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Sir Thomas Wyatt: The precursor of Renaissance verse.

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SIR THOMAS WYATT: THE PRECURSOR
OF RENAISSANCE VERSE

BY

JOHN W. KERR

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies through
the Department of English in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts at the University
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1965
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ABSTRACT

Sir Thomas Wyatt's position in the history of English poetry has, to the present day, remained somewhat obscure. It will be the object of this thesis to try to present a true perspective of his place in English literature. To do this one must keep in mind the era in which he lived and the technical difficulties that confronted him in the use of the English language as an instrument of expression. If these things are understood then Wyatt's position in English poetry becomes clear. He can no longer be associated with the medieval tradition; instead he becomes the precursor of the great poetry of the late Elizabethan period.

Chapter one of this thesis will attempt to recreate the national thought of the early sixteenth century. The atmosphere of the times played a great part in the development of Wyatt's poetry. Chapter one, therefore, will be concerned with the historical traditions that helped form the background for the conflict between the great feudal system of the Middle Ages and the humanistic ideas of the Renaissance. Chapter two will present an analysis of the three major problems Wyatt encountered in the actual construction of his verse. These technical obstacles were: one, his understanding of Chaucer's prosody, two, his
imitation of foreign models, and three, his use of the English language as an instrument of expression. Finally, chapter three will concentrate on the poetry of Wyatt and try to analyze and appraise the effects of the major technical problems on his verse. This chapter will also try and consider the influence of historical tradition and national thought on the themes as well as the ultimate forms of his poetic creation.
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John Walter Kerr

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze and evaluate the problems of poetic creation confronting Sir Thomas Wyatt at the beginning of the sixteenth century. This century was the great age of transition from medieval to modern times. Wyatt worked from a basis of a culture provided for him by the Middle Ages, but was still alive to the influence of his own age. Therefore, in attempting to analyze the various problems faced by him in the use of the English language as an instrument of expression, it will be necessary to keep in mind the national thought and tradition that formed the atmosphere for his poetic imagination.

Within this framework it should be possible to see, and perhaps better understand, his contributions to the history of English literature. Rather than a figure standing in the twilight of the medieval tradition, he should emerge as the precursor in the dawn of the Renaissance in English poetry. One should also be able to appreciate the struggle for originality inherent in the English poetic genius that made itself visible in this
I

Most criticism concerning Sir Thomas Wyatt's contribution to the development of English poetry can be summed up in C. S. Lewis' assessment of his poetic ability. Lewis states, in reference to Wyatt: "We are in fact dealing with a Drab poet....When he is bad, he is flat, even null. And when he is good he is hardly one of the irresistible poets. He has no splendors that dazzle you and no enchantments that disarm criticism."  

Robert Shafer contends that the poetry in Tottel's Miscellany, to which Wyatt was a major contributor, has no other value than historical, because it represents what was, not what was to come. And even W. J. Courthope, who observed that certain advances were made by Wyatt, questioned his "honesty of independent effort in the pursuit of technical trickery."  

The ambiguity surrounding Wyatt's place in English Literature can perhaps be attributed to the critics of the

1 See C. S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama, Oxford History of English Literature (Oxford, 1954), Chapter II.  
2 Ibid., p. 227.  
3 From Beowulf to Thomas Hardy (New York, 1939), pp. 265 - 268.  
late sixteenth century. There seems to have been a great gulf separating the poets of the first eighty years of the sixteenth century and the writers of the late Elizabethan period. Thomas Nash, in 1589, only twelve short years after George Gascoigne's death, fondly remembered him as a poet who belongs to the past, to another tradition. And Sir John Davis, in 1599, felt it was the height of absurdity in youth that anyone should "praise old George Gascoigne's rimes." The great age of Spenser, Marlowe, Jonson and Shakespeare had obscured the poetic contributions of the poets of the early sixteenth century. If they were remembered at all, they were remembered as poets of little worth belonging to a medieval tradition. To Sir Phillip Sidney, Surrey was the only survivor of the literature of the first half of the century. And when Wyatt was remembered, as John M. Berdan points out, he was subordinated to Surrey, but in most instances he was completely forgotten.

It seems that critics of the sixteenth century have been so impressed by the literature of the late


Elizabethan period that they have tended to relegate early sixteenth century poetry to the limbo of C. S. Lewis' "Drab Age Verse." Certainly the contrast between Shakespeare's lyrics and those of Gascoigne, Googe or Wyatt is great. The most casual observer perhaps wonders that they could have lived in the same century. And one can sympathize with Tucker Brooke, who points out, "in two years between Gascoigne's death (1577) and the appearance of The Shepherd's Calendar, poetry passed over a mighty watershed and his works, so broadly representative of the early Elizabethan effort, became only a landmark of the past." It is with the traditional past that the poets of the early sixteenth century have been associated. An inviolable division has been drawn between these poets and those of the late sixteenth century.

Unfortunately Wyatt's proximity to the Middle Ages has helped confuse any proper evaluation of his position in the history of English poetry. He stood between two great eras of history: the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Most critics have hesitated to associate his poetic efforts with the poetry of the late Elizabethan period. They have instead tended to ally him with the traditional poetry of the Middle Ages. He has been considered, in content and style, a poet of the medieval tradition, a poet of the past rather than the precursor of the Elizabethan lyrics.

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9 Brooke, p. 396.
of the late sixteenth century.

However, with patience and perception, any reader can see in almost every line he wrote a titanic struggle for originality against the traditions of the past and a constant battle for an instrument of expression that would open the way for the creative genius of the English imagination. If we have a proper appreciation of what Wyatt was attempting to do and the difficulties that confronted him, then his verse takes on new vitality and he becomes the precursor of the poetry of Spenser, Marlowe, Jonson and Shakespeare. Through him flowed the inspiration for Renaissance poetry, and an understanding of the problems that faced him is essential in evaluating his true worth as a herald of a new era in English poetry.

The object of this thesis will be to underline and analyze the struggle that Wyatt faced in his search for originality and an instrument of expression. In trying to evaluate his position in English poetry it will be necessary not only to understand his contribution, but also to be aware of his faults. Wyatt was a pioneer and his rough, unequal work shows the extent to which he struggled for the perfection of English verse.

In studying Wyatt it becomes apparent that he faced two problems: one, an historical problem of time and place, or the era in which he lived, and two, technical problems of language and form. The first problem involves national thought and traditions that existed at the beginning of the
sixteenth century. As pointed out above, this was a period of transition from medieval to modern times. And the conflicts created by the confrontation of medieval and modern ideas not only influenced the direction and themes of his poetry, but also his technical approach to the art of prosody. These technical problems can be analyzed under three points: Chaucer's prosody, imitation, and language.

Wyatt's difficulty in understanding Chaucer and his imitation of foreign models was directly related to his experiments in form and structure. Berdan contends that Wyatt's chief value lay in his work with various stanza forms. The problem Wyatt had with the English language as an instrument of expression is the framework in which the other two points can be fitted. For example, much of the difficulty arising in his imitation of foreign models can be attributed to the inadequacies of the English language as an instrument of expression.

The present chapter will attempt to recreate the national thought of the early sixteenth century, as well as present a brief biography of Wyatt. The atmosphere of the times, as mentioned, played a great part in the development of Wyatt's poetry. Therefore, parts one and two of this chapter will be concerned with the historical traditions that helped form the milieu for the cataclysmic

10 Berdan, p. 485.
conflict between the great feudal system of the Middle Ages and the humanistic ideas of the Renaissance that were to bring the world into the modern era by the end of the sixteenth century. Chapter two will present an analysis of the three major problems confronting Wyatt in the actual construction of his verse. These technical obstacles as pointed out, were: one, his understanding of Chaucer's prosody, two, his imitation of foreign models, and three, his use of the English language as an instrument of expression. Finally, chapter three will concentrate on the works of Wyatt and try to analyze and appraise the effects of the major technical problems on his verse. It will also try to appreciate the influence of historical tradition and national thought on the themes as well as the ultimate forms of his poetic creation.

II

Any discussion of Wyatt's poetry would be incomplete and ineffective without some knowledge of the historical tradition that helped shape the national thought of the early sixteenth century. The clash of medieval and modern ideas influenced the direction and themes of his poetry.
as well as having a direct bearing on his technical approach to the art of prosody.

The sixteenth century, as mentioned, was the great age of transition: an era of intellectual, spiritual and political change as radical as the technical revolution from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. There were movements in the air that could not help but effect the poetic sensibilities of Wyatt.

