David's Successors in England:
Early Psalm Translations to English from the Hebrew

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Summary

My thesis, *David's Successors in England: Early Psalm Translations to English from the Hebrew* concerns the first English translations of the psalms in which the original Hebrew was consulted. It first takes a broad look at scriptural translation of the day and the historical circumstances surrounding and informing it, then delves into close readings of two specific examples: John Milton's 1653 translation of Psalm 2, and Mary Sidney's 1599 translation of Psalm 102. Each translation is highly original, and strongly reflects not only the meanings and prayerful acts implicit in the Hebrew text but also the political realities, private experiences and opinions of the translators in their own time and context, which I explore substantially with the assistance of a variety of modern scholarship on the translators and their time. We conclude that the nature of the art of biblical translation is intrinsically both deeply personal and deeply political, and are charged with new perspective on how they may be read and understood as well as written in our own Modern and Jewish context.

David's Successors in England: Early Psalm Translations to English from the Hebrew contains:

* The Introduction, containing three subsections
* Two main chapters:
    * Part One: *Psalm 2 and Milton's Timely Translation*
    * Part Two: *The Sidney Psalter, Hebrew Scholarship, and "Theise Most Active Times"*
* A Conclusion, containing two subsections
* A short appendix containing a few more translations of Psalm 102
* A bibliography.

Each main chapter begins with the psalm in its entirety in the Hebrew original, the most relevant contemporary biblical translation to have been consulted by the titular translator, and the translation by Milton or Sidney, respectively. It was found that this format maximally empowers the reader.

For my wife, Emily, whose love of the well-turned phrase is equal to my own.

Introduction

The songs are these, which heavens high holy Muse
Whisper'd to *David*, *David* to the Jewes:
And *Davids* Successors, in holy zeale,
In formes of joy and art doe re-reveale [1]

-John Donne

1. *General introduction, argument that contemporary issues inform Psalm translation.*

Of all biblical writings, the psalms are the most relational and personal. More so than any other form of biblical text, they record and inspire a direct communication with the divine and seek to portray a God who cares for us as individuals, who will not suffer our feet to stumble. As is often remarked in both Jewish and Christian traditions, one can find in the psalms a reflection of any experience, trial or emotion that life presents, as well as comfort for or insight into that experience.[2] Notably for biblical literature, the psalms' origin of intention lies not with God, but with the distinct voice of a human being - in the person of both the psalmist as well as of the contemporary reader in any setting - seeking understanding or comfort, or to offer praise.

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[1] John Donne, "Upon the Translation of the Psalms by Sir Philip Sidney, and the Countess of Pembroke his Sister", in *The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Donne, ed. Charles M. Coffin* (New York: Modern Library Classics, 2001), 367.

[2] As Jonne Donne put it so aptly: "*As Manna tasted to every man like that that he liked best, so doe the Psalmes minister Instruction, and satisfaction, to every man, in every emergency and occasion." (*from "The second of my Prebend Sermons upon my five Psalmes," in *Donne's Prebend Sermons,* ed. Janel M Mueller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1971), 91).

As psalms constitute an intensely personal form of address to God, so too does their translation into other languages. This is made evident by the work of that first generation of translators of the psalms from the original Hebrew into English, some examples of whose efforts I will be analyzing here. [3] These translators, like all translators, had a powerful affinity for their subject matter and were very much products of their own time. And as they saw the psalms as prophetic and eternally relevant works, they understood their content to be of direct relevance to their own concerns as individuals, and by extension to the theological, organizational, cultural and political concerns of their time: one of profound change in all of these areas. Many of these early translators, like John Milton and Phillip and Mary Sidney, were also deeply personally invested in these shifts, and felt that God was invested as well. For this reason, their work, like psalm translation from any time, may be understood not only as prayer but as a record and map of their historical time and concerns from their unique prospective. Furthermore, their translations serve subtly as an argument that the perspective which informed them is one shared by the "author": in short, that "God is on their side." Rather than viewing these phenomena as imperfect renderings or crude divergence from an urtext, I posit that this process is a natural and even a holy one—an extension of and

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[3] One important Early Modern translation of the psalter preceding those dealt with in close readings in this thesis exemplifies this truth and codifies it. *The Whole Book of Psalms Collected into English Metre,* compiled by John Day, Thomas Sternhold, and John Hopkins, published by English Protestants exiled in Geneva during the reign of staunchly anti-Protestant Queen Mary, contains a tabular form of 'A Treatise made by Athanasius' which indicates the appropriate psalm to be read for guidance or comfort for every condition of mind. (Early English Books Online, *The Whole Book of Psalms Collected Into English Meeter, By Thomas Sternhold, John Hopkins, and Others: Conferred With the Hebrew, With Apt Notes to Sing Them Withall* (London: printed by T.N. for the Company of Stationers, 1673.))

continuation of the same impulses and Inspiration that informed the original Hebrew psalms.

Consider the following translation from our own time:

Come, sing in ecstasy to THE ETERNAL ONE,
ring out a fanfare to our rock of rescue!

Hurry forth in thanks before the Presence,
shouting in song to God.

For THE REDEEMER is a generous divinity,
a sovereign greater than all image-gods.

This translation of the opening three verses of Psalm 95 is included in *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vehagim,* the 1996 American Reconstructionist *siddur* intended for use in public worship as well as private meditation. The authors and editors of this particular translation are informed both consciously and intuitively by a host of social, academic, political and religious factors unique to the time and place in which the translation was written as well as by their own individual sensibilities and understanding of the divine. In the act of translating the psalm the translators are also, quite literally, writing a script by which the psalm will be read, understood and absorbed by its future readers. In doing so, the translators influence personal theologies and the development of the divine dialogue which psalms enact via their readers, and they reinforce or redirect the sensibilities and strictures of the religious body of Reconstructionist Judaism. The translation then also becomes a part of the dialogue going on among other streams of Judaism, as well as with other monotheistic religions which may react to this reading and the sensibilities it represents by absorbing, borrowing, reinterpreting or rejecting them. The translation

reveals an ongoing reexamination and reinterpretation of Jewish values, and so it also will serve in the future as a subtle sort of record and documentation of these developments as they existed in our own recent past.

In the first verse, the translators choose to interpret the Hebrew *"n'ran'nah"* to mean "sing *in ecstasy"* (italics my own). This "ecstasy" may arguably be implied by the text but it is certainly not a *p'shat (literal)* interpretation. This choice is interpretative and perhaps even midrashic in nature—indicating that maybe the intention of the translator is to encourage a reading of the text as an inspiration for prayer, and that the translator is informed by its context within Jewish prayer services. It might also reflect an attention to ecstatic practices and a desire on the part of the translator to encourage them, either consciously or simply because of the way that his or her perspective informs the understanding of the text. The translation in *Kol Haneshamah* goes on to reference "THE ETERNAL ONE", as a translation of the Tetragrammaton, *Yud Hey Vav Hey*, read in Hebrew as *Adonai*. Though the Tetragrammaton is itself a mysterious amalgamation of the past, present and future tense of the verb root meaning "To be," the most accurate translation of *Adonai*, the traditional Hebrew *pronunciation* of the Tetragrammaton, is "My Lord." However, this more traditional translation raises concerns in a modern and liberal theology as being both sexist, since it genders God, and feudal in inspiration, being grounded in a romanticization of a potentially exploitative and outdated political and economic system. Though one might argue that translating *Adonai* as "THE ETERNAL ONE" undermines the intention of the psalmist, with a little historical perspective we can understand that reading the tetragrammaton as *Adonai* is itself a sort

of translation, with its own consequences to prayer, belief and understanding, behind which might lie the intentions and arguments of another post-biblical perspective from another time and place.

In translating "*al kol elohim,"* which might be less imaginatively translated as "above all Gods" or, more imaginatively as "above all idols" into "greater than all image-gods," the translator both straddles these two meanings as ably as the Hebrew original does, and additionally guides us away from a reading of the text which is insulting to other religions. In addition, this reading incorporates modern Jewish philosophy, the idea of an "image-God" alluding loosely to a modern philosophical take on idolatry as allowing any "absolute good" in a personal system, such as money, worldly success, or a particular relationship, which can be a barrier between an individual and a truer experience of God.[4] The Reform movement's *siddur* for Shabbat and Weekdays, *Mishkan T'filah,* tackles this issue in another way. Here, Psalm 95 does not include language of lordship or sovereignty, or name God "the Eternal". The translators working in *Mishkan T'filah* provide quite neutral language in the English translation, leaving the Tetragrammaton as "Adonai," and simply using the noun God in place of any gendered pronouns. This choice seems intended to provide space and opportunity for the worshipper to provide for themselves individual, personal experience of God that the more "worked" translation of *Kol Haneshamah* strives to encode within its text. [5]

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[4] Rabbi David Teutsch, editor of *Kol Haneshama,* email interview with author, November 13, 2013.

[5] *Mishkan T'filah: a Reform Siddur* (New York: CCAR Press, 2007), 130-31.

A translator has tremendous power over a text, and if the text is important, a tremendous power over the reader. Our sensibilities inform our choices in translating a text, regardless of whether or not generous additions, interpretations or other liberties take place—and they often do, and should, if the psalms are indeed a living text. These choices that occur in the course of a translation are a part of the fabric by which we collectively, in our places and ages in history, understand these texts as a link to God and as a means of accessing and understanding life. The translations further serve in later dates as a record of the sensibilities and struggles of the time and even as positional statements in those struggles, if we take the time to look through the different lenses available to us. Our translations are informed also by the translations before them, and may seek to inform those that follow. Furthermore, they can just as easily serve as a tremendously personal portrait of individual theological and social struggles as they can communal ones, and often these struggles are interwoven.

Just as we look to the psalms today for guidance through our contemporary issues, and these issues inform our translations of the psalms into English, so do did our Christian forbears who were the first to translate Biblical literature into English following the separation of England from the Catholic Church and the founding of the Church of England.

How better to understand the struggles, considerations and layers of meaning and interpretation involved in this greatest of acts of prayer—the translation of holy text into our native tongues—than to look to the first great translations like our own: from the

Hebrew into the English language. John Milton and Sir Phillip and Mary Sidney were writers, translators, and religious luminaries of no small inspiration. In performing a close reading of their work here, it is my hope to develop and share a better awareness of the factors that influence and inform the act of psalm translation which can be carried into our lives as religious leaders, and a deeper understanding of the psalms, and of the God and divine relationship discussed therein as revealed by their interpreters.

2. *Background information and framing the literary, religious, and historical context*

The early English Protestant translators resided in 17th century England during a time at which the Renaissance had taken a firm hold of England and the future forseen and fought for by those formerly called Reformers—who had in the previous century opposed the authority of the Catholic Church as well as its perceived corruption and its rigid control of worship, biblical text and access—led to a new religious authority in partnership with the crown in the formation of the Church of England.[6] By examining these very early examples translations of the psalms from the original Hebrew, we also make contact with one of the most productive and unprecedented times and places in the history of the English language: Renaissance England at a time of new creative freedom and tolerance of religious creativity. Though there is a tremendous amount of history relevant to this time of enormous change and the upheaval of the century preceding it, I will be brief in addressing the major historical movements quite generally, and delving

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[6] For more on this, see Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution 1603-1714* (New York: Norton, 1980).

into specificity only regarding that information most immediately relevant to biblical translation. Let us take a moment to examine the major events of Englands previous century in terms of the then incredibly incendiary act of biblical translation.

