THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE “THO” SIGNS IN WYATT’S EGERTON MANUSCRIPT

by

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EGERTON MS 2711, in the British Library, is generally, and rightly, seen as the most important manuscript containing Thomas Wyatt’s verse. It is the only manuscript which contains poems in the poet’s own hand, and a number of others which are corrected by him. An important difference from other manuscripts is also that, while in them are found a good many poems which are definitely known not to be Wyatt’s, there is a strong likelihood that—with some easily identifiable exceptions—all the poems in the Egerton MS (E) are by Wyatt himself.

Nevertheless, there are some features about E which scholars have found rather puzzling. In particular, there has been considerable controversy about the question of authorship. Most scholars have assumed that, leaving aside the exceptions already referred to, all of the poems are Wyatt’s, because there is a good deal of evidence that they are, and none that they are not. This view has not gone unchallenged, however. One central oddity about the manuscript is that several of the poems are accompanied by the marginal sign “Tho”—no doubt for “Thomas,” the poet’s first name. There is some disagreement as to whether someone close to Wyatt was responsible for these signs, or whether they are in fact in the poet’s own hand. In either case, it might be argued (and has been) that “Tho” is offered as a sign of authorship, and that accordingly poems without “Tho” need not always be Wyatt’s. This argument would seem to have even greater force if the “Tho” signs are indeed in Wyatt’s hand, as I believe they are. Presumably, it runs, if the poet actually “signed” his own poems, to indicate which were his and which were not, he knew what he was doing; and in that case the poems which he did not “sign” were not his (except where the presence of his hand suggests otherwise).

This argument would appear to be a weighty one, and it must be examined with some care for its validity. I intend to do so in this paper, but I also want to explore another possibility. In my view, “Tho” is not primarily meant to be a sign of authorship, although we may take it that an effect of its presence is that it confirms to us, in a later age, that a poem is Wyatt’s. The poet’s intention, however, was—I shall argue—not to indicate “This is a poem by me, Wyatt, and I want readers to know that” but rather to signal to a scribe who was meant to copy the “Tho” poems that these (not, or not yet, the other poems) could be proceeded with.

But first it will be necessary to say something about the nature and
make-up of E in general, so that the “Tho” marks can be considered within their context.

E is a very unusual manuscript of early Tudor poetry in not being a miscellany. In his book The Courtly Maker (1964), Raymond Southall includes an “Appendix A” (pp. 160–170) which he entitles “The Egerton Manuscript Collection of Early-Tudor Poetry, c. 1530–1542,” and an “Appendix B” (pp. 171–178) which is headed “The Devonshire Manuscript Collection of Early-Tudor Poetry, c. 1532–1541”—that is, Devonshire MS Add. 17492 in the British Library.

These headings suggest not only that the manuscripts are of the same date, which they are, but also that they are the same in kind, which they are not. As for the Devonshire MS (D), we essentially agree. I still stand by what I wrote on p. xxxi of my edition, Sir Thomas Wyatt: Collected Poems (1975): “D shows the typical history of a court album. The MS. went from one hand to another, from scribe to scribe and from reader to reader. For this reason, and because D (like other MSS. but unlike E) contains many poems not by W[yatt], there is no particularly good reason for assuming that unascrned poems which happen to look like W’s, in some or many respects, are his. Until they can be shown to be, they are strictly anonymous.” By “unascrbed” I meant “unscribed in D or elsewhere”: I accept as Wyatt’s poems ascribed to him in, for example, Richard Tottel’s Songs and Sonettes (1557). But I see no reason why we must assume that the mere presence of a number of Wyatt poems in D implies that others are also by him. In fact, as Southall is right to point out (p. 172), D is really an anthology of work by a very mixed bag of authors, both early Tudor and much earlier. Authors who have been identified as occurring in D include Wyatt, Thomas Howard, Margaret Douglas, Mary Shelton, Anne Boleyn, Henry Stuart (Lord Darnley), Edmund Knyvet, John Hall, A.I. (insofar as these initials identify anyone), Jon K., Chaucer, Hoccleve and Roos.

There is no such mixture of authors in E. Indeed, I see no reason for doubting that Wyatt was the owner of the manuscript, and from the beginning intended it to contain copies of his poems only. Physically, there is nothing against this view. With the exception of some leaves inserted in E to make good lost or damaged leaves, all leaves of E have a common watermark, and this, in addition to the fact that the grid measurements and the quality of the paper are the same throughout, proves that a common stock of paper was used. Not many leaves are lost or damaged, and the fact that some are does not, of course, disprove the assumption that E was a bound volume of blank leaves when Wyatt acquired it and instructed the main scribe in E, an amanuensis whose hand is usually referred to as “A,” to begin the task of copying poems which all available evidence suggests were Wyatt’s own. Not all of the leaves were filled while the manuscript was in Wyatt’s possession,

1. I am indebted to Professor Southall for confirming the accuracy of these observations; he points out that the grid measurements of the paper throughout are 17 mm. between 20 laid lines and 21–24 mm. between the chain lines.
and the fact that several were left blank but clearly belong to the same stock further confirms that E was a bound volume from the beginning. After Wyatt’s untimely death in 1542, the manuscript passed through more than one pair of hands within a relatively short time; the poet Nicholas Grimald, for example, whose work is represented in Tottel’s anthology, “edited” a number of Wyatt’s poems by adding punctuation marks and tampering with the wording here and there. But, although in subsequent years E was not looked after with exemplary care and was added to by a variety of hands, its main character as a Wyatt volume remains plainly visible and intact. In their own fashion, various owners looked after the manuscript. For example, John Harington (the father of Sir John, the translator of Ariosto), who acquired E circa 1555, proceeded to have it rebound (as a result of which the manuscript was slightly trimmed), and the Haringtons kept E until about 1810, when it was bound again, under the direction of Wyatt’s great early editor G. F. Nott.

