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Songs and Sonnets

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Critical Introduction

The Devonshire Manuscript

The three sonnets by Thomas Wyatt in this edition are witnessed by the Devonshire manuscript (1530's), which is now part of the British Library collection as Add. MS 17492.¹ According to Southall, though there are around 23 different hands in this quarto volume, its three main scribes were Mary Shelton, Mary Fitzroy and Margaret Douglas.² All of these women served in Anne Boleyn's household during the manuscript's compilation, leading Southall to suggest that its preference for 'expressions of *amour courtois'* reflects the taste of the queen's *coterie*.³ Indeed, Murray sees the manuscript as 'an example of the poetic practises of the early Tudor nobility', encompassing a wide range of forms, from 'native ballads and Chaucerian borrowings to newly fashionable *strambotti, frottola, canzoni* and fourteenline Petrarchan sonnets.¹⁴ Yet, despite these continental forms, Southall observes that many of the approximately 184 poems by authors including Lord Thomas Howard and Lord Darnley place their 'emphasis...unswervingly upon the vernacular'.⁵ This perhaps implies a concern with events and emotions closer to home, which certainly emerges in Wyatt's poetry.

It is worth noting that the Devonshire manuscript is not the only witness to these poems of Wyatt's, which appear in both manuscript and print forms throughout their complex history.

Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542)

¹ London, British Library, Add MS 17492, fols. 70°, 75°, 82°-°. Subsequent references to the poems will be by first line and line number in the text.

² Raymond Southall, 'The Devonshire Manuscript Collection of Early Tudor Poetry, 1532-41', *The Review of English Studies*, 15:58 (1964), 142-150 (p. 144).

³ Southall, 'The Devonshire Manuscript', p. 146.

⁴ Molly Murray, `The Prisoner, the Lover, and the Poet: The Devonshire Manuscript and Early Tudor Carcerality', *Renaissance and Reformation*, 35:1 (2012), 17-41 (pp. 18, 24).

Alongside producing a vast range of poetry, from satires and epigrams to sonnets and psalms, Wyatt was an ambassador for King Henry VIII, whose travels in Europe exposed him to the work of Petrarch.⁶ His subsequent introduction of this influence to England inspired a large proportion of his fame. During his career at court, Wyatt also received patronage from Thomas Cromwell before his 1540 execution and was imprisoned in the Tower of London in 1536, suspected of an affair with Anne Boleyn.⁷

Sources, Themes and Literary Qualities

'Ceaser, whan the traytor of Egipte' and 'Nowe farewell, Love, and all theye lawes forever' demonstrate Wyatt's translation of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, being adaptations of 'Cesare, poi che 'I traditor d'Egitto' and 'Pace non trovo, et non ò da fa guerra' respectively. Yet, all three sonnets echo Petrarch's use of paradox. The most obvious case is the semantic field of oxymoron in 'I finde no peace, and all my warre is donne', illustrated by line 2: 'I fere and hope'. Additionally, the poems employ paradoxical registers, combining high-register references to classical history, mythology and philosophy with low-register diction. For example, 'Ceaser, whan' both refers to Julius Caesar and uses the bodily imagery of 'shitt' (lines 1, 8). This mixture of registers is characteristic of lyrics of the period, such as 'Undo Pi dore, my spuse dere', which conflates secular and religious imagery.⁸ In Wyatt's sonnets, this technique contributes to the sense of a conflicted self, whose interiority – displayed especially in 'Nowe farewell, Love' and 'I finde no peace' – is another Petrarchan preoccupation.

The frustration of the self is also conveyed by Wyatt's use of caesura and half-rhymes: Even in the manuscript, where modern punctuation is absent, lines are interrupted by dashes; and in lines 10 and 11 of 'I finde no peace', for instance, 'helthe' and 'mysilf' are awkwardly made to rhyme. Such devices disrupt the flow of the poem, indicating the speaker's difficulty of movement through love and life. Indeed, movement and stasis are important themes,

⁶ Roland Greene, 'Thomas Wyatt', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Poets,* ed. Claude Rawson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 37.

⁷ Greg Walker, *Writing Under Tyranny: English Literature and the Henrician Reformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 281, 288.

⁸ Anonymous, 'Undo Pi dore, my spuse dere', in J.A. Burrow and Thorlac Turville-Petre, *A Book of Middle English*, 3rd edn. (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), pp. 270-271.