Around the turn of the16th century, the monarchies of Europe and the Catholic Church sought to end the bubblings of reformation begun by Martin Luther and his contemporary religious reformers in Germany and made possible by the relatively new availability of the printing press - suddenly, not only could new ideas be distributed easily and quickly, but it was economically and technologically possible for individuals and lay communities to own religious documents in their own language. This was perceived as a profound, even existential threat by what I would argue was the most powerful organization in the world at the time—the Catholic Church. In the early 16th century, possession of a bible in English was punishable by death throughout Europe.

The most important and influential translations of the New and much of the Old Testament into English at that time were by William Tyndale (1494-1536), which are now collectively known as *The Tyndale Bible*. He moved from England to Germany in order to study the Hebrew language, as there were no Jews in England at that time.[7] Tyndale's translations of the Old and New Testaments from Latin, Greek, and Hebrew were so influential to the later Church of England translations that a 1998 study revealed that even the King James Bible, the third version of the Church of England Bible, "shows that Tyndale's words account for 84% of the New Testament and for 75.8% of the Old

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[7] In 1290, King Edward I issued the Edict of Expulsion, which was overturned by Oliver Cromwell in 1657.

Testament books that he translated.[8]" Tyndale was caught and executed in Germany in 1536, however, and never lived to translate much of the *Tanach*. It would not be until the following century that well-known or influential translations of the psalms would be made into English with direct consultation of the original the Hebrew.

Though the success, position and security of Reformers throughout Europe vacillated wildly throughout the century, things began to look better and better for them in England around this time, largely as a result of Henry VIII's embrace of Reform—which became very helpful to him in obtaining divorces, getting out from under the thumb of the Catholic Church, elevating himself to the head of the church in England (and thereby gaining control of religious authority over his domain), and seizing much of the considerable wealth and land owned by the Church in England for the Crown. In 1538, two years after the execution of William Tyndale in Germany, an injunction was issued in England by Henry VIII that an English Bible should be housed and made available in each of Englands' approximately 10,000 churches. This was followed in 1540 by the publication of the *Great Bible*, now popularly referred to in academic circles as the Coverdale Bible or the Coverdale Translation, the first legally authorized translation of the Christian Bible in history. It was commissioned and overseen by Lord Thomas Cranmer, who was then the Archbishop of Canterbury and the highest religious authority in England after the King.

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[8] Brian Moynahan, *If God Spare My Life: Tyndale, the English Bible, and Sir Thomas More* (London: Abacus, 2003), 1-2.

While much of the Coverdale Bible was written by Thomas Coverdale, it was heavily based on Tyndale's landmark translation.[9] Though Tyndale worked from Greek and Hebrew Texts,[10] Coverdale worked from the Latin Vulgate and German translations in addition to the Tyndale, of course.[11] Tyndale never lived to translate the psalms, and as a result the translations of psalms included in the Great Bible, and thereafter distributed to the English public by the Church of England as the "authortatative" collection of Psalms as *The Book of Common Prayer*, were by Coverdale and had no direct grounding in the original Hebrew whatever.

As a result, though there was much direct translation from the original Hebrew texts that made their way into the Great Bible and other early Church of England publications of religious texts through the work of William Tyndale, all translations of psalms were several translations removed from the Hebrew originals. This was largely a result of the prevalent suspicious attitude among European scholars as to the accuracy of the Hebrew *Tanach* used by Jews.[12] Furthermore, there was a social taboo, rooted in

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[9] Alfred W. Pollard, "Biographical Introduction" in *The Holy Bible* (King James version ed.), (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 1.

[10] Paul Arblaster, Gergely Juhász, Guido Latré, eds., *Tyndale's Testament* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), 53.

[11] *Tyndale's Testament* 28.

[12] Ilona N. Rashkow, "Hebrew Bible Translation and the Fear of Judaization,"*The Sixteenth Century Journal 21, No. 2 (1990): 217-33.*

antisemitism, against the study of Hebrew that came to be relaxed over the next hundred years.[13]

Cranmer and Coverdale provide their readers of the new text's Christianity and divine source in the original title page of the *Great Bible*. Not only does the title page take care not to mention the Hebrew text at all, instead referencing its sources as being German and Latin translations, it also provides a pictorial depiction of the transmission of the text to Henry III. [14]

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[13] Chanita Goodblatt, "'High Holy Muse': Christian Hebraism and Jewish Exegesis in the Sidneian *Psalmes*" in *Tradition, Heterodoxy and Religious Culture: Judaism and Christianity in the Early Modern Period,* Goldstein-Goren Library of Jewish Thought, no. 6, eds. Chanita Goodblatt and Howard Kreisel (Beer-Sheva, Israel: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2006), 287-310.

[14] See image, below.

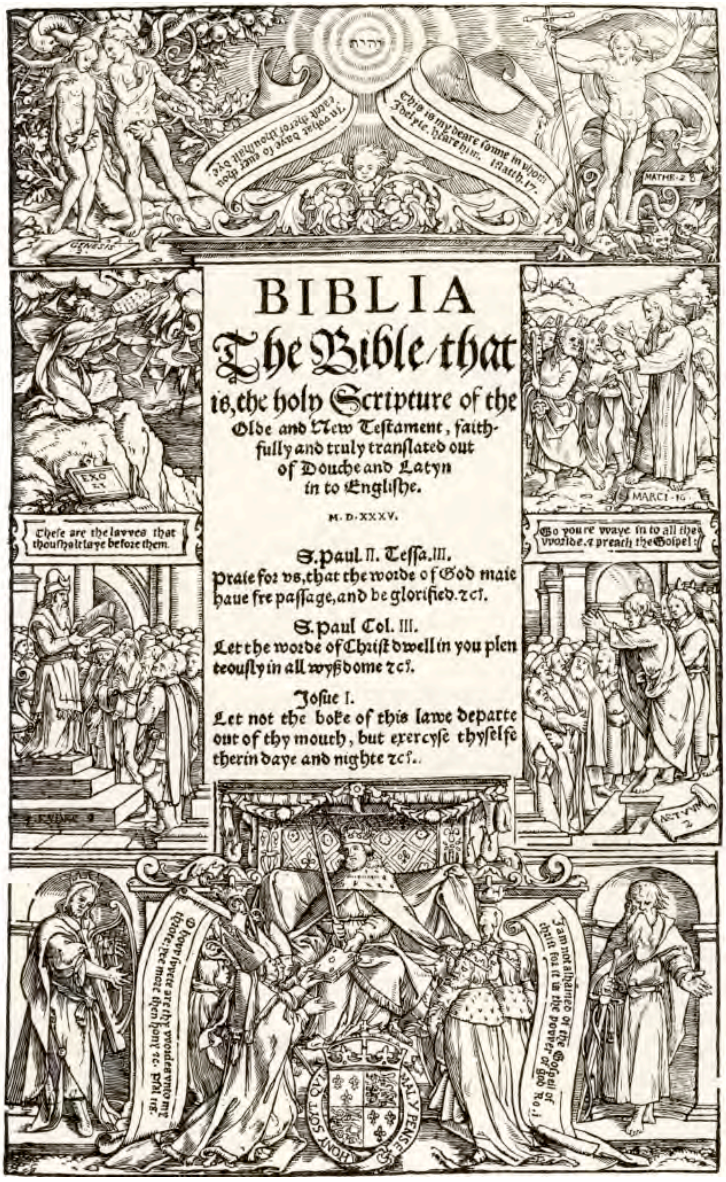

Fig. 1: Title page of the Coverdale Bible.[15]

Ilona Rashkow describes this image's reflection of the Reformation: "At the top of the woodcut, appearing in a burst of heavenly light, is the Tetragrammaton, symbolizing the direct revelation of the Word to the sovereign. Lower on the page, Henry VIII is depicted on his throne distributing Bibles to the kneeling bishops, with

[15] Title page, *Coverdale Bible* (Germany: Marburg, 1535), from The British Library, Images Online: G.12208, accessed January 20, 2014, http://imagesonline.bl.uk.

various crowned heads admiring his action. Figures of harp-playing David and sword-bearing Paul, representing the Old and New Testaments, flank Henry, who is armed with the Sword and the Book, a personification of the Reformation ideal of evangelical kingship at the moment of transition from Old Law to New Law. Two scrolls issue from the Tetragrammaton, one directed towards the terror stricken Adam and Eve, the other towards the risen Christ trampling on the serpent. For Coverdale's readers, the incarnation of Christ as Logos brings release from the original sin of Adam and Eve. Coverdale, by illustration, assures the reader that his is solely a Christian text.[16]"

One can discern in the title page illustration the embodiment of a somewhat ambivalent relationship towards the Hebrew language and towards Jews in Early Modern England. On the one hand, the fledgling Church of England seeks to distance themselves from both in order to appear legitimate: as the Jews are both seen as guilty of not understanding the true meaning of the texts they share with Christendom but also of having an inferior and heavily altered version from the original. On the other hand, though the center text assures us that it is "faithfully translated" from ONLY the German and Latin (though much was in fact lifted from the Tyndale bible which was indeed much translated directly from the Hebrew) the supertext, from which all blessings flow downward is the Tetragrammaton-- the Hebrew name for God. I argue that there is here an acknowledgement that there is a primal power towards which the church of England, its texts, and the populist Reformation movement which fueled the split from the Catholic Church ideologically *wish to return.* And they do so by seeing themselves as primally

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[16] Rashkow 223.

connected to God and God's word, like Adam and Eve, King David (representing the Old Testament), Christ, and Paul, and the other non-catholic figures, who, allied with King Henry return the reader from the Latin control of the Catholic Church to the true authority-- The Hebrew Name for God, and with it, the Hebrew texts.

Indeed, though Coverdale and Cranmer, from their entrenched seats of power at the highest level of the monarchy and the new Church, chose to publicly distance their textual approach from the Hebrew, other scholars felt charged by the spirit of the age to return to the Hebrew roots of the bible, identifying with the Hebrews as escapees from a modern Babylon in the form of Catholic Rome,[17] and seeking to return to the *Hebraica veritas* as they understood Saint Jerome to have done when he originally created the Vulgate, the Latin bible used by the Catholic Church.[18]

Although fear of Judaisation and Christian Hebraist forces were evenly balanced enough to lead to a politic policy of inaction as regards the role of the Hebrew texts on the part of the most central and entrenched forces of the Church of England at the time of its inception, the pendulum would most definitively swing towards an engagement with the Hebrew language and identification with the Hebrews among many educated, independent translators and "Englishers" of texts over the next hundred years. This is particularly true of the psalms, as they are short and thus make smaller tasks, are pithy and thus especially useful as tools in political and social arguments, and are intimate texts

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[17] Sara Coodin, "Inter-Faith Encounters: English Protestants and the Hebrew Bible", Folger Institute. Last updated 2012, accessed January 20, 2014, http://www.folger.edu/folger_institute/globe/s_coodin.html.

[18] Goodblatt, 296.

describing a personal relationship with God, and thus especially resonant for the lone, independent-minded New Christian hearkening in their studies and at the Universities (which increasingly embraced Hebrew as a discipline and a vital aspect of becoming a true Classicist in addition to studying Latin and Greek) to the unadulterated prophetic words of King David, which they understood all psalms to be. Over the following century, many such scholars would do so, engaging in the study of the Hebrew in order to create translations which better reflected the true Intention behind the divine texts. Translation and interpretations of the psalms would become the literary exercise by which the greats of Early Modern English literature would cut their teeth.

