

Recovering the Text of Wyatt's "Disdain Me Not Without Desert"

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Wyatt's "Disdain me not without desert",¹ occurs in three sixteenth century sources. One of these, which is the best known, is *Songes and Sonettes*, printed by Richard Tottel in 1557, popularly referred to as "Tottel's Miscellany".² It is the only text which credits Wyatt with authorship of the poem. On the whole, scholars have faith in Tottel's attributions, and there is really no good reason for doubting that the poem is Wyatt's.³ The state of the text, however, gives some cause for concern. If one compares versions of Wyatt's poems as found in Tottel's text (T) with those which occur in the most authoritative manuscript (which, indeed, contains poems in Wyatt's own hand), viz. MS. Egerton 2711 in the British Library, one is struck by T's departures from the Egerton manuscript (E). These departures in T do not seem to be accidental. On the contrary, many of the poems in T appear to be clearly derived from E or a source very much like that, but have been subjected to a process of editorial revision.⁴ But some of the poems have been interfered with much more than others, and on the whole poems which we think of as "lyrics" have been least affected, except that, as I think has happened in the case of "Disdain me not", refrains were often omitted in the T versions.

The poem appears in T as follows:

- Disdaine me not without desert:
Nor leaue me not so sodenly:
Sins well ye wot, that in my hert
I meane ye not but honestly.
- 5 Refuse me not without cause why:
Nor think me not to be vniust:
Sins that by lotte of fantasy,
This careful) knot neades knit I must.
Mistrust me not, though some there be,
- 10 That faine would spot my stedfastnesse:
Beleue them not, sins that ye se,
The profe is not, as they expresse.
Forsake me not, till I deserue:
Nor hate me not, tyll I offend.
- 15 Destroy me not, tyll that I swerue.
But sins ye know what I intend:
Disdaine me not that am your owne:
Refuse me not that am so true:
Mistrust me not till all be knowne:
- 20 Forsake me not, ne for no new.

In general, this version gives a good deal of sense. It may be safely assumed, judging from Wyatt's own practice in the poems which he wrote out in E, that T's punctuation, here as elsewhere, differs markedly from what the author would have approved. The heavy use of the colon, for example, is typically editorial. Obviously, its function is not equivalent to that of the twentieth century. Most often, we would use a comma or a semi-colon in its place, although the colon in T, as was the practice of the time, as not a purely grammatical sign, but predominantly a rhetorical/rhythmical one. It may also be admitted that, insofar as one can see it as having a grammatical role, it seems to indicate a

fairly important division, and in at least one place its function appears to be similar to the modern one of announcing something to come, viz. at the end of line 10—lines 11-12 are a further explanation of lines 9-10, to the effect that the reason why the speaker should not (he feels) be mistrusted is that the evidence does not support those who are trying to vilify ("spot") his loyalty.

In no instance does the colon act as a modern full stop, and this circumstance alerts us to a structural peculiarity. The first three quatrains are each self-contained, but the fourth and fifth need to be read together. Line 16, "But sins ye know what I intend", obviously must be connected with what comes after. This need not be done in another version, on which in general modern editors have drawn heavily.⁵ This version, which I shall here refer to as F, occurs in the so-called "Folger" fragment of *The Court of Venus*.⁶ I reproduce the F text of the poem below:

Dysdaine me not without desert
 Nor leaue me not so sodeynly
 Sence wel ye wot that in my hart
 I meane nothing but honesty

5 Dysdayne me not
 Refuse me not without cause why
 nor thynke me not to be vniust
 Synce that by lot of fantasye
 The careful knot nedes knyt I must.

10 R e f u s e m e n o t .
 Mystrust me not though some therbe
 That fayne would spot thy stedfastnes
 Beleue them not seyng that ye se
 The profe is not as they expresse

15 Mystrust me not.
 Forsake me not til I deserue
 Nor hate me not til I swarue
 For syth you knew what I entend.
 Forsake me not.

