

# Anne Locke, Mary Sidney and the “hungry dogge”

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## Abstract

*In the early modern period the concept of female authority was severely compromised by a society which considered women to be ruled by their passions and dominated by their physiology. The overwhelmingly patriarchal ideology of the era required modesty, obedience and self-censored speech of its women. This did not encourage women's writing, the most public of speech acts. Religious translation, however, could be considered compliant with the prescribed model of femininity to some extent: an activity pious and chaste, if not silent. This paper examines some of the problems arising from the common assumption that the work of female early modern translators of religious material has an uncomplicated equivalency, which requires little further interrogation. The contrasting approaches to religious paraphrase adopted by two Protestant female poets, Anne Locke and Mary Sidney, reveal startling differences of strategy and resulting effect. Briefly outlining Locke's paraphrase of the 51<sup>st</sup> Psalm as a model of austere Calvinist methodology, the paper goes on to consider Mary Sidney's own approach. The work of the two poets is distanced by fundamental differences, the most obvious of which is the establishment of Protestantism as the state religion upon Elizabeth I's accession to the throne; but there is also dissimilarity of basic purpose and of social degree.*

In the early modern period the concept of female authority was severely compromised by a society which considered women to be ruled by their passions and dominated by their physiology. Most educators felt that private and domestic lives were appropriate to their needs and capabilities and that therefore they had little need of higher learning.<sup>1</sup> In misogynistic pamphlets, ballads and common parlance throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth-century women, predicated on Grandmother Eve's failings, were also frequently constructed as being vainglorious, morally lax and self-seeking.<sup>2</sup> The overwhelmingly patriarchal ideology of the era required modesty, obedience and self-censored speech of its women. This did not encourage women's writing, the most public of speech acts. Religious translation, however, could be considered compliant with the prescribed model of femininity to some extent: it was pious and chaste, if not silent. Some humanist educators even recommended it as not only promoting piety, but also as a fruitful pastime for a learned and studious wife, to avoid the moral dangers of idleness.<sup>3</sup> For female translators and paraphrasists the perception of women as being both morally and intellectually inferior presented specific problems. Given St. Paul's proscription on women's teaching, they needed to guard against charges that their work was inaccurate, and therefore may mislead the reader, but they also needed to avoid the reproach of intellectual vanity.

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<sup>1</sup> Juan-Luis Vives' *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* (1523), Edmund Tilney's *A Brief and Pleasant Discourse of Duties in Marriage* (1568) and Giovanni Bruto's *The Necessarie Fit and Convenient Education of a Young Gentlewoman* (1598), for example. Even more enlightened humanists such as Erasmus and Richard Mulcaster cautiously emphasised that women should be trained according to their household duties before considering limited stimulation of their intellect.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Swetnam's invective, *The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward and Unconstant Women* (1615) reworked pre-existing negative images of women from biblical sources and contemporary ballads and ribaldry. It was extremely popular, being reprinted ten times in under two decades.

<sup>3</sup> See Thomas Becon, *Catechism* (pub. 1564), 'it appertaineth unto the office of virtuous maids never to be idle [...] 'For idleness is a great occasion of many evils [...] pride, slothfulness, banqueting, drunkenship, whoredomm, adultery, vain communication, betraying of secrets,, cursed speaking, etc.', reprinted excerpt in Kate Aughterson, *Constructions of Femininity in England* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 26-9 (26).

For devout Christians, however, the problem of self-expression was compounded by rigid theological teachings which warned against the appetites of the senses and the imagination. Translators of both sexes, Catholic and Protestant alike, faced particular problems in regard to condoned expression and form, which arose from anxiety that the 'living' core of God's Word might be literally lost in translation. Sir Thomas More and Erasmus both addressed the heavy responsibility of translating religious works whilst endeavouring not to damage this sacred supra-lingual element of the Scriptures.<sup>4</sup> This was a particular concern in works which liberally employed the arts of rhetoric and literary embellishment, such as sermons and poetry, in case the form obscured the essential 'life-giving' message.

Seminal works by such feminist critics as Elaine Beilin and Barbara Lewalski have enabled a wider understanding of early modern women writers' participation in manuscript and print culture.<sup>5</sup> As a result of feminist scholarship it is now possible to find increasing numbers of early modern female authors entering the canon, squeezed in between their better known and better regarded male counterparts. The authors can too easily become oversimplified representations of a generic type of 'Writing Woman', however, ignoring differences of ideology, political and religious affiliation and social circumstance. The strategy of reading the work of women writers through this perspective reduces them to mere signifiers of gender, whilst denying their individuality. It is particularly ironic to study women writers of the Renaissance through such a homogeneous frame of reference, since it reflects precisely the same process of reasoning that allowed the patriarchal repression of women in their own times. In bell hooks' terms it "shares a common language rooted in the master narratives it claims to challenge".<sup>6</sup> Dichotomous habits of thought which prevailed in gender discussion in the early modern period do not allow women's work the same status as that of their male counterparts. In these terms male-authored texts still prescribe the parameters of a canon within which female-authored works either sit uneasily, often not taken seriously, or trailing from the edges as curiosities. Anne Locke's work at present stands outside the established canon, while Mary Sidney Herbert's work has a respectable history of praise, initially attracting critical notice largely through association with her brother, Sir Philip Sidney. This paper examines some of the problems arising from the common assumption that the work of female early modern translators of religious material has an uncomplicated equivalency, which requires little further interrogation.<sup>7</sup> The contrasting approaches to religious paraphrase adopted by two Protestant female poets, Anne Locke<sup>8</sup> and Mary Sidney, reveal startling differences of strategy and resulting effect. Briefly outlining Locke's paraphrase of the fifty-first Psalm as a model of austere Calvinist methodology, the paper goes on to consider Mary Sidney's own approach. The work of the two poets is distanced by fundamental differences, the most obvious of which is the

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<sup>4</sup> 'Translation of Scripture' by Germaine Marc'hadour and Thomas M. C. Lawler, in *The Complete Works of Sir Thomas More*, ed. by Thomas M. C. Lawler, Germaine Marc'hadour and Richard Marius (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 509 n. 1; Brian Cummings discusses Erasmus' approach in *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 109.