The most vital and stimulating of these movements was the humanistic revival of classical learning which received its greatest impetus, according to the late Professor Itrat-Husain Zuberi, from the fall of Constantinople in 1453. After the conquest of Constantinople by the Turks there was a great exodus westward of men skilled in classical scholarship, and they brought with them manuscripts that helped enlarge the field of classical studies. The Universities of Italy and France became the centers of instruction in the humanities. And when this new learning was once admitted into the ancient or medieval system of university study it was quick to spread its influence.\footnote{Fritz Caspari, Humanism and the Social Order in Tudor England (Chicago, 1954), p. 61.}

The humanistic spirit found its way to England through the Oxford reformers, or first generation humanists. Men like Thomas Lincare, William Crocyn, and Thomas Starky
went to Italy and at the universities, especially Padua, studied Greek and Latin. They returned to Oxford to teach and spread the humanistic gospel. Frederick Marcham considered them, along with John Colet, to be "The fathers of English Renaissance." Colet was the perfect example of a humanist who believed in enlightened Catholicism. In London he founded St. Paul's school which specialized in Greek studies. Other examples of Catholic humanism were Thomas More, John Fisher and Cardinal Pole. These men were influenced by Erasmus and Petrarch, and like them believed there was no conflict between the wisdom of classical antiquity and Christian doctrine.

The humanistic ideals were applied to literature and criticism by the second-generation humanists. These humanists had more of a direct influence on Wyatt than the Oxford reformers because they were not only interested in moral and political problems, but in critical evaluations of literature. Their revival of Greek and Latin literature led to an intense interest in meter and verse structure which had a great influence on Wyatt's interpretation of Chaucer's prosody and his imitating of foreign models.

Thomas Elyot, who wrote the Governor, thought that

education and literary criticism were an integral part of any political discussion. He was also a staunch advocate of borrowing words from foreign sources to enrich the English language. The reluctance of early sixteenth century poets to go to loan words, or "inkhorn terms" created somewhat of a problem in prosody. And Roger Ascham, author of The Schoolmaster, helped bring out the importance of language in the construction of poetry. He was one of the first to insist on the use of the varnacular in poetic composition. However, unlike Elyot, he strongly opposed the use of inkhorn terms. His criticism led Wyatt and other poets of his day not only to abhor the use of inkhorn terms, but to go back to archaic English words in constructing their poetic meters, which as will be seen created difficulties in establishing an iambic pattern in verse structure. This early phase of the Renaissance, therefore, was embued with ideas in education, literature, the rules of writing, language, and scholarship. And these new ideas and influences had a profound effect on the early sixteenth century poets, including Wyatt.


14 Inkhorn Terms. A phrase supposedly coined by Roger Ascham to ridicule the borrowing of words from foreign sources. Some people considered the use of certain learned words mere pedantry and tried to run them out by ridicule, calling them "inkhorn terms."

As previously mentioned the sixteenth century was a bridge, a period of transition from medieval to modern times, and as such was a meeting of the old and the new. Wyatt, although he was the precursor of modern English poetry, was still deeply rooted in the traditions of the great feudal system of the Middle Ages. And if he was influenced, and perhaps a little startled, by the new ideas of this period, he was equally aware of and could take solace in the recognition of many institutions and ideas of the past in the twilight of their glory. "The great social fabric of Catholicism and Feudalism, in which civil and ecclesiastical elements were blended and balanced, was still standing; an ideal of faith and morals was still before the mind pointing out the duty of man to God in the scholastic theology of the Church and the duty of man to his neighbour in the chivalric institutions of the Holy Roman Empire."¹⁶

If the schools and monasteries were the pillars of the spiritual position of the feudal system, then the fabric of secular authority in the Middle Ages rested mainly on the institutions of knighthood. The standard of knighthood was the unwritten law that had long helped to preserve the unity of European society. But unfortunately by the sixteenth century the flower of nobility of the Middle Ages had all but been decimated. The struggle with

¹⁶ Courthope, p. 42.
the monarchial principle and the formation of national societies, which created civil and foreign wars, wrecked havoc on the aristocracy. Thousands of French leaders of chivalry had perished in battles with the English or in expeditions against Egypt and Tunis. Charles the Bold led the Burgundian aristocracy to oblivion in his struggle with the Swiss; the feudal Lords of Spain were weakened by centuries of fighting with the Moors and among themselves; and the English nobility was all but destroyed by the War of the Roses.¹⁷

However the noble ideals of knighthood and the proper conduct of a gentleman were still present in the sixteenth century. These principles were revived by Baldassare Castiglione in *The Courtier*. He was qualified through his service to the Duke of Urbino and as an ambassador to France and England to form a comprehensive idea of the refined and chivalrous courtier. Castiglione's book deeply impressed the imagination of men in every country in Europe. The qualifications of the courtier in his system are based on the ancient traditions of chivalry.¹⁸ Out of this system is also developed the idea


of the relationship between the sexes. The rules of the art of love were carefully preserved according to the code of the ancient Cours d'Amour. As will be seen, a conflict with these principles of chivalry played an important part in Wyatt's attitude towards love.

These ideals were reflected in various types of English poetry of the Middle Ages: in The Vision of Piers the Plowman, in the Confessio Amantis, and the many love allegories that developed from the Romance of the Rose. This early poetry was characterized by the principles of chivalry and the feudal authority of the Church. However, throughout Europe, in various forms and under different aspects, the ideas of the Renaissance and Reformation began to permeate the atmosphere. These influences swept upon the English imagination and began to break up the traditional beliefs in chivalry and the authority of the Church. In Wyatt's poetry the effect of these new ideas can be seen in conflict with the traditions of the past.

19 Cours d'Amour: A philosophy of love and a code of lovemaking which flourished in chivalric times. According to the system of falling in love is accompanied by great emotional disturbances. The knight agonizes over his condition and indulges in endless self-questioning. His condition improves when he is inspired by his love to great deeds.

III

Sir Thomas Wyatt was born in 1503, the oldest son of Sir Henry Wyatt, a faithful follower of the House of Lancaster during the War of the Roses. Sir Henry was imprisoned in the Tower of London by Richard III, but with the accession of Henry VIII he was given a position of honor and trust and acquired considerable property. Thomas at the age of twelve was entered at St. John's College, Cambridge, where he received his B.A. degree in 1518 and his M.A. in 1522. In 1520 he married Elizabeth, daughter of Lord Cobham, and was introduced at Court by his father, who obtained for him the necessary appointments to assure his success.21

Substantial evidence has been brought forth to support the fact that Wyatt was in Italy between 1526 and 1527.22 It was on this trip that he began his wide acquaintance with Italian literature, which was to have such repercussions on the future of English poetry. From 1527 to 1537 he wrote most of his love poetry, and tradition has it that it was during this period he fell in love with Anne Boleyn. This tradition rests on an epigram

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22 See "The Poetical Works of Sir Thomas Wyatt," pp. xi - xii. Mr. John Bruce obtained access to the Wyatt family papers that were in the possession of the Rev. Bradford D. Hawkins, and in 1850, in Gentleman's Magazine, published the third Earl of Bedford's account of the origin of his ancestor's Italian mission.
of his that, like Petrarch's supposedly played upon his mistress' name: "To his love called Anna." No charge of this nature, however, was made against Wyatt at Anne's trial, which used the weakest of evidence to convict her. And certainly Wyatt would have been in the center of this scandalous trial if the King had had any suspicions concerning him and Anne. The relationship between Wyatt and the King must have been very good, despite the fact he was put in the Tower of London once. On two occasions he was Henry's personal ambassador to Phillip of Spain and at the time of his death, in 1542, he was performing a special service for the King.

It is obvious from Wyatt's heritage that he was embued with the tradition of the past. He was from an aristocratic family that had its roots deeply entwined in the bloody struggle of the War of the Roses. The medieval tradition of the courtier and the code of knighthood

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23 In the winter of 1540 he was put into the Tower of London due to the intrigues of the Duke of Suffolk, and not the displeasure of the King. In his trial before the Privy Council he defended himself, as Nott states, "with great manliness, energy, and humor." Afterwards the King made him high steward of the Manor of Maidstone, as well as giving him lands in Dorsetshire and Somersetshire in exchange for less valuable lands in Kent.

24 Wyatt was sent by the King to conduct the ambassadors of Phillip II to London. While on this mission he contacted a fever and died on October the 10th or 11th, 1542.
were an integral part of his personality. In him we can see a meeting of the old and the new. The ideas of the Renaissance enchanted him as they did most intellectuals of the early sixteenth century. And his desire to duplicate the perfection of the ancient masters and his fierce individually is evident in most of his poetry.