20 Dysdayne me not being your owne
 Refuse me not that I am so true
 Mystrust me not til al be knowen
 Forsake me neuer for no new
 Disdayne me not.

The F version is obviously defective, but its faults should not lead us to think that there is not, ultimately, a source with good authority at its base. In fact, as I argue elsewhere,⁷ it probably derives from an excellent source which contained essentially a mixture of readings from two of the most important manuscripts other than E. While both T and F are decadent texts, they appear to have separate—but distinguished—origins. Both must therefore be taken seriously, and an editor should try to determine on linguistic/literary grounds what is to be taken from each.

The punctuation in F is slight, and appears to indicate little. There is a stop at the end of each stanza, although it seems to have been forgotten after the first. It is possible that the stop at the end of line 9 indicates a break. If so, I must confess that I made an error when I modernized this poem for my edition several years ago, printing the second stanza like this:

Refuse me not without cause why,
 Nor think me not to be unjust;
 Since that by lot of fantasy
 This careful knot needs knit I must,
 Refuse me not.

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Perhaps I should have preferred:

Refuse me not without cause why,
 Nor think me not to be unjust,
 Since that by lot of fantasy
 This careful knot needs knit I must.
 Refuse me not.

Either version is possible, but it will be clear, in an instance like this, just how much difference an editor's punctuation will make to the sense; and I cannot claim that the punctuation which I chose was in any sense authoritative. In my defence I may perhaps argue that I was led by the consideration that in line 18 F's stop cannot possibly have any real significance.

Apart from the rather doubtful punctuation, some things about F are clearly unsatisfactory if we compare F's version with T's. Thus, in line 4, T's "honestly" must be preferred to F's "honesty", which does not rhyme with "sodeynly" in line 2. On a similar principle we may, in the same line, reject F's "nothing", which, unlike T's "not", does not rhyme with "wot" in the preceding line. In line 12, F cannot make sense with "thy stedfastnes": obviously the possessive pronoun must be "my" as in T. And in the next line "seyng" must be rejected as much less likely to be Wyatt's than T's "sins" (which Wyatt was fond of using). The fourth stanza in F appears to be the result of shoddy copying in the peculiar conflation of the first half of T's line 14 with the second half of T's next line (from which, also, "that" is omitted); "For" in F's line 18 is probably due to a copyist looking ahead to "Forsake" in the next line, and T's "But" seems preferable, as does T's "know" to "knew" (also in F's line 18). In the last stanza, T's neatly parallel "that am your owne" and "that am so true" look more persuasive than the clumsy (?editorial) "being your owne" and "that I am so true" in F, while in F's line 23 "neuer" must be rejected for T's "not, ne" for the reason which led us to prefer T's "ye not" to F's "nothing" in line 4—viz. the fact that T maintains internal rhyme where F does not.

Throughout, then, T seems preferable by far to F, and we may well assume that, in the case of this poem, the text from which F was derived was very close to the one on which T is ultimately based; indeed, the faults in F look like unjustified departures from (at least essentially) the same text, with, almost certainly, no independent authority to back them. But if F and T have a common ancestor here, then there is also every reason for believing that F is authoritative where it is clearly superior to T, which is in the use of the refrain-technique. The structure on which the poem is modelled is simple and effective in F, and does away with the difficulty that in T stanzas four and five must be read as a continuum. In each stanza, the refrain echoes the opening words of the stanza, but, while the phrases can stand on their own, it is also possible, as we saw when considering the second stanza, for a phrase like "Refuse me not" to be attached to what precedes. This is what happens at the end of stanza four, where no doubt we must add F's "Forsake me not" to T's "But sins ye know what I intend". Thus, stanza four becomes, like the others, self-contained. Stanza five then brilliantly brings things together. Each line begins with the words with which each previous stanza had started, and then, quite logically and in tune with the practice of the other stanzas, the last line (the refrain "Disdayne me not") once again echoes the opening of the stanza and now, also, the opening of the poem as a whole: thus, to use Wyatt's own words from "My lute awake!" (poem LXVI in my edition), "ended is that we begun" (line 38).

