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William Tyndale and Erasmus on How to Read the Bible: A Newly Discovered Manuscript of the English *Enchiridion*

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British Library MS Additional 89149, newly discovered in 2015 at Alnwick Castle, is a previously unknown translation of Erasmus' *Enchiridion militis Christiani* into English. Dated 1523, it now represents the earliest surviving English translation of any work by Erasmus. This article presents detailed verbal evidence that associates the vocabulary of *imitatio* in the translation with William Tyndale's hermeneutic work on scripture, including his New Testament of 1525–1526. It thus offers the strongest evidence to date of Tyndale's hand in the English *Enchiridion*, long the subject of scholarly enquiry. It also provides a fresh interpretation of Tyndale's engagement with Erasmian humanism, and his position on disputes over literal and figurative senses in early Protestantism. At the heart of this is the distinctive English word 'counterfeit', the meanings of which are traced through a range of medieval and Renaissance sources, from Chaucer onwards.

KEYWORDS Bible, hermeneutics, Erasmus, literal sense, allegory, imitation

In the grand narrative of the Renaissance Bible, England would, no doubt, be but a small diversion, were it not for the retrospective glamour of later linguistic empires. "The English Bible is everywhere," is the megalomaniac claim of the most compendious survey of the field.[1] Nonetheless, William Tyndale made no appearance in Debora Kuller Shuger's *Renaissance Bible* (1994), and with good reason. Shuger's book uncovered that strange alliance between retrospective Protestant triumphalism, and secular English literary history, that has led to a dominant emphasis on

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[1] David Daniell, *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 10.

"only insular, vernacular material."[2] In the process, she argued, English Renaissance literary culture had been profoundly misunderstood. Latinity has been taken to be equivalent to classicism, at the expense of a vibrant Latin and neo-Latin culture of biblical criticism. Religion, equally, has been assumed to be vernacular, cut loose from its European roots. It will be obvious how English Bible translation confirmed both of these stereotypes, and its history was often left to champions happy with a story of vernacular religion. This essay attempts to cross this divide, by creating a pre-history of what Shuger calls "the textual commerce linking England to Continental humanism" (6). By examining a newly discovered manuscript, the first response to Erasmus's biblical project in English, it will relate vernacular translation to the early stages of English humanism in the 1520s.

David Daniell praises Tyndale's "Saxon vocabulary and syntax, matching the original *koiné* (common) Greek."[3] It is made to appear as if the English version arises out of the Greek, almost without mediation. Daniell plays down the influence of Germany, and especially Martin Luther, on Tyndale (143); of his residing in the Low Countries after 1527 (146); and even of the Wycliffite translation of the New Testament (85–6), in case it contaminates Tyndale's English with Latinity. However, an alternative interpretation is possible, in which an early modern English Bible appears more European. Andrew Pettegree points out that the English print industry was too small to take on "ambitious or controversial projects."[4] Tyndale's departure for Germany, perhaps in April 1524, may not have been a brutal exile so much as a stroke of luck. Here Tyndale encountered publishers capable of taking on such a large-scale project as a Bible translation. Cologne, Worms, and later Antwerp, are essential factors in the creation of an English Bible. This European trajectory continued beyond Tyndale into the production of Miles Coverdale's *Biblia* in Cologne in 1535.[5] It even pertains to the Great Bible of 1539, which was undertaken by printers in Paris. Only after 1540 did an insular English Bible become feasible.

These material issues merge with a sense of Tyndale's cultural Europeanism. The most obvious aspect of this is Tyndale's relation to Luther. The *Septembertestament* of 1522 appeared in an affordable quarto edition of 3000 copies from the newly opened print shop in Wittenberg of Melchior Lotter the Younger.[6] Lucas Cranach provided woodcuts and also partly financed the edition, supplying paper from his newly acquired mill.[7] Tyndale's *New Testament*, in the fragmentary Cologne version by Peter Quentell in 1525, is a quarto in very similar size, with a woodcut of St Matthew (also found in a German New Testament of 1529) and a prologue based on Luther's in his *Septembertestament*.[8] The Worms edition of 1526 by Peter Schöffer, an octavo, again looks like a Lutheran

[2] *The Renaissance Bible: Scholarship, Sacrifice, and Subjectivity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 6.

[3] Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 133.

[4] "Publishing in Print: Technology and Trade," in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible: Vol. 3, from 1450 to 1750*, ed. Euan Cameron (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 180.

[5] On the Cologne printing of the Coverdale Bible, see Peter W. M. Blayney, *The Stationers' Company and the Printers of London*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1.344–7.

[6] Pettegree, "Publishing in Print," 172–3.

[7] Andrew Pettegree, *Brand Luther* (London: Penguin Books, 2015), 187.

[8] A.S. Herbert, *Historical Catalogue of Printed Editions of the English Bible, 1525-1961* (London: The British and Foreign Bible Society, 1968), 1.

Testament, with woodcuts of Evangelists and Apostles opening the gospels, and Romans, 1 Peter, 1 John, Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation.[9] Just as striking, although less well-known, is the relation of the trade in English Bibles to the Dutch-speaking world. The work of Guido Latré has shown how Tyndale's books from Antwerp (including editions of the Pentateuch (1530), and a revised New Testament (1534)), make more sense in the context of the Low Countries than they do of England. The Antwerp reprint by Christoffel van Ruremund of Tyndale's Worms New Testament appeared in the wake of the first complete Dutch Bible (based on Luther's German), and the first complete French Bible (by Jacques Lefèvre d'Etaples) from Merten de Keyser.[10] Antwerp was the true centre for the Bible in English for a decade, including not only Tyndale's work but also George Joye's Psalter (1534), the "Matthew Bible" of 1537 (edited by John Rogers), and Coverdale's New Testament (1538).[11]

In addition to this material resemblance, whatever Daniell's assertions, Tyndale readily uses intermediary sources alongside Hebrew and Greek texts in making his versions. This is what a sensible translator does, surrounding herself with glosses, dictionaries, grammars, or alternative versions of the text. Antwerp was one of the best places in the world to find such aids.[12] Luther's German inflects Tyndale's usage even when we can also see him reacting to specific points of Hebrew grammar in Genesis.[13] His Pauline vocabulary of justification develops as a result of a careful knowledge of Luther's struggle between the Latin legal language of *iustitia* and his emerging German theology of *Rechtfertigung*.[14] More broadly, it can be shown that Tyndale learned to express himself in the vernacular partly by the experience of a decade living within German and Dutch multilingual communities.[15] While Daniell consistently, indeed actively, plays down Tyndale's Latinity, it can also be demonstrated, both directly, and indirectly via use of the Wycliffite translations.[16]

I. An English book, called *Enchiridion*

Tyndale, we are reminded, was never strictly speaking part of the Reformation in England. He left before it began, and died before he could join it. As a Reformer, he is better seen in German or Flemish guise: indeed, he was condemned in Vilvoorde not for translating the Bible into English but for local heresies. But can he be seen as part of what Shuger calls the "Renaissance Bible"? The crucial questions here concern Tyndale's relationship to Erasmianism, and to Erasmus in particular.[17] In

[9] Herbert, *Historical Catalogue*, 1–2.

[10] Guido Latré, in *Tyndale's Testament* ed. Paul Arblaster, Gergely Juhász, and Guido Latré (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2002), 13.

[11] *Antwerp, Dissident Typographical Centre: The Role of Antwerp Printers in the Religious Conflicts of England* (Antwerp: Snoeck-Ducaju, 1994), 92–103.

[12] See the examples in *Tyndale's Testament*, 97–105.

[13] Brian Cummings, "The Theology of Translation: Tyndale's Grammar," in *Word, Church, and State: Tyndale Quincentenary Essays*, ed. John T. Day, Eric Lund, and Anne M. O'Donnell (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 36–59, this ref. 44–9.

[14] Brian Cummings, "Justifying God in Tyndale's English," *Reformation* 2 (1997): 143–71; this ref. 152–7.

[15] Brian Cummings, *Mortal Thoughts: Religion, Secularity & Identity in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 220.

[16] Cummings, "Justifying God," 149–52.

[17] See Mark Rankin, "Tyndale, Erasmus and the Early English Reformation," forthcoming in *Erasmus Studies*.

a formal sense, Tyndale used a copy of Erasmus's bilingual text, most likely from the third edition of 1522, as a working copy for his New Testament translation of 1525–1526. The *Enchiridion militis christiani* of Erasmus also has a seminal place in biographies of Tyndale from John Foxe to Daniell.[18] Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* (1563) describes Tyndale, after his university education, returning in 1522 to his native Gloucestershire to work as a tutor for a local landowner with connections at court, Sir John Walsh of Little Sodbury Manor. In which company, Foxe says:

> Amongest whome commonly was talke of learning, as well of Luther & Erasmus Roterodamus, as of opinions in the scripture. The saide Maister Tyndall being learned & which had bene a student of diuinitie in Cambridge, and hadde therein taken degree of schole, did many times therin shewe hys mynde and learnyng.[19]

Tyndale's knowledge of "open and manifest scripture" both impresses his hosts and causes local controversy. Thereupon, Foxe says, "he did translate into English a book called as I remember *Enchiridion militis Christiani*. The which being translated, delivered to his master and Lady" (570). Some corroboration of Foxe's story, with additional detail, occurs in a document dated 1528, later found by John Strype, when the merchant Humphrey Monmouth was arrested for possession of heretical books and petitioned the King's Council. Monmouth related in a petition to Cardinal Wolsey that Tyndale had given him a copy of "an English book, called Enchiridion" four and a half years earlier.[20] Monmouth is understandably cagey about his part in this, and is careful to declare that he sought authority for possessing the book by sending it "to the abbess of Dennye at her request." Monmouth admitted also having "another copy of the same book, which a friar of Greenwich asked for." This copy he now believed was in the hands of John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester.