25 This aspect of Wyatt's background has already been mentioned. It might be well, however, to quote a description of him given on page xi in the Aldine edition of "The Poetical Works of Sir Thomas Wyatt." He was dexterous in the use of arms; sung and played well on the lute; spoke French, Italian, and Spanish with fluency. It appears, from Hall's account of a feat of arms performed before the King at Greenwich, at Christmas, 1525, that he was one of the fourteen challengers on that occasion." This would seem to be an exact picture of Castiglione's concept of the perfect courtier.

26 It is obvious that Wyatt was, as Courthope states, "a boy of precocious powers." He went to Cambridge at the age of twelve, received his B.A. at the age of 15 and his M.A. at the age of 17.
CHAPTER II

THE MAJOR PROBLEMS CONFRONTING WYATT AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

The early sixteenth century, with its conflicting ideas and ideals, did produce through Wyatt the most vital and important poetic advances since Chaucer. After Chaucer's death in 1400, over one hundred years passed without any notable contributions to English poetry.¹

There are several principle causes for this drought in poetic output in the fifteenth century. The primary reason was the War of the Roses, which lasted through a major portion of the century. The noblemen were usually the principle patrons of poetry, and until the end of this vicious civil war in 1485, most of them were to pre-occupied in the conflict between the houses of Lancaster and York to be interested in poetic creation.² Secondly the fifteenth century was the period in which the dialect of London began to be established as the major dialect in

¹ See Berdan, p. 48.
² Ibid., pp. 48 - 119.

17
government as well as in literature. By the fifteenth century Chaucer had already proven the potential of English as an instrument of poetic expression. Therefore, this century became a period of consolidation and establishment of a primary dialect rather than a period of poetic development. And finally, the ideas of the Renaissance had just begun to foment in fifteenth century England, and these ideas left the poetic sensibilities of men like Hoccleve, Lydgate, Ros and their contemporaries a little stunned. So it was not until the latter part of the fifteenth century and the early part of the sixteenth that the visible effects of the Renaissance were apparent in poetry.

With the end of the War of the Roses and the establishment of a stable government under the Tudors, the nobility could turn to pursuits other than war. The new ideas of the Renaissance began to be viewed with much more interest. And the English language, in spite of the revival of Greek and Latin, began to emerge as an important instrument of expression, especially after the introduction of printing by Caxton in the latter part of the fifteenth century.

3 See Baugh, A History of the English Language, pp. 189-239.

It was under these circumstances that Wyatt appeared on the English poetic scene. He had at his disposal a language that was still a very crude instrument of expression. He was confronted with very difficult and real problems in his attempts to create poetic compositions. These problems, as previously mentioned, were threefold: first, he had to deal with the prosody of Chaucer as a basic model for his poetry, second, he was using a language that was not yet refined enough for poetic balance and harmony, and finally, as an imitator, he was unaware of the intricate techniques used in foreign versification, especially the Italian sonnet.

I

One of the most fundamentally important problems that Wyatt faced was the understanding of Chaucer's verse. His interpretation of Chaucer's prosody influenced his imitation of foreign models and his attempts at original creations. In his poetry he followed what he thought to be Chaucer's principles of versification. A. K. Foxwell points out that Wyatt deliberately and conscientiously studied Chaucer with a view of carrying on his method of work. Therefore, Wyatt's rules of versification were adopted from what he thought to be the principles used by

The question unanswered by Miss Foxwell is, what were Chaucer's principles of versification? Obviously it is important to understand what Chaucer was attempting to do, as well as what Wyatt thought he was doing. If Chaucer was using the iambic pattern and Wyatt was merely imitating him, then the latter must be considered only as a step in a long established tradition in English verse. If, however, Chaucer was not using the iambic pattern as the basis of his versification, then Wyatt, as will be seen, established a precedent that became the basis of English metrical structure.

It will be necessary, therefore, to investigate some of the criticism of Chaucer's prosody and to try to arrive at a conclusion concerning his metrical practices. To do this will entail a brief analysis of various critical approaches to his versification. The ultimate aim of this study will be to establish whether Chaucer's principle of versification was basically the iambic pattern. The conclusion that is reached is essential in considering Wyatt's position as the precursor of the great poetry of the late sixteenth century, which used the iambic pattern almost exclusively.

Earlier investigators, such as Child, Schipper, Ten Brink, and Skeat, established, according to Fredson Bower, "out of thin air a hypothetical typus" and extended
the antiquated tradition that Chaucer's line was basically iambic pentameter and that the final e was sounded during his day. This is a direct attack on the long established principle that Chaucer's metrical base was iambic pentameter.

Bower, James G. Southworth, and other opponents of the iambic pentameter theory believe that Chaucer's metrical system cannot be subjected to rigid rules conforming to any particular pattern, and that if any discernable pattern appears in his work it is the four stressed line, which seems to be inherent in the structure of the English language. This was not a new nor revolutionary idea. It was first advocated in the early nineteenth century by George Frederick Nott in his edition of the complete works of Wyatt and Surrey. Today modern investigators, led by professor James Southworth, are slowly but effectively destroying the iambic pentameter myth concerning Chaucer's meter.

The first questions to be asked should be: What was Chaucer's metrical base? Was it iambic pentameter developed from the Italian hendecasyllable or the French decasyllabic line, or was it four stresses with an

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7 See Paul F. Baum, Chaucer's Verse (Durham, N.C., 1961), p. 125

unprescribed number of unstressed syllables?

Advocates of the four-stress, or liberal, approach to reading Chaucer's line base their principle on the rythmical tradition of scanning rather than the metrical tradition. Under this system the single-verse unit, which was the basis of Child's interpretation of Chaucer's line, becomes a myth. The rythmical principle of scanning is not concerned with a single line but only with lines in relation to other lines. C. S. Lewis in "The Heroic Line in the Fifteenth Century" points out the importance of scanning in relation to the rhetorical sense of the lines involved. He proves that by shifting a line and changing its rhetorical interpretation the metrical structure is also changed.

9 See Southworth, pp. 10 - 14.

10 See Essays and Studies, XXIV (Oxford, 1938), p. 47. In his discussion of the heroic line Lewis illustrates the importance of considering a line in relation to other lines in the stanza.

I have given no man of my fruit to eat
I trod the grapes, I have drunken the wine.
Had you eaten and drunken and found it sweet,
This wild new growth of the corn and vine.

Here, the first line determines the movement of the stanza. It should scan as a four-stress line of three anapests and an iamb. In the following stanza, however, the first three lines control the movement of the last line.

I comfort few and many I torment.
Where one is spared a thousand more are spent;
I have trodden many down beneath my feet,
I have given no man of my fruit to eat.

The line can now be read as a five-stress line with three trochees, an anapest, and an iamb. As language these lines are identical, but as parts of a different pattern they assume different characteristics.
Southworth in his analysis of the fallacies of the single-verse unit states that, "the greatest weakness of the single-verse unit theory is that it utterly neglects one of the main characteristics of poetry - its rhythm."\(^{11}\) He goes on to point out that in applying the single-verse unit to Chaucer, "Hundreds of lines can be read as good iambic pentameter if we disregard the rhetorical sense; but they can also be read to fit what we frequently speak of as the rhetorical or rhythmical line."\(^{12}\)

The strength of the iambic pentameter theory in regard to Chaucer's line rests primarily on the application of single-verse unit scanning to his poetry. And the application of the single-verse unit myth permitted, as Southworth says, "the development of a more powerful myth - that of the final e."\(^{13}\) The myth of the sounding of the final e helped substantiate the iambic decasyllable theory. Southworth effectively deals with this problem by showing over two hundred occasions where pronouncing the final e would break the normal rhythm. Most scholars today have come to accept the fact that the final e was not sounded in Chaucer's time. Even Paul F. Baum, who stands by the iambic pentameter principle, concedes modern scholarship

\(^{11}\) Southworth, p. 14.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., p. 11.