There can be no doubt, then, that if we try to recover the text which Wyatt wrote by studying these two versions, T must be followed in preference to F, except that F yields the refrains which we must add to T. The only reason why the refrains are not present in T

is that they have been deliberately left out; otherwise, its text is generally careful and sensible, and may well do justice to Wyatt's intention.

The view which I have here developed differs from that which, by implication, underlies the text in the edition by Muir and Thomson.⁸ There, F is followed (except in its punctuation) in stanzas two and three. In stanza three (line 13) T's "sins" is preferred to F's "seyng", and in stanza four T is followed consistently, except for the addition (from F) of the refrain "Forsake me not". In the last stanza the same procedure is adopted except that, oddly, Muir and Thomson in their line 24 follow F, printing "Forsake me neuer for no new" instead of T's "Forsake me not, ne for no new". The principal defect of Muir and Thomson's text is that the editors do not understand the importance of internal and final rhymes in the poem. On the other hand, they do realize that F's refrains are to be adopted.

When I myself edited this poem, I constructed the text on the principles here expounded, but I could not explain my procedures in what was a book intended for the "general reader". This was unfortunate, for Wyatt's next editor, R. A. Rebholz, decided to produce quite a different text of this poem.⁹

Rebholz uncritically accepts the argumentation about the text of this poem which is advanced by H. A. Mason, in *Editing Wyatt*.¹⁰ Both scholars believe that the text on which the poem should be based is MS. 18752 in the British Library.¹¹ In my own edition, I incorporated only one word from this manuscript, namely, in line 19, "wot" (MS "wote") in line 19 instead of T's "know" or F's "knew", neither of which secures an internal rhyme. Since internal rhyme is so marked a feature in this poem, the adoption of "wot" seemed to me justified; but I think that otherwise MS. 18752 (Z) is best left alone, and I shall here explain why. Allowing for the conventions of modern printing, the Z version can reasonably accurately be offered in the following form:

Dysdayne me not wythout desert ne
 payne me not so sodely
 Syth well ye know that yn my hart
 I mene no thyng but faythfully
 5 refuse me not
 Refuse me not wythout cause why
 nor thynke me not to be onkynd
 my hart is yours untill I dy
 and that yn short space ye shall yt fynd
 10 mistrust me not
 mystryst me not thogh some there be
 that fayne wold spot my stedfastnes
 beleue them not syth well ye se
 the proffe ys not as they expresse
 15 forsak me not
 fforsak me not tyll I desarue
 nor hate me not tyll I offende
 distroy me not tyll that I swarue
 syth ye well wote what I intend
 20 dysdayn me not
 Dysdayne me not that am your own
 Refuse me not that am so trewe
 mystrust me not tyll al be knowne
 fforsake me not now ffor no new
 25 Thus leve me not

In Z, the refrain is written out by the side of each of stanzas 1-4; only the final stanza has "Thus leve me not" at the end. Mason and Rebholz obscure this fact by printing the refrain in a final position throughout without comment. Yet the difference is an important one, for one major disadvantage of the Z version is that "Thus leve me not" hangs loose,

not having any parallel anywhere else. Mason claims (p. 86) that "the poem is constructed in a form of *rime couée* in which the refrain of the first stanza constitutes the first line of the second, and so on, with a gathering up of all the refrains to make a final stanza". But, of course, this is for one thing *factually* untrue in that the F version, certainly, gathers up all the refrains to make a final stanza, but the Z version does not; the reason, obviously, is that the Z version does not, at the end of each stanza, repeat the opening words of that stanza, but, oddly, derives its "refrain" from the beginning of the *next* stanza, with the result that an additional final line had to be found which has no structural place in the poem. Rebholz not only does not reject Mason's reasoning, but repeats it almost verbatim without examining the evidence for himself (p. 425). However, he does not copy his text from Z without tampering. Apparently in an effort to find an echo for Z's "Thus leve me not", Rebholz alters line 2 into "Ne leave me not so suddenly", borrowing from T and F. But, if in line 2 T and F are to be seen as authoritative, why not elsewhere? Or conversely, if, in this line, Z is *not* authoritative, why should we prefer its final stanza? Similar questions may be asked with respect to Rebholz's procedure right through this poem, and the easiest way to reveal that for what it is will be to print Rebholz's departures from Z (disregarding modernized spellings and punctuation marks):

