Washington and Lee both as a student and as an individual. The Department has given me an impassioned love for literature.

For me, this entire process has mirrored that of Corinthians 13:12: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” Alone, I would have been incapable of lifting the veil of this thesis. I thank everyone who aided and heartened me throughout this process.

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Introduction

John Donne preached that the Psalms were the “‘Manna of the Church’, since, just ‘as Manna tasted to every man like that he liked best, so do the Psalms minister instruction, and satisfaction, to every man, in every emergency and occasion.’”¹ For millennia, the Book of Psalms has served Jews and Christians as a primary recourse of supplication, penitence, devotion, and gratitude.² With over 100 Psalms and references to the Psalms found in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* (2018) and 305 on *Poetry Foundation*, the form of the Psalms has been significant to readers and poets alike for generations.^{3,4} Even today, the Psalms remain current and continue to help readers make sense of the world, with writers such as Said and V. Penelope Pelizzon producing Psalm poetry and churches once again drawing the Psalms into liturgy in light of the pandemic.⁵ In his book *Reflection on the Psalms* (1958) C.S. Lewis addresses the agency and role of the poets within the Psalms, explaining that through their authorship, they create “an experience fully God-centered, asking of God no gift more urgently than His presence, the gift of Himself, joyous to the highest degree, and unmistakably real.”⁶ The Psalms, therein, serve as a safe haven for humanity’s voice— from praise to lament. In his

¹ Oxford World Classic, *The Sidney Psalter*, The Psalms of Sir Philip and Mary Sidney, Introduction x

² Peter S. Hawkins, “The Psalms in Poetry,” (New York: The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms, 2014), 99

³ *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, edited by Margaret Gerguson, Tim Kendaal, and Mary Jo Salter, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018), <https://wnorton.com/books/9780393679021/about-the-book/table-of-contents>.

⁴ “Poem results for the keyword ‘Psalms’,” (Online: *Poetry Foundation*, accessed on May 1, 2020), <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/search?query=Psalms&refinement=poems&page=3>.

⁵ N.T. Wright, “Christianity offers no answers about the Corona virus. It’s not supposed to,” (Online: *Time*, accessed on 2020), <https://time.com/5808495/coronavirus-christianity/?fbclid=IwAR2FqB1cUFW4x0J8FzpFrqIIGHN2hmLpJXC-sFkRiiOssGFGf9KTB-BzZw8>.

⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 32.

chapter, “The Psalms in Poetry,” Peter S. Hawkins expounds that “[t]he Psalms bear witness to the need to express both praise and lament because there is abundant reason for voice of both. So, too, poets continue to find in David’s words the motive—and metaphor—for their own new songs.”⁷ Hawkins draws into conversation the longevity of poets’ practice of meditating, translating, and referencing the Psalms, making them “their own new song.” Through this practice, the Biblical Psalter has become a vessel for innovative English poetry, for new song. More specifically, sixteenth-century women substantiated the creation of the Psalms as a literary genre. Though the Medieval time period saw the creation of the Psalms as a literary genre (John Lydgate in 1412 to 1420), and poets of the early sixteenth century turned the Psalms into verse (Wyatt and Surrey in 1530), women were the predominate poets responsible for the expansion and substantiation of the Psalms as a literary genre.⁸

During the sixteenth century, many women wrote metric Psalms or incorporated the Psalms into their poetry. Though, their work has only recently come to light through the efforts of scholars. Unfortunately, past scholarship on sixteenth-century writing and on women has made several false assumptions that bare relevance to the literary canon and women’s intentions in writing Psalms poetry. Predominately, Margaret Hannay argues that women were confined by sixteenth-century expectations, only writing within the medium of the Psalms in order to demonstrate their pious devotion to the Lord.⁹ However, made obvious through this thesis and contemporary scholarship, women did not write within the medium of the Psalms because it was acceptable, but rather because the Psalms exist as exceptional literary entities that individuals

⁷ Hawkins, “Chapter 6: The Psalms in Poetry,” 110.

⁸ “John Lydgate,” (Online: Poetry Foundation, accessed on May 1, 2020), <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/john-lydgate>.

⁹ Margaret P. Hannay, “‘Wisdom the Wordes’: Psalm Translation and Elizabeth Women’s Spirituality,” (Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame, 1991), 65.

have recognized for millennia. This thesis demonstrates how early assumptions about sixteenth-century women writers has been over turned. Understanding what it meant for women to write Psalms, moreover, is part of the most current study of women's writing in early modern England.

This thesis is a true meditation on the Psalms. It explores the works of sixteenth-century women writers, beginning with the literary context of the Bible, then moving into sixteenth-century perception of the Psalms, and ending with analysis of three significant women poets: Mary Sidney Herbert, Anne Vaughan Locke, and Elizabeth Melville. Chapter One, titled "Manna of the Church" with the subtitle "The Psalms: Structure, Elements, & Sixteenth Century Perception," positions the reader both within the Biblical Psalter and within sixteenth-century England. It is impactful to begin by positioning this study in the Biblical Psalms and their literary effects in order to understand how poets work within them. The form, elements, and threshold of the Biblical Psalter allow for a variety of utilizations. They can sustain contemplative personal meditation, calculated political content, artful poetry, and devotional contribution. Therefore, Chapter One illuminates the analysis of Chapter Two and Chapter Three, chapters that both illustrate the artful steps women writers employed in their own time period. Following its study of the Biblical Psalter, Chapter One then narrows in on the sixteenth century because of the shift in significance the sixteenth century placed on the literary uses of the Biblical Psalter. The sixteenth century created the most well-known religious works to date and exists as a highly canonical time period; however, not commonly identified, women were actually the first writers to translate, write slant poetry, and develop particular forms of the Psalms such as lyric poetry, sonnet sequences, and narrative poetry within the medium of the Psalms during the sixteenth century. In full, Chapter One identifies the literary elements of the Biblical Psalter and examines women's practice of Psalm meditation and translation in the

sixteenth century in order to demonstrate the exquisite literary form of the Psalms and the reasons women chose to work within them as a form. In doing so, Chapter One also demonstrates the limits early scholarship has on sixteenth-century women writers and initiates a contemporary conversation on what it meant for women to write Psalms.

From the broader landscape of the Biblical Psalter and sixteenth-century perception of the Psalms, Chapter Two and Chapter Three narrow in on three exceptional poets— Mary Sidney Herbert, Anne Vaughan Locke, and Elizabeth Melville— in order to illustrate women’s relationship with the Biblical Psalter and their effect on the literary cannon. Chapter Two, titled “Heavenly Harmony” with the subtitle “*The Sidney Psalter* as a Vehicle into Sixteenth Century Discourse: Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke,” focuses solely on Mary Sidney Herbert, who authored an entire psalter, known as *The Sidney Psalter*, which her brother began before his death. Mary Sidney wrote in support of Queen Elizabeth, the Protestant Reformation, and her brother. Mary Sidney worked within the Psalter because it was a form with which readers were familiar and could sustain her efforts of lyric poetry in a religious text. Throughout *The Sidney Psalter*, her Psalms teeter between personal and political meditation. Because she authored an entire psalter, Mary Sidney Herbert serves as a prime initiator of Psalm translation for political and literary gain and an impactful example for writers who follow her.

Chapter Three, titled “Eloquence, not silence is the sign of [her] spirituality” with the subtitle “Innovation through the Biblical Psalms: Elizabeth Melville, Lady Culross and Anne Vaughan Locke,” analyzes the works of both Anne Vaughan Locke and Elizabeth Melville. For Anne Vaughan Locke, the Psalms similarly become a vessel for lyric form in her gloss of Psalm 51 “Meditation of a Penitent Sinner” (1560). Through this process, she writes at the forefront of her time period, authoring the first English sonnet sequence in the form of Psalm 51—

publishing 35 years before Philip Sidney published his sonnet sequence, “The Amoretti” (1595). Unlike Mary Sidney Herbert, Anne Locke is clandestine in her writing process, utilizing men to her advantage and suspending gender expectation by publishing a sonnet written in an authorial voice. Predominately, the texts of men such as Wyatt and Surrey and her connection to John Knox influence her work. Finally, Elizabeth Melville similarly wrote in support of religious reformation. Melville specifically wrote “Meditation on Psalm 42” to sustain Scottish Presbyterian ministers facing persecution. Unlike Mary Sidney Herbert, Melville predominately writes for a specific audience fueled by her own selflessness and passion for the movement. However, like Locke, she utilizes her male audience and connection to John Knox to her benefit, though she writes from Scotland forty years later. Even with their similarities, all three of these poets write for differing reasons. Mary Sidney predominately wrote to demonstrate the role lyric poetry could have within religious context. Anne Vaughan Locke writes Psalm 51 as an act of penitence and in efforts of claiming the sonnet sequence for the non-aristocratic. Finally, Melville writes Psalm 42 in order to provide words of relief to her community.

Through an analysis of the Biblical Psalter, the poetry of Mary Sidney Herbert, Anne Vaughan Locke, and Elizabeth Melville as well as sixteenth-century perception of these poets and the Psalms, this thesis explores the Psalms as exceptional literary entities and calls into question assumptions of sixteenth-century women writers. This exploration reveals the significant impact women had on sixteenth-century England, on the Psalms as a literary genre, and on the literary canon as a whole. Finally, this thesis demonstrates how early assumptions about sixteenth-century women writers have been over turned, identifies the limits of scholarship of women’s writing in early modern England, and illustrates the need and shift towards unbiased analysis of early modern women writers.

Chapter 1: “Manna of the Church”¹⁰

The Psalms: Structure, Elements, & Sixteenth-Century Perception

The Book of Psalms forms the largest concentration of poetry and exists as the longest and most ancient repository of text within the Bible. For millennia the Book of Psalms, known as the Psalter, has served Jews and Christians as a primary recourse of supplication, penitence, devotion, and gratitude.¹¹ With its legendary ascription to King David, the Psalter presents human joy, sorrow, and suffering and comprises an extraordinarily wide subset of emotions for addressing God.^{12,13} The Psalter has great depth, existing as the Bible in miniature, with any theme, image, or idea of the Bible represented within the Psalms. Moreover, the Psalter’s deep intertextuality allows the text to grapple with an intangible, omnipotent God. The Psalms seek to ground, codify, explain, and understand the Lord God, while simultaneously acknowledging that any of these forms fails to fully illustrate Him. Through this process, the Psalms cry out against the Lord, celebrate and thank Him, beg for His forgiveness, and ask for His maintained steadfastness. Overall, meditation on the Psalms personalizes the temptations, challenges, and joys of an earthly experience— for female and male reader and poet alike. However, the Psalter has a male voice, both in authorship and editorial form, with clear, human limitation. Regardless,

¹⁰ John Donne quoted in Hannibal Hamlin, Michael G. Brennan, Margaret P. Hannay, and Noel J. Kinnamon, “Psalms and the Metric Psalms” in *The Sidney Psalter*. (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2009), xi.

¹¹ Peter S. Hawkins, “The Psalms in Poetry” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 99.

¹² Although the Psalms are commonly ascribed to King David, there is no exact sense of authorship. In fact, there are a number of scholars who cannot discern any set of authors, while scholars such as Robert Alter have narrowed authorship down to David, Asaph, Ethan the Ezrahite, Heman the Ezrahite, the Korahites, and others. I expand upon the authorship of the Psalter in Chapter 1, subsection “Voice.”

¹³ C.S. Lewis, *Reflection on the Psalms*, (United Kingdom: Harcourt Brace, 1958), 99.

the Psalter shares human, not just male, experiences in an intimate and lasting way, providing readers with an appropriate means for addressing the Lord.

This chapter analyzes the literary structure and elements that allow the Psalms to share historically specific events in a largely ahistorical way, personalizing human experiences. This analysis argues that Psalms poetry demands an intimate and lasting relationship between a poet and an intended reader. Close readings of Psalm 58, 84, and 117 demonstrates the significance of the elements of the Psalms on a microscopic and tangible level. Overall, this analysis elucidates how the Psalms grapple with an intangible Lord. From here, this chapter moves into analysis of sixteenth-century perception of the Psalms, specifically delineating women's relationship with the Psalms. The sixteenth century experienced the newness of the English Bible, with William Tyndale publishing the first English translation in 1526, which was followed by other noteworthy translations such as Myles Coverdale's Bible in 1535 and the *Geneva Bible* in 1560. Thus, sixteenth-century women Psalmists were writing at the first possible moment a tradition could be formed. Part Two identifies women's process of entering sixteenth-century discourse and the eventual effect women-authored Psalms had on sixteenth-century England and the literary canon. Both parts of this chapter provide targeted analysis of the gendered voice and nature of the Psalms. Ultimately, Chapter One provides the necessary grounding for the exploration of sixteenth-century women poets found in Chapter Two and Chapter Three. These chapters support that through the mechanisms of the Psalms presented in Chapter One, sixteenth-century women successfully wrote through the form of the Psalms and at the center of public discourse. Women's ability to enter public discourse through the vehicle of the Psalms proves the prolific nature of this form, which the Psalms' unique structure and elements create. This argument hinges on a clear understanding of the Biblical Psalter found within this chapter.

Structure of the Psalms

Analysis of the structure of the Psalter as a whole demonstrates how each Psalm works towards understanding an intangible God. The dominantly short chapters paired with the sectioning of the Psalter reveals a complex God, but an also complex mortal experience. Notably, the Psalms exist as biblical poetry. In his analysis of the Psalms in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (2018), Richard J. Clifford explains that the poetry of the Psalms creates “segmentation that interrupts the continuous flow of sense found in prose, thereby increasing information density and emotion.”¹⁴ Therefore, the structure serves as a method for readers to progress through the wide range of emotions a relationship with God and a faith require. Moreover, the Psalms envision the complexities of God and His creation, illustrating a range that spans from humanity obediently praising Him to God leaving prayers unanswered.

The Five Books

The 150 poems of the Psalter have been divided into five books which mimic the Pentateuch, the five Old Testament Books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. For Judaism, the books of the Pentateuch establish God as the Creator and include moral, civil, and ceremonial laws given by God to Moses at Mt. Sinai.¹⁵ The Psalter’s mimicking of the Pentateuch highlights the national significance and foundational nature of the Psalms through their connection to the Book of Moses, David’s importance, the people of Israel, and God’s presence. Moreover, these books reveal the origin, consequences, and progressive nature of sin.¹⁶ They establish the dissonance humanity feels from God and portray an active quest back

¹⁴ Richard J. Clifford, “The Poetry of the Psalms” in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 782.

¹⁵ *King James Version*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), Exodus 19.

¹⁶ Clifford, “The Psalms,” 781.

towards Him. All five books reveal a poet separated from the Lord who, through his meditation, draws near to the Lord's omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence in order to better understand this separation. Each of these books closes with a benediction or song of praise. The first three books end with a repetition of Amen, "Amen Amen"; the fourth book ends with "Praise the Lord"; and, although the fifth book lacks an exact doxological coda, Psalm 150 as a whole praises God in song.¹⁷ Overall, each book captures a specific sentiment of Israel's experience of God, which develops into the reader's experience of God. In his book *Notes on the Psalms* (2010), G. Morgan Campbell identifies the sentiment of each book: Book 1, worship of God as the Helper, Psalm 1- 41; Book 2, worship of God as the Almighty, Psalm 42-72; Book 3, ceaseless worship of God, Psalm 73 - 89; Book 4, rendered worship of God, Psalm 90-106; and Book 5, consummated worship of God, Psalm 107 - 150.¹⁸

Categories of Psalms

The five books of the Psalter contain seven major categories of the Psalms: hymns of praise, individual laments of supplication, communal laments, liturgies, thanksgiving Psalms, royal Psalms, and wisdom Psalms. Although seven types exist, the most poignant of the Psalms elude all categories such as Psalm 84 which has aspects of a hymn, pilgrimage, and exile Psalm. First, hymns fall into two categories: praising God for the awesome majesty of His creation (Psalm 8) and praising God for His covenant (Psalm 117). Next, lamentations, either individual or communal, follow a relatively consistent structure. They cry out in pain to God, describe that pain in either a general or symbolic way, and make an expression of certainty that the Lord will

¹⁷ Robert Alter, "Assembling the Book" in *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary*, (New York: Norton & Company, Inc., 2007), xix.

¹⁸ G. Campbell Morgan, *Notes on the Psalms*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers. 2010), 10.

ameliorate that pain. Individual lamentations convey a personalized experience (Psalm 5), while communal lamentations convey an event plaguing a community of people such as a flood (Psalm 60). Overall, hymns and lamentations build roughly two-thirds of the Psalter. The remaining four categories build out the final third of the Psalter. Thanksgiving Psalms celebrate the Lord and often flashback to other moments within the Bible (Psalm 105); royal Psalms relate to a royal event or ceremony (Psalm 45); wisdom Psalms instruct readers on how to respect God and celebrate the law (Psalm 37); and liturgy Psalms have connection to ritual or liturgy, although all Psalms possess this element to some degree (Psalm 15).¹⁹ Within the Psalter, these seven types of Psalms convey the complex relationship between humanity and God and emphasize the flawed, mortal nature of God's people. Overall, the Psalter's structure serves as a literary effect of the Psalms, helping readers and poets understand the theological content of an intangible God.

Elements of the Psalms

In addition to a structure that grapples with understanding the Lord's omnipotence, the elements that make up the Psalter establish humans' mortality in relation to the Lord's divinity. The elements of the Psalms make tangible an earthly experience through discrete, unique descriptions—marked largely by a crying out to the Lord. In Robert Alter's book "The Poetry of the Psalms" (2007), the author narrows in on the poetic elements of the Psalter.²⁰ Additionally, L.W. Batten discusses the parallelism of the book in his article "Duplicates in the Psalter" (1891).²¹ These scholars understand the basis of biblical poetry as parallelism between two halves of the poetic line—whether that parallelism is macroscopic (Psalm 14 repeating Psalm

¹⁹ Hannibal Hamlin. "English Metrical Psalmody" in *Psalm Culture and Early Modern English Literature*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 128.

²⁰ Alter, "The Poetry of Psalms," xxi.

²¹ L.W. Batten, "Duplicates in the Psalter" (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1891), 17.

53) or in the minority of the lines (with two verses of a Psalm repeating the same message). The Psalms sit on a foundation of parallelism and repetition: within and between lines, of sound creating rhythm and voice, and of literary images and metaphors throughout the entire book. The key elements of the Psalms include voice, parallelism, and figurative language and imagery. Moreover, the Biblical Psalter is formulaic, adhering to its core elements at all moments.

Voice

In their introductory article “Psalms and Metrical Psalms” (2009), Hamlin, Brennan, Hannay, and Kinnamon provide that the voice of the Psalms is arguably the most unique voice of the Bible because the Psalter is the only book of the Bible written consistently in first person, and in which the writer addresses himself directly to God.²² Most notably, the Psalter is made up of a voice written and edited by males. Composed anywhere from the Davidic period (ninth century to tenth century BC) through the Exile (sixth century BC) up to Septuagint (circa 300 BC) the Psalter has no sense of authorship but has definite ascription to David legendarily. Alter continues, noting that the Psalter was assembled by editors during the Second Temple (Ezra and Nehemiah) and was completed by the Septuagint. In his discussion of the historical contexts of the Psalms, Robert Alter identifies that the 150 poems of the Psalter were written not only by poets near to David, or even potentially David himself, but also from Asaph, Ethan the Ezrahite, Heyman the Ezrahite, the Korahites, and others.²³ The significance of the variety—whether that be proximity to David, generation, or experience— is that the experience and voice conveyed in the Psalter is not the voice of only one individual, but instead the voice of the people of Israel,

²² Hannibal Hamlin, Michael G. Brennan, Margaret P. Hannay, and Noel J. Kinnamon, “Psalms and the Metric Psalms” in *The Sidney Psalter*. (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2009), x.

²³ Alter, “Historical Contexts,” xv.

made concrete through the life of David.²⁴ Although there are a variety of sources, spanning a number of centuries, there is relative consistency of style between chapters. Despite this limited perspective of the male voice, overall, the Book of Psalms is anonymous and ahistorical, allowing every reader to apply the verses to his or her own life. By addressing no singular individual or moment in time, the poems address every reader and every circumstance—regardless of gender; however, the lack of female authorship ultimately becomes significant as women enter the discourse and begin writing their own Psalms. As seen in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, Mary Sidney Herbert, Anne Vaughan Locke, and Elizabeth Melville make space for themselves within this void, writing in a more inclusive and encompassing form, even while maintaining the Biblical authority the medium of the Psalms require.

In addition to the male poets that create the voice of the Psalter, lyrical elements of the Psalms help create its unique voice. Alter argues that this literary approach and authorship has created the Psalms as “the most urgently, present of all the books of the Bible in the lives of many readers.”²⁵ Peter S. Hawkins expands on the sheer vulnerability of the voice and song of the Psalms in his essay “The Psalms in Poetry”:

For the lyric poet, moreover, the personal voice of the Psalmist provides a biblical warrant for laying the heart bare before God. That said, the first person-speech of the Psalms hold within it a string sense of a communal ‘we’ that encompasses a much larger reality than the speaker’s own... [T]herefore, they continue to inspire a perpetually ‘new song’ (Ps. 40:4[3]).²⁶

This personal voice creates space not only for readers to experience empathy when reading the Psalms, but also for other poets to translate and alter the literary content of the Biblical Psalter.

The voice of the Psalter is made by this “new song” as the lyrical element of the Psalter helps

²⁴ Alter, “Historical Contexts,” xv.

²⁵ Alter, “Historical Contexts,” xiii.

²⁶ Hawkins, “The Psalms in Poetry,” 99.

create the resounding rhythm of the Psalms. In Hebrew, Psalms means “book of praise” while in Greek, Psalms means “something sung.” Both translations capture the musical quality of the Psalms. Within the Psalter, the forwards of many chapters signal readers to sing or accompany these lyric poems with musical instruments. Additionally, throughout the Book, “Selah” appears 71 times, which means “lifting up the voices.” In their creation, the Psalms, or David’s lyre, were linked to music, with “lyre” meaning to be sung. Overall, parallelism, imagery, and figurative language create the musical voice of the Psalms. If humans were able to fully understand God, they would not need the repetition that comes with nearly every line of Psalms poetry. Therefore, the repetition creates rhythm, but more so creates the vulnerability of the text and of the poets’ shouts, crying: “I need you,” “I love you,” “thank you,” and “I am sorry.” The next two chapters explore how this authorial, yet vulnerable voice allows women to work within the medium of the Psalms, poetically personalizing the text while still maintaining the Psalter’s form.

Parallelism

The distinct voice within the Biblical Psalter is built up and supported by literary elements, predominately by the element of parallelism. The parallelism with and between lines exists in three main forms as identified by Robert Lowth, an eighteenth-century Anglican bishop: synonymous, antithetical, and synthetic.²⁷ Overall, “[p]arallelism slows the pace of the poem and sets up resonances between lines. Biblical verse is not metrical in a modern sense, but it does have phonemic stress that contributes to rhythm.”²⁸ The parallelism creates the entrapping rhythm of the Psalter, while also creating a mechanism for individuals to explore their faith and relationship with the Lord in a tangible way.

²⁷ Clifford, “The Poetry of the Psalms” 782.

²⁸ Clifford, “The Poetry of the Psalms,” 782.