The *Enchiridion* was an early work of Erasmus, begun in 1499, and published in 1503 in a selection of *Lucubratiunculae*. In 1515 it was reprinted in an edition on its own by Thierry Mertens in Louvain, and again in 1518 by Johann Froben in Basel in revised form, with a preface to Paul Volz. The 1518 edition was deliberately promoted as part of Erasmus's New Testament strategy, which also saw in the same year the *Ratio verae theologiae*, an expanded version of the *Methodus*, the second of the prefaces of his 1516 New Testament. These two works were among the most frequently reprinted of Erasmus's works, and together constitute a literary theory of the Bible. An English translation of the *Enchiridion* was printed in London in 1533 by Wynkyn de Worde for John Byddel.[21] Like the original Latin, the English was reprinted frequently (in 13 editions). Whether this translation might indeed be the vanished version by Tyndale has been debated for a century.

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[18] David Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 61.

[19] *Actes and Monuments* (London: John Day, 1563), 570; cited from *The Acts and Monuments Online*, https://www.johnfoxe.org/ (accessed February 20, 2018).

[20] *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, ed. J. S. Brewer, J. Gairdner, and R. H. Brodie (London: HMSO, 1862–1932), iv. No. 4282.

[21] *A booke called in latyn Enchiridion militis christiani, and in englysshe the manuell of the christen knyght replenysshed with moste holsome preceptes, made by the famous clerke Erasmus of Roterdame* ([London]: Wynkyn de Worde, [1533]).

J.F. Mozley and James McConica asserted it was his.[22] Robert Demaus and Daniell are among those expressing caution.[23] The most learned discussion is by Anne O'Donnell in her edition of the 1534 second edition for the Early English Text Society in 1981. She concluded, after a stylistic analysis, that "The internal evidence for Tyndale's authorship of the 1533 *Enchiridion* is no more conclusive than the external evidence."[24]

New light on this question emerged in 2015 with the discovery of a manuscript in the collection of the Dukes of Northumberland; it was first listed as present at Alnwick Castle in 1872.[25] It consists of an English translation of Erasmus's *Enchiridion* in brown ink on paper, a large quarto (285 × 195 mm) comprising 145 leaves. An export licence was deferred, and enabled by gifts from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the Friends of the British Library, the Friends of the National Libraries, and an anonymous donor.[26] In September 2015, the British Library announced its acquisition and gave it the new shelf mark of BL Add. MS 89149.[27] It is a fair copy of the text, with penwork initials, in a comely gothic cursive hand, entitled "A compendevs tretis of the sowdear of Crist called encheridion which Erasmus Roterodame wrote vnto a certen courtear a ffrende of his."

There is a possibility that it is a presentation copy, and some markings suggest its possible presence in a printer's shop. However, it is not the copy used in the 1533 edition. It does not contain the letter to Volz, which prefaced Erasmus's work in most Latin editions after 1518, and is included in the printed English version of Wynkyn de Worde. There are other differences in wording and phrasing. The manuscript also contains a completely different set of marginal notes from the printed edition, copied in the same handwriting as the main text, and supplying an often subtle and sophisticated amplification (and sometimes commentary) on Erasmus's text. These divergences are unlikely to have been introduced by a printer. It therefore represents a hitherto unknown version of the English *Enchiridion*.

The colophon (Figure 1) is of exceptional value, as it reads "translated oute of the latten into englisshe in the yere of our lord god m^lvcxxiii" [1523].[28] The manuscript is therefore now the earliest known translation into English of any work by Erasmus, predating extant English translations of Erasmus by Margaret Roper (of the *Precatio dominica*, STC 10477) and Gentian Hervet (of *De misericordia Domini concio*, STC 10474), both printed by Thomas Berthelet in 1526. It is an outstanding example of English Erasmianism in the early sixteenth century. While independent of the Wynkyn de Worde printed text, it raises important questions about where that text came from. For the printed version is closely related to the new manuscript,

[22] J.F. Mozley, "The English Enchiridion of Erasmus," *Review of English Studies* 20 (1944): 97–107; James K. McConica, *English Humanists and Reformation Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 145–6.
[23] Robert Demaus, *William Tyndale: A Biography* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1925), 15; Daniell, *William Tyndale*, 70–4.
[24] Anne M. O'Donnell, ed., *Enchiridion Militis Christiani: An English Version* (London: Oxford University Press, 1981), liii.
[25] *Third Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts* (London: George Edward Eyre and William Spottiswoode, 1872), 113.
[26] http://www.friendsofnationallibraries.org.uk/contemporary-english-translation-erasmuss-enchiridion-militis-christiani.
[27] http://blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2015/09/erasmus-manuscript-saved-for-the-nation.html.
[28] London, British Library Add. MS 89149, fol. 144ᵛ.
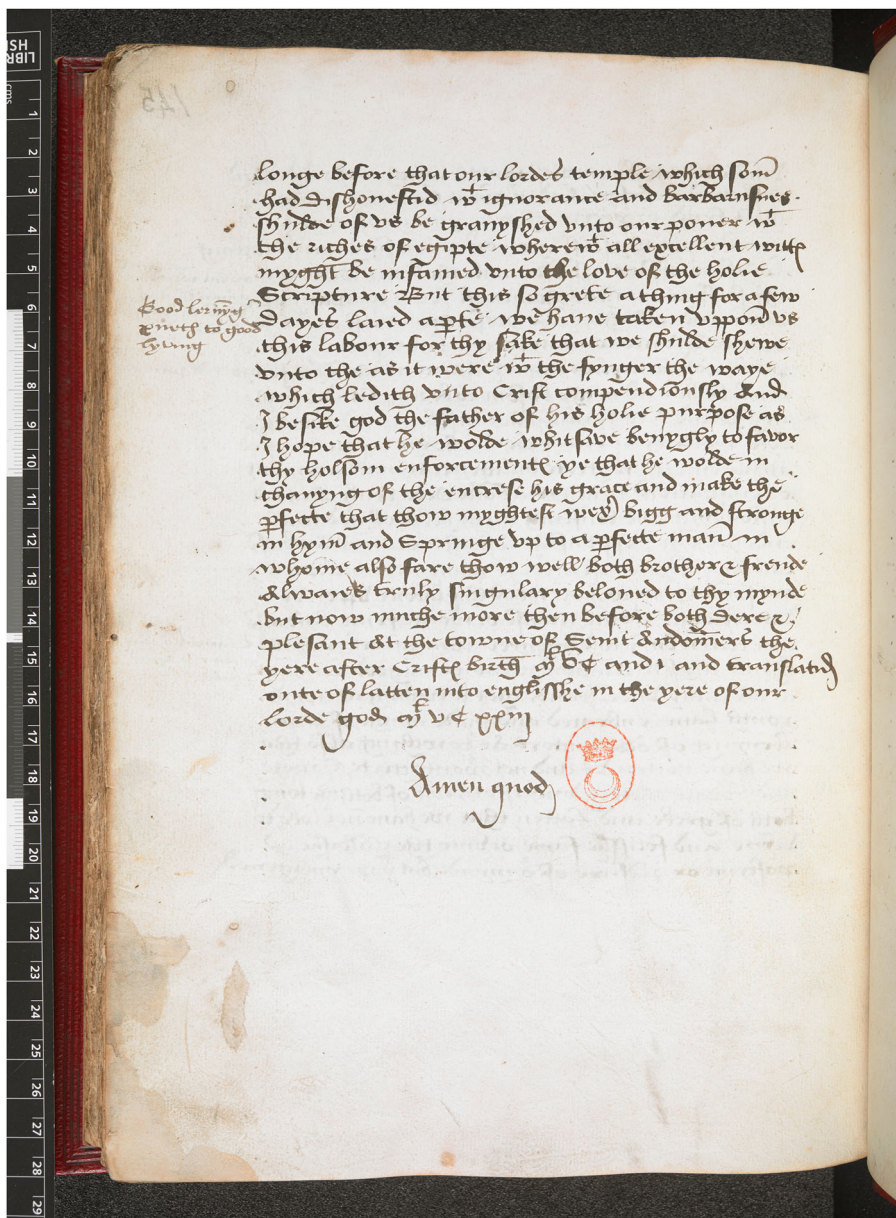
FIGURE 1   "translated oute of the latten into englisshe": British Library, Add. MS 89149, fol. 144v. © British Library Board.

and must have been based on a parallel copy of some kind. At the same time, the changes show an intelligent intervention, and also introduce the Volz letter.