2: payne	Rebholz
3: know	2: leave
4: no thyng	3: wot
4: faythfully	4: it not
7: nor	4: honestly
7: onkynd	7: Ne
8: my hart is yours untyll I dy	7: unjust
9: and that yn short space ye shall yt fynd	8: Sith that by lot of fantasy
17: nor	9: The careful knot needs knit I must
	17: Ne

Some of Rebholz's readings just have no authority whatever. For example, "ne" in lines 7 and 17 do not occur in any of our three sources, but have been invented by Mason, as Rebholz admits. There is no basis for these conjectures. The reasoning adopted by Mason and Rebholz appears to be that because Z has "ne" in line 2, it would be nice to parallel that word at the beginning of lines 7 and 17. But if consistency is to be the argument, there would be a better case for "Nor" throughout which (a) is the form used by Z in two out of the three instances, (b) is used throughout by both T and F, and (c) is used much more often by Wyatt elsewhere than "ne". Similarly with the curious use of "Sith" in line 8. Again this form is Mason's, presumably to make it analogous with Z's "Syth" in line 3 (and "syth" in lines 13 and 19). But, although in this case Z *is* consistent, it remains a fact that T uses "Sins" ("sins") four times, while F has that word twice (though also "syth" in its line]8 and the eccentric "seyng" in line]3). Tellingly, Wyatt only rarely uses "sith" in his poetry.¹² One other "emendation" which Rebholz borrows from Mason, "it not" in line 4, is quite unnecessary as T's "ye not" gives adequate sense.

Naturally, Mason and Rebholz are right to rely on T for "not" here, but, since all Rebholz's other departures are also taken from T,¹³ it is incomprehensible why he did not take that as his copy text, adding the refrains from F and substituting Z's "wot" for T's "know" in line 19. In the event, "wot" is the *only* useful reading that Rebholz gets from Z. In line 24 Z's (and Rebholz's) "fforsake me not now ffor no new" makes some sort of sense but is suspect because redundant: the poet does not want to be forsaken for a new lover at all, at any time—not just "now". He probably does not really consider the possibility that he will ever deserve being forsaken, despite his statement at the beginning

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of stanza four. And the other things which Rebholz obtains from Z must surely be rejected in favour of T on the basis of euphony:

Line 13:- beleue them not syth well ye se	(Z; Rebholz)
Beleue them not, sins that ye se	(T)
Line 19: syth ye well wote what I intend	(Z; Rebholz)
But sins ye know what I intend	(T)

The effete "filler" of line 13 in Z, "well", is almost certainly a later substitute for "that", as "sins that" is common Wyatt usage.¹⁴ The halting rhythm of Z's line 19 is probably likewise due to a revision, involving deletion of "But", and insertion of "well" (again). In both lines "syth" is uncharacteristic of Wyatt. On the other hand, we may fairly safely assume that originally he wrote "But sins ye *wote* what I intend" (my italics) rather than "But sins ye know ..." as in T, because, although he uses *know* more often, the occurrence of the form *wot* in his poetry is not rare, and here prosodically more fitting.