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whether taking the form of the renunciation of Love in 'Nowe farewell, Love' or entrapment, such as in line 5 of 'I finde no peace': 'That...lockithe me in prison'. A final and vital theme is physical language, which is used to articulate the visceral and bitter tone in line 5 of 'Ceaser, whan': 'Her cruell dispight inwardelye to shitt'. It also expresses the anguish of love through the metaphor of physical pain in 'Nowe farewell, Love' and 'I finde no peace' as the speakers respectively are 'sore' (lines 3, 6) and 'bourne and freis' (line 2).

Though the above examples elucidate Wyatt's links to Petrarch, his sonnets differ in that they end with couplets, rather anticipating the form of the Shakespearean sonnet.

Genre

While its clear references to Ceaser and Hannibal make 'Ceaser, whan' a typical historical exemplum poem, the other two in this edition have features of courtly love lyrics, such as the anguished male speaker's *complainte*. However, according to Gray, Wyatt inflects such tropes with 'a characteristically bitter, world-weary turn'. Indeed, he creates an inversion of the courtly love genre in 'Nowe farewell, Love'. Here, the trope of unrequited passion is present but reversed as it is the male narrator who abandons his Love.

Note on the Text

The poems in this edition are written in Early Modern English, which may be unfamiliar to the intended undergraduate readership. Specifically, this edition is aimed at literature students, for whom the orthographical conventions of the period are irrelevant. Therefore, the text has been adjusted as follows to avoid confusion:

- Titles are editorial. The poems have been titled by their first line as they are often referred to in this way and to make it easier for students to differentiate them.
- The text has been glossed on the page for ease of navigation between the poems and translations. Important polysemous words are addressed in the explanatory notes.

⁹ Douglas Gray, `Middle English Courtly Lyrics: Chaucer to Henry VIII', in *A Companion to the Middle English Lyric,* ed. Thomas G. Duncan (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005), p. 148.

- Capitalisation is editorial. The scribes of the Devonshire manuscript do not capitalise all proper nouns and sometimes capitalise other words in the middle of lines. To meet modern critical conventions, the first word of every line has been capitalised, mid-line capitalisations of words like conjunctions and adjectives have been ignored, and all proper nouns have been capitalised. This includes 'Fortune' in line 5 of 'Ceaser, whan' and 'Love' in line 1 of 'Now farewell, Love' due to their personification.
- All abbreviations have been silently expanded and all deletions silently included.
- Spelling is as it appears in the manuscript, except where u/v and y/i are used interchangeably. These variations have been modernised as they are semantically insignificant, yet particularly confusing to first-time readers. Long 'oo' has been transcribed as 'o' for the same reasons.
- Word division has also been modernised.
- Punctuation is editorial and has been added to bring the text in line with critical conventions because the manuscript scribes do not use punctuation in the modern sense. These additions aim to divide units of sense and provide an apparatus for controlling pace so as to convey the tone of the poems. To ensure this is done effectively for students who are new to the subject, editorial intervention has been relatively heavy here at times.
- The abbreviations, MED and OED, refer to the Middle English Dictionary and the Oxford English Dictionary.

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display

lamentation

chances

'Ceaser, whan the traytor of Egipte'

1 Ceaser, whan the traytor of Egipte

With honorable hed ded him presente,

Covering his gladnesse, ded represente°

Plaint° with his tearis outwarde, as it is writ.

5 And Annyball° eke°, whan Fortune ded flitt Hannibal, also

From him and to Rome ded her whele relente, wheel, return

Ded laugh among thim when tearis had besprent°, besprinkled

Her cruell dispight° inwardelye to shitt°. insult, void [as excrement]

So, chaunsith° it oft that everye passhion

10 The minde hidithe bye collor contrarye

With faynid visage, now sad, now merye;

Wherebye if I laughe at any season,

It is bycause I have none other waye

To cloke my care but undre sporte and playe.

Explanatory Notes

1-4: The historical allusion here is to the death of Pompey the Great in 48 BC: After being in alliance and then civil war with Julius Caesar, Pompey was defeated and fled to Egypt, where he was beheaded by Ptolemy XIII, much to Caesar's covered pleasure. Mortimer states that this event has been frequently referenced in poetry of the period 'as a standard example of disguised feelings. Compare line 14 of the sonnet beginning, When traitrous Photine, Caesar did present, in *A Poetical Rapsodie*: Caesar hid not his ioyes so well as I. See Davison, *Early English Books Online*, 2003-4, p. 61.

