Whoso List to Hunt, I Know where is an Hind

POEM TEXT

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.

SUMMARY

If anyone wants to go hunting, I know where you can find a deer. But, alas, I cannot keep hunting. The pointless pursuit has left me so exhausted that I'm all the way at the back of the group of hunters who are going after the deer. Even so, I cannot stop my tired mind from pursuing the deer, and so as she runs away I follow her, almost fainting. I am giving up, since trying to catch her is like trying to catch the wind in a net. If anyone wants to hunt her, let me assure you, you will be wasting your time, just like me. There is written in diamonds in easy-to-read letters around her beautiful neck, "Don't touch me, for I belong to Caesar, and I am wild, though I seem like I'm tame."

THEMES

LUST AND VIOLENCE

"Whoso List to Hunt" is a poem about unrequited love, but it's not exactly romantic. The speaker describes pursuing a woman (rumored to be Anne Boleyn, with whom Wyatt had an affair in real life) and uses an extended metaphor to convey the dynamics of their relationship: it's like hunting a deer he can't catch. The poem portrays love as a violent sport, just like hunting. Though "Whoso List to Hunt" can be read as an eloquent expression of devotion, it also hints that such devotion is threatening, even violent, to its object (that is, to the woman being "hunted").

The poem begins by comparing love to a "hunt." The male speaker is a hunter (one of several hunters, in fact), while the woman he pursues is compared to a "hind"—a deer. She is the animal being hunted. The speaker portrays himself as exceptionally dedicated to this woman—or, at least, exceptionally dedicated to pursuing her. He has chased her to the point of mental and physical exhaustion. The poem itself constitutes an extended admission of defeat: the speaker admits that he cannot catch the woman, and he challenges other men to try their hand at pursuing her, confident that they will end up as exhausted and dejected as he is. The poem is thus a testament to the depth of the speaker's love—and the extent of his frustration.

But the extended metaphor he uses betrays something darker in the poem. The reader might pause and imagine what would happen if the speaker were to catch the "hind." Metaphorically, at least, he would kill her. On the one hand, it is just a metaphor: one imagines that the literal results would be somewhat less violent. But on the other hand, the metaphor still reveals something important about the speaker: he does not quite separate sexuality from violence. He thinks the two are similar enough that one might reasonably be compared to the other. The poem's expression of devotion is thus thrown in shadow by the terms the speaker uses to express his devotion.

The poem also suggests that the woman he pursues (the "hind") stands above or apart from the violent sexuality that the speaker describes. In the final lines of the poem, he notes that the words *noli me tangere* are inscribed on a necklace around her neck—"Do not touch me." This is arguably an allusion to Jesus saying "touch me not" to Mary Magdalene after his resurrection. It casts the woman as something purer--or even *holier*--than the men pursuing her, beyond their brute and violent physicality. Thus, even as the poem celebrates the speaker's unrequited love, it expresses a rather frightening vision of that love. And, in the figure of the woman he pursues, it also presents an alternate model of sexuality and love.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-14

AGENCY, GENDER, AND CONTROL

The extended metaphor of "Whoso List to Hunt" proscribes strict roles to the speaker and to the woman he pursues: his job is to conquer, while her job is to flee. Wyatt's poem doesn't challenge gender roles within his society. Instead it reinforces them: the speaker's comparison of love to

a hunt dramatically limits the possibilities for women, who are relegated to the status of animals or even property.

The woman at the heart of "Whoso List to Hunt," however, refuses to be captured. She thus upsets, and perhaps subverts, the speaker's expectations about how love should work, and finds a measure of agency within the constraints the speaker places on her. However, the poem calls into question even this freedom by suggesting that the woman might belong to another, more powerful, man—and thus has no choice but to refuse the speaker's advances.

The woman whom the speaker pursues so obsessively doesn't have much opportunity to shape the dynamics of their encounter—or, indeed, to refuse that encounter altogether. Her choices are, metaphorically at least, to flee or be killed. For the speaker, then, men take an active role and women a passive role in relationships: that of pursuer and pursued. Within these constraints, the woman finds a kind of power in refusing to be caught. She evades the speaker with such skill that he is forced to give up the hunt. Though she is still acting within a role that he creates for her, she nonetheless finds a way to shape their dynamic so that she can have some control over it.

In the final lines of the poem, however, the speaker calls into question even this limited form of agency, revealing a key detail about the "hind" he pursues. This is the first time in the poem he has described her in any detail at all, and it is notably only in relation to another man: she has a diamond necklace around her neck, and the diamonds spell out the Latin phrase *noli me tangere*. This is, in part, an allusion to the Roman author Solinus. According to Solinus, white stags found in the Roman empire 300 years after Caesar's death had the words *Noli me tangere, Caesaris sum* inscribed on their collars. The Latin words translate to, "Do not touch me, I am Caesar's." They express, in other words, that the emperor owns the stags—even long after his death. They cannot be hunted by anyone else.

Similarly, the allusion to the phrase in "Whoso List to Hunt" suggests that the deer at the center of the poem has already been captured and in fact belongs to a powerful person. According to traditional interpretations of the poem, this person was King Henry the VIII, whom Wyatt served as an ambassador and courtier; the woman in question was Anne Boleyn, Henry's second wife—a woman with whom Wyatt allegedly had an affair before she became queen. However, one need not resort to biographical speculation to understand the import of the allusion. Though the speaker suggests throughout the poem that he cannot capture the "hind" because she is so skillful and fleet of foot, he finally reveals that the real reason is that she has already been marked as off-limits by a powerful man.

Though the poem largely presents the hind as possessing a strong capacity to refuse and elude the men her pursue her, the final lines of the poem suggest that this agency is not entirely her own: she possesses it because she is already under another man's control. Women, then, the poem suggests, can never be truly free; any relative freedom they find comes only in the form of protection by men.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-14

UNREQUITED LOVE

The speaker of "Whoso List to Hunt" pursues his "hind" with considerable energy and devotion. Indeed, he does so even though he knows that the task is pointless. While he describes his hunt as a painful and frustrating experience, he nonetheless seems to derive real pleasure from the act of pursuing his beloved. The speaker thus offers a complex, ambivalent portrait of love. For him, love is a matter of obsession: a fixation sustained by unhealthy devotion. For this speaker, part of the thrill of love lies in the chase itself, even though that chase can lead only to frustration.

The speaker of "Whoso List to Hunt" begins the poem by declaring defeat. He cannot catch the "hind" he has pursued with such energy and devotion. He describes his pursuit of her as a kind of obsession. Though he knows the project is "vain," he can "by no means [his] wearied mind / Draw from the deer." That is, he can't stop thinking about her; his mind, though tired, keeps hunting no matter what. Indeed, the task itself is pointless: it is, he notes in line 8, like trying to catch the wind in a net. Yet he continues to pursue her, even to the point of "fainting"—even, that is, if doing so harms him physically. In this sense, unrequited love is portrayed as dangerous, obsessive, and frustrating.

