

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



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Volume 45, numéro 2, printemps 2022

Special issue: Interpoetics in Renaissance Poetry
Numéro spécial : Interpoétique dans la poésie de la Renaissance

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1094816ar>
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v45i2.39759>

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Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)
2293-7374 (numérique)

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Citer cet article

Porter, D. (2022). Navigating Sacred Languages: Paraphrasing the Psalms in Renaissance Scotland. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 45(2), 83–104. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v45i2.39759>

Résumé de l'article

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Navigating Sacred Languages: Paraphrasing the Psalms in Renaissance Scotland*

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Translations and paraphrases of the Biblical psalms were popular throughout early modern Europe. The Latin poetic paraphrase of Psalm 51 by George Buchanan is examined alongside the Scots-language translation of Psalm 2 by Alexander Montgomerie to illustrate some of the complexities of the Renaissance interplay between Latin and vernacular translation, poetics, confession, and politics. Both poets engage with contemporary debates over the meaning of the Biblical texts, and both display a high degree of poetic and rhetorical sophistication in transforming the psalms according to their own interpretative commitments. Each demonstrates close attention towards and care for correct interpretation, and each shows a high degree of freedom in adapting and recreating the polysemous meanings of the original while also applying new meanings to serve their own liturgical, spiritual, and poetic purposes.

Les traductions et paraphrases des Psaumes furent populaires dans l'Europe de la première modernité. La paraphrase latine du Psaume 51 par George Buchanan et la traduction en scots du Psaume 2 par Alexander Montgomerie font l'objet d'une étude commune afin de mettre en lumière certaines particularités de l'interaction complexe entre traduction en latin et en langue vernaculaire, poétique, confession et politique à la Renaissance. Ces deux poètes prennent part aux débats contemporains sur l'exégèse des textes bibliques et font tous deux preuve d'un haut niveau de sophistication poétique et rhétorique dans la transformation des psaumes, en fonction de leurs propres postures interprétatives. Chacun d'entre eux manifeste une attention et un souci tout particuliers pour l'interprétation juste, et chacun adapte et rend les significations polysémiques du texte original avec beaucoup de liberté, tout en dégagant de nouvelles significations servant ses propres objectifs liturgiques, spirituels et poétiques.

An introduction to psalm paraphrases and translations

Translations and paraphrases of the Biblical psalms, written both in Latin and in vernacular languages, were popular throughout early modern Europe, including Scotland.¹ There, these psalm adaptations enjoyed a particular renaissance under the influence of Calvinism after the Scottish

* This article is based on work I submitted for my post-doctoral project between 2017 and 2020 at Shanghai Jiao Tong University.

1. On this topic, first see Green, "Poetic Psalm Paraphrases." There is also still useful information in Gaertner, "Latin Verse Translations," and Vaganay, "Traductions du Psautier." Although exhaustive in other respects, Timothy Duguid's *Metrical Psalmody* only mentions Buchanan's and Montgomerie's psalms in

Reformation Parliament approved a Protestant confession of faith in 1560.² Prior to the Reformation, the laity did not sing as part of the liturgy, which was performed by clerics, monks and nuns, or professional choristers. The Protestant, especially Calvinist, need for music in worship created a demand for metrical psalters, most notably leading to the *Genevan Psalter*, first issued under John Calvin's direction in 1539. Some of the first attempts at producing Scots translations of the psalms dating from the early 1560s can be found in the Bannatyne manuscript.³ The first complete Scots-language psalter appeared in print in 1564 or 1565, although this edition was heavily influenced by and included versions of the psalms from an earlier 1562 English edition by Thomas Sternhold and John Hopkins.⁴

The interpretation of the psalms was often not only related directly to the original Hebrew but was also influenced by the ancient Greek Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate. Many poets (whether or not they could read Hebrew and Greek) also relied upon Latin versions, either as cribs for glossing the original text, or, as was often the case with the Vulgate version, as sacred texts in and of themselves. The interplay between contemporary theological and poetic concerns and the translation of ancient texts in the three sacred languages makes Renaissance versions of the psalms a useful source for understanding contemporaneous approaches to language and translation.⁵ This article examines George Buchanan's Latin *Psalm Paraphrase 51* and Alexander Montgomerie's Scots translation of Psalm 2 alongside Latin versions of the same texts, and with some consideration of the Hebrew and Greek versions. Buchanan wrote

passing. For early modern French psalm paraphrases, see Ferrer and Mantero, *Les paraphrases bibliques*. Hood, "Metrical Psalm-Singing," adds little here.

2. Mullan, *Narratives of the Religious Self*, 280–81. Also see Elliott, "Some Helpes," 264–75. More background can be found in Duguid, *Metrical Psalmody*; Millar, *Four Centuries*.

