I Find No Peace

POEM TEXT

I find no peace, and all my war is done.
I fear and hope. I burn and freeze like ice.
I fly above the wind, yet can I not arise;
And nought I have, and all the world I seize on.
That loseth nor locketh holdeth me in prison
And holdeth me not—yet can I scape no wise—
Nor letteth me live nor die at my device,
And yet of death it giveth me occasion.
Without eyen I see, and without tongue I plain.
I desire to perish, and yet I ask health.
I love another, and thus I hate myself.
I feed me in sorrow and laugh in all my pain;
Likewise displeaseth me both life and death,
And my delight is causer of this strife.

SUMMARY

I'm not at peace, even though I'm not fighting anymore.
I'm both scared and hopeful. I burn with passion yet feel as cold as ice.
I soar into the sky, yet I can't even get up.
I don't have anything, and yet I have the entire world.
Love, which variously loosens and tightens its grip on me, holds me in a prison.
At the same time, I'm free to leave. But there's no way for me to escape.
It won't let me live nor kill myself,
even though it makes me want to die all the time.
I see without sight and complain without speaking.
I want to die, but I also want to live longer.
I love someone else, and that's why I hate myself.
I sustain myself with sorrow and laugh through constant pain.
Similarly, both the idea of life and of death disappoint me.
My pleasure is the cause of all this trouble.

THEMES

THE JOY AND PAIN OF LOVE

Sir Thomas Wyatt's "I Find No Peace" expresses the glorious and terrible contradictions that come with being in love. Love, here, is both torture and pleasure, ugliness and beauty, life-giving and life-denying. In short, the poem shows love to be not one single emotion, but an unending rollercoaster of extreme—and often conflicting—feelings.

The speaker's world has been turned upside down by love, which has made him feel a bunch of paradoxical things at once—both happy and sad, loving and hateful, trapped and free. The speaker finds no peace, though he has no "war" to make. In other words, he's not in a conflict with his lover *right now*, but he still feels like he is. He both "burns" (suggesting the heat of physical passion) *and* "freezes like ice" (suggesting the metaphorical coldness of emotional distance). He's scared but hopeful, feels like soaring "above the wind" but is also stuck, both imprisoned and unbound.

In short, the speaker expresses the intense flurry of conflicting emotions that go along with being in love, a contradictory state that pulls the speaker—both painfully and joyfully—in many directions at once. Love, then, is hardly a stable or predictable experience in this poem, and the speaker is in a state of constant, violent flux. One day he feels like he has *everything*, and the next he has nothing. His love will neither let him live nor die, making him a kind of zombie at the mercy of love itself. In other words, *love hurts*.

What's more, the speaker *knows* he's in a bad way, yet he can't help but perpetuate his own sorry state. His head—his ability to think rationally—is completely beholden to his heart. Through this, the poem shows how love makes people act against their own interests, drawing out their own suffering just to keep the flame of love alive. When the speaker *says* that he wants to "perish" and die, he doesn't really. What he really wants is more of that love that has made him *feel* like he wants to end it all. He thus readily sacrifices himself at the altar of his love, "feed[ing]" his sorrow with more of the same desire and hating himself all the while for doing so. All in all, then, "I Find No Peace" powerfully captures the tender, painful complexity of love. Love isn't just one emotion, this poem argues, but many, often contradictory feelings all held closely together.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-14

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINE 1

I find no peace, and all my war is done.

This sonnet launches right into the heart of the action, finding its speaker in utter turmoil. The speaker offers no specifics

about his situation, instead beginning a series of paradoxical statements that capture the twin joys and pains of love. In other words, he's lovesick, and he's got it bad!

Almost every line offers a new metaphor—sometimes two—that describes the speaker's tortured, conflicted state. The first line refers to the speaker feeling no "peace" despite his metaphorical warring being "done" (perhaps referring to some fight with his lover that is now technically over). The absence of war is, logically speaking, peace—but the speaker feels anything but peaceful! Whatever "war" he went through is still with him internally even if it isn't actually taking place at this very moment.

The caesura sets up this paradox, with peace on one side of the comma and war on the other:

> I find no peace, || and all my war is done.

This parallel grammatical structure, which will repeat throughout the poem, is an important part of how the reader experiences the speaker's fraught mindset. Think of the speaker as being pulled in two opposite directions—towards and away from the one he desires—and how that threatens to tear him in half.