3. Psalm Culture in Early Modern England.

According to the Elizabethan Act of Uniformity in 1559, attendance at Church of England Services was mandatory for every English citizen. Since the entire Psalter was read through in its entirety every month in the course of church services, the psalms were arguably the most widely- and frequently-read material in all of England.[19] The Reformation "opened the door to both vernacular translation and individual interpretation of the Bible, and one of the immediate and lasting results was a widespread 'Psalm Culture' in which poets, theologians, and devoted dilettantes produced hundreds of

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[19] Hannibal Hamlin, "Psalm Culture in the English Renaissance: Readings of Psalm 137 by Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, and Others", *Renaissance Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (2002): 224-57.

translations, paraphrases, and adaptations of the psalms, as well as meditations, sermons, and commentaries."[20]

This century was a time of triumph and freedom for English Reformers - their dream of a church in which there was no mediator between them and the holy texts was at last a reality, and they could express their devotion and zeal through their literary gifts. For many, including literary giants like John Milton and Sir Phillip and Mary Sidney, this was a time to return to the Hebrew word of God and of King David, unadulterated by what they saw as the mistakes, plutocracy and heavy-handedness of the Catholic Church. Out of this tremendous freedom, and as seeing themselves as, like David, key players and troubadours of a new Godly, biblical age of revelation, creativity abounded in their translations and more liberal reimaginings of the psalms. At the same time, it had become quite fashionable to hone and prove one's prowess as a new writer by translating or reinterpreting psalms, even if only doing it from other translations, as Edmund Spenser and William Shakespeare are known to have done with some frequency early in their careers.

Psalms are, as we Jews well know, also tremendous proof-texts in pressing a case, and so they became fodder for all sorts of political and social debates throughout Anglican England's first century. For example, ten days after Charles I was executed in 1649, two years before the end of the decade-long English Civil war, his *Eikon Basilike* - Greek for "Royal Portrait" - was released. It was a memoir purported to be written by him, and proved an incredibly effective piece of royalist propaganda. The *Eikon Basilike*

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[20] Hamlin, "Psalm Culture in the English Renaissance", 225.

quoted and drew strongly from the psalms, portraying Charles as both a Davidic and a Christ-like figure whose rule was sanctioned and guided by God. Milton, a staunch Parliamentarian, wrote a scathing riposte against it, using the same psalmic language to rebut the claims made in the document. Psalmic language and psalm translations in Early Modern England were not only personal and theological, but profoundly political.[21]

[21] For more on this, see Hamlin's article, "Psalm Culture in the English Renaissance" in which he elucidates how Royalist and Parliamentarian translators around the time of the English civil war translated psalm 137 in such a way as to cast their own side in the role of the exiled Hebrews and the other in the role of Babylon.

Part One: Psalm 2 and Milton's Timely Translation

תהלים 2[22]

א לָמָּה, רָגְשׁוּ גוֹיִם; וּלְאֻמִּים, יֶהְגּוּ-רִיק.
ב יִתְיַצְּבוּ, מַלְכֵי-אֶרֶץ-- וְרוֹזְנִים נוֹסְדוּ-יָחַד:
עַל-יְהוָה, וְעַל-מְשִׁיחוֹ.
ג נְנַתְּקָה, אֶת-מוֹסְרוֹתֵימוֹ; וְנַשְׁלִיכָה מִמֶּנּוּ עֲבֹתֵימוֹ.
ד יוֹשֵׁב בַּשָּׁמַיִם יִשְׂחָק: אֲדֹנָי, יִלְעַג-לָמוֹ.
ה אָז יְדַבֵּר אֵלֵימוֹ בְאַפּוֹ; וּבַחֲרוֹנוֹ יְבַהֲלֵמוֹ.
ו וַאֲנִי, נָסַכְתִּי מַלְכִּי: עַל-צִיּוֹן, הַר-קָדְשִׁי.
ז אֲסַפְּרָה, אֶל-חֹק: יְהוָה, אָמַר אֵלַי בְּנִי אַתָּה--אֲנִי, הַיּוֹם יְלִדְתִּיךָ.
ח שְׁאַל מִמֶּנִּי--וְאֶתְּנָה גוֹיִם, נַחֲלָתֶךָ; וַאֲחֻזָּתְךָ, אַפְסֵי-אָרֶץ.
ט תְּרֹעֵם, בְּשֵׁבֶט בַּרְזֶל: כִּכְלִי יוֹצֵר תְּנַפְּצֵם.
י וְעַתָּה, מְלָכִים הַשְׂכִּילוּ; הִוָּסְרוּ, שֹׁפְטֵי אָרֶץ.
יא עִבְדוּ אֶת-יְהוָה בְּיִרְאָה; וְגִילוּ, בִּרְעָדָה.
יב נַשְּׁקוּ-בַר, פֶּן-יֶאֱנַף וְתֹאבְדוּ דֶּרֶךְ-- כִּי-יִבְעַר כִּמְעַט אַפּוֹ:
אַשְׁרֵי, כָּל-חוֹסֵי בוֹ

Psalm 2 [23]

[1] Why are the nations aroused, and the peoples murmur vain things?
[2] Kings of the earth take their stand, and princes conspire together against the Lord and against His annointed.
[3] "Let us tear off their fetters, let us fling away their bonds!"
[4] He who dwells in the heavens will laugh, the Master derides them.
[5] Then will He speak to them in His wrath, in His burning anger dismay them.
[6] "And I - I appointed My king on Zion, My holy mountain."
[7] Let me tell as is due of the Lord. He said to me: You are My son. I Myself today did beget you.
[8] Ask of Me, and I shall give nations as your estate, and your holdings, the ends of the earth.
[9] You will smash them with a rod of iron, like a potter's jar you will dash them."
[10] And now, O you kings, pay mind, be chastened, you rulers of earth.
[11] Worship the Lord in fear, and exult in trembling.
[12] With purity be armed, lest He rage and you be lost on the way.
[13] For His wrath in a moment flares up. Happy, all who shelter in Him.

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[22] Psalm 2 (Mechon-Mamre, accessed January 26, 2014, http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt2602.htm)

[23] Psalm 2 (Robert Alter, trans., *The Book of Psalms* (New York: Norton, 2007), 5-7.)

Psalm 2 [24]
Done August 8, 1653. Terzetti.

Why do the Gentiles tumult, and the Nations
Muse a vain thing, the Kings of th' earth upstand
With power, and Princes in their Congregations
Lay deep their plots together through each Land,
Against the Lord and his Messiah dear?
Let us break off, say they, by strength of hand
Their bonds, and cast from us, no more to wear,
Their twisted cords: he who in Heaven doth dwell
Shall laugh, the Lord shall scoff them, then severe
Speak to them in his wrath, and in his fell
And fierce ire trouble them; but I, saith hee,
Anointed have my King (though ye rebel)
On Sion my holi' hill. A firm decree
I will declare; the Lord to me hath say'd,
Thou art my Son I have begotten thee
This day; ask of me, and the grant is made;
As thy possession I on thee bestow
Th' Heathen, and as thy conquest to be sway'd
Earths utmost bounds: them shalt thou bring full low
With Iron Scepter bruis'd, and them disperse
Like to a potters vessel shiver'd so.
And now be wise at length, ye Kings averse,
Be taught ye Judges of the earth; with fear
Jehovah serve, and let your joy converse
With trembling; kiss the Son least he appear
In anger and ye perish in the way,
If once his wrath take fire like fuel sere.
Happy all those who have in him their stay.

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[24] John Milton, “Psalm 2” in *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton,* ed. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon (New York: Random House/ Modern Library, 2007), 124-25.

Milton's translation of Psalm Two was written in 1653, at a time when Royalist armies were amassing in Scotland, posing a great threat to the newly empowered Parlimentarian government, the Commonwealth of England. The founding of the Commonwealth just a few years before had catapulted Milton from a fringe radical to a man of power and renown. Milton held office and was the foremost cultural figure and pamphleteer of the new regime—and was very useful to it. Just a few years before, Milton had quoted the bible extensively in his pamphlets justifying the execution of King Charles I. Only weeks after the king's execution, Charles' purported autobiography, the *Eikon Basilike,* was published and gained tremendous influence and distribution as a Royalist rallying cry. In it, Charles was depicted as a Davidic and Christ-like ruler, a portrait that was bolstered by extensive borrowing of psalmic language. Milton was then commissioned by the new parliament to write *Eikonoklastes,* a riposte to the *Eikon Basilike,* in which he used the same psalmic language and quotation to deconstruct the argument for Charles I's divine right and Davidic authority; instead, Milton argued that Charles I's rule and authority were not founded in God and God's will but rather constituted a form of idolatry.

From Milton's perspective the Royalist armies and their threat to the new "Kingdom" in London would likely appear remarkably similar in political and martial circumstance to those depicted between Ancient Jerusalem and its subjugated nations in Psalm 2. Just as the provinces and tribes under Jerusalem's rule wished to cast aside their bonds to Jerusalem's rule through the grumblings of civil unrest, so too did their contemporary equivalents in Scotland from London.

Milton also was having a very difficult year personally. He had finally lost his eyesight completely, lost one of his children, and was suffering great damage to his reputation by a Royalist pamphleteer and rival who was accusing him of homosexuality. A vain and sensitive man, Milton may well have felt personally like Jerusalem as depicted in the psalm, where "Kings of the earth take their stand, and princes conspire together against the Lord and against His annointed"[25] - beset on all sides by those beneath him.

Milton's theological sensibilities were, like many of the foremost Protestant thinkers of the time, deeply typological, meaning that they were trained towards reading Old Testament places and figures as predictors and lower fulfillments of the same divine intention perfected by places and figures in the New Testament. Jonah, for example, was often viewed as a typology of Christ—a prophet chosen by God, who suffered to deliver God's message, but of a lower sort than Christ as he did not go willingly and did not possess Christ's divinity. This thinking particularly pervaded Milton's work and fueled his creativity.[26] This is beautifully exemplified by Book XII of *Paradise Lost,* in which Sinai, and the religious sensibilities it embodies, is presented as a typography of Christ:

> God from the Mount of *Sinai,* whose gray top
> Shall tremble, he descending will himself
> In Thunder, Lightning and loud Trumpet's sound
> Ordain them Lawes; part such as appertain
> To civil Justice, part religious Rites
> Of sacrifice, in forming them, by types

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[25] Ps. 2:2 (Alter).

[26] For more on this, see Carloyn P. Collette, "Milton's Psalm Translations: Petition and Praise" in *English Literary Renaissance* 2, no. 2 (1972), 243-259.

> And shadows, of that desin'd Seed to bruise
> The Serpent, by what means he shall achieve
> Mankind's deliverance…
>
> So Law appears imperfect, and but giv'n
> With purpose to resign them in full time
> Up to a better Cov'nant, disciplin'd
> From shadowy Types to Truth, from
> Flesh to Spirit,
> And from imposition to strict Laws, to free
> Acceptance of large Grace, from servile fear
> To filial, works of Law to Works of Faith.[27]

In Milton's mind, the connection between David's situation as portrayed in Psalm 2 and the political events contemporary with his translation of it would likely be taken even one step further (Milton would have believed, as both the Church of England and the Catholic church did at that time, that all psalms were written by King David).[28] Milton saw Ancient Israel as a typology for contemporary England, and Biblical Jerusalem for Modern London - thus by supporting its role as a sort of headquarters for his own political and religious ideals, he was helping to enact God's will and facilitate messianic progress. Carolyn P. Collette showcases Milton's argument of this point beautifully in her article "Milton's Psalm Translations: Petition and Praise", where she outlines Milton's depiction of England's "preeminence among the nations of the world" through divine election:

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[27] Milton, "Paradise Lost" in *Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, ed. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon (New York: Random House/ Modern Library, 2007), ll. 227-35, 300-06.

[28] The psalms referring to events after David's death were believed to have been written by him in prophecy. For more on this see Hannibal Hamlin, "Introduction", in *Psalm Culture and Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1-16.