<sup>5</sup> Elaine Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987); Margaret P. Hannay, ed., *Silent But for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators, and Writers of Religious Works* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1985); Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, *Writing Women in Jacobean England* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1993); S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies, *Renaissance Drama by Women: Texts and Documents* (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> bell hooks, 'Different Kinds of Difference', *the fontana postmodernism reader*, edited by Walter Truett Anderson (London: Fontana Press, 1996), pp. 106-20 (116).

<sup>7</sup> This is in counter-response to the numerous responses I have had to my own work on Anne Locke over the past six years, and to observations made during my teaching practice over that period.

<sup>8</sup> Anne Vaughan Locke remarried twice during her lifetime. Hence, she is known variously as Anne Vaughan, Anne Locke (Lok, Lock), Anne Derring and Anne Prowse (Prouze).

establishment of Protestantism as the state religion upon Elizabeth I's accession to the throne; but there is also dissimilarity of basic purpose and of social degree.

### **Anne Locke (c 1534 - c 1590)**

Anne Locke was born into a wealthy London mercantile family which, as Patrick Collinson notes, was at the "inner centre of sixteenth-century London Protestantism".<sup>9</sup> She benefited from a liberal education which is considered to have included Latin, possibly some Greek, French, and, very unusually for the time, she also clearly had some understanding of formal rhetorical debate. In her late twenties, writing from within the hotbed of the new Protestant faith in Geneva, Locke was therefore exceptional for her time, in several ways.

In 1560 she published a volume entitled *Sermons of John Calvin Upon the Songe that Ezechias made after he had bene sicke, and afflicted by the hand of God*. This contained not only the translated sermons of the title, however, but also included her own original compositions in both prose and verse. The form of the poetry itself is controversial, in that she used the new poetic form of the English sonnet for pious purposes. This verse form was relatively new to England. Moreover, it was associated with medieval courtly love traditions and the amatory verse of the royal courts of the Continent.<sup>10</sup> As such it was a very masculinist genre, laden with profane implication and seemingly anomalous in terms of the austerity of the new faith and the tone and purpose of her volume. However, Locke's sonnets form a devotional sequence structured to create a penitential meditation. The dedicatory epistle is a thinly-veiled Protestant polemic in the form of a textured allegory upon spiritual disease which displays an understanding of the conventions of formal oration.

### **Mary Sidney Herbert (1561-1621), Countess of Pembroke**

Both sides of Mary Sidney Herbert's family also had staunch Protestant credentials and moved in powerful court circles. Her maternal uncles and grandfather were deeply involved in the plot to crown Lady Jane Grey, to prevent the accession of Mary I and the reintroduction of Catholicism.<sup>11</sup> Born into nobility and wealth, Mary Sidney's education was of the best available to a woman in those times. She studied Latin, Greek and some Hebrew, the latter facilitating reading of learned theological texts. As her works demonstrate, she was also a skilled translator, fluent in Italian and French. The acknowledged brilliance of her brother, Sir Philip Sidney, not only as a poet and apologist, but as a humanist scholar, and the quintessential Renaissance courtier and statesman, cast a significant shadow over her work, however. His undertaking to paraphrase the entire Book

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<sup>9</sup> Patrick Collinson, *Godly People: Essays on Protestantism and Puritanism* (London: Hambledon Press, 1983), p. 46. As Collinson points out, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century these extreme Protestants would be known by the soubriquet 'Puritan'.

<sup>10</sup> The sonnet form was brought to England by Sir Thomas Wyatt in the 1530s, during the reign of Henry VIII. His work almost certainly influenced Locke's, both through shared religious sympathies and the personal relationship between her father and Wyatt. Stephen Vaughan shared at least one diplomatic mission with Wyatt on the Continent and also rented out to Sir Thomas Wyatt the younger "1 tenement within the gate of St. Mary Spytell [...] for £7 6s. 8d. by the year". *Life and Letters of Sir Thomas Wyatt*, Kenneth Muir (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 1963) letters 22, 23 and 24 (pp. 131, 137, 140, 142); *The Abstracts of the Inquisitiones Post Mortem relating to the City of London Returned to the High Court of Chancery*, edited by G. S. Fry, vol. 1 (1896), pp. 85-7. See also Felch, *Collected Works*, pp. xviii, xix; Woods, 'Anne Lock and Aemilia Lanyer.', p. 172.

<sup>11</sup> Lord Guildford Dudley, married to Lady Jane Grey, was executed, as was his father, John Dudley, Duke of Cumberland. Guildford's other brothers were imprisoned and expected the same fate. Her father, Sir Henry Sidney avoided entanglement and was active in the negotiations which concluded in Mary's marriage to Philip of Spain (who acted as Sir Philip Sidney's godfather).

of Psalms in English verse was incomplete at his death in 1586. Early critical opinion considered her contribution to this work to be merely that of an amanuensis, as his literary reputation was already well-established when he died. Mary Sidney is now known to have edited and completed the Psalter. However, her substantial contribution amounts to 107 complete Psalms, plus recorded re-workings of her brother's initial forty-three. Feminist scholars of the last two decades, including Margaret Hannay, Beth Wynne Fisker, and more recently, S. P. Cerasano, Marion Wynne-Davies and Danielle Clark, have argued convincingly that the endeavour certainly bears evidence of Mary Sidney's own skill as an original poet, and that it may have been envisaged as a joint mission from its conception.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the early date of her publication, Anne Locke made no apologies for her entry into print. There are no male-authored letters of assurance that she is a modest wife prefacing the work, for example, nor is there any protestation that she did not intend to publish. The tone of none of the sections of the volume could be termed humble or self-effacing. Quite to the contrary, in fact, in the dedication to the Duchess of Suffolk she confidently counts herself as one of God's Elect, in a direct line of inheritance through John Calvin himself.<sup>13</sup> The translation of Calvin's four sermons is acknowledged in her title but she also included a sonnet sequence in which she extended and embellished the *Miserere*, Psalm 51, creating in the process an austere spiritual guide. The guidance is significant since the era decreed that women should not teach or wield authority, as both were explicitly forbidden by St. Paul's decree of silence, predicated on women's inferiority.<sup>14</sup>