The end-stop after "done" is also rather ironic, creating a solid pause despite the fact that the speaker insists this situation is far from over. Throughout the sonnet, full stops like this will create a sense of weariness—as though composing the poem itself is a torturous act, precisely because it forces the speaker to express how he feels.

LINES 2-4

I fear and hope. I burn and freeze like ice.
I fly above the wind, yet can I not arise;
And nought I have, and all the world I seize on.

The poem's second full sentence is also its shortest: "I fear and hope." This is a rare moment in the poem in which the speaker *doesn't* use metaphor or simile to describe his situation. It's as plain as plain can be, laying out the speaker's contradictory emotions for all to see. And after the full-stop caesura (the finality of which evokes the utter hopelessness of the speaker's situation) comes more figurative language:

> I fear and hope. || I burn and freeze like ice.

This metaphorical burning likely relates to the speaker's lust, the flames of desire, and/or the shared body heat of lovers in bed. At the opposite end of the scale, the speaker might "freeze" because he also feels some anger towards and distance from his lover. He feels filled with passion and icy numbness all at once.

Line 3 follows the formula established in line 1. The speaker's spirit soars, and, at the same time, he feels completely immobilized by his desires. He is both like a bird up on high *and* stuck to the ground. In line 4, he has "nought" (nothing) and "all the world." It's an exhausting set of emotions to read, let alone experience! Having nothing and everything at the same time captures the nature of his lover's paradox: love, like some angry god, giveth and taketh away.

It's also worth noting the repetitive nature of this first quatrain. Three out of four lines begin with anaphora ("I" + a verb), and the first-person pronoun clangs throughout like some kind of torturous bell. This shows how the speaker's troubles seem perpetual and never-ending, and, additionally, how impossible it is for him to think about anything else.

LINES 5-8

That loseth nor locketh holdeth me in prison
And holdeth me not—yet can I scape no wise—
Nor letteth me live nor die at my device,
And yet of death it giveth me occasion.

The second quatrain is a tricky one for modern readers, presenting a tangle of thorny syntax and grammar. The speaker uses the same approach as the first quatrain, using paradox and contradictory statements to capture his conflicting feelings.

Line 5 means something like the following: "The thing that loosens its grip (and doesn't lock) on me still holds me in a prison—and even though it doesn't really hold me, there's no way for me to escape." As a metaphor, then, the speaker probably describes a tempestuous love affair that leaves him wondering where he stands. A modern, and less poetic, equivalent might be someone sending you loads of admiring text messages before *ghosting* (i.e., ignoring) you. That the poem stretches its grammar and syntax to near-breaking point here captures the speaker's tortured mindset. He, too, is on the edge of breaking down. The sentence changes direction repeatedly and rapidly, much like the love affair being described.

The speaker, then, feels he is stuck in a prison which he is, in fact, free to leave. He doesn't *have* to carry on this love affair, and yet it exerts such a strong hold over him that he can't help but follow it down the rabbit hole. He is a like a hostage who has come to love his captor. The repetition of "holdeth"—and the near-repeat of the alliterating "loseth" and "locketh"—shows that this is a perpetual cycle, and plays on the idea of the lovers *holding* each other in their arms. The speaker's lover's arms are both a prison and a paradise.

Lines 7 and 8 develop the above idea into a matter of life and death. The speaker's love won't let him live, nor will it let him die at his own "device." In other words, he is a kind of zombie, destined to walk the earth in a state of undead desire. He can't commit suicide, because that would end not just himself but the love he so craves. Yet that very same love makes every minute seem like the perfect moment to take his own life ("it giveth me occasion")! Life and death are the paradoxical opposites

here—and the speaker has neither.

Finally, the alliteration between "die," "device," and "death" has a persistent, stabbing sound that is also dull and soft. The sound itself, then, captures both his desire to die and his inability to do so.

LINES 9-11

Without eyen I see, and without tongue I plain.
I desire to perish, and yet I ask health.
I love another, and thus I hate myself.

This is a Petrarchan sonnet, which means that line 9 marks the poem's *volta*—the shift from its octave (the first eight lines) to its sestet (the final six). Usually this means a change in direction, but here it's more of an *intensification* of what the speaker has already been saying. The reader already knows that the speaker exists in a state of perpetual despair, and the sestet adds misery to misery.

In line 9, the speaker claims to see without eyes and to complain ("plain") without a tongue. Of course, the speaker doesn't mean this literally. This line presents a kind of puzzle to the reader, asking what it means to see and speak without the necessary organs. Though the speaker sees and speaks, he remains effectively in the same predicament as if he were metaphorically sightless and unable to talk. That is, his seeing and "plain[ing]" are just an act.