What I want to stress here is the unity of the manuscript. It was a bound “book” from about 1530; we need not fear that a collection of heterogeneous papers was bound together at a later date, or that what was originally a bound volume was subsequently split into smaller parts (of which the present manuscript might have been one). At present, a few old leaves are unnumbered, but the bulk is numbered 2–120; a modern leaf precedes folio 2, and nine others follow folio 120. It is possible to calculate the number of leaves lost from the original section which is now numbered 2–120 as probably 18. Some of them, at least, must have contained Wyatt material. The surviving material which I and others regard as Wyatt’s occurs in sections as follows: ff. 4r–70r; ff. 86r–98r; and ff. 100r–101r. The fact that there are no Wyatt poems after folio 101r is readily accounted for by the fact that the poet left the last poem, “Iopas’ Song,” incomplete at his death. As for the other two gaps, the one between f. 98r and f. 100r may simply be due to Wyatt’s habit of using space liberally, but it is harder to see why he left so much space between f. 70r and f. 86r. Some of this space is taken up by material which, although I do not think Wyatt exercised control over it, is nevertheless “Wyatt material” in another sense: on f. 70r a later hand, almost certainly after Wyatt’s death, entered a copy of his poem “Vulcan begot me, Minerva me taught,” and this same hand proceeded to copy, on ff. 71r–73r, two letters by Wyatt to his son. Whoever entered this material clearly thought of E as a Wyatt manuscript, but there

2. “Modern” is a relative term here; the watermark dates this leaf 1807, and it (with the other “modern” leaves) was no doubt inserted when E was re-bound in 1810.


4. The title of this poem (first line: “When Dido feasted first the wandering Trojan knight”) is Wyatt’s own. My practice in this paper will be to refer to poems by their first lines as they appear in my edition. The fact that the lines are modernized will facilitate finding the poems in other editions, and I also modernize—for convenience—other quotations, unless I indicate otherwise.

5. Harrier (above, note 3) is wrong in stating (p. 219) that “Vulcan begot me” is written in Wyatt’s “italic holograph”; no one, either before the appearance of his book or after, has supported him in this assertion.
is no accounting for the fact that the poet himself, finishing a poem on f. 69r (“What rage is this? What furor of what kind?”), did not start his next poem, the beginning of the Penitential Psalms (“Love to give law unto his subject hearts”), immediately after. Nevertheless, as we have no reason for supposing that this gap was meant to include work by another poet, it is clear that, in principle, E was meant to be a Wyatt manuscript from beginning to end.

That idea is reinforced if we examine the distribution of the hands in E. I am here concerned only with what happened while Wyatt was alive. I should point out, though, that there is a great deal of material in E which post-dates Wyatt’s death. Generally, this is easy to distinguish. As for the question of Wyatt’s authorship in relation to poems entered by later hands, I must observe that there are three passages of verse which are clearly entered after Wyatt’s death and which are not his. On f. 7r, Grimaldi entered his own adaptation of the beginning of a Wyatt poem which occurs in D, “The restful place, reviver of my smart.” Following “Madame, withouten many words,” on f. 24r, a later hand has added an “Answer” (“Of few words, Sir, you seem to be”) which no one has claimed for Wyatt. Finally, on f. 85r another later hand has entered a poem known to be Surrey’s, “The great Macedon,” in praise of Wyatt’s Penitential Psalms and preceding them.

I concur with the majority view that all the other poems found between f. 4r and f. 101r are Wyatt’s. In this context, it is important to observe that the hands responsible for copying these poems, with the exception of Wyatt’s own, are secretary hands. This by itself makes E a very different manuscript from D: that manuscript is essentially an anthology compiled by different individuals acting on their own initiative, whereas in E no doubt the scribes worked as secretaries under Wyatt’s instruction. The first scribe, “A,” was initially instructed to copy the poems appearing on ff. 4r–49r (“Behold, Love, thy power how she despiseth” to the end of “Mine own John Poyntz, since ye delight to know”). Wyatt himself then copied two poems in his own hand on f. 50r, “Desire, alas, my master and my foe” and “Venomous thorns that are so sharp and keen.” Hand “A” then went on to copy ff. 50r–54r, “My mother's maids, when they did sew and spin”—“Unstable dream, according to the place.” Wyatt then wrote two poems on f. 54r: “In doubtful breast, whilst motherly pity” and “Of Carthage he, that worthy warrior.” Hand “A” copied further poems on ff. 55r–62r (“Process of time worketh such wonder”—the end of “Lo what it is to love”). A new secretary hand, much less fine than that of “A,” then took over. I shall call Wyatt’s hand “W,” and this one “B.” “B” is responsible for the poetic material occurring on ff. 62r–69r (“I lead a life unpleasant, nothing glad”—stanza four of “Most wretched heart, most miserable”). Another secretary hand (“C”) took over from “B” on f. 64r, starting with stanza five of “Most wretched heart,” and finishing on f. 66r with “If waker care, if sudden pale colour,” although interrupted by “W,” who entered “From these high hills as when a spring doth fall” and “Prove whether I do change, my dear” on f. 66r. “W” resumed on f. 67r with “So feeble is the thread that doth the burden stay” and (for the time being) finished on f. 70r with the fragment “From thought to thought, from hill to hill love doth me lead.” After
a long interval, "W" then starts the Penitential Psalms on f. 86r, finishing that section on f. 98v. "W" then concluded the volume with the incomplete "When Dido feasted first the wandering Trojan knight" (ff. 100v—101r).