Synonymous parallelism occurs most commonly of the three types of parallelism, with each Psalm rich in its abundance. Synonymous parallelism repeats the premise of the first part of the verse in the second part of the verse, with only slight variation of language: “Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”^{29,30} Here, the repetition of “thou shalt” identifies the synonymous parallelism. The verb “break” parallels “dash”, sharing similar imagery; just as a “rod of iron” shatters, so does a potted “vessel.” Other examples include: “O Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure,” where rebuked anger parallels chastened, hot displeasure; and “rescue my soul from their destructions, my darlings from the lions,” where soul parallels darlings and destruction parallels lions.³¹ Each of these lines presents an idea and then repeats that idea only through variation of wording or imagery. The synonymous parallelism moves the reader from one thought to the next, signaling that the two ideas go hand in hand, while also allowing space within the text—both figuratively and literally— for the reader to determine the connection. The poet, therefore, leaves room for a reader to think more critically about the description and to make this experience his or her “own” through interpretation. Overall, synonymous parallelism is a foundational element of the Psalms, and an element that signals a text is a Psalm.

In contrast to synonymous parallelism, antithetic parallelism employs the second part of a verse to present a contrasting or negotiating idea to the first part: “For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.”^{32, 33} Here, the word “but” identifies the antithetic parallelism. The two ideas presented—God knowing the way of the righteous and the

²⁹ Clifford, “The Poetry of the Psalms,” 782.

³⁰ *King James Version*, Psalm 2:9.

³¹ *King James Version*, Psalm 6:1; Psalm 35:17; and Psalm 31:12.

³² Clifford, “The Poetry of the Psalms” 782.

³³ *King James Version*, Psalms Psalm 1:6.

ungodly perishing— strengthen each other but do not have to exist for each half to stand alone. Antithetical parallelism, therefore, positions a reader both in the divine and the righteous; the first part becomes stronger and sharper positioned next to the second part. This type of parallelism physically separates humanity from God, therein illustrating humanity’s need for God’s benevolence. Other examples include: “Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end; but establish the just: for the righteous God trieth the hearts and reins,” where the righteous contract the wicked; “They are brought down and fallen: but we are risen, and stand upright,” where the risen contrast the fallen; and “weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning,” where joy contrasts sorrow.³⁴ In each of these examples, “but” signals the shift from the first part to the second part. Overall, the poet’s employment of antithetical parallelism works to capture the paradoxical nature of faith and of the Lord.

Finally, synthetic parallelism completes or expands the idea of the first part of the verse in the second part: “More to be desired are [the judgments of the Lord] than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.”^{35,36} In these verses, the word “also” identifies synthetic parallelism. The images depicted of “gold” and “honey” support one another, but gold is desirable without the presence of honey, while honey is sweet without the presence of gold. The modifiers of “more to be desired” rather than “desired” and “sweeter” rather than “sweet” offer recognition that God’s judgement surpasses any earthly entity. Synthetic parallelism, therefore, broadens the palpability of “[t]he judgements of the Lord,” both to the poet and to potential reader. Moreover, by framing the judgments of the Lord under the guise of humans coveting tangible, earthly possessions, the poet attempts to ground the Lord’s power and

³⁴ *King James Version*, Psalm 7:9, Psalm 20:8, Psalm 30:5, and Psalm 73:26.

³⁵ Clifford, “The Poetry of the Psalms” 782.

³⁶ *King James Version*, Psalm 19:10.

convey the unconveyable: The Lord's ability. Other examples include: "The Lord sitteth upon the flood; yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever. The Lord will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace"; "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God"; and, "Day and night they go about it upon the walls thereof: mischief also and sorrow are in the midst of it."³⁷ These examples showcase the complex nature of synthetic parallelism. Overall, one image builds on the next, providing a series of images that lead to a conclusion. Synthetic parallelism, as an element, complicates the grouping of thoughts and images of the Psalms, while still creating a foundation for a clear train of thought.

Overall, the element of parallelism helps humans understand and grapple with an intangible God, but never provides the full depth of God. Most often in a Psalm, the poet employs multiple types of parallelism because any amount of description fails to provide the Lord's full depth. The element of parallelism exists in almost every line of poetry within the Biblical Psalter. This element aids the poet in conveying the emotional and psychological implications of humanity's relationship with the Lord—whether that be surprise, doubt, fear, anger, or relief.³⁸ All three forms of parallelism emphasize the humanity of the Psalms—poems written by and for individuals struggling to understand the Lord's might and their faith. Parallelism justifies that this exact struggle is not unnatural. Instead, the repetition within and between verses underscores the flawed nature of humanity, while providing humanity with a means of coping. Just as throughout the Bible the Lord teaches His people the same lesson over and over, the Psalter presents the same ideas in countless shapes. The following analysis proves that the inclusion of parallelism within a text is key to its form as a Psalm. The next two chapters

³⁷ *King James version*, Psalm 29:10-11; Psalm 42:1; and Psalm 55:10.

³⁸ Hamlin, Brennan, Hannay, and Kinnamon, "Psalms and the Metric Psalms," x.

explore how sixteenth-century poets rewrite Psalms, yet maintain the parallelism necessary to mark their work as a Psalm.

Imagery and Figurative Language

From the parallelism and voice of the Psalms comes a body of images core to the Psalms. In the same way that parallelism marks the Psalms, so do the images the poets repeat through parallelism. The imagery of the Psalter portrays and clarifies humans' relationship to the Lord, slowly but surely empathizing with the broken, incomplete, and aspirational human experience through repetition. All five books of the Psalms present their own subset of imagery, frequently through figurative language; however, early on the imagery throughout the Psalter begins to repeat itself. These core images illustrate the Lord and man's relationship with Him. Robert Alter expands on the elements of imagery and figurative language of the Psalms in his book *The Book of Psalms*: "As poetry often framed for use in worship, it flaunts its own traditionalism. It rarely seeks startling effects, and again and again it deliberately draws on a body of familiar images."³⁹ The figurative language and images "rarely seek startling effects" because they seek to describe the intangible; Psalmists do not employ the images with any other goal than eliciting sympathy and understanding—for themselves, from the Lord, or from the reader. Most canonically, and parallel to the entirety of the Bible, the Psalter includes images of valleys, mountains, and vineyards, all of which interact with natural elements of water, wind, and fire. Additional images include the following: other elements of nature such as land, rivers, rocks, clay, skies, and trees; animals such as sheep, lambs, calves, lions, bulls, horses, mules, ox, dragons, and beasts; human body parts such as heart, throat, soul, bone, eyes, heart, mouth, flesh, tears, and ears; and those that describe humanity with broader variety such as shepherd, iron,

³⁹ Alter, "Historical Contexts," xxiv.

vessel, open sepulcher, inheritance, cup, candle, gold, sword, rod, razor, spear, sword, arrow, harp, net, bow, silver, and gold. Overall, these images, among all the images of the Biblical Psalter, affect and portray the humanization within the Psalms. Each of these images, no matter how well-presented, robust, or repeated, is but a signal, lesson, or partial portrait of God's relationship with humankind. This existence upholds that the Psalter is to be read as a book in its entirety, from start to finish, because the meaning of each singular image is deeply connected to and finds grander meaning in the whole Biblical Psalter. Progression through the Psalms' repeated images from start to finish provides a fuller picture of the God the Biblical Psalter seeks to illustrate. The poets of the following two chapters adhere to this repository of images, even as they rewrite, expand, and supplement the content of the Psalter.

Relevant Psalms Close Reading

The close readings of the following Psalms, which pay particular attention to structure and elements of the Psalms, present the variety of the Psalter, while illustrating the importance of the Biblical Psalter's structure and elements to understanding any Psalm. This section demonstrates how the Psalter grapples with an intangible God, whether that be through curse (Psalm 58), pilgrimage (Psalm 84), or praise (Psalm 117). Analysis of these Psalms illustrates the elements of voice; parallelism; and figurative language and imagery in action.

Psalm 58

Psalm 58 is a ferocious curse, relative to other Psalms, that grapples with the Lord's ability to uphold divine justice. The superscription at the beginning of the Psalm, "To the leader: Do Not Destroy. Of David." complicates the verses that follow because despite the direction "Do

Not Destroy,” the eleven verses fixate on destruction.⁴⁰ However, the agency within the Psalm denotes God’s actions of destroying the unrighteous, not a human’s destructive action; therefore, through this Psalm, “the leader” halts their desire to destroy, crying out for God’s intervention. This Psalm is a mechanism for coping with unrighteous emotions, conveying that God is a safe haven for human emotion, even emotion crying out against the enemy and praying for retribution. Psalm 58 has a three-part structure: a challenge, followed by a statement of the wicked, and concluded with the ultimate curse. Within this structure, eight of eleven verses employ parallelism, each marked with a colon or semicolon in English translations of the Psalms. Overall, structure and imagery of the wicked within this Psalm, depicted and emphasized through analogy and parallelism, supplicate humanity to recognize that a just God governs Earth.

Psalm 58 begins and concludes with a statement of divine judgement, targeted not at an individual, but instead at the addressing and worshiping of deities: “Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O congregation? Do ye judge uprightly, O ye sons of men?” where “Do ye indeed speak righteousness” parallels “Do you judge uprightly” and “O congregation” parallels “O ye sons of men.”⁴¹ Both parts of this verse illustrate a contemptuous dismissal of evil “gods” who sponsor evil humans, which sets up the Psalmist’s petition of God to break the power of those men.⁴² The word “indeed” implies that these rulers do not, in fact, speak righteously, or judge uprightly, but only claim such action. By beginning with a challenge, the narrator identifies the unrighteous and calls them to action, laying the foundation for the second two parts of the Psalm. In contrast to this addressing of the unrighteous, the Psalm concludes with a curse of divine

⁴⁰ This superscription, specifically “Do Not Destroy,” is potentially a tune to which the Psalm is to be set as identified by *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 829.

⁴¹ *King James Version*, Psalm 58:1.

⁴² *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 829.

justice addressing the truly righteous: “The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth.”⁴³ The image of a follower washing his feet in the blood of the wicked is disturbing, yet the image manages to illustrate a sense of justice with the enemy conquered. Within this curse, the Psalmist reveals a foundational element of faith: trusting in a Lord that he can neither see, feel, nor fully know and believing God will reward his obedience. The word “verily,” meaning “truly,” underscores this trust; The Lord is not just good, He is truly good. However, this curse also introduces a frightening element of the Psalms: their celebration of the physical destruction of evil, which can come in human form. Overall, the opening and conclusion of this Psalm introduces the dichotomy between how the Lord responds to obedience and any degree of disobedience.

The majority of the text within this Psalm describes the “unrighteous” through the vehicle of figurative language, emphasized through parallelism. The narrator describes the “unrighteous” first in the challenge, and then in the statement of the wicked. The description of the rulers as “evil” uses parallelism to accentuate wayward actions. In verse three, “[t]he wicked are estranged from the womb” synonymously parallels “they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.”⁴⁴ The two parts of the verse repeat the same material content, just using alternate language, emphasizing the limit of human understanding. This verse is one of two moments within this Psalm that expose the limits of the male voice of the Psalter. The narrator describes estrangement from the womb, but disregards how this alienation affects the mother, the holder of the womb. Is the estrangement of the child not deeply painful for the mother of the wicked in the

⁴³ *King James Version*, Psalm 58:10 - 11.

⁴⁴ *King James Version*, Psalm 58:3.

same way it is deeply painful for the Lord? This instance of attention to the female body, but lack of attention towards her experience demonstrates the limit of the male voice of the Psalter. Later, in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, this thesis explores how Mary Sidney Herbert, among other poets, occupies this silence, conveying the female experience. The rest of the challenge of this Psalm shifts away from female imagery and towards other startling images of the wicked, describing that “[t]heir poison is like the poison of a serpent” which synonymously parallels “they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear.”⁴⁵ The entirety of verse five synonymously parallels verse four: “Which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely.”⁴⁶ Both verses convey an inability of the “evil” to listen or hear God’s voice. The parallelism in each verse and between verses yet again demonstrates humans’ need for multiple means to achieve understanding when describing the Lord Himself or asking for the Lord’s help.

After this challenge, the Psalm transitions to four more verses depicting the wicked, also emphasized by the parallelism of each verse. Each verse has two parts, with the second part synonymously or synthetically paralleling the first:

Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth: (A)
 break out the great teeth of the young lions, O Lord. (A)
 Let them melt away as waters which run continually: (B)
 when he bendeth his bow to shoot his arrows, let them be as cut in pieces (C)
 As a snail which melteth, let every one of them pass away (B)
 like the untimely birth of a woman, that they may not see the sun (C)⁴⁷

These three verses demonstrate how parallelism and structure work within the Psalms and their complex but beneficial nature. Marked with letters A, B, and C signaling parallelism (A parallels A, B parallels B, and C parallels C), this stanza depicts a violent, ruthless request of the Lord.

⁴⁵ *King James Version*, Psalm 58:4.

⁴⁶ *King James Version*, Psalm 58:5.

⁴⁷ *King James Version*, Psalm 56:6 – 8.

Furthermore, verse eight is the second moment within this Psalm revealing the limit of the male voice within the Psalter. Although the *King James Version* presents a dangling modifier with the wording not specifying who “may not see the sun,” *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* translates this image as “a stillborn child that will never see the sun.” This emotionally heavy image fails to address the pain and heartbreak of the mother of a stillborn child. Instead, the image of an “untimely birth” is simply a vehicle to ask God to destroy the wicked, excluding the female experience. Chapter Two illustrates how Mary Sidney Herbert occupies this space in her own Psalm 58, conveying the heartbreak of a mother’s miscarriage. Despite this limit, verses six through nine ask for God’s divine intervention, recognizing that the God will provide.⁴⁸ Overall, this prayer depicts the value of vulnerability with the Lord in the face of unrighteousness and the centrality of God’s presence to His people in the midst of injustice and evil.⁴⁹

Psalm 84

Psalm 84 is a hymn that manifests more specifically as a pilgrimage Psalm seeking to provide hope to an exiled Israel. Historically, in Jewish practice, believers would sing this Psalm on their pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem. Despite Psalm 84’s specific purpose, it has the potential to remain timeless to a modern reader because of its lacking biographical content. The close reading of the Psalm’s twelve verses magnifies the Psalms’ ability to aid a reader in understanding the literary content of God’s intangible might. Through imagery of the tabernacle, naming and addressing God, and parallelism, Psalm 84 harkens back to Genesis and makes tangible humanity’s longing to no longer be separated from God.

⁴⁸ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 829.

⁴⁹ Brian Doyle, “Psalm 58: Curse As Voiced Disorientation,” (Online: *International Journal for Philosophy and Theology*, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00062278.1996.10739639>.

The tabernacle is a central, key image of Psalm 84. The Psalm begins by addressing the Lord and the tabernacles: “How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!”⁵⁰ Within the Bible, the tabernacle is an earthly sanctuary inspired by God first introduced to Moses on top of Mount Sinai in Exodus 25. Historically, the earthly object of a Temple demonstrates God’s existence among His people; He possessed these tabernacles and spoke to His people from them. Moreover, followers were able to demonstrate their willing hearts to the Lord through sacrificial offering and obedient following. The significance of the tabernacle pervades this Psalm, and in many ways, creates Psalm 84 as a tabernacle of its own for the reader: an earthly sanctuary inspired by God. Verse ten emphasizes this elevation, depicting a sharp contrast between the threshold of God and anywhere else: “For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.”⁵¹ The poet captures the tradeoff he would make just to inhabit the Lord’s presence. In this compromise, there is a stark elevation of the presence of God. Within the Temple of Jerusalem, no one dwells in the house of the Lord; instead, only the highest priest can enter once a year on Yom Kipur to perform a sacrifice. When the priest enters, he ties a thread to his ankle so that if God were to strike him dead, other priests could pull him out without having to enter. Therefore, this Psalm employs the tabernacle as an analogy, not as the physical, accurate depiction of the Temple. Within this Psalm, the Temple serves as a holy space and a home of the faithful. Moreover, this Psalm demonstrates the element of historic, yet timeless imagery.

In addition to imagery fixated on the Lord’s Temple, Psalm 84 varies in how it addresses God, calling out to him explicitly six times: “O Lord of hosts, my Kind, my God,” “O God of

⁵⁰ *King James Version*, Psalm 84:1.

⁵¹ *King James Version*, Psalm 84:10.

Jacob,” “Behold, O God our shield,” and “Lord God.”⁵² Throughout the Bible, humanity seeks to be with and hear from God; however, beginning in Exodus, God introduces himself as “I am who I am,” establishing the omnipotent and intangible nature of the Lord.⁵³ The variance and multitude in names addressing God within this Psalm signals the poet’s awareness that he does not fully understand the Lord and that God has no limit. Despite this conveyed recognition, this technique still attempts to codify God, as there is no way of discussing the Lord without naming the subject at hand. This struggle serves as a through line of the Psalter. Additionally, this Psalm makes two explicit asks of God: “hear my prayer: give ear,” and “look upon the face of thine anointed.”⁵⁴ These phrases convey the desperate nature of the exiled poet and humans’ impatient nature. The poet seeks to command the Lord, but elsewhere gestures to God’s all-knowing and powerful nature. The Psalm additionally conveys this paradox in its unique, poetic beatitudes, which Matthew 5 alludes to in the New Testament:

Blessed are they that dwell in thy house:
they will be still praising thee. Selah.
Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee;
in whose heart are the ways of them.
Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well;
he rain also filleth the pools.⁵⁵

Each address man finding reward in the Lord—namely, dwelling rewarded with praise, strength rewarded with heart, and trust which has no explicit reward within this Psalm. This Psalm captures human’s desire to command the Lord, while also praising God for His steadfastness, might, and reward. Moreover, Psalm 84’s naming of the Lord reveals the alienation between humanity and God, while also indicating human’s perpetual longing to be with Him again.

⁵² *King James Version*, Psalm 84:1,3; Psalm 84:8; Psalm 84:9; Psalm 84:11.

⁵³ *King James Version*, Exodus 3:14.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, Psalm 84:8; and Psalm 84:9.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, Psalm 84:4-6.

Parallelism, paired with these various titles of the Lord, creates the through line of a longing for the Lord, beginning in verse two: “My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.”⁵⁶ Such longing harkens back to Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve first experience a break between their humanity and God. In this verse, the soul’s longing synonymously parallels the flesh’s crying. Moreover, within the first half of the line, “fainteth” synonymously parallels “longeth.” These two images work together to create the single image of a human both physically and spiritually seeking unity with God. Parallelism appears for a second time in verse six: “Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools.”⁵⁷ Those who “make it a well” parallels the rain that “filleth the pool.” Both depict similar concepts, but different images, bridged by “also”—a mark of synthetic parallelism. Together, the two parts create the core image of a valley filled with God’s presence. The image of the “valley of Baca,” though, mimics Judges 2:1-5 where the valley named “Bakim” serves as a location of “weeping of the Jews” who have broken their covenant with the Lord. Within this Psalm, the Israelites experience a similar exile, as they experience a dissonance from the Lord. Yet, even as this Psalm laments with a distrustful humanity, it provides hope, reminding the exiled that through trust in the Lord, he or she will find hope and blessings despite breaking their covenant. Finally, parallelism again appears when the poet offers the might of the Lord: “For the Lord God is a sun and shield: The Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.”⁵⁸ These three statements build on one another, specifically “sun” parallels “grace” while “shield” parallels “glory.” Within these verses, sun and shield are inherently antithetical, just as grace and glory are

⁵⁶ *King James Version*, Psalm 84:2.

⁵⁷ *King James Version*, Psalm 84:6.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, Psalm 84:11.

antithetical; The Lord is the ultimate source of light, yet still protects; He is all powerful, but forgives. This paradox conveys the brilliance of the God presented within the Bible—he defies logic and human expectation. Moreover, the third sentiment “no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly” parallels the sentiment presented in the first two sentences of verse eleven which illustrate God’s might and glory. Overall, this moment is representative of synthetic parallelism because the thoughts build off one another without repeating or contradicting the initial sentiment. A tireless longing for God’s forgiveness through the element of parallelism marks this Psalm and creates the repetition of the theme.

Finally, humanity’s longing for the Lord, separate from the element of parallelism, also creates the core imagery of Psalm 84. Specifically, the image of the house of the Lord depicts this longing. The Psalm first uses the analogy of a bird’s nest as the poet wrestles with his dissonance from God: “the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars.”⁵⁹ Here, the poet identifies that sparrow and swallow alike have found a home in which they can rest, while humanity cannot find Earthly rest. Again, the desperate tone of the poet signals his displeasure and frustration with his exile, more plainly asking: How can a being as simple as a bird find a home, while I am cast away? Moreover, this imagery creates a naturalistic twist that elevates the courtroom of God as untouchable, while simultaneously embedding it in the natural order of things. The Temple is not out of place, with birds finding rest within and near the Temple. The well-ordered state of the nature surrounding His Temple reflects the righteousness of the King, replicating the divine order of God’s Kingdom. Overall, the structure and imagery of the wicked within this Psalm, depicted and emphasized through analogy and parallelism, successfully supplicate humanity to

⁵⁹ *King James Version*, Psalm 84:3.

celebrate that a just deity reigns over Earth.⁶⁰ By harkening back to Genesis, this Psalm utilizes Biblical intertextuality in order to justify the Lord's ability. Furthermore, this Psalm conveys that God is a safe haven for human emotion and that He rewards the righteous. Later, exhibited in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, sixteenth-century poets will also utilize the trope of longing for the Lord in tandem with the elements of imagery and parallelism in their own Psalms poetry.

Psalm 117

Although Psalm 117 is the shortest Psalm within the Psalter, it conveys great depth and meaning. Broadly, this Psalm reveals the art of the Biblical Psalter. Even in the short, two verses of the Psalm, the elements of voice, parallelism, and imagery persist. Therefore, its close reading upholds that these elements mark each and every Psalm and are key to the later works of women writers. Psalm 117 is a hymn and an invitation to the nations to worship.⁶¹ Moreover, the element of parallelism is key both to the liturgical and lyrical significance of the Psalm. Psalm 117 is a part of Hallel, a six-Psalm grouping beginning with Psalm 113 recited by observant Jews on Jewish holidays.⁶² Most traditionally, the Hallel is sung before and after Passover meals. Psalm 117 is a hymn fixated on "praise," with scholar G. Campbell Morgan identifying that "there is [no other Psalm] greater or grander in its expression of praise."⁶³ The Psalm reads:

O praise the Lord, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people.
For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the Lord endureth for ever.
Praise ye the Lord.⁶⁴

Each individual verse contains parallelism, signaled by the parallel structure marked with a colon. In the first verse, "O praise the Lord" parallels "praise him" and "all ye nations" parallels

⁶⁰ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 829.

⁶¹ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 879.

⁶² Morgan, *Notes on the Psalms*, 216 - 221.

⁶³ Morgan, *Notes on the Psalms*, 221.

⁶⁴ *King James Version*, Psalm 117.

“all ye people.” This synonymous parallelism creates a rhythmic repetition, with repetition coming not from a lack of understanding, but instead to emphasize that the grace and mercy of the Lord is not confined to one singular type of “people” nor to only one “nation.” In the second verse “[f]or his merciful kindness is great toward us” synthetically parallels “the truth of the Lord endureth for ever.” The first part of the verse is not necessary for the second part to exist, but the two parts strengthen the overall message of the verse. Finally, the last line of the Psalm emphasizes the message of the entire Psalm: “Praise the Lord.” Such a conclusion serves as an exclamation point to the entire Psalm, paralleling 117’s entire meaning. Even in the shortest Psalm of the Psalter, parallelism is the mechanism of action. Through parallelism, the Psalm gives motive for praise and emphasizes the Lord’s steadfast love and faithfulness towards His people. More pointedly, this Psalm upholds the significance of structure, theme, and elements to all Psalms of the Biblical Psalter, even to the shortest Psalm.

