

Chapter 18

‘All Scripture is given by inspiration of God’:¹ Dissonance and psalmody

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If the Bible was believed to comprise the word of God disseminated to the people, psalms taught individuals how to converse with God, while at the same time containing axioms that epitomized biblical truths. As David Norton notes, ‘As both essential teaching and as poetry, the Psalms were central to early English literary ideas of the Bible in ways that the prose Bible could not be’.² Psalms were often regarded as the Bible in miniature: each psalm contributed to a paraphrase of biblical teachings and consequently they were much translated and discussed.

The Bible was fundamental to early modern culture, but the psalms underpinned devotional practice: from 1559, *The Book of Common Prayer* enjoined parishioners to read through the entire Old Testament annually, the New Testament three times a year and the psalms once a month. The reading of the psalter was to begin afresh on the first of each month, regardless of how many days the month comprised: for February, the final psalms in the psalter would be left unread and in months containing thirty-one days, the psalms read on the 30th of the month would be repeated the next day.³ This repetition imposed a fixed, cyclical pattern on church worship, which ran parallel with the emphasis Protestants placed upon *sola*

scriptura and the dissemination of divine authority through Bible reading. Yet psalms are a generically unstable form, operating at the margins of oral and literate cultures and between music and poetry. They were widely published and in varying forms. As we will see, the various psalm translations and their transmission in textual and aural/oral form meant that the enduring and perpetual cycle of psalmody articulated in the *Book of Common Prayer* was challenged by the ways in which early modern people engaged with the psalter.

Over the last thirty years, scholarship has afforded much critical attention to the relationship between words and music and the reception history of the psalms. Rivkah Zim's 1987 study established the psalms as a literary and devotional form, while Robin A. Leaver examined church music and the relationship between the psalms and hymnody.⁴ More recently, the turn to material culture has led to some insightful interdisciplinary studies on the relationship between the psalms' devotional, literary and musical functions; their utility in attempting to assert congregational unity through the practices of performing and printing; and their role in domestic settings.⁵ Beth Quitslund has endeavoured to rescue the most ubiquitous of metrical psalm translations - Sternhold and Hopkins - from the late-seventeenth century's derisory view of the volume, and to show the practices of making and unmaking that afforded the psalter different guises and contexts in its various utterances.⁶

These insights locate the psalms at the centre of Protestant and Reformation debates about the use of vernacular language and music in church worship, and illustrate how they functioned as a means of disseminating biblical teachings in a Protestant domestic setting. Yet the psalms were, of course, not the sole property of Protestants; Catholics also read, sang and translated the holy songs.⁷ Drawing upon these studies, this chapter focuses upon how the psalms were used. It first examines the distinctive position of the psalms, understood as both poems and devotions, and the conditions under which psalms were translated into the vernacular in England, before addressing their use in worship and the relationship between music, text and the body. Finally, I explore the material practices of printing the psalms. While psalm-singing was presented as a means of creating unity, the ways in which the psalms were transmitted meant that they became a site of discord.

Translating and paraphrasing the psalms appears not to have been as contentious as the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages (at least not until the Reformation rendered all forms of intervention in the scripture delicate). The earliest psalms in English can be dated back to King Alfred: the Paris psalter contains Old English translations running parallel to their Latin counterparts and it was widely copied. An extant Middle English psalter comprising rhymed quatrains dates to the early fourteenth century.⁸ Translating the psalms into the vernacular was for both pre- and early

modern writers an act of piety, and the sixteenth century reader understood the psalm as both a pleasurable piece of versification and a piece of devotional writing that instilled doctrinal truths in those who experienced it.

In the mid-sixteenth century, the conceptual distinction between the psalms as devotional acts and as literary productions was further blurred by the appearance of what Quitslund has termed ‘Tower Psalms’. Composed by those incarcerated in the Tower of London, these psalms are intensely topical. Courtly poets such as Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard may have developed this form of metrical psalmody as an act of piety, but in so doing, they appropriated scripture to comment upon their own plight.⁹ Poetry and prophecy are both central to Sir Philip Sidney’s reading of the psalms in his *Defense of Poesy*:

And may I not ... say that the holy David’s Psalms are a divine poem? If I do, I shall not do it without the testimony of great learned men both ancient and modern. But even the name of ‘Psalms’ will speak for me, which being interpreted, is nothing but ‘songs’; then, that is fully written in metre, as all learned Hebreians agree, although the rules be not yet fully found; lastly and principally, his handling his prophecy which is merely poetical. For what else is the awaking his musical instruments ... but a heavenly poesy, wherein almost he showeth himself a

passionate lover of that unspeakable and everlasting beauty, to
be seen by the eyes of the mind, only cleared by faith?¹⁰

Sidney thus insists upon the status of the psalms as poetry: he focuses upon the stresses and patterns that are generated by the length of the syllables and in so doing implies that there is musicality in the production of words.

Musical metaphors focus Sidney's discussions upon the role of the psalms as divine poems.¹¹ Although early modern scholars were uncertain about the textures and shape of Hebrew poetry, it seems evident that Sidney's insistence upon the psalms being poetry follows a pattern of thought regarding how the psalms operated. The psalms, difficult to categorise generically, serve two purposes for Sidney: they disseminate scripture, but they also entertain and delight. Sidney presents the psalms as a form of biblical exegesis, and the praise that was subsequently given to his collaborative translations appears to endorse this view.