3: *represente.* The idea of cloaked emotion is visually emphasised by Wyatt's positioning of 'represente' at the line end, which puts performance on the outside of the line, just as the speaker puts a 'faynid visage' (line 11) on his outside countenance.

5-8: These lines refer to the Carthaginian general, Hannibal, who fought against Rome in the Second Punic War from 218-201 BCE, before poisoning himself in 183 when his fortress was surrounded by Roman forces.¹²

5: And Annyball eke. Though Caesar and Hannibal would have been enemies, Wyatt links them, syntactically and by placing them together in the octave. This implies that the experience of having to disguise emotion is universal, transgressing usual boundaries.

6: whele. A homonym of 'whele' in the sense glossed is defined by MED as 'a raised sore, pustule'. Associated with her wheel, this emphasises the narrator's bitter tone towards Fortune.

7: thim. Hannibal's people.

dictionary/dictionary/MED52457/track?counter=1&search_id=5081504> [accessed 20 December 2020].

¹⁰ Fernando Lillo Redonet, 'How Julius Caesar Started a Big War by Crossing a Small Stream', *National Geographic History* (March/April 2017) https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/magazine/2017/03-04/julius-caesar-crossing-rubicon-rome/ [accessed 20 December 2020].

¹¹ Anthony Mortimer, ed., *Petrarch's Canzoniere in the English Renaissance* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2005), p. 65.

¹² Patrick Hunt, 'Hannibal', *Britannica* (December 2020) https://www.britannica.com/biography/Hannibal-

Carthaginian-general-247-183-BC/The-Alpine-crossing> [accessed 3 January 2020].

13 'whēle n.(2)', *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. Frances McSparran et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2000-2018) https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-

Ded laugh among thim when tearis had besprent. The inversion of Caesar 'covering his gladnesse' with 'Plaint' (lines 3-4) in the way that Hannibal covers 'tearis' with 'laugh[ter]' creates a kind of chiasmus. Such a device makes a cross in the octave's structure, potentially suggesting by allusion to the cross of Christ that hiding real emotion for appearances, as both historical exempla do, involves sacrifice. Because he shares Hannibal's experience of 'laugh[ing]' to 'cloke...care' (lines 12-14), the 'l' in the sestet participates in this image, seeming to make the same sacrifice.

8: *Her cruell dispight.* For another characterisation of Fortune as 'cruell' in the context of a speaker having to disguise emotion, compare lines 4-7 of Skelton's lyric beginning, 'Go, pytous hart, rasyd with dedly wo': 'O Fortune unfriendly, Fortune unkynde thow art, /.../ ...wher I love best I dare not dyscure!' See Gray, 'Middle English Courtly Lyrics', 2005, pp. 147-148. *shitt.* MED and OED highlight the polysemy of 'shitt' as meaning both 'To lock' and 'To void as excrement'. Thus, the word captures the conflict between needing to 'lock' emotion 'inwardelye' and wanting to purge it. Furthermore, Dasenbrock argues that this poem is a 'literal translation' of its source, Petrarch's 'Cesare, poi che'. However, this explicit bodily imagery diverges from Petrarch's lines 7-8: '[Hannibal] smiled among his sad and weeping people / to lessen the bitter injury. The difference heightens the visceral nature of the emotional turmoil, as well as the bitter tone, in Wyatt's poem.

9-10: everye passhion / the minde hidithe bye collor contrarye. This shutting down of 'passhion' contrasts with the semantic field of emotive language, exemplified by the repetition of 'tearis' (lines 4, 7) and 'laugh[e]' (lines 7, 12). The effect is of a build-up of denied feeling pressing heavily against the speaker's façade.

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¹⁴ 'shitten v., 2.(a)', *MED*, 2000-2018 https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/MED40004/track?counter=1&search_id=5081578 [accessed 22 December 2020]; 'shit, v., 2.', Oxford English Dictionary Online (Oxford University Press, 2020)

https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/178329?isAdvanced=false&result=2&rskey=3ckFsg& [accessed 22 December 2020].

 ¹⁵ Reed Way Dasenbrock, 'Wyatt's Transformation of Petrarch', *Comparative Literature*, 40:2 (1988), 122-133 (p. 131).
 ¹⁶ Petrarch, 'Cesare, poi che l'traditor d'Egitto', trans. A.S. Kline, *Poetry in Translation* (2002)
 https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Italian/PetrarchCanzoniere062-122.php#anchor_Toc10199218
 [accessed 28 December 2020].