3. Reid-Baxter, "Metrical Psalmody."

4. Green, *Print and Protestantism*, 506.

5. Cf. "Une chose est sûre: la différence de leurs choix littéraires témoigne de l'esprit de liberté que la Bible insuffle à ses interprètes. D'un paraphraste à l'autre, parmi tous ceux qui se succèdent, se chevauchent, se concurrencent à travers les XVI^e et XVII^e siècles, les solutions changent, les méthodes diffèrent, des formes nouvelles se font jour" (One thing is certain: the differences in their literary choices testify to the spirit of freedom that the Bible inspires in its interpreters. From one paraphrase to another, among all those who follow, overlap, and compete with one another throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the solutions change, the methods differ, and new forms emerge). Jeanneret, "Introduction," 14; my translation.

a complete paraphrase of the Biblical psalms, and although his paraphrase of Psalm 2 might be read alongside Montgomerie's poem, the emphasis here is not on how both poets explore the same material but rather on the unique ways both poets respond to sacred texts and their traditions. The multilingual reception of the psalms in different prose and poetic versions lends itself to interpoetic interpretation through comparative readings. The Catholic Montgomerie's vernacular translation and the Protestant Buchanan's Latin rendition are also offered together as a challenge to overconfident dichotomies regarding the position of vernacular and Latin in early modern religious discourse.

George Buchanan's *Psalm Paraphrase* 51

The works of George Buchanan (1506–82), a pre-eminent historian, playwright, and poet, can be read in a Scottish, French, and European context.⁶ Buchanan studied at the University of Paris in the 1520s and was later a professor there at the Collège Sainte-Barbe. Still later he taught Michel de Montaigne at Bordeaux and was a tutor of the future king James VI and I. Buchanan's political thought influenced Scottish and European Reformation attitudes towards the limitations of the monarchy.⁷ His Latin works were themselves very much influenced by Continental and especially French humanism and circulated throughout the Latin-reading world in addition to his native Scotland. His poetic paraphrase of the Biblical psalms was popular, as over one hundred editions appearing in print attest.⁸ A close reading of one of these psalms reveals some of Buchanan's

6. McFarlane, *Buchanan*, 51–66; Ford, "Scottish Nationalism," 145–55. Cf. the opinion of Holloway: "Although Buchanan himself seemed almost to span the generational gap by writing, publishing, and teaching through both the 1520s, 1530s, and 1540s, as well as through the 1560s and 1570s, he nevertheless belonged more to the older model of humanism as represented by Budé and Erasmus. Melville, on the other hand, was the product of that generation of humanists represented by Joseph Justus Scaliger and the methods of critical scholarship he developed." Holloway, *Andrew Melville*, 25.

7. The reader interested in more about Buchanan has the benefit of an excellent biography (see McFarlane, *Buchanan*), a study of his poetry (see Ford, *George Buchanan*), and a collection of essays on the reception of his political ideas (see Erskine and Mason, *George Buchanan*).

8. McFarlane, *Buchanan*, 247. Much has been written on these poetical paraphrases. My own readings have been indirectly but deeply indebted to McFarlane, "Notes" (mostly reworked into McFarlane, *Buchanan*, 247–86); Ford, "George Buchanan"; Green, "Text"; "Matters of Metre"; "Horace"; "Davidic Psalm"; "Classical Voices"; "European Context"; "Heavens Are Telling"; "Dry Bones"; "Poems"; "George Buchanan et ses psaumes"; and especially Green's introduction to Buchanan, *Poetic Paraphrase*, 13–97.

concerns as a poet and translator, and how these concerns operated in the context of the interpretative traditions of sacred poetics.

Psalm 51 is considered to be one of the penitential psalms.⁹ By tradition, it is said to have been composed by King David as a confession to God after he sinned with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. Verses of this psalm formed standard parts of Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant liturgies, making it a well-known expression of a common devotion to God, though sometimes subject to contested confessional interpretations. In particular, this psalm has been set to music many times and has long had a popular exegetical history as a guidebook for the repented sinner's return to the grace of God.¹⁰ Buchanan's version is set into Sapphic stanzas, a metre traditionally associated with poems about love or wine rather than sacred themes, but its use here reflects the humanist preoccupation with reviving and sacralizing ancient Latin forms and language. Renaissance Latin poets often used Sapphic stanzas in odes written for public occasions, which might have recommended its suitability for use in worship. Aside from the general popularity and importance of this particular psalm, its choice here is a reflection of its significant aesthetic achievement, and an assertion that it deserves to be more widely known in the context of early modern poetry. Buchanan's paraphrase of Psalm 51 begins as follows:

O salus rerum, lacrymis precantum
 Mollibus flecti facilis, rogantem
 Lenis exaudi, scelerumque tetras
 Ablue sordes.
 Usque peccati lave et usque labem,
 Dum repurgatum maculis pudendis
 Purius corpus niteat recocto
 Ignibus auro.
 Nam meam agnosco (pudet heu pigetque)
 Ah miser, labem: vitique foeda
 Mentis obversans oculis imago
 Semper oberrat.
 Unus arcani es mihi testis: unus
 Arbiter verax, temerario ausu

