My galley, charged with forgetfulness

Right from the first line of the sonnet that coincides with the title the reader expects to read about a sad situation. Considered that the poet uses the verb to charge that carries a negative connotation. The verb to charge is generally connected to something hurry or to a price you have to pay. Also the contemporary reader wonders why the poet uses the juxtaposition galley and forgetfulness since one word is a material concrete boat while forgetfulness refers to an abstract mental activity. Therefor the reader tries to find out the reason for such association of words.

The reading process with unveil the mystery: the galley is a symbol for the speaking voice’s life, one particularly difficult that is compared to the crossing of “sharp seas in winter nights”. The comparison underlines the difficult period the speaker is undergoing is a long one since the poet uses the plural (“nights”). The mood conveyed is negative, heavy and totally pessimistic since the words chosen always refers to a sea that that seems to be caught by a tempest. The semantic field of the “sharp seas” and “winter nights” is suitable to bring to surface the private inner and sad feeling of a speaking voice that seems hopeless and powerfulness in front such environment. Most western literature exploit the image of the tempest or the shipwreck to hint at difficult fazes in peoples life. The first quatrain refers exactly to such a situation: there is an inner enemy one inside the speaker that makes his life difficult and heavy without light (“winter nights”). The voice of the quatrain seems to be asking for help in front of his enemy’s cruelness. It goes without saying that the situation that justifies the existence of the sonnet is the private conflict the man on the galley is fighting between a “rock and rock” that is the impossibility of communication. It follows that the speaking voice is paradoxically a one that cannot speak. He is not in control of himself: “my lord, steereth with cruelness”.

The second quatrain repeats and rehighterates the same feeling of uneasiness of the speaking voice that, again, sounds obsessed by incessant thought about his “enemy”. In the line “every owre a thought in readiness, as though that death were light” the desperate mood of the speaker is almost tangible. A series of stylistic choices make vivid such desperation. It is conveyed by means on hyperbolic descriptions such as “endless wind”, “tear the sail”, “forced sighs” and “trusty fearfulness”. A careful analysis of the semantic choices makes clear that there is a gradual linguistic transformation: from a concrete use of lexis the poet moves to the emotional sphere of the speaking voice with the purpose to have the reader feel exactly what the lines suggest.

Now the sonnet shows his “volta” but it is not a positive one. Indeed the sestet provides a totally tragic ending since the speaking voice does not seem to see any possible way out or escape to his personal situation which is clearly asserted in the last line where the use of the verb “remain despairing” seems to tie present and future without any credible solution.  
The poet works intelligently on language relying an hyperbolic expression like “a rain of tears” thus attributed human qualities to a natural aspect as well as the expression “a cloud of dark disdain” underlines once again the obsession of the speaking voice. Alliteration of r sound and d make all together such feeling almost concrete.

Even rhyme helps such suggestion since it connects in “with ignorance”, a linguistic choice that is anticipated by the choice of “error”. The speaker feels unable to cope with his personal situation and this pessimistic mood and feelings justifies the ender lines. The last line of the sestet interesting is also to notice the association “the stars”-“ led me to this pain”. It underlines again that the speaking voice enemy is unreturned love , a “lord” that drives his galley with cruelty. There is a perfect symmetry between the octave and the sestet as far as coherence. The syntactical deviation of the second line of the last tercet clearly makes visible that the speaker’s obsession seems the k position of the verb “drowned” brings even more to surface his total inability to use reason and since he cannot make of reason his leading star he cannot even hope to reach his beloved lay’s hearth; in short he “remain despairing of the port”. The sonnet ends with a metaphor where the port becomes the symbol for the lady that has made him one whose life (“my galley”) is “charged with forgetfulness”.