The episode contributes to the depiction of Byrhtnoth as a heroic figure. Details such as the size and wide social range of the fyrd and the hostage's choosing to fight with the Saxons attest Byrhtnoth's magnetism. His instructions to the fyrd bespeak his responsibility as a leader. Similarly, the youth's decision to send away the hawk illustrates Byrhtnoth's power to inspire appropriate action.

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NOTES

Wyatt's DEFAMED GUILTINESS BY SILENCE UNKEPT

In the most recent edition of Wyatt's poetry,1 R.A. Rebholz prints poem CCXXVII as follows:

Defamed guiltiness by silence unkept,
My name all slanderous, my fault detect;
Guilty, I grant that I have done amiss.
Will I never do so again, forgive me this.

Betrayed by trust and so beguiled,
By promise unjust my name defiled;
Wherefore I grant that I have done amiss.
Will I never do so again, forgive me this.

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It becomes plain that Rebholz's punctuation makes nonsense of the syntax. I quote his version of the last stanza again, this time with insertion of while for his will.

Accept mine excuse for this offence
And spare not to refuse me your presence.
Unless ye perceive ye do refrain
From doing amiss, while I live again.

It will be obvious that the last "sentence" is not a sentence and can only assume meaning if we delete the full stop after "presence": the poet is saying that the lady should not spare to refuse him her presence unless she perceives that she refrains from doing amiss again as long as he lives.

Thus we come to repunctuate the poem's last stanza as follows:

Accept mine excuse for this offence
And spare not to refuse me your presence,
Unless ye perceive ye do refrain
From doing amiss, while I live, again.

This is exactly how I had punctuated the poem in 1975, and it is not at all clear why Rebholz rejected my punctuation when he came to edit the poem, as well as my (admittedly all too brief) comment on lines 11-12: "i.e., 'unless you abstain from doing further wrong,' with the implication, 'if you continue to refuse me your presence I will assume that you have done amiss.'"

Apart from my point about the meaning of manuscript wyle, there is another good reason why we should interpret the end of the poem in this manner. At the end of stanza one, the poet says: "Shall I never do so again, forgive me this." In other words: "If I shall never do wrong again (which I promise, having done wrong now), please forgive me." The end of stanza two is similar. The significance of Wyatt's structural parallels (often parallels with a difference) should never escape us: he first innocuously pretends that it is he who has done wrong, and then, in the third stanza, makes obvious, through an ironic twist, that (as so often in his poems) it is the lady who has been unjust.

We must pay particularly close attention to Wyatt's handling of the language in this last stanza. Most commonly, we would expect the poet to say something like "do not refuse me your presence." In saying instead, "spare not to refuse me your presence," he not only says "if you continue to refuse me your presence I can only conclude that you have continued to do wrong to me," but also "please stay out of my sight until you yourself become aware of your not doing wrong to me again for the rest of my life"—and since such awareness is unlikely to come to pass, the poet is politely saying goodbye to the lady as an inveterate wrong-doer.

We cannot, of course, know exactly in what respect the lady has done "amiss" in a way which exceeds the speaker's own wrong-doing as alluded to in stanzas one and two. Most likely, however, her wrong is that she refuses the speaker her presence in retaliation for his wrong, which consisted merely of giving away "his mistress' name to a friend under pledge of secrecy" (Muir and Thomson, referring to lines 5-6). There may be the further implication that it is not only the friend who has betrayed the speaker's trust, but that the lady herself has done so.
in not staying loyal to him. Wyatt's poems are full of references to women who have betrayed the trust he had shown by beguiling him, and whose promises are "unjust" because they are not kept (and not intended to be kept).

There are other difficulties with Rebholz's punctuation. For example, his semicolon after line two suggests that "Defamed guiltiness by silence unkept, / My name all slanderous, my fault detect" can stand by itself—but it cannot, as there would be a verb lacking. Obviously, we must repunctuate in some such way as I attempted in 1975:

Defamed guiltiness, by silence unkept,
My name all slanderous, my fault detect
(Guilty: I grant that I have done amiss),
Shall I never do so again, forgive me this.

We may paraphrase: "Now that my guilt is given a bad reputation, because my friend did not keep silent, and now that my name is in disgrace, my fault being out in the open (I am guilty, and do not deny it), if I shall never do the same thing again, please forgive me."

Similarly, the structure of stanza two is as follows:

Betrayed by trust, and so beguiled,
By promise unjust my name defiled
(Wherefore I grant that I have done amiss),
Will I never do so again, forgive me this.

The sense here is: "Now that the friend whom I trusted to keep a secret has betrayed me and thus deceived me, and now that my name has been defiled because he broke his unreliable promise (which makes it impossible for me to deny my guilt), if I shall never do the same thing again, please forgive me."

It is one of the major ironies of the poem that while no doubt the speaker should not have revealed his mistress' name, it is his name which has been brought into public disrepute, not hers—which no doubt deserved to be. The unreliable friend, too, remains anonymous.

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NOTES

Tourneur's THE REVENGER'S TRAGEDY II.ii.216-18.

When, in the second act of The Revenger's Tragedy, Lussurioso goes by night to his stepmother's chamber, he expects to take her in incestuous adultery with Spurio, his bastard brother, and so be given an excuse for killing them both. Instead, he comes close to killing his father. The old Duke, convinced that Lussurioso intends parricide and terrified by the imminence of death, pleads for an opportunity to repent:

Oh take me not in sleepe, I haue great sins, I must haue daies,
Nay months decere sonne, with penitential heaues,
To lift 'em out, and not to die vncleere. 1

To a Jacobean audience, the Duke's unprincipled use of religion as a device to buy time would in itself have been evidence of villainy. To the cognoscenti in the playhouse, however, the nature of the Duke's plea would have seemed more damning than the device itself. For in begging for "daies, / Nay months" of "penitential heaues" to "lif . . . out" his sins, the old man is using the terminology of Roman Catholic "works" theology rather than the Protestant language of "faith."

Justification by faith was a fundamental tenet of the reformers, common to all the Protestant groups. The Church of England's position was clearly spelt out in the Eleventh of the Thirty-Nine Articles, which states that

We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by faith alone is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification.2

Though Church of England theologians were ready enough to dispute (often acrimoniously) the many questions arising out of the mysteries of grace and election, they never queried the prevenient role of grace in providing justifying faith, or did other than denounce as "papist" the view that "man doth make himself eligible for the kingdom of heaven by his own good works and merits." Far from accepting that a sinner could struggle successfully towards salvation through a programme of spiritual exercises, they believed that through God's grace regeneration was the work of but a moment and that, as the great Puritan divine William Perkins said,

a man is euen at that instant already entered into the kingdome of heauen, when the Lord, that good husbandman, hath cast but some little portion of faith or repentance into the ground of the heart, yea though it be but as one graine of mustard seede.4

It is one of the subtler touches in a play suffused with subtleties, that a man by rank entitled, incongruously, to be called "Your Grace," should be shown to possess what was, to the Jacobean Protestant, a thoroughly unjustified belief in