Mary Sidney completed the psalter after her brother's death in 1586 and is responsible for the majority of the translations that make up the Sidney psalter. Despite the obvious literary and rhetorical flourishes of the poems, they were celebrated not only as a literary form but also as a mode for religious devotion.¹² Mary Sidney's psalm translations, as Danielle Clarke and others have demonstrated, present insights into early modern authorship and female agency.¹³ Women were involved in the manuscript circulation of devotional texts throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth

centuries.¹⁴ Whereas women reading Bibles was seen by some as contentious, there was a long tradition of women reading, singing, and translating psalms, as well as using the psalms within a domestic setting as a form of religious instruction, material object, devotional writing, and as a way to legitimize their writing.¹⁵

The Sidney psalms blur the lines between religious and poetic concerns, but also draw familial bonds into their discourse. In Mary Sidney's prefatory poem, 'To th' Angell spirit', courtly poetry and religious meditation conjoin:

How can I name whom singing sighs extend,
And not unstop my tears' eternal spring?
But he did warp, I weaved this web to end;
The stuff not ours, our work no curious thing,
Wherein yet well we thought the Psalmist King,
Now English denizened, though Hebrew born,
Would to thy music undispleasèd sing,
Oft having worse, without repining worn;¹⁶

As Margaret Hannay notes, Mary Sidney uses the common metaphor of translation clothing text, first as a way to weave together the psalms' dual authorship and then to explicate the scriptural genesis of the psalms.¹⁷ However, the metaphor also becomes a way of weaving together divine authority, kingship and scripture. In referencing 'singing sighs', Mary

Sidney draws attention to her brother's absence. The translation becomes a means of memorializing and monumentalizing Philip Sidney and of drawing male and female translator together with the voice of David; at the same time, it focuses attention upon the court and upon vernacular language - 'English denized' - as a form of harmonious music. Claiming that her translations shy away from intricate detail ('no curious thing'), Mary Sidney's statement chimes with the notion that translating the psalms should lack art as a means to focus upon the divine word, but also gestures towards translating in English as a form of nationalism. In a second dedicatory poem, addressed to Elizabeth, Mary Sidney further emphasizes the relationship between court, language and nation. Thirty years later, William Loe (chaplain to James I), would take this notion to the extreme by publishing psalm translations written entirely in monosyllables, 'It being a received opinion amo[n]gst many ... that heretofore our english [sic.] tongue in the true idiome thereof consisted altogether of Monasillables, until it came to be blended, and mingled with the commixture of Exotique languages'.¹⁸ For Loe, Psalm translation becomes not just a means of devotion, but a way to purify the English language.

For these writers, the psalms were written texts that could be translated and appropriated to suit particular contexts and directed towards certain audiences. Whereas Sidney presents David 'awakening his musical instruments' as a metaphor invoking the musicality of poetic metre, some

Reformists praised the psalms as sung forms. Despite this appreciation of the psalm's virtue as song, psalm setting was the topic of heated debate, especially in the English context.

In the epistle to the reader of his 1542 French translation of the psalter, John Calvin asserts the importance of music in Church worship:

And in truth we know by experience that song has great force and vigor to move and inflame the hearts ... to invoke and praise God with a more vehement and ardent zeal. It must always be looked to that the song be not light and frivolous but have weight and majesty, as Saint Augustine says, and there is likewise a great difference between the music one makes to entertain men at table and in their homes, and the psalms which are sung in the Church in the presence of God and his angels.¹⁹

Calvin thus advocates the use of song in church on the grounds that, by appealing to the senses, music aids devotion: the combined aural and oral sensation of singing speaks directly to the heart and soul of the congregation and in so doing causes people to praise God more fully. Group singing connects individuals to a wider religious community, and within the space of the church a symbiotic relationship is established where members of the congregation feed off each other's fervour. Communal prayer becomes a form of nourishment for the soul, which is enhanced through the use of music.

Earlier, Calvin asserts that ‘Saint Paul speaks not only of praying by word of mouth, but also of singing’.²⁰ Chapter 14 of Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians bursts with allusions to singing and praying. The Geneva Bible (1560) states, ‘For if I pray *in a strange* tongue, my spirit praieith: but mine understading [sic.] is without frute. What is it then? I wil praye with the spirit, but I wil pray with the understanding also; I wil sing with the spirite, but I wil sing with the understanding also’ (1 Corinthians 14:14-15). The King James Bible alters the conjunctive to read, ‘For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, and my understanding is unfruitful. What is it then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also’. While these may seem like minor textual variants, the shift in tone heralded by the alteration in conjunctive is telling. In the Genevan version, the abrasive ‘but’ cuts through the connection that has been established between the processes of praying and the need to understand devotional practices. Employing parataxis (the rhetorical strategy most commonly associated with the King James Bible), the more gentle ‘and’ turns prayer and understanding into a collective undertaking where the one necessitates the other. Wycliffe and Tyndale used the word ‘mind’ instead of the word ‘understanding’, which further alters the resonances of the passage and gestures to a dualistic view of mind and body and how the soul connects to God. In each instance, the need for

comprehension is brought to the fore. In order to participate in church worship, the congregation needs to understand what is going on.

