UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
DI PADOVA

Università degli Studi di Padova

Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari

Corso di Laurea Triennale in Lingue, Letterature e Mediazione Culturale

TESI DI LAUREA

Mary Sidney Herbert, a woman writer during the Elizabethan era. An Analysis of the poem *Even now that Care* and *To the Angel Spirit of the Most Excellent Sir Philip Sidney*

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Anno Accademico 2024 / 2025

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Foreword

Mary Sidney Herbert is an English female writer of the 16th century. The aim of this thesis is to analyse her role and identity as both writer and devoted sister, focusing on her two dedicatory poems *Even now that Care* and *To the Angel Spirit of the Most Excellent Sir Philip Sidney*, found within one of the manuscripts of the *Sidneian Psalms*. Through this analysis, I will explore Mary's skills to combine poetic language, religious themes, and the commemorative and political function of writing.

I chose this particular author and topic to give relevance to a less known writer of that time. Mary Sidney managed to overcame to the cultural barriers against female writers. Unfortunately, she cannot be defined as revolutionary figure because being Philip Sidney's sister undoubtedly helped her breaking societal norms.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. In the first one, I will explore Mary Sidney's biography and works, with particular emphasis on the relationship between the Psalms and Elizabeth I. It will also be explained the connection between the Sidney family and the Queen. The second chapter introduces the Psalms in 17th –Century England to better understand the Sidney's sources of inspiration and in particular the *Sidneian Psalms*' unicity compared to the previous versions. Mary Sidney's role in completing the work on the Psalms cannot be underestimate: she assumed full editorial responsibility, revising Philip's translations and extending the collection from Psalm 43 to Psalm 150. The third and final chapter is centred on the analysis of *Even now that Care* and *To the Angel Spirit of the Most Excellent Sir Philip Sidney*, two dedicatory poems with completely different aim and tone. The analysis of these two poems will give the readers a better understanding of the context in which the Psalms were written and of the strong bond between Mary and Philip.

Chapter 1: Who was Mary Sidney?

This chapter explores the life, works and legacy of Mary Sidney, who was one of the female writers of the English Renaissance. She's an unusual example of non-royal woman writer because at that time women were expected to be silent and not to write or publish works and she's the first to achieve such a high public literary identity in England. There were few other women writers that preceded her but they usually translated or sometimes wrote only religious works, and even for doing that they needed a sort of justification – they were "serving God"[1]. The Countess of Pembroke went against the idea of the woman "chaste, silent and obedient"[2] and inspired a generation of writers and thinkers, not only through her literary works but also through her role as a patron in the Elizabethan court[3].

In fact, she didn't limit herself to translating but she also wrote poetry, not only linked to religion[4]. An important role was played by her relationship with Elizabeth I which will be another key element analysed in this chapter. The Queen, a patron of the arts and a great political figure, was bound not only to Mary Sidney but also to other members of the Sidney family. Henry Sidney and Lady Sidney –Mary's parents – held such an influence with Queen Elizabeth that European diplomats, such as Alvarez de Quadra, the Spanish ambassador and Bishop of Aquila, actively sought their favour[5].

1.1 Mary Sidney's life and works

Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, was a poet, translator, editor and patron[6].

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[1]Herbert, Mary Sidney, *Poems, Translations, and Correspondence*, ed. by Margaret P. Hannay, Noel J. Kinnamon, Michael G. Brennan, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998, pp. 22-29.
[2]Herbert, pp. 22-24.
[3]Lamb, Mary Ellen, *Gender and Authorship in the Sidney Circle*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990, pp. 28-30.
[4]Herbert, pp. 22-24.
[5]Herbert, p.2.
[6]Purslove, Glyn, "Pembroke, Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of, 1561-1621", in *ProQuest Biographies*, Ann Arbor: ProQuest, 2006 https://www.proquest.com/docview/2137908467?accountid=13050&sourcetype=Encyclopedias%20&%20Reference%20Works (accessed on 28 July 2024).

The daughter of Sir Henry Sidney and Lady Mary Sidney, she was born on 27 October 1561 at Tickenhill Palace in Bewdley, Worcestershire. Mary Sidney was part of the Dudley and Sidney family that didn't have fortunes but enjoyed strong alliances that controlled a large part of the land during Elizabeth's rule. She had three sisters and three brothers and with one of them she had a particularly strong bond, her eldest brother Philip Sidney. While she was serving Queen Elizabeth at court, her uncle Leicester arranged her marriage to the Earl of Pembroke, who had recently lost his wife. On 21 April 1577, at the age of 15, Mary became the Countess of Pembroke[7]. The little information about how she felt about this marriage is in a letter she wrote to Leicester and in her paraphrase of Psalm 45 where she gives some advice to a bride of an arranged royal wedding[8]. This Psalm – *Eructavit Cor meum* – is a royal wedding song, celebrating the marriage between a king and his bride. In her version of Psalm 45 she reveals her feelings towards her arranged marriage. She interprets the verses that praise the king and describes the bride's beauty and virtues as both an idealization and an obligation. These verses show not only respect for her role but also Mary's discomfort with the lack of personal choice in her marriage[9].

She immediately took this new role of mother and wife seriously. Mary started taking care of Wilton House, of Baynards Castle, of her children and she frequently received her family and mostly her brother Philip. This marriage generated four children: William, Katherine (who died at only three years of age), Anne (who died "in the flower of her age") and Philip (who would succeed his brother William on 10 April 1630)[10]. Mary Sidney's life then started being marked by a series of deaths: her two daughters (the first in 1584 and the second one around 1606), her father in 1586 immediately followed by Lady Sidney and lastly, in the same year –

[7] Patterson Hannay, "Herbert [née Sidney], Mary, Countess of Pembroke" https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-13040?rskey=QS3pqS&result=2 (accessed on 7 July 2024).
[8] Herbert, p. 4.
[9] J. C. A. Rathmell, "A Critical Edition of the Psalms of Sir Philip Sidney and the Countess of Pembroke", PhD Dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1963, pp. 90-91.
[10] Herbert, pp. 4-6.

after she had been very ill – her brother Philip was wounded and shortly after he died too. At that time women couldn't participate in all the events to commemorate their loved ones – the public mourning, the elegies and the funeral – so she decided to celebrate him through poetry as we can especially see in her poem *Angell Spirit*. "She seems to have begun her literary work to honour her brother, celebrated in England and on the Continent as a protestant martyr"[11].

Taking a step back and talking about her education, she had to learn all the traditional female activities such as needlework, practical medicine, singing and playing the lute, but she also received a humanist education similar to Queen Elizabeth's. Unlike her brothers who studied at the university, she studied with tutors at home; she learnt French, Italian, Latin and maybe some Greek[12]. One of the first and most important works is *The Psalms,* begun by her brother Philip. Two of the manuscript versions of these Psalms contain her dedicatory poems: *To the Angel Spirit of the most Excellent Sir Philip Sidney* – in honour of her brother – and *Even now that Care* to praise Queen Elizabeth. She wrote and decided to print, always for the Queen, *A Dialogue between two Shepherds, Thenot and Piers, in praise of Astrea* and *The Dolefull Lay of Clorinda*; she translated from French *A Discourse of Life and Death* and *Antonius* but she also translated from Italian, for example Petrarch's *Trionfo della Morte*. Unlike many early modern women writers who filled their works with apologies, she neither acknowledges nor apologizes for her position as a woman writer[13]. She has been frequently compared or associated to her brother Philip but not everyone agrees: Aemilia Lanyer considered her as even better than her brother in "virtue, wisedome, learning, dignity"[15] and plenty of poets associated her to a sort of immortal religious creature[16].