However, the speaker also seems to take a kind of pleasure in describing his pain and suffering: he is almost bragging about the extent of his devotion, the depths of his anguish in love. One wonders whether he would enjoy pursuing a woman who did not refuse him, who did not drive him to despair. (And one also wonders whether he would bother to write a poem about such a love.) The speaker thus seems to suggest that part of the thrill of any love is the chase—of wanting what you can't have.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-14

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINE 1

Whoso list to hunt, I know where is an hind,

"Whoso List to Hunt" opens with a bold pronouncement from

its speaker: if anyone out there wants ("lists") to go hunting, he knows where you can find a deer ("an hind"). The poem thus addresses its readers directly: the speaker seems to be inviting the reader to join the hunt. Through this use of apostrophe, the speaker positions his poem as a public statement: he is speaking to a broad, general audience, making a pronouncement. It will thus come as a surprise in the following lines when he describes, with almost obsessive detail, his feelings of despair and disappointment. In the first line of the poem, the reader does not yet receive any hints about the speaker's failure in his hunt; instead, it reads almost like a boast.

However, the speaker does use this first line to set up the extended metaphor that structures the poem: though this poem is outwardly about hunting, its real subject is love—passionate, unrequited love. The speaker does not yet give the reader any concrete clues that the poem is about anything other than hunting--that will come in the following lines. But the speaker's use of sound in the first line sets the stage for some of the dynamics that will gradually unfold over the rest of the poem. For instance, the first line of the poem contains consonance: "hunt" and "hind." (The difference between /nt/ and /nd/ is slight, particularly in spoken English). The consonance punctuates the line's two clauses, marking the close of each, and it also suggests a relationship between them. That is, the "hind" exists in this poem to be hunted: she has no existence outside of the hunt. The consonance between the two words reinforces that limitation on her freedom, her agency.

More broadly, the sound of the first line is rich, with strong alliteration in "hunt" and "hind" (which reinforces the link between the two words) and in "whoso" and "where." The speaker is showing off, demonstrating his literary skill—fittingly enough. "Whoso List to Hunt" was one of the first sonnets to be written in English, so it makes sense that the poet is trying to show his readers that one *can* write sonnets in English--that the language is capable of literary beauty. In doing so, he makes an allusion to one of the most prominent and prestigious writers of sonnets, Francesco Petrarch, who popularized the form in the 14th century: "Whoso List to Hunt" is an elaborate rewriting of Petrarch 190. As Wyatt brings the sonnet into English, he uses English meter: "Whoso List to Hunt" is in iambic pentameter, a meter developed by the English poet and author Geoffrey Chaucer, working from French models. However, Wyatt writes at a period early in the development of English meter, and his meter accordingly lacks the polish that one finds in later writers. The first line of the poem is metrically ambiguous, even confused. (Most plausibly, it could be scanned as an anapest followed by four iambs). Though this metrical confusion likely reflects the poet's relative lack of sophistication, it also suggests the speaker's confusion and distress—which becomes the subject of the following lines.

LINES 2-4

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.

In the first line of "Whoso List to Hunt," the speaker offers a tip to fellow hunters: he knows where they can find a deer to hunt. In lines 2-4, he explains why he's willing to give out so freely this crucial piece of information--it's because he cannot continue hunting. The work has left him so exhausted that he comes in last among the hunters who pursue the "hind." With its use of apostrophe, the first line is public, declarative, but these lines shift in tone: they begin to describe the speaker's mental and physical condition with a degree of intimacy and detail that might be embarrassing or inappropriate to reveal to a large audience. They also begin to suggest that the speaker is not actually talking about hunting. A reader might plausibly wonder why the speaker is willing to drive himself so hard—after all, hunting was a leisure activity for the British nobility at the time Wyatt wrote the poem. At this point in the poem, however, the reader may not yet understand quite what the speaker is getting at; only later does it become clear that the speaker is using an extended metaphor.

Over the course of the first four lines, the poem establishes its basic formal pattern—closely following the established rules for a Petrarchan sonnet. These lines rhyme *abba*. Throughout the first four lines, the rhymes are strong, direct, and simple: the poem uses only one two-syllable rhyme word in these lines, "behind," in line 4. Through these rhymes, the speaker displays his confidence and skill—he is almost showing off his mastery over the form, much as he bragged about his hunting expertise in the first line. Further, after the disturbances and ambiguities of the first line, the meter settles down in these lines and finds a recognizable iambic rhythm. Throughout the first four lines, the speaker uses enjambment only once; the rest of the lines are end-stopped. Further, there are no caesurae in these lines: even when the speaker uses enjambment, he calibrates his thoughts to the length of his lines, so the idea he begins in line 3 comes to a close at the end of line 4. This sets up an order, an expected pattern—which the speaker dramatically breaks in the following four lines.

LINES 5-8

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.

In the first four lines of "Whoso List to Hunt," the speaker announces his plans: he's going to give up hunting the "hind." In the next four lines, he explains why this sacrifice is hard for him to make. He cannot stop thinking about her; he follows her as

she flees, almost compulsively. In line 7, he promises the reader again that he's giving up the hunt—for real this time. He knows how pointless his pursuit is. Using one of the poem's few metaphors, the speaker announces that hunting this "hind" is like trying to catch the wind in a net. His repeated insistence that he is giving up his pursuit may actually create doubt for the reader—with such an exaggerated claim, perhaps the opposite is actually true.

The tone of these lines shifts dramatically from the opening of the poem. Here, the poem becomes obsessively (even uncomfortably) focused on the speaker's interior life: the reader learns, in detail, about his obsession with the "hind" and the anguish and despair he feels about his failure to catch her. As the poem transitions from an exterior, public world to a private interior world, the speaker gives strong hints that this poem is not *really* about hunting. Instead, the farther one reads, the more it seems that the speaker has been searching for the right language to describe his mental state--and that the hunt is an extended metaphor for love itself. The speaker's choice of extended metaphor reveals more about him than the woman he pursues. For the speaker, women play a circumscribed, reactive role in love: they are pursued, just as a deer is pursued by hunters. They do not have the option to decide whether to participate or not. Indeed, the speaker's metaphor in line 8 and his extended metaphor throughout the poem both personify their objects: the deer and the wind. The reader learns about the woman the speaker pursues only through these personifications; that is, she only exists in relation to other things, rather than getting to stand alone as her own individual.

These lines follow the standard formula for a Petrarchan sonnet. Like the first four lines, they are rhymed *abba*; they continue in a rough, but recognizable, iambic pentameter. Given these continuities, one might expect them to repeat the careful use of enjambment and end-stop that characterizes the first four lines. However, these lines contain just a single end-stop, in line 8. Instead of the careful alignment between the speaker's thoughts and the length of his lines shown in the first four lines, his thoughts here end mid-line, introducing strong caesurae in lines 6 and 7. This transformation in the poem's form is disconcerting for the reader; it amplifies the sense that the speaker is out-of-control and deeply distressed.

Finally, although the sonnet is a European form—and although Wyatt is the first person to write sonnets in English—he maintains in these lines an intimacy with older, native forms of English poetry. For example, line 6, with its alliteration on /d/ and its consonance on /f/, closely mimics the alliterative meter of Anglo-Saxon poetry. These lines show how even as Wyatt expands the formal possibilities of English poetry, bringing new continental forms into the language, he also retains a connection with English literature's history.

LINES 9-10

Who list her hunt, I put him out of doubt,
As well as I may spend his time in vain.

The first eight lines of "Whoso List to Hunt" form a formal and conceptual unit: using an extended metaphor, the speaker outlines a failed attempt to seduce a woman he loves and describes his resulting despair. As it progresses, the poem becomes more and more interior, focusing on the speaker's fraught, obsessive state of mind. This obsession is reflected in the poem's rhyme scheme, which uses only two rhyme sounds in the poem's first eight lines. The tight focus on these two sounds reflects and amplifies the speaker's obsessive focus on the woman he pursues.