The most striking fact about the general distribution of these hands is something which has not been commented upon, viz. that hand "A" is the dominant one at the beginning, and Wyatt's at the end. If we take into account that hands "A," "B," and "C" are all secretary hands, we may surely venture to guess that Wyatt originally intended E to be a fair album of his poems and never abandoned his intention that it would contain only his poems. At first, he clearly planned for "A" to be the copyist of his poems—a fact obvious from "A" entering many poems uninterruptedly on ff. 4r—49r, and continuing work as a copyist even after Wyatt started entering poems himself on f. 50r. It is not clear why Wyatt increasingly took over from "A" and the other scribes, but it seems that circumstances may have interfered with what at the outset had been conceived to be the task of "A." The first two poems entered by Wyatt, on f. 50r, give no clue, but the next two, on f. 54r, perhaps do. The first of the two poems here, "In doubtless thief, whilst motherly pity," is based on "Mentre ne duro petto e dispietato," which is located in MS 4117 held by the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid. The second poem, "Of Carthage he, that worthy warrior," ends with the line "At Monçon thus I restless rest in Spain." Wyatt was sent as ambassador to Spain in 1537, and wrote a letter from Barbastro, near Monçon, on 16 October. It is likely, therefore, that these two poems were written at about that time, and the journey abroad may well have prompted Wyatt to write new poems, and in general may have changed the course of E.

Another important factor in this may be that Wyatt was not altogether satisfied with the work of the scribes. There is no sign that he systematically examined their work, but there are many revisions in his hand. The first poem corrected by Wyatt is "Who hath heard of such cruelty before?" on f. 29v, copied by "A." Wyatt's corrections are not confined to work done by "A," however, for the last poem which he revised, "If waker care, if sudden pale colour," on f. 66r, was entered by hand "C." As all the subsequent poems were written out by Wyatt himself, it seems likely that he had meanwhile corrected the poems on ff. 29r—66r, and had come to abandon the thought that E would be a fair album of his poems, so that he started using it as a personal notebook instead. There is general agreement that the last poems in Wyatt's hand, particularly, were composed by him directly into E—revision in these poems is particularly heavy and sometimes involves a search for rhyme-words.

E is thus, I believe, a Wyatt manuscript in more than one sense. It was meant to be a fair album of the poet's work, but it ended up instead as a personal notebook in which we see the poet in the process of creating his own poems.

A number of poems are accompanied by the marginal sign "Tho." Others are ascribed "Wyat." In recent decades, the tendency has been to regard both "Tho" and "Wyat" as evidence of authorship, and nothing else. Arguments to this effect were first put forward by Southall. He believed (pp. 2–3 of The
Courty Maker) that Grimald was responsible for the “Wyat” entries, and that what he calls the “‘Tho’ ascriptions” were the work of a member of the Wyatt family. What is more, he thought that Wyatt himself had seen these “ascriptions” (“Wyat” and “Tho”). Southall thus asked himself: “if, as has been generally supposed, all the poems in the first 120 folios (with two exceptions) are Wyatt’s, why were only some of them ascribed to him and these ascriptions tacitly authorized by him? Why were forty-nine poems (excluding those in Wyatt’s hand) left anonymous? What evidence is there, other than style, to show that these were by Wyatt?” In Southall’s view, poems are thus only to be accepted as Wyatt’s if they are in the poet’s hand, or are “ascribed” to him in a way the poet knew and approved of. Automatically, the other poems are eliminated from the canon.

Southall’s case was not very well answered in Kenneth Muir and Patricia Thomson, eds., Collected Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt (1969). The argument is conducted along these lines: “Everyone would allow that the twelve Egerton poems in the poet’s handwriting, and six others with corrections in his hand, are authentically his. Nearly everyone accepts Wyatt’s authorship of the seventy-two poems which have ‘Wyat’ or ‘Tho’ in the margin, and it is reasonably certain that twenty-four other poems in E, not so authenticated, are his” (p. xix). Scholarly questions should not be settled by a simple appeal to what is claimed to be a majority opinion; and the editors are hardly persuasive when they merely assert—without reference to fact and without demonstration—that poems which are not “authenticated” must nevertheless be Wyatt’s.

When I prepared my edition, I was more sympathetic, in some respects, to Southall’s position, saying that if the “Tho” ascriptions (as I thought they were) “are to be trusted, the authorial status of the remaining poems is somewhat ambiguous” (p. xxii). The reservation which I had against accepting E as a collection of Wyatt poems may be expressed like this: if the person entering the “Tho” signs knew which poems were Wyatt’s, surely all the poems in the manuscript, if they were Wyatt’s, would be so ascribed, and if they are not we must presumably conclude that the poems left unascribed were not his. (I add that at that stage I was uncertain whether “Tho” signs had been added to the poems by a member of the Wyatt family, as Southall supposed, or by the poet himself.)

