WYATT’S “PATIENCE” POEMS

Summary. — Four poems starting with the word ‘patience’ are usually thought of as Wyatt’s: ‘Patience, though I have not’, ‘Patience for my device’, ‘Patience, for I have wrong’, and ‘Patience of all my smart’. Of these the first two are the most interesting and important. Study of these poems in the Devonshire MS shows how, presumably, they were originally conceived as a pair by the author. The connection was lost when Wyatt revised the two poems so as to make them independent units, as they are in the MS with the highest authority (Egerton). Nevertheless, the revised poems still make excellent sense — the only reason why Wyatt altered the D versions was that, in keeping with his general practice, he came to prefer poems which were less obviously ‘personal’. The versions in the so-called Blage MS appear to reflect a transitional stage between Devonshire and Egerton, while variants unique to the Arundel MS are later and without any authority.

In manuscripts containing poems by Sir Thomas Wyatt there are four poems starting with the word “patience.” While that word as such is nothing remarkable in a poet concerned with Stoicism, the poems in question were perhaps meant to be a group: not only do they show a preoccupation with patience thematically, but they also have formal links. The connections between these poems still need to be studied with more care than has hitherto been the case.

The four poems have the following first lines in the most recent edition of Wyatt’s poetry, by R.A. Rebholz:

- Patience, though I have not (p. 107)
- Patience for my device (p. 108)
- Patience, for I have wrong (p. 227)
- Patience of all my smart (p. 233)

Unfortunately, we cannot be sure that the poems are all by Wyatt. It certainly seems highly probable that he was the author of the first. The poem occurs in four manuscripts which in the opinion of almost all scholars contain poetry undoubtedly by Wyatt: Egerton MS. 2711 (E; British Library); Devonshire MS. Add. 17492 (D; British Library); the so-called “Arundel” or “Arundel Harington” MS. (A; Arundel Castle); and the so-called “Blage” MS. D.2.7 (B; Trinity College, Dublin). Most tellingly, the poet himself (as I now believe firmly) has ascribed the poem “Tho” in the margin — not, perhaps, with the intention of signalling his authorship, but with the effect of doing so even if the abbreviation (of “Thomas”) was used to indicate approval of work done by the scribe. The version in D has the annotation “fynys q’d Wyat,” which does not seem to contradict the assumption that the poem was Wyatt’s although we do not know anything about the authority of this comment. The other two manuscripts provide no further evidence about Wyatt’s authorship other than that they both include poems by Wyatt.

“Patience for my device” comes after “Patience, though I have not” in E. Most scholars would (in my opinion quite defensively) attribute this poem, too, to Wyatt,
as the large section of poems usually considered to be his has many signs of his authorship, such as marginal “Tho” (already mentioned), revisions in his handwriting, the ascription “Wyatt” (in another hand), etc. It is moreover extremely probable that the poems are connected in D, although they are there to be found in two quite different places (folio 13v and folio 71v). “Patience for my device,” coming after “Patience, though I have not” as it does in E, is related to that poem in D because it is preceded by a little note which reads (I modernize): “‘Patience, though I had not/The ...’ etc. — to her that said this patience was not for her but that the contrary of mine was most meetest for her purpose.” As this note clearly refers (despite “had” for “have”) to “Patience, though I have not,” and since that poem is ascribed to Wyatt in D, it would seem logical to conclude that D, quite independently, establishes Wyatt as the author of both poems. “Patience for my device” is, like its companion piece, found in B and A as well. Neither A nor B provides any additional information about the question of authorship. The two poems are found together in both manuscripts, but this circumstance counts for little if it is realized that A usually derives from E and that in B the poems are arranged in alphabetical order.

