

ABSTRACT

BROCK, KEVIN MICHAEL. Wyatt's "My Mother's Maids" and the Perils of Ignorance. (Under the direction of M. Thomas Hester.)

Sir Thomas Wyatt's epistolary satire, "My mother's maids," is often overlooked by critics, purportedly because of the superiority of the poet's other two verse satires; and too often dismissed as little more than a straightforward retelling of the "country mouse" fable in Horace's *Satire 2.6*. However, Wyatt's version does not merely endorse Horace's view of the superiority of the simple country life over that of the city and court. Indeed, his poem focuses attention on the inherent violence that characterizes the outside world regardless of the setting. In fact, Wyatt's poem is better read as a satire of its Horatian "source," genre, and central theme about the peace and contentment that can be supposedly found in the country. For Wyatt, exerting any effort to find peace outside of oneself is not only a chimera but a search that may inevitably end in tragedy. This inward focus is reflected beyond this satire in his lyric poems, where Wyatt's criticisms of his fellow courtiers for lacking such a focus grow more ambiguous, veiled by careful use of narrative personae. Wyatt ultimately argues that the only way to survive in the court is through a Stoic philosophy, turning inward and trusting only in oneself and the certainty of appearance as appearance rather than possessing faith in others or the outside world.

**WYATT'S "MY MOTHER'S MAIDS"
AND THE PERILS OF IGNORANCE**

by

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Introduction

Because of its apparent simplicity of structure and meaning, Sir Thomas Wyatt's epistolary satire "My mother's maids" is often overlooked by critics in comparison to his other two satires. Too generally read as merely a retelling of the country mouse fable in Horace's *Satire 2.6*,¹ Wyatt's version, unlike Horace's defense of the superiority of the simple country life, suggests that the world outside of one's own mind – regardless of location – is a corrupting force unworthy of one's trust. Through a structure of narrative frames, each of which expands in scope and eclipses each previous frame within it, the Tudor poet depicts a world that grows increasingly more dangerous and violent as the speaker moves further outward from his personal self and identity.² Wyatt's advice to his friend John Poyntz emphasizes the improvement of one's mind, since one's inward self is the only "safe" place in a deadly and untrustworthy world.

This distrust of the outside world in all its guises transforms Wyatt's poem into a satire of

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- 1 Substantive criticism of Wyatt's satires, focusing in order of importance on "Mine own John Poyntz," followed by "A spending hand," and finally "My mother's maids," includes: Colin Burrow, "Horace at Home and Abroad: Wyatt and Sixteenth-century Horatianism," in *Horace Made New: Horatian Influences on British Writing from the Renaissance to the Twentieth Century*, eds. Charles Martindale and David Hopkins (Cambridge: Cambridge U, 1993), pp. 27-49; Joost Daalder, "Seneca and Wyatt's Second Satire," *Études Anglaises* 38.4 (1985): 422-426; Kenneth Graham, *The Performance of Conviction: Plainness and Rhetoric in Early English Renaissance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell U, 1994); Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: U of Chicago, 1980); Seth Lerer, *Courtly Letters in the Age of Henry VIII: Literary Culture and the Arts of Deceit* (Cambridge: Cambridge U, 1997); H.A. Mason, *Humanism and Poetry in the Early Tudor Period: An Essay* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1959); Jerry Mermel, "Sir Thomas Wyatt's Satires and the Humanist Debate over Court Service," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 11 (1978): 69-79; Raymond Southall, *Courtly Maker: An Essay on the Poetry of Wyatt and His Contemporaries* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1964); Patricia Thomson, *Sir Thomas Wyatt and His Background* (Stanford: Stanford U, 1964); Greg Walker, *Writing Under Tyranny: English Literature and the Henrician Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford U, 2005); Gary Waller, *English Poetry of the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Longman, 1986).
 - 2 For examinations of Wyatt's poetic craft, see Mary Thomas Crane, *Framing Authority: Sayings, Self, and Society in Sixteenth-Century England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U, 1993); Jonathan Crewe, *Trials of Authorship: Anterior Forms and Poetic Reconstruction from Wyatt to Shakespeare* (Berkeley: U of California, 1990); Barbara Estrin, *Laura: Uncovering Gender and Genre in Wyatt, Donne, and Marvell* (Durham, NC: Duke U, 1994); Douglas Peterson, *The English Lyric from Wyatt to Donne: A History of the Plain and Eloquent Styles*, 2nd ed. (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues, 1990); Diane Ross, "Sir Thomas Wyatt: Proverbs and the Poetics of Scorn," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 18 (1987): 201-212; and Krisztina Szalay, *The Obstinate Muse of Freedom: on the Poetry of Sir Thomas Wyatt*, *Studies in Modern Philology* 15 (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2000).