There is an answer to this kind of reasoning provided by Richard Harrier, whose The Canon of Sir Thomas Wyatt’s Poetry (1975) appeared at almost the same time as my edition, and whose work was quite independent. Harrier argues that “Tho” is “Wyatt’s own signature, and not a sign of authorship but of approval for work done by the scribe” (p. 11). That assumption was challenged, however, by Wyatt’s most recent editor, Ronald Rehholz, in Sir Thomas Wyatt: The Complete Poems (1978). Rehholz comments that “a comparison of the hand responsible for the additions of ‘Tho’ in the margin with the ‘Th’ in Wyatt’s book hand on, for example, folios 87 and 90, leaves me unconvinced that ‘Tho’ is Wyatt’s signature” (p. 16). Folios 87 and 90,

6. This Harmondsworth: Penguin edition was reprinted by Yale UP (New Haven) in 1981.
however, provide no proper basis for judgement. They offer poetic material
(part of the Penitential Psalms, written out in Wyatt’s hand); but “Tho” is
not the same as “Tho” and the sign “Tho” should be considered in its proper
context, that is, when used in a signature at the end of letters. An excellent
example of “Tho” which is fully comparable with, and identical to, many of
the “Tho” signs in E, can be found at the end of one of Wyatt’s letters pro-
duced in facsimile facing page 135 of volume 1 of A. K. Foxwell’s edition
The Poems of Str Thomas Wiat (2 vols., 1913). I know from private com-
munications that Professor Southall, too, has come to the conclusion that the
“Tho” signs are in Wyatt’s hand, and both of us agree with Harrier on this
matter.

But, while Rebholz does not believe, or at least is not convinced, that
Wyatt was responsible for the “Tho” signs, he does attach importance to
them as evidence of Wyatt’s authorship. Indeed, he is strongly inclined to
think that poems in E which are not there attributed to Wyatt are not his:
“. . . presence in a manuscript containing so many poems attributed to Wyatt
but absence of attribution of the poem anywhere combine, in my view, to sug-
gest that he probably did not write the poem . . .” (p. 16). Rebholz also pointed
out that “Venomous thorns that are so sharp and keen,” for example, is ac-
companied by marginal “Tho” but is in Wyatt’s hand, and that therefore,
pace Harrier, in an instance like this the sign cannot be an approval of work
done by a scribe.

Yet I think that Harrier’s assertion, unproven though it is, and seemingly
belied by “Tho” signs accompanying poems in Wyatt’s hand, deserves more
careful consideration, or at least may point in the right direction. Literally,
of course, Rebholz is right in thinking that “Tho” cannot be a sign of approval
of scribal work if a poem which it accompanies is in Wyatt’s hand. But in a
somewhat larger sense, Harrier may still have a point. Wyatt may well have
meant to indicate something like this: “Of all the poems in this manuscript,
these, including the ones in my own hand, are now in principle ready for
copying into yet another manuscript.” I do not mean that he considered the
“Tho” poems as necessarily perfect, but I do think that he was sufficiently
satisfied with them to wish to see them copied again. As I pointed out before,
I believe that E had originally been intended to be a fair copy of Wyatt’s
foul papers. When the original intention failed, and after considerable re-
vision of a number of poems in E, Wyatt decided that a fresh copy should be
made of the poems which he marked “Tho.” “Tho” was thus a sign to a
scribe (we do not know which one) to the effect of “these you may proceed to
copy elsewhere.”

It will be clear that I do not consider it likely that “Tho” was inserted in
the manuscript by Wyatt to indicate that he was the author of the “Tho”
poems but no others. For one thing, such an indication, by the author him-
self, would be highly unusual at the time. As Tottel appropriately pointed
out in his preface to the first edition of the miscellany, such verse as Wyatt’s
and Surrey’s had been denied to the public by “the ungentle hoarders up of

7. Foxwell’s text was reprinted by Russell (New York) in 1964.
such treasure.” The hoarders are not necessarily the poets themselves, but it is obvious that it had not been the inclination of poets like Wyatt to publish their verses. Therefore, it would have been in all probability an anachronism for Wyatt to add “Tho” to his poems with the intention of saying to posterity: “these, and no others in this manuscript, are mine.”

The whole direction of my argument so far, with respect to the nature and make-up of E in general, has been that E is a Wyatt manuscript. I believe that this is indicated by such things as the following: the fact that the volume was no doubt already bound when Wyatt started using it; the likelihood that the fact that in addition to Wyatt’s hand we only find those of secretaries implies that those secretaries worked under his instruction, so that E is not an anthology of poems by various poets; the fact that the manuscript increasingly became Wyatt’s own notebook; the presence of many corrections by Wyatt.

But, despite these factors (which I find cumulatively compelling), it perhaps still remains just possible that “Tho” was used to say: “these poems are mine, Wyatt’s, as distinct from the others which are not.” Therefore, I shall survey some of the other reasons for believing that E was designed to be a manuscript containing Wyatt’s poems, not those of other poets.