\(^{13}\) Ibid.
seems to have destroyed professor Child's theory on the sounding of the final _e_ in Chaucer's poetry.\(^{14}\)

Another important theory in regard to Chaucer's prosody which is related to the development of Wyatt's poetry was the assumption that Chaucer used foreign sources, especially French and Italian, extensively. Thomas Tyrwhitt in 1775 suggested that the Italian endecasillabo\(^{15}\) was a possible model for Chaucer. Child accepted Tyrwhitt's statement at face value and erected his elaborate structure of Chaucer's prosody on this hypothesis. The acceptance by Child of Tyrwhitt's theory became the basis of the endecasyllabic principle in the study of Chaucer's prosody. "This unsupported blanket acceptance," states Southworth, "on the part of Child seems incredible, especially since he had a mathematical background, and so should have had some understanding of the logical processes." Southworth points out that it is doubtful whether Chaucer understood the intricacies of the endecasillabo any more than Wyatt was able to fathom the mysteries of Petrarch's sonnet form.\(^{16}\)

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\(^{14}\) See Baum, pp. 117 - 127.

\(^{15}\) Italian endecasillabo (endecasyllable or hendecasyllable): A standard line in Italian poetry consisting of eleven syllables basically formed on an iambic pattern with an unstressed syllable at the end. In its Italian form it was a very flexible meter.

\(^{16}\) Southworth, p. 39.
Support for the French decasyllabic line as a model for Chaucer has gained strength through the ages. The reason for this is the assumption that the court of Edward III spoke French and despised English. Thomas Raleigh and John Speirs debunk this theory on the basis that Chaucer, who was a court poet, wrote in a style that drew from the communal and colloquial elements of the language, which indicates an appreciation of English among the educated people of the court.\(^17\) The final sentence is passed on the French decasyllabic myth by Southworth. He states that this theory is "sheer nonsense, because French verse is not, nor has it ever been iambic, and I think there is general agreement among French scholars on this matter."\(^18\) He is supported by Arthur Grosset, who, in *A Manual of French Prosody*, points out that "unlike English verse French verse is properly measured not by feet or beats, but by syllables, and it must be possible to say of any French line with certainty, how many metrical syllables it contains. The idea of a prosody in feet or iambes is impossible."\(^19\) This is not to infer that French or Italian verse had no influence at all


\(^18\) Southworth, p. 41.

on Chaucer. It does mean to imply, however, that Chaucer was original and did not use French or Italian as constant models for his metrical structure.

In the final analysis it seems that Chaucer was not an imitator of foreign models, nor was he creating poetry on the iambic principle applying single-verse scansion to line structure. But the question will be asked again and again: did Chaucer write iambic pentameter? If he did it necessitated a conscious effort at metrical construction, because, as Baum points out, "the iambic decasyllable is not a popular but a sophisticated, literary form."²⁰

C. S. Lewis poses an interesting supposition concerning the question: "If Chaucer meant his lines to be read as the modern scholar reads them (iambic pentameter), it is extremely likely that he was disappointed. Indeed, having begun his great poem with

Whan that April with his shoures soote,
he was asking a good deal if he expected readers bred on the alliterative line, the octosyllabic, the Horm meter, and the meter of Gamelyn, to see at once that the poem was to go to the pattern of

And singing masons building roofs of gold."²¹

And professor Southworth adds, in regard to human nature's usual acceptance of something new: "Of one thing we can be

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²⁰ Baum, p. 125.
²¹ Lewis, pp. 31 - 32.
sure. If Chaucer's prosody had differed as markedly from the English tradition as later nineteenth century scholars seemed to think, he would not have been immediately popular.... If Chaucer was introducing the iambic decasyllable we should expect to find considerable resistance to his innovation and a delayed popularity; but we find none.\textsuperscript{22}

What was Wyatt's attitude towards Chaucer's prosody? Since Chaucer was the basic model he followed it must be assumed that he was interested not only in the content, but also in the structure of his work.\textsuperscript{23}

The early part of the sixteenth century is marked by the rising primacy of the iambus as a metrical unit and the conformity to particular metrical patterns. There began to develop a quantitative approach in regard to verse structure.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{22} Southworth, pp. 49 - 50.
\textsuperscript{23} Courthope, pp. 92 - 98.
\textsuperscript{24} Quantitative verse is verse whose basic rhythm is determined by quantity, that is duration of sound in utterance. Classical poetry was quantitative, as English poetry has been accentual - syllabic. Meter is the recurrence in poetry of a rhythmic pattern and quantitative meter is meter in which the rhythm is established through units containing regular successions of long and short syllables. Thus you have the development of units of rhythm in the classic pattern given names such as iamb, trochee, etc. English meter is considered to be accentual - syllabic, in which both the number of accents and the number of syllables are fixed or nearly fixed. The word quantitative will be used here in a more general sense than usual. It will be taken to mean the application of the classical metrical system of single-verse scansion to English poetry. This resulted in a line by line analysis of English verse, which cannot be restricted or diagramed according to duration of sounds nor packaged in neat little terms like "iamb" or "trochee."
All this was brought about by the discovery of Greek literature by the second generation humanists. Men like Ascham, Cheke, Wilson and others began to apply quantitative measures to English verse and to use such terms as "iamb", "torchee," etc. Although modern prosodists are in general agreement that the application of a quantitative system to English verse is inaccurate, in the early sixteenth century it was a different story. The revival of classical learning subjected English verse to rules and regulations that should never have been applied.

Wyatt imposed on English verse the methods used in the scansion of classical verse. A line by line analysis of poetry is the basis of the quantitative systems of metrical study. If Chaucer's verse, as stated above, is scanned line by line without consideration of its rhetorical sense, it is possible to detect an iambic pattern in his poetry. Wyatt applied this method of scansion to Chaucer and to his imitation of foreign models. As a result he began to develop the iambic pattern as the basic meter in English verse.

This does not mean that Wyatt used an iambic pentameter line in all of his poetry. The important point is that he made a conscious effort at constructing an


26 Southworth, p. 7.
iambic pattern, and the majority of the time this effort was concentrated within a decasyllabic line. He was influenced by the strict rules of prosody that developed through the revival of Greek and Latin in the early sixteenth century. Any poetry he wrote, whether it was an imitation or an original effort, was subjected to rules, and except for rare occasions the iambic pattern was his principle of metrical construction.

II

The second basic problem confronting Wyatt was his imitation of foreign models. As previously mentioned, Wyatt was an imitator, and he used Chaucer as a basic model in translating French and Italian verse into English.  

27 One of the theoretical principles on which this thesis is based is that Wyatt was aware of the iambic decasyllabic line and attempted to use it in a language not really suited to this type of verse and certainly not yet refined enough for its application. This is the reason his adaptations of Italian sonnets were rough and unmeterical. Some scholars feel that the irregularities in Wyatt were carefully contrived by him or they were the fault of his use of the 'pausing line' in medieval poetry. See Sergio Boldi, The Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt, ed. A. K. Foxwell (London, 1913), p. 91 and D. W. Harding, "The Poetry of Wyatt," The Age of Chaucer (New York, 1948), p. 205. T. F. Prince points out that "the flaw liable to appear in such conjectures is that Wyatt was fully aware of the English decasyllabic line." "The Sonnet from Wyatt to Shakespeare", Elizabethan Poetry, ed. John Russell Brown (London, 1950), pp. 11 - 30. It can be added that if he was aware of the decasyllabic line he was certainly aware of the iambic pattern.
The problem of using an iambic pattern in English was further complicated by his lack of knowledge of the intricate techniques used in foreign versification.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in his development of the sonnet form. Wyatt introduced the sonnet to England. The form he introduced, however, was not the Petrarchan sonnet form but the flamboyant sonnet form, which was very flowery and full of exaggerations and figures of speech. While in Italy, in 1527, he came into contact with the exponents of the flamboyant style in the sonnet.28

The flamboyant style he introduced into England, however, was not like that of Arezzo's, the founder of the style, which tended to be arty and formalized. The style Wyatt introduced was allied to the second period of flamboyant sonnets and was in reality a revolt against Arezzo's style. The second period of flamboyant sonnets was brought to Italy by troubadours and developed by Quinizilli and Caval Canto, and later by Varchi and Serafino. This type of sonnet tended to be clearly related to the human experience of love. It was this style of sonnet that Wyatt introduced to England, not the Petrarchan form.29

28 Professor Zuberi thought that Verchi and Serafino, through Wyatt, were the men who most influenced the early English sonnet.

29 Professor Zuberi felt that Wyatt introduced the flamboyant sonnet to England and not the Petrarchan sonnet. He felt that Wyatt was particularly influenced by Varchi and Serafino, and, although he tried to imitate Petrarch, he had an affinity for these sonneteers. This, coupled with his difficulties in understanding the technical processes involved in the Petrarchan sonnet form, compounded his problem of imitation.
Petrarch's sonnets, although literary, combined the best elements of the flamboyant style and the musical style of Lintino's concept of the sonnet. Professor Zuberi thought that there were two principles underlying the Petrarchan sonnet: one, the principle of continuity, or the cycle principle developed through a variety of episodes, and two, the principle of variation of moods from the octave to the sestet. This brought about the element of transition, which placed great importance on the conclusion.