Yet Paul's main focus is not upon the rights or wrongs of singing in church; instead he discusses the relative merits of speaking in tongues. Calvin appropriates and reinvents Paul's teachings to endorse psalmody and advocate singing in churches and vernacular worship. However, the presence of St Augustine in these discussions complicates the relationship between prayer, music and language. In alluding to St Augustine's remarks regarding the need for church music to have 'weight and majesty', Calvin draws attention to some of the perceived perils of music: in being able to affect the senses and move the spirit to godliness, there is also the danger that music could drive a person to vice. For this reason, not all reformers were in favour of using music in church worship.

Augustine's views regarding music were not limited to the comment to which Calvin alludes. When considering the place and function of music in church worship, Augustine oscillates between acknowledging that it offers earthly pleasure and contending that it enhances religious devotion:

Thus floate I betweene peril of pleasure, and an approved profitable custome: enclined ... to allow of the old usage of singing in the Church, that so by the delight taken in at the eares, the weaker minds may be rowzed up into some feeling of devotion. And yet againe, so oft as it befalls me to be more mov'd

with the *voyce* then with the *ditty*, I confesse myselfe to have grievously offended.²¹

Music aids devotion, but only when used correctly: if the hearer is more delighted with the beauty of the apparatus that produces the music, the listener has erred. The pleasure of music can thus be tempered with remorse. Despite these qualms, Augustine ultimately conforms to orthodox patristic beliefs that advocated music in early Christian church worship.

The combinations of sounds and harmony allure, but this ability to attract individuals was not universally endorsed. Despite the practice of psalm-singing in some Churches, the apparent accord achieved through music hides the tensions elicited by psalm-singing. The reformed church in Geneva initially followed the practice of their counterparts in Berne (who in turn followed the practice that Zwingli had implemented in Zurich) and banned music in church worship. As more Protestants who feared persecution fled Catholic countries and settled in Geneva, the prohibition of music in all churches ceased. In January 1537, Calvin convinced the Genevan council to permit psalm-singing in church worship.²²

In England, as Quitslund notes, one translation from the 1530s demonstrates an indebtedness to the hymnological tradition that influenced continental psalmody. This is Miles Coverdale's *Goostly psalmes and spirituall songes* (c. 1535). This was one of four psalters that Coverdale published between 1534 and 1540; as Jamie Ferguson deftly observes, it

‘manifests a pluralistic conception of scriptural truth’.²³ Scriptural truth is not fixed; it is fluid and open to reappraisal, despite Protestantism’s allegiance to *sola scriptura*. What sets *Goostly psalmes* apart from the other psalters is that it is the first English psalter to be published with music. This might suggest that *Goostly psalmes* could be used in Church worship, but officially England was still married to a Latin liturgy and would not have its first vernacular prayer book for another fourteen years; Coverdale asserts that his psalter is intended for domestic use.

Denouncing profane music, in his epistle to the reader, Coverdale expresses a desire that:

our mynstrels had none other thyng to playe upo[n], nether oure carters & plowmen other thyng to whistle upon, save Psalmes, hymnes, and soch godley songes as David is occupied with all. And yf women syttyng at theyr rockes, or spynnyng at the wheles, had none other songes to passe theyr tyme ... they shulde be better occupied, then with hey nony nony, hey troly loly, & soch lyke fantasies.²⁴

Coverdale weaves psalm-singing into all aspects of everyday life: not only men, but women from all social groupings are considered as fit audiences to consume and disseminate the psalms through song.

Coverdale seeks to replace popular tunes and ballads with psalm-singing. Such a desire demonstrates an anxiety regarding the place and

function of both music and scripture in early modern England. Fearful that secular music can only lead to profane action, Coverdale views the singing of psalms as a way to heighten spirituality. This view is manifested in a text that was translated by Coverdale and reprinted frequently throughout the sixteenth century. Here, Heinrich Bullinger advises against allowing daughters to read romances and suggests they should sing psalms instead:

Bookes of Robin hood, Bevis of Hampton, Troilus & such like fables, do but kyndel in lyers like lyes and wanton love, which ought not in youth with their first spittle to be drunken in, least they ever remayne in them. If ye delight to sing songs, ye have the Psalmes and many goodly songes and books in English, right fruitful & sweete.²⁵

The potential for books to be a corrupting influence - as well as a source for good - means that the psalms ought to be the only texts that are digested.

While Coverdale's psalms marked an important intervention in the paraphrasing of scripture, the shifts in royal authority in the mid-sixteenth century contributed to the psalms not being widely used in Church worship. Coverdale hints at psalm-singing being connected to private and public devotion, but biblical reading and church worship were far from private acts. In 1547, Edward VI and his advisers (more sympathetic to reformist measures in continental Europe) permitted Archbishop Thomas Cranmer to draw up a liturgy in English. However, with Mary's accession, in 1553,

many prominent Protestants fled to Geneva, and other Protestant states, taking with them the psalms that had been translated in or around 1547 by Thomas Sternhold, Groom to Edward's bedchamber, and augmented by John Hopkins around 1549. During the five-year suspension of Protestant worship in England, these psalms would be developed into a complete psalter overseas, published in various formats and with different paratextual materials from 1562.²⁶ While Coverdale's psalms would be added to the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, the Sternhold and Hopkins psalter would become the dominant psalter in domestic and church settings for the next one hundred and fifty years.