England’s Perception of the Psalms in the Sixteenth Century

Just as the Psalms were significant for millennia before the sixteenth century, during the Protestant Reform, they remained at the forefront of religion, politics, and the arts. Although when positioned within this time period, the literary structure and elements of the Psalms do not change, the way in which followers interact, interpret, and meditate on the Psalter becomes specific and unique to sixteenth-century England. The sixteenth century experienced the newness of the English Bible, with William Tyndale publishing the first English translation in 1526, which was followed by other noteworthy translations such as Myles Coverdale’s Bible in 1535 and the *Geneva Bible* in 1560. Thus, sixteenth-century women were writing at the first possible moment a tradition could be formed. Overall, the sixteenth century marks the Psalter as a lyric work accessible to wealthy and poor, educated and uneducated, and men and women alike.

Sixteenth-Century Exposure

The sixteenth century had access to a variety of Bibles, though the *Geneva Bible* was the primary Bible circulating during the Elizabethan time period. During the English Protestants exile in Geneva during the reign of Queen Mary, English Protestants compiled the *Geneva Bible* (1577) and *The Whole Booke of Psalmes* (1547), also referred to as “Sternhold and Hopkins,” creating the beginning of a lasting relationship between Protestants, translation, and the Psalms.

⁶⁵ In Femke Molekamp’s article “The Vernacular Bible and Early Modern Englishwomen: Shifting Possibilities” (2013) she identifies that despite its origins, the *Geneva Bible* “was by no means confined to a readership comprising ‘the hotter sort of Protestant’, but became one of the most widely circulated books of Elizabeth’s reign, due to its appealing combination of affordability, astute biblical scholarship, and many notes, summaries, diagrams, and maps.”⁶⁶ Moreover, the *Geneva Bible* brought printed vernacular scriptures into the household. In light of the Protestant Reformation and increased access to the Psalms, the Psalms magnified in significance, shifting from a text that was of relative importance to Judeo-Christian worship to a primary activity of devotion in the sixteenth century. Hamlin, Brennan, Hannay, and Kinnamon distill that “translating [Psalms] into the vernacular for private meditation and public singing had become a particularly Protestant activity.”⁶⁷ In addition to the devotional aspect of translation, the focus on translation in meter added an element of practicality, making the Psalms easier to both sing and remember.⁶⁸ Before these efforts, English reformers did not have access to a

⁶⁵ Hamlin, Brennan, Hannay, and Kinnamon, “Psalms and the Metric Psalms,” x.

⁶⁶ Femke Molekamp, “The Vernacular Bible and Early Modern Englishwomen: Shifting Possibilities,” (Online: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2013), 2.

⁶⁷ “Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke” (Online: The Poetry Foundation, accessed April 27, 2020), <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/mary-sidney-herbert>.

⁶⁸ Hamlin, Brennan, Hannay, and Kinnamon, “Psalms and the Metric Psalms,” xi

metrical or poetic form of the Psalter because the Hebrew Psalms were not written in any recognizable metric form. Though, individuals did have access to a variety of Psalm translations.

The Whole Booke of Psalmes

The Whole Booke of Psalmes, or “Sternhold and Hopkins,” was the most widely known book of verse in England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and was the first English metrical version of the Psalms.⁶⁹ “Sternhold and Hopkins” was often physically bound to *The Book of Common Prayer*, a service book for daily and Sunday worship that is also the product of English Reformation. Moreover, *The Book of Common Prayer* is both rich with Psalms and largely dependent on Psalm culture; individuals knew to sing parts of *The Book of Common Prayer* because of the presence or dependence on the Psalms and surrounding culture. The lyric nature of both of these texts began the mobilization of the Psalms as an accessible form of poetry and worship. In Hannibal Hamlin’s book *Psalm Culture in Early Modern England* (2004), the author explores the profound influence of the Psalms on early modern England.⁷⁰ Hamlin identifies that “although metrical Psalms had been published in England earlier... as far as the records show, the practice of singing metrical Psalms as devotional recreation begins with Sternhold.”⁷¹ For sixteenth-century England this publication presented the Psalms as a work of poetry while also inviting a church congregation to intentionally engage with them through lyric. This transition shaped the way individuals engaged with the Psalms on an individual basis by both inviting and fostering community around the Psalms while simultaneously stressing private,

⁶⁹ Morgan, *Notes on the Psalms*, 7

⁷⁰ Hamlin, *Psalm Culture in Early Modern England*, 1.

⁷¹ Hamlin, *Psalm Culture in Early Modern England*, 20.

individual worship and meditation.⁷² Because of the eventually ubiquitous nature of the publication, the well-educated and unschooled both had access to and read the Psalms.⁷³

The lyric form and increased access of the Psalter to sixteenth-century England complicate the Psalter's exposure, meaning, and interpretations to sixteenth-century readers and listeners. Hamlin conveys that the "understanding of music's ability to carry meaning, essentially seducing people into righteousness, was a commonplace among sixteenth-century Reformers. It lies at the root of the entire tradition of metrical Psalmody."⁷⁴ Psalm-singing became a part of everyday practice across English Protestant households as individuals would gather after dinner to read and worship together or sing the Psalms on the way to and from church.⁷⁵ Ultimately, because of the lyric nature of the Psalms during this time period, paired with the quantity of "Sternhold & Hopkins" publications, women were able to gain exposure in a way previous centuries did not allow. During the Medieval era, women would have carried or had access to the *Book of Hours*, which contained prayers including Psalms to be read throughout the day. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art* identifies that in this era "[i]ndividuals sought to deepen their faith through study, meditation, and prayer," which might be guided by psalters or private prayer books like the *Book of Hours*.⁷⁶ Although previously noble women in the middle ages would have known the Psalms, though in Latin, the sixteenth century and the publication of "Sternhold & Hopkins" marked a shift in access, providing all classes of women access and ability to meditate and translate the Biblical Psalm

⁷² Hamlin, *Psalm Culture in Early Modern England*, 26.

⁷³ Hamlin, *Psalm Culture in Early Modern England*, 38.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 45 - 46.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 35.

⁷⁶ "Private Devotion in Medieval Christianity," (Online: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed on May 5, 2020), https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/priv/hd_priv.htm

Women's Exposure

In Margaret Hannay's analysis of the sixteenth century, she argues that women were confined by sixteenth-century expectations. Furthermore, in her article "'Wisdom the Wordes': Psalm Translations and Elizabeth Women's Spirituality" (1991) Hannay centers in on women's agency and authorship and justifies that women could not write canonically, but rather could only mediate on religious texts in order to demonstrate their pious devotion to the Lord. Regarding translation, Hannay writes that "[t]ranslation both empowered and controlled women's speech. Educated women were urged to translate religious works for the unlettered, to aid in the dissemination of the gospel; but any original work might be presented as dereliction from that Christian duty."⁷⁷ She narrows in on this process, offering that

Although a woman translator might choose a work or slant the translation toward her own situation, none of these works offered much scope for personal expression. Psalm translation offered more opportunity for individual meditation, for Christians had long been urged to treat the words of the Psalmist as if they were their own, thereby providing women with a more effective persona for public speech than other sacred translation.⁷⁸

Hannay's analysis, although formative in her own time, is antiquated and biased. In 1991, Hannay was trusted, yet today scholars recognize she was applying old methods of scholarship and old canonical standards that are incredibly biased and based on nineteenth century assumptions. Broadly, she assumes that individual writing is more important than translating, which scholars such as Femke Molekamp and Kimberley Coles, among others, identify as false. This general misconception is linked to the original lack of interest in women's writing and the biased assumptions the first critics of early modern women's writing made. This lack of interest is tangibly seen in Hamlin's analysis of the general exposure and perception of sixteenth-century

⁷⁷ Margaret P. Hannay "'Wisdom the Wordes': Psalm Translation and Elizabeth Women's Spirituality," (Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame, 1991), 65.

⁷⁸ Hannay, "'Wisdom the Wordes': Psalm Translation and Elizabeth Women's Spirituality," 66.

England to the Psalms. In his analysis, he fails to address the formative relationship women had with the Psalms, and only remarks that “Sternhold and Hopkins” made its “way into the hands of English men and women who otherwise had little in common” because of the lyric and communal nature of the publication.⁷⁹ Despite impressive gains of scholars on women writers, some scholarship minimizes or entirely forgets women’s work within the Psalms, as seen in Hamlin’s publication “*Psalm Culture in Early Modern England*.” Though, even in the recognition that women had more agency, ability, and control than either Hannay or Hamlin afford them, Hannay still correctly identifies the tremendous power of the Psalter and how it provided women with exceptional capacity for personal meditation. Her words remain true that the Psalms do provide women a more effective persona for public speech than other sacred texts.

Since Hannay’s scholarship publication, historical work has uncovered all of the ways in which women’s texts were politically involved and informed. In the age of the Renaissance, women had genius and authoritative voice. They translated to show they understood language and to signal achievement. They had access to sources beyond just that of the Bible and through their poetry, they assert their authority and find ways of asserting their own voice.⁸⁰ Contemporary scholars such as Patricia Demers, Suzanne Woods, Diane Purkiss, Kimberly Coles, and Femke Molkamp push back against antiquated perception of early modern women. Today, women’s role and women’s poetry composed during the Elizabethan period are more accurately thought of as impassioned, canonical works. As seen in the next two chapters of this thesis, Mary Sidney Herbert, Anne Vaughan Locke, and Elizabeth Melville translated, adapted, and reconfigured the religious model of the Psalms for a variety of reasons.⁸¹ Mary Sidney

⁷⁹ Hamlin, *Psalm Culture in Early Modern England*, 34.

⁸⁰ Suzanne Woods, “Narrative poetry,” (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2019), 52.

⁸¹ Demers, “Genres of Early Modern Women’s Writing,” 137.

Herbert used the medium as a form to hold and support her lyrical poetry, Anne Vaughan Locke used it to hold and support the first sonnet sequence published in English, and Elizabeth Melville used it to hold and support her narrative poetry. All three women, among other poets of the time, worked within the medium to advance the Protestant Reformation.

Demers supports the skillful, poetic work of these three women, offering that “[t]ranslators were also poets; dramatists turned to family stories for models; anxious mothers-to-be and polemical prophets relied on meditations, prayers, and biblical periscopes to structure their argument. The interlamination of public and private realms is part of the legacy of early modern women writers.”⁸² Women, therefore, actually could sit at the center of discourse, writing with the same vigor and ability as men. Furthermore, Coles identifies that despite twentieth-century perception, they had the ability to write canonically within the medium of Psalm translation.⁸³ Today’s typical canonical genres such as epic poetry were still important within this time-period, but pale in comparison to the significance of the Psalms. In Diane Purkiss’s article “Rooms of all our own” (2019), the author articulates why a white space surrounding women and their texts has existed until only recently and the ways in which women-authored texts have been lost.⁸⁴ She offers that “Women writers of the early modern period have been introduced, and reintroduced, and introduced again, as if the mainstream early modernists were deaf, or very forgetful, elderly uncles.”⁸⁵ Purkiss covers a variety of scholarship that has the sole intention of demonstrating the impact of early modern women’s writing on other events in the period, while also considering the methodological, theoretical, and critical elements of their

⁸² Demers, “Genres of Early Modern Women’s Writing,” 128.

⁸³ Kimberly Ann Coles, “Introduction” in *Religion, Reform, and Women’s Writing*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 10.

⁸⁴ Purkiss, “Rooms of all our own,” <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/early-women-writers/>.

⁸⁵ Purkiss, “Rooms of all our own,” <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/early-women-writers/>.

works.⁸⁶ In short, she argues that the male-dominated profession has created this white space surrounding women, as men make space for themselves and only themselves within their institution of privilege.⁸⁷ This realization is deeply troubling, yet its identification is necessary to achieving progress within the field.

Despite this biased institution and affected space surrounding women, as identified by Molekamp and supported by Purkiss, during the sixteenth century, the vessel of the Psalms became “a liberating and pleasurable space for female voices.”⁸⁸ This chapter has provided the necessary framework for considering and analyzing the sixteenth-century Psalm poetry of Mary Sidney Herbert, Anne Vaughan Locke, and Elizabeth Melville. Ultimately, this analysis raises key questions. What is the significance of women writing within sixteenth-century discourse through means of the Psalms? What structure, genre, and theology did these Psalmists work within? What is the significance of the female voice within a Psalm or Psalter? Why have women historically been removed from conversation regarding their Psalms poetry? The following two chapters address and answer these questions, exploring the early assumptions about sixteenth-century women writers and illustrating how these have been overturned. Additionally, the following two chapters reveal the significant impact women had on sixteenth-century England, on the Psalms as a literary genre, and on the literary canon as a whole.

⁸⁶ Purkiss, “Rooms of all our own,” <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/early-women-writers/>.

⁸⁷ Purkiss, “Rooms of all our own,” <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/early-women-writers/>.

⁸⁸ Femke Molekamp, “Women and Affective Religious Reading and Writing,” (Online: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2013), 36 – 38.

Chapter Two: “Heavenly Harmony”:⁸⁹

The Sidney Psalter as a Vehicle into Sixteenth-Century Discourse:

Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke

John Donne celebrated the many works of Mary Sidney Herbert, writing to her: “We thy Sidneian Psalms shall celebrate and that ‘they tell us why, and teach us how to sing’”.⁹⁰ In her article “The Sidney-Herbert Psalms and the Countess of Pembroke as a Reader of the Geneva Bible” (2013), Femke Molekamp touches on the exquisite nature of *The Sidney Psalter*: “Both Sir Philip Sidney and his sister the Countess of Pembroke...were not only striving to create a finer ‘heavenly harmony’ out of the materials of Elizabethan lyric, but were also situating themselves in relation to Genevan literary culture.”⁹¹ Molekamp, among other scholars, identifies that Mary Sidney Herbert took a deliberate and pivotal role in the creation of her Psalter. Yet, both Mary Sidney Herbert and her brother were working at odds by seeking such an affect through the vehicle of the Psalter. In Kimberley Coles article, “[A] pen to paynt’: Mary Sidney Herbert and the problem of a Protestant poetics” (2008), Kimberley Coles upholds that

The integrity of the translation of the Psalter is as crucial to its aims as its artistic expression. Protestant culture in England devalued the imaginative exercises in which the poet engaged: it called poets ‘liars’ and poems ‘sinful fancies’... In their attempt to find a place for lyric poetry within a devotional tradition that sought to deny it, the Sidneys had first to situate their poetics within a specifically Protestant context.”⁹²

⁸⁹ Femke Molekamp, “The Sidney-Herbert Psalms and the Countess of Pembroke as a Reader of the Geneva Bible,” (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2013), 157.

⁹⁰ Hannibal Hamlin, Michael G. Brennan, Margaret P. Hannay, and Noel J. Kinnamon, “Psalms and the Metric Psalms” in *The Sidney Psalter*. (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2009), xi.

⁹¹ Molekamp, “The Sidney-Herbert Psalms and the Countess of Pembroke as a Reader of the Geneva Bible,” 157.

⁹² Kimberley Coles, “[A] pen to paynt’: Mary Sidney Herbert and the problem of a Protestant poetics” in *Religion, Reform, and Women’s Writing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2008), 102 – 103

The Psalms, therefore, were a vehicle for Mary Sidney Herbert to enter sixteenth-century discourse. As Coles supports, she clothed and disguised her lyric poetry in Psalms, allowing readers of her time to experience her poetry first through Protestant worship. Through this process, Mary Sidney fulfilled her brother's intention to initiate a rethinking of lyric poetry's place in worship.⁹³ This mechanism both benefitted Mary Sidney Herbert as a writer by giving her opportunity and increased audience and benefitted sixteenth-century Protestants by making the Psalms more accessible and understandable.

Broadly, this chapter seeks to demonstrate the key similarities and differences between *The Sidney Psalter* and the Biblical Psalter. More specifically, this chapter argues that through the vehicle of the Psalms, paired with her skills as a writer, Mary Sidney Herbert was an influential and canonical sixteenth-century woman writer. Moreover, analysis of Mary Sidney Herbert canonical work reveals biased assumptions regarding her work and the work of early modern women writers. This chapter upholds these claims through analysis of the background of both Mary Sidney Herbert and *The Sidney Psalter*, in addition to close readings.

Background on Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke

Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke lived from 1561 to 1621. Although she did not have the privilege of going to university like her brothers, she did receive training in Latin, French and Italian language and literature.⁹⁴ At the age of fifteen, she was married off to Henry Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, who would come to influence her success because of his status as one of the richest men in England and his network.⁹⁵ Mary Sidney Herbert began her writing career

⁹³ Coles, "[A] pen to paynt': Mary Sidney Herbert and the problem of a Protestant poetics," 75

⁹⁴ "Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke" (Online: The Poetry Foundation, accessed April 27, 2020), <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/mary-sidney-herbert>.

⁹⁵ "Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke," <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/mary-sidney-herbert>.

in the late 1580s, after the death of several family members including her mother, father, daughter, and her brother Philip Sidney. In the 1590s, she began her work on *The Sidney Psalter* which Philip Sidney began before his death. Mary Sidney completed the metric translation of Psalms 44 – 150 and additionally revised Philip’s original 43 translations. Through her publication, Mary Sidney fulfilled her brother’s intention for the Psalter, which Coles articulates as “an entirely different ‘scope’ for poetry, which is ‘to know, and by knowledge to lift up the mind from the dungeon of [man’s] body to the enjoying [of] his own divine essence.’”⁹⁶ This poetic, yet divine focus propelled Mary Sidney’s work within sixteenth-century England, allowing her to continue as a writer, translator, and patron after the completion of her Psalter.⁹⁷ In addition to her poetic ability, Mary Sidney’s marriage provided her the wealth and prestige necessary to become the first English woman to be widely celebrated as a literary patron and writer. In their introduction to *The Sidney Psalter*, “The Psalms of Sir Philip and Mary Sidney” (2009), Hamlin, Brennan, Hannay, and Kinnamon identify that her marriage positively affected and ultimately enabled her success, although she would not have achieved such prestige without her natural talent, dedication, and intention.⁹⁸ The influence of Mary Sidney’s husband and brother raises the key question of what truly enabled Mary Sidney Herbert to enter sixteenth-century discourse and write canonically.

For Mary Sidney Herbert, the translation of the Biblical Psalter was key to entrance into sixteenth-century discourse and her ultimate effect on religious literary tradition. The next sections delineate why the Psalms were a formative vehicle to her success, which includes two

⁹⁶ Coles, “[A] pen to paynt’: Mary Sidney Herbert and the problem of a Protestant poetics,” 84.

⁹⁷ “Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke,”

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/mary-sidney-herbert>.

⁹⁸ Hamlin, Brennan, Hannay, and Kinnamon, “Psalms and the Metric Psalms,” xv.

primarily reasons: one, in sixteenth-century England, Psalm translation was widely received as a form of personal meditation and support of the Protestant reformation; two, from this platform, the Countess of Pembroke was able to overturn, or complicate this expectation with her focus on the lyric nature of her poetry rather than simple religious meditation. Kimberley Coles offers that “[n]either Sidney could have anticipated the consequence of their attempts to vindicate poetry’s place within Protestant culture...; the Psalter in particular worked to legitimate the use of poetry in the treatment of religious subjects.”⁹⁹ Mary Sidney cloaked her exquisite and innovative poetry in the Psalms, successfully entering sixteenth-century discourse because of society’s reception of the Biblical Psalms. Through this process, she justified lyric poetry’s place within religious dialogue, serving as a forerunner in poetic development during the sixteenth century.

Background on *The Sidney Psalter*

Sources & Writing Process

In the creation of *The Sidney Psalter*, Mary Sidney Herbert collages a variety of sources together to write her lyric poetry. Because Mary Sidney was not expert in Hebrew, she worked with Biblical translations in English, French, and Latin.¹⁰⁰ She based her interpretations on standard Protestant texts: the *Coverdale Psalter*, the *Geneva Bible*, and the commentaries on Calvin and Bèze.¹⁰¹ The *Geneva Bible* and the *Book of Common Prayer* served as her core English texts, which incorporated Miles Coverdale’s translation of the Great Bible from 1539.¹⁰² The commentaries of Calvin and Bèze served as her core French text; however, she also drew

⁹⁹ Coles, “[A] pen to paynt’: Mary Sidney Herbert and the problem of a Protestant poetics,” 112.

¹⁰⁰ Hamlin, Brennan, Hannay, and Kinnamon, “Psalms and the Metric Psalms,” xvi.

¹⁰¹ Margaret P. Hannay, Michael G. Brennan, and Noel J. Kinnamon, “Literary Content” in *The Collected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke*, Literary Content, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 11

¹⁰² “Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke,”

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/mary-sidney-herbert>.

from the popular French Psalter *Les Psaumes de David mis en rime Française, par Clément Marot, et Théodore de Bèze* (1562).¹⁰³ Additionally, Hamlin, Brennan, Hannay, and Kinnamon identify she drew from John Calvin and from “continental versions and earlier English metrical Psalms, such as those by Anne Lok and Matthew Parker”— further adding to her diversity of translated Psalm sources.¹⁰⁴ Although she did not follow the exact same process for every Psalm, Mary Sidney generally began in the *Geneva Bible* or the *Book of Common Prayer* to write a preliminary version, and then shifted to the Marot and Bezé Psalms and French translations to crafted the meter of her Psalms.¹⁰⁵ Though, Molekamp identifies that Mary Sidney commonly drops out the diction of the *Geneva Bible* in “favour of a more emphatic, or imagistic, rendition.”¹⁰⁶ Mary Sidney’s empathy is palpable, particularly in the ways she gives voice to the female experience and Queen Elizabeth.

Though Mary Sidney Herbert enters discourse in what looks like a religious act of translation, upon opening *The Sidney Psalter* it becomes obvious that she instead pushes beyond this form and invents her own poetic masterpiece, creating a sound argument for the involvement of lyric poetry and religious texts. Her process testifies to her dedication to accuracy, scholarship, and divinity. Mary Sidney Herbert worked through these various sources to fine tune her own poetry, generating a compelling final product. Frequently, she restates verses and incorporates notes from the *Geneva Bible*, directly carrying over the historical and literary content of her Biblical sources. Furthermore, she echoes wording and sentiments of all of her

¹⁰³ Hamlin, Brennan, Hannay, and Kinnamon, “Psalms and the Metric Psalms,” xvi.

¹⁰⁴ “Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke,”

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/mary-sidney-herbert>.

¹⁰⁵ *The Collected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert, Literary Content*, 13

¹⁰⁶ Molekamp, “The Sidney-Herbert Psalms and the Countess of Pembroke as a Reader of the Geneva Bible,” 160.

sources. Hamlin, Brennan, Hannay, and Kinnamon argue that “the most striking aspect of her work is its composite use of Psalms and commentaries occasionally interwoven with phrases from Sidney’s poems or those of her other contemporaries.”¹⁰⁷ Mary Sidney strikes a balance between keeping the Biblical content of the Psalms while adding her own unique poetic elements, influenced by her contemporaries. The variety of sources Mary Sidney Herbert worked within shaped the ultimate version of *The Sidney Psalter*, forming her metaphors, interpretation, meter, wording, and religious implication.