Traditionally, in a Petrarchan sonnet, there is a turn or *volta* after line 8: the poem changes tack, complicating the position the speaker took in its opening line. As one of the first sonnets written in English, "Whoso List to Hunt" models this special formal characteristic of the Petrarchan sonnet for English readers. Indeed, the poem seems to start over in line 9, returning to a formulation very similar to its opening line. This serves as a kind of refrain, organizing and marking the two main sections of the poem. However, the switch from "Whoso" to "Who" also transforms the meter of the line: where the first line is at best awkwardly iambic, line 9 is strongly and clearly iambic. The strong iambic line, coupled with the flashy assonance in the line's final phrase, "out of doubt" gives the line a self-conscious, literary feel: the speaker is again showing off his capacity to make moving and beautiful poetry in English. Furthermore, these lines introduce two new rhymes, a welcome relief after the obsessive sameness of the poem's rhymes so far; eventually, the final six lines of the poem will introduce three new rhyme sounds total, using the pattern *cddcee*.

However, the force of the volta is somewhat undercut by the content of these lines, which largely reiterate what the reader already knows: if they decide to hunt the hind they will have just as much trouble as the speaker. Unlike a traditional volta, they don't quite add new information or complication. The speaker seems to be holding back, perhaps reluctant to say what's really on his mind. In the poem's final four lines, however, he finally spells out the source of his failure and his anxiety.

LINES 11-14

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.

Throughout the poem, the speaker has compared love to hunting in a revealing extended metaphor. Among other things, the extended metaphor limits women's agency: the "hind"

becomes a passive party, with a limited capacity to shape the dynamics of her encounter with the speaker. She is allowed to flee, to react—nothing else. Yet her astonishing capacity to elude the speaker grants her a kind of agency. The speaker finds this disturbing. He is frustrated not only by his failure to capture the "hind" but also by the fact that the "hind" is herself so skillful and sly--so much smarter and faster than he is.

However, that limited form of agency evaporates in the final four lines of the poem. The speaker describes the deer directly for the first time in the poem—or, rather, describes a collar around her neck, on which the words "*Noli me tangere*" are inscribed in diamonds. The words "*noli me tangere*" are Latin: "Do not touch me." They have a rich history in religion and politics; citing them here, the poem makes allusion to two separate traditions. First, in the Bible, Jesus uses these words after his resurrection, addressing Mary Magdalene. Alluding to this passage in the Bible, the speaker suggests that the "hind" is pure or perhaps holy, beyond the world of violent, base sexuality that he inhabits. This force of this allusion is then challenged by a second allusion. According to the Roman writer Solinus, three hundred years after the death of Caesar, all the stags in Rome had collars inscribed with "*Noli me tangere, Caeseris sum*"—"Do not touch me, for I am Caesar's"—placed around their necks. This second allusion diminishes the woman's personal power: she is beyond capture only because she belongs to a powerful political figure. Indeed, some have taken Caesar here as a sly reference to King Henry VIII, the powerful and unpredictable king who Wyatt served throughout his career—and who married Anne Boleyn, Wyatt's former lover. The speaker seems to emphasize this second reading, ending the poem by closely echoing Solinus's language: the "hind" belongs to Caesar—and, if that's not enough, she's also wild (though she seems tame).

Thus, the poem ends by revealing the real reason why the speaker has been unable to capture the "hind:" she is the property of a powerful man. If this is frustrating for the speaker, it also comforting: he may not have his prize, but her uncanny agency has nonetheless been contained within male control. Indeed, the final lines are themselves marked by a newfound sense of confidence and control. These lines continue the new rhyme scheme established in lines 9 and 10, for instance, creating a new steady pattern after the stifling repetition of the first eight lines. Further, the speaker continues to show off his poetic powers, with more assonance in line 12: "round about." The speaker seems in some ways buoyed by Caesar's entrance into the poem—as though the emperor reassures him of his understanding of the world, even as the speaker's own hopes remain frustrated.

SYMBOLS

HIND

The "hind"—the deer that the speaker pursues, fruitlessly, and that symbolizes the woman he desires—is a potent and suggestive symbol in western literature. The animals were sacred to the Roman goddess Diana (Artemis, in Greek mythology), and because Diana was chaste, a virgin goddess, they were often associated with chastity and virginity. This makes the speaker's extended metaphor particularly apt: he compares this woman, so successful in her refusals, to an animal which is already associated with refusal and resistance to sexuality.

Furthermore, some scholars have seen an allusion to the myth of Actaeon in the poem. A hunter, Actaeon stumbled on Diana bathing in the woods. In retribution, the goddess turned him into a stag—and his hunting dogs devoured him. If there is an allusion to Actaeon in the poem, it suggests a kind of lingering anxiety on the part of the speaker: he fears the power of the woman he pursues, perhaps worrying she might inflict such a punishment upon him. However, this allusion remains faint—though it would've likely been in the back of early readers' minds, it is not explicitly summoned in the poem. (By contrast, Petrarch's 190—Wyatt's source for "Whoso List to Hunt"--is much more explicit in its invocation of the Actaeon myth).

Finally, the Latin author Solinus claims that 300 years after Caesar's death all the white stags in Rome still had the words "Noli me tangere" ("Don't touch me") inscribed on their collars—marking them as the dead emperor's property. As a symbol, the deer calls to mind this kind of eternal ownership, and indeed the speaker explicitly places her within it in line 13. It seems, then, that the hind symbolizes not only women's status as objects to be pursued, but also the way that men effectively own them in escapable ways.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "hind"
- **Line 6:** "deer"

WIND

The speaker of "Whoso List to Hunt" does not have a literal net, nor is he literally trying to capture the wind. Rather, the wind in line 8 is another symbol for the woman the speaker is pursuing--and an important one, since it is one of the very few places in the poem where the speaker directly describes her.

As a symbol, the wind suggests that she is unusually swift and unusually capable of escaping: even the tools designed to catch

her (like the net) cannot hold her. She thus appears as a powerful and crafty figure, almost supernatural in her ability to evade capture. Though the speaker does not provide substantial information about the woman he pursues in the poem, the symbol allows the reader to grasp some of her power. Tellingly, though, wind is also insubstantial, a characteristic that hints at the later revelation that the woman is actually owned by another man, rather than evading the speaker through her own individual strength.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 8:** "wind"

DIAMONDS

In line 11, the speaker provides a surprising detail: the "hind" he's been pursuing has a collar around her neck (even though she's "wild"), and that collar has a message written on it in diamonds. It is likely that these diamonds are literal—as literal as anything can be in a poem like "Whoso List to Hunt," which uses an extended metaphor to explore love and desire. But the diamonds also serve as a symbol of luxury and wealth. They suggest that whoever put the collar on the "hind" is both wealthy and powerful--rich enough to use diamonds on a collar for a wild deer. Furthermore, diamonds are very hard.

They are thus symbols of permanence and endurance. They suggest the power of Caesar (or, more likely, another powerful man similar to Caesar) over the "hind" is not transitory: it will endure long past the speaker's patience—indeed, past his life time. As a symbol, the diamonds thus serve to reinforce the sense that some other man—through his power and wealth—has permanently blocked the speaker's access to the "hind."