There is also a newly open question of who translated the manuscript version. The date of 1523 is, of course, exactly the year suggested in Foxe for Tyndale's version. There is no new external evidence linking the text to Tyndale. But there is one moment of textual detail of exceptional interest. It comes on the verso of folio 54,

in an important passage in the Fourth Canon or "Rule" of Erasmus's work, where he discusses how to distinguish between the nature of good and evil, and how the reading of scripture contributes in this way to the moral life:

> Quaedam vero media, veluti valetudo, forma, vires, facundia, eruditio et his similia. Ex hoc igitur postremo genere rerum nihil propter se expetendum neque magis minusve adhibendae sunt, nisi quatenus conducunt ad summam metam.[29]

Certain things, Erasmus says, are neither good nor bad, but indifferent in themselves, such as health, beauty, strength, eloquence; these things, he asserts, are neither to be sought after nor rejected on their own account, but should be judged only in so far as they contribute to a higher goal. In Wynkyn de Worde's printed version this is translated as:

> nothing ought to be desired/ for it selfe neyther ought to be vsurped more or lesse/ but as ferforthe as they make & be necessarye to yᵉ chefe marke/ I meane to folow Christes lyuyng.[30]

Those last words, "I meane to folow Christes lyuyng," are not in Erasmus's Latin, which reads: *nisi quatenus conducunt ad summam metam* ("except in so far as they lead to the highest goal"). The English version is not content with the bare Latin, and adds a gloss. While Erasmus makes a philosophical point about weighing up moral judgements, the English insists on a theological explanation: the "chefe marke" is Christ's living example.

The manuscript reading is subtly different, however (Figure 2). Here the gloss is longer:

> Certen thinges verely be indifferent or betwene both of their owen nature neither good ne bad nother honest ne filthie. As helth bewtie strength facundynes connyng and such other. Of this last kinde of thinges therefore nothing ought to be desyred for it self nother ought To be vsurped more or lesse but as farforth as they shalbe necessary vnto the chieff m*ar*ke I meane to the folowing or Cownterfetting of Cristes lyving.[31]

"To counterfeit," in the sixteenth century as now, has a mainly pejorative sense. It means to make a fraudulent imitation of something with an intention to deceive, such as a false coin or a forged painting or document.[32] Yet there is also a sense, used by Chaucer in his translation of Boethius, of "to contrefeten" meaning "to be like, to imitate, simulate, resemble" (without implying deceit).[33] In a range of poems from *The House of Fame* to the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer also uses the word to mean "to imitate conduct," as when it is said of the Prioress in the *General Prologue* that she "peyned hire to countrefete cheere."[34] Most inventively,

[29] Erasmus, *Enchiridion militis Christiani*, in *Opera omnia*, ed. J. Leclerc, 10 vols (Leiden: Pieter van der Aa, 1703–6), LB V.1: 25; *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Annemarie Holborn and Hajo Holborn (München: C.H. Beck, 1933), 64.

[30] *A booke called in latyn Enchiridion militis christiani, and in englysshe the manuell of the christen knyght* (London: Wynkyn de Worde, 1533), sig. G5ᵛ-G6ʳ.

[31] London, British Library Add. MS 89149, fol. 54ᵛ-55ʳ.

[32] "*counterfeit*, v.", §§2-4. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, January 2018 (accessed February 21, 2018).

[33] "so as it ne mai nat contrefetin it ne feynen it, ne be evene lik to it"; *Boece*, V.vi.70, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 467.

[34] *General Prologue*, A.139; *Riverside Chaucer*, 25.
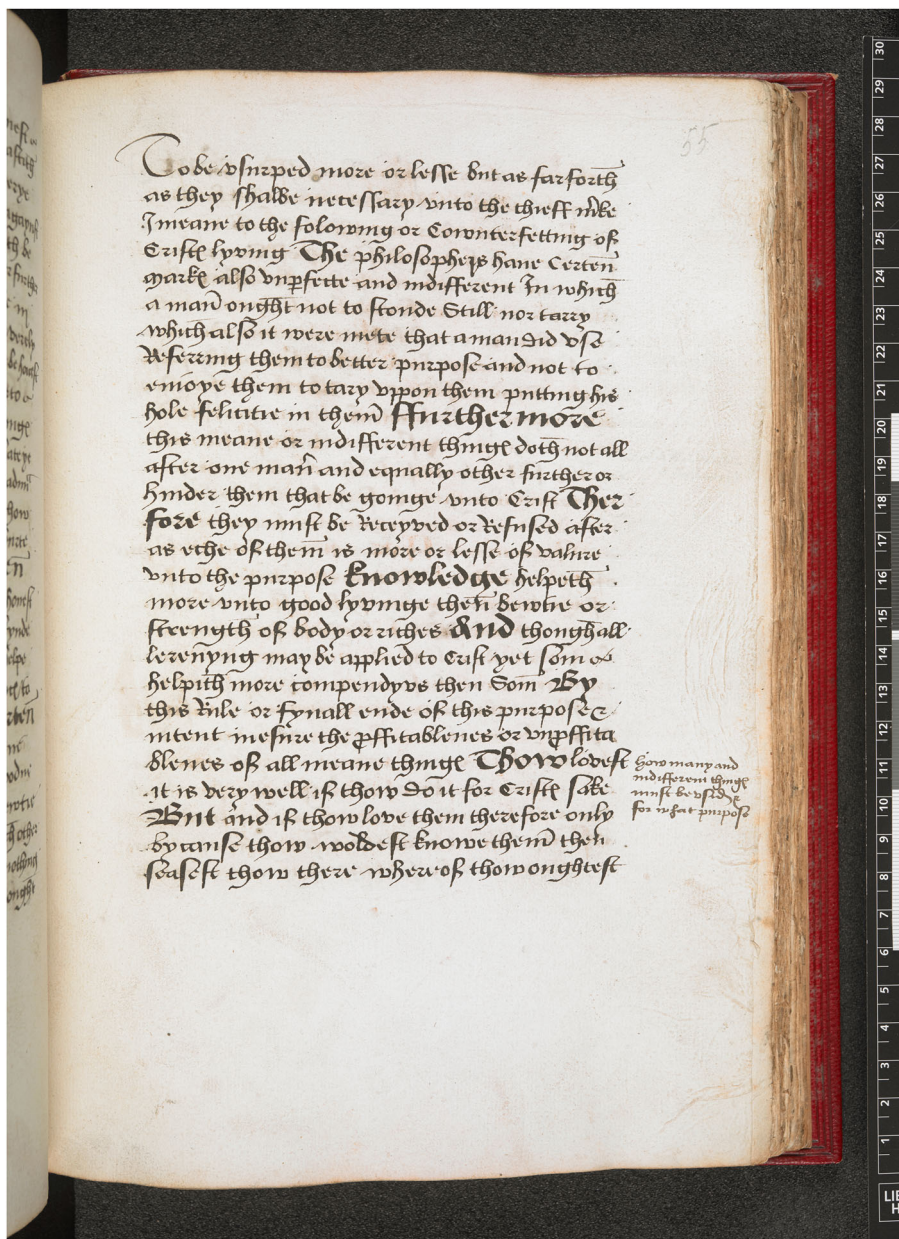
FIGURE 2   "the folowing or Cownterfetting of Cristes lyving": British Library, Add. MS 89149, fol. 55r. © British Library Board.

Chaucer allows the verb to mean "to follow the example of a person." Criseyde chides Troilus in Book III of *Troilus and Criseyde*:

>   Wol ye the childissh jalous contrefete?[35]

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[35] *Troilus and Criseyde*, III.1168; *Riverside Chaucer*, 529.

And Chauntecleer in the *Nun's Priest's Tale* is asked if he really can sing in imitation of his father:

> Lat se; konne ye youre fader countrefete?[36]

While Chaucer is, of course, an exceptionally sensitive user of the language, positive senses of "counterfeit" are found in other literary sources, such as the beautiful fourteenth-century poem *Pearl*, the A Version of *Piers Plowman* ("Of alle maner craftus I con counterfeten") and Thomas Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes*.[37] Nonetheless, it is in a powerfully original sense of the word that Tyndale comes to use it in translating 1 Corinthians 4: 15–16:

> In Christ Iesu / I have begotten you thorowe the gospell. Wherfore I desyre you to counterfayte me.[38]

While Chaucer uses "contrefete" in both directions, as a word meaning to imitate or follow an example, good or bad, Tyndale goes much further, in using the word to be equivalent to the imitation of Christ. In this, he has to run directly against the grain of a peculiar religious sense of "counterfeit," seen for instance in the Homily "On Salvation" (1547). This refers to "a Ded, deuillishe, counterfeit, and feyned faith," as a shorthand for religious hypocrisy or false faith.[39] Similarly, Hugh Latimer compares the superstitious use of relics or images of saints to a "counterfaite" silver coin; and in Nicholas Ridley it comes to be a term (in a transferred sense) for a religious hypocrite of any kind.[40] Catholics, equally, used the word to describe Protestant hypocrites. While these references post-date Tyndale, the word was already a commonplace to mean a turncoat in religion in the fourteenth century, as in Richard Morris's *Pricke of Conscience*: "Þus sal anticrist þan countrefette Þe wondirs of God."[41]

II. Counterfeiting Christ

Tyndale's word "counterfayte" shocks by reclaiming this territory for the imitation of Christ. It is, we note, exactly in line with the usage in the British Library manuscript version of the *Enchiridion*: "the folowing or Cownterfetting of Cristes lyving." The phrase in Paul's Greek which Tyndale translates as "counterfayte" is μιμηταὶ γίνεσθε. Paul uses the identical phrase in 1 Corinthians 11:1. In the Vulgate, the Latin word used here (as also in 1 Thessalonians 1:6) is *imitatores*; Erasmus follows this in rendering *imitatores mei estote* in his 1519 translation. The sense in the Vulgate is picked up in the Wycliffite Revised Version as "be ye