Sir Philip Sidney’s Influence

Exploration of Mary Sidney Herbert’s relationship with her brother, Sir Philip Sidney, further reveals her writing intentions and the literary effects of her work. Due to her close relationship with her brother, Mary Sidney Herbert embarked on the completion of her brother’s Psalms with the hope of creating a publication linked to his name.¹⁰⁸ Hamlin, Brennan, Hannay, and Kinnamon convey that in essence, Mary Sidney served as “her brother’s literary executor supervising the posthumous, authorized (by her) publication of his works, continued the Psalter project, translating the remaining 107 Psalms and revising many of Philip’s.”¹⁰⁹ Sir Philip Sidney was core to Mary Sidney Herbert’s success, both because of his namesake and the inspiration he brought to his sister.

By the time of his death, Philip had completed translations of Psalms 1 – 43.¹¹⁰ Hamlin, Brennan, Hannay, and Kinnamon identify that in his forty-three Psalms, her brother began the practice that she continues throughout the rest of the Psalter of “translat[ing] the Psalms into

¹⁰⁷ Hannay, Brennan, and Kinnamon, “Literary Content,” 11.

¹⁰⁸ “Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke,”
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/mary-sidney-herbert>.

¹⁰⁹ Hamlin, Brennan, Hannay, and Kinnamon, “Psalms and the Metric Psalms,” xi.

¹¹⁰ Hamlin, Brennan, Hannay, and Kinnamon, “Psalms and the Metric Psalms,” xi.

sophisticated verse, selecting or investing a different metre or stanza form for each Psalm”— a practice unexplored in previous English Psalms.¹¹¹ Philip Sidney’s reworking of the Biblical Psalter served as an experimentation in verse and supporting evidence of his arguments of literary theory within his book *Defense of Poetry* (1581) in which he “interlaces classical models and English Calvinism.”¹¹² He utilizes his work in *The Sidney Psalter* to defend the claims that poets were “liars” and poems were “sinful fancies.” Coles narrows in on this intention, offering that “Sidney mounted his Defense precisely because ‘poetry . . . [was] thrown down to so ridiculous an estimation’ in England.”¹¹³ Philip Sidney’s intention illuminates Mary Sidney Herbert’s decisive choice to complete and transform her brother’s work and publish next to his name. She sought to complete the project he began. Ultimately, within the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this decision— to some degree— set Mary Sidney Herbert up to exist within the shadow of her brother, with many readers attributing the Psalter solely to Sir Philip Sidney. This outcome underscores a potential reason Mary Sidney Hebert is not as well-known as her other Renaissance writers.

However, even in these efforts and outcomes, *The Sidney Psalter* remained her literary creation, even if she lacked accreditation.¹¹⁴ She intentionally linked the publication to her brother. Made tangible through her introductory poem dedicated to Philip Sidney, Mary Sidney lauded her brother’s work and being and, in comparison to him, felt inadequate to match his wit and divinity. Furthermore, in Mary Trull’s essay “These dearest offerings of my heart” (2011),

¹¹¹ Hamlin, Brennan, Hannay, and Kinnamon, “Psalms and the Metric Psalms,” xi.

¹¹² Coles, “[A] pen to paynt’: Mary Sidney Herbert and the problems of a Protestant poetics,” 87.

¹¹³ Coles, “[A] pen to paynt’: Mary Sidney Herbert and the problems of a Protestant poetics,” 94.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 76.

Trull offers that Mary Sidney Herbert “implies twinship with her brother in the opening apostrophe,” titled “To the Angel Spirit of the Most Excellent Sir Philip Sidney”:¹¹⁵

To thee pure sprite, to thee alone’s addressed
 This coupled work, by double interest thine:
 First raised by thy blest hand, and what is mine
 Inspired by thee, thy secret power impressed.
 So dared my Muse with thine itself combine,
 As mortal stuff with that which is divine,
 Thy light’ning beams give lustre to the rest.¹¹⁶

Mary Sidney meditates on her brother’s “pure sprite,” placing her own interests in tandem with his. She exalted him for his ability and wrote to honor him. She frankly addresses the structural threads Sir Philip created for her in her prefatory poem addressed to the Queen. Mary Sidney writes: “But he did warp, I weaved this web to end’.¹¹⁷ In Molekamp’s analysis of these verses, she offers that Mary Sidney places “herself, with Sidney, in the tradition of Psalm translation. Pembroke asserts that David, author of the Psalms, would wear their cloth of translation.”¹¹⁸ Together, they made a cloth of poetry. Ultimately, Sir Philip’s influence is significant to *The Sidney Psalter* because of what Mary Sidney Herbert produced, what she wove from the threads he gave her. She created a Psalter rich with the female experience, a product vastly different than what Philip would have likely produced if he were the main writer. The close readings found later within this chapter reveal the ways in which she adapts verse to write in the female

¹¹⁵ Mary Trull, “Theise dearest offspring of my heart”: The Sacrifice of Praise in Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke’s *Psalmes*, (English Women, Religion, and Textual Production, 2011), 56

¹¹⁶ Mary Sidney Herbert, “To the Angel Spirit of the Most Excellent Sir Philip Sidney” in in *The Collected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke*, edited by Margaret P. Hannay, Michael G. Brennan, and Noel J. Kinnamon, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 81.

¹¹⁷ Mary Sidney Herbert. “Even now that care” in *The Collected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke*,, edited by Margaret P. Hannay, Michael G. Brennan, and Noel J. Kinnamon, (Oxford: *Oxford World’s Classics*, 2009), 8.

¹¹⁸ Molekamp. “The Sidney-Herbert Psalms and the Countess of Pembroke as a Reader of the Geneva Bible,” 167.

experience. She effortlessly identifies the voids of the Biblical Psalter, touching on subjects from miscarriage to leadership. Although Philip Sidney was progressive in thought and ability, his main intention in writing was to defend the position of lyric poetry within religious context, absent of advancing the female voice. Hawkins supports this argument, presenting that Mary Sidney's "own rendering of what remained to be done after his death produced poetry that often soars beyond mere paraphrase, notable both for its sensitive understanding of the text and for its technical ingenuity."¹¹⁹ Her ingenuity was not only valued within her own time-period, but has had lasting literary effects explored in this chapter's conclusion.

Circulation & Accreditation

Although *The Sidney Psalter* was not printed until the eighteenth century, the number of surviving manuscript copies testifies to its sixteenth and seventeenth century success. By 1599, Mary Sidney Herbert had completed her first manuscript and brought it into circulation.¹²⁰ During her lifetime, Mary Sidney Herbert circulated *The Sidney Psalter* to a wide audience through manuscript form. However, she initially largely controlled circulation, limiting readership to her close acquaintances.¹²¹ This form created limitations of audience and exposure, but ultimately allowed her to maintain control of her work, which lasted through her lifetime. Although manuscript circulation was a practice of the sixteenth century with authors such as John Donne not having their work printed until after their deaths, Mary Sidney Herbert chose to circulate her Psalter through manuscript form not solely to maintain control, but additionally for the visual benefits of the form. Molekamp further hypothesizes Mary Sidney's decision to work through manuscript, offering that "[v]isual patterning stands out even more in the manuscripts, as

¹¹⁹ Hawkins, "The Psalms in Poetry", 101

¹²⁰ Hamlin, Brennan, Hannay, and Kinnamon, "Psalms and the Metric Psalms," xvi.

¹²¹ Hamlin, Brennan, Hannay, and Kinnamon, "Psalms and the Metric Psalms," xvi.

attention is called to it by the more extreme indention of lines, proportion seeming precisely calculated. Indeed this could even have been a further reason for Pembroke choosing manuscript over print transmission for the Psalms.”¹²² Additionally, Kimberly Coles argues that *The Sidney Psalter* was “not designed for congregational use.”¹²³ Therefore, Mary Sidney Herbert’s manuscripts became a more private, yet visually impactful way for her to begin the circulation of her poetry, with the Psalms serving as vehicle for this artful work. However, due to access and Mary Sidney’s control, sixteenth-century England was not, and could not have been, fully aware of either the masterpiece she was circulating nor of the lasting effects her Psalter would ultimately have on the literary canon.

Elements of *The Sidney Psalter*

Introduction & Process

While the Book of Psalms is anonymous and ahistorical, *The Sidney Psalter* has two definitive authors, Sir Phillip Sidney and Mary Sidney Herbert, and is rooted in the sixteenth century. *The Sidney Psalter* grapples with an earthly, human experience and effortlessly conveys the mortality of humankind. *The Sidney Psalter* does not have the same divine authority as the Biblical Psalter, despite being deeply rooted in Biblical, divine texts. Instead, the voice of Mary Sidney Herbert is evident in each of her Psalms, as she intended it to be present. Despite this key difference, *The Sidney Psalter* accomplishes many of the same effects as the Biblical Psalter because it uses the same elements and techniques as the Biblical Psalter. In contrast to its similarities, *The Sidney Psalter* pushes beyond the scope of the Biblical Psalter providing commentary on, opinion about, and recommendations for sixteenth-century England— both

¹²² Molekamp. “The Sidney-Herbert Psalms and the Countess of Pembroke as a Reader of the Geneva Bible,” 171.

¹²³ Coles. “[A] pen to paynt’: Mary Sidney Herbert and the problem of a Protestant poetics,” 103.

using the same and additional literary elements as the Biblical Psalter. According to Hamlin, Brennan, Hannay, and Kinnamon, Mary Sidney Herbert said that her task of completing *The Sidney Psalter* was “to render the Psalms not ‘transform’d | in substance’ but only in ‘superficial tire’.”¹²⁴ In doing so, she “attempted to retain the sense of the original Hebrew text while she clothes it in English verse.”¹²⁵ Similar to the Biblical Psalter, *The Sidney Psalter* includes the core elements of voice, parallelism, and figurative language. However, *The Sidney Psalter* includes the additional core elements of meter, unique imagery, and political narrative. Despite addressing singular moments in time, established through the elements below, a reader of *The Sidney Psalter* can still apply the verses to his or her own life because of the remarkable form and threshold of the Psalms.

Voice

Although Mary Sidney Herbert draws on a variety of sources, it is Mary Sidney’s voice that is most prominent in *The Sidney Psalter*.¹²⁶ In contrast to the Biblical Psalter, *The Sidney Psalter* is made up and edited by her female voice. More so than just being a literal female voice, Mary Sidney narrows in on the female experience, emphasizing the female body, childbirth, motherhood, and her own life experiences throughout *The Sidney Psalter*. In Psalm 51, Mary Sidney Herbert writes “My mother, lo, when I began to be, / Conceiving me, with me did sin conceive”; Psalm 58, Mary Sidney addresses an unborn child as an “embryo”; in Psalm 68 she writes of a “virgin army” and of “battle maids”; and in Psalm 71, she writes “since imprisoned in my mother.”¹²⁷ Yet, while inserting a female experience not formerly existing in a Psalter, Mary

¹²⁴ Hannay, Brennan, and Kinnamon, “Literary Content,” 15.

¹²⁵ Hannay, Brennan, and Kinnamon, “Literary Content,” 16.

¹²⁶ Hamlin, Brennan, Hannay, and Kinnamon, “Psalms and the Metric Psalms,” xi.

¹²⁷ Herbert, “Psalm 51,” “Psalm 58,” “Psalm 71,” 97, 108, 132.

Sidney Herbert still creates the male experience as the dominant experience. Throughout her Psalter, Mary Sidney addresses humanity as “men,” which although was common practice underscores the environment she was writing in and highlights the significance of her inserting the female experience at all within her work. In Psalm 20, she writes “Let trust of some men be / In chariots armed”; In Psalm 44, she writes “Men by thee in shame forlorn”; and in Psalm 74 “As men with axe on arm.” Such a decision demonstrates the challenging balancing act she engaged with: adhering to the content of the Psalter, while pushing its limits through her voice—molded through her life experiences.

Figurative Language

The Sidney Psalter utilizes scheme— primarily of figurative language— to maintain the content of the Biblical Psalter, while still creating a unique publication.¹²⁸ Mary Sidney Herbert excels at conveying a psychological realism within her Psalms; She represents complex inward thought in verse.¹²⁹ Although the Biblical Psalter contains psychological realism as it grapples with an intangible God and an earthly experience separated from God, Mary Sidney pushes and adapts her sources to depict a convincing mortal experience. In Micheline White’s introduction to the book *English Women, Religion, and Textual Production 1500-1625* (1998), she offers that Mary Sidney “convey[s] spiritual ideas through concrete imagery”, conveyed through figurative language.¹³⁰ Furthermore, she created this literary content through a rigorous process of sourcing and revision. She expands, tightens, transforms, and reimagines the texts she works within— from the Coverdale Psalter to the Geneva Bible. In this process, Herbert artfully combines her

¹²⁸ Hamlin, Brennan, Hannay, and Kinnamon, “Psalms and the Metric Psalms,” xxiii.

¹²⁹ Hamlin, Brennan, Hannay, and Kinnamon, “Psalms and the Metric Psalms,” xx.

¹³⁰ Micheline White, “Introduction: Women, Religious Communities, Prose Genres, and Textual Production” in *English Women, Religion, and Textual Production 1500-1625*, (Burlington, VA, Ashgate Publishing Company, 1998), 58.

own experiences with the divine. Through the figurative language of similes, metaphors, repetition, alliteration, word play, and rhetorical questions, Mary Sidney provides her reader with a tighter and more digestible rendition of the Psalms.¹³¹

Mary Sidney Herbert's use of figurative language in order to create a more digestible text occurs in her Psalm 99 and Psalm 51. In Psalm 99 of the Biblical Psalter, the author writes "He spake unto them in the cloudy pillar: they kept his testimonies, and the ordinance that he gave them,"¹³² while in *The Sidney Psalter*, Mary Sidney Mary Sidney writes

But from cloudy pillar then
God did deign to talk with men:
 He enacting, they observing,
 From his will there was no swerving.¹³³

The vague obedience of the Davidic Psalter juxtaposed with the precise, matter-of-fact language of Mary Sidney Herbert conveys a more accurate human experience. Additionally, her shift from "they kept his testimonies" to "they observing" and the additional "from his will there was no swerving" embodies human temptation. Mary Sidney offers that a reader might desire to swerve from God's will, but God will enact it regardless. Furthermore, the meter and rhythm of these verses has a similar act of artful control. Just as God inflicts His will, Mary Sidney Herbert inflicted her rhythm, poetically moving the reader through her text. In addition to altering preexisting figurative language of the Biblical Psalter, Mary Sidney writes in her own figurative language. She often expands verses of the Biblical Psalter, adding in elements of imagery or figurative language. She appeals to the reader experience in Psalm 51 through alliteration and imagery, writing "For I, alas, acknowledging do know / My filthy, fault, my faulty filthiness"

¹³¹ Hannay, Brennan, and Kinnamon, "Literary Content," 13.

¹³² *King James Version*, Psalm 99:7

¹³³ Herbert, "Psalm 99," 188.

while the Biblical Psalter reads as “For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.”^{134,135} Melville creates a chiasmus, or crossing with “faulty filthiness” as the inverse of “filthy, fault.” The word “alas” demonstrates an unwillingness, but eventual confession of sin, while the “f” alliteration in “filthy, fault, my faulty filthiness” creates a repetition of “filth” and a sense of shame. Through the overall repetition of the verse, Mary Sidney gives her reader companionship, conveying that he or she is not alone in the deep feelings of filth and insufficiency, while still ultimately pointing her reader, and herself, back to the Lord. Overall, through figurative language, Mary Sidney Herbert creates companionship for her readers, a key concept both of *The Sidney Psalter* and of the Biblical Psalter.

Meter

As outlined in the last chapter, a core and key element to the Biblical Psalms is parallelism— an element that transferred in translation from Hebrew to English. However, what many initial Psalms’ translations excluded was the meter of the Hebraic Psalms. Unlike these translations, Mary Sidney wrote each of her Psalms with tremendous metrical variety, while still carrying over the parallelism of previous Biblical translations. Additionally, similar to the Biblical Psalter, the voice of *The Sidney Psalter* is made by its lyrical nature, achieved through meter. In the 107 Psalms that Mary Sidney Herbert translated, she employs 128 different verse forms, with Psalm 119 including twenty-two sections, each employing a different verse form.¹³⁶ When Mary Sidney initially began her metric versions, she adhered to the phrasing and interpretation of the Book of Common Prayer.¹³⁷ However, although on occasion, Mary Sidney

¹³⁴ *King James Version*, Psalm 51:3.

¹³⁵ Herbert, “Psalm 55,” 102.

¹³⁶ Hannay, Brennan, and Kinnamon, “Literary Content,” 13.

¹³⁷ “Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke,”

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/mary-sidney-herbert>.

uses rhymes found in previously written metrical Psalms, generally she is fully responsible for the creation of the unique meter in each of her Psalms, not drawing on sources to create the 128 meters of *The Sidney Psalter*.¹³⁸ Furthermore, as identified by Molekamp, Mary Sidney and her brother use “the ‘well weighed syllable’ of quantitative verse. Their embedding of intellectual music in the Psalms, using quantitative metre, results in the creation of a metaphor of music, which translates sensual music to an intellectual counterpart.”¹³⁹ The Psalms, therefore, were the ideal vehicle for Mary Sidney to demonstrate her skillset and ability, experimenting with rhyme and variety. She employs a variety of meters, forms, and effects most prominent of which include: iambic tetrameter (Psalm 35), trochaic effects (Psalm 56), rhyme royal (Psalm 51 and Psalm 63, with metric variation in Psalm 135 and Psalm 145), sonnets (Psalm 100 and Psalm 150), and feminine rhyme (Psalm 63). In short, Mary Sidney Herbert works within the canonical form of the Psalms to display her own unique poetic talents, formatively of meter. The later close readings of this chapter demonstrate how she utilizes rhyme scheme to create flow, rhythm, and purpose within each of her Psalms.

Sixteenth-Century Connection

The Sidney Psalter served Mary Sidney Herbert as a vessel to engage with what Mary Trull calls the “knotty theological problems” of the sixteenth-century in her article “These Dearest Offspring of my Heart” (2011), predominately the Protestant Reformation and lauding Queen Elizabeth.¹⁴⁰ The project of translating the Book of Psalms demonstrates Mary Sidney’s Protestant mission, supported by her dedicatory poem to Queen Elizabeth “praised her

¹³⁸ The Collected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert, Literary Content, 12

¹³⁹ Molekamp, “The Sidney-Herbert Psalms and the Countess of Pembroke as a Reader of the Geneva Bible,” 171.

¹⁴⁰ Trull, “These dearest offspring of my heart,” 39.

sovereign's defense of the faith." Throughout her Psalter, she comments on contemporary politics, as noted by the Poetry Foundation, "particularly the persecution of 'the godly,' as Protestants called themselves. By expanding metaphors and descriptions present in the original Hebrew Psalter, Sidney also incorporated her experience at Elizabeth's court."¹⁴¹ Although such commentary is evident throughout *The Sidney Psalter*, namely in Psalm 84 analyzed later in this chapter, her intentions are directly evident in her introductory poems to the Queen Elizabeth, who she addresses as "thrice sacred Queen," and to her brother, Sir Philip Sidney. Furthermore, she explicates how her Psalter supports the Elizabethan court, praising Queen Elizabeth for her talents and abilities, writing:

Kings on a queen enforced their states to lay;
Mainlands for empire waiting on an isle;
Men drawn by worth a woman to obey;
One moving all, herself unmoved the while
Truth's restitution, vanity's exile
Wealth sprung of want, war held without annoy,
Let subject be of some inspired style,
Till then the object of her subjects' joy.¹⁴²

Mary Sidney compares Queen Elizabeth to the more typical male leader, emphasizing her strong leadership ability with phrases "queen enforced," "men drawn by worth a woman to obey," and "herself unmoved." Furthermore, she attests to the Queen's effortless ability with the phrase "war held without annoy." Mary Sidney's entire dedicatory poem employs similar language, elevating Queen Elizabeth over all of England. Molekamp casts Mary Sidney Herbert as a female David, supporting that throughout her Psalter, Mary Sidney steadfastly glorifies Queen

¹⁴¹ "Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke," <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/mary-sidney-herbert>.

¹⁴² Herbert, "Eve now that care," 7.

Elizabeth as “the unfailing champion of the Protestant cause.”¹⁴³ Such a comparison attests to Mary Sidney Herbert’s poetic ability and to the success she encountered in her own time period and beyond, painting Mary Sidney as a champion for Queen Elizabeth’s leadership and the Protestant Reformation.

The Vehicle of the Psalms

Overall, Mary Sidney Herbert utilizes voice, figurative language, meter, and sixteenth-century connection in order to ground the divine text in the human experience. Mary Sidney Herbert’s balance of the poetic with the divine was key to her success: she was able to demonstrate her gift and ability through a vehicle that sixteenth-century readers were receptive to despite the assumption that lyric poetry had no place in religious text. Coles conveys that Mary Sidney concentrates her Psalter in English culture on artistic conventions—namely those of devotional lyric in a time when poetics and devotion were not thought of as a capable duo, but rather were at severe odds with one another.¹⁴⁴ Her work was formally celebrated for its religious content and lauded for its poetic dynamism because of the capability of the form of the Biblical Psalter. Coles supports this argument, providing that the “irresolvable nature of the conflict is one of the distinctive features of the Psalter translation.” Furthermore, as outlined in the first chapter, the Biblical Psalter’s ability to address manifestly wrong earthly matters through even the worst of maledictions creates a form that can sustain any modern-day conflict— whether that be a woman welding lyric poetry with a religious text, or advancing the Protestant Reformation. Therefore, although challenging to think of within twenty-first century context, as a woman, Mary Sidney wrote at the center of sixteenth-century discourse through the

¹⁴³ Molekamp, “The Sidney-Herbert Psalms and the Countess of Pembroke as a Reader of the Geneva Bible,” 158.

¹⁴⁴ Coles, “[A] pen to paynt’: Mary Sidney Herbert and the problem of a Protestant poetics,” 77.

vehicle of this religious text. Mary Sidney Herbert subsumed a grand challenge in her process of welding religious meditation with lyric poetry. But, despite this negative potential, Mary Sidney Herbert overcame the challenge and ultimately defies critical assumption, creating a work that is simultaneously a form of personal and liturgical devotion.¹⁴⁵

Close Readings of Mary Sidney Herbert's *The Sidney Psalter*

The close readings of three Psalms of *The Sidney Psalter* reveal the key elements of Mary Sidney's Psalms in action. Specifically, Psalm 58 demonstrates her attention to the female experience, Psalm 84 demonstrates her respect for Queen Elizabeth and the Protestant Reformation, and Psalm 117 demonstrates her Psalms as a vehicle to portray her poetic ability.

Psalm 58

Just like its original, Mary Sidney Herbert's Psalm 58 is a ferocious curse that grapples with the Lord's ability to uphold divine justice. This Psalm is a mechanism for coping with unrighteous emotions, conveying that God is a safe haven for human emotion, even emotion crying out against the enemy and praying for retribution. Mary Sidney follows the three-part structure of the original curse: a challenge, followed by a statement of the wicked, and concluded with the ultimate curse. Mary Sidney Herbert's use of the female experience within the Psalm makes her Psalm 58 particularly compelling. In this Psalm, Mary Sidney writes in what is missing from the original: the female perspective. She accomplishes this through descriptions based in her time period, life, and female experience. Although this Psalm veers very closely to the original, following the same structure, parallelism, and core images, it is a female voice, the voice of Mary Sidney, that shines through and marks this Psalm as its own. Overall, structure

¹⁴⁵ Molekamp, "The Sidney-Herbert Psalms and the Countess of Pembroke as a Reader of the Geneva Bible," 178.

and imagery of the wicked within this Psalm, depicted and emphasized through alliteration, meter, and parallelism, supplicate humanity to recognize their own unrighteousness, while asserting that a just God governs Earth. This intention veers close to the original, creating space for the reader to enjoy the lyric poetry of her rendition.