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 11:** "diamonds"

CAESAR

"Caesar" was the name of the first two Roman emperors, Julius Caesar and Augustus Caesar. (And later it became a title that all Roman emperors used.) The name thus serves as a symbol for political power. Although the speaker plays on a tradition—which holds that 300 years after the death of the first Caesar, all the white stags in Rome still wore collars proclaiming that they belonged to the dead emperor—he also invokes the Roman emperors as a way of characterizing the man who has assumed control over the "hind." This man is someone of considerable power, and thus someone who the speaker must be careful to avoid offending.

Even more specifically, the symbol of Caesar may represent King Henry VIII himself, who was married to a woman (Anne Boleyn) whom Wyatt was rumored to love. In either case, the symbolic use of the name Caesar makes clear the fruitlessness of the speaker's pursuit of the "hind:" she belongs now to someone very powerful, whose authority the speaker cannot contest.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 13:** "Caesar"

POETIC DEVICES

ENJAMBMENT

"Whoso List to Hunt" employs enjambment sparingly. The first four lines of the poem are all end-stopped, creating a kind of regularity and deliberateness to the organization of the poem as the speaker gives out instructions to his fellow hunters. This creates a sense of measured control—it sounds like the speaker has accepted the reality that he's never going to catch this deer (a.k.a. the woman he loves), and has resigned himself to trailing behind the other hunters and doling out thoughtful advice. However, that regularity dissolves in lines 5 and 6, both of which are enjambed.

Here, the speaker's thoughts detach from the line. These enjambments closely mimic the speaker's mood: they convey his anxiety, his sense of exhaustion and frustration. The calm resignation of the earlier lines might just have been a brave face. In these lines, it's as though the speaker's true feelings break through—and in his exasperation he's foregone the calm, controlled tone he'd been using up until now.

The enjambment reflects the specific content of these lines, in which the speaker says that under no circumstances can he stop his pursuit and that no matter how tired he gets, where the deer goes he must follow. The speaker can't help but trail after the deer despite knowing that it's a hopeless hunt, and the structure of the lines mimics that sense of helpless following. The enjambment encourages readers to push on seamlessly from one line to the next for the conclusion of the speaker's thoughts, much the like speaker himself is pulled along by his desperate desire for the deer.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 5-6:** "mind / Draw"
- **Lines 6-7:** "afore / Fainting"
- **Lines 11-12:** "plain / There"

END-STOPPED LINE

Most of the lines of "Whoso List to Hunt" are end-stopped. As mentioned in our discussion of enjambment, these end-stops

create a sense of regularity and control. The speaker seems measured in his instructions to the other hunters. Having seemingly accepted his fate (of never catching the deer himself), he can dole out detached, sage advice from an emotional distance. He sounds a bit like an old man telling the young people around him to run along and have their fun—his back is sore and he'll trail behind.

Of course, the rare moments of enjambment in the poem hint that this is all an act—that the speaker actually is pretty upset about not being able to hunt the deer for himself (in other words, he's unable to be with the woman he loves), and is only feigning his calm demeanor.

Yet after the enjambments of lines 5 and 6, the poem falls back into regular end-stop until the end (with the exception of line 11). The speaker seems to have shaken off the momentary incursion of frustration, and found a new sense of certainty and confidence. This is likely based on the realization that he's not uniquely hopeless: *no one* will catch this deer, and the other hunters will end up just like him soon enough.

Where End-Stopped Line appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "hind,"
- **Line 2:** "more."
- **Line 3:** "sore,"
- **Line 4:** "behind."
- **Line 7:** "therefore,"
- **Line 8:** "wind."
- **Line 9:** "doubt,"
- **Line 10:** "vain."
- **Line 12:** "about:"
- **Line 13:** "am,"
- **Line 14:** "tame."

CAESURA

"Whoso List to Hunt" contains many caesuras. These break up the poem into a plodding sort of rhythm that, like its many end-stops, add to the sense that the speaker is calm and methodical, having accepted that he'll never catch this deer and thus seeing no need to rush through his lines. After all, he'll be in the back of the hunting pack no matter what. Note the caesuras around "hélas" (i.e. "alas") in line 2—the speaker pauses midline for no reason other than to express mild grief and self-pity.

The strongest and most important caesura in the poem, however, appears in line 7. The period in the middle of line 7 is particularly strong, creating an emphatic end to the declaration "Fainting I follow." This is just the way things are, the caesura implies: where the deer goes the speaker will follow, even if he's fainting from exhaustion. The caesura adds a pause, a moment of finality to this statement that underscores the speaker's relative helplessness or lack of control (or, perhaps, the intensity of his obsession). He will never catch the hind, but he follows her anyway. There's no room for debate or to try to convince the speaker to abandon his pursuit.

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "",
- **Line 2:** "," "",
- **Line 6:** ", "
- **Line 7:** ". "
- **Line 9:** "",
- **Line 12:** ", "
- **Line 13:** "",
- **Line 14:** "",

REFRAIN

"Whoso List to Hunt" can be divided into two parts, an initial octave and a final sestet. The first eight lines deal with the speaker's distress over his failure to capture the "hind," the final six explain why he has failed—it's because she already belongs to "Caesar," a symbolic stand-in for some other powerful man.

Each of these two parts begins with a very similar phrase: "Whoso list to hunt" in line 1 and "Who list her hunt" in line 9. These function as a kind of refrain for the poem. The repeating line prefaces each section of the poem and organizes it through a repeated act of apostrophe, addressing the reader directly. And it serves to connect the two halves: whatever the differences in form and tone between them, they open with the same poetic gesture. This device guides the reader, instructing them to return to the first part of the poem and to think through the ways in which it is both separate from and connected to the second part of the poem. In other words, the refrain helps to bind the poem together, despite its varied content.

Where Refrain appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Whoso list to hunt"
- **Line 9:** "Who list her hunt"

METAPHOR

Although "Whoso List to Hunt" consists of a single extended metaphor—love as hunting—the poem otherwise resolutely resists using metaphor: its language is concrete and exact. Unlike other poets who write sonnets, the speaker seems uninterested in elaborate metaphors and similes, preferring to describe things directly.

There is, however, one exception to this general rule. In line 8, the speaker notes that pursuing the "hind" is a vain, pointless activity: "in a net I seek to hold the wind." There are two metaphors at work in the line. First, the speaker extends the over-arching hunting metaphor. Nets were often used in Renaissance hunting to catch birds and other game. His

attempt to seduce the woman he pursues may be similar to this form of hunting; it might employ similarly stealthy strategies, for example.

But however skillful the speaker's hunting may be however, it fails: in the second metaphor, he compares the lady he pursues to the "wind." He has the wrong tool: the wind passes right through the holes in a net, as though the net were not there. This is one of the only places where the speaker actually describes the woman he pursues. She is swift and skillful in her capacity to avoid escape, so much so that she defeats even the most sophisticated hunters and their best tools. The metaphor thus provides key information about the woman—and about the speaker's activities. He has not simply failed in his pursuit of the woman; rather, he has learned that the pursuit itself is pointless.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Line 8:** "in a net I seek to hold the wind"

EXTENDED METAPHOR

On its surface, "Whoso List to Hunt" seems to be a poem about hunting. In it, an anonymous hunter lists the reasons why he is giving up his pursuit of a particular deer—and invites other hunters to try to catch her, confident that they will end up as exhausted and frustrated as he is. But the poem is not really about hunting. Instead, hunting serves as an extended metaphor for love itself: the speaker uses hunting as a way to describe the dynamics—and the frustrations—of his relationship with a specific woman. It's important to consider why the speaker uses this extended metaphor at all, instead of coming straight out and telling the reader what the poem is really about. It seems that the speaker feels himself to be under some kind of constraint, so that he is obliged to speak in code.