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[11]Herbert, p. 6.
[12]Herbert, p. 3.
[13]Patterson Hannay, "Herbert [née Sidney], Mary, Countess of Pembroke".
[14] Hutson, Lorna, "Lanier [Lanyer; née Bassano], Emilia [Aemilia, Amelia] https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-37653?rskey=RVxD9m&result=1 (accessed on 12 November 2024).
[15]Quoted in Herbert, *Poems, Translations, and Correspondence*, p.9.
[16]Herbert, p.9.

Thanks to her resources se was able to create her own name and even influenced a large number of poets. "The Countess of Pembroke does seem to have encouraged other writers, particularly those in her family or household"[17], like her niece and goddaughter Lady Wroth, the large number of poets that went under her patronage after his brother's death, her son William who wrote poetry and maybe her daughter Anne too[18]. Unfortunately, after her husband's death on 19 January 1601, she was not able to write anymore because she had to cover all his duties until William was able to succeed his father. Mary Sidney died of smallpox in London on September 1621 and she was buried in the family chapel in Salisbury, in St. Paul's Cathedral[19].

1.2 The connection between the Sidney Psalms and Elizabeth I

The relationship between the Countess of Pembroke and Elizabeth provides an insight into the intersection of politics, literature and gender in the early modern period. People at that time weren't used to having a female monarch; before Elizabeth, the only woman who preceded her was her sister – the so called "Bloody Mary". As the daughter of Henry VIII, Elizabeth ruled England for 45 years and was a powerful political figure and Mary Sidney, as a countess, was highly involved in political affairs[20]. They both managed to stand out in a male-dominated society and may have been role models for several generations of women. The Queen promoted and loved culture and she had lots of women in the privy chamber that not only served her but in an unofficial way they could participate in politics and had the possibility to try to persuade her to receive rewards for themselves and their families in recognition of their loyal service. One of these women was Mary Sidney's mother[21].

Now, the focus will shift to Mary's mother who will be called "Lady Mary". Lady Mary's

[17]Herbert, p.12.
[18]Herbert, pp.11-13.
[19]Patterson Hannay, "Herbert [née Sidney], Mary, Countess of Pembroke".
[20]Collinson, Patrick, "Elizabeth I" https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-8636 (accessed on 8 August 2024).
[21]Stearn, Catherine Howey, "Critique or Compliment?: Lady Mary Sidney's 1573 New Year's Gift to Queen Elizabeth I", *Sidney Journal*, 30 (2012), pp. 110-113.

father described her as a "nicticorax, an owl of the desert"[22], because she loved spending much time alone, apart from her family, but luckily she was one of Elizabeth's closest friends[23]. Actually, the relationship between the Queen and Lady Mary can be defined as complicated, we know that she nursed Elizabeth through smallpox in 1562 and that on New Year's Day in 1573 Lady Mary gifted her a gold pelican jewel with diamonds and rubies and a pearl pendant[24]. Catherine Howey Stearn argues that since courtiers could give gifts to Elizabeth to criticize her, Lady Mary used the pelican to blame her for not having rewarded her for her care or for not taking care of her children as a good queen should have done. The only certainty is that Elizabeth immediately gave the gift away to another courtier; generally at that time if a monarch gave a gift away it was considered as a way to benefit their servants, but we will never know the meaning of this gesture in this specific case. Elizabeth held a grudge against Lady Mary for not appearing at court after 1562, however, in reality she was unable to attend due to serious health issues – her face was disfigured and she never really full recovered from smallpox[25].

Going back to Mary Sidney, since the Queen was passionate about literature and an amateur poet, there was a mutual respect for their literary talent. In August 1599, Elizabeth was meant to visit Wilton House, a cultural hub at that time. Many scholars believe Mary might have put the dedicatory poem in the Tixall Manuscript just for the occasion[26]. The Tixall Manuscript contains the Sidney Psalms and her two dedicatory poems *Even now that Care* – addressed to the Queen – and *To the Angell spirit of the most excellent Sir Philip Sidney*[27]. It appears that the Countess of Pembroke intended to commemorate Elizabeth's planned visit to her estate with a gift of selected literary works of her own to draw the Queen's attention to her. It is believed that this supposed visit of the Queen

[22]Herbert, p. 3.
[23]Herbert, pp. 2-3.
[24]Stearn, pp. 109-110.
[25]Stearn, pp. 109-120.
[26] Brennan, Michael G., "The Queen's Proposed Visit to Wilton House in 1599 and the "Sidney Psalms"", *Sidney Journal*, 20 (2002), pp. 27-30.
[27] Lamb, Mary Ellen, *Gender and Authorship in the Sidney Circle*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990, pp. 314-316.

was an occasion to discuss the printing of *The Psalms* for a wider dissemination of this work, but this will remain only a supposition, because the manuscripts circulated widely among the Elizabethan elite even without being printed[28].

At that time, there were patents to regulate the printing of biblical works in England. From 1567 Richard Day – playwright and dramatist – received an exclusive patent for life to print metrical psalms. Mary Sidney surely knew that but she was also aware that Queen Elizabeth had the possibility to confer personal patents to individual authors. Despite the legislation in place, the Stationers' Company did not always maintain full control over the situation. The patent system could not completely prevent overlaps between legitimate patents. While Richard Day held the patent for psalms in meter, Thomas Morley possessed a patent for the musical settings and between 1598 and 1599 they remained locked in an unresolved conflict. The situation within the Stationers' Company regarding metrical psalms had become so contentious that the idea of granting a distinct patent for the Sidney Psalms by royal decree might have seemed like a reasonable solution, but unfortunately the Queen didn't show up for the visit at Wilton House. Elizabeth had already visited their residence but not with Mary as countess[29].

Conversely, one of the reasons that could have possibly convinced Mary not to print *The Psalms* could be the fact that she didn't want to create problems to her family. The Sidneys' involvement with the psalms may have stirred painful political memories. After King Edward VI's death, their grandfather, John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, had failed in his attempt to place Lady Jane Grey on the throne, a failure that weighed on their mother Mary Dudley Sidney, whose brother was executed together with Lady Jane who recited Psalm 51 – "Miserere mei Deus". Moreover, two other brothers – John and Robert Dudley – composed metrical versions of Psalm 55 and Psalm 94 with the purpose of denouncing betrayal[30].

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[28]Brennan, pp. 27-31.
[29]Brennan, pp. 31-47.
[30]Brennan pp. 40-41.

Mary Sidney's dedicatory poem *Even now that Care* contains important evidence that most scholars ignored. It is speculated that Pembroke likely started working on her paraphrases after the death of Philip in 1586. Nonetheless, her dedicatory poem to the Queen hints at the possibility that she might have been involved in the project from its inception. When presenting her work to Elizabeth, Mary remarks that the Psalms, which were "once in two", are now unified in "one Subject", "the poorer left, the richer reft awaye"[31]. Taken literally, this comment suggest that the poems initially had two authors[32].

To sum up, the relationship between these two powerful women was marked by a mix of closeness and distance, but also by mutual respect for their literary talents. They both, though coming from different backgrounds, managed to stand out in a male-dominated society, leaving a legacy that profoundly influenced future generations. Especially Elizabeth, having the weight to dominate England had to make people see her "political body" over her physical one[33]. Although the Queen did not visit Wilton House as planned, Mary Sidney's work circulated widely among the Elizabethan elite. They both received a large number of dedications; in particular Mary, because of the passage of patronage from her brother, became the first non-royal woman to receive an enormous quantity of dedications[34]. Despite the personal and political challenges that shaped her life, Mary Sidney's legacy remains a testament to how women of the period could navigate the complexities of court and politics, using literature as means of expression and resistance. Her works, born from the grief of losing family members, also served as a tool of political and cultural engagement, contributing to the transformation of English literature and the definition of women's roles in society.