With popularity came derision. Part of the controversy lay in the psalm settings. Most of the Sternhold and Hopkins psalms are in ballad metre. This rhythmic affinity meant that, despite Coverdale envisaging the psalms as replacing ballads, they could be, and were, set to ballad tunes. However, the title page of the 1560 edition of the - as yet incomplete - Sternhold and Hopkins *Psalmes of David in English Metre* states clearly how they are to be read:

VERY METE TO BE USED of all sorts of people privately for their godly solace and confort, laying aparte all ungodly songs and ballads, which tend only to the nourishing of vice, and corrupting of youth.²⁷

From the earliest editions of *The Whole Booke of Psalms*, the holy songs were presented as the opposite of ballads. The title page emphasizes that psalms are a form of spiritual nourishment. Feeding the soul, the psalms present a counterbalance to the corrupting influence of ballads: the content of the words rather than their metrical patterns mean that the psalms aid private devotion.

By 1566, the title page declares the psalms to be ‘Newly set forth and allowed to me [sic.] song in all churches, of all the people together ... & moreover in private houses, for their godly solace and comfort’.²⁸ Within six years, the text becomes universal, operating at the borders of private and public devotion and at the hinterland of secular and sacred pastime. Such ubiquity allowed the psalms to become a means of solace and of pleasure, yet they still met with hostility. Catholics attacked Protestant worship through references to ‘Genevan psalms’:

their service is nought, because they have divers false and blasphemous things therein: and that which is yet worse, they so place those things, as they may seem to the simple, to be very scripture. As for example, in the end of a certain *Geneva* Psalme, they pray to God to keepe them from Pope, Turke, and Papist, which is blasphemous.²⁹

Thus claimed *A Briefe Discourse Containing Certaine Reasons Why Catholicks Refuse to Goe to Church* (1601). However, it is not clear which

of the psalms is being referenced; by prefacing ‘psalme’ with ‘Genevan’, the author distances translations of the psalms from their roots in the Bible and instead suggests that the mode of translation is an act that conflates political and confessional differences as a way of deceiving a naïve audience. The psalms may be the Bible in miniature, but this reading demonstrates ongoing concerns regarding the exigencies of translation: rather than being a means of disseminating the divine word and unifying the audience, translating the psalms provokes hostility and suspicion.

Protestants may have been reforming Church worship from the sixteenth century, but so too were Roman Catholics. This highlights ways in which Catholics and Protestants reconceptualised church worship in the wake of the Reformation. Amongst some Protestants, congregational psalm-singing was actively promoted: stylistically different to the Catholic Mass, metrical psalm-singing represented a novel interjection in the soundscape.³⁰ At the same time, recusant Catholics retained the material objects of devotion - books, rosaries and sacred items - and married these with pilgrimages to sacred sites and private devotion at home.³¹ Yet Catholics also invested in the religious soundscape and Protestants were in possession of commodities that brought religious imagery into the domestic setting, thereby enhancing their doctrinal refutation of sacred space being fixed in particular religious places.³² This interrelationship of the materiality of faith is mirrored by the lack of consensus regarding whether psalms should be

sung. Not all Protestants encouraged the singing of psalms; although Sternhold and Hopkins' *Whole Booke of Psalms* was bound frequently with Bibles and the *Book of Common Prayer*, the place and function of the psalms in reformed church worship continued to be contentious. Far from demonstrating Protestant unity against Catholicism and *vice versa*, the material practices of devotion were pliable.

Although the psalms were translated into numerous vernacular languages, the Genevan melodies were adopted and appropriated across language divides.³³ This was due to how the music was composed and the development of metrical psalmody across Europe. There was a fluid interplay in the use of music, and composers borrowed from plainsong used in the Catholic liturgy as well as from popular tunes, vernacular hymns and the psalter used in reformist churches in France and Germany.³⁴ This musical interplay emphasizes that it was not just Protestants who were using psalms in early modern Europe, and also reveals the extent to which the relative syllabic and rhythmic unity of the metrical psalms ensured that they could easily be sung to existing tunes. This would seem to imply that the psalms are a way to disseminate the divine word and inspire euphony through the use of music.

Perhaps erroneously attributed to John Case, *The Praise of Musicke* (1586) enforces the connection between word, space and congregation:

Musick with the concinnitie of her sound, and the excellency of harmony, doth as it were knit & joyne us unto God, putting us in mind of our maker and of that mutuall unitie & consent, which ought to bee as of voices so of mindes in Gods church and congregations. ... if there were no other reason, yet this were of sufficient force to perswade the lawful use of Musicke: in that as a pleasant bait, it doeth both allure men into the church which otherwise would not come, & ... continue till the divine service bee ended.³⁵

Music thus becomes a means of creating unity, not just in the church or congregation, but also between an individual and God. It boosts attendance at church and encourages people to be receptive to the words that are sung. However, as we have seen, psalm-singing was not limited to church worship. While Calvin supported the singing of psalms in church, the preface to Claude Goudimel's 1565 four-part harmonization of the psalms asserts that his settings are intended for a different venue: 'To the melody of the psalms we have, in this little volume, adopted three parts, not to induce you to sing them in Church but that you may rejoice in God, particularly at home'.³⁶ Through psalm singing, secular space is rendered sacred. The psalms become a means of bringing musical devotion into the domestic realm, and transforming the household into a congregation.³⁷ But the addition of harmonization acknowledges the household may have greater

musical skill and levels of literacy than the average congregation. It also demonstrates how ubiquitous psalm-singing was in early modern culture: it was designed not only to enhance church worship, but also to entertain and as a means to inspire spirituality in the home.

