

## Sir Thomas Wyatt, (1503-1542)



He was born to Henry and Anne Wyatt at Allington Castle, near Maidstone, Kent, in 1503. Little is known of his childhood education. His first court appearance was in 1516 as Sewer Extraordinary to [Henry VIII](#). In 1516 he also entered [St. John's College, University of Cambridge](#). Around 1520, when he was only seventeen years old, he married Lord Cobham's daughter Elizabeth Brooke. She bore him a son, [Thomas Wyatt, the Younger](#), in 1521. He became popular at court, and carried out several foreign missions for King Henry VIII, and also served various offices at home.

Around 1525, Wyatt separated from his wife, charging her with adultery; it is also the year from which his interest in [Anne Boleyn](#) probably dates.<sup>1</sup> He accompanied Sir Thomas Cheney on a diplomatic mission to France in 1526 and [Sir John Russell](#) to Venice and the papal court in Rome in 1527. He was made High Marshal of Calais (1528-1530) and Commissioner of the Peace of Essex in 1532. Also in 1532, Wyatt accompanied King Henry and Anne Boleyn, who was by then the King's mistress, on their visit to Calais. Anne Boleyn married the King in January 1533, and Wyatt served in her coronation in June.

Wyatt was knighted in 1535, but in 1536 he was imprisoned in the Tower for quarreling with the [Duke of Suffolk](#), and possibly also because he was suspected of being one of Anne Boleyn's lovers. During this imprisonment Wyatt witnessed the execution of Anne Boleyn on May 19, 1536 from the [Bell Tower](#), and wrote *V. Innocentia Veritas Viat Fides Circumdederunt me inimici mei*. He was released later that year. Henry, Wyatt's father, died in November 1536. Wyatt was returned to favor and made ambassador to the court of the Holy Roman Emperor, [Charles V](#), in Spain. He returned to England in June 1539, and later that year was again ambassador to Charles until May 1540. Wyatt's praise of country life, and the cynical comments about foreign courts, in his verse epistle *Mine Own John Poins* derive from his own experience.

In 1541 Wyatt was charged with treason on a revival of charges originally levelled against him in 1538 by [Edmund Bonner](#), now Bishop of London. Bonner claimed that while ambassador,

Wyatt had been rude about the King's person, and had dealings with [Cardinal Pole](#), a papal legate and Henry's kinsman, with whom Henry was much angered over Pole's siding with papal authority in the matter of Henry's divorce proceedings from [Katharine of Aragón](#). Wyatt was again confined to the Tower, where he wrote an impassioned 'Defence'. He received a royal pardon, perhaps at the request of then queen, [Catharine Howard](#), and was fully restored to favor in 1542. Wyatt was given various royal offices after his pardon, but he became ill after welcoming Charles V's envoy at [Falmouth](#) and died at [Sherborne](#) on 11 October 1542.

*The Hind*  
BY SIR THOMAS WYATT

Whoso list to hunt, I know where is an hind,  
But as for me, hélas, I may no more.  
The vain travail hath wearied me so sore,  
I am of them that farthest cometh behind.  
Yet may I by no means my wearied mind  
Draw from the deer, but as she fleeth afore  
Fainting I follow. I leave off therefore,  
Sithens in a net I seek to hold the wind.  
Who list her hunt, I put him out of doubt,  
As well as I may spend his time in vain.  
And graven with diamonds in letters plain  
There is written, her fair neck round about:  
Noli me tangere, for Caesar's I am,  
And wild for to hold, though I seem tame

**Poem Summary**

**Lines 1-4**

In line 1 of "Whoso List to Hunt," the narrator states that for those who wish to hunt, he knows of a particular hind, a female deer. The narrator himself is trying to abandon the hunt, acknowledging in line 2 that this hind is beyond his reach. Indeed, he is "wearied" from the "vain travail," the useless work, of the hunt; he has begun to recognize the futility of the pursuit. He laments in the fourth line that he is the last of the pursuers, the one "that farthest cometh behind."

**Lines 5-8**

In the second stanza, the narrator states that he cannot take his "wearied mind from the deer." When she flees, he proclaims, "Fainting I follow." Nevertheless, he is ultimately forced to indeed abandon the chase, as she is too fast and all that he can catch is the wind that rises after she passes. In sum, the first eight lines, the octave, state the problem of the writer's wasted hunt.

**Lines 9-14**

In the closing sestet, the invitation initially offered by the narrator to whoever wishes to hunt this particular hind is partly rescinded; in line 9, the narrator states that he will remove any doubt about the wisdom of doing so. Just as his hunt was in vain, so would be those of other

hunters, as the hind wears a diamond collar around her neck proclaiming her ownership by another. The concluding couplet notes that the collar reads "Noli me tangere," or "Touch me not" in Latin. Thus, the first part of the warning is "Touch me not, for Caesar's I am." According to legend, long after the ancient Roman emperor Caesar's death, white stags were found wearing collars on which were inscribed the words "Noli me tangere; Caesaris sum," or "Touch me not; I am Caesar's." The first part of that phrase, "Noli me tangere," is also a quotation from the Vulgate Bible, from John 20:17, when Christ tells Mary Magdalene, "Do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father." In the final line, the warning on the collar continues: the deer herself declares that while she appears tame, holding her is dangerous, as she is wild

## **Themes**

### **Courtly Love**

Traditionally, early English sonnets focused on romantic and idealized love, as did the Petrarchan sonnets that inspired the English to adopt the format. The love sonnet often celebrated the woman's beauty, comparing in great detail the features of her face and body to forms in nature. For example, a poet might compare a woman's cheeks to roses in bloom. In "Whoso List to Hunt," Wyatt deviates from the typical love sonnet and casts the woman as a deer, who is pursued in an evidently ardent fashion. In being not an inanimate object of the suitor's affection but a wild animal in flight, the female has more personality than the typical subject of a courtly love poem. While she does not speak, she holds a sort of dialogue with the narrator through her actions and through the display of her collar. Thus, Wyatt shifts the perspective on courtly love to focus on the ideas of masculine desire and ownership.