9. Numbered Psalm 50 in the Septuagint and Latin Vulgate.

10. On Jean Servin's (1529–1609) interesting setting, see Porter, "Psalms for King James," 44–47.

Improbas linguas tua iudicantum
 Facta refutas.
 Quippe iam primo scelus usque ab ortu
 Haeret, infectas vitians medullas:
 Deque conceptu genitricis hausi
 Semina labis. (ll. 1–20)¹¹

(O salvation of all things, easily moved by the tender
 Tears of penitents, mercifully heed my prayer:
 Blot out the feculent iniquities of my sins.
 Over and again, wash away the sin of my shame,
 Until my body, cleansed of shameful blemishes,
 Shines brighter than gold, newly forged in flames.
 Wretch that I am, I admit the guilt that shames
 And afflicts me: the foul image of sin hovers
 Before my mind's eye, and ever blocks my way.
 Thou art the sole witness to my secret; alone true
 Judge, Thou checkest the malicious tongues
 Of those who casually dare to judge Thy deeds.
 Sin cleaves to me, now as ever since my birth,
 Corrupting infected marrow; I take in
 The fruit of the fall from my mother's conception.)¹²

These twenty verses in five stanzas translate the text of Psalm 51:1–7.¹³ The text of the Vulgate follows for comparison:

Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam; et secundum multitudinem miserationum tuarum, dele iniquitatem meam. Amplius lava me ab iniquitate mea, et a peccato meo munda me. Quoniam iniquitatem meam ego cognosco, et peccatum meum contra me est

11. Buchanan, *Opera omnia*, 2:58–59. See also Buchanan, *Poetic Paraphrase*, 252–57, which includes an English translation and commentary (561–62). There is also a Latin hypertext edition with another English translation; see Buchanan, *Psalmorum Davidis Paraphrasis Poetica*.

12. My translation.

13. As mentioned previously, this psalm is numbered 50 in the Greek and Vulgate editions, but Buchanan restores the Hebrew numbering in his paraphrases.

semper. Ecce enim in iniquitatibus conceptus sum, et in peccatis concepit me mater mea.¹⁴

Buchanan's paraphrases often replicate the parallelisms of the original Hebrew poetry, even though many of the slightly rephrased repetitions evident in this passage are clearly "unclassical" imports. Buchanan's translation takes the form of a personal supplication rather than an address from King David to the prophet Nathan as indicated in the ancient versions of the texts. This can be read as evidence of a Protestant theological influence on the translation and a spiritual emphasis on a personal relationship with the divine. Buchanan's approach also universalizes the penitential theme of the text and at the same time dehistoricizes the theme of King David's repentance. The act of repentance shifts from David to the individual singer, speaker, or reader of the poem. That is, the poem is paraphrased for devotional use and personal spiritual reflection. The opening epithet *salus rerum* (salvation of [all] things) perhaps comes from the sixth-century Christian hymnodist Venantius Fortunatus.¹⁵ It was popular, especially in the Neo-Latin poetry of the Italian humanists, to refer to the Christian God with epithets such as *tonans* (the thunderer), which originally applied to the pagan god Jupiter, a poetic tradition that Buchanan departs from in preferring epithets with a thoroughly Christian pedigree. Much of the poetry Buchanan read in his youth likely employed this sort of diction, as it was part of an attempt to restore classical Latin usages—albeit this was subject to criticism by highly scrupulous religious readers, who objected in principle to using pagan terminology within the context of Christian worship. Although Buchanan is here imitating a metrical form used by the ancient poets Catullus, Horace, and others to celebrate sensual themes such as sexual conquest, drinking, and merriment, he is careful to employ language suitable to sacred subject matter. Buchanan adds few embellishments to the texts he paraphrases, but one found here is the image of the body reforged in fire shining brighter than gold (ll.

14. Psalm 50:1–7 (*Biblia Sacra*). Cf. Douay–Rheims Bible: "Unto the end, a psalm of David, When Nathan the prophet came to him after he had sinned with Bethsabee. Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy. And according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my iniquity. Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my iniquity, and my sin is always before me. To thee only have I sinned, and have done evil before thee: that thou mayst be justified in thy words and mayst overcome when thou art judged. For behold I was conceived in iniquities; and in sins did my mother conceive me."