An editor who in general prefers Z to T (and Rebholz adopts so much from T that *in practice* his preference is less than clear) needs to feel confidence, not only that Z is better on linguistic and literary grounds, but also—and no less importantly—that Z has some claim to greater reliability. In this regard, the facts do not seem encouraging. Very little is actually known about the authority of this manuscript, and collations do not suggest that its authority is high. "Disdain me not" is the only poem in Z which (if T's ascription is to be trusted) is definitely Wyatt's, and our comparison of three sources has tended to demonstrate that Z's text is both the most eccentric of the three and least in correspondence with Wyatt's known poetic practices. In some modern editions three other poems which happen to occur in Z are presented as though they might be Wyatt's. They are:

First line	Muir and Thomson	Rebholz
Shall she never out of my mind	p. 255	p. 292
As power and wit will me assist	p. 198	p. 270
Mourning my heart doth sore oppress	p. 163	p. 286

Of these, the most interesting one is the first. It occurs not only in Z, but also, like "Disdain me not", in *The Court of Venus*. In that collection, there are two versions: one of them (incomplete) in the "Folger" fragment, and another one of five quatrains in the "Stark" fragment.¹⁵ Rebholz assumes (p. 529) that the Z version was an "early" one. It is, however, quite impossible to conclude this with any confidence. A good second stanza occurs in Z which is absent from Stark. It may be that both versions derive from one parent, and that the stanza was inadvertently omitted in the copy prepared for Stark, and there are of course various other possibilities. What is least likely, I should have thought, is that the appearance of superior lines in Z and their absence elsewhere is due to Z's representing an *early* version: one cannot imagine anyone, either the poet or an editor, wishing to discard the stanza. But Rebholz actually believes that the Z version was "revised". If so, by whom, and why? Why would someone scrap the following excellent second stanza

She hath myne hart al other before
so hath she my body she may be sure
nothyng on erth maye glad me more
then to spende them both to do her plesure

-- and yet sensibly revise the first stanza immediately before? In Z, that runs:

Shall she neuer out of mynde
nor shall I neuer out of this payne
Alas here yee doth me so bynde
except here helpe I am nere slayne

whereas Stark has, instead:

Shall she neuer out of my mynde
Nor shall I neuer out of this payn
Alas her loue doth me so blinde
Except her helpe I am now slayne

The merits of "bynde" versus "blinde" and "nere" versus "now" may be disputed, but we surely cannot doubt that it is Stark which, substantially, is the correct text. This does not say anything, however, about its being "late" or "early", only about its reliability. Very likely, Z was derived from as good a text, but contains some errors: almost certainly its original had "my minde" as in Stark, and I think we can hardly doubt that in the third line "yee" is an error for "eye",¹⁶ in which case "bynde", at the end of the line, should have been "blinde". We may find some useful material in Z, but, again, our comparison of these versions shows that it is a defective text, and no case has been made why we should have any special faith in it.

The other two poems occur in very good manuscripts, enabling us to make a comparison between the versions in those texts and the ones in Z. The weakness of that manuscript is easily spotted if we compare its handling of "As power and wit will me assist" with that in Devonshire MS. 17492 (in the British Library). In the Devonshire version, the poet says (to quote from Rebholz, who follows that manuscript here) that his "eye and heart" ... "Hath chosen you only alone / To be my joy or else my moan / Even as ye list" (lines 14-17). Quite logically, we then get: "Joy, if pity appear in place, / Moan, if disdain do show his face." Z makes a nonsense of this, producing: "Yf pyte appeyr yn his plas / or yf dysdayn shew his fas." "Mourning my heart" turns out to be only a fragment in Z, but the first two stanzas may be compared with the Blage Manuscript (Trinity College, Dublin), and the second stanza, in particular, seems much superior in that source. After this, Z continues with what should have been presented as a separate poem (which may well be Wyatt's), viz. "Alas, dear heart, what hap had I" (printed from Blage in Muir and Thomson, p. 126; Rebholz, p. 279); the Z text of this poem is different from that in Blage, and generally inferior.

