Wyatt’s proverbial “Though the wound be healed, yet a scar remains”

The first major edition of poems by Wyatt and Surrey, Tottel’s *Songs and Sonettes* (1557), more popularly known as “Tottel’s Miscellany”, contains a poem by Surrey, “My Ratclif, when thy rechlesse youth offendes”, which ends with:

Yet Salomon sayd, the wronged shall recure;  
But Wiat said true, the skarre doth aye endure.

Surrey — like subsequent readers — appears to believe that Wyatt was the first person to use the saying which *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs* (3rd ed., rev. by F. P. Wilson; Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1970) lists (under "Wound", p. 923) in the form “Though the wound be healed, yet a scar remains.” In Surrey’s version, the first part of the statement is of biblical origin; Surrey’s modern editor, Emrys Jones, suggests that Surrey probably alludes to Ecclesiasticus xxvii. 25. The operative word here is “probably”, for it is not at all certain that this *locus* provides the source for Surrey’s words.

At all events, there is no statement by Wyatt in which he reacts to something like “the wronged shall recure”, as Surrey seems to imply. All of the relevant statements are less moralistic. They are as follows.

I

Sure I am, Brian, this wunde shall heale agayne,  
But yet, alas, the scarre shall styll remayne.¹

(Poem CCXLIV, 7–8)

II

The wound as hap in some other place,  
From whence no tool ayyow the scar can race.

(Poem CCCCXLVIII, 13–14)

III

In diepe wid wound the dedly strok doth torne  
To curid skarre that neuer shalle retorne.

(Poem CI, 9–10)

IV

For tho he hele the wunde yet the scharre shall remayne.²


³ Wyatt’s poems are quoted from Kenneth Muir and Patricia Thomson, eds., *Collected Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1969); it has the advantage of being an "old spelling" text, although I am well aware of its shortcomings. Quotations I—III may also be checked (with comments upon them) in my edition, *Sir Thomas Wyatt: Collected Poems* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975). In both editions, the Index of First Lines gives those lines in a modernized form. Thus (I) is from “Sighs are my food, drink are my tears”, (II) is from “The flaming sighs that boil within my breast”, and (III) is from “What rage is this? What furore of what kind?” — a poem which asserts that the wound will not heal, leave alone that it will “return” to a scar which would prove its recovery.

⁴ This statement comes from the Defence which Wyatt prepared during his imprisonment in 1541, and should be compared with quotation (I) which springs from the same context. I quote (III) from Kenneth Muir’s *Life and Letters of Sir Thomas Wyatt* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1969), p. 193.
Almost certainly, Surrey's reference is to (I), in view of the fact that Surrey's "aye" echoes Wyatt's "styll" (in the sense of "always"), the equivalent of which is not found in the other quotations, although I do not wish to suggest that those were unknown to Surrey (whose "recure", for example, may have been influenced by "curid" in the third quotation).

It is important to realize that Tottel's anthology was published well after the death of both Wyatt and Surrey. To the best of our knowledge, poem CCXLIV had not appeared in print before then, as neither had Surrey's. Wyatt's poem was almost certainly written during his imprisonment in the Tower early in 1541, and Surrey no doubt remembered it when he wrote his own poem while he was imprisoned in his turn, in 1542, or (again) in 1543. Surrey must have known Wyatt's poem from a manuscript version, whichever it was (the only one which survives is Harleian MS. 78, where the poem is headed "Tho. W. to Bryan"). Surrey's reference to Wyatt's authorship is therefore a significant attribution, as it precedes Tottel's by something like a dozen years.

Both poems are part of what is sometimes called a "manuscript culture". Wyatt did not write to Brian with publication in mind; rather, his poem is some sort of verse-letter, primarily addressed to a friend, but also to a small audience of readers amongst whom it was allowed to circulate — not the large, anonymous market at which printed books were aimed. Surrey's poem is in this respect similar, addressed to Radcliffe, and, like Wyatt's poem, articulated to express a particular, painful experience in the life of the writer.

But as I said before, Wyatt's statements about the scar which will remain even after the wound is healed are less moralistic than Surrey's. I do not mean that Wyatt had less ground for moralistic complaint, only that his expression is different — more concerned with the nature of suffering, and less with injustice. This is because Wyatt does not have a biblical source in mind, but a classical, stoic one. The fact has not been recognized by scholars, who continue to credit Wyatt with the invention of what has become a proverbial saying; thus, for example, The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs, and the most recent edition of Wyatt, that by R. A. Rebholz, who observes that "Wyatt is the first recorded instance of the saying". 5

Rebholz appears to imply that, although it has not been recorded as such, the saying may well have been used by others prior to Wyatt, and such is indeed the case.

Ultimately, the proverb goes back at least as far as Zeno, the founder of stoicism (c. 315 B.C.), and, although we cannot blame him for it, Surrey's reference to Solomon, and to Wyatt's modification of Solomon's statement, is neither here nor there.

Wyatt probably learned Zeno's statement from Seneca, with whose writings he was much preoccupied. 6 Zeno is quoted by Seneca in the latter's treatise "On Anger" ("De Ira") as saying: "Even the wise man's mind will keep its scar long after the wound has


6 Wyatt is indebted to Seneca in more than one poem; in poem XII ("Farewell, Love, and all thy lawes for ever") he points out to Cupid: "Seneca and Plato call me from thy Iore, / To peferaic whth my wit for to enver"; and in a letter to his son, written from Spain (1537), he speaks of moral philosophers, "among whom I wold Senek were yor studye" (Muir, Life and Letters, p. 43).
healed', or, to use the Latin: 'in sapientis quoque animo, etiam cum vulnus sanatum est, cicatrix manet.' In an instance like this, the modern translation looks like something more remote from Wyatt's saying than the Latin actually is, for what Wyatt chose to translate was merely 'etiam . . . manet', viz. 'even when the wound is healed, the scar remains'. Seneca, in his treatise, is concerned with stoic advice. At the point where he quotes Zeno, he has been arguing that a good/wise man will 'no more view their [i.e. wicked men's] blessings with envy than he views their crimes with anger', and he quotes Zeno only to concede the point that, when dealing with 'something of this sort', the sage 'will experience some slight and superficial emotion'.

To Wyatt, events 'of this sort', were rather more painful. Although he keeps Seneca's words, as a translator, he invests them with a different context and a different emphasis. He derives comfort from Seneca to the extent that he is prepared to believe — although not unreservedly — that the wound will heal. But the scar will remain as an indelible imprint, and in real life, thus Wyatt implies, pain is more permanent than Seneca's comparatively optimistic view would appear to suggest. Stoicism remains useful in sixteenth century England, but only partly so.

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The meaning of utterance in Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode"

In the first two stanzas of his famous 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood' (1807-4/6)1, Wordsworth regrets that the sights of nature no longer reveal their heavenly splendour and dreamlike vivacity to him, which happens either because his own vision fails (l. 9) or because a certain glory has gone from the earth (l. 18). The splendour as it used to be 'seen' by him (l. 9) retrospectively turns into something that did only 'seem' (l. 3), and his scrutiny of potentially lustrous sights ('The Rainbow comes and goes, / And lovely is the Rose' etc., ll. 10-16) sounds more like a casual, indifferent enumeration.

The third stanza then leaves the general complaint in order to focus on the concrete pastoral situation, and shifting from vision to hearing2, it reads:

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