### **Divine Right of Kings**

The doctrine of the "divine right of kings" held that kings were God's representatives on earth and that all of the king's subjects were, in fact, his property. The final lines of the sonnet, when it is revealed that the hind's collar declares her to be the property of Caesar alone, allude to this doctrine. The royal ruler supposedly had the right to possess this female, regardless of her wishes or the desires of any other suitors. While he courted Anne Boleyn, Henry VIII gave her many gifts, which established that he was serious about her. These gifts also served to warn other suitors that the object of the King's desire was not available to other men. Although Anne Boleyn did not wear a collar inscribed with the King's name, she wore jewels and other gifts that he supplied. As king, Henry VIII would have believed in his divine right to possess his subjects, and he would not have been shy about seizing whomever he desired.

### **Obsession**

In Wyatt's sonnet, the hunter can be said to be obsessed with possessing his prey. He describes himself as "wearied" twice, in lines 3 and 5. In line 7, he refers to himself as "fainting" as he continues to follow the hind, even as she flees him. The pursuit is dangerous, as the deer is labeled as royal property, but the hunter follows anyway. When a desire is so intense that it cannot be ignored, even when danger is present, it might be labeled an obsession; mere reasoning is not enough to rid the obsessed lover of his desire.

## Sexism

The object of the hunt in Wyatt's sonnet is a hind, a female deer, which is held to represent the person of Anne Boleyn. The deer is hunted as prey and wears a collar that proclaims her ruler's ownership over her. This portrayal of a woman as a forest animal to be hunted and possessed reflects the low esteem with which women were often viewed in Elizabethan society. In this allegory, courtship and wooing have no role in the relationship between hunter and hunted, and the female cannot escape the fact that she is a royal possession.

## Style

### Allegory

In literature, an allegory is an extended metaphor in which objects and events hold symbolic meanings outside of the literal meanings made explicit in the narrative. In Wyatt's sonnet, the hunter's pursuit of the hind can be held to represent Wyatt's pursuit of Anne Boleyn, and the hind's being the property of Caesar can represent the "ownership" of Anne Boleyn by King Henry VIII. All of the accompanying descriptions of the hunt and the hunter's emotions, then, can be applied to this actual romantic situation.

### Petrarchan Sonnet

The Petrarchan sonnet, also known as the Italian sonnet, consists of two separate sections. The first part is the octave, an eight-line stanza, wherein a problem or issue is put forth. The second part is the sestet, wherein some resolution to the problem is provided. In "Whoso List to Hunt," the octave describes the futile pursuit of the hind, while the sestet explains why the hunter cannot capture his prey: she is the property of her royal master, and to capture her would endanger both the hind and the hunter. More specifically, Wyatt's sestet consists of a quatrain (four lines) and a couplet (two lines), as can be seen in examining the rhyme scheme. Petrarch divided his sonnets into octaves of abbaabba and sestets of various rhyme schemes, usually cdecde or cdcdcd. Wyatt's rhyme scheme is slightly different: abbaabba, cddc, ee. Within such structures, certain rhymes may be somewhat irregular, particularly in that certain words may have been pronounced differently in Elizabethan times. In Wyatt's sonnet, wind, as in "breeze," with a short i sound, is held to rhyme with the long i of hind, behind, and mind. Similarly, in the last couplet, the long a of tame is held to rhyme with the short a of am. In reading that couplet aloud, one might distort the sounds of either or both of those words in order to approximate a rhyme. In ending with a couplet, Wyatt puts emphasis on both of the last two lines; in contrast, the Petrarchan form places more emphasis on the last line of the octave and the last line of the sestet.

### Pentameter

The most common meter of the Elizabethan period was pentameter, wherein a line of verse contains five measures, or feet. If each foot contains two syllables — such as with an iamb, where the second syllable is stressed — each line will contain a total of ten syllables. The resulting rhythm can heighten the reader's aesthetic appreciation of and emotional response to

the poem. The best way to understand iambic pentameter is to read a poem aloud, paying close attention to the sounds of the stressed and unstressed syllables. Wyatt's use of iambic pentameter was irregular; in fact, when some of his poems were included in Tottel's Miscellany, the printer revised and smoothed out the meter. In "Whoso List to Hunt," lines 1, 4, 6, and 8 contain eleven syllables, and line 14 contains only nine syllables; the remaining lines all contain the expected ten syllables. With respect to the measures, or feet, line 10, for example, can be read as a sequence of five iambs; in line 5, on the other hand, only the last two feet are true iambs, while the first three are either trochees, with the first of two syllables stressed, or spondees, with the first and second syllables both stressed. Wyatt used meter and measure irregularly to create his own style.

### **Visual Imagery**

Within a poem, the relationships between images can suggest important meanings. Line 3, "The vain travail hath wearied me so sore," calls to mind the image of a hunter weary with a chase; in being aware of the poem's allegory, the reader will associate this image with a suitor who has exhausted himself in trying to court the object of his affection. Throughout the poem, then, images of the active hunt are associated with the romantic situation in question, endowing it with a degree of excitement that might not otherwise be present. Indeed, effective visual imagery allows the reader to experience a poem in a heightened fashion.