

# The Sternhold and Hopkins *Whole Booke of Psalms*: Crucial Evidence for Edward de Vere's Authorship of the Works of Shakespeare<sup>1</sup>

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**C**he Sternhold and Hopkins translation of the *Whole Booke of Psalms* (*WBP*) is an important but underestimated source for Shakespeare's plays, Sonnets, and *The Rape of Lucrece*.<sup>2</sup> Richmond Noble, a pioneer of scholarship on the Bible's influence on Shakespeare's works, wrote that Shakespeare echoed the Psalms more often than any other books in the Bible.<sup>3</sup> Like many others since him, he believed it was the Coverdale Psalm translation that most influenced Shakespeare. Close examination, however, reveals the *WBP* to be a much richer source of Shakespearean sources than previously acknowledged. Psalm 51, for example, is echoed in Lady Macbeth's "Out damned spot" speech. Our awareness of this allusion to the chief penitential psalm provides a biblical measure of Lady Macbeth's state of mind, which then sharpens our awareness of her lack of full contrition. "That Muse" in Sonnet 21 appears to be the psalmist, not a contemporary poet, when we register the sonnet's repeated echoes of Psalm 8.

This article provides further examples of echoes of *WBP* in Shakespeare's works. As I will explain below, it was Edward de Vere's annotations of 21 psalms in his copy of *WBP* that led to these discoveries. The fact that de Vere's annotated copy uncovered what may be the largest literary source for Shakespeare's works that has been found in years helps validate the Oxfordian authorship hypothesis.

*WBP* went through many early editions.<sup>4</sup> Unlike the Coverdale translation that was used in the *Book of Common Prayer*, its regular meter (still called “common meter” in hymnals today) allowed the Psalms to be set to popular music, providing something of an Elizabethan hymnal for congregational singing. Richmond Noble,<sup>5</sup> Peter Seng<sup>6</sup> and others have explored the unusual importance of music in the works of Shakespeare. Shakespeare’s dozens of echoes of *WBP* were thus explicitly textual, while implicitly musical, just as hearing the words to a well-known song still evokes its music for us. The “common meter” (“fourteeners,” often divided into alternating lines of four and three iambs) of nearly all the *WBP* translations was the same as that of contemporary ballads, and “Some of the tunes associated with [*WBP*] remained in continuous use for more than four centuries and thus represent one of the most enduring English musical traditions.”<sup>7</sup> Despite this widespread contemporaneous influence, C.S. Lewis spoke for many modern critics in derogating both the edition’s literary value and influence. Beth Quitslund has speculated that the long history of attacks on *WBP* was originally based on theological objections, not the later stylistic complaints.<sup>8</sup>

Psalm translation was a popular early modern literary exercise, as well as a statement of both religious and political views.<sup>9</sup> In addition to the many manuscript translations, there were printed versions by Thomas Wyatt, William Hunnis, Francis Seagar, John Hall, Robert Crowley, and others (many of these only included the seven penitential psalms: 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143). Archbishop Matthew Parker published a metrical psalter in 1567.<sup>10</sup> As Hannibal Hamlin notes, “The greatest French metrical psalter was principally the work of Clément Marot and Théodore de Beze, and their Psalms were the most important influence on English practice,” including *WBP*.<sup>11</sup> Rivkah Zim believes Nicolas Denisot may have been the principal source for the influence of French poetic styles on Sternhold. The most popular early modern English translations, next to *WBP*, were the Coverdale translation that was incorporated into the *Book of Common Prayer*; the closely related Bishops Bible; and the Geneva translation. Naturally, the wording in the various translations is often similar. But even where the Coverdale, Geneva, or Bishops Bible translations have limited parallels, the echoes of the *WBP* in Shakespeare are repeatedly more extensive, and they have deeper significance for the meaning of Shakespeare’s works. Only one minor source in *WBP* is noted in the index of Shaheen’s comprehensive list of Shakespeare’s biblical allusions in his plays, and there are a few further unindexed (but also minor) echoes in the body of his text. Unfortunately, his book does not address the Sonnets or narrative poems.

Rivkah Zim, Hannibal Hamlin, and Beth Quitslund suggest several possible reasons for the immense early popularity of *WBP*; their observations in turn may illuminate Shakespeare’s unusual interest in this translation. Making a strong claim indeed, Zim asserts that *WBP* “was probably the most familiar English verse known to the majority of Englishmen” for some 150 years.<sup>12</sup> This familiarity must have contributed to de Vere’s preference for this translation as a source for his work, since it was far better known to his audience than were other translations. Its regular meter and musical settings made it easier for the psalms to be memorized, increasing

the likelihood that early audiences would have recognized even some of de Vere's more subtle allusions to *WBP*.

*WBP* had its origins in Thomas Sternhold's metrical translations of 37 psalms for use at the courts of Henry VIII and Edward VI, offering "guidance in both temporal and spiritual affairs... [He] emphasized the doctrinal value of the Psalms."<sup>13</sup> Zim writes that Sternhold intended his psalm paraphrases to serve "godly recreation" at court as well as "popular edification and enjoyment."<sup>14</sup> Their dual religious and secular intent may have added to their appeal as literary sources for Shakespeare.

Like Shakespeare, Sternhold favored iambs, monosyllables, alliteration, and pairs of alliterative synonyms. He wrote his psalm translations to be sung – including to popular secular melodies, as Quitslund observes. Hamlin notes that the regular meter of *WBP* made this translation better suited for congregational singing than translations with irregular meters such as Coverdale. He speculates that its enduring popularity reflected not only its intrinsic musicality but also its "having established itself first, perhaps taking on the presumed authority of age and tradition,"<sup>15</sup> in addition to the popularity of the tunes to which it was set. Zim observes that, unlike John Hall and other contemporaries who wrote metrical psalm translations, Sternhold saw no conflict between sacred and secular lyrics.

Shakespeare was typically eclectic in his use of a wide range of source material. Some of the examples discussed below illustrate his blending echoes of *WBP* with echoes of the Geneva Psalms, within a given passage. The discovery of the significance of *WBP* as a literary source for Shakespeare is thanks to de Vere having annotated 21 of those psalms. He marked 14 with marginal manicules (pointing hands). Each manicule is strikingly different, reflecting de Vere's unusual interest in these psalms. According to William H. Sherman,<sup>16</sup> most early readers used unvarying, characteristic manicules; de Vere did not follow this sort of consistent pattern. Similarly, he seems to have been much more variable in his spelling even than other early modern writers.

As noted above, recent evidence indicates that *WBP* may have been the most significant Psalm translation in influencing the works of Shakespeare. This evidence suggests that the impact of *WBP* on Shakespeare's works is not restricted to isolated words and phrases. *WBP* sometimes offers pivotal sources that will supplement previous interpretations of Shakespeare's works. Frequently, the intertextuality of Shakespeare's allusions to the Psalms underscore an ironic contrast between their ideals on the one hand, and characters in the plays, the speaker of the Sonnets, or the Fair Youth, on the other (leaving aside examples where the Sonnets instead emulate the many human failures that are recounted in the Psalms).<sup>17</sup> Many psalm allusions compare the Youth to God in a way that may have led one early reader of a 1609 Quarto of the Sonnets to write his memorable critique at the end of them: "what a heap of wretched Infidel Stuff."<sup>18</sup>

To be sure, making a convincing argument for a given literary allusion in Shakespeare is no easy matter. There is always an irreducible degree of subjectivity in each reader's assessment of whether a given phrase or speech in the plays constitutes a specific biblical allusion on Shakespeare's part. Our underlying assumptions as

to whether or not Shakespeare was significantly influenced by the Bible inevitably affect our judgment of possible allusions. Rare words or uncommon phrases are more convincing, especially when thematic parallels enrich our reading of Shakespeare. The evidentiary value of *WBP* allusions is cumulative, and many such echoes have now been documented.