In what follows, I refer to the poems as they occur in Harrier's book.8

We are lucky enough to have a number of poems which are—exceptionally for a sixteenth-century poet—in Wyatt’s hand: 76, 77, 82, 83, 101, 102, 104–108, 110–123. Several of these, particularly towards the end, are full of revisions by the poet. It is a logical assumption, not only that these poems are Wyatt’s, but that revisions became a more prominent feature as the thought of producing a fine copy of foul papers was abandoned; at first, particularly, Wyatt may well have copied from his own foul papers. But, although poem 77, which is very neat, may well lend support to this idea, poem 76, the first poem entered by Wyatt, was substantially revised by him. It is thus possible—although not certain—that he composed all of the poems in his own hand directly into E. At any rate, there is no reason for doubting his authorship.

Several poems which are not otherwise in Wyatt’s hand were corrected by him: 42, 44, 45, 46, 51, 53, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 61, 63, 64, 65, 68, 69, perhaps 84, 86, 88, 90–93, 100, 103. Wyatt’s changes are intelligent and intelligible, as well as quite consistent with his overall poetic practice in these poems,9 and I see no reason for believing that he was correcting someone else’s work. Many of the poems corrected by Wyatt are also marked “Tho,” but there is no

8. The reason for this is that Harrier is the only modern scholar to print the E poems in the order of the manuscript. The numbers which follow are therefore Harrier’s, though the first lines (modernized) remain those of my edition. Readers who have no access to Harrier may wish to know that numbers in Harrier’s edition (arabic) correspond to those in mine (roman) as follows: 1–74=I–LXXIV; 75–CV; 76–77=LXXV–LXXVI; 78–CVI; 79–85=LXXVII–LXXXIII; 86=CVII; 87–89=LXXXIV–LXXXVI; 90–92=LXXXVII; 93–109=LXXXVIII–CIII; 110–123=CIV; 124=CIV.

9. I discuss the nature of his revisions in my article “Rhetoric and Revision in Wyatt’s Poems,” AUMLA 31 (May 1969), 63–75.
complete correlation. I do not think that Wyatt considered it necessary to indicate that the changes were his, as distinct from someone else's, or that his alterations were confined to his own poems. Presumably no such differentiation was necessary as all the poems in question were his anyway, so that no misunderstanding could arise. It is true that Grimald, too, tampered with some of the poems, but his revisions were of quite a different nature, and, being much later, can be seen as “editorial.”

The following are marked “Tho”: 1, 10, 13, 16, 19, 23, 27, 33–39, 42, 44–54, 57–61, 63–70, 72–74, 76, 77, 79, 82–84, 87–93, 95, 97, 98, 101, 103. As I said before, “Tho” is not primarily meant to be a sign of authorship, but we may take it that an effect of its presence is that it confirms to us, in a later age, that a poem is Wyatt’s.

By contrast with “Tho,” “Wyat” was no doubt meant to be an attribution of authorship, and can thus be properly viewed as an ascription. However, pace Southall, “Wyat” was not entered by Grimald, nor were the signs seen, leave alone “tacitly authorized,” by the poet. As Harrier says (p. 12), the “Wyat” signs were inserted by the person who provided the “Answer” to Wyatt’s “Madame, without many words” (poem 34). The nature of the hand leads me to believe that both the poem and the “Wyat” signs were added to E well after Wyatt’s death. I suggest that the person responsible had independent knowledge of Wyatt’s poetry enabling him, or her (the writer of the “Answer” may well have been a woman), to assign poems to Wyatt with confidence. Probably the person did not know that all the Wyatt poems were his, or else “Wyat” would have been added wherever “Tho” does not occur; but this is not the case. Presumably the person did know that the poems marked “Tho” were Wyatt’s, as no “Wyat” signs were added to poems already marked “Tho.” These attributions, then, seem entirely reliable within the limits of the writer’s knowledge, and were no doubt based on considerable familiarity with Wyatt and his work. The “Wyat” ascriptions accompany 7, 9, 12, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20–22, 24–26, 28–32, 55, and 56.

Some of the poems are ascribed to Wyatt in sixteenth-century manuscripts. The most important of these is Devonshire, which attributes the following E poems to Wyatt: 39, 45, 46, 51, 52, 56, 59, 66, 73. Harleian MS 78 (British Library) ascribes to Wyatt poems 59, 68, 77, and 109. Someone has signed poem 101 “W” in the so-called Blage MS (Trinity College, Dublin). It must be admitted that these manuscript attributions have not yet been studied adequately, but no reasons have been advanced why, in any general way, we should distrust them. Most likely Wyatt’s (near-)contemporaries genuinely wished to distinguish between his poems and the work of other poets; there is no evidence that early readers had any particular desire to claim for Wyatt poems which were not his. It also seems probable that they knew which poems he had written and which he had not, and unless we can find evidence to the contrary we cannot ignore this early testimony.

Similar considerations must hold good for attributions in printed books. Of these, the ones which are early and which matter are the first edition of the Penitential Psalms (110–123 in Harrier), which was printed, with Wyatt’s
name on the title-page, in 1549, and Richard Tottel’s *Songs and Sonettes (1557)*. In Tottel’s miscellany, considerable care was obviously taken to include poems known to be Wyatt’s and Surrey’s and to keep these apart from Grimaldi’s and, even more significantly, from the contributions by a number of “Uncertain authors.” So punctilious an attitude was adopted to the question of authorship that in the second edition (July 1557) a poem which in the first edition (June) had been printed as Wyatt’s was transferred to the section of anonymous poems.