Mary Sidney's transposition of the Psalms into verse provides a useful point of comparison with Locke's work. It is complicated, however, by the circumstances of the work's production. It would seem that the Psalms were originally intended for circulation within a coterie readership, in manuscript form. If Mary Sidney's desire was to promote piety among a wider secular readership, as her Christian duty, while providing a lasting memorial to her brother's name, publication might seem more appropriate. As the editors of her collected works point out, in fact, she "stands at a liminal position in the shift from a manuscript to a print culture" in that she did edit her brother's work for publication and yet chose not to make the Psalter available to the general public.<sup>15</sup> The copy prepared for presentation to Queen Elizabeth, is prefaced by the poem "To the Angell Spirit of the Most Excellent Sir Philip Sidney". Despite nuances of criticism regarding her brother's lack of advancement at court and the 'Envie' of courtiers (l. 63), the work is presented with humility, which can be read as evidence of "authorial anxiety". It is framed as a presumptuous tribute to her brother's memory (ll. 25, 30). Repeatedly asserting his greater poetic ability and inspiration, she refers to her own contribution as being a "half-maimed" "piecing together" of "what was left undone" at his death (ll. 23, 18, 24). In typical 'modesty *topos*' fashion,

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<sup>12</sup> See the poem to the "Angell spirit" of her brother in the presentation copy's dedication to Queen Elizabeth: "[the Senders] which once in two, now in one Subject goe" (l. 21), cited by M. P. Hannay, "Mary Sidney and Admonitory dedication" in *Silent But for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators, and Writers of Religious Works*, edited by M. P. Hannay, (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1985), p. 152.

<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, there are two possible concessions to modesty in the text. The first of these is the omission of her full name, which was abbreviated to "A.L." on the title page, although this strategy was sometimes adopted by contemporary male authors also. Secondly, she states at the beginning of the meditation that the material was "delivered" to her by her "friend". *Collected Works of Anne Locke*, "A Meditation", ll. pp. 8-10, 62. Despite this assertion, recent critical opinion, based on lexical analysis and repletion of imagery, now accepts that Locke is the author. Thomas P. Roche, Jr., *Petrarch and the English Sonnet Sequences* (New York: AMS press, 1989), p. 155; Michael Spiller, *The Development of the Sonnet*, p. 92; Margaret P. Hannay, "'unlock my lippes.'" pp. 21-2; Susan M. Felch, editor, *Collected Works of Anne Locke* (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies and Renaissance Text Society, 1999), p. liii.

<sup>14</sup> See John Knox, *The First Blast of the Trumpet*. in *Knox and Rebellion*, edited by Roger A. Mason (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 3-47.

<sup>15</sup> Hannay, Kinnamon and Brennan, "Origins, Early Reception, and Influence", pp. 21-55, in *The Collected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert*, vol. II, *The Psalmes of David*, ed. Margaret P. Hannay, Noel J. Kinnamon and Michael G. Brennan (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), p. 48.

however, the dedication belies her literary achievement, which is confirmed by the high renown in which it was held by contemporary male poets.<sup>16</sup> Although highly-acclaimed during her lifetime, the Psalms only circulated in manuscript form, not being published until 1823.

Superficially, it may seem logical to read the work of these two early modern women writers of similar religious outlook, both working in the genre of translations and Psalm paraphrase, as being complementary and mutually endorsing. An understanding of contemporary religious debate, however, can indicate underlying tensions.<sup>17</sup>

To Catholic theologians and the sixteenth-century reformers alike, a creative approach to biblical material was fraught with difficulties. This was a particular concern in works which liberally employed the arts of rhetoric and literary ornamentation, such as sermons, commentaries or paraphrases. It was felt that there was a danger that the ungovernable imagination may distract from the religious purpose of devotional work, as mankind was considered to be in thrall to the senses. In these terms, the imagination needed constant policing, indicated in Fray Luis de Granada's injunction:

[The imagination ] is a faculty [...] very greedy [...] it imitateth hungry doggs, who tosse and turn all things upside downe, and thrust their snowt into every dish [...].<sup>18</sup>

Given the common perceptions of women as vain and morally lax, a female author needed to guard against the censure of straying from the text, and especially of intellectual pride in her writing. In her *lamentacion* of 1547, for example, Katherine Parr is obviously sensitive to such criticism, and anxiously reiterates, "I trust no bodye will judge I have doon it for prayse".<sup>19</sup> This, then, presented the female poet with a conundrum: her paradoxical position required that she curb her imagination and qualify the sensual appeal of language, without compromising her God-given literary skills to praise and exalt to the best of her ability.

Despite Anne Locke's seeming disregard for conventional propriety, her sonnet sequence on the 51<sup>st</sup> Psalm actually does bear evidence of her extreme caution regarding the dangers of the "hungry dogge" of the imagination. The repeated sonnet form itself demands a certain discipline from the author. Its tight structure of containment may go some way to explain the form's attraction for Locke, in its neat fourteen-line unit, iambic metrical pattern and regular rhyme scheme.<sup>20</sup> A further safeguard against the wanderlust of the imagination can be found in the structure of the sequence itself. The verses of the Psalm appear on the page to the right of her each of sonnets, effectively 'keying' them into a framework; the visual layout of the meditation acting as a constant reminder to the reader of the biblical source. To the first readers the format would also have evoked the Geneva Bible and its contentious side notes, prepared by Locke's friends and neighbours during her exile

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<sup>16</sup> Among others, John Donne and Samuel Daniel evidently valued the Sidneian Psalter, indicated by their praise in poem and dedication, consecutively: John Donne, "Upon the translation of the Psalmes by Sir Philip Sydney, and the Countesse of Pembroke", in *The Divine Poems*, ed. Helen Gardner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952; reprinted 1978), p. 34; in the dedication of his *Cleopatra* Samuel Daniel praises the "*Hymnes*" which Mary Sidney "consecrate[s] to heaven". (H6-H6v), cited in Elaine Beilin, "The Divine Poet: Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke" in *Redeeming Eve*, p. 126.