I included both poems in my 1975 edition of Wyatt, but I left out the other two poems which Rebholz (and other editors before him) can see no reason for excluding. Formally, there are resemblances with the two poems just discussed which I would definitely claim for Wyatt. The stanza form is the same in all four poems, with six syllables to each line and rhyme scheme a-b-a-b-cc. It has been suggested that the stanza form may owe something to the Italian sextina, and the content in one or two places possibly (but not clinchingly) reveals a slight debt to Serafino, “Canzona de la Patientia.” The poems are, if viewed as a group, compatible in poetic attitude, expression, and thematic concerns, although “Patience of all my smart” strikes me as a much weaker poem than the other three, and (more importantly) the two poems which appear together in E are much more obviously connected to each other (especially, as we shall see, in their D and B versions) than they are to either of the other two poems. “Patience, though I have not” and “Patience for my device” suggest a specific situation from which both poems spring; the other two poems, on the other hand, may well refer to quite different incidents. I quote “Patience, for I have wrong” from Rebholz’s edition:

Patience, for I have wrong  
And dare not show wherein!  
Patience shall be my song  
Since truth can nothing win.  
Patience then for this fit!  
Hereafter comes not yet.

The poem is powerful (though Rebholz’s exclamation marks seem unnecessary); its merit suggests that it could well be Wyatt’s, but there is nothing to link it to
something as specific as the little note which in D precedes “Patience for my device.” There is, in other words, no good argument for assuming that the poem was thought of, by Wyatt, as connected with “Patience, though I have not” and “Patience for my device,” and that it should accompany those poems in D, where it is found well apart from them without any comment. Similar reasoning can be applied to “Patience of all my smart.” Both of these poems occur in D only, and there is, despite the fact that they may well be Wyatt’s, no compelling reason for regarding them as his. The mere fact that they resemble known Wyatt poems and are found in a manuscript which includes his poems is not a sound basis for attributing these poems to him.

At any rate, it is the relationship between “Patience, though I have not” and “Patience for my device” which is a close one, and which is textually interesting too. In fact, the relationship as I think it originally existed in Wyatt’s mind (no doubt as a result of a specific situation) can only be deduced from the D and B versions, as he himself, intriguingly, appears (by means of his “Tho”) to have sanctioned (and was no doubt ultimately responsible for) significant variants in the E version of “Patience, though I have not” which make the poem there far less personal than it was in the D and B versions, where both “Patience, though I have not” and “Patience for my device” appear to refer to a particular woman and to be connected because of that fact.

In general, I think that the textual situation regarding these two poems is as follows. The D versions reflect an early stage of composition; the B versions show how the poems were taken closer to those in E but remain as yet “personal”; the poems in E reveal how the author wished the poems to become more “general” in application — but inconsistently, so that the relationship between them has become largely obscured. As the A versions may be supposed to have been derived from those in E without Wyatt’s blessing, they reveal nothing of importance with respect to the question of relationship.

To facilitate appropriate comparisons between the edited poems in, on the one hand, the Rebholz and Daalder editions, and, on the other hand, the manuscripts, I now offer the versions from D with modernization of spelling and punctuation.

I: “Patience, though I have not” (Rebholz, p. 107; Daalder, p. 34)

Patience: though I have not
The thing that I desired,
I must of force, God wot,
Forbear that I required,
For no ways can I find
To sail against the wind. [5]

Patience: do what she will
To work me woe or spite,
I shall content me still
To think that once I might:
To think, and hold my peace,
Since there is no redress.

Patience, without blame,
For I offended nought:
I know she knows the same,
Though she have changed her thought.
Was ever thought so moved
To hate where it hath loved?

Patience of all my harm,
For fortune is my foe;
Patience must be the charm
To ease my of my woe.
Patience without offence
Is a painful patience.

II: "Patience for my device"
(Rebholz, p. 108; Daalder, p. 35)

Patience for my device,
Impatience for your part!
Of contrary the guise
Must needs be overthwart:
Patience, for I am true,
The contrary for you.

Patience: a good cause why
Yours hath no cause at all!
Trust me; that stands awry,
Perchance may sometime fall.
"Patience" then say, and sup
A taste of patience’ cup.

Patience, no force for that,
Yet brush your gown again.
Patience, spurn not thereat,
Lest folks perceive your pain.
Patience, at my pleasure
When yours hath no measure!