It's worth nothing that to "plain" has another archaic meaning: to make a sad and mournful (plaintive) sound. It's not a great leap, then, to see this type of "plain[ing]" as a reference to moaning—a sound the speaker *can* make, as opposed to the rational words that his "tongue" might express.

Line 10 then effectively restates lines 7 and 8, with the speaking again expressing a longing to both die and live at the same time. This repeated sentiment shows the maze-like structure of the speaker's thoughts, his "desire" constantly circling back on itself. Life, death, it's all effectively irrelevant—all he *really* wants is his lover. Note how lines 10 and 11 even start in the same way as the poem's opening: "I + verb." This repetition portrays the speaker as totally stuck on this relationship.

In line 11, the speaker bluntly sums up his situation. Although it's easy to gather that the preceding lines speak from a mood of love sickness, it's not till this line that the speaker states it explicitly. The source of all his problems comes to light: through loving "another" (someone else), he has come to "hate" himself. *All* of the paradoxes presented earlier in the poem, then, evolve out of this tortured dilemma. There's a cold, stark logic at work here: "I love another [therefore] I hate myself."

LINES 12-14

I feed me in sorrow and laugh in all my pain;
Likewise displeaseth me both life and death,
And my delight is causer of this strife.

In the last three lines, things are looking just as miserable for the speaker as earlier in the poem! When the speaker says in line 12 "I feed me in sorrow," this means something like "I feed myself *with* sorrow." In other words, the speaker *sustains* himself with the very same substance that makes him so sick: his love (desire). This love is like a parasite that makes the speaker hungry for more, keeping the speaker alive only in order to perpetuate its *own* survival.

In keeping with the rest of the poem, this line uses parallelism as well:

I feed me in sorrow and laugh in all my pain;

Either side of the conjunction "and," the speaker uses the same elements in the same order: verb + "in" + abstract noun. This constant doubling-back on itself gives the poem a punishing, restless quality, making the reader *anticipate* more and more sorrow and pain as the sonnet unfolds. It's a pattern—just like the speaker's own cycling pattern of passion and anger towards his lover. Laughing in pain, then, highlights the speaker's absurd *tragicomic* situation. He knows he's living a life of torture, yet he keeps going back for more.

In lines 13 and 14, the speaker once again gives a clear-eyed assessment of his lovesick blues. He is so messed up by his love that *both* life and death "displeaseth" him. Just as he stated in line 10, the speaker wishes neither to live nor die—because living with these emotions is painful, but dying would mean he'd never experience that love (the source of his pain!) again. The speaker himself is a bundle of contradiction and conflict, which explains why he speaks almost exclusively in opposite terms, feeling completely opposing sentiments all at the same time. Notice how "death" rhymes with line 10's "health," neatly representing this split in the speaker's life and mind. He wants both death and life, and, at the same time, paradoxically wants neither!

Lines 13 and 14 use alliteration, linking "displeaseth," "death," and "delight" together, mixing these different emotions and concepts together into one deadly, delicious potion. The /d/ sound was used earlier in lines 7 and 8 to suggest both violence *and* inaction. The repeat of /d/ has an insistent sound, stabbing at the lines—but it is also a dull sound, marking the speaker as firmly stuck in his ways.

Finally, line 14 states what the reader already know full well. It's the speaker's "delight"—his love—which causes his "strife" (his pain). The subtle assonance between the two words (that shared long /i/ sound) links them together, presenting love and pain as two sides of the same coin.

POETIC DEVICES

ALLITERATION

Alliteration helps give the reader a sense of the speaker's fraught state of mind. Generally speaking, this is a very repetitive poem—and that's because the speaker himself is stuck in a very repetitive cycle of passion and self-hatred. Alliteration like "loseth" and "locketh" in line 5, then, is one element of all this repetition that works at the level of sound. In other words, the poem's repetitive sounds here reflect the idea that speaker is going on circles.

These words are also essentially opposites (being let loose versus locked up), but the alliteration here connects these concepts—in turn emphasizing the fact that the speaker feels both trapped and free at once!

The same thing happens with the shared /d/ sounds of "displeaseth," "death," and "delight" in the poem's final two lines. The alliteration here links opposites together, reflecting the speaker's conflicted state and how the very thing that's causing him "displeasure" and "death" is also what's making him happy ("delighting" him).