1.3 Mary Sidney's writings

While Mary Sidney is often recognized for her translation of the Psalms, her literary

[31] Quoted in Lamb, p. 339.
[32] Lamb, p. 339.
[33] Collinson.
[34] Herbert, p.12.

contributions extend beyond religious poetry to include adaptations of classical texts, metrical experimentation, and a crucial role in publishing her brother Philip's works. Among her contemporaries, she was widely praised for both her literary achievements and her virtue. Her public image aligned with the Elizabethan ideal of femininity, yet she skilfully expanded this role by engaging in literary pursuits. Rather than openly challenging societal norms, she focused on translation and devotional poetry, genres that were more socially acceptable. By dedicating her works to figures of authority, such as the queen or her late brother, she was able to produce a significant body of poetry while subtly navigating cultural restrictions on women's writing[35].

Following the death of her brother in 1586, she took an active role in editing and publishing his works, ensuring his literary legacy: *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (1590) – a revised and expanded version of Philip Sidney's unfinished prose romance – and *The Defence of Poetry* (published posthumously in 1595) contributing to the dissemination of Philip's influential essay on poetics[36]. She translated and adapted *Antonius*, a French tragic drama by Robert Garnier, into English as *The Tragedie of Antonie*. This work is notable for its refinement of dramatic verse and its role in introducing continental humanist drama to an English audience. During the 1590s, Sidney translated works from Petrarch, including *Triumph of Death*, helping to introduce elements of Italian humanist poetry into English literature. In addition to her translations, she composed original poems. Although only a few of her original poems survive, her poetry reflects themes of religious devotion, grief, and virtue. Some of her extant poems include: *A Dialogue between two shepherds, Thenot and Piers, in praise of Astrea*– a tribute to Queen Elizabeth I – *Even now that Care*, *To the Angel Spirit of the most excellent Sir Philip Sidney*, and *The Dolefull Lay of Clorinda* – a lament composed in honour of Philip[38]. Moreover, Mary Sidney was a pioneer in adapting and refining poetic structures in English. Her translation of the Psalms, which she completed around 1599, displayed a mastery of both metrical experimentation and theological depth[37].

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[35]Herbert, p.15.
[36]Herbert, pp. 6-7.
[37]Purslove.

Mary Sidney's writings stand as a remarkable example of literary ingenuity in the early modern period. She employed a highly sophisticated approach to poetic form, demonstrating an extraordinary command of metrical and stanzaic patterns[38]. Her Psalms exhibit a remarkable variety, with 164 stanzaic structures and 94 different metrical schemes, underscoring her technical mastery and creative range. Scholars have drawn intriguing parallels between her poetic structures and contemporary embroidery techniques, noting how the intricate patterns in her translations mirror the embellishments and stitch work found in Elizabethan needlework. This interconnection between text and textile is reinforced by John Taylor's *The Needle's Excellency* (1631), which praises Sidney's skill both as a writer and as a needlewoman, presenting her literary and artistic pursuits as complementary. The deliberate attention to structure in her poetry suggests an awareness of visual and rhythmic symmetry, a feature that aligns her work with broader artistic trends of the time[39]. Moreover, Sidney's engagement with the *Psalms* goes beyond translation; her linguistic choices often reflect the sonic and poetic qualities of biblical Hebrew, incorporating repetition, chiasmus, and elaborate verbal patterns to enhance their musicality and rhetorical power[40]. Through her writings, Sidney not only established herself as a formidable literary figure but also challenged contemporary perceptions of women's intellectual and artistic contributions, leaving a lasting impact on English devotional poetry[41].

Beyond her literary achievements, Mary also played a crucial role as a patron and intellectual figure within the Elizabethan literary landscape. Her household at Wilton House became a centre for poetic and intellectual exchange. Through her patronage, she fostered a space where literature, translation, and religious thought could flourish, reinforcing her position not only as a poet and translator but as an active participant in the literary culture of her time[42]. Her ability to balance

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[38] Osherow, Michele, ""A pattern to the rest": More on the Convergence of Text and Textile in Mary Sidney's Psalms", *Sidney Journal*, 41 (2023), pp.37-40.
[39]Osherow, pp. 38-46.
[40]Osherow, pp. 54-55.
[41]Osherow, pp. 38-40.
[42]Herbert, pp. 12-16.

personal faith, artistic expression, and intellectual ambition makes her a unique and influential figure in the history of English literature.

Chapter 2: The Psalms in 16th-Century England and the Sidneys' version

In this chapter, the focus is on the role and reception of the Psalms in 16th-century England, a period in which these sacred texts played a fundamental part in both religious practice and literary culture[43]. The chapter will first examine how the Psalms were integrated into the devotional life of the time, shaping both personal piety and communal worship. Attention will then shift to the various English translations and adaptations that circulated during that period, highlighting the evolving relationship between sacred scripture and vernacular poetry. Particular emphasis will be placed on Mary Sidney's translation of the Psalms, which stands out for its metrical complexity, poetic innovation, and engagement with both biblical tradition and humanist literary values.

Understanding the significance of the Psalms in the literary and devotional culture of early modern England requires acknowledging that they were never viewed simply as a collection of religious poems. The *Book of Psalms* was understood as a spiritually formative work, shaped with theological intentionality and poetic sophistication. It functioned as both a pathway to divine truth and a refuge for the soul. One of the reasons the Psalms became so influential lies in their poetic form. Unlike doctrinal prose, the Psalms communicate through metaphor, rhythm, and vivid imagery. This aesthetic structure is not merely decorative – it is essential to the theological content. Through metaphors such as God as king, shepherd, or fortress, the Psalms enabled believers to imagine divine truths in concrete terms, affecting not only their minds but also their affections and spiritual imagination[44].

Furthermore, the Psalter is not an arbitrary compilation of songs. Historical and literary

[43] Steinberg, Theodore L., "The Sidneys and the Psalms", *Studies in Philology*, 92 (1995), p. 266.
[44] Aniol, Scott, "Ascending the Hill to Praise: The Function of the Psalter's Structure and Poetry in Forming Hearts of Praise", *Perichoresis*, 22 (2024), pp. 104-108.

analysis has shown that its fivefold structure presents a narrative arc: a movement from lamentation to praise, from individual cries of distress to communal celebrations of God's kingship. This progression reflects a spiritual journey, inviting the believer to participate in the same movement of the soul – from sorrow to trust, from exile to restoration, from fear to confident worship. Two recurring metaphors embody this structure: pathway and refuge. The first one emphasizes moral and spiritual formation while the second one highlights divine protection, presence, and kingship. The Psalms do not merely reflect the emotions of the soul, they shape them[45].

In this light, the Psalms used and reinterpreted by the Sidneys must be seen not only as literary adaptations but as part of a broader spiritual practice rooted in centuries of theological tradition. Their engagement with the psalms was both creative and devotional, building upon earlier versions while seeking to preserve the formative and imaginative power that had made the Psalms central to Christian worship and personal piety[46].