15. Hymn 3.9.47; see Fortunatus, *Venanti*, 61.

7–8).¹⁶ This metaphor can be compared with a passage from the Catechetical lectures of Cyril of Jerusalem, a fourth-century Christian theologian:

Let thy feet hasten to the catechisings; receive with earnestness the exorcisms: whether thou be breathed upon or exorcised, the act is to thee salvation. Suppose thou hast gold unwrought and alloyed, mixed with various substances, copper, and tin, and iron, and lead: we seek to have the gold alone; can gold be purified from the foreign substances without fire? Even so without exorcisms the soul cannot be purified; and these exorcisms are divine, having been collected out of the divine Scriptures.¹⁷

This analogy is from the first of twenty-three lectures by St. Cyril to catechumens in Jerusalem as they prepared for baptism. St. Cyril's extended metaphor of God restoring the soul into grace as like a goldsmith purifying metal is itself reformed into a handful of words completing a longer phrase at the end of a poetic stanza. Horace's poetry is notorious for its density and compact use of poetic tropes and mythology, and Buchanan is able to recreate that density with Christian metaphors culled from theological and patristic literature.

George Buchanan's direct knowledge of Hebrew is uncertain, though his biographers report on his consultations on Hebrew literature with the scholar François Vatable (c. 1495–1547, also known as Franciscus Vatablus) and the availability of several commentaries on the Hebrew text of the psalms that would have been available during Buchanan's time in Paris.¹⁸ Regardless, he did own and employ works of Hebrew scholarship.¹⁹ In any case, all three sacred languages were read in the early modern period and their meanings and differences explained, discussed, and sublimated into confessional debates, the understanding of which is aided by comparative reading. Hebrew, Greek, and the Vulgate Latin formed part of the psalms' background context, whether

16. This is contrary to Erasmian notions of Biblical traditions, as evident when Erasmus complains that the Vulgate sometimes departs from the original meaning of the Bible through the author's "love of Latinity." See Botley, *Latin Translation*, 133–44, especially 140.

17. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, 4–5. The entire passage is beautifully evocative and worth reading.

18. Irving, *Memoirs*, 125; McFarlane, *Buchanan*, 34–35; Ford, *George Buchanan*, 78.

19. For more details about Buchanan's possible knowledge of Hebrew and its influence on this poem, see Buchanan, *Poetic Paraphrase*, 43–47.

accessed by the early modern reader directly or mediated through vernacular translations, commentaries, or orally from the pulpit and the like.

Comparing some of the language employed here, in the first stanzas of Buchanan's paraphrase, there are three imperatives addressed to God: *exaudi* (heed) the petitioner's prayers, *ablui* (blot out) his sins, and *lave* (wash) his sins and shame. In the Vulgate Latin, the imperatives are *miserere* (have mercy), *dele* (erase) my iniquity, *lava* (wash) away my wickedness, and *munda* (cleanse) me from sin. The Greek text has ἐλέησον' (have mercy), ἐξάλειψον (wash out or obliterate), πλύνόν (wash), and καθάρισόν (cleanse).²⁰ The four in Hebrew are רַחֵם (have mercy or be gracious), מָחַח (blot out), טַהַרֵנִי (cleanse me), and רַחֵץ (wash).²¹

Similar to his avoidance of incorporating tags from classical authors, Buchanan chose to avoid replicating the well-known Latin phrase *miserere mei* from the Vulgate here, which provides a significant assertion of "newness" to this paraphrase. Buchanan instead paraphrases the exhortation for mercy as a call for God to heed the petitioner. *Ablui* literally means "cleanse by washing," and the word departs from the Vulgate's sense of "erase" as well as from the sense of the Hebrew verb meaning "rubbing out," as one would wipe something clean or rub off an inscription. *Ablui* also differs from the Greek word, which indicates plastering or washing over and hence to metaphorically "obliterate something." Thus, Buchanan adopts a word that, although it does not entirely correspond to any ancient version, allows for a new baptismal metaphor. In this way, Buchanan departs freely from a close literal rendition of the original (which ancient Latin and Greek versions attempted to match, in part of a long-standing tradition of sacred translation) in favour of emphasizing the Christian belief of salvation through baptism. This embellishment of the original poem with Christian symbolism is subtle, as was Buchanan borrowing a baptismal metaphor from St. Cyril. But Buchanan's general approach to translation evinces his close attention to both the original text and his poetic project in reshaping it in a Christian confessional context.

In the final stanza given above, Buchanan embellishes the original line from Psalm 51:7, which reads as follows: "For behold I was conceived in

20. Psalm 50:1–7 (*Septuaginta*).

21. Psalm 51:1–7 (*Biblia Hebraica*). Note that in early modern editions the vocalization of Hebrew is eccentric (to say the least), and one cannot reliably use this modern text as an indication of Renaissance pronunciation.

iniquities; and in sins did my mother conceive me.”²² Buchanan replicates the parallelism as first sin cleaves (*haeret*) to the speaker at birth (*ab ortu*) and then is “absorbed” or “drawn up” (*hausi*) from conception (*deque conceptu*). But first he adds the vivid image of sin corrupting the very marrow inside the bones. And finally, in the last couplet, Buchanan adds to the passage an explicit reference to the Christian conception of original sin in referring to “the seeds of the fall” (*semina labis*), indicating that inherited sin refers to the first sin in the Garden of Eden by humanity’s first parents. *Labis* (of the fall) puns on *lave* (wash), another reminiscence of the baptismal imagery throughout the passage.