[36] *Nun's Priest's Tale*, B.4511; *Riverside Chaucer*, 259.
[37] "countrefeten," *Middle English Dictionary*, MED Online, University of Michigan (accessed February 21, 2018).
[38] *The New Testament as it was written and caused to be written by them which heard it* ([Worms: Peter Schoeffer, 1526]), fol. 221ᵛ.
[39] *Certayne sermons, or homelies appoynted by the kynges Maiestie, to be declared and redde, by all persones, vicars, or curates, euery Sondaye in their churches, where they haue cure* ([London: Richard Grafton, 1547]), sig. E4ʳ.
[40] Latimer, *The seconde sermon of Maister Hughe Latimer which he preached before the Kynges Maiestie* (London: John Day, [1549]), sig. G2ʳ; Ridley, *A pituous lamentation of the miserable estate of the churche of Christ in Englande* ([London: Willyam Powell, 1566]), sig. A8ᵛ.
[41] *Prick of Conscience*, ed. Ralph Hanna and Sarah Woods, Early English Text Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), line 4311.

followers of me." Tyndale follows the sense of imperative here, as from Luther's "Seid meine Nachfolger!" However, the peculiar inflection of "counterfayte" is different, and is emphasized in Tyndale's *Prologe or preface vn to the pistle off Paul to the Romayns*, produced at the same time as his ground-breaking translation, where Tyndale attempts to explain Paul's theological understanding of Christ's authorship of our salvation: "even so here setteth he hym forth as an ensample to counterfayte / that as he hath done to vs / even so shulde we doo one to another."[42]

Tyndale's "counterfayte" is exactly the kind of daring usage Daniell admires, while also contradicting his rule of thumb that Tyndale prefers Saxon monosyllables. This word is not only Latinate (and French), but also inherently complex. To understand it we require not only a scriptural concordance of Pauline vocabulary, but a deeper understanding of Paul's literary and philosophical context. The earliest full analysis of this is in Erasmus's *Annotationes* to his *Novum Instrumentum* in 1516. Erasmus notices an ambiguity in Paul's meaning. On the one hand Paul asks us to *become* Christ, as if Christ says *genui vos*, "I have begotten you." On the other hand Christ urges us to copy him (*imitemini me*), using the language of imitation: "you shall have imitated or copied me, as if I had given birth to you" (*id fiet si me parentem expresseritis*).[43] Erasmus backs his case via a reference to Horace, *Odes*, 4.5.23–4:

> laudantur simili prole puerperae,
>   culpam poena premit comes.[44]

It is an odd poem (in doubtful praise of Augustus) to quote in a commentary on 1 Corinthians, and an odd line, too, with a barely concealed irony about how a child's similarity to the mother cannot be so guaranteed in the father. However, the Horatian resonance deftly succeeds in taking us into the complex tradition of understanding the idea of imitation, what Plato and Aristotle called μίμησις, a philosophical tradition which lies at the heart of language theory and of how to understand works of art. This tradition merges with the medieval Latin idea of *imitatio* – derived largely from Horace in *De arte poetica* – of how to follow an example, in moral as well as representational terms.

The philosophical application of the classical theory of imitation to the Christian life begins in Erasmus's work well before the New Testament, in the *Enchiridion*, and continues afterwards into the various editions of *Ratio verae theologiae* (1518–1523). Firstly, in the *Enchiridion*, there is the familiar medieval theory of imitation as the following of a moral example: *Alterius fidem, alterius imitare caritatem* ("Imitate the faith of the one and the charity of the other").[45] This is allied to a theory of how works of art and literature work on the mind, even to change behaviour in the same way: *Peragatur in te, quod illic osculis repraesentatur* ("Let what is

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[42] *A compendious introduccion, prologe or preface vn to the pistle off Paul to the Romayns* ([Worms : P. Schoeffer, 1526]), sig. b8ᵛ.

[43] *Erasmus' Annotations on the New Testament: Acts – Romans – I and II Corinthians*, ed. Anne Reeve and M.A. Screech (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 452.

[44] "mothers win praise because of children like their fathers; while vengeance follows close on guilt"; Latin text and English translation from Horace, *Odes and Epodes*, ed. C.E. Bennett, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 304–5.

[45] *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Holborn, 74; translation from *Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972) [*CWE*], 66: 71.

represented there to the eyes be enacted within you").[46] However, Erasmus also extends the representational part of the theory into much more sophisticated areas of μίμησις, involving classical examples such as Apelles in the visual arts, or Plato and Aristotle in theoretical frameworks. He freely mixes examples from the prophets or gospels with extended comparisons from Homer or Virgil. He then applies this theory of representation openly to the mystical tradition of the *imitatio Christi*. The *Enchiridion* is dotted with injunctions such as *Christum facito in sanctis imiteris* ("make sure you imitate Christ in his saints"). At this point, classical theory of imitation comes face to face with the devotional practice Erasmus knew from his youth in the low countries, via the fifteenth-century masterpiece *De imitatione Christi* (by Thomas of Kempen) and the *devotio moderna*.

It is therefore extraordinary to find that "counterfeit" is the English word used to convey these parts of the *Enchridion* in both the manuscript and the later printed versions. In her edition, O'Donnell glosses this word as a synonym for "to imitate."[47] "Counterfet the ones feith and the others charitie"; "Se thow counterfet Crist in his saintes."[48] These readings from the manuscript version are also adopted in the printed text to translate cognates of *imitare*. However, the word is also used to translate other words in Erasmus: "Cownterfet ye them not therefore. For your father knoweth whereof ye have nede afore ye desire it of hym" (where the phrase in Erasmus is *Nolite ergo assimilari eis*).[49] In relation to the imitation of Christ he translates *in carne et sermone tradidit et moribus expressit* as "Crist here in his body taught wth his owen mouth and doctryne and exp*r*essly presented or counterfettid in his man*er*s and lyving miracles here."[50] The translator has therefore noted how Erasmus uses a range of verbs – *imitare*, *assimilare*, *exprimere* – to create a theory of representation. Perhaps most interesting of all, however, is how the translator uses the same word "counterfet" to express Erasmus's meaning when it is at its most exploratory and inventive.

Prominent among such places is a passage where Erasmus discusses the relationship between the exterior and the interior aspects of the soul via a citation from Virgil's *Georgics*:

> Tum variae illudent species atque ora ferarum.
> Fiet enim subito sus horridus atraque tigris
> squamosusque draco et fulva cervice leaena,
> aut acrem flammae sonitum dabit.[51]

Here the translator in the manuscript version praises "the excellente connynge poet Virgill," but rather than attempt a verse translation, instead paraphrases

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[46] Example taken from the same page: *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Holborn, 74; *CWE*, 66: 71.

[47] *Enchiridion*, ed. O'Donnell, 304.

[48] London, British Library Add. MS 89149, fols. 69^r-69^v.

[49] British Library Add. MS 89149, fol. 10^r; *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Holborn, 30.

[50] *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Holborn, 57; British Library Add. MS 89149, fol. 45^r.

[51] "But when you hold him in the grasp of hands and fetters, then will manifold forms that baffle you, and figures of wild beasts. For of a sudden he will become a bristly boar, a deadly tiger, a scaly serpent, or a lioness with a tawny neck; or he will give forth the fierce roar of flame"; Virgil, *Georgics* iv.406–9, Latin text and translation from Virgil, *Works*, vol. 1, ed. H.R. Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library (London: William Heinemann, 1920), 224–5; cited in *Enchiridion*, in *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Holborn, 51.

Virgil's meaning: "dyuerse symylitudes and ffassions of wilde bestes shock the for sodenly he wilbe a ferefull swyne and a foule tigre and a dragen full of scales and a lyone wth a red mane."[52] In the commentary in the right-hand margin, the translator explains this as a reference to Prometheus (he means of course Proteus), who "changeth hym selff to all maner facions"; back in the text, he explains this as the power of poetic imitation, which he interleaves via a further translation from the poem, which possesses such power as "shall counterfet the quyk sownde of the flame of fire" (Figure 3, fol. 37^r). This improvised use of the word "counterfet," repeated in the printed version of the English *Enchiridion*, has no equivalent in Erasmus's text.[53] In relation to another passage later in the *Enchiridion*, in the Sixth Rule, the translator shows how he has also learned to apply the word "counterfet" in a philosophical sense. Here Erasmus discusses a position taken in Plato's *Republic* but disputed in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, that *virtutem nihil aliud esse quam scientiam fugiendorum atque expetendorum*.[54] The printed version of 1533 glosses this as a person choosing between two paths: them "that folowe vertue and shall accompte them that do otherwyse worthy to be lamented and pityed / & not to be counterfayte or folowed."[55]

It is clear that "counterfayte" has become a key word to capture the elusive quality of Erasmus's theory, especially as applied to the imitation of Christ. How can the human truly follow the pattern of the divine? And how does this occur through reading a text, such as the gospels or epistles? Here, the reading in the printed version ("to be counterfayte or folowed"), as earlier in the manuscript ("the folowing or Cownterfetting of Cristes lyving"), is especially striking. It combines, perhaps ambivalently, the two halves of the theory of imitation: to follow an example and to make an identical copy. If there is a sense of ambivalence, it is hardly surprising. In this early stage of Erasmian theory, before *De copia*, never mind the New Testament prefaces, Erasmus puts together a neo-Platonic essay on the soul and the body; with a rhetorical theory of poetic similitude; with an ethical theory of imitation in human behaviour; with an at times rational and at times rapturous account of *imitatio Christi*. Any reader would be excused in feeling confused. It must be admitted that the English translator, with no readily available technical vocabulary, counterfeits one remarkably well.