<sup>17</sup> See Margaret P. Hannay, "'Unlock my lippes': The *Miserere mei Deus* of Anne Vaughan Lok and Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke" in *Privileging Gender in Early Modern England, Sixteenth-Century Essays and Studies*, 23, pp. 19-36.

<sup>18</sup> Cited in U. Milo Kaufmann, *The Pilgrim's Progress, and Traditions in Puritan Meditation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966), pp. 124-5.

<sup>19</sup> Katherine Parr, *lamentacion*. (1547), STC 4827, unnumbered.

<sup>20</sup> The five prefatory sonnets and those of the main sequence to sonnet seven follow a regular ABAB CDCD EFEF GG rhyme scheme. Sonnet 8, however, adopts a revised scheme after the first quatrain, which simultaneously projects the sense of progression with the hesitance of a backward glance in: ABAB CBCB DCDC until the resolution of the couplet's EE. Sonnet 9 has a similarly disrupted rhyme scheme. *Collected Works of Ann Locke*, Sonnet 8, p. 67.

in Geneva. The new Bible was written by uncompromising Calvinists and was visually quite different to earlier versions in that it divided the chapters into clearly numbered verses, to aid self-directed study.<sup>21</sup>

Locke's layout served the purpose of creating a natural boundary for the content of each sonnet and provided a condoned method of progression. In these terms, however, her elaboration can be read as breaching the parameters when the 19 verses of the Psalm are developed into 21 sonnets. A further method of guarding against personal pride is that she did not present her own interpretation of the Psalm, but used existing revered Protestant sources, such as the Coverdale versions and the Psalms of the Geneva Bible. The decision acknowledges their authority and endorses the veracity of male-authored translations currently in circulation within Protestant circles. This could be interpreted as evidence of female subservience, although equally it can be understood as respect for the theological knowledge of her co-religionists. Importantly she also claimed her place among these brethren of the elect, all of whom felt it their duty to assist in the creation and maintenance of the new Church, as "lyvely stones to the holy building".<sup>22</sup>

Within the sequence there is evidence of persuasive invention and a competent command of her form in adept use of rhetorical figures and oratorical flourish.<sup>23</sup> Her most arresting and successful techniques are the dramatisation and extremely graphic imagery. In Sonnet Five, for example, she uses the lexis of autopsy in her vivid description of the conscience's attack upon the sinner. Personified as a sadistic surgeon it sets about its work with zealous energy, captured in the "splat" and "ripped" of the second line of the third quatrain. The "allpiercing" eye is echoed in the "sharpned [*sic*] knife" which scrupulously exposes the extent of the corruption which is spread before God, like a dismembered and diseased corpse. Despite its compelling imagery, in some areas suggestive of the later metaphysical poets in its unexpected metaphors, the sequence never loses sight of its primary function: to assist the reader to enter a subjective immersion in the reality of his or her fallen state. As such, it is imperative that it maintains a detailed focus, which anticipates a full acceptance of guilt and therefore the possibility of redemption.

Although Mary Sidney and Anne Locke share a Protestant discourse in their weighted references to election and the free gift of grace, the unprecedented variety of tone, metre and rhyme scheme undermines the status of Mary Sidney's Psalms as a purely devotional work.<sup>24</sup> Her extensive reworking and 'tightening' of the poems over a decade demonstrates her keen appreciation of and developing proficiency in Renaissance verse forms.<sup>25</sup> From a Calvinist perspective, however, the fascination with such literary devices can be read as evidence of intellectual pride.

The main sources and influences of both women have been demonstrated to be primarily the Geneva Bible, Coverdale's versions of the Psalms, the Genevan Morot-Beza

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<sup>21</sup>"The Geneva Bible as a Political Document", Craig Hardin Jnr., *The Pacific Historical Review* 7:1 (March 1938), pp. 40-49.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Taverner, *An Epitome of the Psalmes, or briefe meditations upon the same, with diverse other most Christian prayers.*, translated from Wolfgang Fabricius Capito's version (London, 1539), STC 154.14, Psalm. 51, (paraphrase of verse 18). Locke uses a similar phrase in the dedication of her *Of the Markes of the Children of God* (1590), stating, "I have brought my poore basket of stones to the strengthening of the walles of Jerusalem", Prefatory Letter to the Countess of Warwick, *Collected Works of Anne Lock*, ll. 51-2, p. 77.

<sup>23</sup> In Michael Spiller's words: "the achievement of the sonnets of the *Meditation* is astonishing – they were brilliantly written for their date, and at least very competently written for any date". M. Spiller, "A Literary 'First': the Sonnet Sequence of Anne Locke (1560)", in *Renaissance Studies* (1997), vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 41-55, (45).

<sup>24</sup> As Gary Waller has demonstrated, there are 94 variations in metrical patterning, while the stanzaic formulations number a copious 164. Gary F. Waller, "The text and Manuscript Variants of the Countess of Pembroke's Psalms", *Review of English Studies* 26 (1975), pp. 1-18.

<sup>25</sup> Beth Wynne Fisker's research into the numerous revisions of both her brother's finished Psalms (1-43) and Mary Sidney's own (44-150) demonstrates her increasing confidence as a poet in her own right, defining the long process of editing as the "education" of a poet. "Mary Sidney's *Psalmes*: Education and Wisdom" in *Silent But for the Word*, ed. Margaret P. Hannay (Kent, 1985), pp. 166-83 (166).