Roger Bray argues that psalm settings composed for domestic use by the recusant William Byrd could be palatable to Catholics and Protestants alike, implying a unity across confessional divides.³⁸ However, the material practices of performance mean that domestic singers might be more focussed upon the demands of playing than of praying. As Richard Wistreich tellingly observes, notation ‘constantly reminds the reader of the inherent provisionality of music’s textual authority’.³⁹ The retranslating of text into oral/aural form means that the performer’s immediate attention may be on the production of sound rather than the godly content of the words being sung. This leads to discussions over what the place and function of music is in relation to scripture, and points again to Augustine’s fears that the sensory experiences of music both enhance and potentially corrupt devotion.

In 1619, the poet and later parliamentarian radical, George Wither, commented at length on the perils present in the relationship between words and music:

I would advise touching the *Musicke* of these divine *Hymnes* ...
that men should be carefull to let it bee such as were grave, &

suitable to the qualitie of those Songs. For, *Musicke* hath many *Species*, and is of very different operations: insomuch, as if that been not observed, and the qualitie of the subject well considered, with what Straines it most naturally requires; the *Song* and the *Tune* will as improperly sute together, as a Clownes habit, upon a grave Stateman. Yea, the inarticulate sounds have, in themselves, I know not what secret power, to move the very affections of mens soules, according to the qualitie of their Straines ... And if they would remember themselves, they could truely say, that when they have been exceedingly merrily disposed, one deepe solemne Straine hath made them, suddenly and extremely melancholy: And that, on contrary againe, at another time, when they have been oppressed with sadnesse, a touch or two of sprightly *Musicke*, hath quickly raised their hearts to a pitch of jollity.⁴⁰

Echoing Calvin and Coverdale, Wither notes the transformative effects of music, but suggests more clearly the connection between music and humoral imbalances in the body. Hearing serves a medicinal purpose, but this relationship between body and sounds also means that music can be dangerous.⁴¹ Rather than emphasizing the elevated spiritual nourishment that the words of the psalms can afford the listener, inappropriate settings render sacred texts profane:

As our praises of God, and holy invocation ought to bee made with such reverent heede, and in such grace, modest and decent tunes as become them, whether they bee the *Psalmes of Davide*, or other holy *Hymns*, invented for the honour of God, and our spirituall comfort: So, in whatsoever subject it bee, we ought to have a care, that Jesus, or any other name of God, be never used in any song, but where the voice may be lifted up with unfained reverence I have heard in foolish, and ridiculous Ballads . . . the name of our blessed Saviour, invocated and sung to these roguish tunes, which have formerly served for prophane Jiggs . . . : and yet use hath made it so familiar, that we now heare it, and scare take notice that there is ought evill therin. . . . to offer a Prince wine in the uncleanest vessel, were no greater indignity, then to present the great King of heaven with his praises, & the devotions of our soules, in such tunes as have bin formerly dedicated, to some loose Harlot, or used in expression of our basest and most wanton affections. Nor do I recon it little better then Sacriledge, for any man to use those tunes with a profane subject, which have beene once consecrated unto the service and honour of God. (I2r)

Wither's attack on 'improper' settings is long, but worth quoting at length. Not only the psalms, but hymns and anthems need to be presented in the appropriate register. 'Decent' tunes may supply the words with a suitably modest setting, but the use of the word 'grace' points to both earthly elegance (the graceful tone of the words and the music) and the inner grace through which the elect were believed to gain salvation. The sensual experience of listening provides spiritual comfort, but only when the words are set to appropriate music.

Yet Wither's insistence upon 'unfained reverence' suggests a more qualified sense of spirituality and the comfort that can be gained from singing sacred texts. In the seventeenth century, Elizabeth Isham wrote of the delight she took in learning to sing psalms, and recorded the nourishment that they provided her mother during a time of sickness: 'in the night she would call for Suppings that thereby she might refressh her selfe ... after when something better she could give care to reading she called for Psalmes of David, which were often read over to her'.⁴² After receiving bodily nourishment, Isham's mother gains spiritual nourishment, though she is only healed when Mr Dod comforts her by explicating the later verses of Isaiah 28.⁴³ The combined attention to the needs of the body and the soul become a healing ritual, which enforces Helen Smith's contention that reading is a 'bodily and an embodied practice' and emphasizes the complexities of the relationship between text and setting.⁴⁴

Wither's condemnation of ballad tunes being used for psalmody centres around their relationship to the ballad text. However, his impassioned critique of praising God through songs that had previously adored prostitutes is not without qualification. Aghast at the intertextual resonances that are created through recycling music, and believing this will lead people to connect the spiritual with the earthly and thereby fail to place their sights on higher matters, Wither ends with a curious concession:

So I beleeeve, that he who applies, unto vaine songs, those tunes which are once appropriated to Divine Subjects (especially the holy *Psalms*) doth that which is abominable unto the Lord. This is my opinion: If I erre, pardon it, for the Zeale I have unto Gods honour, is the cause of this error. (I2r)

After decreeing that vain songs and divine subjects are not to be mixed, Wither includes the caveat that this is his opinion only. Zeal may have caused him to commit an error, but admitting the potential for (theological) error casts doubt upon Wither's narrative. What has previously been decreed as sacrilege could be a means of enhancing spirituality by setting new words to familiar tunes: memory, text and music conjoin to purge the music of its previous, profane utterances. The words and music of the psalms thus have a destabilising effect, with some who criticised the use of popular tunes unclear over why their appropriation should be an abomination to God's honour.⁴⁵

These distinctions become blurred further when we consider the material practices of printing: under James I's patronage, in 1623, Wither was granted a patent for his *Hymnes and Songs of the Church* to be bound with all metrical psalm-books. This overruled earlier, lucrative patents for printing Sternhold and Hopkins.⁴⁶ The right to print the psalms was hotly contested.⁴⁷ In 1575, the composers Thomas Tallis and William Byrd were granted a monopoly to print music, which included the printing of music paper and music importation. From 1588-1593, Byrd had sole ownership of the monopoly and appears to have focused upon printing his own, Catholic music.⁴⁸ However, from 1592, Byrd's Assignee, Thomas East, was printing editions of *The Whole Booke of Psalms* that included musical notation. Such an enterprise was not without its controversies, given that the patent for printing the psalms was a source of vehement dispute, and East certainly lacked authority to print the words.

Printing music blurs the distinctions between the textual and musical transmission of the psalms in print. In a dedication to Sir John Puckering, East presents the printing of words and tunes as providing the whole psalm and suggests that through experiencing the psalms in their entirety, a restorative pleasure is bestowed on the body: 'The word of God (Right honourable) delighteth those which are spiritually mynded: the Art of Musick recreateth such, as are not sensually affected: wher zeal in the one, and skill in the other doe meet, the whole man is revived'.⁴⁹ Words and

music conjoin to aid spirituality. The assertion that those of a spiritual mind gain solace from the words of scripture seems to be an early modern commonplace, but East's observation that music 'recreateth such, as are not sensually affected' is intriguing. The Oxford English Dictionary tells us that 'Recreateth' can mean 'to restore to a good or normal physical condition from a state of weakness or exhaustion', or alternatively it could mean, 'to refresh or enliven (the spirits or mind, a person) by means of sensory or purely physical influence'.⁵⁰ Yet again, we are presented with the ability of sounds to affect the emotions, understood in this period as both psychological and physical.⁵¹ In this reading, *The Whole Booke of Psalmes* needs to include musical notation as a way to complete the text and to allow the words to be sung. Through the combined sensory experience of hearing skillful music and zealous scripture, an individual is restored.

<Fig. 18.1>

In making these claims, East asserts that 'the hart rejoicing in the word, & the eares delighting in the Notes & Tunes, both these might joyne together unto the praise of God' (A2r). The page becomes a textual space where utterances can be stored prior to performance. These 'complete' texts do not just rival the psalter monopoly, but, due to the presence of notation on the page, become superior to other textual forms. However, East's other textual engagements complicate this representation of Protestant accord. As has been noted, Byrd used his patent and East's press to publish his own

works. While East delayed entering some of these works in the Stationers' Company Register and published some as 'hidden' works, which makes their dating ambiguous, he saw through the printing press volumes of Catholic music, including Byrd's *Cantiones* and *Gradualia*, which were designed for Catholic worship.⁵² In April 1600, recusants met at East's house in Aldersgate to discuss the succession of the crown.⁵³ East's printing press (and home) brings into focus the fraught relationships between different faith communities and emphasizes that, while psalm-singing is presented as a way to inspire euphony and make an individual whole (and Byrd produced psalm-settings that could be appreciated by both Catholics and Protestants), the multiple ways in which the psalms were disseminated meant that the processes of psalm-singing often highlighted discord.

This discord is further emphasized when we reconsider East's dedicatory letter, part of which is quoted above. East's use of the word 'sensually' is striking. In the late sixteenth century, 'sensually' means 'with subservience to the senses or lower nature; with undue indulgence of the physical appetites: lustfully, licentiously' and it was not until 1624 that 'sensually' came to mean 'in a manner perceptible to the senses'.⁵⁴ In 1592, East appears to be using 'sensually' in this later sense, but 'recreateth' could also have a secondary meaning. The word both connotes 'mental or spiritual comfort or consolation', but also 'the action or fact of refreshing or entertaining oneself through a pleasurable or interesting pastime,

amusement, activity'.⁵⁵ 'Pleasurable, or interesting' pastimes need not be licentious, but this blurring of the spiritual with the sensual through singing psalms is striking. East may assert that, for those who are not spiritually-minded, music can restore balance in the humours and in so doing restore the senses and thereby allow the individual to receive the word of God, but the language that he employs brings to the fore tensions between the word and music-setting.



