

Explore the situations of the lover, modes of addressing the beloved, and descriptions of the beloved, in the sonnets and love lyrics of Thomas Wyatt.

Many of the poems and love lyrics of Sir Thomas Wyatt address his beloved and the situations that they are in. Many, such as *They Flee From Me* are mourning the loss of a past relationship, whilst a few others are slightly happier in tone. In terms of the modes of addressing and describing the beloved, one of the most common examples that can be seen throughout Wyatt's poetry is that of an extended metaphor, in which he likens the lover to a doe, a meek and wild creature.

One of the many ballades of Sir Thomas Wyatt that explores the situations of the beloved is the poem *They flee from me*<sup>1</sup>. The way that Wyatt describes the situation in which himself and his lover are in is presented through the extended metaphor of hunting. The imagery of the lover being "gentle, tame and meek"<sup>2</sup> as they try to avoid him at court, presents the lover as an almost waif-like creature that runs from him as he approaches. Presumably Thomas Wyatt was in favour with Henry VIII at this point and as such was often seen at court. This creates the image of the 'deer-like' lover fleeing from him as he comes closer. This metaphor is then extended throughout the rest of the poem as he tells the reader that they sometimes "put themselves in danger to take bread at my hand"<sup>3</sup>, showing that whilst the lover is apprehensive as to approaching him, they do still in some way interact. There is of course the idea that in this particular poem at least, the lover could be interpreted as being Anne Boleyn, the wife of Henry VIII and arguably, an early lover of Wyatt's. When analysing the text with this thought in mind, it can be seen that the ballad (and as such likely the relationship) ends on an extremely bitter tone, especially as the idea of the social hierarchy is emphasised. Particularly in the last stanza, it can be seen that the lady is now of a higher station in society than the one that Wyatt himself holds. The way that he has "leave to go"<sup>4</sup> shows that she has essentially sent him away, even though it can be seen that he did not want to leave, showing a clear inequality between the stations of the two. As such, the relationship that is presented in this particular poem of Thomas Wyatt's is one that shows a clear incapability of being lovers yet again, and as such, Wyatt addresses the beloved in a bitter, defeated sort of tone.

When considering the way that Wyatt addresses the beloved, and often his tone in doing so, one of the things that should be considered is his translations of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*<sup>5</sup>. One particular one, *My Galley Charged with Forgetfulness*<sup>6</sup> shows a rather depressing and dreary view of love. In this sonnet, Wyatt uses the extended metaphor of sailing a boat through a storm to express his inner fight. In the sonnet Wyatt changes a considerable

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Wyatt, R.A. Rebholz. (1978). *The Complete Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt*. Edited by R.A. Rebholz (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997). Pp. 116-117

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Petrarch, *Selections from the 'Canzoniere' and other works*, trans. and ed. with an Introduction and Notes by Mark Musa, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985; repr. 1999), p. 56

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Wyatt, R.A. Rebholz. (1978). *The Complete Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt*. Edited by R.A. Rebholz (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997). p. 81

amount from Plutarch's version, one example being that whereas Plutarch states that his ship sails through "rough seas at the midnight of a winter between Charybdis and the Scylla reef"<sup>7</sup> and instead Wyatt just refers to it as "doth pass 'tween rock and rock"<sup>8</sup>. This is yet another example of Thomas Wyatt's use of Sixteenth Century 'plain style', where he has overly simplified a word, so that instead of referencing the man-eating monsters found in Ancient Greek myths, it is a more understandable and relatable situation. Somewhat ironically, even though Wyatt's poem is far darker than Plutarch's, in simplifying the text, he also makes it less of a dangerous setting, instead of being an incredibly life threatening situation, it is just a slight difficult one. Some critics have similarly criticised Wyatt for this, saying that "occasionally he is guilty of overcompression and consequent obscurity as he tries to follow Petrarch's conciseness, while at others he has to resort to padding"<sup>9</sup>. In this case, he has clearly overcompressed the poem, in Homer's *Odyssey*<sup>10</sup> the monsters of Scylla and Charybdis are extremely dangerous, the former being a six headed monster that takes either six or twelve men from a ship at a time, and the latter being a whirlpool type creature. Between the two Odysseus ends up being shipwrecked, without his crew on the Phaeacians island. In comparison, the role of two rocks are far easier to maneuver and as such, the situation faced by the narrator in the poem is far less terrifying. Since the metaphor of the ship in the storm is arguably for Wyatt's current predicament, it seems that not only is he despairing of his life, but also his love for Anne Boleyn. The feeling that is most conveyed through this poem though is fear and anger, at the man who Thomas Wyatt refers to as "mine enemy...[and] my lord"<sup>11</sup>. This is likely to be Henry VIII, and as such it can be determined that Wyatt at this point was fearful of the King and for his life from the rumours (and possible truth) of his affair with Anne Boleyn. Of course, this fear was well founded, since he was imprisoned twice in the Tower of London for being accused of having an affair with Anne Boleyn, once in 1536 and then again later in his life. As such, the representation of his relationship with his beloved is presented as not only being dangerous, but also as inescapable, other than the one that that death provides. However, the sonnet does suggest that he does all this for love, which not only has no chance of being fulfilled, but also is likely to kill him.