Even if a given allusion seems plausible, there is the further question of whether de Vere made that allusion consciously, or whether it instead reflected his intimate knowledge of literature, and what Richard D. Altick has called Shakespeare's "exceedingly well developed sense of [verbal] association."<sup>19</sup> Thus, we sometimes sense we are watching de Vere's mind at work. If the allusion was deliberate, was de Vere attributing to the character who speaks it an awareness of that allusion? There is a range of possibilities here, and these questions cannot always be settled with certainty.

Roger Stritmatter has shown that marked passages in de Vere's Bible are often echoed in Shakespeare's works.<sup>20</sup> The more times a biblical verse is echoed in the canon, the more likely it is to be annotated in de Vere's Bible. Naturally, some unmarked verses are also echoed. That is the case for *WBP*. Most of my discoveries of Shakespeare's allusions to *WBP* are to psalms that de Vere annotated. The current article includes allusions to three psalms marked with large manicules (Psalms 25, 65, and 103), as well as to one unmarked psalm (Psalm 63).

### **Echoes of Psalm 25 in Shakespeare's Works**

Psalm 25 seems to be one of de Vere's favorites, judging from the frequent allusions to it in Shakespeare. It contains not only a marginal manicule, but also the only marginal fleur-de-lis (a large one, at that) in de Vere's copy of *WBP*, next to verse 11. It is one of eight alphabetical acrostics in the Psalms, with each verse beginning with a different consecutive Hebrew letter. De Vere showed greater interest in Psalm 25 than in the other acrostic psalms. Psalm 25 was a source, for example, of Sonnet 83 ("I never saw that you did painting need").<sup>21</sup>

There are, moreover, many prominent allusions to the psalm in the plays. Although it is overlooked by both Noble and Shaheen, Act 4, scene 3 of *1 Henry IV*, for example, echoes Psalm 25. These echoes portray King Henry, through his emissary Sir Walter Blunt, as offering God-like mercy and forgiveness to Hotspur. Hotspur, in turn, reverses the roles of penitent and merciful, as he reminds Blunt that his father had earlier shown forgiveness to the King, when the "faults" of Bolingbroke's youth included his deposition of Richard II. These pointed reminders ironically contrast with the pleas of 25:6: "Remember not the fautes, and fraylty of my youth:/ Remember not how ignoraunt, I have ben of thy truth." There are some sixteen key echoing words in this scene (see *infra*). In addition, the spirit of the psalm is reflected in the content of the scene – many other words and phrases from the psalm that are not echoed literally are still captured in the scene's ethos. The net result of these psalm echoes is to increase our sympathy for Blunt, as his credibility is enhanced by the nature of his biblical echoes. Blunt brings Hotspur "gracious offers

from the King.” “God” himself is mentioned three times in the psalm, and four times in this scene. The summary of the psalm states that “The Prophet... *prayeth* to God... to have his sines forgiven.” Blunt ends the scene by telling Hotspur, “*Pray God* you do” accept the King’s forgiveness.

The psalm’s final verse entreats God: “Deliver Lord thy folke, and send them some relief... from al their paine and *grief*.”<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Blunt asks Hotspur to “name your *griefs*” so that the King can grant relief by giving Hotspur his “desires with interest.” Verse 5 speaks of God’s “mercyes *manifold*”; in Verse 6, the psalmist asks “Nor after my *deserts*, let me thy mercy find.”<sup>23</sup> Blunt inverts the meaning of these two words in the psalm when he tells Hotspur, “If that the King/ Have any way your good *deserts* forgot,/ Which he confesseth to be *manifold*...” The psalm confesses “manifold” and sinful “deserts,” asking that they be forgotten; Blunt uses “confesseth” to point instead to Hotspur’s “manifold” virtuous “deserts.”

I have mentioned only a few of the verbal parallels in this scene. Other echoed (or similar) words in the scene and the psalm are: *name*; *stand*; *enemy/ies*; *defend*; *peace*; *cruel/ty* (from the psalm’s summary); *poor*; *unminded (mynd)*; *heart*; and *pity*. Once again, I would emphasize the value of this intertextuality in enhancing our sympathy for Blunt.

The next play of the Henriad also has a scene that echoes Psalm 25. In 2 *Henry IV*, Act 4, scene 5, when the Prince begs his father’s forgiveness—“O, *pardon* me, my liege!” the King’s reply echoes the psalm: “God put it *in thy mind* to take it hence.” Psalm 25:6 reads “Nor after my *deserts*, let me thy mercy find:/ But of thine owne benignity, Lord have me *in thy mynd*.”<sup>24</sup> The King continues, a few lines later, “*God* knows, my son,/ By what by-*paths* and indirect *crook’d ways*/ I met this crown.” Verse 3 says “Therefore thy *pathes* and thy *right wayes*, unto me Lorde descry.” As is so often the case, the biblical echo introduces a crucial contrast between God’s “right ways” and the play’s “crooked ways.” Shakespearean biblical allusions often serve in just this manner to highlight the gulf between human frailties and spiritual ideals.<sup>25</sup> Henry IV closes this scene with further echoes of Psalm 25. He asks for the *name* of the place where he lodged. When he is told it is called Jerusalem (a theme of many psalms), he answers “Laud be to *God*! Even there my *life* must end,” echoing the theme of the opening verses (10-12)<sup>26</sup> of the second part of Psalm 25: “Now for thy holy *name*, O Lord I thee intreat:/ To graunt me pardon for my sinne, for it is wondrous great/ Who so doth feare the Lorde, the Lord doth him direct:/ To lead his *life* in such away, as he doth best accept... His sede and his posterity, inherite shal the *land*.” We can safely hypothesize that these specific verses of Psalm 25 took on special importance for de Vere, since he drew the large, unique fleur-de-lis in the margin next to them.

The King’s words here enact the psalm’s ideal of acceptance of the Divine will. The King’s final words express his gracious submission to God’s wishes, even at the moment when he realizes the Jerusalem where he is to die is not the one he thought had been prophesied—“in Jerusalem,/ Which vainly I suppos’d the Holy *Land*” (this echo of “land” in Psalm 25:12 is enhanced by its coming at the end of the line in both works).

Although many biblical allusions in *Measure for Measure* are well known, Noble and Shaheen both overlooked Psalm 25 as a source for one scene in the play (2.3). This is the scene where the Duke, disguised as a friar, visits Juliet in prison after she and Claudio were charged with “lechery.” Psalm 25:1 reads “now suffer me to *take no shame*, for in thee *do I trust*.”<sup>27</sup> In lines 35-36, Juliet says to the Duke, “*I do repent me as it is an evil,/ And take the shame with joy*.” The Duke, as the ostensible friar, then announces Claudio’s death sentence to Juliet. Angelo has perverted the central message of this psalm, and of much of the Bible, by responding to Claudio and Juliet’s repentance not with mercy but with draconian vengeance (the play’s title famously echoes Jesus on mercy in Matthew 7:2, “With what measure ye mete, it shalbe measured to you”). The impression that de Vere is here echoing Psalm 25 is strengthened by the Provost’s earlier words, when he is telling the Duke about Juliet, “falling in the *flawes of her owne youth*...” (2.3.11). A central message of the psalm is ‘Remember not the *fautes*, and *fraylty of my youth*’ (Psalm 25:6). (‘Flaw’ is a near metathesis of ‘fault.’)