Psalm 58 begins and concludes with a statement of divine judgement, targeted not at an individual, but at any unrighteous doer, whereas its original addresses the worshiping of deities:

And call ye this to utter what is just,
 You that of justice hold the sovereign throne?
 And call ye this to yield, O sons of dust,
 To wronged brethren every man his own?
 Oh, no: it is your long-malicious will
 Now to the world to make by practice known
 With whose oppression you the balance fill,
 Just to yourselves, indiff^rrent else to none.¹⁴⁶

The repetition of “And call ye this to,” paired with the parallelism between questions, petitions the unrighteous through irony. Mary Sidney lays the foundation for her contraction to come, “O no” followed by descriptions of maliciousness, oppression, and indifference, by describing the unrighteous subjects as “O sons of dust,” a description parallel to Jesus Christ. Mary Sidney Herbert occupies the Psalter from a New Testament mindset. This description employs irony because her image of “sons” as malicious and oppressive beings juxtaposes the one “son” of Christ who in the New Testament is kind, just, and God-fearing. Her decision to imbed an allusion to Jesus Christ highlights her overarching theme of drawing on motifs of the New Testament within the Old Testament vessel of the Psalms, advancing Christianity.

In contrast to this addressing of the unrighteous, the Psalm concludes with a curse of divine justice addressing the truly righteous:

¹⁴⁶ Herbert, lines 1 - 8 in “Psalm 58,” 108.

Oh, let their brood, a brood of springing thorns,
 Be by untimely rooting overthrown
 Ere bushes waxed, they push with pricking horns,
 As fruits yet green are off by tempest blow.
 The good with gladness this revenge shall see,
 And bathe his feet in blood of wicked one;
 While all shall say, 'The just rewarded be:
 There is a God that carves to each his own.¹⁴⁷

Although Mary Sidney alters the language of the entire Psalm, her shift from the original description of “he is a God that judgeth in the earth” (Psalm 58:8) to “There is a God that carves each his own” captures the main shift of the Psalm. She shifts from the Biblical Psalter’s immediate and divine authority, which at times is almost too proximate to the Lord to be fully understood, to authorship that actively acknowledges the space between herself and the Lord. The difference in “he is a God” to “There is a God” signals a difference in proximity to the divine. Mary Sidney distances herself from the Lord, asserting that there is a God who will serve justice, but not implying her relationship with Him. Just like its original, the opening and conclusion of this Psalm introduces the dichotomy between how the Lord responds to obedience and any degree of disobedience. Overall, the opening and closing of Mary Sidney’s Psalm 84, signal the shift in audience, rather than addressing the worshipping of deities, she more broadly addresses a sinful humanity.

Juxtaposed to the Psalms beginning and ending with a statement of divine justice, the majority of the text within this Psalm describes the “unrighteous” through the vehicle of imagery, depicted through figurative language. The narrator describes the “unrighteous” first in the challenge, and then in the statement of the wicked. Her unique, poignant descriptions mark the initial challenge of Mary Sidney’s Psalm 58. When describing the unrighteous, she explains

¹⁴⁷ Herbert, line 15 in “Psalm 58,” 108.

how society has devolved, an experience she grounds in her sixteenth-century perspective, describing religious leaders of the reformation:

But what could they, who ev'n in birth declined,
 From truth and right to lies and injuries?
 To shoq the venom of their cankered mind
 The adder's image scarcely can suffice.
 Nay, scare the aspic may with them contend,
 On whom the charmer all in vain applies
 His skilfull'st spells: aye missing of his end,
 While she self- deaf and unaffected lies.¹⁴⁸

Mary Sidney identifies the purity of an unborn child, and contrasts that with the sinful nature of a life on earth separated from the Lord. Another provocative description she employs throughout the Psalm in order to describe the unrighteous is “venom of their cankered mind.” This image proffers that the subject of this Psalm’s headspace has become “cancered.” Rather than focusing on the Lord, toxic thoughts inhabit the subject. Mary Sidney Herbert again emphasizes that distance from the Lord leaves space for sin, and ultimately unrighteousness. Additionally, the appearance of “venom” within this stanza connects to the image of a snake which within the Biblical Psalms denotes the devil. Finally, when describing the unrighteous, Mary Sidney paints the gap between unrighteous humanity and God, writing “the adder’s image scarcely can suffice,” making tangible the inadequacy of humankind. She continues this image using alliteration and consonance with the words: “scarce,” “aspic,” “applicies,” “skilful'st spells,” “missing,” “she self-deaf,” and “lies.” The “s” sound creates the onomatopoeia of a snake hissing, actively creating the sensation of evil within the lines. Mary Sidney Hebert’s attention to the unrighteous, conveyed through imagery and emphasized by alliteration, does not alter the key message of Psalm 84, but instead more accurately forms the Psalm to depict the nearness of sin

¹⁴⁸ Herbert, lines 9 – 16 in “Psalm 58,” 108.

in her own life, or the life of any Christian worshipper. Mary Sidney, therefore, departs from addressing the worshiping of deities and instead modernizes and broadens the audience to any unrighteous doer. The rich figurative language of *The Sidney Psalter* comes across in this Psalm. Moreover, through this element, Mary Sidney illustrates the unrighteous in a digestible fashion that differs from the original illustration within the Biblical Psalter.

Unlike these unique descriptions, Mary Sidney shifts to closely mimicking the descriptions and parallelism from the original translation in the statement of the wicked.

Lord, crack their teeth; Lord, crush these lion's jaws;
 So let them sink as water in the sand:
 When deadly bow their aiming fury draws,
 Shiver the shaft ere part the shooter's hand.
 So make them melt as the dishousèd snail
 Or as the embryo, whose vital band
 Breaks ere it holds, and formless eyes do fail
 To see the sun, though brought to lightful land.¹⁴⁹

Just as in the Davidic Psalm, she describes the Lord cracking the teeth of the unrighteous, paralleling the imagine to the Lord's crushing of lions' jaws. Additionally, she describes the unrighteous melting and sinking. But, after these unaltered descriptions, Mary Sidney Herbert parts from the Davidic Psalm, writing in the female experience. Mary Sidney's description of an unborn child as "the embryo" with the extension of ways in which the embryo is unformed of "vital band breaks ere it holds" and "formless eyes do fail to see the sun," position this embryo within a mother's womb. Mary Sidney describes the experience of a woman miscarrying her child, whereas the original translation can only observe "like the untimely birth of a woman" (Psalm 56:8), excluding the female experience. She concludes with a description marked by the Lord's saving grace: "though brought to lightful land." Although Mary Sidney employs this

¹⁴⁹ Herbert, lines 17 – 24 in "Psalm 58," 108.

image to describe the end of an unrighteous doer, she still slips in God's saving grace; the unborn will be saved. Mary Sidney creates space for her voice and the female experience within these verses, writing in what the Biblical Psalter excludes.

Through mirrored structure and imagery, paired with unique descriptions and the female experience, Mary Sidney's Psalm 58 presents the exact same premise of its original, but offers a different, more complex perspective. Her Psalm emphasizes the ability of the Psalm to serve any reader. She does not have to depart from the Psalm's intention in order to personalize its message. However, through this meditation, Mary Sidney identified the missing female voice of the Psalm, and rewrote such a Psalm in order to make it more applicable to first herself, and through circulation, to sixteenth-century worshippers. In full, Psalm 58, similar to all of her Psalms, serves as a vessel for the welding of lyric poetry and religious text.

Psalm 84

The Biblical Psalm 84 is a hymn that manifests more specifically as a pilgrimage Psalm seeking to provide hope to an exiled Israel. Although Mary Sidney takes the core images and content of the Biblical Psalm, she departs from its integral meaning and audience of Israel. Additionally, she writes in iambic tetrameter with the rhyme scheme ababccdd repeated in each of the six stanzas, while the original Psalm of the *Geneva Bible* lacked any sort of rhyme scheme. Mary Sidney's Psalm 84 almost has the ability to remain timeless to a modern reader because of its general lacking biographical content; however, Mary Sidney Herbert does draw upon England's landscape to inform her imagery. Furthermore, the Psalm stays true to its hymn format and intent: praising God for His covenant. The close reading of the Psalm's six stanzas magnifies Mary Sidney Herbert's ability to transform and alter the Biblical Psalter, while still retaining the Psalms' ability to aid a reader in understanding God's intangible might. Through

rhyme scheme, imagery of the Elizabethan Court, naming and addressing God, and parallelism, Psalm 84 makes tangible humanity's longing—conveying Mary Sidney Herbert's specific longing—to no longer be separated from God. Moreover, this Psalm serves as a platform for Mary Sidney Herbert to support the Elizabethan Court and contain her lyric poetry.

Mary Sidney steeps her Psalm 84 in imagery of the Elizabethan Court. Although drawing secondarily from Genesis by relying on the *Geneva Bible*, this Psalm does not directly harken back to Genesis and exiled Israel. Rather, Mary Sidney mimics the original translation, but alludes to Queen Elizabeth. In stanza six she writes: "One day spent in thy courts more comfort yieldeth / Than thousands otherwise appointed." Although "thy courts" appears in the original translation, in Mary Sidney's translation she nods to the Elizabethan courts. Additionally, the diction of "appointed" is language utilized by the Elizabethan court, furthering the initial implications of the first stanza. In this phrase, Mary Sidney both elevates the Lord's court and the Elizabethan court, conveying the sacrifice she would make to be in either. As Mary Sidney expands on the image of entrance into the court, she employs other terms indicative of the Elizabethan court such as "thy butler," "anointed," "porter," and "a lord with wicked mates." Although these descriptions explicitly reference Queen Elizabeth, Mary Sidney alludes more directly to Queen Elizabeth by shifting the "he" of the original to "she," in the second stanza writing:

Alas! The sparrow knoweth
The house where free and fearless she resideth
Directly to the nest the swallow goeth,
Where with her sons she safe abideth.
Oh, altars thine, most mighty
In war, yea, most almighty:
Thy altars, Lord: Ah! Why should I
From altars thine excluded lie?¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Herbert, lines 9 – 16 in "Palm 84," 173.

By describing the sparrow's house, also seen as Elizabeth's court, with the phrases "she resideth" along with "her sons" Mary Sidney writes in Queen Elizabeth to the Psalm. Furthermore, the descriptions of "free and fearless" paired with "safe abideth" convey the upstanding opinion Mary Sidney has of Queen Elizabeth. The sparrow knows to go to the "nest" of Queen Elizabeth for protection, signaled by the gender and counter of the stanza. One female "she," viewed as Queen Elizabeth, will protect many male "sons," viewed as the people of England. The parallelism between God and Queen Elizabeth within this Psalm is but one example of how Mary Sidney works to advance her political and theological stance in favor of the Protestant Reformation. Mary Sidney effortlessly appeals to her audience, advocating for a shift away from the Catholic church. Broadly, Mary Sidney utilizes imagery of the original Psalm, but invigorates it with new meaning, shifting from imagery praising only God to imagery steeped in references to Queen Elizabeth. Ultimately, through this process Mary Sidney Herbert conveys her critical, insightful opinion of sixteenth-century England.

In addition to reworking imagery of the original Psalm, Mary Sidney creates new imagery not written by the original authors. In doing so, she elaborates on her own life experience, lacing descriptions with moments of England: "Me seems I see them going / Where mulberries are growing."¹⁵¹ Mary Sidney Herbert demonstrates her poetic ability with the rhyme scheme and imagery of this stanza. However, this unique description does take away from the general ahistorical nature of the Psalms because it places her in a specific time her in specific time. Unlike the images of honey, wine, or grapes of the *Geneva Bible*, mulberries can be located in time and place. Later, Mary Sidney uniquely writes:

Me seems I see augmented

¹⁵¹ Herbert, lines 21 – 24 in "Psalm 84," 164.

Still troop with troop, till all at length discover
 Zion, where to their sight is represented
 The Lord of hosts, the Zion lover
 Oh Lord, O God, most mighty
 In war, yea, most almighty:
 Hear what I beg; hearken, I say,
 O Jacob's God, to what I pray.¹⁵²

Within these verses, Mary Sidney employs both parallelism and meter. Her use of alliteration that connects between lines of “seems,” “see,” “still” and “troop with troop,” and “till” moves the reader from her perspective of “me seems” to an onlooker’s perspective of “their sight.” Such a description mimics the multidirectional ability of her Psalms: they are a mediation of her own, an observation of the Christian community, and a vessel for others to worship through as they discover Zion for themselves. Through these descriptions, she solidifies her voice within the Psalm, while empathizing with readers by creating a shared experience of crying out to the Lord.

In addition to—and potentially despite—rich, provocative imagery, whether that be of the Lord or of Queen Elizabeth, Psalm 84 conveys Mary Sidney Herbert’s longing for God. Although Mary Sidney does talk about Queen Elizabeth she still references God and writes a true Psalm of praise to Him. In the first stanza, when articulating her desire to be with the Lord God, in verse four Mary Sidney writes “My soul doth long and pine with longing” and in verses seven through eight writes “My heart and body both aspire / Above delight, beyond desire.”¹⁵³ Mary Sidney artfully conveys a human, or Christian, experience, yet laces her longing with optimism. The phrase “above delight and beyond desire” shifts away from the earthly and towards the divine. She articulates that fixation on the Lord abolishes coveting, delight, and desire from her heart. This phrase is a prime example of how Mary Sidney balances divine wisdom with human

¹⁵² Herbert, lines 25 – 32 in “Psalm 84,” 164.

¹⁵³ Herbert, lines 4, 7 - 8 in “Psalm 84,” 164.

understanding. Mary Sidney continues this optimism, positively longing for the Lord in stanza three. She repeats the phrase “Oh, happy who” when describing a follower whose “remaineth” and “sustaineth,” whose “praise unfoldeth” and “journey holdeth” in Christ. Mary Sidney manages to successfully balance a longing for the Lord with a steadfast confidence in him. She exists in, and fully articulates, the gap between earthly and divine, yet has her eyes fully fixed on the Lord, upholding the hymn form of this Psalm.

Broadly, Mary Sidney’s combination of unique imagery and poetic form, steadfast focus on the intent of the original Psalm, and reference to Queen Elizabeth asks the question: Can the Psalm both praise Queen Elizabeth and God simultaneously? Furthermore, is such a shift not indicative of idolatry? This analysis argues and supports that the Psalm can have both meanings, just as Biblical Psalms hold near-endless potential for a reader— a safe haven to express emotion, a vessel providing hope, a condemnation of an enemy, and many other possibilities. Through meditation on Psalm 84 of *The Sidney Psalter*, a reader can read it either as a piece praising the Lord, supporting Queen Elizabeth, or both. However, the intention of Mary Sidney Herbert is critical to overall interpretation of her work. Her mediation on the Psalms and rewriting of them as lyric poetry attests to her devotion and deep faith; she could not have effectively employed the Biblical Psalter for political use without a critical understanding of the text. Therefore, her precise rewriting of the Biblical Psalter strays away from idolatry and is instead a testament to the ability and intellect of Mary Sidney Herbert.

Psalm 117

Although Psalm 117 is the shortest of the Biblical Psalter, it relies on parallelism to motivate its reader to praise the Lord for His steadfast love and faithfulness towards His people. Just as Psalm 117 demonstrates the consistent complexity of Psalms poetry within the Biblical

Psalter, even in this short Psalm, Mary Sidney Herbert continues her artful and innovative craft in her own Psalm 117. Mary Sidney writes in iambic tetrameter, employing a rhyme scheme of abab cdcd efef that swiftly moves a reader through the twelve verses of the Psalm. Mary Sidney stays true to the message of the original, spelling out “PRAISE THE LORD” in acrostic form:

Praise him that aye
Remains the same:
All tongues display
Iehovah’s fame.
Sing all that share
This earthly ball:
His mercies are
Exposed to all,
Like as the word
Once he doth give,
Rolled in record,
Doth time outlive.¹⁵⁴

She draws upon the Hebraic translation of the Psalms, which was originally written in similar form. Mary Sidney adapts the short, simple Psalm 117 of the Davidic Psalter, to a more playful, but equally celebratory form. Her simple, tactful verses strike to the core message of the Psalm: praise God who is always good. She disembarks from the parallelism of the original translation, but does employ repetition. She repeats moments of praise such as “Praise him,” “All tongues display” and “sing all”; and descriptions of the Lord’s steadfastness such as “Remains the same” and “Doth time outlive.” Additionally, in her description of the world she employs repetition as “earthy ball,” with both “earthy” and “ball” describing the world. This Psalm demonstrates how Mary Sidney manipulates and molds Psalms of all types in order to aid herself and readers in worship and praise of the Lord. Moreover, similar to the Biblical Psalter, this short hymn proves the mechanism of the Biblical Psalter as a whole. Although Mary Sidney Herbert explores and

¹⁵⁴ Herbert, “Psalm 117,” 224.

adapts the elements of structure, elements, and intention, reminisce of each must remain in order for her poetry to remain a true Psalm.

Conclusion

Through the vehicle of the Psalms, paired with her skills as a writer, Mary Sidney was an influential and canonical sixteenth-century woman writer. Mary Sidney Herbert's work within the Psalms testifies to her poetic ability, political prowess, and devoted heart. Her ability to break into discourse through *The Sidney Psalter* testifies to the power and impact the vehicle of the Psalms had on her own life, and on sixteenth-century England; Only through this medium did Mary Sidney weld personal and political meditation, infusing a religious text with lyric poetry. She serves as a prime example of how impactful the Biblical Psalter was for sixteenth-century women writers, and the lasting effect women such as Mary Sidney would have on the Psalms. Just as *The Sidney Psalter* was acknowledged in its own time as a masterpiece of English Renaissance poetry, *The Sidney Psalter* had lasting effects on sixteenth-century England and beyond.¹⁵⁵ Outside of the sixteenth century, *The Sidney Psalter* has significantly shaped religious poetry to come, namely: John Donne, George Herbert, Christopher Harvey, and Henry Vaughan.¹⁵⁶ These poets praised Locke's work within their own time periods. Additionally, Mary Sidney impacted subsequent women writers such as Elizabeth Melville, covered in the following chapter. Mary Sidney Herbert fueled English reformers, introduced lyric poetry to religious writing, impacted subsequent English religious verse, and paved the way for female authorship and authority alike.

¹⁵⁵ Hamlin, Brennan, Hannay, and Kinnamon, "Psalms and the Metric Psalms," xvii.

¹⁵⁶ Hamlin, Brennan, Hannay, and Kinnamon, "Psalms and the Metric Psalms," xvi.

Yet, even after this chapter's thorough analysis of Mary Sidney Herbert's personhood and successes, the question of why Mary Sidney Herbert does not have the same namesake and recognition as her male counterparts remains unanswered. What this chapter does reveal is the gifted ability of Mary Sidney Herbert, her intentions in writing, the popularity of her Psalter, and her political position within sixteenth-century England. However, the prolific information of this chapter does not align with the space Mary Sidney has occupied within twentieth century conversation. Her ability and publications match her counterpart, yet her work has been minimized or excused within discourse. Unfortunately, the early scholarship on women writers and early modern scholarship regarding women writers, covered within past two chapters, has created false assumptions and biased claims. This scholarship not only diminished the significance contribution of Mary Sidney Herbert to her own time-period, but also diminished the major canonical poets', such as Donne and Herbert's, appreciation of Mary Sidney's work and recognition of how she shaped their own work. Furthermore, this early research has had lasting effects on the reception of Mary Sidney, answering the question of why her work, among other women writers, has been absent within the canon until only recently— specifically until 2012 with the ninth edition of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* including her work, among other women writers.¹⁵⁷ In order to better understand these claims and the white-space surrounding women-authored texts, and to gain a fuller picture of the efforts of sixteenth-century women Psalm poets, the next chapter looks to Anne Vaughan Locke and Elizabeth Melville as case studies. Moreover, Chapter Two furthers the argument that women wrote canonically through the mechanism of the Biblical Psalter.

¹⁵⁷ Purkiss, "Rooms of all our own," <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/early-women-writers/>.

Chapter Three: “Eloquence, not silence, is the sign of [her] spirituality”¹⁵⁸

Innovation through the Biblical Psalms:

Anne Vaughan Locke and Elizabeth Melville, Lady Culross

In support of last chapter, the following chapter analyzes poets Anne Locke and Elizabeth Melville who like Mary Sidney Herbert wrote to advance their religious communities through the vehicle of the Psalms during the sixteenth century. Through translation and expansion of the Biblical Psalter, Anne Locke wrote to legitimate Calvinism in England, while Elizabeth Melville wrote to legitimate proto Protestantism in Scotland. Scholar Femke Molekamp, who compares Anne Locke and Melville in her article “Women and Affective Religious Reading and Writing” (2013), identifies that “Calvin prescribed the Psalms, which are especially marked by passions, to be read affectively as ‘an anatomy of the soul’.”¹⁵⁹ Therefore, within context of the Presbyterian movement, reading the Psalms, particularly metrical versions, aided Anne Locke and Elizabeth Melville alike in their “development of subjective religious lyrics for the expression of religious affect, especially penitence.”¹⁶⁰ Locke and Melville intimately engaged with scripture, while incorporating a variety of other sources and forms in order to create a Calvinist religious experience, which focuses on sin, penitence, and salvation.

Locke writes her “A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner” in the mid-sixteenth century, while Melville writes her “Meditation on Psalm 42” in the late sixteenth century. Both poets elicited similar effects of community support and advancement of Presbyterianism. Chapter Three, Part One analyzes the work of Anne Locke, while Chapter Three, Part Two analyzes Elizabeth

¹⁵⁸ Hannay, “‘Wisdom the Wordes’: Psalm Translation and Elizabeth Women’s Spirituality,” 78.

¹⁵⁹ Femke Molekamp, “Women and Affective Religious Reading and Writing.” (Oxford: *Oxford Scholarship Online*, 2013), 144.

¹⁶⁰ Molekamp, “Women and Affective Religious Reading and Writing,” 144.

Melville who was likely influenced by Locke's work. This chapter argues four main points. One, these poets illustrate the literary potential and ability of the Biblical Psalms. Through the vehicle of the Biblical Psalter, Locke and Melville both demonstrate deep spirituality, pour into a community of individuals, and poetically innovate. Only through this mechanism did either break into sixteenth-century discourse. Two, both poets produce a literarily unique text. Their poetry resists conventional formal boundaries and seeks to engage with expression of religious affect.¹⁶¹ Three, Locke and Melville work within this medium to advance their political agendas. Both poets weld private cogitation and public demonstration in order to drive the Protestant Reformation. And finally, four, despite their cutting-edge advancements and sixteenth-century success, both women have been excluded from literary conversation and the canon up until progress made in the past decade.¹⁶² Melville and Locke demonstrate the historic bias regarding the study of women-authored texts and the recent progress in scholarship in the early-modern field. In order to support these four points, Part One and Part Two both begin with a background on its respective poet, touching on the position Locke and Melville held within their communities and the reception of their work. Following background information, Part One and Part Two transition into analysis of the poet's respective Psalm poetry, covering the significance of the Psalm they work within, the literary form and elements they employ, a close reading of a portion of their text, and comparison to *The Sidney Psalter*. This Chapter supports the broader argument that women wrote canonically through the mechanism of the Biblical Psalter in the sixteenth century.

¹⁶¹ Molekamp, "Women and Affective Religious Reading and Writing," 150.