On a broader level, note how the poem passes the baton of alliteration from the /l/ sound to the /d/ in line 7:

> Nor letteth me live nor die at my device,

The speaker moves from the /l/ sounds of "letteth me live" to /d/ sounds of "die at my device," and then goes on to use only /d/ alliteration throughout the rest of the poem. This thudding sound lends a heaviness to the poem's second half—an imposing, almost violent quality that echoes the speaker's half-wish for his own death.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 5:** "loseth," "locketh"
- **Line 7:** "letteth," "live," "die," "device"
- **Line 8:** "death"
- **Line 13:** "displeaseth," "death"
- **Line 14:** "delight"

CAESURA

Before diving into the poem's use of caesura, keep in mind that, back in the time period when this poem was written, writers didn't always use punctuation in the ways they do now. In fact, they often did without it all together! This is a modernized version of the text, which means that some of the punctuation here has been added or amended by editors throughout history. (Check out the Resources section to see the poem in Wyatt's own hand—and his tendency towards using colons, rather than commas, for caesura). Sometimes poems from this era do use punctuation for caesura, and in other examples the caesura is *implied* by the words and the order that they're put in.

Here, the speaker uses caesura (punctuated or otherwise) to highlight the poem's repetition and parallelism. Most of the lines here contrast two opposite images or concepts, with the speaker explaining how he experiences both of these things at the same time. The caesura in line 1, for example (which is not punctuated in the original text), shows "peace" on one side and "war" on the other.

The speaker sees his life through a maddening series of paradoxes, and caesura helps to frame the speaker's confused state for the reader. In line 10, the speaker's "desire to perish" is separated by a comma from his wish for good health. In line 11, love and hate sit either side of the caesura. Lines 3, 4, and 9 all use caesura in the same way. It's as though the speaker is rocking on some kind of torturous see-saw, swinging back and forth from one extreme to the other with only a caesura to hold it all together.

The caesura in line 2, however, is a bit different from the rest (and is also marked by a colon—rather than a full stop—in the original text). This line has two sets of paradoxes (whereas the others tend to have one). The caesura separates these into two desperate sentences, one literal and the other metaphorical.

The speaker literally "fear[s] and [hopes]," and, after the caesura, describes himself as metaphorically burning and freezing. The caesura here thus helps the poem compress even more of the speaker's torturous state of mind into the poem, building an intense atmosphere of misery and anxiety.

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "peace, and"
- **Line 2:** "hope. I"
- **Line 3:** "wind, yet"
- **Line 4:** "have, and"
- **Line 6:** "not—yet"
- **Line 9:** "see, and"
- **Line 10:** "perish, and"
- **Line 11:** "another, and"

END-STOPPED LINE

Nearly all of the poem's 14 lines are end-stopped. The pauses at the end of each line grant the poem a very weary, plodding rhythm—which is exactly how the speaker's life might feel to him! He's grappling with an exhausting set of paradoxical emotions, feeling both light and heavy, free and caged, wanting to neither to live nor die. This exhaustion comes across through these end-stops, which repeatedly tap the brakes on the poem and halt its momentum. It's as though the speaker barely has the willpower to get through this poem.

Most lines use metaphor too, and the end-stops provide the

reader with an extra beat to absorb an image and prepare for the next one (as in the switch from fire/ice in line 2, to flying/being stuck on the ground in line 3). By the end of the poem, the reader has been pummeled by one metaphor after another, the many end-stops making each new line seem all the more pained and tragic.

The only ambiguous end-stops come in lines 5, 6, and 7, each of which build on a long sentence that spills across the line breaks. Some readers might argue that line 5, in particular, is enjambed—that there's no pause after the word "prison," and that this lack of pause evokes the idea that the speaker is at once trapped and free. This is a valid reading! That said, each of these lines also contains a complete clause in its own right; the lines that follow simply add information to, rather than grammatically *completely*, the phrases at hand, and as such are just as arguably end-stopped.

An important caveat when determining whether a line is end-stopped here: this is a very old poem, and features some very old-fashioned punctuation. As with caesura, the end-stops in this version of the text have been modernized, with some punctuation added on by later editors. In the original text, the end of a sentence was implied by grammar and syntax (which is where modern editors take their cues). Check out the poem in Wyatt's original hand in the Resources section of this guide to compare.

Where End-Stopped Line appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "done."
- **Line 2:** "ice."
- **Line 3:** "arise;"
- **Line 4:** "on."
- **Line 6:** "wise—"
- **Line 7:** "device,"
- **Line 8:** "occasion."
- **Line 9:** "plain."
- **Line 10:** "health."
- **Line 11:** "myself."
- **Line 12:** "pain;"
- **Line 13:** "death,"
- **Line 14:** "strife."