The t’other was for me,
This patience is for you.
Change when ye list let see,
For I have ta’en a new.
Patience with a good will
Is easy to fulfil.

At this point I should explain how I have edited the two poems. The process of modernizing the words did not involve me in any difficult choices: it is clear throughout, in the D text, what words the sixteenth century forms are meant to
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represent. But I have corrected some obvious scribal errors, occurring as follows: then cf. MS the (II, 11), was cf. MS swas (II, 19); you cf. MS yon (II, 20). It will be evident from this brief list that I regard the D transcripts highly, but that in my view poem II has been copied less accurately than poem I. It should be pointed out that poem II is copied in a different hand; no doubt the scribe was less precise. I do not imply that the poems were copied faultlessly in all other respects — only that I can, with the exception of the three readings mentioned, make sense of the transcripts offered by the D scribes. The punctuation is instrumental in indicating my interpretation: in D, there is no punctuation in poem I at all, and the only signs which occur in poem II are virgulae after lines 4, 18, and 24.

To my mind, the two poems as I have represented them make perfectly adequate sense in a way which is suggested by my punctuation and which I shall moreover comment on in broad terms a little later.

Meanwhile, however, I should say something about the way in which other scholars have recently approached these poems.

In their 1969 edition, Kenneth Muir and Patricia Thomson printed the poems from E. To this there is in principle no objection, but it is a little odd to read the following comment on the poems (XXXIX and XL in the edition): "The note appended to XL in D shows that it was intended as a sequel to XXXIX. In XL the lover mocks the lady for her impatience, her refusal to respond to the patience he preached in XXXIX. The two are companion pieces ..." Certainly they are, but that fact is not at all obvious from the E text, where "Patience, though I have not" (as it appears in my edition, which also follows E) does not refer to a lady at all: line 7 has "they" for "she", as had line 15, etc. (We shall later consider these changes in more detail.)

In my edition (1975), I referred to this oddity as follows: "...in D, XXXIX is quite different from E's version, regularly with she for they, etc. W later seems to have made the application of XXXIX more general, with the result that its connection with XL has become more tenuous than in D." I could not elaborate any further on this point in an edition meant for "the general reader."

At about the same time (and, it must be conceded, quite independently) R.C. Harrier, transcribing the poems from E for his book, commented on the relationship between the D and E versions in these terms: "The variants to poem 39 indicate that the pronoun 'she' (II. 7, 15, 16) was introduced into the D text to suit this fictional background" (i.e. of the note preceding "Patience for my device" in D). "In neither text of E is there a direct feminine mode of address or reference."

I find this an extraordinary assertion for more than one reason. For one thing, Harrier completely overlooks the fact that in the first poem the speaker refers to more than one person (e.g. "do what they will," line 7), whereas in the second poem (in E) he says, for example, "brush your gown again" (line 14), clearly referring to
a single individual. This discrepancy indicates a peculiarity in the E versions of the poems, not the versions in D. Furthermore, it is impossible to see how, as Harrier appears to imply, the D text could have been adjusted after the E text. The two poems were entered at a considerable distance from each other in D, and by two different copyists. How could a poem on folio 13\textsuperscript{v} incorporate changes to take account of a note on folio 71\textsuperscript{a} entered by a different person, no doubt at a later time? It is much more probable that the D versions preserve earlier readings (presumably variants Wyatt once approved of but which he later corrected); we must remember at this point Miss A.K. Foxwell’s general observation that in several places readings in D correspond to paralells in E which Wyatt subsequently revised in that manuscript — an observation which Muir and Thomson correctly support in their edition.\textsuperscript{6}