Wyatt was completely unaware of the principle underlying this complex structure. He was misled by the Strombotti of Serafino, which used the Ottava rima to sum up the conclusion of a couplet. And the application of a rime couplet to the closing of the English sonnet, according to Professor Zuberi, destroyed its musical quality. In his endeavor to construct sonnets on this principle he led all future English sonnet writers, who tried to follow the Petrarchan form, astray. Surrey, a contemporary of

30 Giacomo de Lentino was the creator of the sonnet form. He followed a Sicilian meter, the strambotto which was based on a musical principle. Therefore the musical tradition of the sonnet goes back to its origin. According to Professor Zuberi, there was a musical variation from the first part to the second part. In other words, one had a transition or change of tune from the first part, which became known as the octave, to the second part, which became known as the sestet.
Wyatt realized that something was wrong, so he changed the whole structure of the sonnet to four quatrains and a rimed couplet, which summed up the thought of the sonnet in an epigrammatic conclusion. This was not a continuation of the Italian sonnet but a completely new sonnet form which later became known as the Shakespearean sonnet.\textsuperscript{31}

Therefore the failure to understand the intricate construction of foreign models created a major problem for Wyatt. His dedication to the iambic pattern and his conformity to strict metrical rules compounded the problems of versification when he attempted to translate. His imitations, especially of the sonnets, were often harsh and uneven, lacking any sense of rhythm or harmony. But no matter how crude some of his imitations were, they helped establish the primacy of the iambic pattern in English verse.

\textbf{III}

The final problem that confronted Wyatt and all the poets of the early sixteenth century was the use of the English language as an instrument of poetic expression. His problem of applying what he thought to be Chaucer's principles of versification to his imitation and his original compositions were increased because of the inadequacy of English as a language of poetic expression. Despite the

\textsuperscript{31} See Courthope, pp. 90 - 93.
revolutionary change in the language during the fifteenth century, English at the beginning of the sixteenth century was still insufficient and crude. During the early part of the sixteenth century the dialect of London was still in the process of being defined as the primary dialect of literature. And it was not until 1589 that George Puttenham, in The Arte of English Poesie, was able to define the language of literature as "the usual speech of court and that of London and shires lying about London not more than ten miles."  

The language that Wyatt was using was a language only in respect to vocabulary and syntax. It was a language that had just begun to be subjected to rules. The standardization of a written language was still taking place during the first half of the sixteenth century. It was not until 1550 that a nucleus of common practices in spelling was established which added to the development of a standard written language. Wyatt, however, was not privileged to have a language that was standardized and refined into a well tuned instrument of expression. He had to take the instrument available to him and apply to it rules of harmony, balance and rhythm.

The English language in the first half of the sixteenth century was not only struggling for stability

33 Baugh, A History of the English Language, p. 287.
and standardization; it was also searching for fulfillment and enrichment. One of the main difficulties was that the English language was not as efficient as the classical languages for the expression of ideas or emotions. The most obvious way of enlarging and enriching the language was through borrowing from foreign sources. However, through most of the sixteenth century there was strong opposition to borrowing or using inkhorn terms to extend the scope and power of the language.

As late as 1575 George Gascoigne published a volume of poetry in which he stated in the preface five reasons for writing poetry. One of the five reasons he gave was: "I have always been of the opinion that it is not impossible, either in poems or in prose, to write both compendiously and perfectly in our English tongue. And, therefore, although I challenge not unto myself the name of an English poet, yet may the reader find out in my writings that I have more faulted in keeping the old English words (quamvis jam obsoleta) than in borrowing of other languages such epithets and adjectives as smell of the inkhorn." 34

In this statement Gascoigne launched a direct attack on poets who would try to enrich the language by borrowing from foreign sources. Nearly all the poets of the early sixteenth century were of the same opinion as

Gascoigne. Baugh states that these poets had such an aversion to inkhorn terms that they tended to return to words found in older English history, and even drew on local dialects to establish their poetic language.35

The opposition to borrowing was not exclusive with the poets. Scholars like Roger Ascham, who coined the word "inkhorn" to ridicule borrowing, was against this obvious way of enriching the English language.36 Thomas Wilson in his Art of Rhetorique also attacks inkhorn terms especially from the point of view of their obscurity. He wrote, "Among all other lessons this should be first learned, that we never affect any strange inkhorn terms, but speake as is commonly received."37

This strong opposition to borrowing led men like Thomas Elyot to apologize for introducing such words as "maturity" into the English language. "Wherefore I am constrained to usurp a Latine worde..., which worde though it be strange and darke, yet... ones brought in custome,


36 Toxophilus (Oxford, 1870 - 1923), last edition by E. Arber. On page 18 Ascham states the basic argument against borrowing. "He that wyll wryte well in any tongue, muste folowe thys counsell of Aristotle, to speake as the common people do, to thinke as wise men do; and so should euery man understand hym, and the iudgement of wyse men alowe hym. Many English writers have not done so, but visinge strange wordes as Latin, French and Italian, do make all things darke and harde."

shall be facile to understande as other wordes late common out of Italy and Fraunce... Therfore that worde maturitie is translated to the acts of man, ...reservyng the wordes ripe and redy to frute and other thinges." Even John Cheke, who was a great classical scholar, showed little sympathy for any type of borrowing, classical or otherwise. In a letter to Sir Thomas Hoby, prefaced to Hoby's translation of The Courtier, in 1561 he wrote, "I am of this opinion that our tung shold be written cleane and pure, unmixt and unmangled with borrowing of other tunges, wherein if we take not heed by tijm, ever borrowing and never pay­eng, she shall be fain to keep her house as bankrupt." 39

However, the English language at this time, as Baugh states, was "inadequate, as compared with the classical languages, to express the thought which those languages embodied and which in England was now becoming a part of the rapidly expanding civilization." 40 Therefore, it is obvious that the reluctance of Wyatt and other early sixteenth century poets to borrow from foreign sources only compounded the problems of metrical composition. The preference for native English words that had a natural stress on the first syllable went contrary to the iambic pattern of construction,

39 Castiglione, p. 7.
40 A History of the English Language, p. 259.
which places the stress on the last syllable. If, however, Wyatt and his contemporaries had been receptive to borrowing from Latin, Italian and French sources they would have found it much easier to construct the iambic pattern. These are inflectional languages that tend to stress the final syllable thereby forming the iambic pattern more naturally than English.

It is evident, then, that the inadequacy of the language and the reluctance of Wyatt to borrow from foreign sources led to technical problems when he attempted to write poetry on the iambic principle of metrical construction.
CHAPTER III
AN ANALYSIS OF WYATT'S POETRY

Two marked and contrary features distinguish Wyatt's poetry: one, the individual energy of his thought, and two, his persistent imitation of foreign models. It is the former, the individual energy of his thought, which separates him from the poets of the Middle Ages. Before Wyatt, with the exception of the Canterbury Tales, almost every English poem of any importance had been didactic in intention, showing the influence of the Church, and symbolic in form, showing the influence of the allegorical method of interpreting nature and scripture.¹

Wyatt, however, looked at nature through his own eyes and sought to express directly the feelings of his own heart. In most of his poetry he asserts his own thought, but being aware of the imperfection of his native language as an instrument of expression, he submitted himself to the superiority of foreign models whose styles he tried to reproduce. Nowhere is his submission to foreign models more evident than in his attempts to render the Italian sonnet in English.

¹ See Courthope, pp. 49 - 50.
As pointed out in Chapter II, Wyatt went to Italy for his basic inspiration for the sonnet. Of his thirty-one sonnets ten are more or less translated from Petrarch; nine seem to be the products of original thought in an imitated Italian form; two are direct translations of Petrarch; one comes from St. Gelays; two are constructed from Serafino's Strambotto; and one comes from Romanello. None of them show any real marks of inspiration. They are the works of a man who has been inspired with the sonnet as handled by the Italians and who tried to reproduce its effect in language not yet refined enough for his purpose.

In his attempt to render these sonnets into English he followed what he thought to be Chaucer’s principle of versification. Miss Foxwell points out that Wyatt made his exercise and study of Chaucer’s versification the basis of his introduction of the Italian sonnet. Hence, in his renditions of the sonnets, his rules of versification were based on what he thought to be Chaucer’s principles of versification.