Furthermore, the choice of extended metaphor tells the reader a lot about the speaker and his attitudes toward gender, sexuality, and love. It is revealing—and perhaps alarming—that the speaker thinks that love can be described through hunting, since hunting is a violent activity that culminates in the death of the pursued animal. The speaker imagines himself (and the other men in the poem) as the active parties: they initiate the chase and pursue the "hind" doggedly. The "hind," however, has little agency in the encounter: she does not decide whether to participate in the hunt. Her only option is to flee. She is so good at escaping her pursuers that she seems to carve out some agency for herself—but then the final four lines of the poem limit that agency once again, explaining that the real reason why the speaker can't catch her is because she already belongs to a powerful man). The extended metaphor thus does two things at once: it allows the speaker to describe, surreptitiously, his frustrations in love, and at the same time, it also lets him convey what he considers to be the dynamics of love, its gender roles, and its relationship with violence.

In the final four lines of the poem, the speaker finally seems to reveal why he needs to use extended metaphor: the "hind" he pursues already belongs to a powerful person, "Caesar" (who is likely a symbolic stand-in for another powerful man). Given "Caesar's" ownership of the hind, it would be dangerous for both parties if she yielded and allowed herself to be seduced by the speaker. Further, even pursuing her might be offensive to "Caesar," as it would suggest an implicit challenge to his power and authority. The speaker thus has to voice his complaints with considerable care and skill, so that he does not offend this powerful and dangerous person. The extended metaphor, then, allows the speaker to describe his complaint about the "hind," while also concealing the potentially comprising facts and relationships that underlie the situation.

Where Extended Metaphor appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-14

ALLUSION

"Whoso List to Hunt" contains a number of allusions, some of which are explicit and some of which are subtle—sometimes so subtle that readers may reasonably disagree about whether the poem is really making the allusion in question. Most notably, the entire poem is an imitation of a sonnet by the Italian Poet Francesco Petrarch, and it contains a number of direct allusions to Petrarch's poem.

For example, in both poems, the speakers are captivated by and obsessed with a deer. And in both, the deer has a message written on a collar around her neck: "*noli me tangere*" ("Do not touch me") in Wyatt's and "Let no one touch me" in Petrarch's. As a whole, the poem is closely bound up with Petrarch's sonnet, and their connection points to Wyatt's larger project of bringing the sonnet form into English literature.

The message on the deer's neck further alludes to the Latin translation of the New Testament, the Vulgate. In the Vulgate, Jesus says to Mary Magdalene after his resurrection, "Do not touch me" (or "Touch me not)—a command that suggests his purity and his distance from the world of mortal beings. In the Vulgate, the phrase is translated into Latin from Greek as "Noli me tangere." This suggests that the deer in the poem is also virtuous and holy, existing beyond the base and violent sexuality that characterizes the speaker's account of love.

To complicate matters further, the phrase also appears in Roman political history: according to the writer Solinus, 300 years after the death of Caesar, every stag in Rome was tagged with a collar that read, "*Noli me tangere, Caeseris sum*": "do not touch me, for I am Caesar's." This allusion contradicts the implications of the allusion to the Vulgate: instead of suggesting that the "hind" is beyond all things earthly, it suggests that she is actually the property of a wealthy and powerful man.

Finally, some scholars have argued that this poem and Petrarch 190 make reference to the myth of Actaeon. In the myth, Actaeon accidentally sees the goddess Diana bathing while he's hunting. In retribution, she transforms him into a stag and his hunting dogs turn on him and devour him. Diana, the goddess of virginity, is often associated with deer, who frequently serve as a symbol for her across western literature. If there is such an allusion in the poem, it suggests an underlying anxiety: that the woman the speaker pursues is powerful and vengeful, and that she may use that power to harm him. However, the allusion is very faint; though Wyatt's early readers certainly would've been familiar with the myth, they may or may not have heard echoes of it in the poem.

Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-14

APOSTROPHE

"Whoso List to Hunt" begins by addressing an undefined group of people. Its opening word, "Whoso," means "whoever" or "if anyone." One can imagine the speaker addressing a group of eager hunters, providing them some inside information about his experience hunting the "hind." Or one might imagine him addressing the reader directly, as though the reader were part of the group of hunters. (The speaker makes the same gesture in line 9, closely repeating the language of the first line).

This act of apostrophe—addressing the reader or an implied group of hunters—makes the poem feel more public than it might otherwise. Though the speaker is discussing matters of the heart, describing his own frustrations in love, he positions himself as though he is addressing a group. This, in turn, raises questions about the speaker's motivations in the poem: though he is ostensibly airing his feelings, he makes those feelings public business. One has the sense that there is an underlying political complaint: perhaps the speaker is contesting the justice and authority of the powerful man, the "Caesar," who has deprived him of his chance to capture the "hind."

Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Whoso list to hunt"
- **Line 9:** "Who list her hunt"

PERSONIFICATION

"Whoso List to Hunt" employs personification in both specific moments and in larger, more systematic ways. Indeed, the poem's extended metaphor relies on personification. As the speaker compares love to a hunt, he also suggests that the woman he pursues is like an animal, a deer—and he gives that deer human characteristics. The deer seems unnaturally smart and sophisticated, and especially unusually skilled in the way it evades capture. It seems to retain some of the human characteristics of the woman to whom it is compared. The use of personification is thus revealing: it shows the reader that the poem is not entirely literal, and it encourages the reader to unfold the extended metaphor and see what's happening underneath it.

Something similar happens in line 8, a much more precise instance of personification. The speaker compares the woman he's pursuing to "the wind" and complains that pursuing her is like trying to catch the wind "in a net." The wind acquires some of the same characteristics which the poem has elsewhere extended to the deer: cleverness, speed, the capacity to escape. It too takes on the characteristics of the woman the speaker is pursuing, despite being inanimate.

These instances of personification are particularly important to the poem because the poem otherwise resists providing literal, direct information about the woman at its center; the speaker is careful to speak in code throughout. The use of personification transfers the pursued woman's qualities to coded, symbolic objects, thus allowing the speaker to say what he needs to say without risking the wrath of the "Caesar" figure who seems to possess the woman.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "hind"
- **Line 6:** "deer," "she fleeth afore"
- **Line 8:** "Sithens in a net I seek to hold the wind"

ALLITERATION

"Whoso List to Hunt" employs alliteration throughout the poem, at a fairly constant pace: generally there are at least two alliterations per line throughout (and these alliterations reverberate with other sounds, particularly consonance). This relatively dense use of alliteration marks the poem as being particularly literary: the speaker of this poem—and its author—are not afraid to show off a little bit and demonstrate their skill organizing poetic sound.

This is fitting for a ground-breaking poem like "Whoso List to Hunt." The poem demonstrates that prestigious European forms like the sonnet can be successfully produced in English. It also shows that the English language is capable of poetic beauty and intensity. This is particularly significant because, at the time of the poem's writing, many people within and beyond England looked down on the English language, considering it inferior to languages like French and Italian.