Thus on all scores editors of Wyatt who seek to establish the correct text of "Disdain me not" have reason to be suspicious of Z, and, although this does not mean that Z can never be a valuable witness, the text of the poem must on the whole be based on T and F. Furthermore, insofar as any claims can be made about the value of Z as a record of other poems possibly by Wyatt, it would appear that those, too, are on the whole best based on other sources. For the purpose of this paper, that fact is material only because comparisons involving other poems than "Disdain me not" support my case concerning that; but critical use of an ill-known manuscript must, of course, be seen as a matter of considerable methodological concern going well beyond the instance of one poem alone.

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NOTES

1. I modernize the spelling of the first line to enable the reader to find the poem readily in the Index of any edition of Sir Thomas Wyatt's poems, not just "old spelling" ones. It may, however, help readers to consult my edition *Sir Thomas Wyatt: Collected Poems* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975) in order to see how I treated the text of the poem then (see p. 231, and also the comment on p. 246).
2. I quote from *Songes and Sonettes (Toilet's Miscellany) 1557*, a facsimile edition of the only

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- known copy of the first edition, which is in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. The facsimile was published in Menston by The Scolar Press Ltd., in 1967. Cf. also H. E. Rollins, ed., *Tottel's Miscellany* (1557-1587), 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2nd ed., 1965).
3. The first scholar to question what had been regarded as the canon of Wyatt's poems was Raymond Southall, in *The Courty Maker* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964), especially in Chapter I. For his view of Tottel's authority in particular, see p. 4. Southall's views have been influential, but perhaps least so with regard to this source, the reliability of which (concerning the question of authorship) seems evident from the fact that a poem assigned to Wyatt in the first edition ("Some men would thinke of right to haue") was transferred to the section of anonymous poems in the second edition, which, in July 1557, followed hard on the heels of the first (June 1557).
 4. Substantial revision of many of the poems was first undertaken for the so-called Arundel MS., and then continued for Tottel's edition, although T appears to be based directly and independently on E in some places. Cf. Ruth Hughey, *The Arundel Harington Manuscript of Tudor Poetry*, 2 vols. (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 1960). See also my "Wyatt and Tottel: a Textual Comparison", *Southern Review*, Vol. V, No. 1 (1972), pp. 3-12.
 5. See for example A. K. Foxwell, *The Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt*, 2 vols. (London, 1913; repr. New York: Russell & Russell Inc., 1964), and Kenneth Muir and Patricia Thomson, eds., *Collected Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1969).
 6. *The Court of Venus*, edited by Russell A. Fraser (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1955), consists of three, probably related fragments, referred to by Fraser as follows: "Douce" (1537-1539), "Stark" (1547-1549), and "Folger" (1561-1564).
 7. Cf. "Wyatt Manuscripts and *The Court of Venus*," *Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand Bulletin* (forthcoming, 1984).
 8. See note 5, above. The text appears on p. 257.
 9. *Sir Thomas Wyatt: The Complete Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978; repr. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981). The poem is printed on p. 156.
 10. Cambridge: The Cambridge Quarterly (Publications), 1972. See pp. 86-87.
 11. Rebholz repeats the gist of Mason's arguments on p. 425 of his edition. For a transcript of the Z poems, see E. B. Reed, *Anglia XXX* (1910), pp. 344-69.
 12. The regular reader of Wyatt will remember facts like this, but they can be checked in E. C. Hangen, *A Concordance to the Complete Poetical Works of Sir Thomas Wyatt* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1941). Hangen's work is based on the edition by A. K. Foxwell (see note 5, above), and this includes some poems which are not necessarily Wyatt's; nevertheless, it seems significant that of 114 examples of usage of "since"/"sith" only six quotations involve the latter. One of these occurs in Foxwell's text of "Disdain me not".
 13. Except that in line 9 T has "This" for F's and Rebholz's "The".
 14. See again Hangen (note 12, above), for several examples.
 15. So called by Fraser (note 6, above).
 16. Rebholz astonishingly "emends" Z's "yee" to "she".

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