Psalter of 1562 and Calvin's prose *Commentaries* on the Psalms.<sup>26</sup> The shared scholarly and pious approach of the two women writers, however, finds different expression in their response. Locke's perspective is tightly restrained and focuses inward for the exploration of its theme; the Countess' focus is on familiar Elizabethan life experiences but rendered into a completely different type of verse. Her manipulation of the Psalms to emphasise references can be assumed to have particular resonance for female readers, since they allude to seclusion in the home, pregnancy, childbirth, and in many cases to children. Evidence gleaned from the Countess' working papers shows that her original paraphrases often emphasised female experience.<sup>27</sup> In Psalm 68: 12, for example, she developed the Geneva Bible's "She that remained in the house" into "we house-confined maids with distaffs" (l. 34).<sup>28</sup> There are many similar examples of such re-focussing which facilitate a greater degree of imaginative engagement with the content. These strategies align well with Sir Philip Sidney's assertion that the poet has a quasi-religious vocation, to "teach and delight".<sup>29</sup> Although Locke's undertaking aims to achieve a very different outcome, she also ensures close engagement with her subject matter in her use of an allegory which meshes with the common experience of spiritual *dis*-ease, resulting in a dramatic discourse of Calvinist despair:

As in the throte of hell, I quake for feare,  
 And then in present perill to be lost  
 (Although my conscience wanteth to reple,  
 But with remorse enforcing myne offence,  
 Doth argue vaine my not availing crye)  
 With woefull sighes and bitter penitence  
 To him from whom the endless mercy flowes  
 I cry for mercy to releve my woes.<sup>30</sup>

In the case of Mary Sidney's Psalms, however, the "delight" may seem to outweigh the didactic purpose. Aspects of the Psalms leave her culpable in terms of Calvin's severe decree: "we maye not forge fantasies of oure own braine as we think goode".<sup>31</sup> Apart from her intense enthusiasm for experimentation in rhyme and metre, several of the poems demonstrate further elements of intellectual acrobatics. Psalm 111 is developed into an alphabetical acrostic, following the form of the Hebrew original, each line beginning with the consecutive letter of the English alphabet, except 'J', and ending on the letter 'U'.<sup>32</sup> In Psalm 117 she creates another acrostic which reads PRAISTHELORD in the initial capitals of each line, while Psalm 119 is an extended exploration of this structure, dividing the Psalm into 22 sections of eight verses, each taking a letter of the Hebrew alphabet as its starting point. The scheme is further complicated by using a different stanzaic form for each section.<sup>33</sup> No doubt influenced by her brother's experiments, seven of Sidney's Psalms explore

<sup>26</sup> Sources are discussed in Beth Wynne Fisker, "Mary Sidney's *Psalmes*: Education and Wisdom", in *Silent But For the Word*, ed. Hannay, p. 167; Elaine Beilin, "Mary Sidney", pp. 144, 145. From internal evidence it is apparent that Anne Locke was influenced by Sir Thomas Wyatt's *Certaine Psalmes* and Bishop John Fisher's *Treatise Upon the Seven Penitential Psalmes*, see my *Text and Context: A Re-evaluation of the Early work of Anne Locke*, forthcoming. Mary Sidney is also considered to have been familiar with Archbishop Parker's *Psalms*. The Penitential Psalms are 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130 and 143.

<sup>27</sup> Fisker, p. 167. Margaret Hannay discusses this in detail in "'House Confined Maids': The Presence of Women in the Psalms of the Countess of Pembroke", *English Literary Renaissance* 24:1 (1994), pp. 44-71.

<sup>28</sup> Although in the final presentation copy this became the more neutral "[those] that weak in howse did lye" (l. 28).

<sup>29</sup> Philip Sidney, *Defence of Poesie*. (London: Dent, 1997), p. 90.

<sup>30</sup> *Collected Works of Anne Locke*, Prefatory Sonnet 4, ll. 62-9 (p. 63). Stachniewski discusses the widespread problem of Calvinist despair in *The Persecutory Imagination*.

<sup>31</sup> *Collected Works of Anne Locke*, fourth sermon, ll. 79-80 (pp. 50, 51).

<sup>32</sup> Cited by the editors, "Literary Context", pp. 3-32, *Collected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert*, p. 18.

<sup>33</sup> *Collected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert*, pp. 192-212, 425-31.

contemporary theories of composition intended to imitate the 'perfection' of Roman quantitative verse.<sup>34</sup> This was founded upon the concept of creating poetry based upon the pronunciation length of syllables, rather than conventional metre and rhyme.<sup>35</sup>

A hidden meta-level of detail which can also be discovered in some Psalms further complicates this issue. As demonstrated in the poetry of contemporary male poets, there was a fascination for structural organisation based on numerical value. Her Psalm 55 reveals an extraordinary degree of control in this respect. The structure of the poem is devised in patterns of three: three rhymes presented in palindromes, twelve lines to each stanza and six stanzas in total. The first stanza, for example rhymes: a b c c b a a c b b c a:

My god glad to look, most prone to heere,	a
an open eare o lett my praier find,	b
and from my plaint turne not thie face away.	c
behold my jestures, harken what I say	c
while uttering mones with most tormented mind,	b
My body I no lesse torment and teare.	a
for loe their fearfull threatnings wound mine eare,	a
who griefs on griefs on me still heaping laie,	c
a mark to wrath and hate and wrong assign'd,	b
therefore my hart hath all his force resign'd	b
to trembling pants, death terrors on me pray,	c
I feare, nay shake, nay quiv'ring quake with feare. <sup>36</sup>	a

The Psalm is voiced by David and is concerned with calling down divine retribution upon those who have slandered and defamed his name; terror-stricken that they have plotted his destruction, he wishes in vain to escape his existence of "fearfulness and trembling" (Geneva Bible, Ps. 55: 5). The "iniquitie and mischief", "wickedness, deceit and guile" of the city are condemned, as is the ruler who permits such behaviour, by implication (Ps. 55:10, 11).<sup>37</sup> Sidney's imaginative engagement with the text creates a theatrical 'anti-masque' of the powers of evil. Mischief personified is depicted as lord of the streets. In his clothes of deceit "with treason lin'd", he reigns over the burgesses of the city, named as "oppressions, tumults" and "guiles of every kind" (ll. 29, 30, 26). Mother Wrong and her daughter Strife meanwhile are in every town, displaying their "ensigns", and walking through the city scandalously "both night and day" (ll. 22, 23, 25). It does not take great imagination to parallel this with the corruption and precariousness of contemporary London court life and Philip Sidney's own uneven career, alluded to in "To the Angel Spirit".<sup>38</sup>

A particularly poignant aspect of the Psalm is the betrayal experienced by the speaker as he bitterly laments "For not an enemy reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither he that hated me did magnify against me [...] but a man mine equal, my guide and mine acquaintance" (Ps. 55:12, 13). Sidney renders this:

<sup>34</sup> Psalms 120-127. *Collected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert*, vol. II, pp. 212-19, 431-4.