Tottel’s book thus provides important further evidence of Wyatt’s authorship. Not all of the E poems occur in Tottel; also, Tottel includes as Wyatt’s a number of poems which are not found in E, but which either are unique to Tottel or else can be found in other authoritative sixteenth-century sources as well. However, the overlap between E and Tottel is considerable, and the following E poems are printed, and attributed to Wyatt, in Tottel’s anthology: 1–4, 8–14, 16, 20–25, 28–34, 37, 42, 44, 46–50, 52–54, 56, 59–61, 64–66, 68, 75–78, 81–83, 86, 96, 98, 101, 103–107, 109, 124.

In their massiveness, these facts surely establish Wyatt as the author of the poems in E. If all these facts are to be relied upon, hardly any of the poems in E remain unaccounted for: they are either in Wyatt’s hand, or corrected by him, or (if for the moment we regard “Tho” as an “ascription”) are attributed to Wyatt either in E or in other (good and early) sixteenth-century sources.

More importantly, if the facts are presented in this way, it becomes very difficult to maintain that “Tho” is merely to be interpreted as a sign of authorship according to which all poems not marked “Tho” would have to be excluded. Admittedly, those who see “Tho” in such terms usually would also accept as Wyatt’s the poems in Wyatt’s hand or corrected by him, as well as the ones marked “Wyat.” But there are difficulties even about this position. For example, if the “Tho” signs were inserted by Wyatt himself, and the “Wyat” ascriptions by someone else after his death, the latter category would be without value if “Tho” is to be seen as a mark of authorship, for all the poems not signed “Tho” by the poet himself would not be Wyatt’s, including all of the “Wyat” poems, as the “Wyat” signs nowhere overlap with the “Tho” ones. Furthermore, if “Tho” was a sign of authorship and not intended to be something else, why did Wyatt append it to some of his poems, and not to others? Of the poems in Wyatt’s hand, 76, 77, 82, 83 and 101 do have “Tho,” but 102, 104–108, and 110–124 are “unsigned.” But no one who


11. It would also be possible to argue for Wyatt’s authorship on the basis of verse forms used (e.g. sonnets, stanzas, etc.), although the fact that it is known to have introduced them in England does not preclude the possibility that other poets may have imitated him so successfully that we can now no longer keep his work apart. A more promising approach, I feel, is to study all the references to autobiographical events in the poems; I do this—as part of my argument—in a separate paper “Are Wyatt’s Poems in Egerton MS. 2711 in Chronological Order?” which I hope to publish soon.
has seriously studied the Penitential Psalms (110–123) in E doubts that those poems are Wyatt's. They are not only in the poet's hand, but heavily revised by him; his search for rhyme-words, obvious in the manuscript when we consider what he first wrote and subsequently preferred, shows that he composed the Psalms directly into E. Additional confirmation that they are his is provided by the 1549 edition which prints his name on the title-page. There must, therefore, be other reasons why "Tho" accompanies some of the poems in Wyatt's hand and not others. We are forced to conclude that, although accidentally the presence of "Tho" indicates Wyatt's authorship, its absence does not establish that a poem is not Wyatt's.

Why, then, did Wyatt mark some of the poems which he entered with the sign "Tho" while he left others without it?

It is important to realize that the distribution of the marks is not arbitrary. The group of poems marked "Tho" precedes the other one. The very first two of the "Tho" poems in Wyatt's hand, "Desire, alas, my master and my foe" (76) and "Venomous thorns that are so sharp and keen" (77), are also the first of any of the poems in his hand. They are short, and, as they stand in E, I cannot find fault with them. Wyatt probably found them satisfactory enough to "approve" them for further copying by adding "Tho." Poems 82, "In doubtful breast, whilst motherly pity," and 83, "Of Carthage he, that worthy warrior," were probably judged similarly by Wyatt, and they do indeed seem completed poems in E. The same reasoning applies to "From these high hills as when a spring doth fall" (101).

We must note that all of these poems are short, as well as, it seems, in all senses complete. Are the poems not marked "Tho" either long or somehow incomplete or both?

Interestingly, the next poem in Wyatt's hand, "Prove whether I do change, my dear" (102), is only four lines, but stops in the middle of the fourth line; it has to be regarded as an incomplete fragment, ending with "And if ye find..." It would have been very surprising if Wyatt had attached "Tho" to these lines, and I am not surprised that he has not: the poem was obviously not yet ready for further copying.

The next poem in E, "If waker care, if sudden pale colour" (102), was not entered by Wyatt, but is the last to bear "Tho." After this, all the remaining poems are in his hand, but not a single one is accompanied by "Tho." As we have seen, the evidence so far fits the theory that Wyatt added "Tho" to poems in his hand if he considered them satisfactorily completed, but not if he did not. All of the "Tho" poems in his hand are, moreover, short. The one short poem not marked "Tho" is a fragment.

At first glance, the remaining poems seem to justify an affirmative answer to the question asked above. "So feeble is the thread that doth the burden stay" (104) is a long poem. So are, if viewed as a group, the Penitential Psalms (110–123), starting with "Love to give law unto his subject hearts," and

12. Except for "Vulcan begot me, Minerva me taught" (109) discussed before, and other material entered after Wyatt's death which scholars have not claimed for him and which is easily distinguished from his work.
“When Dido feasted first the wandering Trojan knight” (124), which, moreover, is incomplete—no doubt because Wyatt did not live to complete it (it is the last poem by him in E).