Who could this translator be? An answer might be found in the fact that this phrase, "to counterfeit and follow" is found (outside of these instances in the translation of the *Enchiridion*) just three times in English before 1537: all three are in Tyndale's controversial work, *The parable of the wycked mammon*. Each time he uses "counterfet and folowe" as a technical term for a process of imitation. In one case, he uses the term to describe a negative process – a form of behaviour that we imitate, which leads to unrighteousness and sin:

[52] British Library Add. MS 89149, fol. 36^v-37^r.
[53] *A booke called in latyn Enchiridion militis christiani*, sig. E5^r.
[54] *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Holborn, 90.
[55] *A booke called in latyn Enchiridion militis christiani*, sig. L6^v.
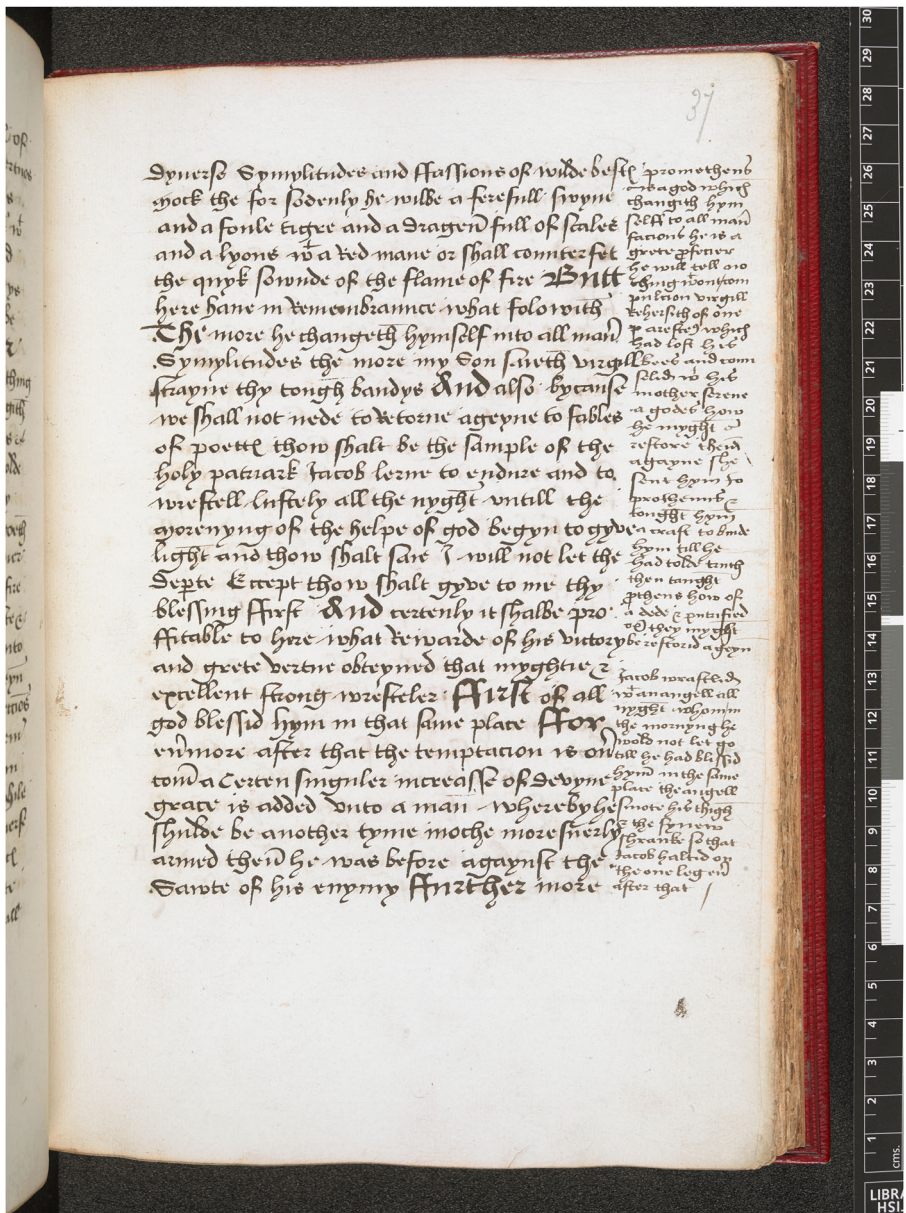
FIGURE 3   "dyuerse symylitudes and ffassions of wilde bestes": British Library, Add. MS 89149, fol. 37r. © British Library Board.

For a forder vnderstandinge of thys Gospell / may here be made .iij. questions. What mammon is / whi it ys called vnrighteous / and after what maner Christ byddyth vs counterfet and folowe the vniust and wycked stuard.[56]

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[56] *That fayth the mother of all good workes iustifieth us before we ca[n] bringe forth anye good worke* [*The parable of the wicked mammon*] (Malborowe [i.e. Antwerp]: Hans luft [i.e. J. Hoochstraten], [1528]), sig. C8ʳ.

But he also uses it of positive examples of Christian living: "But & if ye counterfette and folowe God in well doinge then no doute it ys a sygne yᵗ the spyrite of God ys in you & also the favoure of God."[57] Most strikingly, it describes the process by which a Christian is led to imitation of Christ: "Every Christen man ought to have Christ all ways before his eyes / as an ensample to counterfaite & folowe / & to do to his neyboure as Christ hath done to him."[58]

A short guide to the parts of speech in 1537 uses "I folowe or counterfeyte the" as equivalent to *Emulor te, idest, imitor*, which shows some cross-fertilization between theological and rhetorical usage.[59] But nowhere else is this phrase used in this way until the 1540s – interestingly enough, in another English translation of Erasmus, this time the *Paraphrases*, in the version prepared by Nicholas Udall.[60] While no internal textual evidence can finally prove the authorship of a text, it is not easy to imagine this English verbal pattern for the theory of imitation happening twice, independently, in the 1520s. We are left with two possibilities: either Tyndale is the translator behind the English *Enchiridion*, or else he was one of its earliest readers. Given the external witness provided by Humphrey Monmouth, the simplest explanation is that the translation is his.

The dating of the manuscript in 1523 also provides an explanation for the remarkable use of "counterfayte" in the 1526 New Testament. It shows Tyndale's Erasmianism definitively at work before he left England. As for which version of the English *Enchiridion* is more exactly his – the manuscript or the 1533 text – the best answer is neither. The phrase "counterfeit and follow" is used in both witnesses, but in every instance against the reading of the other. Another copy may have once existed which used the phrase more consistently; or else a later copyist may have done some incomplete tidying. Nevertheless, the phrase is a kind of Tyndalian signature, a shorthand encapsulating a key scriptural concept. In any event, the single word "counterfeit" is used over a dozen times in each version, always in this case corroboratingly. We can see this as a highly important and complex attempt to create an English Erasmian language, developed to account for a radical theory of scriptural interpretation. Indeed, the oddity of the phrase "folowing or Cownterfetting" registers the translator's uncertainty in fully understanding it. The word counterfeit is already strange in context, added to by the hendiadys, in which two terms are co-joined without quite overlapping.[61] To explain this fully, we need to consider further the concept of imitation in Erasmus. For at the heart of Erasmus's method is a bold alignment between a literary theory of imitation – the ancient hermeneutic idea of μίμησις, and the moral and theological concept of imitation. This also enables us to reconsider the question of what kind of reader Tyndale is of Erasmus, and *a posteriori*, of his Bible.

[57] *The parable of the wicked mammon*, sig. D3ʳ.
[58] *The parable of the wicked mammon*, sig. F5ʳ.
[59] *Certayne briefe rules of the regiment or construction of the eyght partes of speche* (London: T. Berthelet, 1537), sig. C1ᵛ.
[60] Jesus "ordeyned a patarne or an example in hymselfe, for vs to counterfayte and folowe"; *The first tome or volume of the Paraphrase of Erasmus vpon the Newe Testamente* ([London]: Edwarde Whitchurche, 1548), sig. B4ʳ.
[61] O'Donnell comments on the "doublet" as a feature of the 1533 version, xliii–iv.