“Offense” is used as a synonym for sin in both passages. Psalm 25:17 reads “Remit my *sinne* and mine *offence*”;<sup>28</sup> the Provost speaks of Juliet’s impregnation as “such *offence*” (II. iii. 14), and the Duke later refers to Juliet’s “most *offencefull act*” (II. iii. 26). In this scene, the Duke refers to Juliet’s “sin” three times. Psalm 25:7-8 says “the Lord *wil sinners teach*.../ The humble he *wil teach*.” The Duke says to Juliet, “*I’ll teach you how you shall arraign your conscience*” (2.3.21). Psalm 25:15 says “For I am poore and desolate, and *comfortles* alone.”<sup>29</sup> Juliet echoes this sentiment in her final words of the scene, “Must die tomorrow! O injurious love,/ That respites me a life whose very *comfort*/ Is still a dying horror!” (2.3.40-42).

These multiple allusions to Psalm 25 underscore the contrast between God’s mercy and forgiveness, and the Duke’s seeming lack of mercy, which echoes the draconian and corrupt actions later taken by Angelo, whom the Duke has chosen to rule temporarily in his stead.

The summary of Psalm 25 suggests one possible reason that it was such a fertile source for this play and for some of de Vere’s other works — “The Prophet [i.e., the psalmist] touched with the consideration of his sinnes, and also greved with the cruell malice of his enemies, prayeth to God most fervently to have his sinnes forgiven, especially suche as he had committed in his youth.” I suspect those words affected de Vere deeply, reminding him of his remorse over his own transgressions, such as killing a servant when he was seventeen, and his pathological jealousy of his first wife.

### **Psalm 65 is a Source for Sonnet 135**

*WBP* is an important source for Shakespeare’s Sonnets: “Both contain overlapping themes—despair and consolation; man’s sinfulness and hopes for mercy; supplication and thanksgiving; complaints about enemies and suffering.”<sup>30</sup> Helen Vendler called Sonnet 135 (“Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy *Will*”) a “perplexing, even maddening sonnet.”<sup>31</sup> Exploring this sonnet in the light of

Psalm 65's hitherto unnoticed influence may reduce these vexingly enigmatic qualities. Vendler noted that Sonnet 135 "quickly becomes... a prayer... Such echoes of liturgical prayer make the sonnet one of several blasphemously parodying an alternate discourse. Against the discourse of divine generosity Shakespeare sets a mercantile discourse of addition... and surplus." She cited Stephen Booth's conjecture that the sonnet's "proverbial" phrase "the sea, all water; yet receives rain still" mediates between a divine and a mercantile level of discourse. Vendler wondered if Shakespeare's reference to the sea might come from two verses in Ecclesiastes.

An additional, previously unknown biblical allusion in this pivotal phrase in the sonnet is Psalm 65. Some of the very features that Vendler highlighted in Sonnet 21 have parallels in the psalm. Verses 7 and 9 use the sea and rain as tropes of surplus: "The swelling *seas* thou doost asswage, & make their streames ful *stil*/ Thou doost restrayne the peoples rage, and rule them at thy wil... When that the earth is chapt and dry, and thirsteth *more* and *more*,/ Then with thy drops thou doost apply, & much encrease her *store*."<sup>32</sup> Note the parallel here with de Vere's "The *sea*, all water, yet receives rain *still*,/ And in abundance addeth to his *store*" (and "*more*" occurs in line 12). *Sea/s*, *still*, and *store* occur in the same order in both psalm and sonnet. The content as well as some of the words of the psalm are echoed in the sonnet. This source confirms Vendler's surmise that lines 9 and 10 of the sonnet are not merely proverbial, but biblical. They are the most obvious echo of Psalm 65 in the sonnet, and they help direct us to further, more subtle echoes of this same psalm.

For example, rhymed words in the sonnet echo those of the psalm. Notoriously, six lines of the sonnet end with -ill: *Will* (thrice), *still* (twice), and *kill*. Similarly, six versets of the psalm share this rhyme, in the six different words *hil*, *fulfil*, *stil*, *wil*, *fil*, and *distil*.<sup>33</sup> And, in fact, "thy will," which occurs twice in the sonnet, also occurs in the psalm as already quoted. As Booth so thoroughly catalogued, many words in the Sonnets have obscene meanings. Such is the case with "will" in this sonnet—it can mean *lust*, *penis*, or *vagina*. Shockingly, de Vere seems to be making obscene puns on the psalm's allusion to the Divine Will.

To the extent that de Vere was thinking of Psalm 65 when he composed Sonnet 135, it is likely that he was primed to find indecent double-entendres in the psalm. For example, de Vere may have thought of the Dark Lady's sexual intimacies with his rival as he read in verse 4: "The man is blest whom thou doost chuse, within thy court to dwel:/ Thy house and temple he shal use, with pleasures, that excel." Likewise, de Vere may have thought of his rival when he read in verses 10-11 that God "doth guide the thing/ With wheate thou dost her furrowes fil." At least as far back as Chaucer's "Wife of Bath's Tale," "thing" could be a euphemism for the genitals (OED, meaning 11c). Thinking of "the thing" as the penis, "with wheate [think, *seed*] thou dost her furrows fill" easily assumes a sexual connotation. Such a reading of verse 10 restores pre-Christian connections between the fertility of the earth, and human sexuality and fertility. Literary intertextuality is bidirectional, so that the later work is both enriched by *and* glosses the earlier text. Tempting the reader to co-construct such sexual innuendoes in the Psalms may enact de Vere's wish to corrupt him (I leave to one side here the many overt sexual allusions in the Bible).

Verse 10, in another image of surplus, states “The fload of God doth *overstow*, and so doth cause to spring” the sown seed. “Overstow” rhymes with “sow.” As early as 1456, *stow* could mean to *store* or *keep in reserve*. John Hopkins, the translator, presumably intended an intensification of this meaning of *stow* in his “overstow.” This unusual word in the psalm is echoed in de Vere’s “will in *over-plus*” in the second line of the sonnet. “Over-plus” means excess (it can also mean “that which remains in the mind; a conclusion”).

“Will” occurs in abundance in Sonnet 135. Its 12 occurrences are an extreme example of a recurrent feature of many sonnets, where one or more words are repeated two, three, or more times in a given poem. This may reflect a broader stylistic influence of the Psalms, whose poetic structure includes frequent verbal repetition, often for the purpose of intensification. For example, the second half of a verse may repeat or paraphrase words from the first half; the end of a psalm frequently echoes its beginning.

### **Psalm 63 is a Source for Sonnet 29**

Commentators have noted some biblical echoes in Sonnet 29 (“When, in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes”). G. Blakemore Evans compared line 3 with Job 30:20—“When I cry unto thee, God, thou dost not hear me.” In fact, he understood the first four lines of the Sonnet 29 as alluding to Job. Booth found that a “Christian distinction between material and spiritual well-being functions as a hyperbolic metaphor throughout this sonnet.”<sup>34</sup> Further, Booth maintained that “the beloved’s love functions as the love of the deity does in Christian theology.” In view of the many echoes of the psalms in several sonnets, Booth’s point is of central importance for all the first 126 sonnets.