<sup>35</sup> This was extremely complex and further compromised by lack of concord over English pronunciation. The problems are discussed in Sharon Shuman's scholarly essay "Quantitative Verse: Its Ends, Means and Products" in *Modern Philology*, vol. 74:4 (May 77), pp. 335-49.

<sup>36</sup> For comparison: Geneva Bible, Ps. 55: 1-4: 'Heare my prayer, o God, & hide not thy self from my supplication. Harken unto me, & answer me: I mourne in my prayer, and make a noise, For the voyce of the enemie, & for the vexation of the wicked, because they have broght iniquitie upon me, & furiously hate me. Mine heart trembleth within me, and the terrors of death are fallen upon me.'

<sup>37</sup> The Header to the Psalm in the Geneva Bible reads "David being in great heaviness & distresse complaineth of the cruelties of Saul".

<sup>38</sup> "To the Angel Spirit of the Most Excellent Sir Philip Sidney", l. 63, *The Collected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert*, vol. I, p. 111.



my fellow my companion, held most deere,  
my soule, my other self, my inward frend:  
whom unto me, me unto whom did bind  
exchanged secrets, who together were  
god's temple wont to visit, there to pray. (Ps. 55, ll. 38-42)

The anaphoric repetition of 'my' and the expression "my other self" emphasise the degree of personal treachery. The worst possible betrayal is that of a co-religionist, with whom he is bound by "exchanged secrets". The palindromic patterns of the Psalm reflect the theme of the poem, which deals with the betrayal or 'doubleness' of the speaker's closest companions.

Given that the poem is a metrical version of a Psalm, a reference to the Trinity is not unexpected but the extent to which the *trope* is elaborated is. Closer examination of the structure of the Psalm in its entirety reveals a degree of ingenuity that may seem altogether inappropriate in a devotional aid. If the rhyme scheme of the first stanza is written down it appears as a b c c b a a c b b c a, as is demonstrated reading across the first row of figure one, lines 1 to 12 (see Appendix on page 13 of this essay). Repetitions in patterns of three appear, as all three (a, b and c) rhymes are repeated in the doubling. If the scheme is annotated in this way throughout the entire Psalm, the pattern which emerges reveals that the a b c c b a sequence can also be found reading *through* the first lines of each stanza. There are three rhyme patterns found reading through the first, second and third lines of the Psalm, which are repeated in a mirror image in lines four, five and six, as was the rhyme pattern of the first stanza. The following three lines, seven, eight and nine create a new pattern which is again repeated palindromically (see Fig. 1). Leaving behind the linguistic aspects and focussing only on the abstract patterns, the rhyme scheme appears as in Fig. 2.

The a b c c b a pattern is repeated throughout the scheme, both vertically and laterally, forming a framework within which the other rhymes are contained, as it interacts with all of their components. The effect is to create an image of two open complementary figures which are contained within the larger unit; a further implied unit of three. The two 'open' sections created by a different rhyme scheme at the beginning of stanza six and the end of stanza one, in fact match each other and 'close' the figure (see fig. 3).

The discovery of the hidden visual harmony represented within the poem encourages an observant reader to search for an embedded meaning in the repeated pattern. The two images are congruent but different, which emphasises the theme of the 'doubleness' of the false friendship of verse 12 of the Psalm. The repeated 'bar' of the a c b b c a rhyme also draws together the two halves of the figure, indicating that the two seemingly independent and disparate elements can be absorbed into one harmonious whole. The doubling *topos* is further confirmed in the syllabic count of the Psalm which overall numbers 720, significant in that it represents the circle encircled. As confirmed in contemporary works of numerology, the perfect number was considered to be 360, so the Psalm evokes the concept of consummate perfection achieved by the presence of three in one: the Trinity. The images of both the circle and the square are particularly apposite to devotional verse, as George Puttnam points out, "The Spheare is appropriat to the heavens" and "The square is of all other accompted the figure of most soliditie and stedfastnesse".<sup>39</sup>

The structure of the poem as it appears on the page undulates; the starting points of the first three lines retreat to form half of a concave curve, which is completed by the next three lines, the starting points of which mirror lines one to three (see page 8 of this essay). The same format is repeated in the remaining six lines, which results in the undulating form

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<sup>39</sup> George Puttnam, *The Arte of English Poesie* (Cambridge: University Cambridge University Press), p. 100.

of the number 3, which again draws attention to the patterning of triads within the rhyme scheme and the theological implications. The visual impact of the Psalms was obviously of importance to Sidney, as is apparent in her positioning of the staves of different lengths to create intriguing images on the page throughout the Psalter.<sup>40</sup> In Psalm 55 the form also serves as a 'key' to the hidden content, however. George Puttnam terms this type of visual arrangement 'proportion by situation', adding "it so falleth out most times your ocular proportion doeth declare the nature of the audible [...] this is by a natural *simpathie*, betweene the eare and the eye".<sup>41</sup>

The remarkable depth of organisational skill which underlies just this one Psalm provides an insight into Sidney's genius. The most interesting aspect of it, however, is that it is hidden to most readers; it is a mystery buried beneath the surface of the Psalm which is only discoverable by diligent searching. In fact, such devices as internal semi-concealed rhymes, visual patterning of form which echoes the content, numerical equivalences and denotation are quite common in the work of Sidney's male contemporaries and later poets influenced by the Psalms. Aspects of the work have been discussed as metaphysical in approach (and of particular interest to Donne in this respect), highly topical in their references to court and London life, and as influencing Henry Vaughan, John Milton and especially George Herbert.<sup>42</sup>