Rebholz prints his “Patience, though I have not” from E. His punctuation is crucially different from mine particularly with respect to the word “Patience” with which each stanza opens. Thus, for example, he starts the poem with: “Patience, though I have not/The thing that I require!” Obviously, the word “Patience” is thrown less into relief this way, and a disadvantage of that is that the stanzas are less clearly connected to each other, and to “Patience for my device.” It must be admitted, however, that the manuscript itself, through its lack of punctuation, makes Rebholz’s divisions possible, even if perhaps we do not like the notion of “Patience” with an exclamation mark. What is more disconcerting is that Rebholz prints “Patience for my device” from D, not E, because, as he says, the E version is “unintelligible” to him; and he then, astonishingly, goes on to print that D version (“with a few emendations”) as though stanza one is spoken by a “lover,” stanza two by a “lady,” and so forth. There is absolutely no textual authority for this procedure, and it is by no means impossible to make sense of the poem (either in D or in E) on the assumption that it is spoken by one and the same person throughout. Neither will it be necessary to see “Patience for my device” as an example of “Wyatt’s Bawdy,” as it in effect becomes in Rebholz’s interpretation (e.g. “If I understand 11. 23–4 correctly, the lady ultimately defines her kind of ‘patience’ as ‘bearing another’s body’ or ‘submitting to another’s lust’, a patience which has caused her gown to need brushing [1.14] and which she practises with ‘a good will’ [1.23]”).

How, then, should we interpret these two poems? By and large, Muir and Thomson seem to me correct in saying that the second poem was meant to be a sequel to the first, with the lover mocking the lady for her impatience, her refusal to respond to the patience which he had preached. But this kind of connection is only obvious from the D/B versions (while Muir and Thomson print the first poem from E), and the connection is also, I think, one which has a more subtle twist than Muir and Thomson indicate.

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In the D version, “Patience: though I have not” refers unmistakably to a relationship between the speaker and one woman (as distinct from “they” in the E text). It is possible that the “thing that I desired” (line 2) is sexual intercourse, but it is by no means necessary to assume that this is what Wyatt is writing about, and indeed in most of his poems what he desires is a stable relationship, a firm commitment on the part of the woman, rather than sex. As is usual in Wyatt's poetry, the woman is seen as treacherous, and as taking delight in making him suffer. Thus he accuses her of having “changed her thought” (line 16) and of trying to inflict “woe or spite” (line 8) upon him.

There is nothing effective which he can do to change the relationship as such — the only solution to his predicament is internal. He must learn to cultivate patience, i.e. patient endurance, in the face of — or simply: of — his “harm” (line 20).

Predominantly, in this poem, “patience” has the sense of “enduring with calmness and composure.” If we remember Wyatt's fascination with the Stoicism of Plutarch, Seneca and others, it is not difficult to see that he is exhorting himself to be as indifferent to pain as they recommended, even though at the end of the poem he admits that, confronted by injustice, patience is painful to bear. But then, the sense of “suffering” or “longsuffering” was (and remains) implicit in the word “patience.”

“Patience” in this poem also has the frequent meaning of “the calm abiding of the issue of time, processes, etc.” and this merges into “constancy in labour, exertion, or effort.” (All these are senses given by OED.) This semantic area becomes the important one in considering the import of the note which in D precedes “Patience for my device”: “‘Patience, though I had not / The...’ etc. — to her that said this patience was not for her but that the contrary of mine was most meetest for her purpose.”

In the first poem, Wyatt had adopted, as he puts it in the first line of the second, “Patience for my device” (i.e. motto). He had tried to instruct himself to face his adversity with Stoic equanimity. However painful it is to achieve such a state of mind, he felt himself morally supported by the fact that he had been “true” (line 5 of “Patience for my device”). He, in his affection for the woman, is not just “sincere,” but “loyal, constant.”

The lady, however, had no such profound notions of patience. She takes Wyatt's first poem to mean that she should be “patient” in the sense of “not hasty or impetuous.” In other words, when she told Wyatt that “this patience was not for
her,” she meant that such complicated concepts of “patience” as Wyatt’s (in his first poem) are, in her case, simply not relevant; to her, the choice is between being either hasty or not hasty, and, as (in Wyatt’s view) she is not by temperament “true,” she opts for a hasty relationship with another man. Thus we may paraphrase the first stanza of “Patience for my device” as follows: “My motto has been and is that I must be patient (“forbearing in the face of adversity,” etc.), but your function in our relationship is to be impatient (“impetuous”). Opposites always show themselves as such. My device is patience because I am loyal and honest, whereas yours is impatience because you are not.” Therefore, the woman was right in saying that the contrary of Wyatt’s patience was “most meetest” for her purpose, although she had no doubt meant to convey to Wyatt, quite innocuously, that she was not patient in his Stoic sense of the term — not that she was not patient because of impetuous promiscuity. Being, however, internally of quite a different temperament from Wyatt’s, she externally shows a form of behaviour which, inescapably, is also different — and far worse than her words had been intended to suggest.