Throughout this poetic paraphrase, Buchanan demonstrates a conscious effort to reshape the original text in a way that emphasizes the Christian doctrines he believed were implicit in the text. And he does so with a keen display of poetic originality. Through wordplay, the incorporation of patristic metaphor, and subtle changes in diction and phrasing, Buchanan turns away from the psalm’s original context, where King David repented of his adultery with Bathsheba, and towards a poetic exhortation where the speaker decries his own sin and beseeches salvation through God and, in particular, through the means of baptism. This emphasis challenges the literalism of the popular ancient Latin and Greek translations of the Hebrew text as well as points towards Buchanan’s Protestant belief in personal salvation. The addition of baptismal language also veers from the Anabaptist tradition that de-emphasized the salvific efficacy of the rite of baptism itself.

The popularity of Buchanan’s version of the psalms well into the nineteenth century, and thus for as long as Latin was commonly employed in Christian reading and ritual, speaks to their success as a poetic achievement as well as their success in theological terms in transforming the psalms into a text that could serve the doctrinal intentions of the Protestant community. The subtlety in which Buchanan handled the insertion of Christianized diction likely contributed to its broad acceptance and reception, as a more heavy-handed or obtrusive approach would have no doubt led to more frequent confessional challenges. Montgomerie’s poem also hints at confessional creeds in an unobtrusive and non-confrontational way, emphasizing devotional and non-polemical assertions of belief.

In terms of language, Buchanan’s psalm paraphrases demonstrate a certain literary freedom with translation, but only in circumscribed terms. A

22. Psalm 50:7 (Douay–Rheims Bible).

classical Roman metre is uniquely mixed with frequent parallelisms, the most commonly noted feature of Hebrew poetry. But from there, the poet departs from the literary standards of classical Latin, Hebrew poetry, and even the received tradition of Biblical translation. The poet departs from literalism in translation, preferring to reveal and embellish the text within the conventions of Christian exegesis. This is comprehensive in the context of the paraphrase, which, rather than render word-for-word literal translations, adapts the original text for devotional use—perhaps as an aid to understanding the original but not a direct recreation of it. Classical diction and poetic metre are employed, but explicitly pagan imagery, mythological allusion, or even reference to or direct quotes from pagan Roman poets are never allowed into the text. Buchanan even avoids copying the wording of the Vulgate Latin psalms, so that even for a simple word like “mother,” which in Latin is most commonly *mater*, Buchanan opts to use the rarer *genitrix*, perhaps for poetic effect but also to differ from the Vulgate version. Notably, this personal style of translation is not one that can be easily discerned from formal early modern treatises on translation but can only be discovered through close attention to the translations themselves. This is indicative of the hidden complexity of translation and the interplay of languages in early modern Scotland, as well as in the context of European humanism. Buchanan’s psalms demonstrate a highly developed understanding of literary translation deployed to convey the meaning of the original text as well as to introduce the translator’s interpretative framework. Even small departures from the original text and traditions of Biblical translation are replete with meaning and poetic intentionality, which can be further highlighted through comparison with the Hebrew, Latin, and Greek as a means to draw out and expose the poet’s navigation through existing bodies of meaning.

Alexander Montgomerie’s Scots psalms

Alexander Montgomerie (c. 1550–98) was a colourful figure in Scottish poetry.²³ He was a successful Jacobean courtier in the 1580s and served as a Scottish soldier for the Dutch Republic against the Spanish from 1586 to 1588. A Catholic poet in a predominately Protestant court, Montgomerie was in his final years involved in a plot under Hew Barclay of Ladyland to seize the island of Ailsa Craig to serve as a supply point for a Spanish invasion of

23. On conjecturing the date of Montgomerie’s birth, see Lyall, *Alexander Montgomerie*, 37–39.

Scotland.²⁴ After its failure, Montgomerie was declared an outlaw and possibly only received a Christian burial due to the intervention of the king himself.²⁵ He was also, in the words of one scholar, the “chief architect of James’ new Scottish prosody,”²⁶ and his work is thus representative of the literary aims of the Jacobean court. Among his literary corpus, he most likely translated three psalms.²⁷ Ronald Jack has referred to these psalms as written in a “light metre,” but this belies their literary complexity.²⁸

The second of these psalm translations is titled “The 2 Psalm to the Tone of In throou the windows of myn ees,” which, as the name suggests, adapts the psalm to the music of a popular song. It has been noted that as a song it is “suited to congregational singing” and is best understood as a performative text.²⁹ Montgomerie’s Psalm 2 begins as follows:

Quhy doth the Heathin rage and rampe
And peple murmur all in vane?
The Kings on earth ar bandit plane
And princes ar conjoinit in Campe,
Aganst the Lord and Chryst ilk ane.
“Come let our hands
Brek all thair bands.” (ll. 1–7)³⁰

This translation adheres fairly closely to the original Vulgate in many passages.³¹ But even in this short passage, Montgomerie’s word choices can be compared with both the Vulgate version and, whether directly or indirectly, a more recent

24. Lyall notes the heterogeneous religious make-up of the court of James VI, and therefore Montgomerie’s potential audience in the final two decades of the 1500s; see Lyall, *Alexander Montgomerie*, 282–83.