¹⁶² Purkiss, "Rooms of all our own," <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/early-women-writers/>.

Chapter Three, Part One

*Anne Vaughan Locke*¹⁶³

Background on Anne Vaughan Locke

In 1560 at the age of twenty-seven, Anne Vaughan Locke published “A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner” (1560), the first sonnet sequence written in the English language and by a woman in Europe.¹⁶⁴ In addition to her work as a poet, Locke worked as a translator and religious figure in England to legitimate Calvinism. The daughter of a silk woman and prosperous London merchant who served as a diplomat in Henry VIII’s court, Locke grew up in an academic, Protestant home that “piously and excellently educated” her according to Michael G. Spiller in his article “A literary ‘first’: The sonnet sequence of Anne Locke” (2008).¹⁶⁵ Anne Vaughan married her husband Henry Locke and as a couple they had ties to the prominent Scottish reformer John Knox. Due to the political upheaval of the time period—severe Protestant persecution—Locke took exile in Geneva with her two children and her maid, though her daughter died days after their arrival. With John Knox, she was a part of the English exile community where she had access to the *Geneva Bible* Psalms.¹⁶⁶ From exile, Locke wrote to console the preachers and ministers among her who were exiled because they contradicted liturgical rules of Catholicism (such as omitting communion or having church outside). In her

¹⁶³ This thesis makes the conscious decision to spell Anne Locke’s last name “Locke,” though variety of scholars employ different spellings: Lok (Felch), Locke (Spiller, Nugest), Lock (Quatro).

¹⁶⁴ Jamie Quatro, “The Hidden Life of a Forgotten Sixteenth Century Poet,” (New York: *The New Yorker*, accessed on April 28, 2020), <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-hidden-life-of-a-forgotten-sixteenth-century-female-poet>

¹⁶⁵ Michael G. Spiller. “A literary ‘first’: The sonnet sequence of Anne Locke,” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 45.

¹⁶⁶ Margaret P. Hannay, “‘Wisdom the Wordes’: Psalm Translation and Elizabeth Women’s Spirituality,” (Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame, 1991), 67.

article “A new Jerusalem: Anne Lok’s ‘Meditation’ and lyric voice” (2010), Kimberly Coles points out that Locke “was influential in the promotion of Calvinism in England— but she largely exercised both her social and cultural power through the vehicle of men.”¹⁶⁷ Locke utilizes the arguments and works of Calvin, Wyatt, and Surrey, and other men to advance both her religious and political opinions. Through this reliance, paired with her relationships and intellect, she was prominent religious figure at the center of her community. Yet, simultaneously, she positioned herself within the fringes of her work, not placing her name on her published sonnet sequence. This occurrence introduces questions of her status as a woman and writer: What was expected of her as a woman? What does her reliance on men say about her as a poet?

Broadly, women’s subordination to men was expected within sixteenth-century England, though there was altering expectation based on class position. Contemporary scholar Kimberly Coles recognizes the challenge Anne Locke faced writing both in exile and as a woman, yet identifies how Anne Locke made her entry into discourse:

[T]he subordinate position that [Lok] assumes is part of a gendered performance. Indeed, her strategy is to undermine boundaries appropriate to her sex and status while never appearing to do so. The marginal place that Lok assumes appears to be her own construction. But there is a kind of agency at the margins that a central location does not afford.¹⁶⁸

Locke’s utilization of the texts and relationships with men lend to this gendered performance. Anne Locke works in a politically charged, yet clandestine fashion, precisely aware of the limits she chooses to push or not to push. A woman adhering to boundaries, or blatantly disregarding them, would likely have been unable to publish the first sonnet sequence written in English. By working within the margins, Locke writes to claim the sonnet sequence as her own, shifting it

¹⁶⁷ Kimberly Coles, “A new Jerusalem: Anne Lok’s ‘Meditation’ and lyric voice,” (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 124 – 125.

¹⁶⁸ Coles, “A new Jerusalem: Anne Lok’s ‘Meditation’ and lyric voice,” 127.

away from its state as an aristocratic luxury item. Coles additionally identifies how Locke employs the sonnet form “to package Calvin’s message for delivery to an urban, non-aristocratic English readership.”¹⁶⁹ Just like Mary Sidney Herbert’s *The Sidney Psalter* proves that lyric poetry can exist in a religious text, Melville proves that the sonnet sequence belongs to all.

Despite Locke’s ability to quietly push the envelope, she still produced considerable tension from welding religious translation with the sonnet form.¹⁷⁰ Although women’s voices were not fully stifled within the Elizabethan period and translation was not the only medium woman had to exercise their voices as Margaret Hannay argued in 1991, controversy persisted over the agency women had within English communities. Locke treads between empowerment and control, translating a religious text, yet writing a sonnet sequence charged with Calvinist meaning. She signals this balancing act by publishes her work without her name, priming the reader to assume the text has a male author. Coles touches on the absence of her name, writing:

The fact that Lok does not claim the experiment as her own once it is produced suggests a lapse in her assurance when the project reaches print. Perhaps Lok’s tentativeness in relation to the publication of her sonnets corresponds to her deepening awareness of the controversy in which she was involving herself.¹⁷¹

Despite her innovation and forefront position within sixteenth-century discourse, Anne Locke placed herself in the peripheral unlike either Mary Sidney Herbert or Elizabeth Melville.

Though, similar to Mary Sidney and Melville, the namelessness of Locke’s work positions her text somewhere between private cogitation and public demonstration.¹⁷² Thus far, this section has introduced how Locke’s position as a woman influenced her writing, her production of a literarily unique text—the first sonnet sequence written in English—, and her quest to advance

¹⁶⁹ Coles, “A new Jerusalem: Anne Lok’s ‘Meditation’ and lyric voice,” 124.

¹⁷⁰ Coles, “A new Jerusalem: Anne Lok’s ‘Meditation’ and lyric voice,” 124.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, 127.

¹⁷² *Ibid*, 127.

Calvinism and the Protestant Reformation through poetry. Overall, in order to understand the significance of Locke's Psalm Meditation, and support the four main arguments of this chapter—role of the Psalms, literary creation, political advancement, and position as a woman—the following section analyzes Anne Locke's "A Meditation on a Penitent Sinner," seeking to understand the significance of the parts that make up the whole: the Psalm and the sonnet.

Analysis of Anne Locke's "A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner"

Psalm 51

Analysis of the history, intention, and elements of Psalm 51 help prove that only through working within the medium of a Psalm was Locke able to achieve the success she experienced. Moreover, this analysis identifies the political elements Locke addresses in her text along with touching on gendered readings of her work. Because Anne Locke wrote from exile in Geneva, the medium of the Biblical Psalter served as an appropriate vessel for her worship because its underlying theme of exile and a number of Psalms written from physical exile: 44, 69, 85, 102, 123, and 137. However, Anne Locke does not choose any of these Psalms, but instead authors her own Psalm 51, an intentional decision. Attributed to David within biblical tradition, Psalm 51 is one of seven Penitential Psalms and is a prayer of repentance and renewal. Psalm 51, known as "Miserere mei, Deus" which translates as "Have mercy on me, O God" was first set to music in the fifteenth century, where it experienced wide reception because of its melodic form and vocabulary.¹⁷³ Because the Psalm was also well-known by sixteenth-century Church congregations, it increased the reception of Locke's own "A Meditation on a Penitent Sinner." The Psalm begins with the superscription "To the leader. A Psalm of David, when the prophet

¹⁷³ Clare Costley King'oo, "Plotting Reform" in *Miserere Mei*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2012), 118.

Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba,” which references 2 Samuel 11 and 12 that illustrate David’s affair with Bathsheba and act of repentance. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* explains that Psalm 51 serves as “a reminder that all humans, even the most revered, must ask God for forgiveness.”¹⁷⁴ Psalm 51 has themes of sin, sacrifice, and renewal and turns what begins as a personal petition into a national Psalm, reflecting on the destruction of Jerusalem.¹⁷⁵ Remaining true to its original, Anne Locke’s Psalm lacks a single, unique subject, taking on the necessary authorial voice required within a religious text. Coles supports Locke’s decision to minimize her female voice, pointing out that “the figure of the woman assumes a Presbyterian position— more involved in collective than individual agency.”¹⁷⁶ Just as David’s Psalm 51 begins with superscription addressing his adultery, but nowhere within the Psalm does the narrator explicitly write in his actions, Anne Locke’s Psalm 42 dances around her personal narrative, yet still presents an individual, vulnerable introspection to a community in need.

Striking within the Psalm, only once the Temple had been rebuilt, which Locke mirrors as the Presbyterian community, will the community experience acceptable sacrifices again.¹⁷⁷ Locke extends this trope, ruminating on how sinner’s make sacrifices within the heart, not within the Church. During Locke’s lifetime, Presbyterians adopted, adapted, and appropriated the Penitential Psalms, reinventing the Latin Church’s economy of salvation and repenting directly to the Lord, rather than to a priest.¹⁷⁸ Despite the prominence of penitence within the Protestant Reformation, Locke’s decision to translate a Penitential Psalm rather than an exile Psalms

¹⁷⁴ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* edited by Michael D. Coogan, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), “Psalm 51,” 824.

¹⁷⁵ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, “Psalm 51,” 825.

¹⁷⁶ Coles, “A new Jerusalem: Anne Lok’s ‘Meditation’ and lyric voice,” 124.

¹⁷⁷ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, “Psalm 51,” 825.

¹⁷⁸ King’oo, “Introduction” in *Miserere Mei*, 3.

remains intriguing. In a community of exile, it seems more likely that Locke's community would be receptive to Psalm 74, a community supplication for God to restore the devastated Temple, or Psalm 123, a community plea for divine mercy, rather than Psalm 51, the only Penitential Psalm that explicitly addresses David's adultery. But, Locke— aware of her community's needs— chose Psalm 51, writing from an individual perspective rather than a community perspective, and emphasizing sin rather than exile. But, what is so core to Psalm 51 that causes it to avail over the inherent attraction of an exile Psalm? Psalm 51 was significant to the Presbyterian Reformation because it is the only place within the Hebrew Bible that describes Original Sin— "Behold, I was born in iniquity, and in sin hath my mother conceived me"— and stresses sacrifice made in the heart rather than in the Temple.^{179,180} Through this vessel, Nugest presents that "Lock expresses individual worth through the posture of unworthiness by crafting a poetic figure out of penitence and piety, which voices the fear of damnation and the desire for salvation."¹⁸¹ The fear of damnation and desire for salvation are core teachings of Calvinism and arise from the teaching of predestination. By writing from an individual perspective present within Psalm 51, Locke inhabits an individual voice, yet creates a communal voice of Presbyterian position.

Although this thesis has answered why Locke chose Psalm 51 over an exile Psalm, scholarship on Locke's text also raises this question. In author Jamie Quatro's article "The Hidden Life of a Forgotten Sixteenth Century Poet" (2019), she similarly questions why Locke gave voice to King David's guilty conscience. Though most scholars agree that illicit relationship between Locke and Knox was unlikely, Quatro follows the train of thought, acknowledging that "Perhaps it isn't too far-fetched to imagine the poet— separated from her

¹⁷⁹ Hannay, "'Wisdom the Wordes': Psalm Translation and Elizabeth Women's Spirituality," 69.

¹⁸⁰ *Geneva Bible*, (Geneva: Tolle Lege Press, 1599), "Psalm 51:5."

¹⁸¹ Nugest, "Anne Locke's Poetics of Spiritual Abjection," 22.

husband, living and working in close proximity to the man who ‘loved her best’— adopting the Psalmist’s voice to torture herself over an unspoken longing.”¹⁸² Although such a reading is fascinating, Quatro’s desire to search for Locke’s biology and biography applies “gynocriticism,” which Kimberley Coles articulates “initiated a tendency to read women’s texts for gender-inflected markings... which has value in both critical and political terms.”¹⁸³ Despite its potential value— as seen through the text of Mary Sidney Herbert— this type of strategy can affect or dismiss the relevance of women in material circulation and position within discourse.¹⁸⁴ It is this exact train of thought that has excluded many women poets from the canon, marking them as soft, mistaken, or distracted for so long. This instance identifies the biased assumptions placed on women-authored texts even as recently as 2019. Therefore, although the search for Locke’s personal motivation in the selection of Psalm 51 remains intriguing, such an investigation overlooks her core motivations.

For Locke, Biblical Psalm 51 was not just necessary to her personal devotion, but also to the literary creation of her sonnet sequence because of the Psalm’s prominence within sixteenth-century England and core elements. Locke’s Meditation on Psalm 51 allows her to ruminate on fallen humanity and create space for Calvinist beliefs. So, rather than translating a Psalm of exile, intentionally placing the Presbyterian movement above the Catholic Church by addressing the Protestants physical exile in Geneva, she fixates on her own brokenness, demonstrating her need for God’s salvation, which Calvinism delivers. She does not elevate herself or her

¹⁸² Jamie Quatro, “The Hidden Life of a Forgotten Sixteenth Century Poet,” <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-hidden-life-of-a-forgotten-sixteenth-century-female-poet>

¹⁸³ Kimberly Ann Coles, “Introduction” in *Religion, Reform, and Women’s Writing*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 10.

¹⁸⁴ Coles, “Introduction,” 10.

community, but rather offers mercy to her Catholic persecutors. Yet, even in her submission to God and counterpart, her eyes remain fixed on the progression of Presbyterian beliefs made possible through the core elements of Psalm 51— authorial voice, fixation on sin, and illustration of Protestant beliefs— further explored in the close reading of Locke’s “A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner.” Analysis of Psalm 51 has identified Locke’s utilization of the Psalm to advance Calvinist teaching, along with providing dialogue on gendered readings of Locke’s text, proving the past biases in scholarship of women-authored texts.

Locke’s Sonnet Sequence: Influence, Rhetoric, and Poetics

By shifting focus from understanding of Psalm 51 to analysis of the sonnet, this section proves the Biblical Psalm’s ability to support literary innovation and further analyzes Locke’s poetic advancement. Additionally, this section analyzes the influence of men on Locke’s success. Not only does Locke meditate on Psalm 51, she additionally writes the first sonnet sequence written in English through the medium. This form allows her, and subsequent poets, to create a poetic persona situated between God’s overflowing grace and human’s fear of His rejection.¹⁸⁵ This ability mimics that of the Biblical Psalter: a form capable of enduring the shrillest cries and warmest praises. Locke’s sonnet sequence falls into such a category. Furthermore, unlike Elizabeth Melville’s “Meditation on Psalm 42,” which few scholars have analyzed, Anne Locke’s “A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner” has been analyzed by many noteworthy scholars, ranging from Margaret P. Hannay in 1991 to Kimberly Coles in 2010 to Jamie Quatro in 2019, who each attest to Locke’s influential persona.

Locke translates the *Geneva Bible’s* Psalm 51 onto the Petrarchan octave first written in English by Sir Thomas Wyatt, complicated by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey. In Clare Costley

¹⁸⁵ Nugest, “Anne Locke’s Poetics of Spiritual Abjection,” 22.

King'oo's chapter "Plotting Reform" (2012) she analyzes Wyatt's meditation on all seven Penitential Psalms in which Wyatt apprehends lyric in a fictional mode.¹⁸⁶ Wyatt combines ottava rima written in the third person, and terza rima spoken in the person to convey two voices, his voice and the Psalmist's voice. Understanding Wyatt's own meditation is important to understanding how Locke adheres and departs from his work. Coles identifies that "Lok appropriates Surrey's sonnet form, and borrows Wyatt's diction; but the dilation of scripture that produces the sequence imitates the rhetorical practice of Calvin."¹⁸⁷ Locke maps each of Psalm 51's nineteen verses onto its own sonnet, though she gives verse one and verse four two sonnets, mimicking Wyatt's translation and five prefatory sonnets.¹⁸⁸ Her sonnets employ the rhyme scheme abab cdcd efef gg, separated into three quatrains and a couplet. Locke heavily relies on men to create her work, demonstrating her intellect and the standard she seeks to achieve.

Through intertextuality to these poetic works and other biblical texts, Locke conveys the voice of both David and herself all while leading her English congregation in prayer, just as Mary Sidney does in *The Sidney Psalter*.¹⁸⁹ Locke's reliance on the texts of these male authors impacts her success because these men wrote at the forefront of discourse, creating highly celebrated and influential works. In order for Locke to produce the same effect, it only makes sense that she would allow them to influence her work. Yet, even in their influence, literarily she is her own woman; She does not simply translate Psalm 51, mindlessly mimicking Wyatt or Surrey's sonnets, or copy the text of Calvin. Rather, she allows this intertextuality to complicate her own unique work. She alters and expands the diction, images, and intention of Psalm 51 to

¹⁸⁶ King'oo, "Plotting Reform," 118.

¹⁸⁷ Coles, "A new Jerusalem: Anne Lok's 'Meditation' and lyric voice," 129.

¹⁸⁸ Spiller, "The sonnet sequence of Anne Locke," 46.

¹⁸⁹ Coles, "A new Jerusalem: Anne Lok's 'Meditation' and lyric voice," 129.

support Calvinist teaching. Namely, she advocates for direct confession to and absolution from the Lord, while fixating on Original Sin through her Penitential Psalm. In doing so, she creates a text that clearly reads as the work of Anne Vaughan Locke. This section has explored Locke's exact poetic method, while investigating men's influence on Locke's success. The close readings below further illustrate Locke's shift in liturgical reliance and church teachings, emphasizing the significance of Penitential Psalm 51's authorial voice, fixation on sin, and illustration of Protestant beliefs, paired with Locke's own poetic elements.

Close Reading of Sonnet 4 of Anne Locke's "A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner"

<i>For I knowledge my wickedness, and my sinne is ever before me.</i>	<p>Haue mercie, Lord, haue mercie: for I know How muche I nede thy mercie in this case. The horror of my guilt doth dayly growe, And growing weares my feble hope of grace. I fele and suffer in my thrall'd brest Secret remorse and gnawing of my hart. I fele my sinne, my sinne that hath opprest My soule with sorrow and surmounting smart. Drawe me to mercie: for so oft as I Presume to mercy to direct my sight, My Chaos and my heape of sinne doth lie, Betwene me and thy mercies shining light. What euer way I gaze about for grace, My filth and fault are euer in my face.¹⁹⁰</p>
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Through the elements of melodic vocabulary paired with fixation on sin, and illustration of Protestant beliefs paired with authorial voice, Locke shifts the liturgical reliance and church teachings of Psalm 51 to support the Presbyterian movement, adding in her own poetic style. Moreover, her Penitential Psalm reclaims agency, offering that through this vessel, she creates an intimate and lasting relationship with the Lord— one that can bear direct confession to Him. Locke begins Sonnet 4 by fixating on sin through melodic diction. Striking, Locke repeats

¹⁹⁰ Locke, "Meditation on a Penitent Sinner," Sonnet 4.

“mercie” five times within the sonnet, diction that does not appear once in her translation of its aligning biblical verse to the left. She fixates both on the magnitude of her sin and on the mercy she requires from God. Locke utilizes repetition, alliteration, and consonance to create the melodic flow of the sonnet. Locke’s octave conclusion illustrates the burden of bearing her own sin, countering and expanding God’s mercy. As sin magnifies within the stanza, Locke decays: the “h” alliteration of “Haue,” “how,” “horror,” “hope,” and “hart” signaling God’s mercy shift and multiply to the “s” alliteration of “suffer,” “secret,” “sinne,” “soule,” “sorrow,” “surmonting,” and “smart” signaling sin. The sin within the beginning octave exponentially grows within Locke’s sonnet. Furthermore, supported by Quatro, in this sonnet and in the entire sequence, Locke has “a nearly myopic focus on the sinner’s utter helplessness in the face of God’s wrath.”¹⁹¹ The myopic focus of the first eight verses demonstrates the capacity of this text to sustain any amount sin, therefore demonstrating its ability to sustain direct confession to the Lord. It is also worth noticing Locke’s subtle illustration of where she feels and suffers sin: her “thrall’d brest.” Here, the narrator signals her gender, drawing similarities to the voice of Mary Sidney Herbert who intentionally writes in female biology. This imagine harkens back to Genesis—with Eve bearing partial responsibility for the creation of Original Sin. The placement of sin in her breast lends to Locke’s gendered performance. Here, Locke either pretends to be a male author commenting on the female experience, or reveals to her reader her true gender, while adhering to sixteenth-century boundaries. This remark aligns with male-authored texts of her time, allowing her to never appear to undermine sixteenth-century boundaries.

¹⁹¹ Quatro, “The Hidden Life of a Forgotten Sixteenth Century Poet,” <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-hidden-life-of-a-forgotten-sixteenth-century-female-poet>

Locke shifts from melodic vocabulary and fixation on sin to an illustration of Protestant beliefs paired with authorial voice. Locke moves her Psalm 51 from her fallen state and consuming sin to her command or sympathetic request for God to “Draw me to mercie,” signaling the volta. This verse, and beginning of the sestet, starts with an initial trochee, a medial pause, and an enjamed line.¹⁹² These poetic elements emphasize Locke’s weary state as a sinner by shifting from the previous lengthy, alliterated verse to the short, sharp command. After eight verses of explicating her sin, she lays it at the feet of the Lord in one, short command in an authorial voice. This shift illuminates how Locke exists within the paradox of Christianity. She can identify her sin and need for mercy, but is incapable of granting herself the necessary mercy only God provides. Locke articulates this space in lines twelve and thirteen: her “Chaos” and “heape of sinne” separate her from God’s “mercies shining light.” After the volta, Locke utilizes the sonnet to further the Presbyterian movement. Spiller identifies that “the phrase ‘I gaze about for grace’... has a peculiarly Calvinist accuracy pathos, and is by no means just inert alliteration.”¹⁹³ Through this pathos, Locke conveys that only through God’s grace can she be saved, and only through God’s grace can she be afforded the necessary faith to identify her unworthiness. The narrator’s separation from God sits at the forefront of Locke’s poem. Through core elements of the Biblical Psalter’s Psalm 51, paired with Locke’s own poetic elements, she reclaims agency through this Psalm— both for herself as a female sinner and for her Presbyterian community seeking to directly repent to the Lord. Moreover, this close reading provides an experience in Locke’s work, making tangible her poetic ability and intention.

¹⁹² Spiller, “The sonnet sequence of Anne Locke,” 52.

¹⁹³ Spiller, “The sonnet sequence of Anne Locke,” 52.

“A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner” in Conversation with Mary Sidney Herbert’s Psalm 51

Locke’s sonnet sequence in conversation with Mary Sidney Herbert’s *The Sidney Psalter* further illuminates the intention and ultimate effect of Locke’s work. Locke and Mary Sidney enter discourse through the medium of the Psalms, but create differing forms of poetry within the vessel. Despite their differing final products, Felch argues that “both exhibit an indifference to the pressures that impede university men.”¹⁹⁴ Both Mary Sidney and Locke write as pioneers. While Mary Sidney Herbert was aware of the controversy due to her political and financial capital, she entered the arena with the intention of writing lyric poetry and following suit with her brother’s calculated footing. Similarly, Anne Locke ignored stereotypical boundaries, entering the area with the intention of stimulating her community through the publication of her work, adhering to the Protestant mission, and writing the first English sonnet sequence. Like Mary Sidney, Locke expands verses of the Biblical Psalter in a politically aware manner. But, rather than adding in elements of imagery or figurative language like Mary Sidney, Locke grows sin, causing it to consume the reader in the same way it consumes the sonnet. In her Psalm 51, Mary Sidney appeals to the reader experience through alliteration and imagery, writing “For I, alas, acknowledging do know / My filthy, fault, my faulty filthiness.” Mary Sidney Herbert creates a chiasmus, or crossing with “faulty filthiness” as the inverse of “filthy, fault.” Locke employs similar language in her final verse: “My filth and fault are euer in my face.” Both Locke and Mary Sidney create a repetition of “filth” and a sense of shame. Though, because Anne Locke allots a sonnet to each biblical verse of Psalm 51, Sonnet Four of her Meditation does not conclude in the same way either Mary Sidney’s or the Biblical Psalm concludes: by pointing to

¹⁹⁴ Susan M. Felch, “Introduction” in *The Collected Works of Anne Vaughan Locke*, by Anne Vaughan Locke (Tempe: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1999), 4.