A further noteworthy biblical echo in Sonnet 29 that underscores Booth’s latter point is of Psalm 63. The psalm specifies “material and spiritual well-being” in its first verse: “my soule and body both, do thirst of thee to tast.” For the remainder of the psalm, bodily needs are treated solely as a trope for spiritual needs, as the latter are fulfilled and the former needs are ignored. Just as Evans speculated that the opening lines of Sonnet 29 allude to the story of Job, so does the psalmist begin with allusions to life-threatening dangers—“in this barren wilderness, where waters there are none:/ my flesh is parched for thought of thee” (verse 2). He speaks of “this lyfe and wretched dayes” (verse 3). The psalm then turns in the fourth verse, to a promise to lift up the psalmist’s hands to worship God. In a hopeful tone reminiscent of the sestet of the sonnet, the final seven verses of Psalm 63 celebrate the many benefits of God’s protection. Words and sentiments from the psalm match up closely with those of the sonnet, in a way that does indeed turn the Fair Youth into a deity.

Lines 10-14 of Sonnet 29 most clearly echo Psalm 63. Line 10, “Haply *I think on thee*, and then my state” echoes verse 6: “When as in bed *I think on thee*, and eke al the night tyde.”<sup>35</sup> This is an unusual example, as five consecutive words from *WBP* are echoed in Shakespeare. EEBO lists *WBP* as the first instance of this phrase. The second is in the 1573 *A hundreth sundrie flowres*,<sup>36</sup> attributed to George Gascoigne.



Gascoigne's poem is titled, "An absent lover doth thus encourage his Lady to continew constant." Its fourth stanza is:

What sayd I? soone? yea soone I say againe,  
 I will come soone and sooner if I may:  
 Beleue me now it is a pinching payne,  
 To thinke of loue when louers are away.  
 Such thoughts I haue, and *when I thinke on thée*,  
 My thoughts are there, whereas my bones would bée.

It is noteworthy that Gascoigne, like de Vere, echoes *WBP*. The repetition of this phrase in Sonnet 29 supports the hypothesis that de Vere may have written some of the work of "Gascoigne" pseudonymously.

Here, as elsewhere, the sonnet's psalm echo implicitly compares the Youth with God. Line 11, "Like to the lark at break of *day arising*" might make one think of "wings" in verse 7: "For under cover of thy wings, thou art my joyful guide."<sup>37</sup> Line 12, "From sullen earth, *sings* hymns at heaven's gate" echoes verse 5, "my mouth therefore, shall *sing* such songs, as are for thee most mete."<sup>38</sup> We should also ponder the clear allusion to the Psalms in that phrase "sings hymns at heaven's gate." In de Vere's day, *WBP* were in fact the liturgical hymns that were sung to heaven. Line 14 alludes to not wishing to change the poet's state "with *kings*." Verse 11 also refers to a "king." The psalm preface alludes to David being endangered by Saul, the king he did go on to replace — with whom he did "change his state," so to speak. De Vere may have been thinking of that dimension of the psalm in the final line of Sonnet 29.

### **Psalm 103 is a Source for Sonnet 103**

Psalm 103 is a rich source for several of Shakespeare's sonnets (e.g., 21, 69),<sup>39</sup> as well as for *Edward III*.<sup>40</sup> Here, I explore its influence on the sonnet bearing the same number—103 ("A Lack, what poverty my Muse brings forth"). This numerical parallel may have been deliberate on de Vere's part, drawing attention to his source in the Psalms (and thus supporting the 1609 ordering of the Sonnets). De Vere may have grasped an aspect of Psalm 103 that was recently noted by a contemporary scholar. Robert Alter observes that, in Psalm 103, "The speaker's exhortation to his inner self or essential being ... to bless the Lord is an unusual rhetorical move."<sup>41</sup> This inner self is evoked by a phrase in verse 1— "all the secrets of my hart." This focus on the inner self parallels the Sonnets as lyric poetry, which Vendler describes as the "representation of inner life."<sup>42</sup>

The first echoed word, *praise*, only occurs in 103.4. Yet the first quatrain subtly alludes to the laudatory goal of Psalm 103 (as well as many other psalms). The emphasis on *lack* and *poverty* in the sonnet's first line contrasts with the tropes of overwhelming abundance of praise in the psalm. Other sonnets (such as Sonnet 21) suggest the poet is competing with the psalmist, claiming to praise the Youth more effectively than the psalmist praises God. In Sonnet 103, however, de Vere compares

himself unfavorably with the psalmist.

Sonnet 103 locates itself with respect to two poetic frames of reference — the poet of Psalm 103 and the rival poet alluded to in Sonnet 102. That preceding sonnet gestured toward Shakespeare’s previous “lays” to the Youth. They are compared to Philomel’s “hymns,” “music,” and “song,” which evoke the many echoes of the musical *WBP* in the previous sonnets. That covert allusion to the psalms in Sonnet 102 prepares the Youth for a return to psalm allusions in Sonnet 103. These references to earlier sonnets, and also to the Psalms, further enact what Vendler called “the discourse of reminiscent nostalgia”<sup>43</sup> of Sonnet 102. Implicitly, Shakespeare asks the Youth to compare his current dearth of love poems not with the work of the rival poet, but with Shakespeare’s earlier poems, and with the psalms to God which they repeatedly echo.

The second quatrain of Sonnet 103 ushers in more specific echoes of the psalms. Lines 5 and 6 allude to Psalms 31 and 56. Psalm 31, a psalm of supplication, says in verse 17, “Lord let *me not* be put to *blame*, for that on thee I call:/ But let the wicked beare their shame, and in the grave to fal.”<sup>44</sup> This verse is echoed by “O *blame me not*” in Sonnet 103. This allusion to 31:17 thus adds an implicit imprecation against Shakespeare’s “wicked” enemies, including the rival poet. Psalm 56 also calls upon God to protect the psalmist from his enemies. 56:8 is “Thou seest how oft they [those enemies] make me flee, and on my teares doost *looke*/ Reserve them *in a glas* by thee, and *wryte* them in thy booke.”<sup>45</sup> This is one of only two uses of “write,” and one of three uses of “glass” in *WBP*. Shakespeare divides God’s role in this verse between himself and the Youth in saying “O *blame me not* if I no more can *write*!/ *Look in your glass....*”

The second quatrain ends with “Dulling my lines, and *doing me disgrace*.” This last phrase, “doing me disgrace,” occurs nowhere else in *EEBO*,<sup>46</sup> but “Do me” followed by a verb (*persecute, hurt, scorn, forsake, and keep*) occurs six times throughout *WBP*. *Disgrace* occurs only twice in *WBP*. Psalm 103:15-16 reads “And how the tyme of mortal men, is lyke the withering hay:/ Or like the floure right fayre in field, that fades ful soone away./ Whose glosse & beauty stormy winds, *do* utterly *disgrace*.”<sup>47</sup> The use of nature tropes here to emphasize human transience is close to the language of many of the first 126 sonnets. So the occurrence of “disgrace” in this passage of Psalm 103 may be relevant to its use in Sonnet 103. More specifically, it alludes to the act of damaging the beauty of something in both poems—the flower in the psalm, and the “lines” of poetry in the Sonnet (and, as Vendler noted, the disgrace of the poet himself, based on “the substitution of the poet’s self for his art”<sup>48</sup>). Psalm 103 contrasts this trope of human mortality in the next verse with compensatory references to God’s eternal goodness to one’s descendants.