METAPHOR

"I Find no Peace" uses a flurry of metaphors from start to finish. These dramatize the speaker's situation, bringing the pain and joy of love to life on the page. They also allow the speaker to say the same thing in new ways over and over again, and in doing so illustrate the intensity of his inner turmoil.

All these metaphors add to the poem's hyperbolic tone as well. In line 1, for example, the speaker declares that though all his "war is done" he still can't "find [...] peace." Here, he's presenting his relationship—or, perhaps, newly *ex*-relationship—as a massive armed conflict, which presumably it isn't! The speaker is saying that his love feels as violent and destructive as actual warfare, and that even though the fighting might be over (perhaps a reference to the end the speaker's relationship), the speaker is still filled with internal conflict.

In line 2, the speaker says that he "burn[s] and [freezes] like ice." Again, he's not literally on fire, nor is he frozen. But his life does feel like it's torn between two extremes as starkly opposed as these elements themselves; he's filled with fiery passion and icy hatred and/or sadness. Again, the metaphor is built on hyperbole and meant to illustrate how intense the speaker's conflicting feelings are.

The speaker hints at happier times in line 3. Sometimes his love makes his spirit soar like a bird on high, yet other times he can't "arise" at all—perhaps not even out of bed! So far, then, love is, metaphorically, both war and peace, fire and ice, flight and stasis. Next, the speaker deems love both freedom and imprisonment. In lines 5 and 6, the speaker metaphorically compares his love to something that both does and doesn't "holdeth" him "in prison." He's trapped by his lust, yet, through its satisfaction, is also set free by it. The use of "holdeth" also evokes the way that lovers hold one another in their arms.

In perhaps the poem's most complex metaphor, the speaker claims in line 9 to see and speak without eyes or a tongue ("plain" here means "complaining" or moaning). The speaker isn't literally missing his eyes or tongue, nor would he be able to see or speak if he were! This metaphor thus requires the reader to do some imaginative work—to treat sight and speech *themselves* as metaphorical. The speaker seems to be saying that he can "see" what's happening clearly and complain about it (as in this poem!), but he still can't take any *action*. Nothing he sees or says really makes any tangible difference.

Finally, in line 12 the speaker describes how he "feed[s]" himself "in sorrow." This metaphorically transforms sorrow into a kind of substance, like a food keeping the speaker just barely alive.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "and all my war is done"
- **Line 2:** "I burn and freeze"
- **Line 3:** "I fly above the wind"
- **Lines 5-6:** "That loseth nor locketh holdeth me in prison / And holdeth me not—yet can I scape no wise—"
- **Line 9:** "Without eyen I see, and without tongue I plain."
- **Line 12:** "I feed me in sorrow"

PARADOX

The poem's many paradoxes capture the speaker's tortured state of mind. The lovesick speaker is filled with contradictory feelings that seem to make no sense—yet which many readers who've been in love might relate to! These paradoxes are the

heart of the poem, and are meant to illustrate the rollercoaster of emotions that may accompany love and desire.

In line 1, for example, the speaker is neither at peace nor at war. Logically speaking, this makes no sense—but love has its own twisted take on logic, throwing sense out of the window. The speaker fears and hopes, burns with passion and freezes with either animosity or sorrow (line 2). His spirit soars in ecstasy, yet he feels totally stuck to the ground (line 3). He has nothing and everything at the same time (line 4). He's stuck in a metaphorical prison *and* free to leave at any time (lines 5 and 6). He wants to die, wants to live, and wants neither all at once (lines 7 and 8)!

In line 9, he can see but has no eyes, and can complain but has no tongue (his metaphorical way of describing that, given he's not going to do anything about his situation, he might as well not see or speak). In line 12, he laughs in pain, and, in the last two lines, he candidly admits that both life and death "displeaseth" him and that *all* of this can be traced back to his "delight" (his love). Put simply, the world makes no sense. Like some medieval torture instrument, love has the speaker twisted this way and that, almost torn in half!

Where Paradox appears in the poem:

- Line 1
- Line 2
- Lines 3-7
- Lines 9-10
- Lines 12-13
- Line 14

PARALLELISM

The poem uses parallelism throughout to set up its many paradoxes (all those contradictory images or ideas set side-by-side). Through this, the poem paints of a speaker who is of two minds, pulled in two conflicting directions. The speaker is stuck in a cycle, knowing that he should stop chasing this relationship but unable to ever put an end to it. The use of parallelism captures this to and fro of emotion—as soon a speaker's sentence goes in one direction, it is pulled back in the opposite direction.