There would appear to be a difficulty, however, about some of the other poems. Admittedly, “From thought to thought, from hill to hill love doth me lead” (108), is generally regarded as a fragment. It consists of only two lines, and, although they make sense on their own, the “poem” would be an unusually incomplete translation of a longer Petrarch poem (“Di pensier in pensier, di monte in monte”). On the other hand, “Tagus farewell, that westward with thy streams” (105) and “Of purpose Love chose first for to be blind” (106) are both short poems and, I feel, are textually perfect. Why, then, are they without “Tho”?

I think that the answer must be that we are to view the last poems entered by Wyatt, from poem 104 on, as a group, for the purpose of our investigation. The last poem which he marked “Tho” was 103: after this, we find a number of poems which at least in some instances were incomplete in a way immediately obvious to us now, and which, in the case of the long poems at any rate, it would be logical for us to assume the poet may well have wished to do further work on. (The long poems in Wyatt’s hand are usually those he intensively revised in E, although the same is true of some shorter ones.) An additional reason for considering these last poems as a group is that together they conclude the manuscript as “unsigned” work after poem 103. As the last poem in E is incomplete, it is probable that Wyatt never got around to checking (and completing) poems following 103 because his sudden death prevented him from doing so. This is not to say that he would necessarily have changed every poem after 103 if he had found time, but to argue that there are good reasons why he ceased adding “Tho” to his poems after the last one which he had checked (and, indeed, corrected).

I am not suggesting that all of the poems in Wyatt’s hand which he failed to mark “Tho” were necessarily imperfect when he left them, nor even that he had thoroughly checked—or would eventually have found perfect—the poems to which he did attach “Tho.” But I do think we find an important correlation. Whatever qualifications we must accept, it remains a fact that poems which he marked “Tho” appear to need no further revision, while the obviously imperfect ones were not provided with “Tho.” This, at least, applies to poems in his own hand.

Let us now consider poems which were not entered by Wyatt but corrected by him, to see whether there is any significant pattern which we can detect when we relate these to “Tho” marks. Interestingly, the poems corrected by Wyatt are all, with a very few exceptions, also marked “Tho.” The following belong to both categories: 42, 44–46, 51, 53, 54, 57, 59–61, 63, 64, 66, 68, 69, 84 (if corrected by Wyatt), 86, 88, 90–92, 93, 100, 103. By contrast, these are poems corrected by Wyatt (not otherwise in his hand) which are not marked “Tho”: 56, 86, and 100. I suggest that in the vast majority of cases Wyatt was contented enough with his corrections to indicate his approval of the poems as they stood by supplying “Tho”; but concerning three poems
he must either have felt that he had yet more work to do, or he must have been forgetful. It will be of some importance to consider those three poems.

It is necessary to study the poems within their context. Thus, we must be aware that poem 56 occurs amongst several poems which are both corrected by Wyatt and marked "Tho" by him. It would seem that he must have studied poems immediately before and after 56 with some care, and presumably he found this poem defective when he withheld "Tho" from it. But 56 is not the only poem without "Tho" in its immediate context: poems 54 and 57 have "Tho," but 55 is without it, and if there was a reason why Wyatt did not provide 56 with "Tho," there must also have been a reason why he did not supply it in the case of 55.

In the event, it is very easy to see why Wyatt found 55 inadequate, the poem beginning "Ah, Robin." All editors have found the poem in E gravely deficient, and surely Wyatt could see what they did. A whole stanza is missing from the E version, and as each stanza is in turn spoken by "Le Plaintiff" and someone providing the "Response," the poem as it stands is quite nonsensical and incomplete. I would conjecture that Wyatt was aware of the deficiency, but did not want (or was unable) to supply the missing stanza without the manuscript from which the scribe had been copying. No. 56 was partly revised by Wyatt, but apparently not enough to seem adequate to him. It is difficult to decide what Wyatt may have disliked about the poem in its E version. However, the fact that I cannot see an obvious shortcoming in the text is no reason for supposing that there was nothing to displease Wyatt, or at least to make him decide that he might come back to the poem later. Clearly, the fact that No. 55 is so patently unsatisfactory makes it more probable that Wyatt left No. 56 intentionally without "Tho" than that he forgot to put the sign there, although the latter possibility cannot be excluded.

In any case, poems 86 and 100 were almost certainly left "unsigned" deliberately, although Wyatt corrected them a little. Both poems are long ones, and a careful craftsman like Wyatt would not lightly have attached his approval to them. The text of the first ("A spending hand that alway poureth out") would to us probably not have seemed very bad when Wyatt decided against marking it "Tho," but it is demonstrably not perfect even after he corrected it. In line 37 the rhyme demands the equivalent of modern "nowadays," but the sixteenth-century scribe wrote "nowaday se" or "nowaday so." We should remember, moreover, that Wyatt may well have corrected obvious scribal errors but that this does not imply that he might not have revised the poem at a later stage; we know from his practice of revising poems in his own hand that at times he rejected what would to us have seemed perfectly adequate. Thus a poem copied out by a scribe may look completely acceptable to us while Wyatt may have left it "unsigned" because he intended to revise it afterwards. However, poem 100 is a very straightforward case of a composition surviving in an incomplete and bad text, allowing even for the fact that a leaf is missing now. For example, in line 16 E's "Upright all" makes no sense whatever and needs to be emended to "Bright as." It is difficult to believe that Wyatt would have sanctioned so
blatant an error, and the absence of his “Tho,” combined with the fact that he did revise the poem elsewhere, no doubt indicates that he did not sanction it. But he seems to have been cautious of approving longer poems in any case: No. 78 (“My mother’s maids, when they did sew and spin”) is another example of a long poem which Wyatt did not ascribe “Tho.”