Wyatt based his analysis of Chaucer’s verse on the metrical system of scansion that was developing among the humanists of the early sixteenth century. Using this type

2 See above, Chapter II, Part I, pp. 19 - 29.
3 See Study of Sir Thomas Wyatt, pp. 72 - 96.
of system he arrived at the same conclusion that later scholars were to reach, namely that the basis of Chaucer's prosody was the iambic pentameter line. Therefore, it is apparent that the construction of his sonnets followed an iambic pattern based on what he thought to be the pattern of Chaucer's line.

Wyatt's indebtedness to Petrarch is apparent in a comparison of his "Of Others' Feigned Sorrow, And The Lover's Feigned Mirth" with Petrarch's "Cesare, poi che 'l traditor d'Egitto." Following are the two sonnets broken into stanzas and the two versions interposed to give a clearer picture of Wyatt's indebtedness to Petrarch.

Cesare, poi che 'l traditor d'Egitto
Li fece il don de l'onorata testa,
Celando l'allegrezza manifesta
Pianse per gli occhi fuor, si come e scritto;

Cesar, when that the traitor of Egipt,
With th' honorable hed did him present,
Covering his gladnes, did represent
Playnt with his teres owteward, as it is writt:

Et Anibal, quando a l'imperio afflitto
Vide farsi fortuna si molesta,
Rise fra gente lagrimosa e mesta,
Per isfogare il suo acerbo despitto.

And Hannyball, eke, when fortune him shitt
Clene from his reign, and from all his intent
Laught to his folke, whom sorrows did torment,
His cruel dispite for to disgorge and qwit.

4 See above, Chapter II, Part I, pp. 19 - 29.

5 Poetical Works, p. 6.

There is no question that Wyatt imitates Petrarch. In fact his version can be considered as a translation and a surprisingly accurate one at that. The first stanza is a good example of Wyatt's attempt to apply an iambic pattern to an English imitation of the Italian hendecasyllable. The first line of Petrarch's sonnet, which follows the basic meter of the whole poem, can be read with five stresses in a hendecasyllabic pattern. In the English version Wyatt attempts to form an iambic pentameter pattern. In the first line he runs into trouble forming the iambic pattern because of "Caesar" and "Egipt," which should be stressed on the first syllable. The second line, however, forms a near perfect iambic pentameter line.

There are other occasions where he forces the iambic pattern, thereby creating a somewhat uneven overall effect. In line nine, for example, it seems that he is not depending on the inflectional ending of "chaunceth" to form a stressed syllable, which, as will be pointed out later,
was a common practice of his, especially in forming his
rimes. He forms an iambic pentameter line by not stress­
ing "eth" and forming a hovering stress over "it" and "oft." To form a rime with "season" in the twelfth line he used a French word "passion" that preserves the stress on the last syllable. Thus, "passion" becomes a three-syllable word stressed on the first and last syllables. The iambic pattern is then formed by using "chaunceth" as a one syllable word, using a hovering stress over "it" and "oft," stressing the first syllable of "every" and eliding the middle syllable, and by stressing, as in French, the first and last syllables of "passion."

An example of Wyatt's inadequacies, as well as his strong individuality, is evident in his imitation of Petrarch's "Passa la nave mia colma d'oblio." 9

Passa la nave mia colma d'oblio
Per aspro mare, a mezza notte il verno,
Entra Scilla e Caribdi; et al governo
Siede 'l signore, anzi 'l nimico mio;

A ciascun remo un penser pronto e rio
Che la tempesta e 'l fin par ch'abbi a scherno;
La vela rompe un vento umido, eterno,
Di sospir, di speranze, e di desio;

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7 Hovering Stress: A term designating the metrical effect that results from two adjacent syllables sharing the accent, so that the stress appears to hover over both syllables.

8 Refer to footnote 11.

9 Songs and Sonnets, p. 280.
Pioggia di lagrimar, nebbia di sdegni
Bagna e rallenta le gia stanche sarte,
Che son d'error con ignoranzia attorto.

Celansi i duo mei dolci usati segni;
Morta fra l'onde e la ragion e l'arte,
Tal ch'i' 'ncomincio a desperar del porto.

Wyatt's production, although energetic, nevertheless brings out many of the problems he faced.

My galley charged with forgetfulness,
Through sharp seas, in winter nights doth pass 'Tween rock and rock; and eke my foe, alas,
That is my lord, steereth with cruelness:

And every hour, a thought in readiness,
As though that death were light in such a case.
An endless wind doth tear the sail apace
Of forced sighs and trusty fearfulness:

A rain of tears, a cloud of dark disdain,
Have done the wearied cords great hinderance:
Wreathed with error, and with ignorance:

The stars be hid that lead me to this pain;
Drowned is reason that should be my consort,
And I remain despairing of the port.10

Petrarch's sonnet follows a general iambic pattern shifting the stress whenever it is necessary. The first line can be read in an iambic pattern with perhaps the exception of "Passa", which under ordinary circumstances forms a trochee. This line could be translated: "My ship is sailing, full of mindless woe," which, using a rhythmical system of scansion, would be a line of six stressed syllables. Wyatt's rendition of this line, however, forms a decasyllabic line of five stresses. An iambic pentameter line can be assumed if "forgetfulness" is read

10 *Poetical Works*, p. 10.
with a stress on the second and fourth syllables. In the third line Wyatt forms almost a perfect iambic pentameter line by substituting "rock and rock" for the "Scilla e Charibdi."

The first line, along with the fourth and fifth and eighth, brings out not only a problem with the instrument of expression Wyatt was using, but the tendency of early sixteenth century poets to revert to older forms of English words in their poetic creations. "Forgetfulness, "cruelness," "readiness" and "fearfulness" are used to preserve the accent on the final syllable so as to form an iambic pattern. These are weak syllables and should have been rejected for English words that formed natural iambics, or for iambic phrases formed with articles and prepositions; or finally, they should have been substituted for loan words, or "inkhorn words" that were naturally iambic.

Wyatt's inability to reproduce the force of the Petrarchan sonnet is also apparent in his effort to render,

11 The word "forgetfulness" as applied by Wyatt is stressed on the second and fourth syllables. The use of "ness" as an inflectional ending with a stress is a deliberate practice of his. W. J. Courthope states that Wyatt and "all his predecessors had been accustomed to the cheap device of making their consonances either out of the final syllable or words retaining the ancient inflections of verbs, expressing an abstract quality, or derived from the French and so preserving the accent on the last syllable against the genius of the English language. Thus Wyatt rhymes: (1) fleeth, appeareth, feareth; (2) forgetfulness, cruelness, fearfulness; (3) reason, season, fashion." (p. 95)
A ciascun remo un penser pronto e rio
Che la tempesta e 'l fin par ch' abbi a scherno:

which should be read,

At each oar sits a rapid wicked thought
Which seems to scoff at storms and at their end.

Wyatt's version does not develop the urgency or power of
wicked thoughts that scoff at nature's fury. And his use
of "consort" for the equivalent of "arte" in line thirteen
just for the sake of forming an epigrammatical rime coup­
let takes away from the power of the conclusion, as well as
its potential musical value. 12

Wyatt's attempt to render Petrarch's "Amor, che
nel penser mio vive e regna," 13 shows his effort to form an
iambic pattern by stressing the inflectional endings "eth"
and "ence" in his rime scheme.

The long love that in my thought I harbour,
And in my heart doth keep his residence,
Into my face presseth with bold pretence,
And there campeth displaying his banner.

She that me learns to love and to suffer,
And wills that my trust, and lust's negligence
Be reined by reason, shame, and reverence,
With his hardiness takes displeasure.

Wherewith love to the heart's forest he fleeth,
Leaving his enterprise with pain and cry,
And there him hideth, and not appeareth.

12 The proper rendition for "arte" would perhaps be
"word" or "literature". In any case the musical form
would still be destroyed.

13 Sonnets and Songs, p. 230.
What my I do, when my master feareth,
But in the field with him to live and die?
For good is the life, ending faithfully.

This is perhaps Wyatt at his worst. It seems that not only Wyatt, but the English language itself was unequal to the task of producing a delicately balanced stanza of metrical construction. In the rime scheme he resorted to his practice of using words with inflectional endings to stress the last syllable in each line. This was a forced attempt to apply the iambic pattern to the structure of his sonnets. Lines five, six and seven are good examples of Wyatt's trying to press the iambic pattern by using an inverted word order. This results not only in very harsh rhythm but in a muddled interpretation of what he was trying to do in the octave. The thought here is confused and does not clarify the relation between love and the lover.