III. Tyndale and the Renaissance Bible

By 1530, Tyndale's explicit references to Erasmus tended to be less than flattering. In "W.T. to the Reader," Tyndale's preface to the Pentateuch, Tyndale made a Lutheran joke in noting how Erasmus's wit turns little gnats into huge elephants.[62] And in making *An Answere vnto Sir Thomas Mores Dialoge*, Tyndale could not resist a little swipe at More's "darling" Erasmus:

> But how happeth it that M. More hath not contended in lyke wise agaynst his derelynge Erasmus this long while?[63]

Yet even the sentence making fun of Erasmus acknowledges his authority, citing the *Encomium Moriae* against More. For if the work were translated into English, Tyndale says (*The Praise of Folie* was not printed in English until 1549) everyone would see how far More had changed from his humanist youth. It is clear Tyndale has read the *Encomium* in Latin. Indeed, the phrase "derelynge Erasmus," shows that Tyndale was also reading the *Opus epistolarum* of Erasmus in Latin, in which More keeps using the phrase *Erasme charissime*.[64]

Erasmianism (and humanist Latinity) inflect even Tyndale's most famous phrase:

> Maister Tyndall hearing that, answered hym, I defie the Pope and all his lawes, and sayde, if God spare my lyfe ere many yeares, I wyl cause a boye that dryueth þᵉ plough, shall knowe more of the scripture then thou doest.[65]

This comes directly from Erasmus. In *Paraclesis*, the preface to the Greek New Testament in 1516, Erasmus declared how he disagreed with those unwilling for holy scripture to be translated into the vulgar tongue, as if Christ taught doctrines that could scarcely be understood by theologians, or as if the strength of the Christian religion consisted in people's ignorance of it. "If only," Erasmus continued rapturously, "the farmer would sing parts of scripture at the plough (*ad stivam aliquid decantet agricola*), the weaver hum them to the movement of his shuttle, the traveller lighten the weariness of his journey with like stories."[66]

Tyndale's direct knowledge of *Paraclesis* is shown by *The Obedience of a Christen Man* (1528).[67] The truly radical claim of *Paraclesis* is that anyone can read the Bible. Weavers are readers first, even before they are believers. A labourer or a weaver (a *fossor* or a *textor*) can be a true theologian, Erasmus declares, as long as he teaches and expresses in his own life the *philosophia Christi*. Some among the learned call this philosophy *crassula et idiotica* ("a bit stupid and vulgar"). These people even

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[62] *The first book of Moses* (Antwerp: Merten de Keyser, 1530), sig. A2ᵛ. See Rankin, "Tyndale, Erasmus and the Early English Reformation."

[63] *An Answer to More*, ed. Anne M. O'Donnell and Jared Wicks, *The Independent Works of William Tyndale*, Book 3 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 14.

[64] The phrase is first used in *Ep*. 388, the first letter of More to Erasmus that survives; *Epistolae Erasmi*, ed. P.S. Allen, 12 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906–58), ii.193. The letter was first published in *Epsitolae ad Erasmum* (Louvain: Thierry Martens, 1516) and reprinted many times.

[65] *Actes and Monuments* (1563), 570; cited from *The Acts and Monuments Online*, https://www.johnfoxe.org/ (accessed February 20, 2018).

[66] Erasmus, *Paraclesis*, in *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Holborn, 142; trans. John C. Olin, *Christian Humanism and the Reformation: Selected Writings of Erasmus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 101.

[67] *The obedience of a Christen man and how Christen rulers ought to governe* ([Antwerp: Merten de Keyser?, 1528]), sig. C4ʳ.

think this philosophy is *illiterata*; but Erasmus responds that it has "drawn the highest princes of the world to its laws, an achievement which the power of tyrants and the erudition of philosophers cannot claim."[68] Here, Erasmus reverses the cliché among the church fathers that the New Testament is inferior in style to the literature of the ancients. Simultaneously, he elevates the gospels to the highest expressions of human writing (*litterae hominum*). "Why," he asks, "have we steadfastly preferred to learn the wisdom of Christ from the writings of men than from Christ himself?": *Cur statim malumus ex hominum litteris Christi sapientiam discere quam ex ipso Christo?*[69] Would that princes, priests or schoolmasters, he avers, teach this vulgar doctrine rather than the subtleties of Aristotle or Averroes.[70] For the new philosophy consists in reading the *litterae* of Christ: *Platonicus non est, qui Platonis libros non legerit; et theologus est, non modo Christianus, qui Christi litteras non legerit?*[71]

Erasmus slips in the phrase *litterae Christi* almost without us noticing. Indeed he does so with conscious literary play, since just a moment before, he said that *philosophia Christi* was *illiterata* by the standards of the eloquent. He plays with nouns such as *veritas* and *sapientia*, and adjectives such as *eruditus* and *antiquus*, in such a way that we do not know quite where we are any more. Christian doctrine is less subtle than Aristotle, but wiser; less eloquent than classical literature, but also as *antiquus* and as beautiful as Plato. Humanist values of classical literature and eloquence are both appealed to and overturned by the transformative power of Christ's writings. The result is that, against the prejudices of theologians and humanists alike, *litterae Christi* are proclaimed as an ultimate form of literature.[72]

In 1529, an English translation of *An exhortation to the diligent studye of scripture, made by Erasmus Roterodamus* appeared in Antwerp, probably translated by George Joye. By 1536 it was being used as a preliminary to a reprint of Tyndale's New Testament.[73] It appears, then, that early readers of Tyndale had no problem assimilating him with Erasmian humanism.[74] This does not mean they always understood the radical claims Erasmus was making. Joye's own translation of *litterae Christi* shows him tempering its edge and making it a conventional appeal to "scripture":

> We can not calle eny man a platoniste / vnles he have reade the workes of plato. Yet call we them Christen / yee and devines/ whiche never have reade the scripture of Christe?[75]

The translation shows us the distance between Erasmus referring to *scriptura* and to *litterae*. Erasmus is telling his readers not only to read scripture but to read it

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[68] *Paraclesis*, in *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Holborn, 146; tr. Olin, *Christian Humanism*, 105.

[69] Ibid.

[70] *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Holborn, 143; tr. Olin, *Christian Humanism*, 102.

[71] "He is not a Platonist who has not read the works of Plato; and is he a theologian, let alone a Christian, who has not read the literature of Christ?"; *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Holborn, 144; tr. Olin, *Christian Humanism*, 103. Olin's word "literature" is controversial.

[72] For a more extended examination of this issue, see Brian Cummings, "Erasmus on Literature and Knowledge," in *Literature, Belief and Knowledge in Early Modern England*, ed. Subha Mukherji and Tim Stuart-Buttle (London: Palgrave, 2018), 39–62.

[73] Herbert, *Historical Catalogue*, 3–5.

[74] For extended discussion of this point, see Rankin, "Tyndale, Erasmus and the Early English Reformation."

[75] *An exhortacyon to the diligent studye of scripture, made by Erasmus Roterodamus. And translated in to inglissh* ([Antwerp: Merten de Keyser?, 1529]), sig. a8ᵛ.

differently – that is, in the way they would any other ancient writer. Joye cannot avoid this inference in the extraordinary peroration to *Paraclesis*, when Erasmus compares reading Christ's writing as equal or better to meeting him in person: *at hae tibi sacrosantae mentis illius vivam referunt imaginem ipsumque Christum loquentem, sanantem, morientem, resurgentem, denique totum ita praesentem reddunt, ut minus visurus sis, si coram oculis conspicias.*[76] This is Joye's version:

> But the evangely doth represent and expresse the qwicke and levinge ymage of his most holy minde / yee and Christe him silf speakinge / healinge / deyenge / rysinge agayne / and to conclude all partes of him. In so moch that thou couldeste not so playne and frutefullye see him / All though he were presente before thy bodlye eyes.[77]

Erasmian humanism and English evangelism come face to face in this paragraph.

This is the heart of Erasmus's argument about what specially characterizes the New Testament as a literary text and gives it its literary value. This is expressed as a form of *imitatio*. The New Testament provides us with the person of Christ by a process of literary imitation: *in his litteris praecipue praestat, in quibus nobis etiamnum vivit, spirat, loquitur* ("he stands forth especially in this writing in which he lives for us even at this time, breathes and speaks").[78] It is in this context that the English vocabulary for Erasmian imitation in the 1523 manuscript version of the *Enchiridion* becomes newly significant. Part of the reason for O'Donnell's caution in identifying Tyndale as the translator of the 1533 printed text is her analysis of Tyndale's theological vocabulary, particularly as it relates to the controversy with More over words such as "congregation" and "love." Here she notes that the 1533 text prefers the traditional terminology of "church" and "charity." At best, she says, the 1533 *Enchiridion* shows "an earlier stage of his development both theologically and stylistically."[79] One reading in the manuscript text may indeed represent an earlier stage even than the 1533. In the discussion of the death of the body in Chapter 1, the manuscript gives: "For verely god is the liff of the soule / and where god is there charitie is & compassion of thy neyghbour."[80] In the 1533 version, this becomes: "bycause her lyf is away / that is god. For veryly where god is / there is charite / loue & compassyon of thy neyghbour / for god is that charite."[81] Is the introduction of "loue" here evidence of second thoughts, either in another manuscript, or even by an editor of the printed text under the influence of Tyndale's New Testament? In this respect, it is also surely interesting that the manuscript *Enchiridion* is now the earliest recorded usage of the distinctive phrase "filthy lucre," a distinctive part of Tyndale's vocabulary and quickly a proverbial phrase in early modern English.[82]

[76] *Paraclesis*, in *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Holborn, 149.

[77] *An exhortacyon to the diligent studye of scripture*, sig. A5ʳ.

[78] *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Holborn, 146; tr. Olin, *Christian Humanism*, 105.

[79] *Enchiridion*, ed. O'Donnell, liii.

[80] London, British Library Add. MS 89149, fol. 6ʳ.

[81] *A booke called in latyn Enchiridion militis christiani*, sig. A7ʳ.