We may find ourselves somewhat surprised to discover errors in poems which Wyatt did mark “Tho.” But I think we can come to terms with this if we consider the various likely factors involved. The first poem in E, “Behold, Love, thy power how she despiseth” (1), has, at the end of line 14, the surprising manuscript form “entreadh.” In view of the fact that, given the rhyme scheme of the poem, the word which this is meant to rhyme with is “breaketh” (line 11), one would have expected “entreateth.” One must assume that Wyatt either did not bother about such minor points as he read the poem through but wished to make sure that the poem would get copied out again (not precluding the possibility of revision then), or that he overlooked some rather unimportant errors. The latter is not as unlikely as it sounds at first. This particular poem, for example, is not corrected at all, and Wyatt may have read it through rather quickly. He was not, moreover—to put it mildly—the best proofreader of his own poems, even though he was given to the habit of revising his work. In my edition I list places where the Penitential Psalms, for example, are unambiguously in need of emendation, despite Wyatt’s prolonged work on these poems, composing them directly into E and extensively revising them. (Cf. 110-123 in Harrier; CVIII and p. 248 in Daalder.) When Wyatt corrected poems entered by the scribes, he at times corrected them imperfectly even when he did check them. An example is “Lo what it is to love!” (90). Wyatt did correct this, but in line 5 he left scribal “the grownd is greiff” where the Blage MS, no doubt correctly, has “growndyd.” Another word which Wyatt failed to correct was MS “have” in line 28, where the syntax demands “hath.” Obviously, then, Wyatt did leave mistakes here and there, but that fact cannot be used to argue that “Tho” was a sign of authorship, and that our assumption of its function is unsound.

Conversely, it is interesting to consider poems not marked “Tho.” As we do not know just how much time Wyatt had to look in detail at all of the poems copied out by the scribes, we should not immediately expect them all to be glaringly deficient. There is the further complicating factor that some of these poems may originally have had “Tho” but are now without it because a leaf was lost or torn: this certainly happened in some instances, and I suspect that “In eternum I was once determed” (71), half of which was lost when the leaf on which it was written suffered tearing, once had marginal “Tho” like the poems immediately before or after. On the other hand, we have also seen that there are poems so deficient that one would not expect “Tho” beside them. It is useful to assemble some of the most telling evidence here. Poem 102 is a fragment of two lines, and of course Wyatt did not add “Tho,” although the poem is in his hand. No. 55, which was not marked “Tho,” is seriously incomplete as a result of a scribal omission. No. 100 con-
tains at least one very serious error. No. 32 is obviously deficient in that—as a gap in E indicates—line 4 is quite incomplete. No. 48, which occurs between two poems marked “Tho,” is not incomplete, but contains an absurd error which Wyatt would not have accepted. As the version stands in E (unmodernized), the speaker wishes the lady to make some “hope appere” of “stedfastnes remedy” (line 28). Here “stedfastnes” (noun instead of adjective) is both nonsensical and unmetrical in an otherwise metrically regular poem. Thus, we readily find quite defective poems which, according to our expectation, Wyatt did not approve with “Tho.”

We can safely conclude, then, that “Tho” was inserted by Wyatt to indicate to a scribe that the poems so marked were in principle ready for copying into another manuscript. (We would hardly be justified in believing that the “Tho” poems were ready, or intended, to be printed.) E had been planned to be a fair album of Wyatt’s poems, but when that aim was not achieved Wyatt decided that a number of poems, at least, which—often after correction—were in reasonable shape, should be copied out again. It may well be that the manuscript which was to contain the “Tho” poems was to be the kind of fair album that E had failed to become, but more likely it was merely meant to be an improvement on the increasingly untidy Egerton MS, which in the course of time had come to contain more and more corrections, and heavily revised poems in the poet’s own hand. The poems which Wyatt marked “Tho” are not always perfect as they stand in E, even after correction and revision, and we need not assume that Wyatt would not again have revised the poems if they had been copied into another volume. On the other hand, as “Tho” implies approval and as the “Tho” poems are on the whole textually satisfactory, editors should obviously be very cautious about “emending” the “Tho” poems in E, and this is one important reason for being clear about the function of the “Tho” marks. Rebholz, for example, is much too eager to interfere with these (and other) poems in E.

The other important reason is that we must distinguish between “ascriptions” such as the “Wyat” signs and these “Tho” marks. Scholars like Southall and Rebholz have been wrong to confuse the two categories. If viewed as a whole, E is demonstrably a Wyatt manuscript, not a miscellany like the Devonshire MS, and it was always meant to contain only Wyatt’s work while the author had control over it. At first, scribes were used to provide a clean copy of the poet’s foul papers, but afterwards the poet more and more concerned himself with E directly, adding poems in his own hand, revising these, and correcting scribal errors. The assumption that “Tho” indicated authorship and that therefore poems not marked “Tho” are not Wyatt’s cannot be sustained as reasonable when all the relevant evidence is considered. It so happens that the “Tho” signs confirm to us that the poems are Wyatt’s; however, the marks were not intended to signal that message to us, but a very different one to a sixteenth-century scribe.