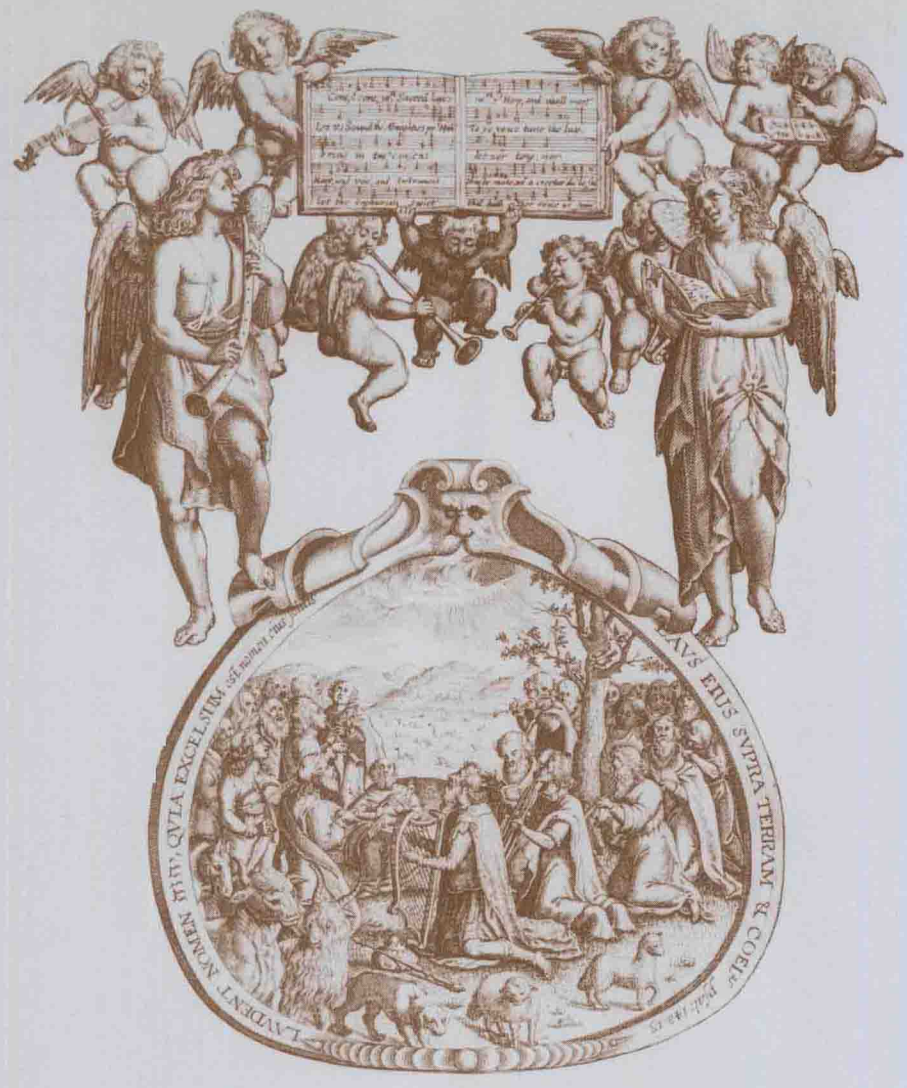

HANNIBAL HAMLIN

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Note on the text

Unless otherwise noted, biblical citations are from the King James Version (KJV). Citations from the psalm translations of the English Bibles (Coverdale, the Great Bible, Geneva, Bishops', King James) are from *The Hexaplar Psalter*, ed. William Aldis Wright (Cambridge, 1911). Wherever possible, the original spelling of quoted material has been maintained, even though this results in the occasional risk of confusion ("the" for "thee," for instance). Contractions, however, have been expanded, the archaic use of u/v, i/j, and long s modernized, and elaborate variations in font size and character have been normalized. To avoid adding further complications to an already substantial body of citations, page numbers have been omitted when psalms are quoted from whole psalters, on the principle that psalm numbers provide sufficient reference. Page numbers have been supplied for all selected psalms included in larger volumes.