Take line 2, for example:

> I fear and hope. I burn and freeze like ice.

Notice how the grammatical structure is identical either side of the full-stop—everything comes in twos: "I [verb] and [verb]." For every positive emotion, the speaker feels a negative one, and this pattern is so dominant in his life that it appears in the way he speaks.

Parallelism here is thus all about emotional extremes, taking the reader on a violent ride this way and that. It also sets up antithesis throughout the poem as the speaker places two juxtaposing states side by side. Doing so, in turn, gives the poem a sense of tragic logic: "I do this *therefore* I do that." Lines 10 and 11 are a case in point:

> I desire to perish, and yet I ask health.
> I love another, and thus I hate myself.

Both lines again follow a repeated formula "I + a verb + grammatical object." This gives the poem a relentless, almost punishing quality—as though the reader, like the speaker, is being ground down by the situation. The poem's use of anaphora—all those times the speaker starts a sentence with "I"—is part of its parallelism and adds to the sense that the speaker is trapped in this never ending back and forth. Parallelism thus helps capture love in all its terror and glory.

Where Parallelism appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-4
- Line 9
- Line 10
- Lines 11-12

REPETITION

"I Find No Peace" is a very repetitive poem. The speaker himself is stuck in a repetitive cycle, shifting from wild extremes of love and desire on the one hand and frustration and self-hatred on the other. He constantly wants to "perish," yet also wants to live, thus perpetuating a torturous, lovesick pattern of behavior. It makes sense, then, for the poem itself to be full of repetition and mirror the speaker's inner turmoil.

The clearest repetition here is more specifically anaphora (itself a form of parallelism). Nearly half of the poem's lines start with the first-person pronoun "I." Not only does this build a sense of the speaker's repetitive thought process, but it also shows how the speaker can think of nothing else apart from his situation. In other words, he is totally consumed with his "strife," unable to conceive of anything other than himself and his desire. The "I" repeats elsewhere in the poem too, chiming like a bell to remind the speaker—and the reader—of the speaker's self-hatred.

Other words repeat here too. "Holdeth," for example, appears in quick succession in lines 5 and 6 (this type of repetition is known as diacope). The repetition is part of the vicious logic of the speaker's feelings, and hints at two types of holding—being held in his lover's arms, and being held in a metaphorical prison built with bricks of love and desire. "Death" appears in line 8 and 13, showing how the speaker fixates on ending it all—but, of course, wants to live and love too!

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "I"
- **Line 2:** "I," "I"
- **Line 3:** "I"
- **Line 5:** "holdeth"
- **Line 6:** "holdeth"
- **Line 7:** "die"
- **Line 8:** "death"
- **Line 9:** "Without," "without"
- **Line 10:** "I"
- **Line 11:** "I"
- **Line 12:** "I"
- **Line 13:** "death"

SIMILE

The poem only uses one simile, and it's part of a broader metaphor: the speaker says in line 2, "I burn and freeze like ice." Burning and freezing—simultaneously—presents the reader with a paradox. As with everything else in the poem, the metaphor ("I burn") and simile ("freeze like ice") relate to the speaker's love. While the speaker might "burn" with passion (or, perhaps, fury), freezing like ice might relate to an emotional distance. Perhaps the speaker's lover has *gone cold*.

It's worth noting that "burn" could belong grammatically to the simile too (as in, "I burn [...] like ice"). Ice can provoke a burning sensation, though it seems more like that the speaker means them as separate opposites here. Ice also has connotations of death, pre-empting the speaker's desire to die mentioned later in the poem.

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "freeze like ice"

VOCABULARY

Nought (Line 4) - Nothing.

Seize On (Line 4) - Grab hold of.

Loseth (Line 5) - Loses or loosens.

Locketh (Line 5) - Locks.

Holdeth (Line 5, Line 6) - Holds.

Scape (Line 6) - Shortened form of "escape."

No Wise (Line 6) - In no way.

Letteth (Line 7) - Lets.

Giveth (Line 8) - Gives.

Occasion (Line 8) - A ripe moment (for the speaker to die).

Eyen (Line 9) - Archaic form of "eyes."

Plain (Line 9) - Archaic form of "complain." Could also mean to make a sad, mournful (*plaintive*) sound.

Perish (Line 10) - Cease to exist.