2.1 Earlier versions of the Psalms: Sources of inspiration for the Sidneys

The *Book of Psalms* – called *Sefer Tehillim* in Hebrew, meaning "Book of Praises" – is a collection of around 150 religious poems. Their appeal lies in their thematic diversity, including songs of worship and grief, imprecation and gratitude, historical narrative, and reflection on divine law and creation. These poems have enjoyed enduring popularity. Many were sung in the ancient Temple of Jerusalem and later integrated into both Jewish and Christian religious practices, especially during the post-Reformation period in England. Traditionally, they were believed to have been written by King David, though this claim is not historically accurate. Nevertheless, the tradition significantly shaped how people have interpreted the *Psalms*. Though the Psalms typically don't have titles, many include superscriptions explaining the context in David's life during which the poem was written[47].

[45] Aniol, pp. 110-114.
[46] Aniol, pp. 115-117.
[47] Steinberg, pp.266-267

Reformers and theologians have long emphasized the Psalms' psychological and spiritual depth. John Calvin regarded them as a comprehensive portrayal of human emotion, while Richard Hooker and John Donne praised their pedagogical and devotional value[48]. Their consistent use of the first person singular gave the Psalms a uniquely intimate and adaptable quality, allowing individual readers to speak directly to God. Renaissance translator Anthony Gilby famously observed that while other scriptures convey God's words to humanity, the Psalms instruct believers in how to address God themselves[49].

By the Reformation, the Psalms played a vital role in religious conflicts, often invoked in the name of the Prince of Peace. Despite being involved in ideological battles, the Psalms remained appreciated for their poetic beauty. Their popularity persisted, and by 1640 there were already more than 300 published versions in English verse. Although the Sidney version was not printed during their lifetimes, it is widely regarded as the most exceptional[50].

An influential English version of the Psalms during the 16th and early 17th centuries was the Sternhold and Hopkins Psalter, first published in 1562. This metrical translation, created by Thomas Sternhold, John Hopkins, and other contributors, aimed to make the Psalms accessible for congregational singing in the Church of England. Its language was simple and its meter straightforward, privileging clarity and singability over poetic refinement. Despite its stylistic limitations, their Psalter became immensely popular, remaining in use for over a century and shaping the devotional experience of generations of English worshippers. Its widespread adoption reflects a broader trend of the Reformation: the emphasis on individual engagement with Scripture in the vernacular language, a movement also seen in the production of the Geneva Bible – which included

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[48] Stillman, Robert E., Review of Deborah Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics and the Dominant Culture* and John Spencer Hill, *Infinity, Faith, and Time: Christian Humanism and Renaissance Literature*, *Sidney Journal*, 16 (1998), pp. 45-55.
[49] Goodrich, Jaime, *Faithful Translators: Authorship, Gender, and Religion in Early Modern England*, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2014, pp. 125-128.
[50]Steinberg, p. 267.

highly influential translations of the Psalms[51]. The Sternhold and Hopkins' version is relevant because the Sidneys, even though they composed a completely different work, drew inspiration from their Psalms.

The Protestant Reformation had a profound impact on how the Psalms were understood and used. Reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin championed the Psalms not only as sacred scripture but also as a guide for personal prayer and emotional expression. As Martin Luther observed in the preface to his *Book of Psalms*, the Psalms form a "little Bible", a condensed reflection of the entire scriptural message; while Calvin praised them as a mirror of the soul[52]. This theological perspective encouraged translations that were both faithful to the original Hebrew and emotionally resonant for lay audiences. Consequently, English translations of the Psalms during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries increasingly sought to balance doctrinal correctness with poetic expressiveness[53].

In daily life, the Psalms played an essential role in shaping both public worship and private devotion. They were central components of the Book of Common Prayer, used during regular church services, and were often recited or sung in households for morning and evening prayers. Many families owned psalters alongside their Bibles, and children were taught to memorize and chant the Psalms from an early age. The persuasive use of the Psalms fostered a spiritual culture in which individuals were expected to internalize sacred texts as part of their religious identity. Singing or reading the Psalms became an act of worship, a means of teaching theological principles, and a way to cultivate moral character[54].

Many of these earlier versions served as direct sources of inspiration for Mary and Philip. They drew on a wide range of existing translations and commentaries in English, French, and Latin. In English, they referred to the prose translations found in the *Book of Common Prayer* – derived

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[51] Sidney, Philip and Mary, *The Sidney Psalter: The Psalms of Sir Philip and Mary Sidney*, ed. by Hannibal Hamlin, Michael G. Brennan, Margaret P. Hannay, Noel J. Kinnamon, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. x-xi.
[52]Goodrich, pp. 222-225.
[53]Goodrich, pp. 11-12.
[54]Steinberg, p.266.

from Coverdale's 1539 Great Bible – and the *Geneva Bible*. In French, the elegant verse translations by Marot and Beza in *Les CL. Pseaumes de David* (1562) were especially influential. They also consulted Calvin's and Beza's commentaries on the Psalms, available in English translations such as *The Psalms of David and others*. The Geneva Bible's extensive marginal notes offered another source of scholarly commentary. Additional English sources included the *Bishops' Bible* and the psalters of Sternhold and Hopkins[55]. From the Latin tradition, they especially consulted the Psalms commentary of Immanuel Tremellius, a converted Jew and renowned Reformed scholar whose Latin translation of the Old Testament was widely respected in Protestant circles[56].

Given the ubiquity of the Psalms in early modern English life, it is unsurprising that numerous attempts were made to render them into metrical, vernacular forms. However, most earlier versions prioritized functional simplicity over literary artistry. In contrast, the Sidneys' translation stands out for its deliberate engagement with both the spiritual depth of the original texts and the aesthetic ideals of Renaissance poetry. Their version combines intricate formal structures, rich imagery, and nuanced emotional tones, thus offering a more sophisticated and imaginative approach to the Psalms than many of their predecessors.

2.2 The Sidneian Psalms

The Sidneian Psalms defy easy classification. They lie somewhere between translation, paraphrase, and poetic meditation. What distinguishes their Psalms from the previous English versions is the creative and interpretative nature of the Sidneys' engagement with the biblical Psalms[57]. Their approach is not bound by literalism but instead seeks to convey the emotional and spiritual resonance of the original Hebrew texts.

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[55]Sidney, p. xviii.
[56] Gordon, Bruce and Matthew McLean, eds., *Shaping the Bible in the Reformation: Books, Scholars and Their Readers in the Sixteenth Century*, Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2012, p. 181.
[57]Steinberg, pp. 267-268.

One of the most striking features of the Sidneian Psalms is their formal variety. As J. C. A. Rathmell has noted, only four instances of repeated stanza and rhyme patterns occur throughout the entire collection. This remarkable poetic experimentation led the Psalms to be described as a "school of English versification"[58], as well as a continuation of a sustained interest in poetic form. The Psalms function almost like musical cadenzas – moments of virtuosic display that also carry significant emotional and spiritual weight[59].

Such virtuosity reflects more than literary display. In *A Defence of Poetry*, Philip praised the Psalms as "a heavenly poesy"[60], where David appears "a passionate lover of that unspeakable and everlasting beauty"[61]. Yet he also lamented the inadequate English metrical versions available at the time. His own effort to versify Psalms 1-43, and Mary's completion of the rest, can be read as an ambitious attempt to offer an alternative metrically elegant and spiritually resonant[62].