As he raises the literary status of English, however, Wyatt does not abandon the native rhythms and characteristics of the traditional English poetry. Indeed, several lines in the poem closely resemble lines of Anglo-Saxon poetry, which always includes a caesura at the center of the line, with an initial alliteration on one side of the caesura and a different alliteration on the other side of it. For instance, line 6 begins

with an alliteration on a /d/ sound and then moves to an /f/ sound (which slips into consonance by the end of the line):

> Draw from the deer, but as she fleeth afore

Though the sonnet is a European form, and the meter that Wyatt uses (iambic pentameter) is based on French models, Wyatt also continues to maintain older, native English literary patterns that call back to the practice of Anglo-Saxon poets (like the anonymous poet who wrote *Beowulf*). The poem's use of alliteration thus complicates its relationship to poetic history. On the one hand, the speaker is clearly showing off his capacity to generate literary grandeur and to bring European forms into English; on the other, he is careful to preserve quintessentially English literary forms within his polished European lines.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Wh," "h," "wh," "h"
- **Line 2:** "m," "h," "m," "m"
- **Line 3:** "h," "w," "m," "s," "s"
- **Line 4:** "th," "th"
- **Line 5:** "m," "m," "m," "m"
- **Line 6:** "D," "d," "f"
- **Line 7:** "F," "f"
- **Line 8:** "S," "s"
- **Line 9:** "W," "h," "h"
- **Line 10:** "A," "a"
- **Line 13:** "a"
- **Line 14:** "A"

CONSONANCE

"Whoso List to Hunt" is full of consonance. Alongside the poem's extensive deployment of alliteration and assonance, consonance helps to give the poem a strongly orchestrated, literary feel: this is a poem of intense sonic pleasure and density. In other words, the speaker is showing off a little, demonstrating his virtuosic mastery over literary sound.

This is fitting for a poem like "Whoso List to Hunt," since it is one of the first sonnets written in English. The poet is trying to prove that he *can* write sonnets in English--that his native language is up to the task of producing beautiful poetry in a prestigious European form. And in doing so, he is attempting to increase the prestige of his own language.

The speaker's use of consonance also subtly reinforces the poem's central themes. For example, in the first line one finds consonance at the end of each clause:

> Whoso list to hunt, I know where is an hind,

The /nt/ and /nd/ sounds are so close as to be indistinguishable, particularly in spoken English. These sounds punctuate the line, marking the end of each clause. Even more importantly, the consonance offers a subtle reminder that the "hind" is first and foremost the object of the speaker's hunt--a limited, constrained role that reflects the broader theme of gender and agency.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Wh," "h," "nt," "n," "n," "h," "nd"
- **Line 2:** "m," "h," "m," "m"
- **Line 3:** "v," "v," "s," "s"
- **Line 4:** "m," "th," "m," "th," "th," "m," "th"
- **Line 5:** "m," "n," "m," "n," "m," "d," "m," "n," "d"
- **Line 6:** "D," "f," "m," "d," "f," "f," "r"
- **Line 7:** "F," "f," "ll," "l," "ff," "th," "f"
- **Line 8:** "S," "th," "ns," "n," "n," "t," "s," "t," "th," "nd"
- **Line 9:** "Wh," "h," "h," "t," "t," "h," "t," "t"
- **Line 10:** "m," "n," "m," "n," "n"
- **Line 11:** "nd," "n," "d," "m," "nd," "n," "n"
- **Line 12:** "n," "r," "n," "r," "n"
- **Line 14:** "ld," "ld," "m," "m"

ASSONANCE

"Whoso List to Hunt" is one of the first sonnets composed in English. Its author, Sir Thomas Wyatt, is thus showing off a little bit, attempting to prove that his native language is capable of equaling the force and beauty of other European languages. This urge to show off finds expression in the poem's plays of sound, which are often elaborate and dense; this is a poem that takes great pleasure in assonance, alliteration, and consonance.

There are a number of moments in the poem where the use of assonance in particular becomes flashy and highly literary. For example, in lines 9 and 12, the speaker uses a /ou/ sound twice in close proximity: "*ou*t of d*ou*bt" and "r*ou*nd ab*ou*t." Coming where they do—at the ends of lines, involved in rhymes, and augmented by consonance on /t/ and /d/ sounds—theses instances of assonance call attention to themselves and to their own sonic density. In moments like these, the speaker seems to be directing the reader's attention to his own sonic virtuosity as well as the English language's capacity for beauty.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "o," "o," "o," "o"
- **Line 2:** "o," "o," "o"
- **Line 3:** "ai," "ai," "ea," "e," "o," "o"
- **Line 4:** "a," "o," "a," "a," "o"
- **Line 5:** "I," "y," "ea," "y," "ea," "i"
- **Line 6:** "a," "ee," "e," "ee," "a," "o"
- **Line 7:** "o," "o," "o," "o"
- **Line 8:** "i," "e," "i," "e," "I," "o," "o," "i"
- **Line 9:** "i," "u," "u," "ou," "ou"
- **Line 10:** "A," "a," "ay," "i," "i," "ai"

- **Line 11:** “a,” “ai”
- **Line 12:** “i,” “i,” “ou,” “ou”
- **Line 13:** “e,” “e,” “e,” “a”
- **Line 14:** “o,” “o,” “o,” “a”

VOCABULARY

Whoso (Line 1) - "Whoso" is now an obsolete word. It can mean either "whoever" or "if anyone." Wyatt most likely uses the word in the first sense here. In combination with the next word, "list," then, the opening clause of the poem might be summarized as: "Whoever wants to hunt" or "If anyone out there is interested in hunting." The word is broad enough that the speaker might be directly addressing a specific, contained group of people—or he might be speaking to a bigger audience, like the general public.

List (Line 1, Line 9) - "List" means "to desire" or "to want." The word "list" is rarely used in this sense anymore; generally, in contemporary English, it describes the act of making a list. But Wyatt uses the word to refer to the desire to do or have something. In the sense that he uses it, the word has strong connections with sexuality: as a noun, list can describe an appetite, craving, or desire. The use of the word early in the poem (and again in line 9) thus serves as a clue to the reader about the poem's extended metaphor: though the outward subject of the poem is hunting, its real focus is appetite and desire.

Hind (Line 1) - A hind is a female deer. Though it is now obsolete, the word was generally used to refer to mature female deer, usually after their third year; it also often referred specifically to red deer. The word is one of the oldest in the English language, with a first recorded use circa 900 AD. The word is thus closely linked to the English language itself—and distant from French alternatives like "venison" that entered English after the Norman Conquest (in 1066 AD). Using it, Wyatt announces his commitment to English as a language and as a culture, even as he imports the sonnet tradition from European poetry into the language.

Hélas (Line 2) - The word "hélas" is an exclamation of sorrow or grief. It is roughly equivalent to a more common expression in poetry: "alas." The speaker uses it as a way of communicating the extent of his frustration and exhaustion: he has been so completely defeated by the "hind" that he can only cry out in pain and suffering.

Travail (Line 3) - "Travail" describes hard work, whether physical or mental, and it usually describes punishing, unpleasant work. It comes from an Old French word, which means, literally, "suffering." After the heavily Germanic diction of the opening of the lines, the speaker permits himself a word of French origins, suggesting an underlying cultural fluency running beneath his strong, direct language. This brief gesture toward European languages highlights the connection that this poem forges between the European sonnet form and the English literary tradition.