> in the doctrine *and Discipline of Divorce* he writes, "Let not England forget her precedence of teaching nations how to live…." (II, 232) and in *Of Reformation* he describes England's place in God's plan yet more fully in a passage on the awful workings of Privedence in earthly affairs; he laments England's present situation and asks '… how it should come to passé that *England* (having had this *grace* and *honour* from God to be the first that should se up a Standard for the recovery of *Lost Truth*, and blow the first *Evangelick Trumpet* to the *Nations*, holding up, as from a Hill, the new Lampe of *saving light* to all Christendome_ should now be last, and most unsettl'd in the enjoyment of the *Peace*, whereof she taught the way to others…" (I, 525). The two nations are most clearly equated in the following passage from *Areopagitica*: "Why else was this Nation chos'n before any other, that out of her as out of *Sion should* be proclaim'd and sounded for the first tidings and trumpet of Reformation in all *Europ?"* (II, 552).[29][30]

Though Milton began every day with the study of the bible in the original Hebrew[31] and his Hebrew scholarship is extensively documented, it would be naïve to analyze his translation against only the original Hebrew. I will therefore also compare Milton's translation with the version found in the King James Bible (King James version), which is the third edition of the Church of England Bible - and would have been the version that Milton used at church, and from which he appears to have retained many aspects in his own version. Despite the similarities between these two translations, Milton makes a surprising and lively choice in adapting Psalm 2 to the *tertzetti* form, more commonly known as *terza rima*, where three-line stanzas incorporate an interlocking rhyme scheme (A-B-A, B-C-B, C-D-C, etc.) and culminate with either a rhyming couplet

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[29] Collette 249.

[30] All quotations included by Collette are from John Milton's *Complete Prose Works*, gen. ed. Don M. Wolfe, (New Haven, 1959).

[31] According to the 17th century antiquarian John Aubrey, who was confirmed to have closely consulted his friends and widow: "He was an early rise <*scil.* at 4 a clock *mane*>; yea, after he lost his sight, He had a man read to him. The first thing he read was the Hebrew bible, and that was at 4h. *mane*, ½ h. plus. Then he contemplated" (*The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton,* xxviii.)

or, as is the case with Milton's translation of Psalm 2, a single line. *Terza rima* was first used by Dante Alighieri for his *Divine Comedy*—thus Milton evokes epic struggle and good and evil by association. It is also, typically of Milton, rather untidy - unlike Dante's or Spencer's use of the form, the ends of Milton's lines are rarely bracketed with punctuation. This enjambment leads the ends of lines unresolved and hastens the reader's progress forward through the poem.

Choosing to use *terza rima* also serves to deemphasize the formal parallelism of the original Hebrew version. This is not surprising, as formal parallelism was not uncovered as the smallest organizational unit - a rough parallel to a rhyme scheme - of the psalmic style until Robert Lowth's lectures in the 18th century.[32] Formal parallelism is described in the introduction to *The Sidney Psalter*: *the Psalms of Sir Philip and Mary Sidney* as "most simply, a statement is made, then a second statement follows with roughly the same meaning but different words. For example, Psalm 33 contains the verse, 'A horse is a vain help, and shall not deliver any by his great help', in which the second clause expresses the same idea with greater intensity and detail.'"[33] (p. x, Ps. 3 translation by Miles Coverdale for the Great Bible). Though this knowledge had yet to be fully articulated, some form of awareness existed, and seems to have bolstered the trend of rhymed translations in Early Modern England. Philip Sidney, Milton's contemporary and brother to the author of our other close reading asserted that the book of Psalms "is fully

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[32] See James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and It's History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); and Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985)

[33] Hannibal Hamlin, introduction to *The Sidney Psalter: the Psalms of Sir Philip and Mary Sidney* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), ix-xxxi.

written in metre, as all learned hebricians agree, although the rules be not yet fully found'.[34]

Though formal parallelism had yet to be articulated as the guiding structural principal of the psalms, (a realization hindered in Britain no doubt by prejudice against learning Hebrew) it was nonetheless understood on some level as evidenced by its provenance in most translations. Milton further enhances the distinctively Miltonic forward motion of his rendering by allowing units of formal parallelism to straddle tertzets, rather than resolving the formal parallel structure in lockstep with the poetic units - this is in staunch contrast to both the Hebrew original and the King James version - whose line structure retains its correspondence to units of formal parallelism as in the Hebrew original. The King James version translation is as follows:

> Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?
> The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together,
> against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying
> Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.[35]

The first unit of formal parallelism defines the first line here and in the original—(A) *lamah ragshu goyim,* (B) *ulumim yegu-rik?* Milton's verse structure creates a sense of jumping over the division between units:

> Why do the gentiles tumult, and the nations
> Muse a vain thing, the kings of th' earth upstand
> With power, and the princes in their congregations
> Lay deep their plots together through each land,
> Against the Lord and his Messiah dear?

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[34] *The Sidney Psalter,* 77.

[35] *The Bible: Authorized King James version with Apocrypha* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), Ps. 2:1-3.

Let us break off, say they, by strength of hand
Their bonds, and cast from us, no more to wear
Their twisted cords...[36]

This also creates the opportunity for Milton to use the heady and somewhat wild musicality brought about by the friction between these two competing organizational schemas to create new emphases in the text. By placing "lay deep their plots" at the beginning of a new tertzet he grants it additional emphasis and power, and by doing so in a way that creates dialectical frission between his own structure and the structure of formal parallelism, serves to emphasize in the structure of the translation itself the threat to order represented by the "tumulting gentiles."

Milton's knowledge of Hebrew is strongly evidenced here as well. The psalm opens *lamah rag'shu goyim*, which Robert Alter renders in his fairly literal, modern translation as "Why are the nations aroused."[37] *Goyim* is rendered in the King James version as "heathens" rather than nations. Milton very interestingly renders *goyim* as "gentiles" - a translation that both straddles the King James version and a more literal interpretation of the Hebrew original, but may also come out of the more modern meaning of the word *goyim* as it appears in Jewish liturgy.

Milton's first great liberty is to be found in these opening lines as well. Where *"vroz'nim nosdu-yachad"* might be literally translated as "the princes conspire together", this line is translated in the King James version as "the rulers take counsel together". Milton's translation expands this image in lines 3-4: "the princes in their congregations/

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[36] Milton, "Psalm 2" ll. 1-8.

[37] Ps. 2:1 (Alter)

Lay deep their plots together through each land." In addition to being much more dramatic, Milton's rendition paints a more specific portrait of the rebellious subjugated earthly rulers of the psalm—reinforcing their relationship to their own lands and thereby enhancing the sense of the conflict as being a *geo*political one but also serving to make them appear more numerous: "through *each* land."

I believe this choice may be inspired by Milton's own relation to the time. Milton felt personally beset by the Royalist armies in Scotland as well as the monarchal and Catholic powers that were in Europe. The European powers were threatened by England, and would likely in turn have seemed to Milton a constant threatening cloud on the horizon. At the same time, these other nations were to be instructed in the proper, Godly and free way to live exemplified by the Reformers in England, which would "blow the first *Evangelick Trumpet* to the *Nations*, holding up, as from a Hill, the new Lampe of *saving light* to all Christendome."[38] As Milton sees a typological relationship between Ancient Jerusalem and modern, Anglican and parliamentarian London, so too does he see in European "Christendome" *goyim* to be instructed as from a "Hill," Zion. From Milton's perspective, the *goyim* of the psalms were likely an analogue to the surrounding nations of his own day. Their need for religious enlightenment from London is made more explicit by Milton's creative addition to the text, in altering *vroz'nim nosdu-yachad* to "the princes *in their congregations*".[39]

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[38] Milton, "Of Reformation", in *Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton,* ed. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon (New York: Random House/ Modern Library, 2007), 809-10.

[39] Italics mine.

Milton draws further attention to this addition with the double-rhyme with “nations,” the only such rhyme in the psalm. In Milton’s time both Catholicism and competing forms of Protestantism were, in their “congregations,” grumbling about religious and political schisms, rebellions, and trouble-making when they should be heeding the standard born in London, Milton’s Jerusalem. Of course, by making explicit what is subtler and much more implicit in Milton’s translation I may be undermining, somewhat, the subtlety and feeling of universal and timeless truths to be found in poetic and general statement. Milton is never so crass as to explicitly get on his soapbox and expressly identify the correlation between the psalm content and his own perspective on contemporary political reality in the psalm translation itself. He is deeply on record for invoking psalms to that effect in pamphlets and other explicitly political documents such as *Eikonoklastes*-- so my theories are hardly out on a limb. It’s worth noting as well, that the product of his more explicit attempts at politicizing the psalms are much less powerful than his sweeping and epic psalm translation and are of comparably minuscule literary and spiritual value.

In lines 4-5 (“Lay deep their plots together through each land,/ Against the Lord and his Messiah dear?), Milton translates *M’shicho,* as “his Messiah—” a prime example of Christological typography for in the figure of David and may also be reflective of the common thinking of the time that the psalms were prophetic documents. It’s interesting, however, that Milton goes one step further than the King James version, which translates *M’shicho* more literally as “his anointed.” However, both translations render God’s later words to the psalmist at verse 7, “*b’ni atah,*” as “Thou art my Son” with a

capital “S”. In the original context, Robert Alter notes in the footnotes of his own translation, referring to a king as God’s anointed or son was very common practice in the Ancient Near East.[40] From a Christian perspective, of course, being God’s son and his anointed had developed a much more specific theological significance in the figure of Christ. In evoking it, Milton’s perspective of the Christ-like nature of the central figure of the psalm, imprinted in his translation, seems to align more or less with that of the King James version and by extension with the Church of England. As is typical of him, however, in rendering *M’shicho* as “His Messiah” rather than “His anointed” Milton takes this association one step further.

Milton’s personal and creative theology and theological and Messianic take on London’s role in the arc of history is further revealed in a creative and telling adaptation of the original Hebrew Psalm 2, verses 8-9 in the sixth and seventh tertzets:

> This day; ask of me, and the grant is made;
> As thy possession I on thee bestow
> Th’heathen, and as thy conquest to be swayed
> Earth’s utmost bounds: them shalt thou bring full low
> With iron scepter bruisd, and them disperse
> Like to a potters vessel shivered so.[41]

Here we find a significant departure from the spirit of the King James version, which again reveals both Milton’s brilliance for adding (or from his perspective, I would venture, simply revealing) additional layers of meaning through accurate but imaginative translation as he did earlier with the addition of “in their congregations.” God says to the

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[40] Alter 6

[41] Milton, “Psalm 2” ll. 16-21.

psalmist/anointed son at verse 8: "*she'al mimeni - v'etnah goyim nachalatecha; v'achuzat'cha afsei-aretz*." A more literal translation of this would be "Ask of me - and I will give the nations to you as your estate; and your holdings (to) the ends of the earth." In this ambiguity between ownership of the *goyim*, the nations, as land on the one hand and as subjugated peoples and perhaps slaves on the other, Milton finds space for his own interpretation. In contrast to his translation of *goyim* as "nations" in the first tertzet, emphasizing the antagonists as geopolitical bodies, he here translates the word as "heathens," ascribing the *goyim* a status not only as human personages but also as apostates. He reverses the more intuitive translation of the earlier and later use of the word "*goyim*" in the King James version as "nations" and "heathens." In doing so, God now grants to the protagonist of the psalm not the *nations* to the ends of the earth as an inheritance, but the *apostate*s, the people themselves, as an inheritance to the ends of the earth in terms of time as well as geography. In other words, Milton's translation finds in God's statements not just a promise for the expansion of land and national holdings, but of converts, and perhaps even a charge to seek them. Milton finds in the psalms, through his own creative and typographical perspective, a modern reflection of the ancient promise by God. Milton sees in the promise made to David, the psalmist, and to Christ, the anointed inheritor of David's role as shepherd of men from Zion, a promise that Milton worked towards in his own way in his own time. He hoped to enact God's will through his own in influencing the course of politics and religion towards his own ideals, with London as its epicenter. He here signals God's blessing over the English Protestant

values as the light and the future of Europe—he is sounding the *"Evangelick Trumpet"* promised in "Of Reformation".