- **12-14:** The burden on the speaker is realised by the I's position squashed at the bottom of the poem.
- **14:** *cloke my care.* The image of a cloak connotes both disguise and shelter from the elements. If the 'l' of the poem can be identified with Wyatt, the weather he is sheltering from may be the suspicion of the Henrician court, which killed his patron and imprisoned him (see biography).

'Nowe farewell, Love, and theye lawes forever'

1 Nowe farewell, Love, and theye° lawes forever;

your

Thye baytid hookis shall tangle me no more.

To sore a profe° hathe called me from thye lore°

piece of evidence, teaching

To surer helthe my wittis to endever.

5 In blinde error whilist I dede persever,

Thye sharpe repulse that prickith so sore

Hathe taught me to sett in trifflis° no store, decorations

But skape° furthe for libretye is lever°.

escape, one who refrains from taking

Therefor, farewell. Go truble yonger hertes

10 And in me clayme no more autorytye.

With idle youth go use thye propretye°

quality

And thereupon go spende thy brittle° dartes.

changeable

For hidreto° I have loste mye time,

until now

Me liste° no longr b° rottyn bowes° to clime°.

desire, by, branches, climb

Explanatory Notes

2: baytid hookis. Compare the love's 'silver hooks' (line 4) and the narrator's comment to her, 'For thou thyself art thine own bait; / That fish that is not caught thereby, / Alas, is wiser far than I' (lines 26-28) in Donne's 'The Bait'. See Robbins, *The Complete Poems of John Donne*, 2013, pp. 134-137. This presents the speaker as Love's prey. The sharp imagery of 'hookis' is repeated in lines 6 and 7 ('brittle dartes'), as well as heightened by the abundance of sharp consonants like 's' and 't', which aurally 'pryckith' the reader, subjecting them to Love's violence too.

3: Editions like Rebholz's often transcribe this line, 'Senec and Plato call me from thy lore', referring to the Roman and Greek philosophers. See Rebholz, *Sir Thomas Wyatt: The Complete Poems*, 1978, p. 87. Mention of Seneca may be linked to the yearning for 'libretye' in line 8 as, according to Caldwell, 'Wyatt's concept of liberty – freedom from fear, hope and desire – derives from Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*.'¹⁷ The speaker seeks escape from the 'baytid hookis' of Love's 'desire', making Seneca relevant. However, the absence of this classical reference from the Devonshire manuscript replaces its high register with the greater immediacy of painful experience in 'To sore a profe'. This adds to the semantic field of pain continued in line 6 and to the personal tone.

lore. Alternative definitions given by MED include 'Loss...of property, or money', 'loss in battle' and 'spiritual loss'.¹⁸ Such polysemy emphasises the destructiveness of Love here, making it an antonym to its usual association with creation (of children).

4: *helthe.* Here, the scribe provides two possible words: 'helthe' and 'welthe'. This edition has transcribed 'helthe' because the idea of physical recovery follows as a solution to the physical pain in Wyatt's metaphor for the damage done by Love.

 $^{^{17}}$ Ellen C. Caldwell, 'Recent Studies in Sir Thomas Wyatt (1970-1987)', English Literary Renaissance, 19:2 (1989), 226-246 (p. 230).

¹⁸ 'lore n.(1), 1.(a), (b), (d)', *MED*, 2000-2018 https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED26095/track?counter=1&search_id=5112010 [accessed 5 January 2021].

11: *propretye.* The specific quality denoted by 'propretye' is likely 'beauty', corresponding to 'tryfflis'.¹⁹

12: *brittle dartes.* The image of Love's 'brittle dartes' is derived from the arrows of Cupid, who is sent by Venus to kill Psyche, but instead becomes her rescuer and lover, in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses.*²⁰ Wyatt's narrator takes the role of Psyche, but unlike in Apuleius, is left averse to Love. Consequently, these 'brittle dartes' are reminiscent of Cupid's lead arrow in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which destroys Daphne's interest in sexual relationships, whilst the golden one arouses Apollo.²¹ The various agendas and effects of Cupid in these narratives likely inspired Wyatt's characterisation of Love's 'dartes' as 'brittle'.