Despite their poetic innovations, the Sidneys maintained a surprising degree of fidelity to the original Hebrew. Rather than imitating classical meters or relying exclusively on simplified English hymn forms – as seen in the work of Sternhold and Hopkins – they managed to reflect the tone and content of each Psalm. For example, while Psalm 14 and 53 are nearly identical in Hebrew, the Sidneys rendered them in dramatically different poetic forms. This balance of fidelity and poetic freedom also reflects the influence of certain interpretative models the Sidneys had previously encountered. Among these, Immanuel Tremellius' Latin translation and commentary offered a particularly nuanced perspective. Having already drawn on his work among other sources, Mary seems to have appreciated the way Tremellius combined scholarly rigour with a sensitivity to the Psalms' poetic and affective dimensions. His annotations, often literary rather than doctrinal,

[58]Steinberg, p.267.
[59]Steinberg, pp. 266-270.
[60]Quoted in Sidney, Philip, "*A Defence of Poetry*", ed. by Jan Van Dorsten, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 22.
[61]Quoted in Sidney, p. 22.
[62]Brennan, p. 38.

underscored the rhetorical force of the Psalms and their capacity to comfort and instruct. The emphasis on rhythm, classical allusion, and Christological resonance in his edition appears to parallel the Sidneys' own efforts to elevate the Psalms into a form of spiritually rich English verse[63]. In this emphasis on the Psalms' poetic force and emotional resonance, the Sidneian project finds an unexpected echo in the Latin preface written by Tremellius. Though primarily concerned with the accuracy of his translation from Hebrew, he devotes considerable space to reflecting on the Psalms' stylistic and affective power. He describes them as "a tranquillity of souls"[64] and likens their poetic rhythm to the sweetening of bitter medicine – an aesthetic and theological strategy aimed at ensuring both comprehension and spiritual consolation. In his view, the Psalms not only instruct but heal, acting both as doctrinal tools and emotional balm. This conception resonated with the Sidneys' own poetic ambitions: their refusal to adopt a single prosodic form across the 150 Psalms mirrors a belief in the Psalter's capacity to engage the full range of human emotion and spiritual condition. Like Tremellius, they recognize in the Psalms a text that demands not only fidelity but imaginative rendering[65].

Chapter 3: Mary Sidney's dedicatory poems *Even now that Care* and *To the Angel Spirit of the Most Excellent Sir Philip Sidney*

In this chapter I will analyse Mary Sidney's dedicatory poems *Even now that Care* and *To the Angel Spirit of the Most Excellent Sir Philip Sidney*. Functioning as a kind of preface, these two poems appear at the beginning of the Tixall Manuscript of the *Sidney Psalms*. The Tixall Manuscript is one of the eighteen extant manuscripts of the *Sidney Psalms* and it is probably the only one to include both dedicatory poems[66].

[63]Gordon, pp. 11-13.
[64]Quoted in Gordon, p. 225.
[65]Gordon, pp. 222-226.
[66]Brennan, p.28.

These texts reveal Mary Sidney's authorial positioning, her mourning of her brother Philip Sidney, and the context in which the *Sidney Psalms* were being presented. Furthermore, her dedicatory poems are not only acts of familial piety but also strategic interventions that place the Psalms as part of a broader cultural and theological project. Through these verses, Sidney elevates her brother's legacy and humbly asserts her own role in the continuation and editing of his work[67].

3.1 An analysis of *Even now that Care*

The poem *Even now that Care*, addressed to Queen Elizabeth I, is a profound reflection on the significance of the Psalms and introduces the *Sidney Psalms* solemnly. As in many earlier vernacular translations of Scripture, this poem follows the tradition of dedicating religious texts to the sovereign, a convention seen in works such as the Great Bible and the Bishops' Bible. Mary Sidney's contribution, however, added a personal and literary dimension to the tradition of that time – the reader is able to capture her own voice[68].

This poem functions as both a dedication and a meditation. It not only honours the Queen but also establishes the Psalms not only as translations, but as carefully meditated reflections of faith, monarchy, and authorship. In what follows, I will explore how Mary constructed her voice in the poem, the strategies she used to present herself as both devout and authoritative, and how the poem introduces the broader *Sidney Psalter* project. The poem is composed of twelve stanzas, each consisting of eight lines. Mary adopted an alternate rhyme scheme (ABAB) and most of the lines are iambic pentameter. This regularity in form supports the poem's function as both a devotional offering and a political tribute.

Even now that care which on thy crown attends
And with thy happy greatness daily grows
Tells me, thrice sacred Queen, my muse offends,
And of respect to thee the line outgoes.

[67]Herbert, pp. 6-7.
[68]Brennan, p.28.

One instant will, or willing can, she lose,
I say not reading, but receiving rhymes,
On whom in chief dependeth to dispose
What Europe acts in these most active times?[69] (lines 1-8)

In the opening stanza, Mary directly addresses Elizabeth I, recognizing her authority. The author fears being disrespectful, exposing the tension between her desire for self-expression and her respect for the queen. Her reference to her Muse – the typical symbolic source of poetic inspiration – shows an awareness of the boundaries of courtly decorum. Since Mary – to elevate the Queen – presents Elizabeth as the centre of European politics, she rhetorically questions whether the Queen would have time to, not even read but at least pay attention to her verses –highlighting Elizabeth's many duties. These lines suggest that even in times of great political responsibility, there may still be space for spiritual and literary devotion.

Yet dare I so, as humbleness may dare,
Cherish some hope they shall acceptance find,
Not weighing less thy state, lighter thy care,
But knowing more thy grace, abler thy mind.
What heav'nly pow'rs thee highest throne assigned,
Assigned thee goodness suiting that degree:
And by thy strength thy burden so defined,
To others toil, is exercise to thee. (lines 9-16)

In the second stanza, Mary declares her brave act of addressing the Queen, framing it as a gesture of respectful audacity. She strategically seeks Elizabeth's attention through humility. The Queen is then portrayed as chosen by God, suggesting that her authority derives from divine will. Mary emphasises that Elizabeth possesses both the moral and physical qualities necessary to rule, presenting her as a perfectly capable ruler. The purpose of this description is probably to connect the Psalms to both religious and political authority, framing the translation project not only as a literary and devotional act, but also as aligned with sovereign power.

Cares though still great, cannot be greatest still,
Business must ebb, though leisure never flow:
Then these, the posts of Duty and Goodwill,
Shall press to offer what their senders owe,
Which once in two, now in one subject go,
The poorer left, the richer reft away,
Who better might (oh, 'might': ah, word of woe!)
Have giv'n for me what I for him defray. (lines 17-24)

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[69]Sidney, pp. 5-7.

In this stanza, the metaphor of "Duty and Goodwill" highlights that the Psalms are not simply personal works, but reflect a feeling of duty and respect. Here, Mary begins to mourn her brother, alluding to the fact that they started the Psalms together, but she was left to finish the work alone. I personally find particularly striking the line "Who better might (oh, 'might': ah, word of woe!", where she confesses that her brother would have been a better presenter of the work, and mourns the reversal of role caused by his death.

How can I name whom sighing 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 undispleased sing,
Oft having worse, without repining worn; (lines 25-32)

This stanza is deeply moving: Mary asks how she could name her brother without starting to cry uncontrollably. With the line "But he did warp, I weaved his web to end", she compares their literary effort to the shared act of weaving a fabric. Then she acknowledges that the Psalms are not their own creation, but a poetic interpretation of this sacred text. Mary also affirms that King David would have probably liked their work – having often accepted less without complaint.

And I the cloth in both our names present,
A livery robe to be bestowed by thee:
Small parcel of that undischarged rent,
From which nor pains nor payments can us free.
And yet enough to cause our neighbours see
We will our best, though scanted in our will:
And those nigh fields where sown thy favours be
Unwealthy do, not else unworthy, till. (lines 33-40)

Mary continues the metaphor of the poetic fabric, which now becomes a garment – a "livery robe" – which gives the idea of an eternal debt owed to the monarch. This debt cannot be repaid through either effort or offering. Yet, she states the value and dignity of poetic and spiritual labour: even if their work may not be enough to show gratitude for the Queen's authority, the "neighbours" – probably other poets or nations – will recognize that Mary and Philip have done all they could to honour her.