Draw (Line 6) - "Draw" here means to remove or free oneself. Wyatt's use of the word is precisely the opposite of its ordinary usage. Generally, one "draws" something *to* oneself, but in Wyatt's usage, the word conveys just the opposite: pushing something away. Likely, this is an abbreviation of a longer phrase, like "draw away" or "withdraw"—which is relatively colloquial and straightforward. The phrase has probably been shortened for the sake of the meter.

Sithens (Line 8) - An obsolete word, "sithens" is a contraction of the word "sithence," also obsolete. It implies a causal relationship between two things, meaning, roughly, "since" or "because." The speaker is thus meditating in line 8 on the reason why he is unable to catch the "hind," why he has to give up his hunt: because it's like trying to catch the wind using the net, an obviously pointless activity.

Graven (Line 11) - "Graven" is a synonym for "engraved." The speaker's use of the word is slightly confusing, because the message on the hind's collar hasn't actually been engraved *with* diamonds. Rather, the message is written *in* diamonds; diamonds form the letters and the words. Through this odd word choice, the speaker is perhaps playing on the origins of the word "writing." In Ancient Greek, the word for writing, "graphesis," literally refers to the act of engraving something on a piece of stone or metal. The speaker may thus be referring to the ancient sense that all writing is, in a sense, engraving: cutting or inscribing something into a pre-existing surface.

Noli me tangere (Line 13) - "Noli me tangere" is a Latin phrase. It means: "Touch me not." It is an allusion to two separate things. First, in the Bible, Jesus says to Mary Magdalene after his resurrection, "Do not touch me"—words that were translated from Greek into Latin as "Noli me tangere." In this sense, the allusion suggests that the "hind" is a virtuous, even Christ-like figure: someone who has risen above the material world and left behind its base and violent sexuality. Second, the phrase also alludes to a passage from the Roman author Solinus. He claims that all the white stags found in the Roman Empire 300 years after Caesar's death had their collars inscribed with "*Noli me tangere, Caesaris sum*."

Caesar (Line 13) - The name of the first two Roman emperors, Julius Caesar and Augustus Caesar. (And later in the Roman empire it came to be the name that every emperor used). During their lives, they were the two most powerful men in the western world; as a result, their name has come to symbolize power and authority itself. In other words, the speaker isn't suggesting that the "hind" literally belongs to a Roman emperor. Rather, he suggests that she is the property of some powerful and influential figure—perhaps even King Henry VII

himself—whom the speaker must take pains to avoid offending.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Whoso List to Hunt" is a Petrarchan sonnet. Its author, Sir Thomas Wyatt, is widely credited as the first poet to write sonnets in English. The sonnet began as a form of popular song, sung in medieval Italian taverns and festivals. But, thanks largely to the poet Francesco Petrarch, it eventually became one of the most popular and prestigious forms of poetry, with sonnets and sonnet sequences written across Europe in the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries. England, however, was one of the last places to adopt the form. Wyatt introduced it to the language in the 1530s and 1540s by translating and imitating Petrarch's sonnets. ("Whoso List to Hunt" is a rewriting of Petrarch 190).

Wyatt closely follows the form of Petrarch's poem. Though Petrarchan sonnets are often one stanza, they can be divided into two parts within that single stanza: an initial eight lines, called the octave, and a final six lines, called the sestet.

Traditionally, the first eight lines of the sonnet lay out an argument or a scenario; the final six lines complicate that argument or add nuance to the scenario. The pivot between the octave and the sestet is called the volta, or the turn: it's the place where the poem pivots, changes its mind, or begins to dispute its own premises.

Wyatt's poem follows this formula. The first eight lines of the poem lay out a scenario: the speaker is a hunter who has been pursuing a single deer with obsessive energy; he's giving up the chase, though, because the deer is too quick for him to catch. The final six lines complicate that scenario, explaining why he can't catch the deer: she already belongs to another man, a powerful person. Lines 9 and 10 serve as a kind of volta, reiterating the poem's first line, though they don't add as much complication or nuance as a traditional volta might; rather, they simply underscore just how desperate the speaker's quest has become.

METER

"Whoso List to Hunt" is in iambic pentameter. Iambic pentameter became—partially due to Wyatt's influence—the standard meter for sonnets in English. (Other languages use different meters. For example, most French sonnets are written in iambic hexameter). Wyatt likely chose the meter because the popular 14th century poet Geoffery Chaucer used it in his work. (Chaucer had adapted the meter for English from French models). In his choice of meter, then, Wyatt signals his affiliation with an emerging canon of English poetry. He is eager to position his own poem as a contribution to and extension of that canon, building the prestige of English poetry—at a time when many readers in England and in continental Europe looked down on poems written in English.

However, because Wyatt wrote at a moment early in the development of English meter, it sometimes plays out imperfectly here. Although he writes in recognizable iambic pentameter, the poem is peppered with strange metrical substitutions. For example, the first line begins in metrical ambiguity. It might be best scanned as an anapest followed by four iambs:

> Whoso list | to hunt, | I know | where is | an hind

But the line is metrically ambiguous. It could also be scanned as a series of trochees that gradually settle into an iambic rhythm in the second line:

> Whoso | list to | hunt, I | know where | is an hind
> But as | for me, | *hélas*, | I may | no more.

Each scanning is plausible (though the first is more elegant and better fits the poem's syntax). The confusion is only multiplied by line 9, which closely echoes line 1:

> Who list | her hunt, | I put | him out | of doubt

Though the line is strongly iambic, it complicates the scanning of the first line; there is a kind of broken symmetry between the two lines' meters that further clouds the reader's sense of the poem's rhythm.

Wyatt's meter is not the kind of strong, polished meter one expects in the opening line of a sonnet. Instead of establishing a compelling rhythm for the poem, the poem begins in confusion and uncertainty—fittingly for a poem about exhaustion and despair. Though it is tempting to read the metrical oddities of Wyatt's poem as evidence of a lack of sophistication and skill, the strained meter of "Whoso List to Hunt" may also reveal important things about the speaker's desperate and unsteady mental condition.

RHYME SCHEME

"Whoso List to Hunt" is a Petrarchan sonnet—one of the first ever written in English. It closely follows the expected rhyme scheme of a Petrarchan sonnet. Its first eight lines form one group of rhymes and its final six lines take on a different scheme. The rhyme scheme overall follows this pattern:

ABBAABBACDDCEE

The first eight lines of a Petrarchan sonnet always rhyme ABBAABBA. The rhymes in the first section of this poem are simple and direct: Wyatt rhymes with one-syllable words most of the time. The repetition of just two rhyme sounds gives these lines an obsessive quality, which closely mimics the speaker's own obsession with the "hind." Just the as the speaker "may…by

no means [his] wearied mind / Draw from the deer," so too is his mind caught up in these insistent, repeated rhyme sounds.

Typically, the poet writing a Petrarchan sonnet has more freedom when rhyming in the final six lines, though there are established patterns—one of which Wyatt follows here. In the final six lines of "Whoso List to Hunt," the rhyme scheme shifts and three new rhyme sounds are introduced into the poem: CDDCEE.

Again, the rhymes are simple and direct, almost all one-syllable words. (The rhyme in the poem's final couplet may seem like a slant rhyme, but this is due to changes in pronunciation since Wyatt's time: for Wyatt and his early readers, "am" and "tame" would've sounded like a perfect rhyme).