[82] London, British Library Add. MS 89149, fol. 69ʳ; Early English Books Online records over 2500 instances. The MS is also the first recorded use of "jote and tittle" (fol. 14ᵛ). The phrase "wicked mammon," used in the printed *Enchiridion* (ed. O'Donnell, 99), is rendered in the MS as "the dyvell of Innyquytie" (fol. 56ʳ).

In any event, there is a reason to give a more positive valuation of O'Donnell's judgement that "the English *Enchiridion* may represent Tyndale's apprentice-work as translator" (liii). For the manuscript contains, we have seen, a sophisticated English philosophical language. If the imprint of this marks the vocabulary of counterfeiting Christ in Tyndale's New Testament, a broader version is evident in the manuscript *Enchiridion*:

> Next is the spirit wherein we represent the symylitud of the nature of god in whiche also oure most blessed maker after the orygynall patorne or example of his owen mynde hath graven the eternall lawe of honesty wth his fynger that is so swete wth his spirit the holie goste.[83]

What does it mean to call the spirit a "symylitud of the nature of god"? Here we need to come to terms with the complex approach to figurative language in the *Enchiridion*. The section in question, entitled *De tribus hominis partibus, spiritu et anima et carne* ("On the three parts of man: spirit, soul, and flesh"), combines a neo-Platonic analysis of the physical human being, with a figurative account of metaphysical process, in which the division between flesh and spirit is imagined (as in Plato) as a conflict between divine likeness and the "brute animal," with "the middle soul between the two," mediating between like and unlike.[84] "Do you wish me to point out the distinction between these parts in more concrete language?" Erasmus asks, pointedly – quoting from the *Satires* of Horace (2.2.3) in the process.

How do we think Tyndale responds to this? It certainly does not fit the received view of Tyndale's approach to scripture, such as in *The Obedience of a Christian Man*:

> arme thy selfe to defende the with all / as Paul teacheth in the last chapter to the Ephesians. Gyrde on the the swerde of the spirite which is Gods worde and take to the the shilde of fayth / which is not to beleve a tale of Robyn hode or Gestus Romanorum or of the Cronycles / but to beleve Gods worde that lasteth ever.[85]

Reading God's word is manifestly different from reading other literary works, whether the *Gesta Romanorum* (a loose anthology of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century tales, including religious ones, used as a source by Chaucer and Shakespeare) or else legendary fictions like Robin Hood. The *Enchiridion* (as we have seen at length) is littered with references to Horace, or Virgil, which the English versions make considerable efforts to master. One of these cases is the section on Christian imitation, where the *Georgics* is made into a powerful leading metaphor of the Protean struggle between body and soul; another is the account of death in the opening chapter, with an extended comment on the cruel violence extended by Achilles to the body of Hector, before "the walles of troy," as the marginal comment in the manuscript helpfully adds.[86] To accommodate these classical

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[83] Translating: *Spiritum vero, qua divinae naturae similitudinem exprimimus, in qua conditor optimus de suae mentis archetypo aternam illam honesti legem insculpsit digito, hoc est spirito suo* (*Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Holborn, 52).
[84] *CWE*, 66: 51.
[85] *The obedience of a Christen man*, sig. T4[r].
[86] London, British Library Add. MS 89149, fol. 5[r].

sources into the methodology of Tyndale is a large stretch, yet we need at least to acknowledge his evident familiarity with the arguments of Erasmus both here and in *Paraclesis*, where he says that the *litterae Christi* are like other forms of *litterae*, to be valued all the more highly than *litterae hominum*. Well before the Protestant rallying cry of *sola scriptura*, Erasmus adopts the more sensational principle of *sola littera*: we know Christ by his writings best of all. Yet is classical rhetoric so foreign to Tyndale as we think? One of the recommendations he took to Cuthbert Tunstall in 1523 was a translation he had made from an oration of Isocrates.[87] Isocrates is one of the masters of what Shuger calls "The Christian Grand Style in the English Renaissance."[88]

We also need to see how central arguments about figuration are to Erasmus. This leads, in the Fourth Rule of his handbook, to a crucial statement on Biblical interpretation:

> Litteras amas. Recte, si propter Christum. Sin ideo tantum amas, ut scias, ibi consistis, unde gradum facere oportebat. Quod si litteras expetis, ut illis adiutus Christum in arcanis litteris latentem clarius perspicias, perspectum ames, cognitum atque amatum communices aut fruaris, accinge te ad studia litterarum.[89]

Reading scriptures leads to the knowledge of Christ. It does so by a process familiar from ancient literary theory: Christ is represented in scripture, like the mystery of meaning itself, in the way that knowledge is figured within words. The hidden Christ is revealed in *litterae*. In the Fifth Rule which follows, Erasmus gives a fuller explanation, comparing the relationship of hidden and revealed truth to the relationship between figurative and literal meaning: *Idem observandum in omnibus litteris, quae ex simplici sensu & mysterio, tamquam corpore atque animo constant, ut contempta littera, ad mysterium potissimum spectes*.[90] All literary works are made up of a literal sense *and* mysterious sense, body and soul. Erasmus's advice is "to ignore the letter and look rather to the mystery," which he backs up by reference to Homeric and Ovidian myths such as Prometheus, Circe, and Sisyphus, interspersed with the story of Adam in Genesis.
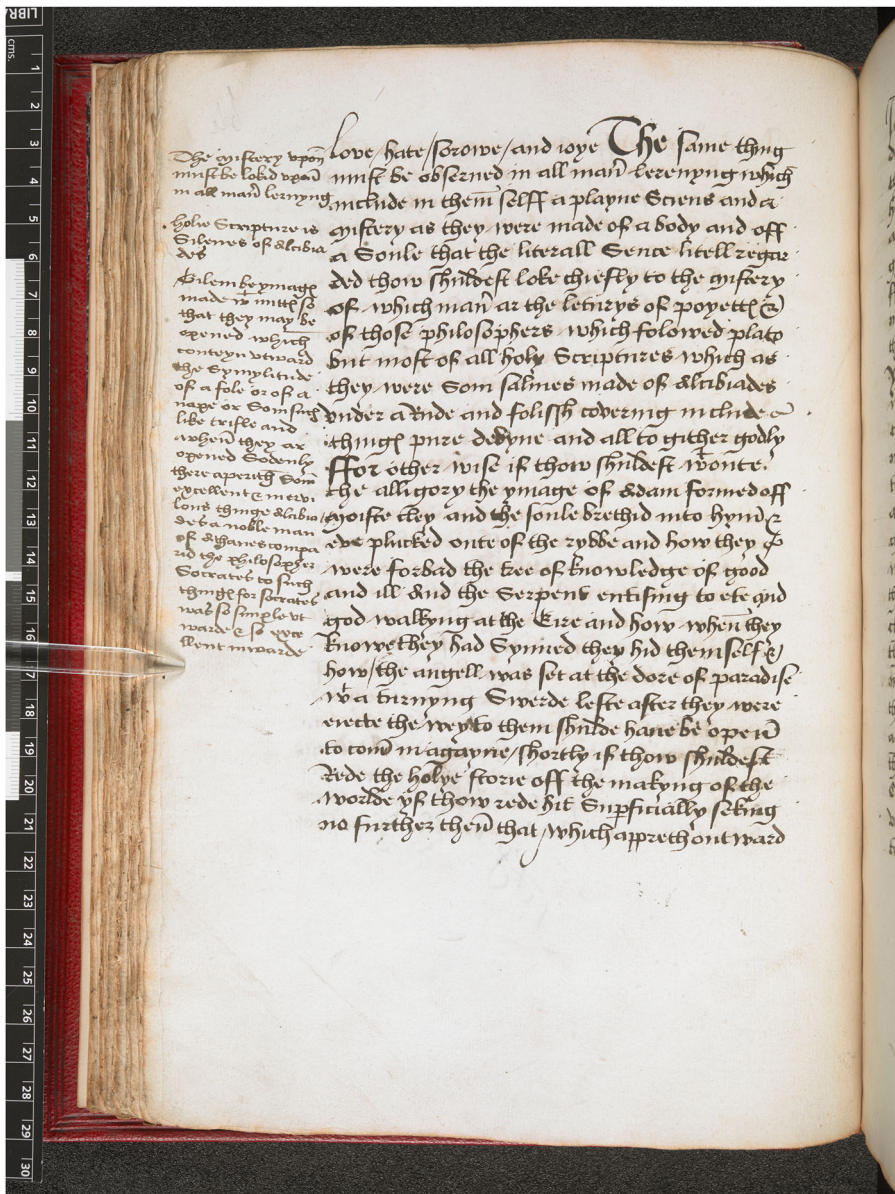
A complex figure is used by Erasmus to explain how figures work. In Plato's *Symposium*, he recalls, Alcibiades (the Athenian general and lover of Socrates) compares Socrates to those images of Silenus which enclose divinity under a lowly and ludicrous external appearance. This is true of any literature, and also applies to Scripture: *Cuiusmodi sunt litterae poetarum omnium et ex philosophis Platonicorum. Maximo vero scripturae divinae, quae fere silenis illis*

Alcibiadeis similes sub tectorio sordido ac paene ridiculo merum numen claudunt (70). This receives the following translation in the manuscript English *Enchiridion* (Figure 4); "all man*er* of lerenyng," it is declared, "include in them selff a playne Sciens and a mistery":

the literall sence litell regarded thow shuldest loke chiefly to the mistery of which man*er* ar the leturys of poyettes & of those philosophers which folowed plato but most of all

holy Scriptures which as they were some salmes made of Alcibiades vnder a Rude and folissh covering include thinges pure divyne and all to gither godly.[91]

The translation struggles to make sense of Erasmus's Latin, and of the shock of the ideas it contains. In the text, the "ymage of Adam" is described as an example of "alligory." In a moment of comic relief, either the translator or the scribe compares this to the "Psalms" of Alcibiades. But the marginal annotation in the manuscript makes a much better attempt: "Sileni be ymages," it is said, "which conteyn vtward the Symylitude of a fole"; yet "when they ar opened Sodenly apering Som excellent & mervilous thinge." The reference to Plato is explicated carefully: "for Socrates was so simple vtward & so excellent inwarde."