Translating the final verse is the most thorny, as the Masoretic text of the Hebrew most likely contains a crux. According to Robert Alter, *nakshu-bar* (2:12) is the first crux of the psalms. "As they stand, they make little sense, and the most elaborate efforts have been undertaken - none very convincing - to make the text mean something by extensive reconstructive surgery."[42] Alter goes on to elucidate that among the most sensible routes is revocalizing *"bar,"* which one might translate as "son" or even "wheat" as "*bor:"* "Purity." *Nakshu* can mean "to kiss" but it can also mean "to bear arms" as in Psalm 78:9, Chronicles 12:2, and 2 Chronicles 17:17. Robert Alter thus translates *nakshu-bar* as "with purity be armed"[43]; similarly, the Jewish Publication Society translates this phrase as "do homage in purity."[44]

From a Christian perspective, in which the psalms are prophetic, the passage appears much less problematic. The King James version translation of the psalm renders *nakshu-bar, pen ye'enaf* as "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry." The crux in the Masoretic text is, from my modern Jewish perspective, deeply convenient to the translator or redactor responsible for the version in the King James Bible, most likely Coverdale. Not only does it easily allow for an interpretation involving a prophetic relationship to Jesus, it also creates the opportunity to invoke a host of Christian resonances: it evokes the

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[42] Alter 7.

[43] Ps. 2:12 (Alter).

[44] Ps. 2:12 (Jewish Publication Society, *[Tanakh] = JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh : the Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation--Second Edition* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999).)

kissing of Jesus' feet by sinners as in Luke 7:36-50, a model for repentance and submission to Christ and the Church, as well as the kissing of the altar and cross which is so central to the choreography of the Anglican service that would constitute the King James Bible's primary venue.

Milton translates the verse, however, as:

> and let your joy converse
> With trembling; kiss the Son lest he appear
> In anger and ye perish in the way,
> If once his wrath take fire like fuel sere.
> Happy all those who have in him their stay.[45]

Milton suggests that Jesus (or God) might "*appear* in anger,"[46] not "be angry" or "rage," which would be the most literal translation; he explicitly invokes the threat of Jesus' appearance or manifestation in anger, not merely that he would be angry. Furthermore, in the lines that follow, there is a more intense evocation in Milton's translation than either the Hebrew or the King James version of burning and fire. In emphasizing Jesus' appearance in anger and the resulting *flames* of his wrath beyond these other versions I believe Milton is making the choice to consciously evoke imagery from the book of Revelations regarding Hell and Armageddon - both objects of Milton's interest judging by the themes of Paradise Lost, as well as themes familiar to the loping meter favored by Dante. Perhaps Milton envisions a fiery punishment for the armies and detractors that loom in his own time.

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[45] Milton, "Psalm 2", ll. 24-28.

[46] Italics my own.

In the final line, “Happy all those who have in him their stay,” Milton reverses the subject and object of both the King James version and the Hebrew original “*Ashrei*, kol-chosei vo:” “Happy, all who shelter in Him.” Rather, Milton seems to empower the believer not as one who submits his will as explained by another power, but as one who accepts God and Jesus into his heart, presumably thereby gaining power and holiness. Milton accomplishes this both in the thematic content of his psalm translation, as well as in his choice - unusual even today - to not capitalize pronouns (he/him) referring to God; this grammatical or stylistic choice brings the God of Milton’s Psalm 2 into more direct conversation with the individual speaker. This is in keeping with the Protestant ethic that the most ideal relationship with God is one reached through private prayer, reflection and choice.

Milton’s personal political and theological concerns powerfully impacted his translation of Psalm 2. Milton was a man of deep personal faith and conviction. As he believed that the psalm he translated was a holy and prophetic document, and as his relationship to it would have been a prayerful one characterized by seeking guidance and looking for the word of God, it is not a great stretch to imagine that he found that word there. The will and message of God in Psalm 2, as has been the case with all biblical literature for so many great minds in history, reflected for Milton the will of God as all the best and most inspired things in his own view of the world. This is deeply ingrained in the text of Milton’s translation. In embedding his own values and interpretations, Milton not only extended his pamphleteering to his other, more creative, work; he also

allowed the psalm to better reflect what was specific to the great struggles and conditions of his own time, sharpening and enhancing its grip on the Early Modern English mind.

All translations do this - some more obviously than others. There has yet to be a translator without beliefs. Does this make translations, in some way, impure? Certainly - as impure as any attempt to discuss God with words. I do not unpack Milton from his translation cynically. I believe it is holy work. I propose to the reader, however, that we not be naïve in how we regard translation of holy text. It is political. And it reflects the image of God which resonates best for the translator and the image of God, and a relationship with God, that the translator wishes to propagate.

Let us move forward, then, in a spirit of honesty about what we do as guides of the Jewish people. Let us do it as our moralities, and sensibilities, and as God guides us - and let us not attempt to hide our own tracks.

Part Two: The Sidney Psalter, Hebrew Scholarship, and "Theise Most Active Times"

תהלים 102[47]

א תְּפִלָּה, לְעָנִי כִי-יַעֲטֹף-- וְלִפְנֵי יְהוָה, יִשְׁפֹּךְ שִׂיחוֹ.
ב יְהוָה, שִׁמְעָה תְפִלָּתִי; וְשַׁוְעָתִי, אֵלֶיךָ תָּבוֹא.
ג אַל-תַּסְתֵּר פָּנֶיךָ, מִמֶּנִּי-- בְּיוֹם צַר-לִי: הַטֵּה-אֵלַי אָזְנֶךָ; בְּיוֹם אֶקְרָא, מַהֵר עֲנֵנִי.
ד כִּי-כָלוּ בְעָשָׁן יָמָי; וְעַצְמוֹתַי, כְּמוֹקֵד נִחָרוּ.
ה הוּכָּה-כָעֵשֶׂב וַיִּבַשׁ לִבִּי: כִּי-שָׁכַחְתִּי, מֵאֲכֹל לַחְמִי.
ו מִקּוֹל אַנְחָתִי-- דָּבְקָה עַצְמִי, לִבְשָׂרִי.
ז דָּמִיתִי, לִקְאַת מִדְבָּר; הָיִיתִי, כְּכוֹס חֳרָבוֹת.
ח שָׁקַדְתִּי וָאֱהִיֶה-- כְּצִפּוֹר, בּוֹדֵד עַל-גָּג.
ט כָּל-הַיּוֹם, חֵרְפוּנִי אוֹיְבָי; מְהוֹלָלַי, בִּי נִשְׁבָּעוּ.
י כִּי-אֵפֶר, כַּלֶּחֶם אָכָלְתִּי; וְשִׁקֻּוַי, בִּבְכִי מָסָכְתִּי.
יא מִפְּנֵי-זַעַמְךָ וְקִצְפֶּךָ-- כִּי נְשָׂאתַנִי, וַתַּשְׁלִיכֵנִי.
יב יָמַי, כְּצֵל נָטוּי; וַאֲנִי, כָּעֵשֶׂב אִיבָשׁ.
יג וְאַתָּה יְהוָה, לְעוֹלָם תֵּשֵׁב; וְזִכְרְךָ, לְדֹר וָדֹר.
יד אַתָּה תָקוּם, תְּרַחֵם צִיּוֹן: כִּי-עֵת לְחֶנְנָהּ, כִּי-בָא מוֹעֵד.

[48]Psalm 102 (Geneva)

1 O Lord hear my prayer, and let my cry come unto thee.
2 Hide not thy face from me in the time of my trouble: incline thine ears unto me, when I call, make haste to hear me.
3 For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burnt like an hearth.
4 Mine heart is smitten, and withered like grass, because I forgat to eat my bread.
5 For the voice of my groaning, my bones do cleave to my skin.
6 I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the deserts.
7 I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top.
8 Mine enemies revile me daily, *and* they that rage against me, have sworn against me.
9 Surely I have eaten ashes as bread, and mingled my drink with weeping,
10 Because of thine indignation and thy wrath: for thou hast heaved me up, and cast me down.
11 My days *are* like a shadow that fadeth, and I am withered like grass.
12 But thou, O Lord, dost remain forever, and thy remembrance from generation to generation.
13 Thou wilt arise *and* have mercy upon Zion: for the time to have mercy thereon, for the appointed time is come.
14 For thy servants delight in the stones thereof, and have pity on the dust thereof.

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[47] Psalm 102 (Mechon-Mamre, accessed January 26, 2014, http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt26a2.htm)

[48] Psalm 102 in *The Geneva Bible: a facsimile of the 1560 edition*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007.)

טו כִּי-רָצוּ עֲבָדֶיךָ, אֶת-אַבָנֶיהָ; וְאֶת-עֲפָרָהּ, יְחֹנֵנוּ.
טז וְיִירְאוּ גוֹיִם, אֶת-שֵׁם יְהוָה; וְכָל-מַלְכֵי הָאָרֶץ, אֶת-כְּבוֹדֶךָ
יז כִּי-בָנָה יְהוָה צִיּוֹן--נִרְאָה, בִּכְבוֹדוֹ.
יח פָּנָה, אֶל-תְּפִלַּת הָעַרְעָר; וְלֹא-בָזָה, אֶת-תְּפִלָּתָם.
יט תִּכָּתֵב זֹאת, לְדוֹר אַחֲרוֹן; וְעַם נִבְרָא, יְהַלֶּל-יָהּ..
כ כִּי-הִשְׁקִיף, מִמְּרוֹם קָדְשׁוֹ; יְהוָה, מִשָּׁמַיִם אֶל-אֶרֶץ הִבִּיט.
כא לִשְׁמֹעַ, אֶנְקַת אָסִיר; לְפַתֵּחַ, בְּנֵי תְמוּתָה.
כב לְסַפֵּר בְּצִיּוֹן, שֵׁם יְהוָה; וּתְהִלָּתוֹ, בִּירוּשָׁלָם.
כג בְּהִקָּבֵץ עַמִּים יַחְדָּו; וּמַמְלָכוֹת, לַעֲבֹד אֶת-יְהוָה.
כד עִנָּה בַדֶּרֶךְ כֹּחוֹ (כֹּחִי); קִצַּר יָמָי.
כה אֹמַר--אֵלִי, אַל תַּעֲלֵנִי בַּחֲצִי יָמָי: בְּדוֹר דּוֹרִים שְׁנוֹתֶיךָ.
כו לְפָנִים, הָאָרֶץ יָסַדְתָּ; וּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדֶיךָ שָׁמָיִם.
כז הֵמָּה, יֹאבֵדוּ--וְאַתָּה תַעֲמֹד: וְכֻלָּם, כַּבֶּגֶד יִבְלוּ; כַּלְבוּשׁ תַּחֲלִיפֵם וְיַחֲלֹפוּ.
כח וְאַתָּה-הוּא; וּשְׁנוֹתֶיךָ, לֹא יִתָּמּוּ.
כט בְּנֵי-עֲבָדֶיךָ יִשְׁכֹּונוּ; וְזַרְעָם, לְפָנֶיךָ יִכּוֹן.