While neither Catholics nor Protestants would question the authority of the Bible, the principle of *sola scriptura* implies that the Bible conveys a fixed divine authority that can be deciphered by the lay reader without the intervention of the church. However, if the psalms represented the Bible in miniature, we see that *sola scriptura* quickly becomes fragmented as individuals battle over the 'correct' way to transmit them. Due to translators' use of ballad metre, the most ubiquitous of Protestant psalm translations in late sixteenth and seventeenth-century England could be sung to ballad tunes. The distinctions between sacred and secular were further compromised by the marketplace of print, where the lucrative and legally-contested patent for printed psalmbooks would eventually be taken into the ownership of the Worshipful Company of Stationers.⁵⁶ Psalm-singing was not only undertaken by Protestant communities, but also by Catholics, and

the singing of the psalms took place within formal church worship and in a domestic setting. The unregulated and confessional nature of psalm-singing meant that psalmody often exposed religious contentions. As with the early modern Bible, translating the word would prove a controversial task. Printing, disseminating and singing psalms only enhanced this dissonance.

Further reading

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Sacred Space in the English Parish Church, 1547–1642', in Will Coster and Andrew Spicer, eds, *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe*

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- Smith, Jeremy L. *Thomas East and Music Publishing in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
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- Willis, Jonathan. *Church Music and Protestantism in Post-Reformation England: Discourses, Sites and Identities* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

¹ Timothy 3:16.

² David Norton, *A History of the Bible as Literature*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 115.

³ *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559 and 1662*, ed. Brian Cummings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 217. On the rota of public readings, see the chapter by Ian Green in this volume.

⁴ Rivkah Zim, *English Metrical Psalms: Poetry as Praise and Prayer, 1535–1601* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Robin R.

Leaver, *'Goostly Psalmes and Spirituall Songes': English and Dutch Metrical Psalmes from Coverdale to Utenhove, 1535-1566* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁵ See, for example, Linda Phyllis Austern, Kari Boyd McBride and David L. Orvis, eds, *Psalmes in the Early Modern World* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); Hannibal Hamlin, *Psalm Culture and Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Christopher Marsh, *Music and Society in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁶ Beth Quitslund, *The Reformation in Rhyme* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

⁷ An example of both female and Catholic translation is Laura Battiferra's Florentine translation of the penitential psalms, which were dedicated to Vittoria, Duchess of Guidobaldo, the granddaughter of Pope Paul III (*I sette salmi penitentiali profeta Davit* (Florence, 1566)); for an English translation and commentary, see *Laura Battiferra and Her Literary Circle: An Anthology*, ed. and trans. Victoria Kirkham (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

⁸ For an overview of pre-Sternhold psalms, see Quitslund, *The Reformation in Rhyme*, 11-18.

⁹ Quitslund, *The Reformation in Rhyme*, 15-16.

¹⁰ Gavin Alexander, ed., *Sidney's 'The Defense of Poesy' and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism* (London: Penguin, 2004), 6-7.

¹¹ Early modern scholars followed the lead of St. Jerome in identifying versification and classical metres in the construction of psalms; later critics have found similar patterns present in prose sections of the Hebrew scriptures. See Hamlin, 5.

¹² Margaret P. Hannay, 'Re-vealing the Psalms: Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke, and Her Early Modern Readers', in Austern, et al., eds, *Psalms in the Early Modern World*, 219-33.

¹³ Danielle Clarke, *The Politics of Early Modern Women's Writing* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), esp. 127-47.

¹⁴ For a case study of three seventeenth-century devotional manuscripts, see Victoria E. Burke, "'My poor Returns": Devotional Manuscripts by Seventeenth-Century Women', in Sarah C. E. Ross, ed., 'Early Modern Women and the Apparatus of Authorship', *Parergon* 29:2 (2012): 47-68.

¹⁵ Margaret P. Hannay, "'So May I With the Psalmist Truly Say": Early Modern English Women's Psalm Discourse', in Barbara Smith and Ursula Appelt, eds, *Write or Be Written: Early Modern Women Poets and Cultural Constraints* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 105-127.

¹⁶ *The Sidney Psalter: The Psalms of Sir Philip and Mary Sidney*, eds Hannibal Hamlin, Michael G. Brennan, Margaret P. Hannay and Noel J. Kinnamon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5-6.

¹⁷ Hannay, 'Re-vealing the Psalms', 222-3.

¹⁸ [William Loe], *Songs of Sion for the Joy of Gods Deere Ones, Who Sitt Here by the Brookes of this Worlds Babel, & Weepe When They Thinke on Jerusalem Which Is on Highe* ([Hamburg, 1620]), A3r.

¹⁹ Oliver Strunk, ed., *Strunk's Source Readings in Music History*, ed. Leo Trietler, rev. ed. (New York and London: Norton, 1978), 365. Calvin is referencing Augustine's *Epistola* 55.18.34

²⁰ Strunk, ed., *Strunk's Source Readings*, 365.

²¹ Augustine, *Saint Augustines Confessions Translated*, trans. William Watts (1631), Gg3r.

²² For a study that examines the varying Protestant attitudes to church music, see Jonathan Willis, *Church Music and Protestantism in Post-Reformation England: Discourses, Sites and Identities* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

²³ Jamie H. Ferguson, 'Miles Coverdale and the Claims of Paraphrase', in Austern, et al., eds, *Psalms in the Early Modern World*, 137-54 (138).