For in our work what bring we but thine own?

What English is, by many names is thine.
There humble laurels in thy shadows grown
To garland others, would themselves repine.
Thy breast the cabinet, thy seat the shrine,
Where muses hang their vowed memories:
Where wit, where art, where all that is divine
Conceived best and best defended lies, (lines 41-48)

In this stanza, Mary makes a strong patriotic and monarchic statement: she claims that every cultural product ultimately belongs to the Queen. There is also a mystical elevation of Elizabeth, who is portrayed as mother, patron, and protector of the arts and intellect. Her reign is described as a sacred space – a shrine – where culture is not only preserved, but also best conceived and most strongly defended.

This portrayal aligns Elizabeth with both divine favour and national identity, reinforcing her role not only as political ruler but also as cultural and spiritual guardian.

Which if men did not (as they do) confess
And wronging worlds would otherwise consent,
Yet here who minds so meet a patroness
For author's state or writing's argument?
A king should only to a queen be sent:
God's lovèd choice unto his chosen love,
Devotion to devotion's president,
What all applaud, to her whom none reprove. (lines 49-56)

In the seventh stanza, Sidney argues that there is no better fitting figure than Elizabeth as addressee and guardian of the Psalms. It is said that even if people failed to recognize her excellence, her suitability for this role would still be undeniable. Indeed, the Anglican Church recognizes the monarch as the head of both political and religious spheres.

The stanza draws a parallel between Elizabeth and King David: just as David was God's chosen ruler and the original author of the Psalms, Elizabeth is presented as the perfect recipient of their poetic rendering. The Queen becomes a spiritual leader embodying the Psalms' message. In my opinion, this alignment reinforces both the divine legitimacy of her rule and her moral and spiritual authority.

And who sees aught, but sees how justly square
His haughty ditties to thy glorious days,
How well beseeming thee his triumphs are,
His hope, his zeal, his prayer, plaint, and praise,
Needless thy person to their height to raise,
Less need to bend them down to thy degree:
These holy garments each good soul assays,

Some sorting all, all sort to none but thee. (lines 57-64)

This is perhaps the most politically and theologically dense stanza. Mary stresses that the Psalms fit Elizabeth perfectly, as if they had been written for her. The themes of triumph, hope, zeal, lament, and praise align with the Queen's reign and persona. There is no need to elevate Elizabeth to reach the Psalms, nor to lower their tones to suit her because the match is natural. The final lines suggest that, while many may try to apply the Psalms to various individuals, only Elizabeth embodies their full spiritual and moral significance.

For ev'n thy rule is painted in his reign:
Both clear in right, both nigh by wrong oppressed;
And each at length (man crossing God in vain)
Possessed of place, and each in peace possessed.
Proud Philistines did interrupt his rest,
The foes of heav'n no less have been thy foes:
He with great conquest, thou with greater blest;
Thou sure to win, and he secure to lose. (lines 65-72)

In this stanza, Mary draws an explicit and powerful parallel between Queen Elizabeth and King David. Both are described as just rulers who face oppositions and injustice.

However, while David's triumphs are framed in terms of "great conquest", Elizabeth's are presented as "greater", emphasizing her superiority. The Queen's victory is assured. Sidney also aligns Elizabeth's enemies with the "foes of heav'n", suggesting that opponents to her rule are also God's opponents.

Thus hand in hand with him thy glories walk:
But who can trace them where alone they go?
Of thee two hemispheres on honour talk,
And lands and seas thy trophies jointly show.
The very winds did on thy party blow,
And rocks in arms thy foe men eft defy:
But soft, my muse, thy pitch is earthly low;
Forbear this heav'n, where only eagles fly. (lines 73-80)

This stanza presents Queen Elizabeth's glory as connected to that of King David. Her achievements are universal: they are celebrated on land and sea, even by natural elements like winds and rocks.

However, by the end of the stanza Mary accepts that her Muse is not worthy enough to completely reflect the Queen's majesty. This confession of limitation becomes itself a form of poetic glory. By doing this, she underscores the distance between human expression and royal divinity.

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

Thy utmost can but offer to her sight
Her handmaid's task, which most her will endears;
And pray unto thy pains, life from that light
Which lively lightsome court and kingdom cheers,
What wish she may (far past her living peers
And rival still to Judah's faithful King,
In more than he and more triumphant years)
Sing what God doth and do what men may sing. (lines 81-96)

The last two stanzas reinforce Elizabeth's image as a supreme figure of power, grace, and devotion. In this final comparison, Elizabeth becomes the living fulfilment of what David represents. Sidney defines herself as a simple handmaid, highlighting even more the Queen's greatness. This act of humility elevates Elizabeth and shows respect and loyalty for the entire nation.

In this poem, Mary did not rely on the typical ways of that time to praise the Queen. She did not mention Elizabeth's beauty, youth, or chastity[70]. The monarch is elevated in a totally different way: divinely chosen and superior to King David. I think that in this poem Mary manages to praise the Queen effectively, even if it is possible to feel a tone even too composed– so much that the reader may not feel intense emotions while reading. However, I find this poem a great way to introduce the *Sidney Psalter*, presented as different from any other previous version of the Psalms.

3.2 An analysis of *To the Angel Spirit of the Most Excellent Sir Philip Sidney*

Philip Sidney died on 17 October 1586 while he was fighting in the campaign to free the Protestant Netherlands from Spanish rule. His funeral, celebrated on 16 February 1587, counted more than seven hundred mourners: scholars, soldiers, and famous writers. Not only did Mary decide to commemorate her brother through poetry, there were also popular ballads mourning him, such as *A Doleful Dyttie of the Death of Sir Philip Sidney*, *A Ballad of the Buriall of Sir Philip Sidney*, and *A*

[70]Herbert, p. 101.

Mirrour of the Life and Death and Vertues of Sir Philip Sidney[71]. Since women could not participate at funerals, Mary did not have the opportunity to be present at his public mourning. Therefore, she decided to mourn her brother through this literary project.

In what follows, I will analyse her poem *To the Angel Spirit of the Most Excellent Sir Philip Sidney*. The poem is composed of thirteen stanzas, each consisting of seven lines. The first four lines follow an enclosed rhyme scheme (ABBA), while the last three lines follow the pattern BBC.

To thee, pure sprite, to thee alone's addressed
This coupled work, by double interest thine:
First raised by thy blest hand, and what is mine
Inspired by thee, thy secret power impressed.
So dared my Muse with thine itself combine,
As mortal stuff with that which is divine;
Thy light'ning beams give lustre to the rest,[72] (lines 1-7)

I find the first stanza very deep and full of meaning. She starts by highlighting the fact that this work is dedicated to Philip exclusively. The striking element is the spiritual and poetic fusion of Mary and her brother: "So dared my Muse with thine itself combine". This is not a simple fusion; it is the convergence between the earthly (Mary) and the divine (Philip), as expressed in line 6. Here there is also a reference to the Psalms because he started the work and then his sister finished it. It is notable that Mary chose a refined poetic voice different from the one used for Elizabeth. Here, the reader is able to perceive her strong feelings of admiration for her brother.

