

The Tempest

The metaphor is a device that serves as the vehicle to meaning and understanding of concepts in literature. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Gawain, a chivalric and notable man, receives a wound from the Green Knight. The wound serves as a metaphor to Gawain's mortality and vulnerability. In past works of literature, metaphors for *life* consisted of paths through thicketed forests, footprints in the sand, and even a Sunday afternoon spent tarring a roof. Three legendary poets, Francis Petrarch, Sir Thomas Wyatt, and Edmund Spenser, used the common metaphor of a wandering ship to symbolize the tumultuous pangs of unrequited love. Although they all similarly used the same metaphor, the ways in which they went about manifesting the metaphor into their sonnets are unique and reflect the tone of each individual poet.

Petrarch's sonnet, *Rime Sparse 189* is not only the first poem of the three written, but is also the median between the other two. On the spectrum of emotion, this sonnet is not as romantic and optimistic as Spenser's sonnet, *Sonnet 34*, and not as steadfastly disillusioned and pessimistic as Wyatt's sonnet, *My Galley*. All three poets seem to be veiled in laments of different degrees.

All three of these poems are about the stitches these men have in their lives when it comes to the bumpy path to love. The sonnets begin with different descriptions of the sea in which their ship is sailing. Wyatt's sea is threatening and antagonistic, which sets the mood for the rest of the sonnet. Petrarch's sea is harsh and dark, disabling him to see his way out of his predicament. Spenser's sea is just vast and hardly described at all, but there's a storm approaching, which is also described in the other two sonnets. These storms symbolize the cruel fates that they must try to endure. These poets also describe the captain of their ships, a cruel enemy in the cases of Wyatt and Petrarch. Spenser, the more optimistic of the two, sees his predicament as not the fault of someone else's doing, but his responsibility alone. Wyatt and Petrarch chastise themselves; they feel hopeless and throughout most of their sonnets they regret, stick out their tongues, hiss, and boo at their fates. The moods depicted by the poets in these sonnets are displayed quite accurately through the diction used in these sonnets.

The diction displayed in each of these sonnets helps to distinguish the poet's tone. In Petrarch's sonnet, the ship is "laden with forgetfulness [that] passes through a harsh sea," which is not as harsh as Wyatt's "galley [that is] charged with forgetfulness thorough sharp seas." From the beginning, Wyatt's disillusioned tone is evident through his blunt diction. He uses this diction, which is very cynical in nature, to allow the reader to feel just as betrayed as the poet: "That is my lord, steereth with cruelty;/And every oar a thought in readiness,/As though that death were light in such a case". Wyatt blames his lord on his current situation and also blames the lord on taking delight in doing this to Wyatt. This contributes to the antagonistic nature of the sonnet. The specific word "galley" is used instead of ship, producing a more vivid image of the ship in the mind of the reader. The idea of "sharp seas" convinces the audience that Wyatt's predicament is laden with many tribulations. The turmoil within the poet is easily recognized by the reader. The diction in Spenser's *Sonnet 34* displays the romanticism and emotion that constructs the optimistic tone of the sonnet: "Yet hope I well, that when this storme is past/My Helice the lodestar of my lyfe/Will shine again, and looke on me at last." Spenser displays his optimistic standpoint through his word-choice, as well. Spenser tends to use affirmative phrases to show the audience the hope he has for his future.

The idea of what the future has in store is different in each sonnet. Only one of the sonnets, Spenser's *Sonnet 34*, gives a clue to the future emotions and events to come: "My Helice the lodestar of my lyfe/Will shine again, and looke on me at last,/With lovely light to cleare my cloudy grief." In this sonnet, Spenser claims that the stars, a metaphor for his lover, will bring light into his life again—but until then he will "wander carefull comfortlesse,/In secret sorrow and sad pensiveness." Spenser uses both present and future tense in his sonnet in order to give the reader a positive sense of the future. The end of this sonnet does not give the reader an overbearing sense of woe as the other two sonnets do. In Wyatt's sonnet, *My Galley*, the future is so dismal and bleak that it isn't even revealed. The whole sonnet is in present tense, bringing the reader into the sonnet to witness the turmoil and lack of a promising future. As a reader, we are left on the cold waters with Wyatt as he "remain[s] despairing of the port". In Petrarch's sonnet, *Rime Sparse*, the future is similarly dismal. Again, only the present tense is used, but this particular sonnet seems less dreary than Wyatt's

because of the present mood of Petrarch himself: "dead among the waves are/reason and skill; so that I begin to despair of the port". The key word here is *begin*. This suggests the change in mood of Petrarch himself throughout his sonnet.