One of Wyatt's songs that pronounces the most love and gives us as a reader the most insight into a lovers mindset is the one entitled *I Love, Loved, and so doth she*<sup>12</sup>. Not only do the lyrics from this song have an extremely clear expression of love, it also shows both the great positives and negatives that it also brings. Throughout the song it has a clear juxtaposition in what is both good and bad about love, and this is enforced in many ways,

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Wyatt, R.A. Rebholz. (1978). *The Complete Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt. Edited by R.A. Rebholz (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997).* p. 81

<sup>9</sup> D. G. Rees, "Sir Thomas Wyatt's Translations From Petrarch", *Comparative Literature*, 7.1 (1955), 17 <<https://doi.org/10.2307/1769058>>.

<sup>10</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. and ed. by E.V. Rieu, with an Introduction by Peter Jones, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin Books, 1946; repr. 2003) PP. 157-168

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Wyatt, R.A. Rebholz. (1978). *The Complete Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt. Edited by R.A. Rebholz (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997).* p. 81

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Wyatt, R.A. Rebholz. (1978). *The Complete Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt. Edited by R.A. Rebholz (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997).* p. 267

through the rhyme scheme, the repeated rhetorical questions and the overall tone. The repeated use, yet manipulation, of the line “To love so well and...”<sup>13</sup> is used throughout the song as the last line of each of the six stanzas as a juxtaposition. The endings vary, including “...live in pain”, “...live in woe”, and “...not rejoice”<sup>14</sup>. All of the six promote the same message that love causes immense pain, yet it juxtaposes with the beginning, giving off the impression that a relationship has both good and bad factors. The use of the quatrains, with the alternating rhyme patterns (ABAB) creates a similarly juxtaposing image to the reader. Whilst cannot be certain from the lyrics whether the lover and beloved are together at this point, it is suggested that there is something inhibiting them from being happy and content in their relationship. It is highly likely that this is because of the dominating society that ran the court at the time of Wyatt’s writing, especially since everything was about station in society, if one was of a lower class or have less money, they were limited in their choice. Either way, these lyrics show an extremely sad and painful view of love.

Another of Thomas Wyatt’s songs that shows that love is immensely painful is *There Was Never Nothing More Me Pained*<sup>15</sup>. The seemingly clear exaggeration and dramaticness shown throughout this poem is representative that whilst love looks meagre from an outsiders point of view it can infact be more painful than anything that could be physically done to the human body. Much of the song written by Thomas Wyatt is in the dialogue form, spoken from the perspective of the beloved, whilst he speaks of the interaction and his pain. One of the key things that these lyrics show is that love is not only painful, but it also inhibits the lover from doing normal, everyday things. The way that the beloved says “my restful nights and joyful days since I began to love be take from me” shows that the love stops her from not only sleeping but also being able to do her daily activities. Presumably the beloved is married, whilst having an affair with someone else, since the ways that she describes her situation is like she is inhibited from being with her true love. Even though Henry VIII gained the ability for people to get divorces freely, by splitting from the Roman Catholic religion and creating the Church of England, it was exceedingly uncommon for them to happen withing the general public. And even if a couple did manage to get divorced, then they would have likely been shamed by the majority of society. This can be seen in the lyrics where the beloved says “all thing decays yet can I not remove”<sup>16</sup>. Since the wife was also typically under the ownership of the husband in a marriage it was especially unheard of for a woman to initiate a separation. The poem in general does emphasise the idea that love is extremely painful and also incapacitating, since you can no longer do anything without your love.

Overall, the poet Sir Thomas Wyatt generally promotes himself, and his situation, as one that is despairing and painful. One of the poems that this can be seen most clearly in is *My Galley Charged With Forgetfulness*<sup>17</sup>, in which he translated Petrarch’s poem, yet made several changes which, in turn, made it fair more depressing and despairing. With his debatable previous love affair with Anne Boleyn many of his works have been speculated as

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Wyatt, R.A. Rebholz. (1978). *The Complete Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt. Edited by R.A. Rebholz* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997). p. 81

to alluding to her, and this is one of the ones which most critics do believe is about her. However, even if he never had a love affair with Anne Boleyn or the poems just aren't about her, the ballads and love lyrics of Wyatt show an extremely painful view of love, and they clearly convey that him himself has experienced these feelings often. One of the main ways that Sir Thomas Wyatt both addresses and describes the beloved is in the use of extended metaphors, alikening the beloved to a doe with the use of hunting imagery. He also uses metaphors often to show that he is in a difficult position, not necessarily with the beloved, but with others in the court, such as the King, Henry VIII. Overall, Sir Thomas Wyatt's poems are just extremely depressing and often show what could be interpreted as suicidal tendencies.