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Introduction

The Renaissance was a cultural movement founded on the enterprise of translation, in which works of classical culture were rediscovered and transformed into scholarly Latin as well as European vernaculars. Yet, the culture of early modern England involved the translation of not one but two ancient cultures, two ancient literatures, the classical and the biblical, though traditionally less critical attention has been paid to the latter than the former. The earl of Surrey and Richard Stanyhurst translated Virgil's *Aeneid*; Arthur Golding and George Sandys translated Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; but all four translated the Psalms, as did John Milton, Sir Philip Sidney, the countess of Pembroke, Sir Thomas Wyatt, Sir Francis Bacon, Henry Vaughan, Phineas Fletcher, and Richard Crashaw. Virtually every author of the period (Shakespeare, Spenser, Bunyan, Donne, Herbert, and Jonson) translated, paraphrased, or alluded to the Psalms in their major works. In fact, the translation, or "Englishing," of the biblical Psalms substantially shaped the culture of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, resulting in creative forms as diverse as singing psalters, metrical psalm paraphrases, sophisticated poetic adaptations, meditations, sermons, commentaries, and significant allusions in poems, plays, and literary prose, by English men and women of varied social and intellectual backgrounds, accommodating the biblical texts to their personal agendas, whether religious, political, or aesthetic.

The Protestant Reformation sanctioned and even demanded vernacular translations of the Bible, but no biblical book was translated more often or more widely in the subsequent two centuries than the Psalms. The singing of psalms in meter to catchy tunes, sometimes to popular melodies borrowed from secular songs, was an essential component in the rapid spread of Reformation ideas; many of Martin Luther's own first publications were metrical psalms and hymns.[1] The educational value of the Psalms was

[1] Inka Bach and Helmut Galle, *Deutsche Psalmendichtung vom 16. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin and New York, 1989), 89–99.

affirmed by Richard Hooker (stating a view which had been repeated by Christian writers since Basil originally expressed it in the fourth century), when he asked, "What is there for man to know that the Psalmes are not able to teach?"[2] Like Luther, John Calvin wrote metrical translations of the Psalms for congregational singing in the Genevan Church (continuing the French tradition begun by Clément Marot), designed to instruct while they delighted, and wrote an extensive commentary on the Psalms, praising them in their multiformity as representing an "Anatomy of all the partes of the Soule."[3] This view was shared by John Donne, who described the Psalms as the "Manna of the Church" since, just "as Manna tasted to every man like that that he liked best, so doe the Psalmes minister Instruction, and satisfaction, to every man, in every emergency and occasion."[4]

Many Renaissance poets similarly held the Psalms in high esteem, not only for their religious truths but for their literary quality as well. One of the earliest to express this view was Petrarch, who himself composed a series of Latin "Psalms" – actually original compositions but intended to evoke the style and tone of the Vulgate Psalms. In a letter he thanked Giovanni Boccaccio for sending him Augustine's sermons on the Psalms, stating that he could imagine no "greater work of such tremendous literary merit or wealth of content." With this prized volume, he could "sail David's sea with greater assurance, avoiding the reefs, unafraid of his waves of words or collisions with mysterious meanings."[5] In another letter he elucidates one of his own pastorals in which a shepherd named "Monicus," apparently voicing the author's opinion, praises another shepherd's singing above that of the great poets of classical antiquity: "The shepherd whose singing Monicus prefers to Homer and Vergil is none other than David."[6] Several hundred years later, at the other end of the Renaissance, Milton made the same comparison between the Psalms and "those magnific odes and hymns

[2] Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book V, in the Folger Library edition of *The Works of Richard Hooker*, vol. 2, ed. W. Speed Hill (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1977), 150 (chap. 37.2).

[3] For Calvin's Psalms 36, 46, 91 (90), 113, and 138, see *Calvin's First Psalter [1539]*, ed. Sir Richard R. Terry (London, 1932). Calvin's versions were later replaced by Marot's in the Genevan Psalter of Marot and Théodore de Bèze. Calvin's epistle to "the godly Readers" is cited from *The Psalmes of David and others. With M. John Calvins Commentaries*, trans. Arthur Golding (London, 1571), sig. *6^{v}.

[4] John Donne, "The second of my Prebend Sermons upon my five Psalmes," in *Donne's Prebend Sermons*, ed. Janel M. Mueller (Cambridge, MA, 1971), 91.

[5] Petrarch, "To Giovanni Boccaccio, an expression of gratitude for sending Augustine's book on the Psalms of David," *Fam.* XVIII, 3, in *Letters on Familiar Matters, Rerum familiarum libri XVII–XXIV*, trans. Aldo S. Bernardo (Baltimore and London, 1985), 47. Petrarch's "Penitential Psalms" (c.1355) were translated into English by George Chapman in 1612.