God as the ultimate source of salvation. Rather, her sonnet ends similarly to its paralleled verse: painfully aware of sin's ever-present weight. Overall, both women poets give their reader companionship, conveying that he or she is not alone in the deep feelings of filth and insufficiency.

Lasting Effects

This section has demonstrated Locke's magnificent reworking Psalm 51 in order to write a sonnet sequence steeped in Calvinist ideals for non-aristocrat and aristocrat alike. Locke has complex motivations, motivations the Biblical Psalter effortlessly sustains and sixteenth-century England welcomes with open-hands. Kimberly Coles notes that Locke's sonnet sequence had a profound effect on the aesthetic development of religious lyric in England.¹⁹⁵ Scholar Nugest extends this effect, presenting that more broadly Locke

sought to turn the position of powerlessness and despair into a regenerative experience, out of which she could fashion a powerful lyrical voice... Perhaps Lock's poetry succeeds (as impassioned lyric, if not political advice) because it delicately balances the inherent tensions between the powerful and powerless.¹⁹⁶

Locke writes in a calculated, yet impassioned way. As her sonnet sequence intensifies in passion, it intensifies in reason all while illustrating the fallen world.¹⁹⁷ Even in her decision to publish her work anonymously, Locke sits in the space between the powerful and powerless. She does not shy away from the pain of her exile, nor hide the magnitude of her sin. Rather, she inhabits Psalm 51 to confront her faith, her community, and her adversary alike. Most formatively, though, through her Psalm 51 and work as a religious figure, Locke emboldened her community to take refuge in the Lord, finding identity in Him, rather than in any political leader.

¹⁹⁵ Coles, "A new Jerusalem: Anne Lok's 'Meditation' and lyric voice," 147.

¹⁹⁶ Nugest, "Anne Locke's Poetics of Spiritual Abjection," 22.

¹⁹⁷ Spiller, "The sonnet sequence of Anne Locke," 53.

As a poet, Anne Locke enters sixteenth-century discourse in an unparalleled fashion, yet does so through a vehicle all too familiar to the times: the Psalms. When considering Locke's male counterparts, to be the first author of an English sonnet sequence would mean to exist at the forefront of public discourse, to be lauded for gift and effort alike. However, despite her final product, sixteenth-century reception of her work, and scholars analysis of the work of her male counterparts, scholars only recently welcomed Locke into the canon, with the *Norton Anthology of English Literature* formally adding her work to their publication in 2012.¹⁹⁸ Though modern-day scholars have taken positive steps forward in the inclusion of Locke's work in the canon, as seen through the work of Molekamp and Coles among others, early-assumptions regarding Locke's' position and intention have prohibited her from receiving the necessary praise and recognition her work and contributions to English literature deserve. Locke's position as a woman and decision to withhold her name from publication has complicated assumptions regarding her success, but, nonetheless, she acted as a trail-blazer, writing deliberately within sixteenth-century England.

¹⁹⁸ Purkiss, "Rooms of all our own," <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/early-women-writers/>.

Chapter Three, Part Two

Elizabeth Melville, Lady Culross

Some forty years after Locke, circa 1600, Elizabeth Melville brought innovation to religious poetry, writing devotional sonnets and other religious lyric poems.¹⁹⁹ In Femke Molekamp's article "Women and Affective Religious Reading and Writing" (2013), the author identifies that "Melville's influence by Lock is highly probable. Both women were staunch Calvinists and Lock had strong Scottish connections, through her close friend John Knox and consequent efforts to rally financial support in London for Scottish congregations."²⁰⁰ Furthermore, just as Locke did, many of Melville's texts have a penitential emphasis, "and like Lock's they harness the potential of the sonnet form's compression and intimacy for the expression of affectivity."²⁰¹ Paired with Melville's impressive Scottish poetry, which employs complex interlaced rhyme schemes, Melville's Psalm Meditation and inclusion of the Biblical Psalms in a variety of her works illustrates the Biblical Psalter's ability to support literary creation, marking the Biblical Psalter as a continued vehicle into sixteenth-century discourse.²⁰² Part Two of this chapter covers the four main points of this chapter in context of Elizabeth Melville: the significance of the Psalms, her literary innovation, her political advancement, and her position as a woman.

¹⁹⁹ Molekamp "Women and Affective Religious Reading and Writing," 143.

²⁰⁰ Molekamp "Women and Affective Religious Reading and Writing," 143.

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, 143.

²⁰² *Ibid*, 144.

Background on Elizabeth Melville, Lady Culross

In 1603 at the age of twenty-five, Elizabeth Melville, Lady Culross was the first Scottish woman writer to have her work appear in print— a truly remarkable achievement.²⁰³ Elizabeth Melville was a member of a prominent Scots Presbyterian family and was the daughter of Sir James Melville of Halhill, a diplomat who later wrote an autobiography.²⁰⁴ Just like Mary Sidney Herbert and Anne Locke, within her time period Elizabeth Melville was highly esteemed for her position and lauded for her work. Molekamp identifies that “[a]s a member of the Presbyterian Scottish Kirk, which allowed expanded roles for women, it may have been the case that Melville was engaged in preaching. She was certainly an active member of religious assemblies, in which others noted her emotional piety, and its authoritative effects.”²⁰⁵ Moreover, based on the findings of Sarah C.E. Ross in her article “Peripatetic Poems: Sites of Production and Routes of Exchange in Elizabeth Melville's Scotland” (2019), Melville heralded “as the only Scottish woman to achieve canonical literary status.”²⁰⁶ She was the most published poet in Scotland during her time— countering British reception. In order to fully understand the true value of the Psalms to Elizabeth Melville and to gain an accurate perception of her work within sixteenth-century Scotland, this chapter reframes Elizabeth Melville within sixteenth-century Scotland’s understanding, and not in today’s understanding—or lack therefore—of her work. In her chapter “Elizabeth Melville’s Religious Verse” (2015), Sarah C. E. Ross identifies

²⁰³ Jamie Reid Baxter, “Afterword” in *Poems of Elizabeth Melville, Lady Culross*, (Edinburg: Solsequium, 2010), 98.

²⁰⁴ Woods, “Narrative poetry,” 222.

²⁰⁵ Molekamp, “Women and Affective Religious Reading and Writing,” 132.

²⁰⁶ Sarah C.E. Ross, “Peripatetic Poems: Sites of Production and Routes of Exchange in Elizabeth Melville's Scotland” (Online: Taylor and Frances Group, 2019), <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rwow20>.

Elizabeth's manuscript lyrics reveal the close interaction between the tropes of inner spirituality and those of ecclesiastical and civil resistance, as a personalized Calvinist poetic becomes a means of simultaneously inscribing the devotional self into poetry and articulating a political stance of defiance against James VI and I's incursions on the Presbyterian model of Kirk governance.²⁰⁷

Ross draws on Jamie Reid Baxter's work who actively works to uncover and analyze Melville's manuscripts. The framework of Scottish Presbyterianism as a theological and devotional movement delineates the twofold effect of Elizabeth Melville's poetry: personal and political. She situated herself within the tensions between Church and king within Scotland, opposing the king's policies on the Scottish Church.²⁰⁸ Melville writes to support the Presbyterian community with who she identified. Laroche articulates that more specifically, she writes to support the Presbyterian ministers who were under constant ridicule as they "resisted the king's attempts to align the Scottish Kirk with the Church and to control the outcome of the Scottish General Assembly."²⁰⁹ Therein, her poetry served as personal words of comfort, inspiration, and sustenance to the ministers as they fought against the king of Scotland and England's tyranny.

Understanding of Melville's family, position in Geneva, and political intention in writing has only recently been uncovered, though. Before 2002, only a handful Melville's texts had been found. However, in 2002 twenty-nine more of her poems were uncovered in a manuscript. Today, Jamie Reid Baxter and other scholars continue to actively work to uncover and collect Melville's works, which unfortunately were never collected, disseminated, or attributed despite their positive reception by Presbyterians in sixteenth-century Scotland.²¹⁰ Although only one of

²⁰⁷ Sarah C. E. Ross, "Elizabeth Melville's Religious Verse" in *Women, Poetry, and Politics in Seventeenth-Century Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 30.

²⁰⁸ Rebecca Laroche, "Elizabeth Melville and Her Friends: Seeing 'Ane Godlie Dreame' through Political Lenses," (Santa Barbara: *Clio*, 2005), 278.

²⁰⁹ Laroche, "Elizabeth Melville and Her Friends: Seeing 'Ane Godlie Dreame' through Political Lenses," 278.

²¹⁰ Baxter, "Afterword," 98.

Elizabeth Melville's Psalm poems has been found, Melville employs elements of the Psalms outside of just "Meditation on Psalm 42"—namely in her canonical poem "Ane Godlie Dreame" (1603). Analysis of her reliance on the Psalms in this well-known poem demonstrates her reliance on Psalms, supporting the significance of the Biblical Psalter to Melville's success. Melville wrote "Ane Godlie Dreame" in Scots in 1603.²¹¹ As identified by *Undiscovered Scotland* "Ane Godlie Dreame" "tells the story of one person's struggle in the temporary earthly life that seems so at odds with the soul's true home in heaven."²¹² Just like Locke's "Meditation on Psalm 42," this dream poem assumes Calvinist beliefs, arguing against the doctrines of the Roman Church. Laroche digs to the core of the poem, identifying that Melville

taps into an aspect of Biblical language that is at once about the struggles of the tribes of Israel and the early Christian church and about the faithful individual's ongoing encounter with despair and earthly temptation, while simultaneously anticipating, through the images of the lion and the crown, the particular religious conflict between Scottish Kirk and the king of Scotland and England.²¹³

Melville roots "Ane Godlie Dreame" in the Bible and draws upon the Psalms in both form and intention, making direct references to the Biblical Psalms over thirteen times.^{214,215} Melville is only able to illustrate this "particular religious conflict between Scottish Kirk and the king of Scotland and England" through allusion to the Psalms. The image of a lion appears in five Psalm

²¹¹ "Elizabeth Melville," (Online: Undiscovered Scotland, accessed on May 2, 2020), <https://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/usbiography/m/elizabethmelville.html>.

²¹² "Elizabeth Melville," <https://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/usbiography/m/elizabethmelville.html>.

²¹³ Laroche, "Elizabeth Melville and Her Friends: Seeing 'Ane Godlie Dreame' through Political Lenses," 291.

²¹⁴ Karen Rae Keck, "Elizabeth Melville's 'Ane Godlie Dreame': A Critical Edition," (Lubbock: Texas Tech University, 2006), 103 – 127.

²¹⁵ Melville's references to the Psalms in "Ane Godlie Dreame" include: Psalm 140:3 and Psalm 145:3 which both illustrates an insufficient humanity in lines 7-8 of the poem; Psalm 102 which illustrates God's compassion to a fallen humanity in line 65; Psalm 55 which illustrates the wings of a dove in line 71; Psalm 89 which illustrates God as the Creator of the land and sea in line 445; and eight other references.

verses: “Lest he tear my soul like a lion”; “Like as a lion that is greedy of his prey, and as it were a young lion lurking in secret places”; “He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den”; “as a ravening and a roaring lion”; and “Save me from the lion's mouth.”²¹⁶ Each of these references relies on simile to depict the enemy— namely, “like a lion,” “as a young lion,” and “as a lion.” By placing this biblical image onto the king of Scotland and England, Melville paints the king as the enemy, the lion, and articulates the political turmoil of her time-period in an ahistorical way, generalizing Presbyterian persecution. Moreover, Melville similarly illustrates the struggles of her Presbyterian community by illustrating the “struggles of the tribes of Israel and the early Christian church” found within the Biblical Psalter. By juxtaposing these two images, a lion and the tribes of Israel, Melville specifically addressing historic turmoil, yet does so discretely. Understanding how Melville utilizes the Psalms in “Ane Godlie Dreame” makes tangible the way in which Elizabeth Melville relies on the Psalms, welds religious expression and politics, utilizes her work to sharpen her own and others understanding of Calvinism, and writes canonically.

As seen through the analysis of Melville’s political intentions and “Ane Godlie Dreame,” Elizabeth Melville boldly made her thoughts public during a time in which women were encouraged to refrain from doing so.²¹⁷ Despite Scotland’s encouragement of women’s silence, in her article “Noble Society in Scotland” (2000), Keith M. Brown identifies that Elizabeth Melville was able to write in the way she did because in Scotland women “could enjoy all the corporate privileges of their rank, and some of the honorific privileges in the absence of male heirs, including succeeding to a higher title like an earldom depending on the terms of the

²¹⁶ *Geneva Bible*, Psalms 7:2, Psalm 17:12, Psalm 10:9, Psalm 22:13, and Psalm 22:2.1

²¹⁷ Baxter, “Afterword” in *Poems of Elizabeth Melville, Lady Culross*, 98.

patent.”²¹⁸ Therefore, Melville had the ability to write at the center of public discourse because of her rank and network—a privilege to which not all women had access. Scholar Rebecca Laroche substantiates the impact of Melville’s network in her article “Elizabeth Melville and her Friends: Seeing ‘Ane Godlie Dreame’ through Political Lenses” (2005), offering that Melville’s allegiances were “inconvertibly with men... who persisted toward Presbyterian goals.”²¹⁹ Her allegiance with men become significant within modern-day dialogue. Melville serves as the pinnacle of a prominent female writer within Scotland, yet does so by writing for men— on her own accord. This circumstance brings into question whether Melville derived her success from her reliance on the Psalms, or from writing for men involved in political turmoil. This question is better framed in conversation with Mary Sidney Herbert and Anne Locke. Mary Sidney Herbert achieves the same effect and ultimate success as Melville, writing for the specific audience of Queen Elizabeth and relying on her brother and husband. Similar to Melville, Anne Locke writes for a community of men and draws solely on male-authored texts. Like Mary Sidney and Locke, Melville’s reliance on men in any form immediately impacted her success. Moreover, there is no clear way to separate one from the other, postulating whether Melville would have been successful without her reliance on men. Regardless of their reliance on men, though, these poets’ utilization of the Biblical Psalter and literary originality undoubtedly lent to their success.

In the analysis of Melville’s position as a women, literary creation, and political intention, what comes to the forefront is that the Psalms, both in part and in whole, are key to Melville’s success. Thus far, this section has introduced how Melville sought to advance

²¹⁸ Keith M. Brown, *Noble Society in Scotland: Wealth, Family and Culture from Reformation to Revolution*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 7.

²¹⁹ Laroche, “Elizabeth Melville and Her Friends: Seeing ‘Ane Godlie Dreame’ through Political Lenses,” 278.

Calvinism and the Protestant Reformation through poetry; how the Biblical Psalter impacted a variety of Melville's texts; how her position as a woman influenced her writing; and how she was excluded from dialogue until Jamie Reid Baxter recently uncovered her manuscript in 2010. Overall, in order to understand the significance of Melville's Psalm 42, and support the four main arguments of this chapter, the following section analyzes Elizabeth Melville's "Meditation on Psalm 42," upholding the unique nature of Melville's poetry, the significance of Melville's political beliefs, and the impact of her position as a woman, while demonstrating the effectiveness of working within the medium of the Psalms— a vessel key to Melville's success.

Analysis of Elizabeth Melville's "Meditation on Psalm 42"

Psalm 42

Analysis of Psalm 42 identifies Melville's utilization of the exile Psalm to advance Calvinist teaching, her creation of narrative poetry through intertextuality, and biased assumptions of her work. In its original form, Psalm 42 is a Psalm of lamentation, crying out from exile for God's mercy and salvation. The Psalm identifies humanities' separation from God and the quest back towards Him and alternates between discouragement and resolve, despair and hope.²²⁰ Unlike Locke, Melville's decision to reflect on an exile Psalm aligns with her community's physical exile and oppression by the king. In its original form, Psalm 42 describes an individual wanting to join a community in the Temple. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* offers that "the sufferer, away from the Temple, complains of taunts by unbelievers and pleases for a guide for the journey home."²²¹ Yet, these very taunts of those who reject God, or in Melville's case the teachings of the Presbyterian Church, depress the Psalmist and encourage

²²⁰ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, "Psalm 42," 817.

²²¹ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, "Psalm 44," 817.

worship.²²² Through narrative poetry, Melville shift's the Israel community of the original Psalm to that of the Presbyterian Church, making tangible her distaste for King James VI. Suzanne Woods describes narrative poetry as "transforming common materials into works of considerable historical and often aesthetic interest."²²³ In her article "Narrative Poetry" (2019), Susanne Woods establishes that in this process, poets transform "common materials into works of considerable historical and often aesthetic interest."²²⁴ Narrative poetry "was more typically expected to represent and teach the values of a culture. The authority of the speaker was therefore more of an issue in narrative than lyric poetry, making biblical poetics an attractive foundation for the presumably weaker and usually less educated sex."²²⁵ However, this assumption is but another that scholars have perpetuated surrounding sixteenth-century women. Elizabeth Melville, like other Psalmists, did not work within the medium because of her "presumably weaker" or "less educated sex" status, but rather because of the exquisite form and ability of the Psalms. Melville develops ideas and teaches the values of the Presbyterian Church as she collages texts of the Psalms, Song of Solomon, Revelations, Alexander Montgomerie's immensely popular "Solsequium" lyric, Shakespeare's "Sonnet 116," and Calvinist texts.²²⁶ Molekamp supports that through the mechanism of Psalm 42, paired with her narrative poetry, Melville casts "herself as an authoritative visionary" through religious passion.²²⁷ Moreover, she wades between private spiritual struggle and public political confrontation.²²⁸ Psalm 42 as an

²²² *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, "Psalm 44," 817

²²³ Woods, "Narrative poetry," 222.

²²⁴ Suzanne Woods, "Narrative poetry," (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2019), 52.

²²⁵ Suzanne Woods, "Narrative poetry," 223.

²²⁶ Baxter, "Notes on the Poems" in *Poems of Elizabeth Melville, Lady Culross*, 123.

²²⁷ Molekamp "Women and Affective Religious Reading and Writing," 132.

²²⁸ Laroche, "Elizabeth Melville and Her Friends: Seeing 'Ane Godlie Dreame' through Political Lenses," 278.

entity gave Melville the necessary persona and foundation to not only create a magnificent work of poetry, but also to empathize with her exiled community.

Close Reading of Elizabeth Melville's "Meditation on Psalm 42"

In Melville's Psalm 42, Baxter articulates that Melville illustrates "[h]ow to live in the hell of this fallen world and yet hold fast the joyful promise of eternal life."²²⁹ This paradox goes hand-in-hand with Melville's ability to resist oppression through the medium of Psalms poetry: she passively, yet directly resists the king. Moreover, although Melville's "Meditation on Psalm 42" embodies the pain of living in a fallen world and extends tropes of the Biblical Psalms and Old Testament broadly, Melville points to Christ as the ultimate act of salvation and source of living water. In support of this argument, this close reading covers rhyme scheme and form, allusion to the Psalms, and imagery of Christ.

Melville's rhyme scheme and form mark her poetry as her own. Within her Psalm 42, Melville departs from the formulaic structure of the original translation where verse five and twelve cry out in question to the Lord and follow with a response of resolution in His steadfastness: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him."²³⁰ She replaces this physical repetition of lines with a more complex structure turning the twelve verses of the Biblical Psalter into twenty-four stanzas, each with the interlacing rhyme scheme of aabccbdeffe. The verse of "Meditation on Psalm 42" is written in dimeter and trimeter, a meter Mary Sidney Herbert employs within her Psalm 44 and Psalm 91 among others. Furthermore, Elizabeth Melville draws from both the *Geneva Bible* and "Sternhold & Hopkins" taking elements of verse, diction, and imagery from each as she

²²⁹ Baxter, "Afterword" in *Poems of Elizabeth Melville, Lady Culross*, 98.

²³⁰ *Geneva Bible*, Psalm 42:5, 12.

crafts a work of narrative poetry. Woods identifies that Melville writes in “a skilled Scottish plain style of highly alliterative verse with simple metaphors” that she seldom develops.²³¹ The alliteration of her text, paired with her rhyme scheme and short verses, knits together the lines of each stanza, while also knitting together stanzas in full. Melville does this knitting by creating a through line of rhythm, inviting her reader to move swiftly through each stanza in order to complete the rhyme scheme of the work. Moreover, at times Melville withholds alliteration “as a form of emphasis, as the technique sets up unfulfilled expectations.”²³² Baxter extends this analysis, writing that Melville writes her Meditation “to the beautiful rising and falling ‘proper tune’ for the metrical version of the Psalm. In every one of Melville’s twenty-four stanzas, the wording fits the melody to perfection.”²³³ Her Psalm, rhyme scheme, and form, begin as follows:

As hairst full fant
 Doth braith and pant
 For rinning rivers cleir
 Oprest with wo
 I sigh also
 For thee my god most deir
 My hair doth brist
 My saull doth thirst
 For thee the well of lyfe
 Quhen sall I sie
 Thy majestie
 And leave this vaill of stryfe?²³⁴

Elizabeth Melville translated verses one and two of Psalm 42 in order to create the first stanza of her Meditation: “As the Hart brayeth for the rivers of water, so panted my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, even for the living God: when shall I come and appear before the

²³¹ Woods, “Narrative poetry,” 226.

²³² Woods, “Narrative poetry,” 226.

²³³ Baxter, “Notes on the Poems” in *Poems of Elizabeth Melville, Lady Culross*, 123.

²³⁴ Elizabeth Melville, “Meditation on Psalm 42” in *Poems of Elizabeth Melville, Lady Culross*, edited by Jamie Reid Baxter (Edinburgh: Solsequium, 2010), 13.

presence of God.”²³⁵ Melville’s diction of “braith and pant,” “sigh,” and repetition of “doth” within the first stanza create a breathiness to her words through onomatopoeia of sounds of breathing. The rhetorical question “And leave this vaill of stryfe?” mirrors the biblical verse of “when shall I come and appear before God?,” but rather than focusing on where Melville will “appear” she depicts “this vaill of stryfe,” or her physical location and separation from the Lord—a repeated trope of the Biblical Psalter. Overall, the rhyme scheme and form of this poem demonstrate the unique nature of Melville’s poetry and her keen attention to detail.

Paired with her artful rhyme scheme and form, Melville complicates her Meditation through allusion to other texts, with a large focus on the Psalms, such as the verses “Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation”; “As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore”; and “Hear my prayer, Lord, listen to my cry for help; do not be deaf to my weeping. I dwell with you as a foreigner, a stranger, as all my ancestors were.”^{236,237} Most prominently, Melville alludes to Biblical Psalm 23 throughout her Psalm 42, both directly and through imagery. Within sixteenth-century England, Thomas Sternhold wrote an early metrical version of Psalm 23 in “Sternhold and Hopkins,” lending to the lyric tradition of the Psalm, the translation of which Melville relied heavily on in her composition. Psalm 23 alludes to the Exodus tradition of the divine Shepard guiding Israel, which when put in conversation with the New Testament becomes a foretelling of Jesus Christ.²³⁸ In stanza eight and stanza fifteen, Melville alludes to Psalm 23:5 which in the *Geneva Bible* reads as “Thou dost prepare a table

²³⁵ *Geneva Bible*, Psalm 42:1-2.