The translation responds hand in hand to Erasmus's parallel theories of imitation and figuration. Earlier we saw the word "counterfeit" as an example of the struggle of an English translator to understand the complexity of Erasmus's Latin. Repeatedly, the word "counterfitt" is used to translate Latin cognates of *imitatio*. We can here see why. The *Sileni Alcibiadis* are one of the leading tropes in all Erasmus, subject to an elaborate commentary in *Adagia* III.iii.1, and a powerful discussion in the *Praise of Folly*. In the *Sileni* Erasmus identifies a metaphor for scripture itself, and at the same time a μίμησις of Christ. Yet if Tyndale is the translator, we have a final puzzle. *Enchiridion* states that in reading scripture we should prefer interpreters *qui a littera quammaxime recedunt* – "the literall sence litell regarded." The marginal note in the manuscript confirms: "The mistery must be lokid vpon in all maner lernyng." We need the allegory, as much in scripture as in pagan texts: "Ye peradventure a poyettes ffable in the alligory shalbe Redy wᵗ somwhat more frute than a narracion of holie bokes iff thow shuldest Rest in the rynde or vtter part only."

How do we explain, then, that in the *Obedience*, five years later, Tyndale states: "Thou shalt vnderstonde therfor yᵗ the scripture hath but one sence which is yᵉ literall sence," the very opposite of the lesson of the *Enchiridion*?[92] The appeal to the literal sense has become a fetish of reading Tyndale, both in Daniell and in a counter direction in James Simpson.[93] In the one, the literal sense is the pathway to truth and righteousness, in the other a virus, equivalent to "textual hatred." In each account, Tyndale is made the friend of Luther and enemy of Erasmus. The English *Enchiridion* is kicked into the dust as irrelevant juvenilia. Yet in that case, Tyndale has barely read his text. Time and again Erasmus states that the fundamental process of language is figurative: we substitute one way of saying for another. Scriptural language is not exempt from this; how could it be? In *Ratio verae theologiae* Erasmus lists hundreds of examples of figures of speech from the Bible. Christ himself, he says, loves figures of speech. This is central to the way scripture works, in terms of meaning, and in the impression it makes on our emotions.

What we need is to make subtler distinctions between allegory and figuration. A way forward is offered by Shuger: "In Erasmus, a basically rhetorical

[91] This and quotations in the following two paragraphs are taken from London, British Library Add. MS 89149, fol. 63ᵛ.
[92] *The obedience of a Christen man*, sig. R1ᵛ.
[93] Daniell, *Tyndale: A Biography*, 239; James Simpson, *Burning to Read: English Fundamentalism and its Reformation Opponents* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 107.

understanding of language takes the place of medieval allegoresis."[94] A similar point might be made about Luther. Try as he might, Luther cannot get rid of the figurative. To get round his difficulty, he sometimes says that figurative meaning is itself *part of* the literal sense.[95] This is a category error: literal and figurative are terms which only ever work in tandem, as two parts of something else. Yet in its way Luther's assertion is part of a longstanding debate in Christian exegesis about the turn of the literal, as in Hugh of St. Victor in the twelfth century:

> "We read the scriptures," they say, "but we don't read the letter. The letter does not interest us. We teach allegory." How do you read Scripture, then, if you don't read the letter? Subtract the letter and what is left?[96]

Erasmus recognizes both sides of this argument better than anyone. But even Luther, when he disagrees with Erasmus, often does so on a point of figurative interpretation. In that way, he remains an Erasmian even as he rejects Erasmus.

Could it be that something similar happens in Tyndale? Tyndale in the *Obedience* improvises a similar argument, as he attempts to come to grips once more with the Erasmian inheritance. First, he makes a point straight out of Erasmus's *Ratio*:

> Never the later the scripture vseth proverbes / similitudes / redels or allegories as all other speaches doo / but that which the proverbe / similitude / redell or allegory signifieth is ever the literall sence which thou must seke out diligently. As in the english we borow wordes and sentences of one thinge and apply them vnto a nother and geve them new significacions.[97]

This equivocation comes straight out of Luther: "but that which the proverbe / similitude / redell or allegory signifieth is ever the literall sence." This either makes a nonsense of the idea of the figurative in language, or begs the question of what we mean by the literal. But in the next sentence, Tyndale changes tack again, now giving a nice definition of the process of figuration: "As in the english we borow wordes and sentences of one thinge and apply them vnto a nother and geve them new significacions." In fact, this sentence is close to a translation from Erasmus's *De copia*, where he says that metaphor is "so called because a word is transferred away from its real and proper signification to one that lies outside its proper sphere."[98] It would be nice to think that Tyndale is translating this sentence directly, since Erasmus gives, as the most appropriate word for the Greek μεταφορά, the Latin word *translatio*. All of language is metaphorical, Erasmus says; every act of making meaning and of interpreting meaning involves translation.

Tyndale knows this at some level, intimately. Everyone who reads his translations admires his feel for figurative language. In the *Obedience*, he recognizes figuration even as he disavows it, as when he says: "loke yer thou lepe / whose literall sence is /

[94] Shuger, *Renaissance Bible*, 20.

[95] Brian Cummings, "Protestant Allegory," in *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 177–90.

[96] *De scripturis*, V.13; translated by Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), 93.

[97] *The obedience of a Christen man*, sig. R2ʳ.

[98] *CWE*, 24: 333.

doo nothinge sodenly or without avisemente."[99] What is that sentence doing if not trying to come to terms with the slippage between different ways of meaning? Like Luther, part of what he is doing is to distinguish in interpretation between acknowledging figures of speech (figuration that is present in the text of the Bible), and what we might call interpretative allegorization, where a difficult passage in the Bible makes us reach for an alternative way of putting it. So he says:

> So when I saye Christ is a lambe / I meane not a lambe that beareth woll / but a meke and a paciente lambe which is beaten for other mens fautes. Christ is a vine / not that beareth grapes: but out of whose rote the braunches that beleve / sucke the sprite of lyfe and mercy.[100]

This distinctly complex interpretation is plucked out of nowhere as the plainest of plain sense. A caveat follows, "Which allegories I maye not make at all the wilde adventures,"[101] but this only serves to make allegory an even more wildly figurative process. He then goes on to give an example of interpretation in action, as he figures out what is meant by Peter cutting off the ear of the servant Malchus in John 18. Now we find Tyndale in free allegorical mode: "And of Peter and his swerde make I the law and of Christ the Gospell sayenge / as Peters swerde cutteth of the eare so doeth the law."[102]

There is no better example of Tyndale the Erasmian. He asserts that there is only one sense while manifestly dealing with two and sometimes more. He denies the power of allegory while indulging in some imaginative allegorizing. He also declares that scripture is a different kind of text from any other literature: "Moare over if I coulde not prove with an open texte that which the allegory doeth expresse / then were the allegory a thinge to be gested at and of no greater value then a tale of Robyn hode."[103] Yet all the time he reads scripture exactly in the same way that he might approach any other literary text. In this way, the spirit of the *Enchiridion* still breathes in Tyndale even as he declares open war on Erasmian modes of interpretation. This shows the reach of Erasmus in the sixteenth century. It is not that Erasmus is the first person to read the Bible in a literary way. The rabbis were doing that as soon as Scripture was written down. Every medieval commentary, pace Erasmus, was using rhetorical methods from the Greek and Roman grammarians.[104] But Erasmus takes the leap of saying that reading is the key to the New Testament; and every reader by that fact is finding out for herself a *philosophia Christi*. Did Tyndale remember, as he translated the New Testament, Erasmus's plea for "the sp*irit*uall sens or knowledge of holy scripture"?[105] Erasmus here resists the appeal for meaning "only after the litterall sens." Tyndale formally insisted that there was only one meaning, the literal; but also assumed that to understand the literal, we need to look for the spiritual. In this powerful equivocation in the interchange between *littera* and *spiritus*, he could not help being still a true Erasmian.

[99] *The obedience of a Christen man*, sig. R2ʳ.
[100] *The obedience of a Christen man*, sig. R2ᵛ-R3ʳ.
[101] *The obedience of a Christen man*, sig. R3ʳ.
[102] *The obedience of a Christen man*, sig. R3ᵛ.
[103] *The obedience of a Christen man*, sig. R4ʳ.
[104] Christopher Ocker, *Biblical Poetics Before Humanism and Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
[105] London, British Library Add. MS 89149, fol. 15ᵛ-16ʳ.

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