Here, the intertextuality with Psalm 103 serves as an implicit “gloss.” In a sonnet that is ostensibly devoted solely to praise of the Youth’s beautiful appearance, the subtle allusion to Psalm 103 whispers a contrasting reminder of the transience of all mortals, including both the poet and the Youth. The Youth’s mirror may indeed accurately reflect his beauty, but that beauty will soon be lost, if it is not recorded for posterity by the poet.

The sestet opens with a reference to sin. “Sinful” occurs only here among the first 126 sonnets. “Sin” occurs in three of them. Most notably, in an earlier rival poet sonnet — Sonnet 83 declares that the Youth has imputed “sin” to Shakespeare for his poetic reticence. That earlier sonnet offers several parallels with Sonnet 103. Both justify the poet’s silence, in contrast with the productivity of the rival poet. Words used in both sonnets include *show*, *worth*, *praise*, and *barren/bare*. As in Sonnet 83, Sonnet 103 does not acknowledge any sin on the part of the poet. On the contrary, it argues that the poet is avoiding the sin of marring the Youth’s actual reflection with what are doomed to be inadequate poetic reflections of it.

Psalm 103:9 says “He chides not us continually, though we be ful of *stryfe*:/ Nor kepes our faultes in memory, for al our *sinful* lyfe.” This may contribute to the first line of the sonnet’s sestet, “Were it not *sinful* then, *striving* to mend” [“Mend” occurs in a prayer bound with *WBP*]. The couplet of Sonnet 103 begins “And more, *much more*, than in my verse can sit.” Psalm 103:11 reads “But as the space is wondrous great, twixt heaven and earth above/ So is his goodness *much more* large, to them that do hym love.”<sup>49</sup> The psalms often use tropes of measurement in their praise of God’s mercy and might. Shakespeare uses both explicit as well as implicit comparisons in his praise of the Youth. In fact, Sonnet 105 will soon allude to these psalm echoes, in rejecting the charge of idolatry in his “songs and praises” to the Youth.

Sonnet 103 explicitly compares the limitations of de Vere’s verse with the superior qualities of the Youth’s reflected beauty. Implicitly, de Vere has constructed a running commentary on his sonnets to the Youth in his intertextuality with the psalms. The recurrent psalm allusions in the sonnets have encouraged the Youth’s inflated self-regard, as he has thereby been deified. Sonnet 103, like several others, celebrates the Youth’s narcissism, along with his physical beauty. Now, though, de Vere uses parallels with the psalms more ironically than hyperbolically. The “much more” of the couplet indirectly reminds the Youth that he is “much less” than divine. The Youth especially falls short of the divine model in his loyalty and, in the words of Psalm 103:11, “goodness... to them that do him love.”

## Conclusion

De Vere’s echoes of *WBP* serve many functions. Sternhold believed the Psalter “comprehendeth the effecte of the whole Byble,”<sup>50</sup> thus functioning as a sort of literary hologram. De Vere’s creative gifts (especially in the Sonnets) included his extraordinary skill in compressing a seemingly infinite world of meanings into just a few words. Echoing the already compressed psalms multiplies his meanings. Some might ask if de Vere’s fondness for the Protestant *WBP* sheds light on the question of his religious preferences. Perhaps. However, our dichotomizing categories are often too narrow to capture de Vere’s astonishing complexity. He regularly looked at polarizing questions from multiple points of view, avoiding the trap of false dichotomies. This contributes to his universal appeal. Since the Psalms are the most personal book of the Bible, it is likely that they had compelling personal meaning for

him. In particular, one senses that he suffered from deep and persistent feelings of guilt, which many of the psalms helped him address.

In the effort to draw attention to *WBP* as a source for Shakespeare's works, this article may have inadvertently created the misleading impression that there are not other sources for the cited passages. Of course there are. Many of the words and phrases attributed here to echoes of *WBP* have many other possible sources. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that considering *WBP* as one important literary source for Shakespeare can open up new interpretive possibilities that enrich our literary comprehension. Shaheen worked under the assumption that a secular source, if available, would make it unlikely the Bible served as Shakespeare's source for the passage in question.<sup>51</sup> Ironically, Shaheen's methodology thus embodies something of an anti-biblical bias. Following his method helps avoid making inaccurate attributions to biblical sources; but it simultaneously increases the risk of overlooking valid biblical sources. Shaheen is aware of the danger of projecting the scholar's own religious beliefs onto Shakespeare. In our secular era, however, there is also the opposite danger of underestimating the extent to which Shakespeare was influenced by the Bible and its Psalms.

In his history plays, the Psalm allusions subliminally hint at a providential interpretation of English history, comparing the English to the Israelites as God's Chosen People. Just as Caroline Spurgeon observed of his use of imagery,<sup>52</sup> de Vere used both single psalm allusions, and also repeated allusions to one psalm, that contribute to the overarching structure of a play (as is the case for Psalm 137 and *Richard II*, and Psalm 103 and *Edward III*). De Vere created multiple plot lines in all his plays to powerful effect, as one plot line echoes or contrasts with another. The echoes of the Psalms in his Sonnets offer a similar sort of intertextual reverberation, expanding the Sonnets' extraordinary complexity. Restoring readers' familiarity with the repeated allusions to the Psalms offers a "constant subtext," in Marjorie Garber's phrase — a running counterpoint to the words of the Sonnets, as the poet and his beloved are compared and contrasted with the psalmist and his God. Like the centuries of soot that obscured the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel until the 1980s, our unfamiliarity with *WBP*'s echoes has deprived us of a potentially richer enjoyment of de Vere's artistry.

I would like to raise some questions about de Vere's annotations. I do not pretend to know the answers to these questions, but it is my hope that studying the intertextuality between the *Whole Book of Psalms* and Shakespeare's works will give us some leads. Why did he choose to annotate *WBP* in the unusual way that he did? Beth Quitslund, who had already examined some 50 other early copies of *WBP* before she saw de Vere's copy, told me she had never before seen one whose early owner took such apparently deep interest in it.

