

Wyatt Abroad: Tudor Diplomacy and the Translation of Power.

William T. Rossiter.

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This engaging study seeks to pin down the notoriously slippery poet Wyatt in intricate, overlapping networks of translation and diplomacy. It finds him “abroad,” both in foreign embassy at European centers of power, and within the pages of his Continental literary sources (principally French and Italian). Rossiter’s nuanced analysis is framed by translation — translation not just as a literary bridge between a foreign source and its Englished counterpart (in a process that fuses late medieval *translatio* and early modern *imitatio*), but also as a transferal and displacement of political authority, a *translatio imperii*, and a negotiation of power involved in diplomatic exchanges. Rossiter cleverly recasts Wyatt’s translations as a form of textual diplomacy in a compelling theory of Wyatt’s reading (and “creative misreading”) of anterior, authoritative discourses (24).

The book is structured logically and, in large part, chronologically. Chapter 1 presents Wyatt’s early lyrics as an interfusion of French and Italian poetics (for instance, triangulating Wyatt, Jean Marot, and Serafino). Reversing an entrenched critical and editorial bias, it gives renewed prominence to Wyatt’s overlooked debts to French poetry, not least his formal inheritance of *balades* and *rondeaux*. The second chapter locates Wyatt’s Petrarchan translations in an ambassadorial context. Rossiter reads seemingly amatory lyrics through a lens of diplomatic negotiations: Wyatt’s Petrarchism is “a language of counterpoint which he was learning to speak as a fledgling ambassador” (95). In a similar vein, chapter 3 discusses Wyatt’s return to Petrarchan lyrics during his embassies at the Spanish imperial court (between 1537 and 1539) to voice his political and amatory frustration and disillusionment: the “cornerstones of Wyatt’s poetic vocabulary” (“hope, desire, fear and trust”) are each “undermined through experience by despair, repugnance, Stoic resilience and suspicion” (136). Chapter 4 unpacks the “soteriological diplomacy” (173) of Wyatt’s psalm paraphrases, treating them as end products of the diplomatic adaptation, imitation, and recombination of several sources and analogs. Here Wyatt wrestles with a religio-political lexis that had “become dangerously over-determined” (196). The concluding chapter addresses Wyatt’s response to an English poetic tradition of Chaucer and para-Chaucer (especially Lydgate), popular forms of proverb and fable, and a “pre-existing Anglo-Italian” late medieval English poetics (217).

This study deftly fuses literary biography, sensitive close reading, and translation theory. It will be of particular value to those interested in literary genealogies and paradigms of literary influence in the late medieval and early modern periods. Rossiter is admirably attentive to Wyatt’s handling of sources, the deictic ambiguities of his poetic idiom, and his reliance on suggestion, simulation, and dissimulation. Among its many virtues, this book questions the assumption that early modern literary culture marks a revolutionary rupture with its medieval past: *Wyatt Abroad* bridges the gap between

Wyatt's native precursors (principally Chaucer and Lydgate, with cameos from Charles d'Orléans, Dunbar, and Skelton) and his later sixteenth-century commentators and successors (Puttenham, Ascham, and Harington). In keeping with Wyatt's own practice of intertextual writing, *Wyatt Abroad* seamlessly works quotations from primary sources (not least, of course, Wyatt's poetry) into its unfolding narrative. It ventures persuasive cross-references between Wyatt's poems, tracing thematic anxieties across his oeuvre, and takes pains to map out a chronology of composition (a vexed topic in Wyatt studies). The glossary of theoretical terms at the end and the dense footnotes add valuable layers of context, both literary and historical: Rossiter is sensitive to precise dating, though is cautious not to force biographical correspondences.

In its biographical loading, this book draws effectively from Susan Brigden's instantly canonical study *Thomas Wyatt: The Heart's Forest* (2012), but also responds impressively to Thomas Greene's theory of "subreading" to show how, for instance, Wyatt subreads Ovid in Petrarch. An engaging read cover to cover, *Wyatt Abroad* offers particularly rewarding discussions of Wyatt's handling of Petrarch through the intermediary filter of the commentator Alessandro Vellutello, whose 1525 edition of Petrarch's lyrics Wyatt is shown, conclusively, to have used. (It would have been interesting to know if Wyatt is similarly indebted to Vellutello's expanded 1528 edition too.) Not unimpressively, Rossiter ventures a new Wyattic source in the Italian Protestant Reformer Antonio Brucioli's commentary on the penitential Psalms, and new allusions to Chaucer in Wyatt's most overanalyzed poem, "They flee from me" — and that alone is no mean feat.

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