15 Then the heathen shall fear the Name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth thy glory,
16 When the Lord shall build up Zion, *and* shall appear in his glory,
17 *And* shall turn unto the prayer of the desolate, and not despise their prayer.
18 This shall be written for the generation to come: and the people which shall be created, shall praise the Lord.
19 For he hath looked down from the height of his Sanctuary: out of the heaven did the Lord behold the earth,
20 That he might hear the mourning of the prisoner, and deliver the children of death.
21 That they may declare the Name of the Lord in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem,
22 When the people shall be gathered together, and the kingdoms to serve the Lord.
23 He abated my strength in the way, *and* shortened my days.
24 *And* I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days: thy years *endure* from generation to generation.
25 Thou hast aforetime laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens *are* the work of thine hands.
26 They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: even they all shall wax old as doth a garment: as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed.
27 But thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.
28 The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall stand fast in thy sight.

Psalm 102: *Domine, exaudi*[49]

O Lord, my praying hear:
Lord, let my cry come to thine ear.
Hide not they face away,
But haste, and answer me,
In this my most, most miserable day,
Wherein I pray, and cry to thee.

My days as smoke are past:
My bones as flaming fuel waste,
Mown down in me (alas
With scythe of sharpest pain.
My heart is withered like the wounded grass;
My stomach does all food distain.

So lean my woes me leave,
That to my flesh my bones do cleave:
And so I bray and howl
As use to howl and bray
The lonely pelican and desert owl,
Like whom I languish long the day.

I languish so the day,
The night in watch I waste away;
Right as the sparrow sits
Bereft of spouse, or son,
Which irked alone with dolour's deadly fits
To company will not be won.

As day to day succeeds,
So shame on shame to me proceeds
From them that do me hate,
Who of my wrack so boast
That wishing ill, they wish but my esatate,
Yet think they wish of ills the most.

Therefore my bread is clay,
Therefore my tears be wine allay:
For how else should it be,
Sith thou still angry art,

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[49] Mary Sidney, "Psalm 102" in *The Sidney Psalter*, 191-194.

And seem’st for naught to have advanced me,
But me advanced to subvert?

The sun of my life-days
Inclines to west with falling rays,
And I as hay am dried,
While yet in steadfast seat
Eternal thou eternally dost bide,
Thy memory no years can fret.

Oh then at length arise:
On Zion cast thy mercy’s eyes
Now is the time that thou
To mercy shouldst incline
Concerning her: O Lord, the time is now
Thyself for mercy didst assign.

Thy servants wait the day
When she who like a carcass lay
Stretched forth in ruin’s bier,
Shall so arise and live,
That nations all Jehovah’s name shall fear
All kings to thee shall glory give.

Because thou hast anew
Mad Zion stand, restored to view
Thy glorious presence there,
Because thou hast, I say,
Beheld our woes and not refused to hear
What wretched we did plaining pray,

This of record shall bide
To this an every age beside:
And they commend thee shall
Whom thou anew shalt make,
That from the prospect of thy heav’nly hall
Thy eye of earth survey did take,

Heark’ning to prisoners’ groans,
And setting free condemned ones:
That they, when nations come,
And realms to serve the Lord
In Zion and in Salem might become

Fir means his honour to record.

But what is this if I
In the mid way should fall and die?
My God, to thee I pray,
Who canst my prayer give:
Turn not to night the noontide of my day,
Since endless thou dost ageless live.

The earth, the heaven stands
Once founded, formed by thy hands:
They perish, thou shalt bide;
They old, as clothes, shall wear,
Till changing still, full change shall them betide
Unclothed of all the clothes they bear.

But thou art one, still one:
Time interest in thee hath none.
Then hope, who godly be,
Or come of godly race:
Endless your bliss, as never ending he,
His presence your unchanged place.

The "Sidney Psalter," begun by Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586) and finished after his death by his sister, Mary (1561-1621), the Countess of Pembroke, bears the imprint of numerous influences across many languages, suggesting a profound degree of scholarship and drive as well as a strong adherence to Reformation and Calvinist values of independent biblical scholarship and devotion. Though it was thought for years that Philip's role was the dominant one in the authorship of this influential volume, modern scholarship shows that Mary wrote all translations from Psalm 44 until the end of the psalter, and edited her brother's work on the first forty-three psalms.[50]

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[50] Hannibal Hamlin, et. al., introduction to *The Sidney Psalter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), xii-xv.

In addition to the original Hebrew, in which much scholarship of the last decade suggests she was deeply knowledgeable,[51] Mary also consulted various translations of the psalms in English, French, and Latin: "In English, [Philip and Mary] used the prose versions of the Book of Common Prayer… and the Geneva Bible. In French, the artful verse translations of Marot and Beza in *Les CL. Pseumes de David, mis en rime Francoise* (1562) were an important source."[52] While he served as Edward VI's representative at French Court in 1551 and '52, Philip gained early access to many of the Huguenot translations as they grew in popularity in France. Though the "French Psalter" had not at that time been completed by Beza following Marot's death, Marot's psalms were making substantial waves in France among those with Reformist inclinations, and were under attack by the Catholic Church.[53] The French Psalter is an especially important influence, as it was the only Psalter preceding the Sidneys' own that incorporated such a wide array of styles, form, and meter to illuminate the holy texts in any *lingua franca*.

In addition, the Sidneys consulted the psalm commentaries of Calvin and Beza, available in English translation. Their research was wide-ranging, including nearly every available resource; they "read and occasionally incorporated details from the Matthew, Bishops' and other English Bibles, the psalters of Sternhold and Hopkins, Robert

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[51] For more on this, consult Chanita Goodblatt's excellent article, *'High Holy Muse': Christian Hebraism and Jewish Exegesis in the Sidneian Psalmes*. Previously, Sidney scholars had generally concluded that Mary's Hebrew knowledge was minimal. That assumption is now being reassessed and there is very substantial evidence to the contrary in both historical testimony and in close readings of her translations.

[52] Introduction to *The Sidney Psalter,* xviii.

[53] Margaret P. Hannay, *Philip's Phoenix: Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 85.

Crowley, and Matthew Parker, select Psalms translations by George Gascoigne and Anne Vaughan Lock… and the Latin commentaries of Victorinus Strigelius…., Franciscus Vatablus, and Immanuel Tremellius."[54]

Despite this wide variety of influences, Mary's translations, are tremendously original, though they are faithful to the tropes of the Masoretic and Genevan texts. They often expand upon the statements of the original psalm through intrabiblical allusion, as occurs frequently in Psalm 102, of which I will be doing a close reading. Furthermore, imagery of physicality and of the condition of the body reflecting emotional and theological states, are expanded on with tremendous poetic power-- particularly those passages illustrating struggles with theodicy. These literary qualities are present throughout the psalter but are particularly exemplified by Mary's translation of Psalm 102.

The Sidney Psalter as a whole displays a virtuousic variety and ingenuity of stanza and form meter—so notably that Hallet Smith describes the Sidney Psalter as "a

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[54] Introduction to *The Sidney Psalter,* xviii.

School of English Versification."[55][56] Indeed, the Sidneys, and Mary in particular, were incredibly important figures in establishing a new body of literary excellence in England as patrons and Muses. Mary made of her estate at Wilton a literary salon that would be foundational to the work of Edmund Spenser, John Donne and others.[57] Many poets memorialized her as a great muse; John Donne refers to Philip and Mary as a modern, British Moses and Miriam, writing that "both told us what, and taught us how to doe… They tell us *why,*and teach us *how* to sing."[58]

Though the psalter displays an array of formal virtuosity and variety, it does so always in service to the content of the psalms, and its adherence to the tropes of the original is matched only by the originality with which those tropes are arrayed. This is amply demonstrated by a brief look at Mary's translation of Psalm 55. The basic unit of

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[55] Hallett Smith, "English Metrical Palms in the Sixteenth Century and Their Literary Significance", *Huntington Library Quarterly* 9 (1946), 269.

[56] For example: "The Sidneys wrote in both iambic and trochaic metres… the Sidneys use rhyme royal (an invention of Chaucer, used in 51, 63), the common metre stanza of 'Sternhold and Hopkins' (19, though with feminine rhymes in odd lines), and both Spenserian and Sidneian sonnets (100 and 150, respectively)… the Sidneys also borrowed *terza rima*… and *ottava rima* (78)… From classical verse, Mary appropriated quantitative elegaics (123), hexameters (122), anacreontics (127) and sapphics (125), and phaelacian hendecasyllables (121); she also imitated the alphabetical forms of the Hebrew Psalms (111 and also 119, the latter according to the first letter of each section)… and Mary's Psalms borrow some stanza forms that Philip invented for his secular poems in *Astrophil and Stella, Certain Sonnets,* and the *Arcadia* (99, 142, 143, 146)… Many of the Sidney's stanza forms appear to be their own inventions, however, and this formal ingenuity shaped the subsequent poetry of Herbert, Vaughan, and their imitators." (Introduction to *The Sidney Psalter*, xxiii-xxiv.)

[57] Hannay, 84.

[58] John Donne, "Upon the Translation of the Psalms by Sir Philip Sidney, and the Countess of Pembroke his Sister" in *The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Donne,* ed. Charles M. Coffin *(*New York: Modern Library Classics, 2001), 367.

the rhyme scheme is the number 3, meant to reflect the trinity. The total number of lines is 72, which is the number of letter of the name of God in the Kabbalistic tradition. Furthermore, "in its arrangements on the page… each stanza resembles a pair of wings, visually embodying in the structure of her translation the desire expressed in verse 6 of the biblical Psalm 55: 'O that I had wings like a dove, for then I would fly away and be at rest.'"[59]

My own scholarship is not adequately extensive to examine Latin and French sources in a close reading, most notably the "French Psalter" which was undoubtedly influential to the Sidneys. I will be comparing Mary's translation of Psalm 102 with the Hebrew original and the version from 1559 Geneva Bible. The Geneva Bible was a tremendously influential document and is widely considered to have been the first "Study Bible" (a radical Reformation concept at the time), containing guides to the reading as well as extensive marginal notes on the text which draw from Calvinist and Reformation ideologies (and were in fact written by John Calvin and Beza). The Geneva Bible also incorporates a wide variety of interpretations, including some with origins in Rashi and other aspects of Rabbinical tradition. Though this Bible was favored by Elizabeth, it was also rooted in hard-line early Reformation ideals. The Great Bible and its third edition, the King James Bible, by contrast, were closely associated with the Church of England, which sought moderate customs, rituals and theologies which would still be familiar to those with one foot in Catholicism. For that reason, the Great Bible was associated with those in Elizabeth's time who wished to steer the Church of England away from more

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[59] Ps. 55:6 (Alter).

hardline Reformist movements such as Calvinism. As time passed, the Geneva Bible became increasingly associated with not only those with strong Calvinist bents but even breakaway movements such as the Puritans, and as such it was the first bible to be brought with them to the New World.

In addition to the Geneva Bible of 1559, I will also contrast Mary's translation with the original Hebrew Masoretic text, and additionally will be consulting Robert Alter's translation as an exemplar of a minimally interpretive translation, as well as the "Sternhold and Hopkins," as a more typical example of metered, rhymed translation of the Sidneys' era.[60] The Sternhold and Hopkins psalter was an inexpensive and widely distributed collection in common, ballad meter. It represents the most widely known, even ubiquitous metrical version of the psalms from the Sidneys' day, but is regarded by most modern scholars, as well as by many from its own time, as having little literary merit.[61]

The Sidney Psalter is not without a political dimension, as well. Mary had a long relationship with Queen Elizabeth, having spent many years at court as her attendant and part of Elizabeth's inner circle. Mary completed the psalter in time for Queen Elizabeth I's visit to her estate at Wilton in 1599, where she presented the queen with a bound copy containing two dedicatory poems, "Even now that care," and "To the Angel Spirit of the Most Excellent Sir Philip Sidney." The royal flattery of "Even now that care," a dedication to Elizabeth, is somewhat subdued in comparison with the usual expectations

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[60] See Appendix A for the full text of each of these translations.