Although the content of Wyatt's sonnets, due in part to the many technical problems he faced, is sometimes vague, he on many occasions asserts his individuality and revolts against the traditional vein of the troubadours. Despite the ancient code of knighthood which, as mentioned, was still an integral part of him, he was influenced by the new order of things that began to permeate the atmosphere of the early sixteenth century. Individuality was a mark of sixteenth century humanism and Wyatt revolted

14 Poetical Works, p. 1.
against the ancient code of chivalry that made the male a 
servile tool of the female.15

Yet was I never of your love aggrieved,
Nor never shall while that my life doth last:
But of hating myself, that date is past;
And tears continual sore have me wearied
I will not yet in my grave be buried;
Nor on my tomb your name have fixed fast,... 16

In another sonnet he reproaches his mistress 
because she is cruel.

My love to scorn, my service to retain,
Therein, methought, you used cruelty;
Since with good will I lost my liberty,
To follow her which causeth all my pain.... 17

The idea of justice in love was not a part of the 
principle underlying the love poetry of the Cour d'Amour. 
In the ancient tradition of the troubadours the lover sub­mitted himself willingly and without flinching to his 
mistress' every whim. Wyatt, however, strays so far from 
the code to not only reproach his mistress for her in­justices, but demand a reward for his faithful service.

My heart I gave thee, not to do it pain,
But to preserve, lo, it to thee was taken.
I served thee, not that I should be forsaken;
But, that I should receive reward again,
I was content they servant to remain;
And not to be repayed after this fashion.... 18

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15 See H. A. Mason, Humanism and Poetry in the Early Tudor 

16 Poetical Works, p. 2.
17 Ibid., p. 11.
18 Ibid., p. 16.
II

In his epigrams, Wyatt needed a form of composition by which he could adequately express himself. His model was Serafino, who used the ottava rima stanza. He was confronted with the same problems of imitation that he found in trying to adopt the Italian sonnet into English. Again, as in the sonnet, he did not understand the nature of its structure, nor was the language refined enough to develop the iambic pentameter pattern. Courthope explains that in Wyatt's attempt to develop the ottava rima "we see the want of a perfect instrument as well as errors of imperfect taste."20

The epigram during this period was a short poem consisting of two parts: an introduction stating the occasion and setting the tone, and a conclusion which was sharp, and effectively bringing out the main point. The ottava rima, although perfect for Italian romantic poetry, was not suited for the nature of the epigram, which needed a stanza that could lead to a terse epigrammatic couplet. Wyatt was again confronted with the problems of following the iambic principle of metrical construction in his imitation of foreign models. The following is an example

19 Ottava rima: a stanza consisting of eight iambic pentameter lines. Boccaccio is credited with originating this pattern. In its original Italian form ottava rima lines were hendecasyllabic.

20 Courthope, p. 57.
of Wyatt at his worst.

Alas! Madam, for stealing of a kiss,
Have I so much your mind therein offended?
Or have I done so grievously amiss,
That by no means it may not be amended?
Revenge you then; the readiest way is this;
Another kiss, my life it shall have ended;
For to my mouth the first my heart did suck;
The next shall clean out of my breast it pluck.21

Wyatt's riming words in the couplet are crude and harsh.
And the tenuous idea of revenge for the theft of a kiss is lost in the confused syntax of the last line. However, the importance of his development of the epigram lies in his work with the rimed couplet ending. The continuation of his effort towards the perfection of this form in an iambic pentameter pattern was to have a great effect on the English form of the sonnet. The rimed couplet ending in the English sonnet became the major feature of the sonnet at the close of the sixteenth century.22

Wyatt was more successful, at least in content, with his satires than his epigrams. Here, as in most of his poetry, he was an imitator. He is indebted to Luigi Alamanni for the form of his satire, but he does show individuality in using Alamanni's terza rima which is a simple three line stanza of iambic pentameter. He thoroughly assimilated this foreign model into the English language.23

21 Poetical Works, p. 167.
22 See Prince, pp. 11 - 31.
23 See Lewis, p. 226.
His success with this form can be attributed to the fact that it was somewhat less complicated than the sonnet and could be applied to satire. It was also basically iambic pentameter in its Italian form which made it simpler for Wyatt to adapt to English.24

My mother's maids, when they do sew and spin,
They sing a song made of the fieldish mouse.
That for because her livelode was but thin,
Would needs go see her townish sister's house.
She thought herself endured to grievous pain,
The stormy blasts her cave so sore did souse;
Than when the furrows swimmed with the rain,
She must lie cold and wet, in sorry plight;
And worse than that, bare meat there did remain
To comfort her, when she her house had light;
Sometime a barley corn, sometime a bean;
For which she laboured hard both day and night,
In harvest time, while she might go and glean.
And when her store was stroyed with the flood,
Then wellaway! for she undone was clean:
Then was she fain to take, instead of food,
Sleep if she might, her hunger to beguile.
'My sister,' quod she, 'hath a living good;
And hence form me she swelleth not a mile.
In cold and storm, she lieth warm and dry
In bed of down; the dirt doth not defile
Her tender foot, she labours not as I.
Richly she feeds, and at the rich man's cost;
And for he meat she needs not crave nor cry;
By sea, by land, of delicates the most,
Her cater seeks, and spareth for no peril.
She feeds on boil'd meat, baked meat, and on roast,
And hath therefore no wit of charge nor travail.25

Although the terza rima did not survive as a basic form in English poetry, Wyatt's work with the iambic pentameter line further established its potentiality as a poetic meter. The above poem is of particular interest because,


25 Poetical Works, p. 186.
although Wyatt imitates Alamanni's form, the poem is pure English in content. C. S. Lewis points out that it has a "country-house atmosphere that makes it read like an original." Wyatt was not involved here with the abstract complexities of a form like the sonnet that needed a language developed through centuries of cultural refinement. The objects of this poem were indigenous to sixteenth century England and could be encompassed within the framework of the language. The originality that Wyatt displayed in his satires was the essence of the poetry of the late sixteenth century.

III

From the moralizing mood of his satires Wyatt turned to the rendering of the Seven Penitential Psalms of David. For the most part he contented himself with a mere translation of the Psalms. And superficially one might agree with Lewis that "the work on a whole is flat and cacophonous." However, a study of the content and structure of the Psalms reveal some interesting insights to Wyatt and his struggle with poetic composition.

Characteristic of Wyatt, the idea for the framework of his rendition of the Psalms was borrowed from a prose version by Pietro Arentino. His main indebtedness to

26 Lewis, p. 226.
27 Ibid., p. 226.
Arentino, however, lies in his conception of the work from a purely literary standpoint.28

Wyatt's approach to the Psalms was original and shows his interest in methods of poetic structure. Whereas his predecessors had contented themselves with simple translations, he inserted before each psalm a poetic comment which tried to explain or create the mood David was in when he composed it. It was unfortunate, however, that he used the terza rima as his basic meter, because he again restricted himself to the use of a rigid pattern of metrical construction which forced his originality to conform to the confined limits of the iambic pentameter line.

In the fifty-first psalm the Authorized Version reads: "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Wyatt's version reads:

Thou shalt me wash, and more than snow therefore I shall be white, how foul my fault hath been."29

As Berdan points out, in this case, Wyatt's version is certainly inferior to the Authorized Version.30 His meter is forced and, as in so many occasions, he has had to use an awkward inverted order to develop the iambic pattern.

28 See Berdan, pp. 481 - 483.

29 Poetical Works, p. 220.

30 Berdan, p. 482.

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The Psalms have a greater significance to the development of English poetry than the technical difficulties evident in their structure, or the fact that they are only imitations or translations. As was observed, Wyatt took a step beyond the mere mechanical exercise of translation and added an original prologue to each psalm. It is in these prologues that the temper of the times is apparent. The social fabric of medieval Catholicism is rent by the fervor of individual freedom of conscience.

Wyatt was a Lutheran devoted to the objectives of the Protestant revolt. In his prologues can be seen the essence of national thought that pervaded the structure of the early sixteenth century and moved the poetic sensibilities of men like him.

Of deep secrets, that David there did sing,
Of Mercy, of Faith, of Frailty, of Grace;
Of God's goodness, and of Justifying
The greatness did so astonny him apace,
As who might say, Who hath expressed this thing?
I sinner, I what have I said? alas!
That God's goodness would in my song entreat,
Let me again consider and repeat....