25. On his burial, see Lyall, *Alexander Montgomerie*, 192–93.

26. Sweetnam, “Calvinism,” 143.

27. Psalms 1, 2, and most likely 23. Lyall, *Alexander Montgomerie*, 291.

28. Jack, “Lyrics of Alexander Montgomerie,” 174. See also Lyall, *Alexander Montgomerie*, 288–90.

29. Reid-Baxter, “Montgomerie’s Solsequium,” 365.

30. Montgomerie, *Poems*, 1:4–5.

31. As Hoffmann says, “Paraphrasen des 1. und 2. Psalms, welche sich im Ausdruck ziemlich genau an das Original anschliessen” (Paraphrases of the 1st and 2nd Psalms, the expression of which follows the original quite closely). Hoffmann, “Studien zu Alexander Montgomerie,” 37; my translation.

early modern translation of the entire Bible into Latin by Immanuel Tremellius (1510–80).

Tremellius was a Jewish convert to Christianity—first to Catholicism, then to Calvinism. The Catholic Montgomerie’s use of the Calvinist Tremellius is not entirely surprising, as Tremellius’s version of the Old Testament had a reputation for accuracy and enjoyed some favour at the Scottish court; King James himself once translated Psalm 104 from Tremellius’s Latin version.³² Tremellius’s insular influence also stemmed from his residence in England from 1548 to 1553, first at Lambeth Palace and then as a professor of Hebrew at Cambridge.³³ Montgomerie could have also been influenced by any number of French translations of the psalms, as the French influence on his poetry has been noted.³⁴ In particular, it has been demonstrated that Clément Marot’s versions of the psalms impacted Montgomerie’s diction, though no single French source explains all of Montgomerie’s departures from the Latin original.³⁵ These seven lines here correspond to Psalm 2:1–3 in the Vulgate:

Quare fremuerunt gentes, et populi meditati sunt inania?
 Astiterunt reges terræ, et principes convenerunt in unum adversus Dominum, et
 adversus christum ejus.
 Dirumpamus vincula eorum, et projiciamus a nobis jugum ipsorum.³⁶

And in Tremellius’s translation:

Quare tumultuantur gentes: et nationes meditantur inane;
 Sistunt³⁷ se reges terrae, et proceres consultant simul; contra Iehovam, et contra
 Christum eius.

32. Serjeantson, “English Bards,” 182. On Tremellius’s Biblical translations, see Austin, *From Judaism to Calvinism*.

33. Becker, *Immanuel Tremellius*, 15–20.

34. Borland, “Montgomerie and the French Poets,” 127–34.

35. Lyall points out the general influence of Marot but notes that individual parallels could be derived from the original psalms themselves, or from versions of French translations by Pierre Robert Olivétan, the Latin Vulgate, or even Buchanan’s paraphrase; see Lyall, *Alexander Montgomerie*, 287.

36. Psalm 2:1–3 (*Biblia Sacra*). Cf. Douay–Rheims Bible: “Why have the Gentiles raged, and the people devised vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the princes met together, against the Lord and against his Christ. Let us break their bonds asunder: and let us cast away their yoke from us.”

37. Emend. *Sistuut* (ms) / *Sistunt*.

Dicentes, disrumpamus lora istorum; et projiciamus a nobis densos fines istorum?³⁸

Lyall has previously found five significant readings in Psalm 2 that mark departures from the Vulgate, and he has noted that each of these has individual parallels in the French versions of Clément Marot and Pierre Robert Olivétan, as well as in the English version of Thomas Sternhold; these words are “murmur,” “in vane,” and “bandit,” noted above, and from later in the poem “beloved” (l. 19) and “bruis” (l. 32).³⁹ Comparison with these Latin versions is meant to expand, not contradict, Lyall’s readings.

“Murmur” here is an acceptable translation of the Latin verb *meditor* in both the Vulgate and ancient Christian poetry and so corresponds both with Tremellius and the Vulgate. “In vain” is more suitable for Tremellius’s adverb *inane* than the Vulgate noun *inania*. One meaning of Scots “bandit” is “secure with a band,” which is suggested by Tremellius’s *sistunt*, which carried the juridical meaning of appearing in court after being bound—this is over and in addition to its martial meaning of being drawn up in preparation for a battle, made explicit by Montgomerie and easily understood in English or Scots, as in “to band together.”⁴⁰ Montgomerie’s “my sone beloved” (l. 19) is unparalleled in either Latin version. Lyall correctly draws parallels with other vernacular translations, and further comparisons with English Bibles could be made as well: “bruis” is similar to “Thou shalt bruse them” (Psalm 2:9) in the Great Bible of 1539, and “murmure in vaine” (Psalm 2:1) and other phrases are echoed in the Geneva Bible.⁴¹ Bible translators often reuse the same phrases so many more parallels can be found, which demonstrates the complexities (and a degree of futility) in this sort of “source hunting.”