[61] For more on this, see Hamlin, "Introduction", in *Psalm Culture and Early Modern English Literature*.

of the Elizabethan court,[62] where elaborate and creative flattery was highly encouraged. The poem charges Elizabeth as monarch, in a tradition established in the forward to the Geneva Bible (of which Elizabeth had a treasured copy) as well as the "French Psalter," with upholding the interests of the new Church against Catholicism by invoking comparisons between her person and office with analogues from ancient Israel who fought the influence and military threat of surrounding countries. Elizabeth is compared especially to King David, in keeping with a comparison made by Elizabeth herself in her own youthful translation of Psalm 13. According to Margaret P. Hannay's analysis in *Philip's Phoenix: Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke*, even the compliments to Elizabeth contain Mary's charge that the fate of Europe "rest in her hands: she is the one on whom in chiefe dependeth to dispose / what Europe acts in theise most active times." Hannay explains that "active" is a code word meaning "busy in the Protestant cause." An example of this usage, Hannay elucidates, is found in Fulke de Greville's dedication of his own work to her departed brother, *Dedication to Sir Philip Sidney.* According to Hannay, "'those active times' is a code phrase referring to the Protestant interventionism of Elizabeth's reign, as contrasted with 'the narrow salves of this effeminate age,' the Stuart period… Like her family and like the Genevan Protestants, Mary Sidney believed that Elizabeth herself was the key to the establishment of the Protestant faith, in Continental Europe as well as England. If she functioned as a godly monarch, these would become 'active times.' To the Sidneys, her efforts were feeble, inadequate to the task."

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[62] Hannay, 90.

Sidney further lionizes and memorializes her brother through both of the dedicatory poems, reminding Elizabeth of his death during a war she underfunded and inadequately supported, according to Hannay. “If the countess is barred by her sex from political councils and from the battlefield, she will use her pen. Thus by reminding the queen of Philip’s death in the first half of the dedication, Mary Sidney was continuing the family tradition of seeking to influence Elizabeth toward a more radical Protestant stance.”[63]

Mary’s rhyme scheme, AABCBC, is known as an “inverted stanza” or a French sizain[64], and is typified by two units, AAB and CBC, with competing saliences tied up with the rhyme scheme. In other words, AAB and CBC are discrete units from each other, but at the same time there is an additional bridge for thematic commonality along with the rhyme of the B unit. This creates both creative opportunities, as well as a sense of disjointedness. This sense is furthered by the forms’ unusualness - it is essentially a backwards version of a much more traditional and harmonious rhyme scheme - appropriate for a penitential psalm invoking loss, desolation, and issues of theodicy. The form itself reflects the sense of unrightness in the suffering of the believer or Jerusalem at the hands of her enemies. More on that later.

The rhythmic scheme is also consistent and somewhat oblong. Line by line, it is consistently 3-4-3-3-5-3. Thus, the patterning can be remembered as A3-A4-B3-C3-B5-C3. It is the penultimate line, B5, that tends to invoke the greatest sense of an emotional

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[63] Hannay, 91

[64] Jean-Louis Aroui and Andy Arleo, eds., *Towards a Typology of Poetic Forms: From language to metrics and beyond* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2009), 31.

swelling, released in the final line with the sense of a sigh, or perhaps a "bray," as in Mary's third verse (a much less indelicate word at the time, associated not with donkeys but with deer, and referring to a sort of crying sound). [65]

In the first stanza, Mary emphasizes the despondency of the psalmist in measure equal to or even greater than that of the original Hebrew. *"B'yom tzar li",* which I would render "on the day of my troubles", becomes in Mary's adaptation "In this my most, most miserable day".[66] The Geneva bible, known for being more emotionally driving than the King James Version, merely translates this line as "in my time of trouble." Here is a perfect example of the emotional tenor of Mary's more despondent translations. Mary displays a preference for increasing the emotional intensity and immediacy relative to other English translations of her day, though she never does so cheaply, and always works will within emotional spaces implied in the original.

The text of Mary's second verse reflects an inter-biblical relationship with Ecclesiastes that is also present in the Hebrew as well as the Geneva Bible's translation. This relationship is present through the the invocation of despondency and mortality in the expression "withered like grass," *"hukah cha'eisev."* Mary goes a step farther in her embellishment, however, borrowing language of starvation and divine neglect from early Lamentations and describing in detail the broken body of the penitent as evidence of the darkness of her days:

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[65] "bray, v.1", OED Online (Oxford University Press), last modified December 2013, accessed January 28, 2014, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/22839?rskey=xg6bMR&result=4

[66] Mary Sidney, "Psalm 102", ln. 5.

My days as smoke are past:
My bones as flaming fuel waste,
Mown down in me (alas
[10] With scythe of sharpest pain.
My heart is withered like the wounded grass;
My stomach does all food distain.[67]

The language of the "scythe of sharpest pain" is wholly original, but both the Hebrew and the Geneva refer to one's bones as being like a hearth, so the "bones as flaming fuel" are her own descriptive addition and evoke Lamentations 1:13, "From above hath he sent fire into my bones, and it prevaileth against them: he hath spread a net for my feet, he hath turned me back: he hath made me desolate and faint all the day." (KJV) This strengthens and enhances the evocation of the subject as an analogue for Jerusalem as is the case with the figures of the Widow and the Harlot in Lamentations. In more directly incorporating this material (which she does again in lines 50-51), Mary Sidney further increases the sense of the femaleness of the subject, as the Jerusalem of Lamentations is very distinctly female; a female acted upon and victimized by chaotic forces, but containing also the potential for regeneration and nourishment of God's people and plan.

As the psalmist was believed by all parties at that time to have invariably been David, this alteration increases resonances in Sidney's translation of Psalm 102 with the figure of Queen Elizabeth, to whom the Psalter was in part dedicated and who is compared to David, the psalmist, in the dedicatory poem.

Mary was, like Elizabeth, a female of inestimable ingenuity who retained their female persona while also rosing to a position as an "honorary man" through cleverly

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[67] Mary Sidney, "Psalm 102", ll. 7-12.

working around, massaging or creatively exploiting the normative gender roles of early modern England. Elizabeth retained sole custody of the throne by creating for herself a persona as “Virgin Queene,” while retaining power and influence through flirtation and the encouragement of suitors, while at the same time assuming a sort of maleness through her transubstantiation as embodiment of the land of England itself. Mary became a literary powerhouse through her wealth, influence, by working in a literary form supporting an image of demure female piety, and by sharing ostensible authorship with her deceased and respected brother even as she created the foundation of Early Modern English poetry through her mentorship and example

In this moment in her Psalm 102 and throughout the Psalter, Mary uses her scholarship and ingenuity to tie together meanings in such a way as to create a reading of the Bible that is both uniquely feminine and tied to the struggles with power and powerlessness experienced by women - an experience best embodied in her own time by the recipient of the poem itself, Elizabeth. Here as elsewhere, enhancements of the language of embodiment are one of the primary devices by which she carves out this new literary space.

Jerusalem and Zion are not mentioned in the Hebrew original (or the Geneva) until verse 14, halfway through the psalm, and the association between the city and the subject is vastly looser. Mary’s allusions to Lamentations make this relationship much more explicit. This is an example not only of Mary’s tendency to enhance female embodiment, but also of a second powerful thematic tendency in Mary’s translations - the theme of Jerusalem tends to be maximally teased out, and its implicit invocation in the

Hebrew original or the Geneva Bible tends to be made more explicit throughout the Sidney Psalter. As her translations are also a political document aimed, in the tradition of the Geneva Bible and the "French Psalter," at swaying how the monarchy directs the development of the church, this is a logical web of associations to build and strengthen. Mary shares with Milton a desire to build in London a new, Protestant, Jerusalem which will act as a light to the nations through literature and government,[68] as revealed in part by her charge to Elizabeth in the dedicatory poem for the psalter.[69]

In the fourth verse, Mary writes:

> I languish so the day,
> The night in watch I waste away;
> Right as the sparrow sits
> Bereft of spouse, or son,
> Which irked alone with dolour's deadly fits
> To company will not be won.[70]

This is a substantial expansion upon line 7-8 of the Hebrew original and 6-7 of the Geneva Bible, which reads: "I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the deserts./ I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top." Mary furthers the language of depression and despondency in the final two lines of this stanza just as she did in verse two regarding bread; the psalmist is unable to summon in herself the ability to take sustenance from life, and so, the despondency that is alluded to is not only one of

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[68] For more on this, see Kimberly Anne Coles, "A new Jerusalem" in *Religion, Reform, and Women's Writing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 113-148.

[69] "Even now that care," in which the fate of Europe "rest in her hands: she is the one on whom in chiefe dependeth to dispose / what Europe acts in theise most active times." (*The Sidney Psalter*, 5).

[70] Mary Sidney, "Psalm 102", ll. 19-24.

historical circumstances but is more closely tied to individual emotions as well: a portrait of depression or perhaps an inability to receive God's blessings originating in something out of alignment in the self, a portrait of a soul racked by heavy theological concerns, a sense of being wronged or unjustly served, and doubts.

The bereftness of spouse or son in lines 22-23 is a wholly original expansion upon the psalmist's lonely insomnia. I believe there are many deep layers of meaning to be found in this addition. In the Protestant ethic, Jesus, the "Son" of the trinity, is like a husband to the Christian soul, as exemplified by the King James Bible translation of Isaiah 54:5: "For thy Maker is thine husband*;* the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called."[71] [72] Furthermore, there is a long tradition among female British mystics who also reject the fetters of the traditional gender roles to relate their heightened spirituality as a marriage to Jesus. Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, for example, were both known to have reflected deeply on their marriages to Christ in their own devotional writings. Being without a spouse or son, therefore, is likely a reference to the same inability to receive nourishment as when unable to eat (verse 2) or socialize, but the nourishment unable to be received is the "Son" himself. To the inability to take food or friendship Mary expressly ties to to being without the touch of God in one's life-- locating the suffering as one that originates from within as much as it does from the circumstances of the protagonist. Though the expression will not be coined until two years after the completion of her psalter, Mary describes a "dark night of the soul," teasing it out from

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[71] See also Rev. 19:7-9, 21:1-27.

[72] Of course, nuns and other monastic figures accept a "marriage to Christ," as well.

its more primordial implication within the language of the original psalm and reframing the psalm as a whole to more directly reflect a specific psychological state which most people experience at some point in their lives - a state which appears to have been a hot topic of the time.

Of course, this reading does not preclude more historical and political facets to the same turn of phrase. Elizabeth, the “Virgin Queene” to whom the psalm was dedicated, was of course also without a spouse or son - a condition which meant national unease and uncertainty for England. So Mary also cleverly expresses the national historical anxieties of the time in the same phrase. A monarch, a “royal we,” is of course also seen as embodying in their person the whole country (and this is especially true of Elizabeth), which corresponds again to both the “ruined body” and the ruined/rebuilt modern Jerusalem. The verse thus serves as a prime example of a cyclical invocation of a trinity of layers of meaning underlying Mary’s Psalm 102. In a single verse, Mary Sidney aptly and originally describes an individual emotional state, the state of the body, and the state of the body politic or historical circumstances surrounding it, creating ties in all cases between biblical and contemporary readers and circumstances. In doing so, she applies herself to extending the inborn nature of the psalms as a form that is at once deeply personal and universal.