Why did de Vere draw the 14 distinctly different manicules in the margins of his *WBP*? Why do they always point to the first verse, even when he was forced to draw an awkward fist with a pointing thumb in the gutter (inner margin) for Psalm 51? De Vere only drew one manicule in the rest of his Geneva Bible,<sup>53</sup> but he often used marginal fleurs-de-lis (simple drawings of flowers, which varied much less than

his *WBP* manicules). Why did he draw the one, large fleur-de-lis in his *WBP* (next to verse 11 of Psalm 25)? Marginal flowers were a medieval method of annotation, connected with *florilegium* ('reading for flowers') and with the 12<sup>th</sup>-century book, *Libri deflorationum*, a guide to picking the choicest passages from a book.<sup>54</sup>

Why did de Vere draw the unique bracket and three dots next to Psalm 31? And why did he make the curious, large 'C'-shaped drawing next to Psalm 130? Psalm 130 is one of the seven penitential psalms; de Vere marked two others (6 and 51) with manicules. It is reasonable to hypothesize that his various annotations reflected something specific about his interest in the psalm in question. William H. Sherman gives examples of early readers who had simple or complex systems of marginal annotation. It would be of immense interest if someone could decipher de Vere's system. A tentative conjecture is that de Vere may have used manicules to mark psalms he especially wanted to echo in his literary works. There is a much higher number of echoes of the maniculed psalms in the works of "Shakespeare" than there is for non-maniculed but otherwise marked passages elsewhere in his Geneva Bible.<sup>55</sup>

Roger Stritmatter encouraged me to pursue my research on these psalms, by confirming that my findings were hitherto unknown. Previously, Stritmatter noted that some psalms that Shaheen identified as sources for Shakespeare are marked in de Vere's *WBP*. Stritmatter prophetically concluded that "Should there turn out to be a correlation of any kind between these references [in Shakespeare's works] and the markings found in de Vere's Sternhold and Hopkins, it would constitute a level of confirmation of the present thesis [that de Vere wrote Shakespeare's works] involving a multiplication of several independent factors which would be almost beyond belief."<sup>56</sup> Since the marked psalms in de Vere's copy of *WBP* have yielded dozens of important sources for the works of Shakespeare, Stritmatter's prediction has been amply fulfilled.

De Vere's echoes of the Psalms illustrate the power of literary allusion, which Alter rightly called "an essential modality of the language of literature."<sup>57</sup> De Vere was so familiar with *WBP* that some of its echoes in his works probably reflect the associative process that was integral to his creative genius. He may not have been conscious of each allusion. As Shaheen put it, "Shakespeare may have echoed Scripture without being aware of it, since the thought had become his own."<sup>54</sup> Each of these allusions would not have registered consciously for every early modern reader or audience member. In fact, allusions to *WBP* often exemplify Alter's point that "a good deal of allusion is either meant to have or ends up having a subliminal effect."<sup>58</sup> Yet noticing and reflecting on them deepens our understanding of de Vere's creative method. These echoes also support Alter's argument that "The evoked text becomes a fundamental ground of reference for the alluding text."<sup>59</sup> In some instances, "the allusion is a key to the work not merely through strategic placement... but through being a recurrent thread in the formal design of the imaginative definition of character, theme, and world."<sup>60</sup>

We might re-examine our interpretation of many of de Vere's works, in view of his repeated allusions to the Sternhold and Hopkins *Whole Booke of Psalms*.

Further, the fact that it was an Oxfordian who stumbled upon the significance of *WBP* as an overlooked literary source for Shakespeare's plays and poems should bring renewed attention to the ongoing study of the Folger library copy of the de Vere Geneva Bible, and the correlation between marked verses in that volume and the Biblical allusions in the works of Shakespeare.



### **Tables**

*WBP* from 1569 copy that belonged to Edward de Vere, now at Folger Shakespeare Library

### **Psalm 25**

[Summary:] The Prophet touched with the consideration of his sinnes, and also greued with the cruell malice of his enemies, prayeth to God most feruently to haue his sinnes forgeuen, especially such as he had committed in his youth. He begynneth euery verse accordyng to the Ebrue letters two or three except.

[verse 1] I Lift mine hart to thee, my God & guide most iust, now suffer me to take no shame, for in thee do I trust.

[verse 2] Let not my foes reioyce, nor make a scorne of me, and let them not be ouerthrowen that put their trust in thee.

But shame shal them befall, which harme them wrongfully:

[verse 3] Therefore thy pathes & thy right wayes, vnto me Lord descry.

[verse 4] Direct me in thy truth, and teach me I thee pray:

Thou art my God and sauour, on thee I wayt alway.

[verse 5] Thy mercyes manifold, I pray thee Lord remember:

And eke thy pitie plentiful, for they haue ben for euer.

[verse 6] Remember not the fautes, and fraylty of my youth:

Remember not how ignoraunt, I haue ben of thy truth:

Nor after my deserts, let me thy mercy find,

But of thine own beningnity, Lord haue me in thy mynd.

[verse 7] His mercy is ful swete, his truth a perfect guide

Therefore the Lord wil sinners teach, & such as go aside.

[verse 8] The humble he wil teach, his preceptes for to kepe:

He wil direct in al his wayes the lowly and the meke,  
 [verse 9] For al the wayes of God, are truth & mercy both,  
 To them that kepe his testament, the witnes of his troth.

*The second part.*

[verse 10] Now for thy holy name, O Lord I thee intreat,  
 To graunt me pardon for my sinne, for it is wondrous great.  
 {a large, marginal fleur-de-lys is drawn next to verse 11 in de Vere's copy--}

[verse 11] Who so doth feare the Lord, the Lord doth him direct.  
 To lead his life in such a way, as he doth best accept.

[verse 12] His soule shal euermore, in goodnes dwel and stand,  
 His sede and his posterity, inherite shal the land.

[verse 13] Al those that feare the Lord, know his secret intent:  
 And vnto them he doth declare, his wil and testament.

[verse 14] Mine eyes and eke my hart, to him I wil aduaunce:  
 That pluckt my feete out of the snare, of sinne & ignorance.

[verse 15] With mercy me behold, to thee I make my mone:  
 For I am poore and desolate, and comfortles alone.

[verse 16] The troubles of mine hart, are multiplied in dede:  
 Bring me out of this misery, necessity and nede.

[verse 17] Behold my pouerty, mine anguish and my payne  
 Remit my sinne & mine offence, & make me cleane agayne.

[verse 18] O Lord behold my foes, how they do stil increase:  
 Pursuing me with deadly hate, that faine would liue in peace.

[verse 19] Preserue and kepe my soule, and eke deliuer me:  
 And let me not be ouerthrown, because I trust in thee.

[verse 20] Let my simple purenes, me from mine enmies shend:  
 Because I looke as one of thine, that thou shouldst me defend.

[verse 21] Deliuer Lord thy folke, and send them some relief:  
 I meane thy chosen Israel, from al their paine and grief.

### **Psalm 63**

[Summary:] Daudid after he had bene in great daunger by Saule, in the deserte Ziph, made this Psalme: wherin he geueth thanks to God for his wonderful deliuerance, in whose mercies he trusted, euen in the midst of his miseries: prophesying the destruction of gods enemies, & contrarywise happenes to al them that trust in the Lord.

[verse 1] O God my God, I watch betyme to come to thee in hast:  
 For why? my soule and body both, doth thirst of thee to tast  
 And in this barren wildernes, where waters there are none:  
 my flesh is partcht for thought of thee, for thee I wish alone

[verse 2] That I might see yet once agayn, thy glory, strength, and might:  
 As I was wont it to behold, within thy temple bryght.

[verse 3] For why? thy mercies far surmount, this lyfe and wretched dayes:  
My lips therfore shal geue to thee, due honor, laude, and prayse.  
[verse 4] And whilst I lyue, I wil not fayle, to worship thee alway:  
And in thy name I shal lift vp, my hands when I do pray.  
[verse 5] My soule is filled as with marow, which is both fat and swete:  
my mouth therfore, shal sing such songs, as are for thee most mete.  
[verse 6] When as in bed I think on thee, and eke al the night tyde:  
[verse 7] For vnder couert of thy wings, thou art my ioyful guide.  
[verse 8] My soule doth surely stick to thee, thy right hand is my power:  
[verse 9] And those that seke my soule to stroy, them death shal sone deuoure.  
[verse 10] The sword shal them deuour ech one, their carcasses shal fede  
The hungry foxes which do run, their pray to seke at nede.  
[verse 11] The king and al men shal reioyce, that do profes Gods word:  
For liers mouthes shal then be stopt, which haue the truth disturbde.