[6] Petrarch, *Epistolae de rebus familaris* 10:4, cited in James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry* (New Haven and London, 1981), 213.

wherein Pindarus and Callimachus are in most things worthy," writing that the former, "not in their divine argument alone, but in the very critical art of composition may be easily made appear over all other kinds of Lyrick poesy, to be incomparable."[7] Such views were widespread among European literati.

Two general yet essential questions should be addressed here in order to provide a framework for what follows. First, what are the Psalms? The answer to this question may seem self-evident, yet in many ways a "psalm" is difficult to define as a specific literary genre. Indeed, this generic indeterminacy is partly responsible for the rich variety of Renaissance psalm translations. The second question concerns the use of the term "translation." Again, what seems clear at first glance proves more problematic on closer scrutiny. For example, given the necessarily complex relationship between a work and its translation, to what extent can a translation itself be considered an "original" work? Questions of originality and the authority of the "original" were complicated for Renaissance psalms by the fact that most translators did not read Hebrew and therefore relied on previous Latin, English, or other vernacular translations, and by the fact that there was universal ignorance regarding the specific formal workings of Hebrew poetry. To what extent were these questions raised by Renaissance translators themselves?

To begin with, the simplest description of a "psalm" is that it is one of the 150 texts that make up the biblical Book of Psalms.[8] Although more critical readers recognized that these texts might have been written at different times by different authors (various attributions are indeed made in some of the headnotes of the Psalms, as in Psalm 90, "A prayer of Moses," or Psalm 85, "A Psalme of the sonnes of Corah"),[9] still, the popular idea persisted throughout the Renaissance that all of them had been composed by King David. George Wither, for instance, in his *Preparation to the Psalter* (1619), outlined the arguments against Davidic authorship in great detail, yet ultimately preferred to set them aside:

> Neverthelesse; Seeing there are so many probable Evidences, to make it credible, that David was at least composer of farre the greatest part, if not of all the Psalmes: Seeing the holy ghost hath vouchsafed him so great a favour, as to make him his noble Instrument, whereby he conveyeth unto us so many heavenly raptures, for

[7] John Milton, *The Reason of Church Government* (1642), in *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York, 1957), 669.

[8] This is the title of the book in the Vulgate and most vernacular bibles. The Hebrew title is *Tehillim* ("praises").

[9] Coverdale's translation in the Great Bible (1539).

the comfort of our soules: And forasmuch also as the enemies of Christ thinke to make it an advantage on their parts, to deny him as much as may be of that sacred worke; I would not (even for those respects) that hee should bee robbed of any honour, which I thought might appertaine unto him by those excellent Poems.[10]

Despite widespread agreement among Wither's contemporaries as to who wrote the Psalms, their genre is difficult to define in any way that would have been generally understood in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Psalms consist mostly of short texts, though they do vary in length from the abrupt two verses of Psalm 117 to the copious 176 verses of Psalm 119. (Psalm 119 actually can be said to consist of a sequence of short sections, but some of the other psalms are also relatively long: Psalm 106, for instance, has 48 verses, and Psalm 78 has 72.) The common understanding was that the Psalms were poems, but, as will be discussed in detail below (see chapter 3), the precise nature of Hebrew poetry was not understood by anyone, not even the learned, so no one could define the genre of "psalm" in any consistent or accurate way. In fact, based on the writings of Jerome and other church fathers, the general view was that the Psalms encompassed a wide variety of genres and forms. Even without reference to Hebrew, one could perceive some of this variety, distinguishing psalms of praise and thanksgiving, lament, invective, and wisdom.[11] Some of the psalms are historical narratives, some seemingly liturgical prayers or responses, some introspective personal meditations. There are psalms about kingship, about the history of Israel, about David, about moral doctrine. These are all distinctions of subject, tone, and purpose, however; no one in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries could clearly distinguish among these on the basis of formal conventions except by purely speculative analogy to the conventions of such genres in the poetry of other languages, especially Latin and Greek.

Paul's counsel to the Christians of Colossae – "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" (Coloss. 3:16) – offers an apparent distinction among these lyric genres, but in practice one cannot clearly distinguish even these three "kinds" on the basis of formal conventions.[12]

[10] George Wither, *A Preparation to the Psalter* (London, 1619), Spenser Society reprint (New York, 1884, rpr. 1967), 34.

[11] There have been many attempts to categorize the Psalms generically. The most important modern work in this area is Hermann Gunkel's *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction*, trans. T. M. Horner (Philadelphia, 1967, orig., 1951). See also Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, trans. Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen (Atlanta, 1981, orig., 1961).