²⁴ *Goostly Psalmes and Spirituall Songes Drawen out of the Holy Scripture, for the Co[m]forte and Consolacyon of Soch as Love to Rejoyse in God and his Worde* ([London: 1535]), *2v.

²⁵ Heinrich Bullinger, *The Christian State of Matrimony, Wherein Husbands & Wyves May Learne to Keepe House Together wyth Love*, trans. Miles Coverdale (London: John Awdeley, 1575), M7r.

²⁶ Beth Quitslund, 'The Psalm Book', in Andy Kesson and Emma Smith, eds, *The Elizabethan Top Ten: Defining Print Popularity in Early Modern England*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 203-11.

²⁷ *Psalmes of David in Englishe Metre, by T. Sterneholde and Others* (London: [John Day], 1560), title page.

²⁸ *The First Part of the Psalmes of David in English Meter by T. Sternhold and Others* (London: John Day, 1566), title page.

²⁹ Robert Parsons, *A Briefe Discourse Containing Certaine Reasons Why Catholikes Refuse to Goe to Church* (Doway [i.e. England]: 1601), E7v.

³⁰ For a discussion of psalm-singing in church, and the noisiness of the English church, see John Craig, 'Psalms, Groans and Dog-Whippers: The Soundscape of Sacred Space in the English Parish Church, 1547–1642', in Will Coster and Andrew Spicer, eds, *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 104-23.

³¹ See Alexandra Walsham, 'Beads, Books and Bare Ruined Choirs: Transmutations of Catholic Ritual Life in Protestant England', in Benjamin J. Kaplan, Bob Moore, Henk van Nierop, and Judith Pollmann, eds, *Catholic Communities in Protestant States: Britain and the Netherlands c.1570-1720*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 103-22.

³² Tara Hamling, 'Reconciling Image and Object: Religious Imagery in Protestant Interior Decoration', in Hamling and Catherine Richardson, eds,

Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and its Meanings (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 321-34; Craig, 104-5.

³³ Andreas Marti and Bert Polman. "Reformed and Presbyterian church music." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/48535>>

³⁴ 'Introduction', in Austern, et al., eds, *Psalms in the Early Modern World*, 1-33 (20).

³⁵ *The Praise of Musicke: Wherein besides the Antiquitie, Dignitie, Delectation, & Use Thereof in Civill Matters, is also Declared the Sober and Lawfull Use of the Same in the Congregation and Church of God* (1586), K4r.

³⁶ Strunk, *Strunk's Source Readings*, 368.

³⁷ Beth Quitslund, 'Singing the Psalms for Fun and Profit', in Jessica Martin and Alec Ryrie, eds, *Private and Domestic Devotion in Early Modern Britain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 237-58.

³⁸ Roger Bray, 'William Byrd's English Psalms', in Austern, et al., eds, *Psalms in the Early Modern World*, 61-75.

³⁹ Richard Wistreich, 'Musical Materials and Cultural Spaces', *Renaissance Studies* 26 (2012): 1-12 (1).

⁴⁰ George Wither, *A Preparation to the Psalter* (London: Nicholas Okes, 1619), H1v-H2r.

⁴¹ For a reading of the relationship between sounds, hearing and the ‘green’ passions of desire, see Bruce Smith, ‘Hearing Green’, in Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe and Mary Floyd-Wilson, eds, *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 147-68.

⁴² NjP, Robert Taylor Collection, MS RTCO1, fol. 11r, cited in Femke Molekamp, *Women and the Bible in Early Modern England: Religious Reading and Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 153. Transcribed at <http://web.warwick.ac.uk/english/perdita/Isham/>.

⁴³ NjP, Robert Taylor Collection, MS RTCO1, fol. 11v-12r.

⁴⁴ Helen Smith, “‘More swete vnto the eare / than holsome for ye mynde’”: Embodying Early Modern Women’s Reading’, *Huntington Library Quarterly* 73 (2010): 413-32 (414).

⁴⁵ Wither seeks to separate sacred from secular words and music, though, Tessa Watt notes, it was in the middle of Elizabeth’s reign that ballads began to be seen as an immoral and scandalous means of spreading the word. This presents the interesting possibility that the ballad metre of the psalm translations may have been a residual echo of this popular inheritance. Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁴⁶ David Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 216.

⁴⁷ Jeremy L. Smith, *Thomas East and Music Publishing in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 22-28 & 71-75.

⁴⁸ Smith, *Thomas East*, 58. See also Jeremy L. Smith, 'Turning a New Leaf: William Byrd, the East Music-Publishing Firm and the Jacobean Succession', in Robin Myers, Michael Harris and Giles Mandelbrote, eds, *Music and the Book Trade from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century* (New Castle and London: Oak Knoll Press and the British Library, 2008), 25-43.

⁴⁹ *The Whole Booke of Psalmes with Their Wonted Tunes, as They Are Song in Churches, Composed into Foure Parts* (London: Thomas East, 1592), A2r.

⁵⁰ "recreate, v.1." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2014.

⁵¹ See Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 1-24.

⁵² Smith, *Thomas East*, 96-102.

⁵³ Smith, *Thomas East*, 103-05.

⁵⁴ 'sensually, adv.' *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2014.

⁵⁵ 'recreation, n.1.' *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2014.

⁵⁶ Smith, *Thomas East*, 28.