### Psalm 65

[Summary:] A praise and thanksgiving unto God by the faithful, who are signified by Sion and Jerusalem, for the choosing, preservation and governance of them, and for plentiful blessings poured forth upon all the earth.

[verse 1] Thy praise alone, O lord, doth reign, in Sion thine own hill:  
their vowes to thee they do maintain, & their behests fulfil.  
[verse 2] For that thou dost their prayer hear, and dost thereto agree:  
Thy people all both far and near, with trust shall come to thee.  
[verse 3] Our wicked life so far exceeds, that we should fall therein:  
But Lord forgive our great misdeeds, and purge us from our sin.  
[verse 4] The man is blessed whom thou dost choose, within thy court to dwell:  
Thy house and temple he shall use, with pleasures, that excel.  
[verse 5] Of thy great justice heare us God, our health of thee doth rise:  
The hope of all the earth abroad, and the sea coasts likewise.  
[verse 6] With strength thou art beset about, and compassed with thy power:  
thou makest the mountains strong and stout, to stand in every shower.  
[verse 7] The swelling seas thou dost assuage, and make their streams full still:  
Thou dost restrain the people's rage, and rule them at thy will.  
[verse 8] The folk that dwell full far on earth, shall dread thy signs to see:  
which morn and even in great mirth, do pass with praise to thee.  
[verse 9] When that the earth is chapt and dry, and thirsteth more and more.  
Then with thy drops thou dost apply, and much increase her store.  
[verse 10] The flood of God doth overstow [overflow], and so doth cause to spring:  
The seed and corn which men do sow, for he doth guide the thing.  
[verse 11] With wheate thou dost her furrows fill, where by her clods do fall:  
Thy drops to her thou dost distill, and bless her fruit withal.  
[verse 12] Thou deckest the earth of thy good grace, with fair and pleasant crop:



Thy clouds distill her dew apace, great plenty they do drop.

[verse 13] Wherby the desert shal begin, full great increase to bring:

The little hills shal joy therein, much fruit in them shall spring.

[verse 14] In places plaine the flock shall feed, and cover all the earth:

The valleys with corn shall so exceed, that men shall sing for mirth.

### Psalm 103

Argument: This is a Psalme most excellent, wherin the Prophet doth prouoke men and angels, and al creatures to prayse the Lord for his fatherly mercies, and deliuerance of his people from al euils for his prouidence euer al things and the preseruacion of the faithful.

[verse 1] MY soule geue laud vnto the Lord, my sprite shall do the same: and all the secrets of my hart praise ye his holy name.

[verse 2] Geue thanks to God for al his gifts, shew not thy self vnkind, & suffer not his benefites to slyp out of thy mynde.

[verse 3] That gaue thee pardon for thy faults, and thee restord again:

For al thy weak and frayle disease, and heald thee of thy paine.

[verse 4] That did redeme thy life from death, from which thou couldst not flee

His mercy and compassion both, he did extend to thee.

[verse 5] That fild with goodnes thy desire, and did prolong thy youth:

Like as the Egle casteth her bil, wherby her age renueth.

[verse 6] The Lord with iustice doth repay, al such as be opprest:

So that their suffrings & their wrongs, are turned to the best.

[verse 7] His wayes & his commaundements, to Moyses he did shew:

His counsels and his valiant actes, the Israelites did know.

[verse 8] The Lord is kind and merciful, when sinners do hym greue:

The slowest to conceyue a wrath, and rediest to forgeue.

[verse 9] He chides not vs continually, though we be ful of stryfe:

Nor kepes our faultes in memory, for al our sinful lyfe.

[verse 10] Nor yet according to our sinnes, the Lord doth vs regard:

Nor after our iniquities, he doth not vs reward.

[verse 11] But as the space is wondrous great, twixt heauen and earth aboute

So is his goodnes much more large, to them that do hym loue.

[verse 12] God doth remoue our sinnes from vs, and our offences al:

as far as is the sunne rising, ful distant from his fal.

*The second part.*

[verse 13] And looke what pitie parents deare, vnto their children beare:

Like pitie beares the Lord to such, as worship him in feare:

[verse 14] The Lord that made vs knoweth our shape, our mould & fashion iust:

how weake and frayle our nature is, and how we be but dust.

[verse 15] And how the tyme of mortal men, is lyke the withering hay:

Or like the floure right fayre in field, that fades ful soone away.

[verse 16] Whose glosse & beauty stormy winds, do vtterly disgrace:

and make that after their assaults, such blossoms haue no place.

[verse 17] But yet the goodnes of the Lord, with his shal euer stand:  
their childrens children do receyue his righteousnes at hand.

[verse 18] I meane which kepe his couenant, with al their whole desyre:  
and not forget to do the thyng, that he doth them requyre.

[verse 19] The heauens hye are made the seat, and footestool of the Lord:  
And by his power imperial, he gouernes al the world.

[verse 20] Ye angels which are great in power, prayse ye and bles the Lord:  
Which to obey and do hys wyl, immediatly accord.

[verse 21] ye noble hostes and ministers, cease not to laud him stil:  
Which ready are to execute, his pleasure and hys wil.

[verse 22] ye all his works in euery place, prayse ye his holy name:  
My hart, my mynd, and eke my soule, prayse ye also the same.

### Sonnet 29

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,  
I all alone beweepe my outcast state  
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries  
And look upon myself and curse my fate,  
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,  
Featured like him, like him with friends possess'd,  
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,  
With what I most enjoy contented least;  
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,  
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,  
Like to the lark at break of day arising  
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;  
For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings  
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

### Sonnet 103

A Lack, what poverty my Muse brings forth,  
That having such a scope to show her pride,  
The argument all bare is of more worth  
Than when it hath my added praise beside.  
Oh blame me not if I no more can write!  
Look in your glass and there appears a face,  
That over-goes my blunt invention quite,

Dulling my lines, and doing me disgrace.  
 Were it not sinful then striving to mend,  
 To mar the subject that before was well,  
 For to no other pass my verses tend,  
 Than of your graces and your gifts to tell.  
 And more, much more than in my verse can sit  
 Your own glass shows you, when you look in it.

### Sonnet 135

Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy Will,  
 And Will to boot, and Will in over-plus;  
 More than enough am I that vexed thee still,  
 To thy sweet will making addition thus.  
 Wilt thou, whose will is large and spacious,  
 Not once vouchsafe to hide my will in thine?  
 Shall will in others seem right gracious,  
 And in my will no fair acceptance shine?  
 The sea, all water, yet receives rain still,  
 And in abundance addeth to his store;  
 So thou, being rich in Will, add to thy Will  
 One will of mine, to make thy large will more.  
 Let no unkind, no fair beseechers kill;  
 Think all but one, and me in that one Will.

[The author is grateful for the support of Gail Paster and the staff of the Folger Shakespeare Library, without whose help this article could not have been written. Roger Stritmatter offered crucial advice and support for this project.]