That heaven's king may deign his own, transformed
In substance no, but superficial tire
By thee put on, to praise-not to aspire
To those high tones so in themselves adorned,
Which angels sing in their celestial choir,
And all of tongues with soul and voice admire
These sacred hymns the kingly prophet formed. (lines 8-14)

In the second stanza, Sidney rhetorically humbles herself by stating that her contribution is only superficial. I think that, as she did with Elizabeth in *Even now that Care*, she gave herself less importance to elevate even more her brother. Moreover, she refers to the Psalms: composed by King David and sung by the angels. In the last lines, she establishes her authority as a poet – in a religious

[71]Herbert, p. 106.
[72]Sidney, pp. 8-10.

and patriarchal context – stating that she is not the author of the Psalms, she is only an intermediary.

Oh, had that soul which honour brought to rest
Too soon not left and reft the world of all
What man could show, which we perfection call,
This half-maimed piece had sorted with the best.
Deep wounds enlarged, long festered in their gall,
Fresh bleeding smart; not eye— but heart—tears fall.
Ah, memory, what needs this new arrest? (lines 15-21)

In the third stanza there is the crucial part of her mourning. Mary is tormented by grief for Philip's early death, which she represents not only as a personal loss but also as a cultural and spiritual deprivation. The reference to the "half-maimed piece" (line 18) represents the interruption of the *Sidney Psalms* and also symbolises an interrupted spiritual legacy. Her pain is depicted with strong physical images such as "deep wounds" and her bleeding heart. In the last line, the image of memory is personified: memory, rather than comforting, becomes invasive and oppressive for Mary. I think that Mary, by using these evocative images, gives the reader a clear sense of the depth of her pain.

Yet here behold (oh, wert thou to behold!)
This finished now, thy matchless Muse begun,
The rest but pieced, as left by thee undone.
Pardon (O blest soul) presumption too, too bold,
If love and zeal such error ill become:
'Tis zealous love, love which hath never done,
Nor can enough in world of words unfold. (lines 22-28)

In this stanza, Mary emphasizes again that she finished the work they began together and asks for forgiveness – she believes that her brother would have done a better work on the Psalms. Her request shows not only humility but is also a way to give prestige to her work, as she finished the Psalms as an act of love for her brother – it represents their strong bond, even after Philip's death. Furthermore, she highlights the feelings she has for her brother. She portrays her love as something so strong that cannot be expressed in words.

And sith it hath no further scope to go,
Nor other purpose but to honour thee,
Thee in thy works where all the Graces be,
As little streams with all their all do flow
To their great sea, due tribute's grateful fee,
So press my thoughts, my burdened thoughts in me,
To pay the debt of infinites I owe (lines 29-35)

This stanza is linked to line 27 and 28. She compares her love for Philip to little streams flowing into one single, vast sea – she probably meant to express that her contribution is modest but sincere.

The Graces convey the idea of beauty and harmony, elements found in Mary's works. As in the previous poem, Mary expresses a sense of endless debt, likely in terms of affection and cultural values.

To thy great worth, exceeding Nature's store;
Wonder of men, sole born perfection's kind,
Phoenix thou wert, so rare thy fairest mind
Heav'nly adorned, Earth justly might adore,
Where truthful praise in highest glory shined:
For there alone was praise to truth confined;
And where but there, to live for evermore? (lines 36-42)

Oh, when to this account, this cast-up sum,
This reckoning made, this audit of my woe,
I call my thoughts, whence so strange passions flow,
How works my heart, my senses stricken dumb,
That would thee more than ever heart could show,
And all too short! Who knew thee best doth know
There lives no wit that may thy praise become. (lines 43-49)

In the sixth stanza there is a hyperbole: Mary exaggerated the description of Philip depicting him as a perfect human being and a phoenix – symbol of unicity and rebirth. Yet, the eighth stanza is rich in terms such as account, reckoning, and audit, probably because Mary is trying to measure or give structure to her pain. She is not capable of being rational facing the spiritual greatness of Philip ("How works my heart, my senses stricken dumb") and realises that there is no tribute that would be enough to properly honour him.

From now on I feel like Mary tends to repeat similar ideas, which creates a sense of redundancy. I cannot say whether she deliberately chose this style to highlight even more her statements but it arguably renders the poem heavy.

Truth I invoke (who scorn elsewhere to move
Or here in aught my blood should partialize),
Truth, sacred truth, thee sole to solemnize
Those precious rites well known best minds approve:
And who but doth, hath wisdom's open eyes
(Not owlly blind the fairest light still flies),
Confirm no less? At least 'tis sealed above (lines 50-56)

Here Mary refuses the idea that her mourning is guided by mere family love and she states that the only way to celebrate Philip is through holy truth. Furthermore, she affirms that wise people recognise his greatness – because is stated by God ("At least 'tis sealed above"). On the contrary, who is "blind to the light" cannot see his majesty.

Where thou art fixed among thy fellow lights:
My day put out, my life in darkness cast,
Thy angel's soul with highest angels placed
There blessed sings, enjoying heav'n-delights,
Thy Maker's praise: as far from earthy taste
As here thy works so worthily embraced
By all of worth, where never Envy bites. (lines 57-63)

In this stanza, Mary uses the noun "darkness" to refer to her life, to symbolise the profound void left by her brother's death. Moreover, she elevates even more Philip's image – he is described like an angel in a state of eternal beatitude. In the final lines, there is a parallelism between the divine exaltation and the human recognition of Philip's importance. His works will be celebrated only by those who are worthy and not envious.

As goodly buildings to some glorious end
Cut off by Fate, before the Graces had
Each wondrous part in all their beauties clad,
Yet so much done, as art could not amend;
So thy rare works- to which no wit can add,
In all men's eyes which are not blindly mad,
Beyond compare, above all praise extend- (lines 64-70)

In the tenth stanza, there is a meaningful metaphor: the unfinished building symbolizes his early death or his legacy that remained incomplete. He died too soon, even before finishing the work on the Psalms – left incomplete like the building itself. In lines 68-70, Mary states that his "rare works" extend "beyond compare, above all praise", placing them beyond the limits of ordinary human judgment. It is recurring throughout the poem that Philip is associated with something divine – above humans – constantly emphasizing his exceptional greatness and the quality of his works.

Immortal monuments of thy fair fame,
Though not complete, nor in the reach of thought,
How on that passing piece time would have wrought
Had heav'n so spared the life of life to frame
The rest. But ah, such loss. Hath this world aught
Can equal it, or which like grievance brought?
Yet there will live thy ever praised name, (lines 71-77)

Then, Mary continues to highlight the eternal value of Philip's works: they are perfect even if they are unfinished. She rhetorically asks herself what "heights" he could have reached if he had not died so soon. Here, Mary celebrates both his potential and realised greatness, a greatness that surpasses all possible human praise.

To which these dearest off rings of my heart,
Dissolved to ink while pen's impressions move
The bleeding veins of never dying love,

I render here: these wounding lines of smart,
Sad characters indeed of simple love,
Not art nor skill which abler wits do prove,
Of my full soul receive the meanest part, (lines 78-84)

In this stanza, Mary gives the reader a very powerful image: the ink is like blood. She states that writing is both an act of love and of pain, like a sort of ritual sacrifice. The only means that Mary has to remain connected with Philip is through writing, so it is painful likely because it keeps his memory constantly present.

Receive these hymns, these obsequies receive;
If any mark of thy sweet sprite appear,
Well are they borne, no title else shall bear.
I can no more: Dear Soul, I take my leave;
Sorrow still strives, would mount the highest sphere
Presuming so just cause might meet thee there:
Oh happy change, could I so take my leave! (lines 85-91)

By the sister of that
incomparable Sidney

In the last stanza, her lines are compared to funeral rites. As in all the other stanzas, her suffering continues and she desires to be reunited with him in heaven. I think that she chose to close the poem with a sense of acceptance and spiritual elevation.