14: *Me liste no longr b rottyn bowes to clyme.* This metaphor suggests that Love's support is untrustworthy, like a rotten branch that might break at any moment.

¹⁹ 'prŏpretē n., 4b.', *MED*, 2000-2018 https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED34963/track?counter=1&search_id=5112740 [accessed 3 January 2021].

²⁰ Julia Haig Gaisser, 'Cupid and Psyche', in *A Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology*, ed. Vanda Zajko and Helena Hoyle (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2017), p. 337.

²¹ Bronwen L. Wickkiser, 'Cupid's Arrows: Lead, Gold, Magic and Medicine in Ovid, *Met.* 1.452-567', *Mnemosyne* 71:1 (2018), 100-124 (p. 101).

'I finde no peace, and all my warre is donne'

1 I finde no peace, and all my warre° is donne; war

I fere° and hope; I bourne° and freis° like ise°; fear, burn, freeze, ice

I flie° aboute the heavin, yet can I not arise;

fly

And nought I have, and all the worlde I leson°. gather

5 That loosithe° and lockithe me in prison frees

And holdithe me not – yet can I scape° no wise° -; escape, way

Nor lettithe me live nor die at my devise°, discretion

And yet of dethe it givethe me occasion.

Without yes°, I see, and without tong, I playne°; eyes, lament

10 I desire to perishe, and yet I aske helthe;

I love another and thus I hate mysilf;

I fede me in sorrowe and lawghe° in all my paine.

Likewise, displesithe me both dethe and lif,

And my delight is causer of this strif°. strife

Explanatory Notes

4: *leson.* MED also defines 'leson' as 'To lose', undermining the speaker's success.²² Such language encapsulates typically Petrarchan paradox and contributes to the semantic field of oxymoron, creating a tone of frustration and confusion.

5: *That.* In this poem's source, Petrarch's 'Pace non trovo', the second quatrain clearly identifies 'Love' as the 'One who imprisons [the speaker]' (lines 7, 5).²³ By contrast, Wyatt's 'that' may be interpreted either as a pronoun referring to the poetic voice's 'delight' (line 14, the equivalent of 'Love') or as a relative pronoun referring to 'the worlde' (line 4). This ambiguity implies that the narrator is constrained both by intimate love and the wider world, creating an even more fraught voice than in Petrarch.

loosithe and lockithe. Here, the scribe offers multiple words: 'nor' as well as 'and', and 'holdithe' as well as 'lockithe'. This edition has transcribed 'and lockithe' because it has more of the sense of oxymoron present throughout the poem, with the alliteration between 'loosithe' and 'lockithe' emphasising the juxtaposition. Moreover, 'loosithe' also denotes 'draw[ing] (a sword), fir[ing] (a cannon)', indicating that even liberty holds threat for the speaker.²⁴

7, 13: *live nor die...dethe and lif.* The inversion of this phrase between these lines shows how, in the speaker's experience, 'lif' and 'dethe' are easily interchangeable. This either suggests that his 'lif' is so miserable as to be comparable to 'dethe', or if readers consider Glaser's point (see note to line 8), it may corroborate the idea that these states are controlled by the whims of Henry VIII.

8: And yet of dethe it givethe me occasion. Glaser interprets this line as a reference to Wyatt imprisonment in the Tower, during which his supposed 'delight' (line 14) for Anne Boleyn 'of

²² 'lēsen v.(4), 1a.(a)', *MED*, 2000-2018 https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED25210/track?counter=3&search_id=5124880 [accessed 2 January 2021].

²³ Petrarch, 'Pace non trovo, et non ò da fa guerra', *Poetry in Translation*, 2002

https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Italian/PetrarchCanzoniere123-183.php [accessed 8 January 2021].

²⁴ 'lōsen, v.(3), 4.(a)', *MED*, 2000-2018 https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-

dictionary/dictionary/MED26123/track?counter=2&search_id=5135752> [accessed 10 January 2021].

dethe [gave him] occasion', and argues that it shows how the poet 'politicizes his originals [Petrarch], making them reflect his own insecure and violent world.'25

12: I fede me in sorrowe and lawghe in all my paine. The theme of disguised emotion from 'Ceaser, whan' re-emerges here, potentially strengthening Glaser's theory of allusion to the Henrician court.

²⁵ Joe Glaser, 'Wyatt, Petrarch and the Uses of Mistranslation', *College Literature*, 11:3 (1984), 214-222 (p. 221).

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