[12] The sorts of careful delineation of generic conventions made, for example, for the hymn and ode by Philip Rollinson and Paul Fry cannot be made for the psalm, which is defined, in the Renaissance at

As Philip Rollinson notes, the Greek *hymnos* "refers to a song, poem, or speech which praises gods and sometimes heroes and abstractions."[13] By this definition, a great many of the Psalms are clearly hymns. The Protestant tradition, however, tended to distinguish between psalms and hymns (as in the separate sections for psalms and canticles in the "Sternhold and Hopkins" psalter; see chapter 1), yet many of the "hymns" in later hymnals are in fact psalm paraphrases. The word "psalm" is even less helpful than "hymn" in establishing generic boundaries, deriving from the Greek *psalmos*, "a song sung to the accompaniment of a plucked instrument." The Hebrew terms for these songs are more general still: *mizmor* ("song") and *tehillah* ("praise"), the latter providing the title of the Hebrew book, *Tehillim*.[14]

Neither can one recognize formal distinctions between the "songs" in the Book of Psalms and those found elsewhere in the Bible. A number of other songs in the Old Testament, such as the Songs of Moses and Deborah (Exodus 15 and Judges 5), were commonly associated with the "Psalms" proper. That there might be "psalms" outside of the Book of Psalms is, in fact, perfectly logical, given that one of them (Psalm 18) also appears in the Second Book of Samuel (2 Samuel 22), where it is sung by David after his victory over Saul. Even with a knowledge of Hebrew, the generic distinction of the "psalm" is difficult. As James Kugel has shown, the very notion of Hebrew "poetry" may be questionable, with the heightened, more formally self-conscious style of Hebrew in which many of the Psalms are framed found elsewhere in biblical passages, some of which are not generally thought of as at all "poetic."[15] This said, it remains true that,

least, by its generic diversity. See Rollinson, "The Renaissance of the Literary Hymn," *Renaissance Papers*, 1968 (Durham, NC, 1969), 11–20; Fry, *The Poet's Calling in the English Ode* (New Haven and London, 1980), esp. 1–14. This is not to say that attempts were not made to categorize biblical songs on the basis of Paul's categories, as in the marginal gloss in the Geneva Bible (1560): "By Psalmes hee meaneth all godly songs which were written upon divers occasions, and by Hymnes, all such as conteine the praise of God, and by spirituall songs, other more peculiar and artificious songs which were also in praise of God, but they were made fuller of Musicke" (cited in Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* [Princeton, 1979], 38). By this description, hymns are a sub-category of psalms. What the editors mean by "artificious songs" is not clear (perhaps something like a Renaissance anthem or motet).

[13] Rollinson, "hymn," in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan (Princeton, 1993), 542.

[14] Robert Alter, "psalm," in the *New Princeton Encyclopedia*, 995–96.

[15] Kugel, *Idea of Biblical Poetry*, esp. chap. 2. Kugel gives numerous examples of critical dilemmas connected with "parallelism" and the definition of "poetry." Jer. 25:18–26, for instance, which presents a list of Moabite cities, exhibits the characteristics of Hebrew "poetry," leading one scholar to label it as such, despite admitting that it does not seem in any other way "poetic" (ibid., 82–83). There is a circularity to arguments about the "poetic," since in order to identify a passage as "poetic" one requires a definition, which in turn can only truly be tested on the basis of specific examples. Despite

although no one in the Renaissance accurately understood the nature of Hebrew "poetry," they remained convinced that the Psalms were indeed poems, and the concern of this study is with what Renaissance readers and writers thought them to be, rather than with current debates.

The fact that Hebrew was so little known in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England meant that there was essentially no "original," no accessible, authoritative text with which to compare a translation, and as a result, for the vast majority of their readers, the English Psalms were the *only* Psalms (supplemented for some by "cognate" versions in Latin, German, or French). More importantly, English translations of the Psalms held a different status than English translations of either classical literature or vernacular works in other European languages, in that they were not intended as a crib for those who couldn't get at the original texts, nor as a kind of second-best version for the monoglot. The Psalms were not really conceived of as "texts" in the way that translations of Catullus or Petrarch were. They were holy Scripture and, as such, had a unique function, being *used* by English Christians every day, or at least every week, of their lives: they were sung in the services of the English Church, attendance at which was compelled by law if not by personal belief; they were sung at home as part of personal or family devotions; they were recorded in diaries, interpreted in commentaries and sermons, alluded to in the sacred texts of the liturgy and in the secular plays of the theater alike; they were among the most familiar texts in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. Because of the central place of the Psalms in English daily life, and their vital functions within the body of English culture, they were thus, in a powerful if peculiar sense, *English* works.[16]