The disposition of the poets that is seen through the sonnets all differ, as well. For instance, in Petrarch's sonnet, *Rime Sparse*, despite the turbulence that the poet seems to be going through, his mood or spirit does not yet seem to be affected negatively as does Wyatt's. Petrarch seems helpless and bewildered: "...a wet, changeless wind of sighs, hopes,/and desires breaks the sail". The *changeless wind* serves as a metaphor for helplessness. To the reader, Petrarch seems like an unfortunate man that hopes for the best and has the potential to become quite bitter, like Wyatt, in the future. In Spenser's sonnet, *Sonnet 34*, the reader can easily picture Spenser as a romantic or dreamer—a man who does not lose hope or become desperate—a man who is willing to fight the storm gracefully. He seems patient; waiting for the stars to guide him: "Till then I wander carefull comfortless,/In secret sorrow and sad pensiveness". Yes, Spenser may be full of sorrow, but it remains *secret* as he battles the "storme [that] hath dimd her trusty guyde". It is quite obvious that Spenser is not bitter like Wyatt, for he did not describe the storm as an *enemy* as Wyatt and Petrarch did, but more as an inconvenience like a sluggish cow in the middle of the road. Wyatt's disposition is obvious through the venomous tones he uses against himself: "Wreathed with error and eke with ignorance./The stars be hid that led me to this pain". In this line, Wyatt's self-loathing is very much on display. He complains about his inability to see himself out of his dilemma.

Wyatt speaks disapprovingly of his lord, or God who "steereth with cruelness;/And every oar a thought in readiness,/As though that death were light in such a case". Here Wyatt again puts blame upon something else, accusing God of steering him into a tumultuous path of pain as though his suffering was a joy to the lord, his *enemy*. Also, in Petrarch's sonnet, *Rime Sparse*, the lord is "the tiller" or, the person who steers a ship. But like Wyatt, Petrarch presents the lord as his enemy: "Each oar is manned by a ready, cruel thought that seems to scorn/the tempest...". In other words, each progressing moment seems to be fuelled by cruel thoughts that can inevitably lead to bitterness. Spenser, in his sonnet, *Sonnet 34*, does not once mention the lord but instead mentions astrological guides that serve him a justice just

the same as a lord would. Spenser's ship was guided "by [the] conduct of some star", rather than by a lord. This "Helice" is the woman.

Through these different mechanisms and moods that are all very much different from one another, are the same in the fact that these gloomy ships are heavy metaphors for unrequited love and the woman that each sonnet is about. Spenser's romantic sonnet displays the woman as a hidden constellation that with time, will reappear and shine light onto his path of threatening waves. To the reader, this woman seems to be one who ran away from love and Spenser seems to be the man worthy of her love. In Wyatt's sonnet, the woman is displayed as the cause of a threatening storm that destroys him. In the end of his sonnet, it is not the woman that he desires like Spenser does. In Petrarch's sonnet, he represents his feelings for his woman as "the tempest". Unlike Wyatt, Petrarch does not portray his woman as a terribly threatening vice, but more as an elegant storm of wind and rain. Wyatt's sense of hatred and resentment is not evident in Petrarch's sonnet.

These three renowned poets successfully created sonnets that even through the art of imitation, were able to become something so unique and creative to the poet. They represent the spectrum of emotions from the paramount of love to fickle bitterness. Amazingly, these men managed to write about the same theme but in different manners of doing so. That is what literature needs to do in order to survive in times like these where everything and every idea has already been written.