Displeaseth (Line 13) - Displeases.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

Given that this poem is an adaptation of a poem by the 14th-century Italian poet Petrarch, it's no surprise that this is a Petrarchan sonnet! That means it has 14 lines that can be broken up into an eight-line stanza called an octave and a six-line stanza called a sestet. —The octave can further be broken up into two quatrains, and the sestet into two tercets.

Sir Thomas Wyatt actually introduced the sonnet form to the English language, and made some tweaks on it as he did so. In a Petrarchan sonnet, for example, the transition from octet to sestet represents a *turn* in direction, known technically as a *volta*. This is a moment when the poem starts responding to the first eight lines in some way. It's notable, then, that this sonnet *doesn't* really turn when it's supposed to! That is, the poem opens in turmoil, stays in turmoil, and *ends* in turmoil. This captures the speaker's troubled and singular state of mind. He's totally, utterly, lovesick, and can think of nothing else but his love—so a real shift in the direction of his thoughts proves impossible.

The poem is also very repetitive, and intentionally so. Look, for example, at how the speaker ties himself—and his reader—up in grammatical knots in the second quatrain. This paradoxical language makes it clear that the speaker is a kind of walking, talking paradox, torn in two completely different directions by his desire on the one hand and his longing to be free from that desire on the other.

METER

As is the case with most sonnets, "I Find No Peace" uses iambic pentameter throughout. This means there are five feet called "iambs" per line, each of which follows an unstressed-stressed syllable pattern (da-DUM). The first two lines are perfect examples of this:

I find | no peace, | and all | my war | is done.
I fear | and hope. | I burn | and freeze | like ice.

Generally speaking, iambic pentameter gives the poem a steady, regular pulse.

There is quite a bit of metrical variation in this poem, however! In lines 5 to 7, for example, the speaker ties himself up in grammatical knots, mirroring the way his life has become similarly complicated through conflicting emotions. Here, the meter starts to lose its way, giving the reader a sense of the

speaker's troubled and disorderly state of mind:

> That los- | eth nor lock- | eth hold- | eth me | in prison
> And hold- | eth me not | —yet can | I scape | no wise—
> Nor let- | teth me live | nor die | at my | device,

There are some extra syllables and anapests (da-da-DUM feet) here. On the one hand, this just help keeps the poem sounding interesting. It also subtly evokes the prison/freedom metaphor in these lines: the meter seems to want to break free and stay in its box all at the same time!

Other lines feature similar variations, but the speaker brings it home with one last line of straight-up iambic pentameter:

> And my | de light | is caus | er of | this strife.

This give the last line a sense of finality. The poem's return to a steady form suggests that there's little chance of the speaker's situation changing anytime soon; his will steadily exist in this unsteadiness.

RHYME SCHEME

"I Find no Peace" follows a typical Petrarchan sonnet rhyme scheme, though it deviates from the specific rhyme scheme found in Petrarch's *Rime* 134 (the Italian poem on which Wyatts is based). The first two quatrains (the first eight lines) use two rhyme sounds throughout, a set-up that's easier to achieve in Italian than English! The sestet then uses three more rhyming sounds, making the overall pattern:

ABBA ABBA CDECDE

For the most part, the rhymes work to propel the poem forward. Not all the rhymes are perfect, however, and many read like slant rhymes (especially to modern ears). This occasional mismatch between rhyme sounds ("ice" is not a perfect match with "arise," for example) make things seem ever so slightly off-kilter.

At two points, the poem's rhymes also seem to sum up the speaker's situation pretty neatly. Line 10 and line 13 pair "health" with "death" (a slant rhyme to modern ears), which represent the two sides of the speaker's dilemma. He wants to live and love, but he also wants to die and be done with that very same love. Meanwhile, the rhyme between "myself" and "strife" suggests how the speaker does this to himself by continuing to indulge his desires. That is, he goes against his better judgment time and time again, prolonging his misery.

SPEAKER

Readers don't know much about the poem's speaker, apart from the fact that this person is suffering from serious love sickness. The lack of identifying factors make it easy for anyone who has felt similarly to identify with the poem's dramatic (and hyperbolic) speaker.

The speaker repeatedly draws attention to himself throughout the poem (note all those "I" pronouns), suggesting the speaker's fixation on his own predicament *and* the cyclical nature of his lovesick troubles. He is pulled this way and that by the twin joys and pains of his love, and all this "I" gives the impression that his sense of self is almost at breaking point. Indeed, in line 11 he professes to hate himself *because* he loves another.