Translations are a generally problematic category of literature. For instance, one common standard, at least in this century, for measuring the quality of a literary work is its originality. But "originality" is itself a problematic concept.[17] Normally an "original" work is considered to be one that

Kugel's prominence in the field of biblical "poetry," it should be noted that there remain dissenting views. Alter, for instance, makes notable claims for the legitimacy of Hebrew "poetry." See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York, 1985).

[16] Actually, one could make similar claims for the status of some of the most widely known and widely translated classical literature, like Horace's *Odes* or Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, that also had a formative influence on English culture. But I am concerned with exploring the complex nature of English translations of the Psalms rather than with distinguishing them categorically from other literary works that may well share some of this complexity.

[17] For an extended exploration of the concept, see John Hollander, "Originality," in *The Work of Poetry* (New York, 1997), 13–38. Danielle Clarke offers a useful critique of the general modern attitude toward the "literal" translation: "A judgement that a translation is literal presupposes that it is read exclusively in relation to its source text, rather than in the context to which it is directed; it also

is new, fresh, independent of prior works, the opposite of a work that is derivative, imitative, or commonplace. In the context of translation, however, the "original" work is not at all new; it is in fact the oldest version, the one on which any translation is based. As a result, a translation's lack of "originality" in the second sense makes it difficult for us to perceive it as "original" in the first sense, however imaginative or genuinely inventive it may be. Some of the translations of the English Renaissance are nevertheless considered to be among the period's literary masterpieces. Ezra Pound (whose own translations are among the most "original" in modern English) describes Golding's translation of the *Metamorphoses* as "the most beautiful book in the language."[18] When John Keats sings the praises of the *Iliad*, it is in the translation of George Chapman, on whom Keats bestows an equal share of credit:

> Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
> That deep–brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne;
> Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
> Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold.[19]

F. O. Matthiessen goes so far as to suggest that some of the best Elizabethan translations, Thomas North's Plutarch, for instance, are not only the equal of but actually superior to their originals.[20] The reason, Matthiessen explains, is that translators like North, or Philemon Holland (translator of Pliny), aimed not at the "meticulous imitation of the classical style," but at "the production of a book that would strike into the minds of their countrymen," resulting in English versions that naturalized the originals, that "made the foreign classics rich with English associations," taking Plutarch, Pliny, Montaigne, and others "deep into the national consciousness."[21] These Elizabethan literary works were "original" in a sense we do not customarily apply to translations, but it is in this sense that they – and, I would argue, the English Psalms – confirm George Steiner's insight that it is the process of translation and "the continuum of reciprocal transformation and decipherment which it answers, that determine the code of inheritance in

makes an assumption about the stability or presence of the original to be reproduced," in *Isabella Whitney, Mary Sidney, and Aemelia Lanyer: Renaissance Women Poets*, ed. Clarke (Harmondsworth, 2000), xxvi.

[18] Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (Norfolk, CT, n.d.), 58. Pound also includes Golding's Ovid, along with Gavin Douglas's translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*, on his list of suggestions for an anthology of the best English poets (79).

[19] John Keats, "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer," in *John Keats: Complete Poems*, ed. Jack Stillinger (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1978, 1982), 34.

[20] F. O. Matthiessen, *Translation: An Elizabethan Art* (Cambridge, MA, 1931), 5.

[21] Ibid., 6–7, 4.

our civilization."[22] The formation of culture has thus been typically and fundamentally an act of translation.

Another problem in coming to terms with works of translation lies in the gap between theory and practice, evident from at least as early as the Renaissance. Since there is little theoretical writing about translation in sixteenth-century England as compared to France and Italy, there is no clear rationale for the rather loose practice of Elizabethan translators.[23] This may also explain their lack of consistent terminology for distinguishing different degrees of freedom in translation such as John Dryden introduced in the preface to his 1680 translation of *Ovid's Epistles*. He distinguished the categories of "metaphrase," "paraphrase," and "imitation," on the basis of an increasing degree of creative license taken with the text of the original.[24] More than a century earlier, Roger Ascham, in *The Scholemaster*, listed six "wayes appointed by the best learned men for the learning of tonges and encrease of eloquence, viz. *translatio linguarum*, *paraphrasis*, *metaphrasis*, *epitome*, *imitatio*, *declamatio*." Imitation (*imitatio*) does seem for Ascham, as for Dryden, a broader approach than metaphrase (*metaphrasis*) or paraphrase (*paraphrasis*), but the only distinction Ascham perceives between the latter two is that metaphrase involves the translation of verse (verse into verse, verse into prose, or prose into verse), whereas paraphrase is confined to prose, with neither practice being more or less "literal" than the other.