The Sidney Psalter was a great literary achievement in its time and, in fact, served as a poet's handbook, due to its extraordinary variety of verse forms. As Hannibal Hamlin notes, it explores all of the categories that George Puttnam's *Arte of English Poesie* enumerates in its second book, "Of Proportion Poetical".<sup>43</sup> Mary Sidney herself was no doubt influenced by the literary experiments of male poets whom she knew personally, through her brother's connections, or whose work she knew through manuscript circulation. There are correspondences with Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* in some Psalms, and her knowledge of quantitative verse no doubt was gained from her brother and the syllabic experiments of Dyer, Drant, Harvey and Spenser, who all produced work in this form. There are verbal links with Sir Thomas Wyatt's *Certayne Psalms*, George Gascoigne's *Psalms in Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* and also Anne Locke's *Meditation*.<sup>44</sup>

Even this brief examination of the religious paraphrases of Anne Locke and Mary Sidney reveals some perplexing differences of attitude. Locke's sequence avoids gender-specific reference (the speaker is merely a generic 'sinner') and to a large extent evades issues of accepted female propriety in the presentation of the volume. It is confidently addressed to a noble female patron on terms of equality and communicates an unshakeable degree of assurance in her own status as one of God's chosen. Conversely, it also

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<sup>40</sup> Of all her Psalms, only eight poems are what would be termed 'left justified' today. These are Pss. 111, 117, the 'f' poem of 119, 121, 122, 126, 127 and 140.

<sup>41</sup> Puttnam, p. 85.

<sup>42</sup> Hannibal Hamlin, *Psalm Culture and Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), "The Psalms and English Poetry II," pp. 119-31, *passim*. Herbert's *The Temple, Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations* (1633) also utilises a great variety of verse forms, creates 'ocular sympathy' or *carmen figuratum*, where the form replicates the content of the poem, and experiments with hidden acrostics and 'echo poems'.

<sup>43</sup> Hamlin, p. 119; Puttnam, pp. 64-136.

<sup>44</sup> The editors of her collected works identify "O god, god of my health" (Ps. 51, l. 40) as being "a direct quotation of Lok (211)". *The Collected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert*, vol. II, p. 369 n. 40. Both the Matthew's Bible and Coverdale's version, which is most probably inspired by Tyndale's Psalter also have this correlation, delivered as, 'God, thou that art the God of my health'. Although the Vulgate and orthodox translations based upon it also carry this correspondence, only the 'family' of translations associated with Tyndale and Coverdale in reformed translations of the Psalm examined make any similar references to God's role as guardian of the health, physical or spiritual. Locke not only uses this figure in the introductory psalmic verse, but also begins her sonnet, 'O God, God of my health', the term being repeated as the first line of the concluding couplet. Anne Locke, *Collected Works of Anne Locke*, Sonnet Sixteen, l. 297, l. 309, pp. 69, 70. Note, the side note spelling is 'helth', l. 300 (p. 69).

observes conspicuously strict measures of restraint. These could be interpreted either as relatively uncomplicated evidence of her acceptance of cultural restrictions, or of her earnest acceptance of Calvinist doctrine.

Mary Sidney's submissive modesty and apparent denial of authorial ambition is compromised to differing extents, however, by the outspoken addresses to the Queen in the 'Even now that Care' and 'To the Angel Spirit.' dedications, her valorising of female experience, the literary excesses and especially the apparent intellectual pride exhibited within the Psalms.<sup>45</sup> The religious contexts of the two works are also radically different. Locke wrote as an exile in the hotbed of Calvinism, among religious extremists who were engaged in evangelising for the 'new' religion. As a direct result of the urgency of the enterprise and an unwavering belief in her own election, she was able to transcend normative cultural restrictions placed upon female authorship. By contrast, Mary Sidney wrote from the relative stability of an established state Protestantism and for a select readership.<sup>46</sup> Philip Sidney's death, in 1586, seems to have been the catalyst not only to producing her own literary works, but also to continuing his commitments of literary promotion and patronage. The style of her paraphrases is assured, even courtly, and engages with contemporary poetical and political discourse. As Margaret Hannay has indicated, the dedication "To the Thrice Sacred Queen Elizabeth", should be read as "a strong political statement", intended to continue her brother's commitment to Protestantism.<sup>47</sup> The Queen is uncompromisingly reminded of her duty to support the cause in Europe as the Countess binds herself to his religious and political ideals in what she terms a joint literary venture. The veiled criticism of Psalm 55, which is aimed at monarchs who allow corruption and evil in their domain, can also be read as the honest speech of a loyal humanist advisor.<sup>48</sup> The modest and self-deprecating persona, carefully crafted in the elegy which follows, clearly needs interrogation. The implications are wider than this, however.

The sheer ingeniousness and delight in intellectual play evidenced in the Psalter undermines both the Countess' self-construction within the elegy and the simple piety suggested by the choice of genre. The complex structures hidden within the Psalter, such as those of Psalm 55, are not apparent upon either a superficial reading or hearing. Rather, they require in-depth visual engagement with the written text, which one would have thought unlikely except in the case of the poem being critically scrutinised by other poets. In this respect they may be encoded for a specific readership. The Psalms should be read as the *magnum opus* of an extraordinary literary talent. In fact, the venture suggests a response to the type of poetical test that Puttenham describes as demonstrating the "promptnesse of wit [...] great arte and a notable memorie" appropriate in a true "crafts maister".<sup>49</sup> The immediate audience of the Psalms was the Countess's coterie, including prominent members of the nobility and an extended literary circle. The patronage and support of the Sidney/Herbert families assisted literary figures such as Fulke Greville, Edmund Spenser, Samuel Daniel, Thomas Nashe, John Florio, John Donne and Ben Jonson. Given the

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<sup>45</sup> "Even now that Care" is the dedicatory poem to Queen Elizabeth in the Tixall Manuscript of the *Psalms*. "To The Angel Spirit of Sir Philip Sidney" praises her brother's memory and is part of the great literary outpouring which lamented his death in 1586 while supporting the Protestant Netherlands against Catholic Spain. He was remembered as a Protestant martyr and his death was ascribed by many to Elizabeth's insufficient support of the cause.