Although we cannot determine the extent to which Montgomerie used Tremellius as a direct or indirect influence (the Vulgate influence is more

38. Tremellius, Du Jon, and de Bèze, *Biblia Sacra*, 362. “Why the gentiles are in disorder, and the nations are vainly contemplating; The kings of the earth themselves stand, and the nobles at the same time deliberate; against Jehova, and against his Christ. Speaking, let us shatter their reins; and shall we tear down their close borders?” My translation.

39. Lyall, *Alexander Montgomerie*, 289–90.

40. *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue (DOST)*, s.v. “band,” accessed 19 July 2022, https://dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/band_v.

41. For the Great Bible, see <https://textusreceptusbibles.com/Great>. For the Geneva Bible, see <https://textusreceptusbibles.com/Geneva>.

clear), comparative readings between these as well as other ancient texts often illuminate Montgomerie's expressions. The root of the Hebrew verb רָגַשׁ (*ragash*) means "rage" or "be in a tumult," which Tremellius conveys with his usual assured literalism in the verb *tumultuor* (to make a disturbance). The Vulgate verb *fremo* (to roar, to rage, to growl, to murmur) is less strictly literal, though "murmur," again, means "to complain in a low voice" in Scots, conveying one meaning of the Vulgate's *fremo*.⁴² The Scots verb "rampe" indicates an animal raised on its hind legs in a threatening position, so Montgomerie's "rage and rampe" conveys some of the animalistic aspect to the heathen's rage present in the Vulgate. The Septuagint uses the verb φρονέσσομαι here, which means "to neigh and prance" (as a horse) and thus refers to people behaving unruly. Montgomerie's preference for the Vulgate is evident here in his use of "people," which is closer to the Vulgate *populi* than to Tremellius's *nationes*, as is the case with his "princes" for *principes* as opposed to *proceres*, as well as with "bands" for *vincula* (bonds) instead of *lora* (reins). Unsurprisingly for a Catholic writer like Montgomerie, he prefers throughout to address God as "Lord" (cf. Latin *Dominus*) as opposed to *Iehova* (Jehovah), as was popularized by Protestant Biblical translators from William Tyndale onward, and as one sees here in Tremellius. Note that although the use of "the Lord" for the Tetragrammaton is found in both Catholic and Protestant traditions of the Bible, it is Montgomerie's avoidance and the transliteration *Iehova* that is suggestively "Catholic."

Further along, Montgomerie's adaptation of the psalm concludes as follows:

3e Judges of the earth, I say,
 Be leirnd and instructit ay.
 Rejoyce and serve the Lord in feir,
 And kisse the SONE and him obey
 Leist vhen his yre
 Sail burne as fyre
 3ea perish in the way and fall.
 And sik as trust
 In God most just
 Sail happy be and blissed all. (ll. 34–44)⁴³

42. DOST, s.v. "murmur," accessed 19 July 2022, https://dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/murmur_v.

43. Montgomerie, *Poems*, 1:5.

These ten short lines correspond to four verses in the Vulgate:

Et nunc, reges, intelligite; erudimini, qui iudicatis terram.
 Servite Domino in timore, et exsultate ei cum tremore.
 Apprehendite disciplinam, nequando irascatur Dominus, et pereatis de via justa.
 Cum exarserit in brevi ira ejus, beati omnes qui confidunt in eo.⁴⁴

And in Tremellius's translation:

Nunc ergo reges, animadvertit; eruditionum percipite o iudices terrae:
 Colite Iehovam cum reverentia, et exsultate cum tremor
 Osculamini filium et non irascatur, et pereatis in via quum exarserit vel minimum irae eius:
 beati omnes qui se recipiunt ad eum.⁴⁵

In these passages one sees more concrete evidence of Tremellius's influence on Montgomerie. "3e Judges of the earth" closely corresponds to *o iudices terrae*. Montgomerie's "kisse the sone" renders Tremellius's *osculamini filium* (kiss the son), which is quite different from the Vulgate's *apprehendite disciplinam* (receive discipline). This meaning, found in Montgomerie and Tremellius, was first suggested by John Calvin, but the different interpretations of this verse are not strictly partisan, nor do they follow confessional divides.⁴⁶ The poet John Donne (1572–1631) summarizes the state of scholarship on this verse at only a couple decades remove, which is worth quoting in full as a summary of the early modern exegesis:

[...] the Son of God, *Osculamini Filium, Kiss the Son*. Where the translations differ as much, as in any one passage. The Chaldee paraphrase

44. Psalm 2:10–13 (*Biblia Sacra*). Cf. Douay–Rheims Bible: "And now, O ye kings, understand: receive instruction, you that judge the earth. Serve ye the Lord with fear: and rejoice unto him with trembling. Embrace discipline, lest at any time the Lord be angry, and you perish from the just way. When his wrath shall be kindled in a short time, blessed are all they that trust in him."