Every line in the poem portrays the speaker as conflicted. He fears *and* hopes; his spirit soars *and* he feels stuck on the ground like a stone. He wants to be free from his lover, but all he *really* wants is to be held by that same lover. He wants to live, he wants to die, and yet, somehow, he wants neither of these. He is, then, a kind of walking, talking paradox, with every though that comes out of his mouth immediately undercut by its opposite.

We've used male pronouns in this guide for simplicity's sake and because many critics take the speaker to be Wyatt himself. That said, historians and literary critics still speculate about how much of an autobiographical element can be read into Wyatt's poetry. The answer, predictably, is that it varies from poem to poem—and that, given the centuries between then and now, it's not getting any easier to answer these kinds of questions. In truth, it's not even really necessary in understanding or enjoying the poem itself.

SETTING

The poem gives little away about its setting. Because the speaker rarely talks literally, it's probably best to see this poem as set in the speaker's mind itself. His psyche is tortured, pulled this way and that by his desire; similarly, the poem never settles, lurching from one hyperbolic metaphor to the next. The lack of a clear setting also implies that the speaker's pain will follow wherever he goes. His torment is tied to his mind rather than a specific place.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Sir Thomas Wyatt is generally considered one the most important English poet of the first half of the 16th century (writing shortly before Shakespeare came along and gave everyone a run for their money!). Wyatt was a considerable poetic technician and innovator, setting up some formal conventions in English poetry that still hold firm today. In fact, Wyatt even introduced the sonnet form to the English language. Wyatt was well-schooled in classical literature, and was also heavily influenced by Geoffrey Chaucer, a 14th-

century poet often dubbed the "father of English poetry."

Wyatt took his sonnet cues, though, from Petrarch, an Italian poet operating in the 14th century (full name Francesco Petrarca). Wyatt produced numerous translations of Petrarch (among many other writers), which can also be thought of as adaptations. This particular poem uses Petrarch's *Rima* 134 as its inspiration.

Other English writers, including Shakespeare, would go on to tweak the sonnet form, but Wyatt sticks to Petrach's model here. This means the poem consists of an octave and a sestet (more on that in the Form section of this guide). By contrast, Elizabethan, or Shakespearean, sonnets tend to end with a rhyming couplet and use more rhyming words (Italian is better suited to rhymes than English). On that note, it's worth checking out Shakespeare's "Sonnet 147"—which finds its speaker in a very similar lovesick situation to the one here. Wyatt's well-known "They Flee From Me" also looks at the painful complexities of love and desire.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Sir Thomas Wyatt lived from 1503-1542, meaning he grew up under the rule of the notorious English king Henry VIII. Like his father before him, Wyatt's life was entangled with the life of the court (the small elite society that surrounded the monarch). Wyatt served in various official positions under Henry VIII, including as a diplomat. He also fell out favor on more than one occasion, even ending up in prison faced with potential execution (Henry VIII thought Wyatt, like many others, was getting a little too close to Anne Boleyn).

Henry VIII was part of the Tudor dynasty, which ruled England from 1485 till 1603. Henry's reign was a time of particular upheaval, in which the king completely upturned the religious structures governing English society. Court life, though lavish, could also be dangerous! Henry VIII ruled with complete authority, punishing those who upset or disobeyed him with ruthless indifference. It was also a place of sexual encounter and intrigue, and numerous poems of the era display sex and love as a kind of power game not unlike those taking place at the political level.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Wyatt's Life and Work — Check out Wyatt's biography from the Poetry Foundation. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/thomas-wyatt)
- "Whoso List to Hunt" — An interesting article about another of Wyatt's poems, offering insight into the relationship between his poetry and Petrarch's. (https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2009/aug/10/poem-of-the-week-thomas-wyatt)
- Love and the Court — An interesting essay that explores the relationship between love and politics in Wyatt's poetry. (http://ifa.amu.edu.pl/sap/files/14/20_Heine-Harabasz.pdf)
- Petrarch's Original — The poem from which Wyatt adapted his, shown in Italian and an alternative translation. (https://lyricstranslate.com/en/pace-non-trovo-e-non-ho-da-far-guerra-134-i-find-no-peace-and-have-no-arms-war.html)
- The Egerton Manuscript — A compilation of poems made during Henry VIII's reign, including some poems written in Wyatt's own hand. (http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=egerton_ms_2711_fs001r)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER SIR THOMAS WYATT POEMS

- They Flee From Me
- Whoso List to Hunt, I Know where is an Hind

HOW TO CITE

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