In the second stanza, Wyatt presses the virtue of patience upon the lady. But the very mention of the word immediately makes him aware of her impatience, which is related with her lack of loyalty. He thus has “good cause” (in his own insistence on patience) for believing that her motto (impatience) has nothing to support it (“hath no cause at all”). He asks her to trust him, as “that” (her impatience) “stands awry” and “Perchance may sometime fall.” Since impatience is unreliable, he urges her to taste a sip of patience’ cup — to try the virtue which he believes in.

But, as patience is not congenial to the lady, the draught of patience does not go down well: she spills the cup, and therefore must brush her gown again. Ironically, the only way (Wyatt suggests) in which she can counter her impatience is by once again trying to be patient. Indeed, as he points out to her, one reason why one must not spurn patience is that by showing it one can prevent others from seeing one’s pain. But a note of glee here creeps into the poem. The lady’s own “patience,” when she tries it, turns out to be something which no “measure” can contain, because it is in fact impatience. Yet the accident with the cup gives the poet pleasure: it shows her impatience for what it is, and at the same time demonstrates the need for real patience.

In the last stanza, however, Wyatt points out that real patience is something which he has displayed in the past, while this new kind of “patience” is actually impatience — the only thing which she is capable of. Such “patience” is ironically a quality which he too can entertain: she can show change whenever she likes, for he has “ta’en a new” (girlfriend). Hence he now knows that such newfangled patience as the lady’s “... with a good will / Is easy to fulfil.” Here the poem does assume such sexual overtones as Rehbolz wishes us to see throughout — but there is no need for following him in thinking that “patience” means “bearing another’s body” or “submitting to another’s lust,” or that the lady (not Wyatt or his male protagonist)
speaks this last stanza. Much of the irony of the two poems depends on our seeing how Wyatt comes to accept as his own mode of behaviour such impatience (involving a change of partner) as he first criticized the lady for.

Although, undoubtedly, the two poems are more satisfying to read as a pair than in isolation from each other, I would maintain that nevertheless each still makes good sense on its own. Hence, when Wyatt came to sanction — or more likely to introduce — changes which would finally lead to what we have in E (two poems separated by the fact that the first refers to “they” and the second to “she”), we certainly need not accuse him of incompetence, or to assume that his authorship of the second poem is in doubt (as Rebholz is inclined to do).

Readers who do not have access to the manuscripts in question (D, B, and E), or at least microfilms of them, will nevertheless be able to study the variants in Harrier, who transcribes the poems from E, but with listing of the variants which he finds in D and B. It remains for me to comment on the significance of the most important ones.

I do so in the belief that on the whole (with some exceptions) the variants may be analyzed as being part of a process of revision undertaken by the author. I have already explained why I think that D is the text which contains much of what Wyatt first wrote, whereas E represents something like his final intention. If that general assumption is correct, then B would represent an intermediate stage.

As I see it, B generally tightens up the poems somewhat, but still crucially retains the reference to a “she” in the first. I modernize (for the sake of consistency) the variants which I shall discuss.

In the “personal” sphere, B is in tune with D because it has “ye” in line 7 of “Patience: though I have not,” where D has “she”; “ye” may be a mistake, but probably not for “they” which E has, and in line 15 B has “I wish she kno’yth the same” where “wish” is presumably a mistake (for “wot”?!) but where “she kno’yth” supports D and not E’s “they know”; similarly, in line 16 D and B both read “Though she have changed her thought,” while E has “Though they have changed their thought.”

B stays with D, interestingly, in line 10. Here, D and B have “To think that once I might,” while E has “To think both day and night.”