As the psalm progresses, Mary’s own creative and religious genius is further awakened, and she takes increasingly greater liberties with the original text. Verses 13-14 of the Geneva Bible (corresponding to 14-15 in the Hebrew) reflect the literal meaning of the original quite closely:

[13] Thou wilt arise *and* have mercy upon Zion:
for the time to have mercy thereon, for the appointed time is come.
[14] For thy servants delight in the stones thereof,
and have pity on the dust thereof.

Mary writes:

Oh then at length arise:
On Zion cast thy mercy's eyes
Now is the time that thou
To mercy shouldst incline
Concerning her: O Lord, the time is now
Thyself for mercy didst assign.

Thy servants wait the day...[73]

Through Mary's translation, the psalmist compels God to fulfill his promise of mercy and of rebuilding Zion. The word "now" is imported and repeated, bracketing the verse in prominent positions at the beginning of line 45 and the end of 47, creating an interlocking thematic patterning reinforced by meter and rhyme which can be boiled down to: "Now-Mercy-Now-Mercy." The relationship with God is immediate, petitionary, and fully reestablished in the context of rebuilding Zion "now," in the present time and place.

This request is not only an urgent demand to God, but also to the contemporary readership, first among whom is Mary's friend the Queen, the "one on whom in chiefe dependeth to dispose / what Europe acts in theise most active times."[74] I posit that she is establishing a model for prayer, finding and revealing in the psalm what she understands to be the desire of God - that England be established as a Protestant Zion and a "light

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[73] Mary Sidney, "Psalm 102", ll. 43-49

[74] Mary Sidney, "Even Now that Care", in *The Sidney Psalter*, 5, ll. 7-8.

unto the nations." In creating this model for prayer, building it out of and ascribing it again to David, the psalmist, and comparing Elizabeth to that psalmist and dedicating the translation to her, Mary has written not only a psalm for England generally, but a liturgy for Elizabeth specifically. Through her translation, Mary is outlining the challenges of the nation as she perceives them and attempting to guide Elizabeth's prayer and meditations toward adapting the same few and the same charge to change it. Is anything more personal or more political possible?

I believe that Mary understood thoroughly what was expressed perfectly by Mahatma Ghandi more than 400 years later: "Prayer is not an old woman's idle amusement. Properly understood and applied, it is the most potent instrument of action."[75] Neither Mary nor Elizabeth were idle (or old, at the time), and their prayers undoubtedly guided their actions, which altered the course of history. Did they thereby create on Earth a closer approximation of the new Jerusalem to which they aspired? That is an entirely different debate. I like to think, however, that though the new Jerusalem - an analogue and perhaps even typology for our Modern Liberal Jewish hopes for a Messianic era - is a work in process, and that we are indeed closer as a result of continued guidance from scripture as it touches and blooms forth from our own hearts, minds, and hands. It undoubtedly did in the case of Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke.

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[75] "Gandhi's Views on God", Mahatma Gandhi Information Website, last modified 2004, accessed January 29, 2014, http://www.gandhi-manibhavan.org/gandhiphilosophy/philosophy_god_prayerfoodsoul.htm

Conclusion

1. *Politics, Values and Perspectives: How we are to read translations.*

Through the course of closely studying these early examples of psalm translations from Hebrew into English, I hope that I have begun to provide a blueprint for some of the the avenues and mechanisms by which the values and politics of a translator get tied up and encoded in their translations - and they do! This is true for all translation, but is especially true of scripture, and even more especially true for psalms, which exemplify, embody, create and recreate *personal* communion with God. Thus, psalm translations not only have the capacity but the inborn and irresistible tendency to be deeply personal. Rather than a problem, I think this should be accepted as an inevitability, and a celebration of God's ongoing revelation.

This understanding can help divest us of the illusion of an *im*personal translation of scripture. Impersonal translations are impossible for all texts, but even more impossible for scripture, and especially impossible for Psalms. We must view all psalm translations as being, in part, political documents and theological arguments as the translators sensibilities are as deeply entrenched in their English texts as the psalmist's are in the original. This understanding informs how we read them and how we interweave them into our meditations, lives and liturgies.

On the other hand, we must do our interweaving with care, as any translation of scripture, especially when integrated into liturgy, is a blueprint for how we relate to and

understand the nature and intention of God. In short, psalm translation is both a political and prophetic act. As I originally argued on page 6:

> Our sensibilities inform our choices in translating a text, regardless of whether or not generous additions, interpretations or other liberties take place—and they often do, and should, if the psalms are indeed a living text. These choices that occur in the course of a translation are a part of the fabric by which we collectively, in our places and ages in history, understand these texts as a link to God and as a means of accessing and understanding life. The translations further serve in later dates as a record of the sensibilities and struggles of the time and even as positional statements in those struggles, if we take the time to look through the different lenses available to us. Our translations are informed also by the translations before them, and may seek to inform those that follow. Furthermore, they can just as easily serve as a tremendously personal portrait of individual theological and social struggles as they can communal ones, and often these struggles are interwoven.

2. Nechemta and a Call to Action: How we are to write translations.

Having explored the deep interpretive implications of these early examples of the psalms as expressed in English by those who directly consulted the Hebrew originals, what are we to make of these deeply personal and political documents from our own position over four hundred years later, across oceans of time and space and even religion? I believe we are to find in these texts true models for the Liberal Jewish attitude towards scripture, in which the greatest holiness is to be found not within the text intrinsically but in our relationship to and interaction *with* the text. In short, the truest Sinai exists in our own ongoing encounters with the texts, and this is perspective is exemplified with a vengeance in the creative genius with which Milton and Sidney wrote their translations.

As explored in the introduction, the translation of Psalm 95 in our current Reform *siddur*, the *Mishkan T'filah,* exemplifies care and also carefulness towards the text and its foreseen interface with readers. The meaning of the original is maintained as literally as possible, with the only major alteration being an elimination of gendered pronouns regarding God. This is totally appropriate as the intended purpose of the translation is use in a Reform service, and one of the foremost guiding principles of the modern Reform movement as well as the *Mishkan T'filah* specifically are inclusiveness and fidelity to the Hebrew (though this fidelity is vastly more flexible in consideration of modern theological and sociological perspectives in the translation of non-biblical liturgy).

However, in comparison to the psalms of Sidney and Milton, with their incredible energy, striking originality, and decidedly non-committee-related origins, I can't help but feel as if there is a world of possibility in psalm translation from among our own talented leadership that has yet to be explored as was so deeply in the English Reformation tradition.

To my surprise, then, I find that this paper is in part a call to action, or at least a pointed pointing-out of fertile ground and opportunity for the literarily and devotionally inclined among our ranks. In honesty, this being a masters thesis that will not see wide circulation, it may only be a call to myself and a few others. But as Mary Sidney and John Milton have shown me, God waits for us in our hearts and minds and imaginations, and it is up to us to deliver to Him the sparks of our inspiration.

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Appendix A:
Other English Translations of Psalm 102

Psalm 102 from *The Whole Booke of Psalms* (Sternhold and Hopkins):[76]

[1] Hear thou my pray'r, O Lord and let
my cry come unto thee,
In time of trouble do hot hide
thy face away from me:
[2] Incline thine ear to me, make haste
to hear me when I call;
For as the smoke doth fade, so do
my days consume and fall:
[3] And as an hearth my bones are burnt,
my heart is smitten dead,
And withers like the grass, that I
forget to eat lay bread.
[4] By reason of my groaning voice
my bones cleave to my skin:
As pelican in wilderness,
such case now am I in.
[5] And as an owl in desert is,
Lo, I am such a one;
I watch, and as a sparrow on
the house-top am alone:
[6] For daily in reproachful wise
my foes they do me scorn;
And them that mad upon me are,
against me they have sworn.
[7] Surely with ashes as with bread,
my hunger I have filled,
And mingled have my drink with tears
that from my eyes distilled.
[8] Because of thy displeasure, Lord,
thy wrath and great disdain;
For thou hast set me up on high,
and cast me down again.

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[76] Early English Books Online, *The Whole Book of Psalms Collected Into English Meeter, By Thomas Sternhold, John Hopkins, and Others: Conferred With the Hebrew, With Apt Notes to Sing Them Withall. (*London: printed by T.N. for the Company of Stationers, 1673), accessed January 23, 2014.

[9] The days wherein I pass my life
are like the fleeting shade;
And I am withered like the grass,
that soon away doth fade:
[10] But thou, O Lord, for ever dost
remain in steady place,
And thy remembrance ever doth
abide from race to race.

The Second Part.

[11] Thou wilt arise, and mercy thou
to Zion wilt extend;
The time of mercy, now the time
foreset is come to end.
[10] For in the very stones thereof
thy servants do delight,
And on the dust thereof they have
compassion in their sight.
[13] Then shall the heathen people fear
the Lord's most holy Name,
And all the kings on earth shall dread
his glory and his fame.
[14] Then when the Lord the mighty God
again shall Zion rear,
And then when he most nobly in
his glory shall appear;
[15] To pray'r of the poor destitute
when he himself shall bend,
When he shall not disdain unto
their suits for to attend:
[16] This shall be written for the age
that after shall succeed;
The people that are yet unborn
the Lord's renown shall spread.
[17] From his high sanctuary he
hath look-ed down below,
And out of heav'n most high he hath
beheld the earth also:
[18] That of the mourning captive he
might hear the woeful cry,
And that he might deliver those
that were condemned to die.

[19] That they in Zion may declare
the Lord's most holy Name,
And in Jerusalem set forth
[20] Then when the people of the land
and kingdoms with accord,
Shall be assembled to perform
their service to the Lord.

The Third Part.

[21] My former force of strength he hath
abated in the way,
And shorter he did cut my days,
thus I therefore did say,
[22] My God, in midst of all my days
now take me not away;
Thy years endure eternally,
and never do decay:
[23] Thou the foundations of the earth
before all time hast laid;
The heav'ns also, they are the work
which thy own hands have made:
[24] They all shall perish and decay,
but thou remainest still;
And they shall all in time wax old
e'en as a garment will:
[25] Thou as a vesture shalt them change,
and changèd they shall be;
But thou dost still abide the same,
thy years do never flee.
[26] The children of thy servants shall
continue and endure,
And in thy sight their happy seed
for ever shall stand sure.

Psalm 102 From *The Book of Psalms* (translated by Robert Alter):[77]

[1] A prayer for the lowly when he grows faint
and pours out his plea before the Lord.
[2] Lord, O hear my prayer,
and let my outcry come before you.
[3] Hide not Your face from me
on the day when I am in straits.
Incline Your ear to me. On the day I call, quickly answer me.
[4] For my days are consumed in smoke,
and my bones are scorched like a hearth.
[5] My heart is stricken and withers like grass,
so I forget to eat my bread.
[6] From my loud sighing,
my bones cleave to my flesh.
[7] I resemble the wilderness jackdaw,
I become like the owl of the ruins.
[8] I lie awake and become
like the lonely bird on a roof.
[9] All day long my enemies revile me,
my taunters invoke me in curse.
[10] For ashes I have eaten as bread,
and my drink I have mingled with tears -
[11] because of Your wrath and Your fury,
for You raised me up and flung me down.
[12] My days are inclined like a shadow,
and I - like grass I withered.
[13] And You Lord, forever enthroned,
and Your name - for all generations.
[14] You, may You rise, have mercy on Zion,
for it is the hour to pity her, for the fixed time has come.
[15] For Your servants cherish her stones
and on her dust they take pity.
[16] And the nations will fear the name of the Lord,
and all kings of the earth, Your glory.
[17] For the Lord has rebuilt Zion,
He is seen in His glory.
[18] He has turned to the prayer of the desolate
and has not despised their prayer.
[19] Let this be inscribed for a generation to come,
that a people yet unborn may praise Yah.

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[77] Robert Alter, trans., *The Book of Psalms* (New York: Norton, 2007), 353-55.