Wyatt's concept in this passage is passionate and personal. 'I the sinner,' is the central theme. He was concerned with his own personal relationship with God rather than a relationship based on a religion that conformed to the formal structure of hierarchical principles.

A revolt against the Latin system of Christianity was the tour de force behind his prologues.

31 Poetical Works, p. 221.
With this he doth defend the sly assault
Of vain allowance of his own desert;
And all the glory of his forgiven fault
To God alone he doth it whole convert;
His own merit he findeth in default....32

or:

When David had perceived in his breast
The Spirit of God return, that was exiled
Because he knew he hath alone express'ed
The same great things, that greater Spirit compiled:
As shawm or pipe lets out the sound impress'ed
By music's art forged tofore and filed;
I say when David had perceived this,
The spirit of comfort in him revived is....33

In these passages Wyatt perceived the spirit of God as something immediate and personal to each man according to his own individual conscience. This concept of individuality was an integral part of the new order of things that permeated the national thought of the early sixteenth century. Each line was charged with individual feeling and could not have helped but leave a lasting impression on the society of his time. In this aspect Wyatt was a precursor of the spirit of literature that was to be the hallmark of the late sixteenth century.

IV

Tucker Brooke states that "the finest part of Sir Thomas Wyatt's work is the part which stands freest of foreign influences."34 His poetry that stand freest from

32 Ibid., p. 226.
33 Ibid., p. 225.
34 Brooks, p. 340.
foreign influences are his lyrics. Most of his lyrics were written for the accompaniment of the lute, and the rules of music seem to keep his thought within well defined limits which at the same time allow enough scope for the development of his genius.

One of the most beautiful and finished of his lyrical compositions is "The Address to his Lute."

My lute, awake! perform the last
Labour that thou and I shall waste,
And end that I have now begun;
For when this song is sung and past,
My lute, be still, for I have done.

As to be heard where ear is none,
As lead to grave in marble stone,
My song may pierce her heart as soon:
Should we then sing, or sigh, or moan?
No, no, my lute! for I have done.

The rock doth not so cruelly
Repulse the waves continually,
As she my suit and affection;
So that I am past remedy
Whereby my lute and I have done.

Proud of the spoil that thou hast got,
Of simple hearts, thorough Love's shot,
By whom, unkind, thou hast them won;
Think not he hath his bow forgot,
Although my lute and I have done.35

Wyatt uses a very simple ballad-like meter of iambic tetrameter. The monotony of the meter is broken by skillful application of an inverted foot,36a trochee, dispersed throughout the poem. Although the pattern is consistent

35 Poetical Works, p. 29.
36 Inverted foot: It is usually a trochaic foot at the beginning of a line of iambic feet. This breaks up the monotonous drone that can develop with pure iambic meter. Examples of this in the above poem are: line two, "labour"; line nine, "should we"; line sixteen, "proud of"; and line nineteen, "think".

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it is not a forced pattern applied to the imitation of a foreign model. He is not confronted with the task of applying his interpretation of Chaucer's principles of versification to a complicated model like the sonnet.

The following stanzas are examples of Wyatt's ability to use variations of the simple ballad form.

Forget not yet the tried intent
Of such a truth as I have meant;
My great travail so gladly spent,
Forget not yet!

Forget not yet when first began
The weary life ye know, since whan
The suit, the service none tell can;
Forget not yet!...37

Here, as in "The Address to his Lute", he uses an iambic tetrameter line, but instead of having five lines to a stanza, he has four. This is a typical lyric poem. The lyrics are developed into a series of cries, skilfully regulated, ending in a refrain after each stanza. The quality of the refrain adds to the ballad characteristics and heightens the musical effect of the poem.38

Another one of his most beautiful lyrics is "Blame not my Lute."

Blame not my Lute! for he must sound
Of this or that as liketh me;
For lack of wit the Lute is bound
To give such tunes as pleaseth me;
Though my songs be somewhat strange,
And speak such words as touch thy change,
Blame not my Lute!

37 Poetical Works, p. 123.
38 Brooks, p. 340.
My Lute! alas! doth not offend,
Though that perforce he must agree
To sound such tunes as I intend,
To sing to them that heareth me;
Then though my songs be somewhat plain,
And toucheth some that use to feign,
Blame not my Lute! 39

In this poem he also uses a refrain which is applied at the end of each stanza. His individuality is evident in the stanza form he developed here. It is a modification of the medieval rime royal. However, he changes the rime scheme of ababbcc to ababcc with a refrain in the seventh line. The refrain naturally adds to the musical quality of each stanza. Also the lines are iambic tetrameter instead of the standard iambic pentameter pattern of the rime royal.

In some of Wyatt's lyrics, his experimentation with form almost has a modern touch.

What should I say!
Since Faith is dead,
And Truth away
From you is fled?
Should I be led
With doubleness?
Nay! nay! Mistress.

I promis'd you,
And you promis'd me,
to be as true,
As I would be.
But since I see
Your double heart,
Farewell my part! 40

39 Ibid., p. 96.
40 Ibid., p. 132.
Although the rhythm is halting and the musical quality is all but lost, this lyric is an example of Wyatt's originality. It is a unique form which uses iambic dimeter in a seven line stanza rime ababbcc. He has adapted the rime royal rime pattern to lines of the iambic dimeter.

The above poems all have two things in common which have a bearing on Wyatt's position as the precursor of a new type of poetic effort that led to the development of the great poetry of the late sixteenth century: first, his originality and individual energy of thought, and second, his constant application of the iambic pattern. The latter led the way to the establishment of the iambic pattern as the basic meter in English poetry. The first was a definite break with the medieval tradition in content, as well as form. These poems are not didactic in intention or influenced by the Church, nor are they examples of the allegorical method of interpreting nature and literature.41 And the stanza forms are certainly examples of new experimentation in the history of English poetry. Brooke admits, "that nothing like these thrilling little songs had appeared before."42

C. S. Lewis sees very little in these poems to commend them as precursors of the Elizabethan lyric. He feels that Wyatt's language is "usually as plain as that

41 See above Chapter III, p. 38.
42 Brooke, p. 340.
of his English predecessors. It seems unrealistic to relegate these lyrics to the medieval tradition because of their simplicity. If this is a valid criteria, then much of Spenser's, Jonson's and Shakespeare's lyrics can be evaluated in the medieval tradition because of simple, plain language. On the contrary these lyrics in their freedom and individuality are the spirit of the Renaissance. And from a technical point of view they are evidence of Wyatt's work with the iambic pattern, which he established as the standard meter for the Elizabethan lyric.

V

The problems that faced Wyatt seem distant and remote to the twentieth century mind. We are accustomed to radical and sometimes violent change. In the last one hundred years man has witnessed more change in his political, moral and economic ways of life than in all the previous years of his history on earth. Wyatt, however, stood at the end of a way of life that had flourished for one thousand years and at the beginning of an era that made modern civilization possible.

The question we have tried to answer in this thesis is whether he was a part of the new order of things that was moving the sixteenth century into the modern era, or

43 Lewis, p. 227.
whether he was still a part of the medieval past. The only answer to this question lies in the legacy he left us, his poetry. Although his heritage was deeply rooted in the chivalric traditions of the Middle Ages, we have seen that his poetry was a herald of the things that were to come. To his imitations he added the spirit of individuality that became the hallmark of Elizabethan poetry. He was a humanist alive to the ancient Greek concept of the worth of the individual. And we have seen, in his rendition of the Psalms, the effect of the ideas of the Protestant revolution. Freedom of conscience and man's personal relationship to God replaced the hierachial structure of feudal Catholicism.

If the content of his poetry moved in the direction of the Renaissance, the form and the structure did also. He established the iambic pattern as a standard metrical pattern in English poetry. It is not important that he thought he was following Chaucer's versification, but it is important that he developed a metrical form that was to last until the present day.

Perhaps, as Berdan points out, his greatest value to the history of English poetry was his experimentation with different forms of poetry. He tried the rondeau, the sonnet, the terza rima, the ottava rima, the iambic dimeter pattern, different types of triplets with refrains,

44 Berdan, p. 485.
modifications of the rime royal, quatrains with refrains, and types of ballad meters. These experiments paved the way for later poetic developments. The energy and originality he used in working with these different poetic forms were characteristic of the Renaissance. It proves he was seriously occupied in studying various verse forms.

He was, as George Puttenham called him, "a lantern light" that illuminated the darkness into which English poetry had fallen after Chaucer. And in the ultimate analysis, Wyatt can only be considered as the precursor of the great poetry of the late sixteenth century.
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