As Ascham's divergent usage indicates, Dryden's taxonomy was a belated attempt to organize a fairly haphazard practice in which "metaphrase," "paraphrase," "imitation," and other terms, such as "translation," and, most simply, "Englishing," were used interchangeably to describe acts that we would probably consider degrees of paraphrase. Actually, as Thomas Greene has noted, even Dryden could not maintain his own careful distinctions between the three kinds of translation, since he concluded his preface to Ovid by admitting that he himself had taken "more liberty than a just translation will allow."[25] Part of Dryden's difficulty lies in his attempt to apply what are essentially schoolroom distinctions to the much more sophisticated and flexible practice of translation by mature writers, himself included.

[22] George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (London, 1975), 461.

[23] *Critical Essays in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. J. E. Spingarn 3 vols. (Bloomington, IN, and London, 1957, rpr. 1968), vol. 1, xlviii–lviii, esp. lii, n. 2.

[24] John Dryden, preface to *Ovid's Epistles, Translated by Several Hands* (1680), in *John Dryden: Of Dramatic Poesy and Other Critical Essays*, 2 vols., ed. George Watson (London and New York, 1912, rpr. 1967), vol. 1, 268.

[25] Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven and London, 1982), 52.

Dryden's careful terminology applied no better to Renaissance psalm translations than to translations of classical or European secular literature. The metrical psalters of George Sandys (1636) and Samuel Woodford (1667), for instance, announced themselves as "paraphrases" and were indeed relatively free versions. Sandys confessed the liberal nature of his paraphrase in his dedication to Charles I:

> And since no narrow Verse such Mysteries,
> Deepe Sense, and high Expressions could comprise;
> Her labouring Wings a larger compasse flie,
> And Poesie resolves with Poesie.[26]

In the preface to his *Paraphrase upon the Psalmes*, Woodford compared his versions with Sandys's, admitting that "In mine will appear a greater liberty, both as to the expression and the different sorts of stanzas which I have us'd."[27] He also condemned metrical translators who turn the English prose psalms into "versions so exactly laboured ad verbum, that what by the unlucky transposing of words, what by leaving out some little particles, wherein the grace of the sentence did consist, they lose all their former beauty, and from excellent Prose, though the language continue the same, degenerate into very indifferent, and untuneable Rhyme."[28] Miles Smyth, on the other hand, also called his metrical psalm translations "paraphrases," but he claimed to be striving for the "genuine sense" as well as metrical sophistication.[29] In 1607 Joseph Hall published *Some fewe of Davids Psalms Metaphrased, for a taste of the rest*, explaining in his preface his desire to see "our english Metaphrase bettered," by which he seems to refer to the standard metrical psalter of Sternhold and Hopkins et al.[30] Neither "Sternhold and Hopkins" nor Hall's attempted betterment seem metaphrases of the sort that Dryden had in mind. Henry King adds a further degree of confusion in *The Psalmes of David from the New Translation of the Bible turned into Meter* (1651). The title implies, as King's preface makes clear, that these metrical psalms are not a new translation at all, but simply the Psalms of the King James Bible "turned into Meter."[31]

[26] *A Paraphrase upon the Psalmes of David* [London, 1636], rpr. with *A Paraphrase upon the Divine Poems* [London, 1648], sig. F6^{r}.

[27] Samuel Woodford, *A Paraphrase upon the Psalmes* (London, 1667), sig. c^{v}.

[28] Ibid., sigs. a3^{r}–a3^{v}.

[29] Miles Smyth, *The Psalms of King David, paraphrased and turned into English verse* (1668), cited in *The Psalmists of Britain*, ed. John Holland 2 vols. (London, 1843), vol. 2, 56–57.

[30] *The Collected Poems of Joseph Hall*, ed. A. Davenport (Liverpool, 1949), 125, 128.

[31] "I have so closely followed the New Translation of the Psalms in our Church Bibles, that He who is able to read the Prose, may perceive the Reason of the text neither lost, nor abused in the Rhime;