The new rhyming sounds in this second part of the poem corresponds with a shift in the poem's content: instead of focusing on his own feelings of exhaustion and frustration, the speaker turns his attention outward, describing the deer and her relationship with a powerful man, "Caesar." The new sounds, then, mirror the broadening of the poem's concern; in these lines, the speaker becomes willing to engage with the external world after his obsessive focus in the opening lines of the poem.

SPEAKER

The speaker of "Whoso List to Hunt" is ostensibly an anonymous hunter. He has been pursuing a single deer for a long time—and, as he announces early in the poem, he is giving up hunting her: "I may no more. / The vain travail hath wearied me so sore..." He is frustrated, exhausted, and worst of all, he admits that the deer he seeks already belongs to someone else: a powerful person whom he calls "Caesar."

But the speaker of "Whoso List to Hunt" is not actually a hunter: rather, he uses hunting as an elaborate extended metaphor for love. He is a lover, someone pursuing a relationship with a woman who eludes him and refuses his advances. The metaphor reveals some interesting things about the speaker and his view of love. It suggests, for instance, that he has expectations about the way men and women will behave in love. Men are active; they pursue. Women are responsive; they flee. This metaphor also suggests that, in the speaker's eyes, love involves violence. Finally, it allows him to cautiously explain the reasons why he has been disappointed in love: the deer he seeks has already been captured by someone else. If the speaker is a lover, he is a lover who lives in close proximity to powerful and dangerous people, whom he must be careful not to offend. This strengthens the sense that the speaker is a political figure, someone who serves a ruler and seeks his favor. It further suggests that readers should treat the poem as a political instrument, part of the rituals of the English court, in which courtiers used poetry to curry favor and make subtle complaints to the king.

Indeed, Wyatt himself was a prominent figure at Henry VIII's court and was involved intimately in the King's various love affairs and marriages. Accordingly, it's often rumored that the speaker of this poem is really Wyatt himself, who was said to have had an affair Henry VIII's second wife, Anne Boleyn, before she became queen.

SETTING

"Whoso List to Hunt" is, on its surface, a poem about hunting. It is thus most likely set in a wood or deer park (a part of the countryside fenced off so that aristocrats and royalty can use it to hunt). The poem does not focus on its setting, however; indeed, the speaker does not describe it all. This marks a significant shift from the poem's source, Petrarch 190, which describes the "green grass" and the "laurel's shade" where the speaker first encounters the "pure white hind" he pursues. Where Petrarch's poem focuses on the external world, Wyatt's focuses instead on the internal landscape: the despair and exhaustion the speaker feels after his long and fruitless pursuit.

"Whoso List to Hunt" is, however, only outwardly about hunting; the hunt actually serves as an extended metaphor for the dangers and frustrations of pursuing love at court. The implied setting of the poem, the forest where the speaker hunts for the "hind," is thus also a metaphor: a metaphor for court itself, perhaps even the court of King Henry VIII, in which Wyatt served. The speaker suggests that the court is a wild and uncivilized place, full of violent sports and desperate pursuits.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Sir Thomas Wyatt's "Whoso List to Hunt" is somewhere between a translation and a rewriting of "Una candida cerva sopra l'erba," by the 14th-century Italian poet Francesco Petrarch. Petrarch was one of the earliest poets, alongside Dante, to write in his own language rather than Latin. Additionally, he is widely credited with taking the sonnet—a form that had previously mostly been used for drinking songs in Italian taverns—and turning it into an exalted, prestigious literary form. Over the course of his life, he wrote more than 300 sonnets, all in praise of a single woman, Laura. As he describes it in his sonnets, his love for Laura is passionate and ultimately unrequited.

Wyatt is generally considered to be the first poet to bring the sonnet form into English. He did this by translating Petrarch's sonnets directly and by adapting, imitating, and loosely rewriting some of Petrarch's poems.

In Petrarch's original version of this poem, the speaker

discovers a white deer in the forest and pursues her, even though he notes that "'Touch me not,' in diamonds and topaz, / was written round about her lovely neck." Petrarch's poem is also a kind of dream or vision: it ends with the speaker falling "into water, and she vanished." Wyatt adapts many of the details of Petrarch's poem: the beautiful deer, the necklace and its warning, the speaker who is part voyeur, part hunter. But he eliminates much of the dream imagery and focuses instead on the emotional and physical strain the speaker experiences as he pursues his beloved. The result is a much more physical, immediate poem.

To modern eyes, it may seem that Wyatt has plagiarized much of his poem from Petrarch. However, in the context of Renaissance poetry, it was common—even expected—for poets to closely imitate other peoples' poems, particularly poems written by famous authors in the past. In doing so, Wyatt takes on some of Petrarch's prestige for himself and for English poetry, at a time when poetry written in the English language was not highly regarded. It is as though he's saying, "See! We can do this in English, too!"

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Sir Thomas Wyatt lived in the early part of the 16th century in England—a time of considerable political turmoil. In 1532, King Henry VIII broke away from the Catholic Church, making England a nominally Protestant country. The reasons why he did so are complex, but they include at their center the king's desire for a divorce from his wife, Catherine of Aragon—a divorce the Pope refused to grant. Once England had split from the Catholic Church, Henry divorced Catherine and married Anne Boleyn, an English noblewoman, in 1533. (The marriage lasted only three years; she was executed in 1536).

Wyatt was at the center of this political storm. He came from a prominent political family, served as an ambassador to Rome (where he may have encountered Petrarch's sonnets), and was a close friend of Anne Boleyn's. Indeed, many have speculated that Wyatt and Anne Boleyn had an affair in the 1520s, prior to her marriage to the king; if this was really the case, it's possible that "Whoso List to Hunt" is about Wyatt's relationship with Boleyn—and about his frustration at losing her to the king.

Whether these biographical speculations are accurate or not, poetry played an important role in political life at the English court. Courtiers would recite poems to win favor from the king (and later the queen); they would also use them to express personal and political grievances indirectly, without offending the king. This was an important and difficult project during Henry VIII's reign—he was a famously difficult and moody king who often lashed out against those who served him. Wyatt's poem expresses a sense of exhaustion and insecurity that may reflect a frustration with the arbitrary moods and rules of Henry's court. But the poem does not challenge those rules; it is an admission of defeat, not an expression of defiance.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Petrarch 190 in English and Italian — Link to the Italian text and English translation of Petrarch 190, "Una candida cerva sopra l'erba," the poem on which "Whoso List to Hunt" is based. (http://petrarch.petersadlon.com/canzoniere.html?poem=190)
- Carol Rumens on "Whoso List to Hunt" — A brief essay by Carol Rumens on "Whoso List to Hunt" for the Guardian newspaper. (https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2009/aug/10/poem-of-the-week-thomas-wyatt)
- Reading of "Whoso List to Hunt" — A reading of "Whoso List to Hunt." (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLfNiaHforg)
- Biography of Sir Thomas Wyatt — A biographical note on Sir Thomas Wyatt from the Academy of American Poets. (https://poets.org/poet/thomas-wyatt)
- W.S. Merwin on "Whoso List to Hunt" — An essay by the American poet W.S. Merwin on Wyatt's poetry. (https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2014/09/30/w-s-merwin-on-sir-thomas-wyatt/)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER SIR THOMAS WYATT POEMS

- I Find No Peace
- They Flee From Me

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