Mary makes a striking choice by signing the poem, not only with her name – and she chooses Sidney not Herbert probably to emphasise even more her role – but also defining her bond with Philip: “By the sister”. I believe that, with apparent humility she asserts that she could be the only one to offer such a high and personal tribute to him. While both the poems are respectful tributes, it is clear that *Even now that Care* carries a notable sense of obligation. Yet, Sidney’s dedicatory poem for her brother finally reveals her emotions and vulnerability. I find *To the Angel Spirit of the Most Excellent Sir Philip Sidney* particularly touching, her strong bond with Philip is undeniable. It is striking how Mary managed to transform her pain into a great public work.

To conclude, I believe that Mary was an incredibly capable writer that introduced significant innovations to the English culture of that time. She was a great example for posthumous female writers, starting from her family with her nephew Mary Worth.

Riassunto

Mary Sidney Herbert, contessa di Pembroke, era una scrittrice, traduttrice, editrice e mecenate vissuta nell'Inghilterra del diciassettesimo secolo. Può essere definita come la prima donna non regale a possedere una forte identità letteraria pubblica nell'Inghilterra elisabettiana. L'obiettivo di questa tesi è dare rilevanza a questa figura, al giorno d'oggi poco conosciuta, andando ad analizzare due poesie dedicatorie – *Even now that Care* e *To the Angel Spirit of the Most Excellent Sir Philip Sidney* – situate all'interno del *Sidney Psalter*.

All'epoca le donne dovevano essere "caste, silenziose e obbedienti". Le poche donne che scrivevano si limitavano solamente a tradurre o raramente scrivere opere religiose e per farlo avevano il dovere di giustificare le loro azioni, affermando che stavano "servendo Dio". Mary Sidney non solo non si limitò a svolgere unicamente traduzioni religiose ma ispirò le future generazioni di scrittori e scrittrici attraverso le sue opere e con il suo ruolo di mecenate all'interno della corte Elisabettiana.

La prima parte del primo capitolo è dedicata alla vita e alle opere di Mary Sidney. Nacque il 27 ottobre 1561, aveva tre fratelli, tre sorelle e aveva un forte legame con un fratello in particolare: Philip. Nel suo percorso di vita dovette affrontare molti lutti e momenti difficili: a partire dal suo matrimonio combinato, la morte prematura di due dei suoi figli, la morte prima del padre e poi della madre e infine di suo fratello Philip. Nella sezione 1.2 l'attenzione si sposta sul legame tra Mary e la regina Elisabetta I. La regina amava la letteratura ed era una scrittrice, tra le due c'era un grande rispetto reciproco per il loro talento letterario.

Il secondo capitolo è interamente dedicato ai Salmi nell'Inghilterra del diciassettesimo secolo e in particolare alla versione dei Sidney. I salmi non erano semplicemente testi religiosi, ma anche uno strumento politico e poetico. Non si trattava solamente di una raccolta di canzoni, ma di un vero e proprio viaggio dal lamento alla lode. In essi si riscontra quindi una duplice funzione: formazione spirituale ma anche protezione e riconoscimento divino. Durante la riforma, i Salmi giocarono un ruolo fondamentale all'interno dei conflitti religiosi ma rimasero pur sempre apprezzati per la loro bellezza poetica.

Nel 1640 erano già state pubblicate più di 300 versioni di Salmi Inglesi in versi. Una versione molto famosa all'epoca e degna di nota è quella di Sternhold e Hopkins. I fratelli Sidney trassero sicuramente ispirazione da loro, ma crearono una versione unica nel suo genere e innovativa. Oltre alla versione di Sternhold e Hopkins, Mary e Philip fecero riferimento ad altre traduzioni francesi e latine. In particolare, per quanto riguarda il latino, si rifecero al commento sui Salmi di Immanuel Tremellius, teologo e umanista protestante, di origine ebraica convertito al cristianesimo. Infatti, una particolarità dei *Sidneian Psalms* è quella di essere incredibilmente vicini alla versione ebraica. Molti studiosi si sono interrogati sulla possibilità che Mary potesse conoscere l'ebraico, ma l'ipotesi più plausibile è che si sia basata sul lavoro di Tremellius.

I Salmi di Philip e Mary non possono essere facilmente inquadrati in una categoria definita, oscillano tra la traduzione, la parafrasi e la riflessione poetica. Mary svolse un lavoro incredibile: in tutta la raccolta dei 150 Salmi si contano solamente quattro casi in cui lo schema delle strofe e delle rime viene ripetuto. Infatti, la loro versione fu presa come modello di versificazione in lingua inglese.

Infine, il terzo capitolo contiene l'analisi di *Even now that Care* e *To the Angel Spirit of the Most Excellent Sir Philip Sidney*. Le due poesie si trovano all'interno del Tixall Manuscript, uno dei diciotto manoscritti dei *Sidneian Psalms* e probabilmente l'unico a contenere entrambe le poesie. Infatti Mary all'epoca non pubblicò l'opera, venne fatta circolare per mezzo di questi manoscritti.

Even now that Care, dedicata alla regina Elisabetta I, svolge una duplice funzione: sia di dedica monarchica sia di riflessione religiosa sui Salmi. Mary Sidney esalta, con grande rispetto, la figura di Elisabetta come guida spirituale e politica. La regina viene paragonata al Re Davide fino a diventare una figura praticamente divina: nessuno se non lei sarebbe più adatto a proteggere il paese, l'arte e i Salmi. Inoltre, nel corso della poesia Mary allude al fatto che il lavoro sull'opera era iniziato a quattro mani – con Philip – e che ciò che era "in due" è diventato "in uno".

Invece, *To the Angel Spirit* – dedicata al fratello defunto – presenta un tono molto più intimo e personale. Si può percepire all'intero componimento un costante senso di lutto e amore fraterno. Infatti, all'epoca le donne non potevano partecipare ai funerali pubblici quindi questa poesia è l'unico

strumento che Mary poté adoperare per commemorare il fratello. Sidney si rivolge direttamente allo "spirito angelico" di Philip e subito nella prima strofa avviene una sorta di fusione tra i due: Mary rappresentata come semplice mortale e Philip come essere divino. In tutta la poesia c'è una costante esaltazione del fratello, definito come una figura perfetta e unica – immagine della fenice. Mary, al contrario, si sminuisce e afferma che nonostante abbia portato a termine il lavoro iniziato assieme al fratello, lui avrebbe fatto di meglio. Un elemento insolito che si trova in questa poesia è la firma finale "the sister of that incomparable Sidney". All'epoca i poeti non erano soliti firmare i propri testi quindi, con questa scelta Mary afferma che nessuno meglio di lei avrebbe potuto rendere giustizia al fratello.

Entrambe le poesie, probabilmente per rafforzare i concetti espressi, presentano elementi di ridondanza. Nel componimento dedicato al fratello, al contrario di *Even now that Care* che assume i toni di una dedica obbligata alla regina, emerge molto più sentimento e autenticità. Infine, grazie a queste due poesie, è possibile cogliere la raffinatezza stilistica e l'intelligenza poetica di Mary. È fondamentale che venga riconosciuto il suo contributo alla tradizione poetica inglese, soprattutto il suo lavoro effettuato sui Salmi. È necessario riconoscere Mary non come figura marginale rispetto a quella del fratello Philip ma, al contrario, come autrice principale dei Salmi dotata di una voce poetica consapevole.

Ai miei genitori
e a tutte le persone
che hanno sempre creduto in me.

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