45. Tremellius, Du Jon, and de Bèze, *Biblia Sacra*, 362. "Now therefore kings, take notice; gain instruction O judges of the earth: worship Jehovah with awe and exalt him with trembling. Kiss the son and do not be angry, even you may die on the path as he is inflamed with even the least of his anger: blessed are all who are taken back to him." My translation.

46. Ó hAnnracháin, "Bible and the Early Modern," 121.

(which is, for the most part, good evidence) and the translation of the Septuagint (which adds much weight), and the current of the fathers (which is of importance too) do all read this place, *Apprehendite disciplinam*, *Embrace knowledge*, and not *Osculamini Filium*, *Kiss the Son*. Of the later men in the Roman church, divers read it as we do, *osculamini*, and some farther, *Amplectimini*, *Embrace the Son*. Amongst the Jews, Rab. Solomon reads it, *Armamini disciplina*, *Arm yourselves with knowledge*; and another modern man reads it, *Osculamini pactum*, *Kiss the covenant*; and, *Adorate frumentum*, *Adore the corn*, and thereby carries it from the pacification of Christ in heaven, to the adoration of the bread in the sacrament. Clearly, and without exception, even from Bellarmine himself, according to the original Hebrew, it ought to be read, as we read it, *kiss the Son*. Now very many, very learned, and very zealous men of our times, have been very vehement against that translation of the Roman church, though it be strengthened, by the Chaldee, by the Septuagint, and by the fathers, in this place. The reason of the vehemence in this place, is not because that sense, which that translation presents, may not be admitted; no, nor that it does not reach home, to that which is intended in ours, *kiss the Son*: for, since the doctrine of the Son of God, had been established in the verses before, to say now, *Apprehendite disciplinam*, Lay hold upon that doctrine; that doctrine which was delivered before, is, in effect the same thing, as, *kiss the Son*. So Luther, when he takes, and follows that translation of that church, says, *Nostra translatio, ad verbum, nihil est, ad sensum proprissima*; That translation, if we consider the very words only, is far from the original, but if we regard the sense, it is most proper. And so also Calvin admits; take it which way you will. *Idem manet sensus*. The sense is all one. (Sermon 39: Preached upon Trinity Sunday)⁴⁷

In this context, Montgomerie decided to utilize this phrase according to the findings of the most recent scholarship rather than adhere to the traditional interpretation found in the Vulgate, which was still accepted as correct by many of Montgomerie's Catholic contemporaries.

In these final lines, with the phrase "trust in God," we also see Montgomerie follow the Vulgate's *confido*—"trust" in God—rather than Tremellius's verb

47. Donne, *Works of John Donne*, 2:188.

recipio—“to be taken back” or “retreat” to God. At the termination of the poem, “happy be and blissed all” translates *beati omnes* found in both Latin versions. *Beatus* in Latin means both “happy” and “blessed.” Both meanings are also found in the corresponding Hebrew word עֲשֵׂה (*esher*). Thus, Montgomerie here chooses to translate both meanings rather than lose out on one semantic component of the original, similar to his handling of “rage and rampe” at opening of the psalm. So, through comparison with Latin translations, Montgomerie shows an awareness of contemporary contentions about Biblical translations, and his word choices position him within the debate about the precise and elusive intended meaning of the Biblical verses.

Concluding thoughts

Both Buchanan and Montgomerie created adaptations of the psalms for use in worship—Buchanan in Latin and Montgomerie in Scots. But both poets demonstrate an awareness of contemporary scholarship and debates concerning the meaning of the Biblical texts, as well as a high degree of poetic and rhetorical sophistication in transforming the psalms according to their own interpretative commitments. Whether considered as literal or free translations, they demonstrate a very close attention towards and care for meaning and interpretation while showing a high degree of originality and versatility in adapting and recreating the polysemous meanings of the original (or rather, several “originals” viewed through the lens of glosses, exegesis, and translations). In addition, they were both able to apply new meanings to the originals to serve their own liturgical, spiritual, and poetic purposes.

Latin and vernacular literary cultures coexisted during the early modern period. Working in separate but parallel literary traditions, George Buchanan and Alexander Montgomerie engaged with shared and competing interpretative traditions, and their psalm paraphrases—in this case, Buchanan’s *Psalm Paraphrase 51* and Montgomerie’s translation of Psalm 2—were read alongside a plurality of existing versions. Comparative reading of these interpoetic traditions is a means of revealing more about the poets’ cultural backgrounds and can facilitate an understanding of the individuality and inventiveness of each poet within the context of religious and poetic composition.

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