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Some readers may be interested in the prior saga of this article. The editor of a major mainstream journal apologized that it took his journal nearly two years to reject the article. When it was first submitted, one peer reviewer wrote, “its thesis is sound and its detail convincing.” The author was asked to expand the article. He did so, and submitted a second draft. A few weeks later, the editor wrote that the first peer reviewer “thinks it can be published as it stands.” The second reviewer wrote, “this reader is haunted by the suspicion that there’s something to the argument.” But he asked for extensive revisions. Alas, the second reviewer never approved the third, fourth, or fifth revisions. Only at the end of the process did the author reveal his Oxfordian authorship opinion to the editor. (He self-censors manuscripts he sends to mainstream English literature journals; he looks forward to the day when that will no longer be necessary.)
- <sup>2</sup> Richard M. Waugaman, “The Sternhold and Hopkins *Whole Booke of Psalms* Is a Major Source for the Works of Shakespeare,” *Notes & Queries* 56:595-604 (2009); “Echoes of the ‘Lamed’ Section of Psalm 119 in Shakespeare’s Sonnets,” *Shakespeare Matters* 8:1-8 (2009). “Psalm Echoes in *1 Henry VI*, *Richard II*, and *Edward III*,” *Notes & Queries* 57:359-364 (2010); “The Discovery of a Major New Literary Source for Shakespeare’s Works in the de Vere Geneva Bible,” *Brief Chronicles II*:109-120 (2010); “*Titus Andronicus*, the Psalms, and Edward de Vere’s Bible,” *The Oxfordian* 13:34-49 (2011); “An Oxfordian Quark, or a Quirky Oxfreudian? Psalm Evidence of de Vere’s Authorship of Shakespeare’s Works,” *The Shakespeare Oxford Newsletter* (in press). (Most of the author’s publications on Shakespeare are available at [www.oxfreudian.com](http://www.oxfreudian.com).)
- <sup>3</sup> Richmond Noble, *Shakespeare’s Biblical Knowledge* (New York: Macmillan, 1935).
- <sup>4</sup> Beth Quitslund, *The Reformation in Rhyme* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008). WBP was often bound with a Bible or prayerbook. This article uses the 1565 edition from the University of Illinois (STC 2434; available on EEBO). Unless otherwise specified, all psalm allusions in this article are from WBP.
- <sup>5</sup> Richmond Noble, *Shakespeare’s Use of Song* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923).
- <sup>6</sup> Peter Seng, *The Vocal Songs in the Plays of Shakespeare: A Critical History* (Cambridge,

Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967).

- <sup>7</sup> Rivkah Zim, *English Metrical Psalms: Poetry as Praise and Prayer, 1535-1601* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 143.
- <sup>8</sup> Beth Quitslund, *The Reformation in Rhyme*.
- <sup>9</sup> See, for example, Margaret P. Hannay, ‘“Wisdom the Wordes”: Psalm Translation and Elizabethan Women’s Spirituality.’ *Religion and Literature* 23 (1991), 65-82.
- <sup>10</sup> But his wording seldom corresponds to the wording of the examples below.
- <sup>11</sup> Hannibal Hamlin, *Psalm Culture and Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 23.
- <sup>12</sup> Zim, 143.
- <sup>13</sup> Zim, 115.
- <sup>14</sup> Zim, 144.
- <sup>15</sup> Hamlin, 43.
- <sup>16</sup> *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).
- <sup>17</sup> As Antonio observes in *The Merchant of Venice*, ‘The devil can cite Scripture to his purpose./ An evil soul producing holy witness/ Is like a villain with a smiling cheek.’ (1.3.96-98).
- <sup>18</sup> Quoted in Robert Giroux, *The Book Known as Q: A Consideration of Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (New York: Atheneum, 1982), 225.
- <sup>19</sup> Richard D. Altick, in his ‘Symphonic Imagery in *Richard II*,’ in Jeanne T. Newlin, *Richard II: Critical Essays* (London: Garland Publishing, 1947/1984), 278.
- <sup>20</sup> Roger A. Stritmatter, *The Marginalia of Edward Vere’s Geneva Bible: Providential Discovery, Literary Reasoning, and Historical Consequence* (Northampton, MA: Oxenford Press, 2001), 225.
- <sup>21</sup> See Waugaman, 2009.
- <sup>22</sup> The Geneva [G], Bishops [B], and Coverdale [C] translation do not use “grief” here.
- <sup>23</sup> G, B, and C do not use “manifold” or “deserts” here.
- <sup>24</sup> G, B, and C do not use “in thy mind” here.
- <sup>25</sup> Hannibal Hamlin, personal communication, October 24, 2008.
- <sup>26</sup> As noted, de Vere showed special interest in Psalm 25:10.
- <sup>27</sup> G, B, and C do not use “take shame” here.
- <sup>28</sup> G, B, and C do not use “offence” here.
- <sup>29</sup> G, B, and C do not use “comfortless” here.
- <sup>30</sup> Waugaman, 2009.
- <sup>32</sup> Helen Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).
- <sup>33</sup> G, B, and C do not use “still,” “more,” or “store” here.
- <sup>34</sup> G, B, and C (unrhymed) translations of Psalm 65 also lack any final words ending in -ill.  
G. Blakemore Evans, *The Sonnets*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 141.
- <sup>35</sup> Stephen Booth, *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 180.

- <sup>36</sup> G, B, and C do not include this phrase. “I think on thee” occurs only five other times in EEBO before 1600.
- <sup>37</sup> London: Richarde Smith.
- <sup>38</sup> Athanasius’ “treatise,” often printed with *WBP* (including its 1569 edition), says of this psalm, “If to auoyde persecution thou flee into the desert, feare not as though thou were there *alone* and desolate: but hauyng God, and in the dawning of the *day arising* to him, sing the 63d psalm.” “Alone and desolate” are echoed not only by the sense, but also by one of the words of the second line of the sonnet (“I all *alone*”).
- <sup>39</sup> G, B, and C do not use “sing” here.
- <sup>40</sup> Discussed in Waugaman, 2009.
- <sup>41</sup> Discussed in Waugaman, 2010.
- <sup>42</sup> Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms* (New York: Norton, 2007), 358.
- <sup>43</sup> Vendler, 435.
- <sup>44</sup> G, B, and C do not use the highlighted words here.
- <sup>45</sup> Once again, G, B, and C do not use the highlighted words here.
- <sup>46</sup> Early English Books Online (EEBO) has fully searchable texts of some 22,000 books.
- <sup>47</sup> G, B, and C do not use “do disgrace” here.
- <sup>48</sup> Vendler, 440.
- <sup>49</sup> Neither of these highlighted words is used in G, B, or C.
- <sup>50</sup> Zim, 115.
- <sup>51</sup> Shaheen, “If the passage in Shakespeare over which there is uncertainty also occurs in one of Shakespeare’s sources... then we can reasonably conclude that Shakespeare was not making a biblical reference” (7).
- <sup>52</sup> Caroline Spurgeon, *Shakespeare’s Imagery and What It Tells Us* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935).
- <sup>53</sup> Next to 2 *Maccabees*, chapter 3.
- <sup>54</sup> Ann M. Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information Before the Modern Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).
- <sup>55</sup> This comparison has some limitations, since de Vere tended to mark entire psalms in *WBP*, and single verses elsewhere in his Geneva Bible.
- <sup>56</sup> Stritmatter, 225.
- <sup>57</sup> Alter, 111.
- <sup>58</sup> Shaheen, 70.
- <sup>59</sup> Alter, 124.
- <sup>60</sup> Alter, 125.