Taken together, these instances of agreement of D and B against E would suggest that (in these cases) D and B retain earlier readings which are wholly consistent and intelligible, and which are highly likely to be the author’s. I am of the view that Wyatt in his revisions as they occur in E does similar things to what we may suppose he has done here. For example, in “If waker care, if sudden pale colour” (XXVIII in Rebholz’s edition, XCVII in mine) W first appears to have wanted “Her that did set our country in a roar” in line 8, but revised this into “Brunet that set my wealth in such a roar” — no doubt to disguise what would otherwise have seemed a much
too personal reference to Anne Boleyn.

Elsewhere, however, B is closer to E. Thus, I take it that D's line 2 ("The thing that I desired") was deliberately revised into "The thing that I require" which is found in both B and E, while similarly D's line 4, "Forbear that I required," became, in those sources, "Forbear my most desire." It would seem that these changes were primarily designed to aid euphony (particularly to avoid the repetition of "that I"). and it seems a logical assumption that they were first introduced into B, and then into E. (Or rather, more likely, into the manuscript[s] from which B and E were copied.) Likewise with "heal" (line 23), which in B and E replaces D's "ease".

Readings unique to B are harder to explain. Some of them (like "wish" discussed above) may be scribal, but others could (although they need not) represent what the author at one stage approved of. For example, in line 22 B has "Patience shall be the charm" while D and E have "Patience must be the charm." As both variants make good sense, but one is found only in B, it is impossible to decide whether or not both are authorial or only the one found in D and E.

"Patience for my device" is textually somewhat less interesting, in that predominantly B and E are very close here, with B less markedly showing a transitional stage between D and E than is the case with "Patience: though I have not." Nevertheless, the same process of development from D to E can still be detected. Thus, line 4 in D, "Must needs be overthwart," was apparently turned into "Is ever overthwart" for B before it became "Is ever the overthwart" in E: one imagines that Wyatt wrote the D line first, then struck out "Must needs be" before substituting "Is ever," and then added "the." Line 10, "Perchance may sometime fall," probably was first revised into its B version, "May chance sometime to fall," before "May" was once more changed into "Per", so that the line in E became "Perchance sometime to fall."" But in general the B text resembles that in E (which Harrier transcribes and which I modernize in my edition). Although there are plenty of differences between the D version on the one hand, and the B/E one on the other, I do not think (unlike Rebholz) that they make for a more or less intelligible poem, and I would essentially interpret the E version in much the same way as the D text which I have discussed. The situation is probably that Wyatt revised the D versions of both "Patience: though I have not" and "Patience for my device" so as to improve them (as he thought), and that each poem was tackled as an independent unit, so that the connection which had existed in D was severed. The two poems as they appear in E are still perfectly adequate and can be understood independently, but they lack the interesting, more human dimension of the D versions which we have considered and which appear to have their own kind of authority even if that was eventually disowned by the poet himself.
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NOTES


2 When I first came to study the Egerton manuscript I felt uncertain as to whether the "Tho" which appears frequently in E was in the poet's hand or that of someone else. Subsequently, I came to consider that the former was more likely to be the case, and I know from private communications that Raymond Southall (author of The Courtly Maker [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964] and of an unpublished Ph.D [Birmingham University, 1961] which contains the most accurate transcript of E yet) that he, too, is wholly convinced that marginal "Tho" must be considered as Wyatt's. Such, too, is the opinion of Richard Harrier, in The Canon of Sir Thomas Wyatt's Poetry (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), who says, moreover, that "Tho" is "Wyatt's own signature, and not a sign of authorship but of approval for work done by the scribe" (p. 11). I concur with Harrier not only about the authorship of the "Tho" signs (as does Southall), but also on their likely significance.


5 See above, note 2.


7 This hesitation between "May chance" and "Perchance" probably was a characteristic of Wyatt. For example, D and B have "May chance" in line 26 of "My lute awake!" (LXVI in my edition, CLX in Rebholz's), whereas the E version (which was corrected by Wyatt) has "Perchance."