<sup>46</sup> See Margaret P. Hannay's "'Wisdom the Wordes": Psalm Translation and Elizabethan Women's Spirituality', *Religion and Literature* 23:3 (Autumn 1991), pp. 65-82.

<sup>47</sup> Margaret P. Hannay "'Doo What Men May Sing': Mary Sidney and the Tradition of Admonitory Dedication", pp. 149-65, in *Silent But for the Word*, ed. M. P. Hannay (Kent, Ohio: Kent University Press, 1985), p. 149. As Hannay points out, the Queen's expected visit to Wilton in 1599 was cancelled, although she did make a brief visit to Penshurst, the Sidney seat, November of the same year, p. 276 n 2.

<sup>48</sup> As in Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*, for example.

<sup>49</sup> Putnam, pp. 90-91.

virtuosity demonstrated, it seems reasonable, therefore, to consider the work primarily as literary, rather than devotional and as intended for this type of readership.

The partial revelations and 'keys', with the encouragement to seek further, do present analytical challenges which were no doubt attractive to intellectuals and scholars, and so may be censured as encouraging intellectual vanity. Although it may seem paradoxical, another altogether more devout purpose may underwrite the impressive coding, however. Alistair Fowler's remarkable works on structural patterns in Renaissance poetry reveal pervasive understanding and use of numerological symbolism in the work of Elizabethan poets.<sup>50</sup> Sir Philip Sidney, Jonson and Spenser all used structural patterning in their poems, based on contemporary understanding of the significance of numbers.<sup>51</sup> Rather than occult associations, this indicated instead a comprehension of classical and medieval traditions which are largely lost to a modern day reader. Fowler accepts that these common perceptions of the importance of number may seem abstruse to modern readers, but insists that "contemporaries of Sidney's understood". Moreover, he reads numerical significance into Mary Sidney's organisation of her brother's sonnet sequence, for publication in 1598, which hides an implied "compliment on Lady Penelope Rich's virtue", predicated on the classical significance of the number 108.<sup>52</sup> Numerical iconography was meshed with biblical allusion and dated from the times of the Church Fathers, hence the incorporation of this type of concealed discourse founded upon mathematical precepts could be understood as denoting divine archetypes and intimations of the ineffable.

## Conclusion

The reception of early modern women's works is often compromised by our own contemporary preoccupations. Focusing on the gendered production of the texts can have the effect of universalising the authors' subject positions. Rather than assigning these works a compromised niche in literary history which demands special status as 'Women's Writing' and results in interpretive homogeneity, therefore, a more profitable route of investigation may be to read them alongside those of their male contemporaries and their ideological peers. Anne Locke's work needs to be read in parallel with that of her co-religionists, whose aim in their translations and metrical Psalms, was to produce functional aids to piety. Her volume is also part of the powerful desire to create a Protestant identity and history for the new faith and, as such, can also be read as propaganda. Notwithstanding the pious genre, Mary Sidney's Psalms cannot be considered an exercise in the devotional lyric, according to the severe tenets of early Calvinism. Nonetheless, her work exhibits a scholarly knowledge of contemporary Psalm translations and commentaries. The Psalter demonstrates her significant literary achievements which equal and, in many cases, surpass those of her male contemporaries. Despite the meticulous approach to her work, however, it is possible to discover religious motivation in the use of arcane signification, rather than mere literary posturing or the excesses of an untrammelled imagination.

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<sup>50</sup> Alistair Fowler, *Triumphal Forms, Structural Patterns in Elizabethan Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) and *Conceitful Thought, The Interpretation of English Renaissance Poems* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1975).

<sup>51</sup> Jonson's masque *Hymenaei* and "A New Year's Gift Sung to King Charles 1635" (*Triumphal Forms*, pp. 146, 147, 152); Spenser's *Epithalamion* and "Amoretti" (*Ibid.*, pp. 161-73, 180-82); Sidney's *Astrophil & Stella* (*Ibid.*, pp. 174-80).

<sup>52</sup> Fowler, *Triumphal Forms*, p. 175.

## Appendix

**Fig 1**

stanza	Line 1 rhyme pattern		2		3		4		5		6	
	1	Here	a	find	b	away	c	say	c	mind	b	teare
2	Wind	b	beare	a	stay	c	way	c	there	a	behind	b
3	day	c	kind	b	neere	a	weare	a	lin'd	b	sway	c
4	May	c	deere	a	frend	b	bind	b	were	a	pray	c
5	fin'd	b	slay	c	heire	a	forbeare	a	pay	c	design'd	b
6	upcheare	a	waigh	c	pin'd	b	kinde	b	allway	c	yeare	a
stanza	Line 7		8		9		10		11		12	
	1	Eare	a	laie	c	assign'd	b	resign'd	b	pray	c	feare
2	Blind	b	astray	c	appeare	a	where	a	display	c	confin'd	b
3	Play	c	cheere	a	unkind	b	sign'd	b	reare	a	assay	c
4	Decay	c	mind	b	beare	a	cleare	a	enclin'd	b	dismay	c
5	undetermin'd	b	meare	a	betray	c	bewray	c	speare	a	Rind	b
6	Here	a	shin'd	b	stay	c	allay	c	twin'd	b	sheare	a

**Fig. 2**

Stanza	Line											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1	a	b	c	c	b	a	a	c	b	b	c	a
2	b	a	c	c	a	b	b	c	a	a	c	b
3	c	b	a	a	b	c	c	a	b	b	a	c
4	c	a	b	b	a	c	c	b	a	a	b	c
5	b	c	a	a	c	b	b	a	c	c	a	b
6	a	c	b	b	c	a	a	b	c	c	b	a

**Fig. 3**

Stanza	Line											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1	a	b	c	c	b	a	a	b	c	c	b	a
2	b					b	b					b
3	c					c	c					c
4	c					c	c					c
5	b					b	b					b
6	a	c	b	b	c	a	a	b	c	c	b	a

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