²³⁶ Baxter, “Notes on the Poems” in *Poems of Elizabeth Melville, Lady Culross*, 122.

²³⁷ Psalm 62:1, Psalm 133:3, Psalm 39:12,

²³⁸ *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, “Psalm 44,” 800.

before me in the sight of mine adversaries: thou dost anoint mine head with oil, and my cup runneth over” and in the “Sternhold & Hopkins” translation reads as “Thou hast my table richly spread in presence of my foe; Thou hast my head with balm refreshed, my cup doth overflow.”^{239,240} Melville explicitly alludes to Psalm 23:5 twice, first alluding to it in verse 87:

Quhen sall I prove
That well of love
 That sweitlie doth ou’rflow
Alace alace
For my trespass
 That hold me heir below²⁴¹

Once again, in stanza fifteen, Melville alludes to Psalm 23:

With flagons stay
My soun I say,
 Imbalme me from above.
With apils sweit
Reveive my spirit
For iam seik of love²⁴²

Therefore, Melville’s two direct allusions include “That sweitlie doth ou’rflow” referencing “my cup doth overflow” and “Imbalme me from above” referencing “thou dost anoint mine head with oil.” This verse emphasizes the Lord as a provider, building on the already established image of the Lord as a protector, a Shepard. This allusion upholds that Melville does not simply translate Psalm 42, rather she creates exact and expanding meaning through intertextuality. Furthermore, in these verses, Melville makes a variety of other allusions signaling her employment of narrative poetry. Namely, she also alludes to John 4:14 and the final two lines of Shakespeare’s Sonnet 116 which read: “If this be error and upon me prov’d, / I never writ, nor man ever

²³⁹ *Geneva Bible*, Psalm 23:5.

²⁴⁰ “Sternhold & Hopkins,” Psalm 23:5.

²⁴¹ Melville, lines 85 - 90 in “Meditation on Psalm 42,” 16.

²⁴² Melville, lines 170 – 125 in “Meditation on Psalm 42,” 20.

lov'd."²⁴³ Through intertextuality, Melville writes in the form of a Psalm lamentation, while teaching the values of the Presbyterian Church. Molekamp attests to the impact of Melville's intertextuality, writing that "the spiritual authority of the poem continues to be built upon the confluence of biblical text and affective piety."²⁴⁴ The physical presence of Psalm allusions within Melville's Psalm 42 allows Melville to embody the pain of living in a fallen world and extend tropes of the Biblical Psalms and Old Testament. Moreover, this analysis ascertains the significance of the Biblical Psalter to Melville's work.

Supported by her rhyme scheme and form, and intertextuality, Melville's Psalm 42 more broadly looks to "the final consummation of all things at the Second Coming of Christ."²⁴⁵ Melville steeps her rewriting of an Old Testament text within the New Testament, signaling Christ as the lasting source of salvation. In this intertextuality, Melville relies on two images key to the Biblical Psalter: water and a Shepard. From the beginning of the Meditation, Melville alludes to the image of Christ as a well of everlasting life in John 4:14. Furthermore, she rewrites Psalm 42's typology, or containment of provisions of types of Christ, emphasizing Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament. In verses 51 to 54, Melville alludes more broadly John 4:16, illustrating Christ as the source of living water offered to the Samaritan:

Forsaken soul alace for wo, for wo
 Wher shall I run to seek relief?
 What course is best wher shall I go, I go?
 What shall I get to ease my greige,
 What can I doe bot die and dwine,
 Oh who shall ease this heart of myne²⁴⁶

²⁴³ William Shakespeare, "Sonnet 116: Let me not to the marriage of true minds," (Online: Poetry Foundation, accessed on May 2, 2020)

²⁴⁴ Molekamp "Women and Affective Religious Reading and Writing," 132.

²⁴⁵ Baxter, "Notes on the Poems" in *Poems of Elizabeth Melville, Lady Culross*, 122.

²⁴⁶ Melville, lines 50 - 55 "Meditation on Psalm 42," 15.

Melville continues the melody of her Psalm 42 through word repetition, a key element of the Biblical Psalter, repeating “for wo, for wo” and “I go, I go.” This stanza contains five questions, each with Christ as the answer, or source of refuge. Christ will “seek relief,” “easy my greige,” and “ease this heart of myne.” Melville juxtaposes her earthly struggle with His divine relief.

Later Melville describes her physical state as “This barren hell / wherein I dwell.” In these beginning verses, Melville also foretells of Christ as a fulfillment in excess of the Old Testament, writing “For thee the well of lyfe.” Within John 4:14, Jesus preaches “But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never be more athirst: but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life.”²⁴⁷ Melville continues the image of water into the second stanza, linking the verses with the word “vaill”:

This vaill of tears
 This vaill of fearis
 This vaill of dangers deip
 This vaill of two
 Quhairin my fo
 Doth catch me quhills I sleip
 This vaill of cair
 And siching sair
 Quhairin my saul dois burne
 This vaill so dry
 Quhairin I cry
 Until the springs return

Her diction of “tears,” “dangers deep,” “cry,” “springs” and counter descriptions of “saul dois burne” (soul doth burn), and “so dry” all fixate on the image of water, alluding to Christ as the source of living water and answer to unquenched thirst. The narrator thirsts “[u]ntil the springs return,” which Melville signals as Christ. Between the two stanzas, Melville employs the repetition found within the Biblical Psalter, repeating “vaill” seven times: “vaill of stryfe,” “vaill

²⁴⁷ *Geneva Bible*, John 4:14.

of tears,” vaill of fearis” “fail of dangers deip” “vail of two,” “vail of cair,” and “vail so dry.” Melville turns the breathiness of the verse stanza, created through onomatopoeia, into pure melody through repetition of diction that she extends throughout the remainder of the poem.

Melville not only laces her Psalm 42 with undertones of imagery of Christ, but also explicitly writes Christ into the Psalm, depicting him as “O living well”:

For want I pyne
 For Christ I tyne
 Into this wilderness
 My groning grief
 Without relief
 Doth more and more increas
 O living well
 Cum and expel
 My evirburning drouth
 My spous most sweit
 Receave my spirit
 With kisis of thy mouth²⁴⁸

In the direct referent of “for Christ I tyne / into this wilderness” which Melville shifts to as “O living well,” Melville tangibly emphasizes Christ as the ultimate redeemer. Molekamp connects Melville’s devotion and ability to weave Christ into an Old Testament text to her advancement of the Presbyterian movement.²⁴⁹ Throughout her Psalm 42, Melville employs Christ imagery of water and a Shepard. Overall, as seen through this close reading, Melville pushes beyond simple translation, or even slant poetry, politically charging her “Meditation on Psalm 42” in order to combat King James VI’s oppression, she provides words of relief to Presbyterian ministers of her community by alluding to Christ as the Savior. More broadly, though, Melville’s rhetoric and focus on unquenched thirst push beyond the needs of her community, creating her Psalm 42 as an empathetic safe haven for a broader audience.

²⁴⁸ Melville, lines 73 – 84 “Meditation on Psalm 42,” 16.

²⁴⁹ Molekamp, “Women and Affective Religious Reading and Writing,” 132.

“Meditation on Psalm 42” in conversation with Mary Sidney Herbert’s Psalm 42

Although Mary Sidney Herbert does not have a Psalm 42 to compare to Elizabeth Melville’s Psalm 42, the first Psalm Mary Sidney authors within *The Sidney Psalter*, Psalm 44, “is a close, but not exact, imitation of Sidney’s Psalm 42 (both have eight-line trochaic tetrameter stanzas with feminine rhymes)” according to Coles.²⁵⁰ In her Psalm 44, Mary Sidney Herbert develops her own poetic style and “exploits the poetic potential of the Psalms’ metaphoric language through frequent expansion of biblical images”—as seen in Chapter Two.²⁵¹ The unique voice of Mary Sidney Herbert that persists within Psalm 44 through Psalm 150 does not persist within Psalm 42. The comparison of the two Psalms demonstrates differences in poetic form and emphases, although it does not demonstrate the difference between Mary Sidney Herbert and Elizabeth Melville as poets. However, analysis of Melville’s “Meditation on Psalm 42” against Philip Sidney’s “Psalm 42” and more broadly against Mary Sidney Herbert’s *The Sidney Psalter* illuminates how Mary Sidney Herbert’s and Elizabeth Melville’s benevolent intentions—serving others—propel their poetry.

As seen in analysis of “Ane Godlie Dreame” and “Meditation on Psalm 42,” Elizabeth Melville’s poetry largely lacks the female voice present within *The Sidney Psalter*. Moreover, she does not rely on her own life experience, or affirm her personal biography and biology within her Meditation. However, just as scholar Quatro applies to Anne Locke’s text, searching for female biology and biography applies “gynocriticism” to Melville’s text, which dismisses the relevance of Melville’s material circulation and position within discourse. For Melville, this

²⁵⁰ Coles, “[A] pen to paynt’: Mary Sidney Herbert and the problems of a Protestant poetics,” 103.

²⁵¹ Coles, “[A] pen to paynt’: Mary Sidney Herbert and the problems of a Protestant poetics,” 103.

reading renders her text as “missing”: Why has she not woven in her female experience? Yet, affirmed by Coles, this reading is not always effective, or necessary. The model of looking for feminine biology and biography constrains a reading of Melville’s text because it does not capture what Melville seeks to accomplish: narrative poetry advancing Calvinist beliefs. Rather, her voice is intentionally ungendered and almost male, as it commands its reader with near Biblical authority. More accurately, Baxter notes that Melville voices “the vicissitudes of the human-divine relationship... [with] no topical or gendered references of any kind: Melville writes entirely devotional verse, a poetry of prayer and exhortation, which any good Calvinist could use as a form of spiritual exercise.”²⁵² Therefore, looking for feminine voice or biology is to miss what Melville executes. Melville’s Psalm 42 assumes biblical authority, employing a genderless, ahistorical voice in order to sustain Presbyterian ministers. Moreover, Melville’s poetry has the same effect as a Biblical Psalm: written for a specific intention—to sustain the Presbyterian ministers—, yet removed from this context, allows any reader to find hope within her vessel. Melville’s adherence to biblical authority, and lack of biographical or gendered information, lofts her work within sixteenth-century Scotland, propelling it within her community and beyond.

Comparatively, in *The Sidney Psalter*, Philip Sidney authored Psalm 42, with revisions employed by his sister, Mary Sidney Herbert. In *The Sidney Psalter*, Psalm 42 exists as seven octaves each with the rhyme scheme ababccdd and mimics the *Geneva Bible*. Philip Sidney combines trochaic meter and feminine rhyme—a technique he similarly employs in Psalms 34,

²⁵² Jamie Reid Baxter, “Elizabeth Melville, Lady Culross: New Light from Fife,” (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 52.

36, 38, 39, 40, and 42.²⁵³ Unlike Melville who departs from the core structure and phrasing of the *Geneva Bible*, Philip Sidney closely follows the *Geneva Bible* translation of Psalm 42 which begins: “As the Hart brayeth for the rivers of water, so panted my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, even for the living God: when shall I come and appear before the presence of God?” (Psalm 42:1-2). In the first stanza of Philip Sidney’s Psalm 42, he begins:

As the chafed hart which brayeth,
 Seeking some refreshing brook,
 So my soul in panting playeth,
 Thirsting on my God to look.
 My soul thirsts indeed in me
 After ever-living thee.
 Ah! When comes my blessed being,
 Of that face to have a seeing?²⁵⁴

Philip Sidney’s verses map onto the *Geneva Bible* translation without falter, beginning with “As the chafed hart which brayeth” mimicking the biblical verse “As the Hart brayeth for the rivers of water” and ending with his final question “Ah! When comes my blessed being, / Of that face to have a seeing?” mimicking the biblical verse “when shall I come and appear before the presence of God.”²⁵⁵ Philip Sidney experiments with verse translation achieving trochaic meter and feminine rhyme, yet closely mirrors the *Geneva Bible*. Melville, on the other hand, experiments with verse, meter, rhyme, and intention. While Philip Sidney writes for the scholarly, Melville writes for the oppressed. Philip Sidney reworked the Biblical Psalter to support his arguments on literary theory and classical models within his book *Defense of poetry*. Conversely, Elizabeth Melville, like Mary Sidney Herbert, sought to weld personal and political

²⁵³ Coles, “[A] pen to paynt”: Mary Sidney Herbert and the problems of a Protestant poetics,” 102.

²⁵⁴ Mary Sidney Herbert, “Psalm 42” in *The Collected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke*, edited by Margaret P. Hannay, Michael G. Brennan, and Noel J. Kinnamon, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 81.

²⁵⁵ *Geneva Bible*, Psalm 42

contemplation her work in order to aid her community. This intention propelled the works of both women within sixteenth-century discourse.²⁵⁶

Lasting Effects

Within her day, Melville wrote canonically for a wide audience, existing as a prominent religious figure. But, with eighteenth century's falling out of awareness of Melville's work and nineteenth century's prejudices among literary editors, Melville's canonical work has been lost until only recently. Because Melville's texts have only recently been uncovered, and a variety of her works still remain missing, the lasting effects of her work are not yet fully known. Though, with her canonical writing status, Melville undoubtedly influenced discourse within Scotland. As she has returned to scholarly awareness, individuals and Scottish communities have worked to bring her back into the culture at large. For example, there is a flagstone in Edinburgh with lines of Melville's text. Melville, therein, serves as a gem at an archeological site. Scholars have come to realize they have not yet uncovered many women-authored texts, but manuscripts such as Melville's prove that the continued search is necessary and worthwhile. The texts of Elizabeth Melville provide hope that scholarship and dialogue surrounding women-authored texts will continue to positively alter and progress.

Conclusion

Through their respective Psalm Meditations, Anne Locke and Elizabeth Melville prove that "eloquence, not silence, is the sign of [their] spirituality."²⁵⁷ In the sixteenth century, Anne Locke and Elizabeth Melville found a way into discourse, not spirituality as Hannay argues, through the words of the Psalms, even while working in the confines of their time.²⁵⁸ They wrote

²⁵⁶ Coles, "[A] pen to paynt': Mary Sidney Herbert and the problems of a Protestant poetics," 87.

²⁵⁷ Hannay, "'Wisdom the Wordes': Psalm Translation and Elizabeth Women's Spirituality," 78.

²⁵⁸ Hannay, "'Wisdom the Wordes': Psalm Translation and Elizabeth Women's Spirituality," 66.

canonically through the medium of the Biblical Psalter. This chapter has explored the works of Anne Locke and Elizabeth Melville in order to demonstrate the exceptional nature of their texts, their reliance on the Psalms, and their fierce political leanings. In Anne Locke's lyric poetry and Elizabeth Melville's narrative poetry, these poets employ elements of the Biblical Psalter in order to address public need, making tangible humanities need for God's presence in the midst of personal and political turmoil. Despite past biased assumptions surrounding their work, Locke and Melville both benevolently served their communities and existed as influential political figures. Moreover, both women's works were widely-received within sixteenth-century discourse, influencing subsequent poets. *Norton Anthology of English Literature's* recent inclusion of Anne Locke's work and the scholars' uncovering of Melville's work lend to the positive progress scholars have made in the study of early-modern women. Though the field requires continued progress, the research and findings of contemporary scholars Femke Molekamp, Kimberley Coles, Sarah C.E. Ross, among others, have deeply and positively impacted perception of Locke and Melville.

Conclusion

Through analysis of the Biblical Psalter and the poetry of Mary Sidney Herbert, Anne Vaughan Locke, and Elizabeth Melville as well as research on sixteenth-century perception of these poets and the Psalms, this thesis has illustrated the Psalms as exceptional literary entities, analyzed the pioneering works of sixteenth-century women poets, and called into question assumptions of sixteenth-century women writers. This exploration reveals the significant impact women had on sixteenth-century England, on the Psalms as a literary genre, and on the literary canon as a whole. These three poets, among other women writers, wrote at the forefront of sixteenth-century discourse, impacting subsequent poets by writing canonically through the medium of the Biblical Psalter. By inhabiting the Psalms, women poets wrote in the missing: female voice and perspective. Moreover, these women advanced the political and religious reformation of their time periods, serving as influential players. Ultimately, this entire thesis challenges the ways in which early modern literary scholars have approached and ignored women's writing of the period. It illustrates the white space surrounding women within the institution, elucidates the need for unbiased analysis of women-authored works, and brings awareness to the continued need for scholarship within this field. Yet, it simultaneously celebrates scholars excellent work over the past two decades on early modern women authors.

This thesis in and of itself is a Psalm meditation, demonstrating the ability of the Biblical Psalter to sustain lyric poetry, sonnets, narrative poetry, and even this literary study. Moreover, this thesis serves as an invitation to spend time within the Biblical Psalter and Psalm poetry as a means of better understanding humanity, political turmoil, and an earthly existence. Particularly in light of today's pandemic, the study of the Psalms proves beneficial in understanding the seemingly impossible. Predominately, Psalms of exile ring true today. Though the world is not

experiencing the same exile Anne Locke experienced in Geneva, Elizabeth Melville experienced in Scotland, or Israel experience from Jerusalem, for many an exile far different persists: an exile from everyday life. This exile remains vastly complex and different for every individual on Earth, yet its commonality is that it affects every living person. The pandemic has exiled individuals from their lives, yet not uprooted them. Rather, they are called to shelter-in-place, isolated from others. Meanwhile, one common, untouchable enemy persists: a virus.

The Psalms resound with the uncertainty, despair, and turmoil surrounding the pandemic. Psalm 22 addresses the helplessness of a plague that has no definite cause or foreseeable solution: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring.”²⁵⁹ Psalm 88 addresses death’s hand, touching on the grief of the living: “Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction: Lord, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee. Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise and praise thee? Selah.”²⁶⁰ Psalm 69 addresses the common, relentless enemy of the virus: “I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God. They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head: they that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty.”²⁶¹ And, Psalm 137 addresses what once was, illustrating the life the psalmist seeks to return to when he is no longer in exile from Zion:

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?²⁶²

²⁵⁹ *King James Version*, Psalm 22:1.

²⁶⁰ *King James Version*, Psalm 88: 9 – 10.

²⁶¹ *Ibid*, Psalm 69:2 – 3.

²⁶² *Ibid*, Psalm 137.

These verses, among countless others, create a safe haven for exploring the pain and heartbreak of being separated from loved ones, living in uncertain conditions, and of the darkness of exile. Through meditation on these verses, the Psalms emphasize that an early experience of separation is to be expected, others have felt this same way before, and today, others feel this same way. Moreover, the Psalms in conversation with today's pandemic provide a lived experience as to why Mary Sidney Herbert, Anne Locke, and Elizabeth Melville chose to inhabit them in the face of political and personal turmoil. Although Mary Sidney Herbert, Anne Vaughan Locke, and Elizabeth Melville each meditated on these exact verses, the work of Elizabeth Melville becomes particularly applicable today because of her similar audience of the persecuted. In her thirty-four-stanza poem "Loves Lament for Christs Absence", Melville sought to provide her community peace, but in order to do so, she was present to their and her own grief:

Alace what gripping grief have I, have I
 What can put end unto my care
 I weep I wail I call I cry, I cry
 My soul is slain with weeping saire
 Through pouring out my piteous plaint
 With grievous groans my heart growes faint
 My bodie poore and weake
Three lines omitted by scribe
 Yet non alace can send relief
 But he whose absence makes my grief²⁶³

The first seven verses of this stanza plainly, but acutely illustrate grief. Melville captures the many overwhelming ways grief manifests: "I weep I wail I call I cry." As the stanza progresses, the grief magnifies and the body withers; Grief begins by having the body and by line seven causes the body to deteriorate. Although Melville fixes the eyes of her community on Christ, a reader can interpret this poem in many ways, making it directly applicable to any situation of

²⁶³ Melville, "Loves Lament for Christs Absence" in *Poems of Elizabeth Melville*, Lady Culross, 84.

longing. The phrase “Yet non alace can send relief / But he whose absence makes my grief” although with intended meaning of the Christ, can be positioned within the pandemic: the only thing that will relieve the world today is the absence of the virus. Or, to anyone quarantining without someone for who they care deeply, the only thing that will relieve that separation pain is a reunion with the person whose absence causes that grief: a partner, a relative, a friend, or a pet.

After being present to the grief of exile, Melville’s work points the reader towards patience, hope, and delivery, mirroring the Psalms. Melville asks for patience to endure her exile: “Lord give me leave to long for thee.” She identifies her weakness and asks for the Lord’s strength: “Thow sees I have no strength to stand / Lord help me up with thy right hand.”²⁶⁴ She directly asks for the persecution to end: “Take hart and all and end the strife.”²⁶⁵ She concedes, seeing the ways in which the Lord had provided through her persecution: “Lord let me in, I crave no more, / With crumes and dropes my strength restore.”²⁶⁶ And finally, only after sitting with her grief for thirty-three stanzas, she turns to the Psalms not in lamentation, but in celebration:

To thee till I com home at last
 And lead my in thy light
 Then shall I presse my tyme to spend
 In psalms and songs that cannot end.²⁶⁷

Her poem, like the works of Mary Sidney Herbert, Anne Vaughan Locke, and the Psalmists at large, provides promise that this pandemic persists with purpose, even if its existence causes deep trouble and painful grief. The Psalms, therefore, welcome lamentation, but slowly turn that lamentation into gratitude and celebration. Psalm 22 turns the meek into the satisfied: “The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the Lord that seek him: your heart shall live for

²⁶⁴ Melville, “Loves Lament for Christs Absence,” 49.

²⁶⁵ Melville, “Loves Lament for Christs Absence,” 56.

²⁶⁶ Ibid, 51.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, 59.

ever.”²⁶⁸ Psalm 69 turns exile into reunion: “For God will save Zion, and will build the cities of Judah: that they may dwell there, and have it in possession. The seed also of his servants shall inherit it: and they that love his name shall dwell therein.”²⁶⁹ Psalm 137 strikes poetic justice, offering that the enemy will suffer what it has forced others to suffer: “O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us.”^{270,271} And, Psalm 88 which bleakly casts God as the enemy, holds out hope that God still provides: “O lord God of my salvation.”²⁷² The Psalms, therein, are an invitation to lean into brokenness and accept it at face value, just as Mary Sidney Herbert, Anne Vaughan Locke, and Elizabeth Melville did. In doing so, they find peace, rest, and joy within the Lord. These women psalmists, like the biblical psalmist, did not shy away from the persecution and turmoil of their lives, but rather meditated on it in order to find hope and create their own “new song.”²⁷³

²⁶⁸ *King James Version*, Psalm 22:26.

²⁶⁹ *King James Version*, Psalm 69: 35 - 36.

²⁷⁰ *King James Version*, Psalm 137:8.

²⁷¹ The New Oxford Annotated Bible, “Psalm 137”, 894.

²⁷² *King James Version*, Psalm 88:1.

²⁷³ Hawkins, “Chapter 6: The Psalms in Poetry,” 110.

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Pledge:

On my honor, I have neither given nor received any unacknowledged aid on this thesis. All acknowledgements can be found on "page ii" of this thesis. Catherine Latour '20