Horatian satire, criticizing Horace's work for its suggestion that lessons can be learned from one's mistakes and that peace and contentment can be found in the country. For Wyatt, the search for peace can only be successful when focused internally; turning outward, seeking fulfillment away from and outside of the self, is the most fundamental error. Wyatt's country mouse, like the Renaissance courtier, has no opportunity to learn from her mistake, and the poet suggests that the same fate awaits everyone who turns outward to seek prosperity. As a result, exerting any effort to find peace outside of oneself is not only a waste but a search that will inevitably end in tragedy: for Wyatt's country mouse it is death, while for the courtiers he describes to Poyntz it is a loss of virtue.

Inwardness for Wyatt is defined primarily as an internal focus and self-reflection that allows one to search for truths within one's mind as opposed to learning truths from external sources.³ By turning inward to look within oneself for answers, one is able to examine one's innate value and virtue; outward influences, on the other hand, alter and corrupt that innate value into something else. Wyatt, in *The Quyetie of Minde*, his translation of Plutarch's *De Tranquillitate et Securitate Animi*, says that

wisdom maketh the best life to be also most plesant. Therefore the well of surete of the
mind/springing in our self/let vs assay to make most pure & clere/that those thinges that gyue
vs foren thinges & chaunceable/we may make mete & according/in suffreing with gret
vprightnesse of the mynde.⁴

It is surety *of the mind* that springs “in our self” that allows one to make life (or at least the self) “most pure & clere.” Given that the Tudor court was filled with individuals seeking to further their own political careers at the (often violent and lethal) expense of others', Wyatt's preference to look inward

3 Daalder, noting the influence of Seneca's Epistle IX on Wyatt, suggests that “instead of looking outside ourselves for something which we wrongly think may help us, we should, Seneca and Wyatt both agree, aim to be self-sufficient” (426).

4 Kenneth Muir and Patricia Thomson, eds. *Collected Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt* (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool U, 1969), p. 445.

for peace is understandable if not necessary.

This inward focus is reflected beyond this satire in his lyric poems, where Wyatt's criticisms of his fellow courtiers for lacking such a focus grow more ambiguous, as the poet is forced to mask his critiques of his fellow courtiers in narrative personae, ambiguous phrases, and other frames designed specifically to keep the poet "safe" in the dangerous environment of Henry's court. Wyatt further disguises his criticisms through the use of a narrative persona in each lyric, masking his attack on the court behind increasing degrees of intimacy in the recollection of his persona's courtly experiences. The more concretely defined his persona becomes, such as referring to specific trysts in "They flee from me," the less direct and explicit are Wyatt's attacks on his fellow courtiers.

Ultimately, Wyatt suggests through his satire and his lyrics that the only way to survive in the court is by adopting a Stoic philosophy, turning inward and trusting only in oneself and the certainty of appearance rather than the assumption of steadfastness in others. For Wyatt, a courtier and diplomat for Henry, separation from the court is not an option; but neither does the poet recommend blind trust in one's fellow courtiers, for he knew full well the deception involved in court politics. Such inwardness, Wyatt intimates, allows one to maintain a level of security within without succumbing to the self-serving blandishments and mendacity of the early Tudor court.

Wyatt's "My Mother's Maids": Structure and Meaning

"My mother's maids" is constructed as a kind of poetic Silenus box, its meaning gradually unfolded by its narrative frames within frames.⁵ By moving through these frames, Wyatt's speaker turns from the security of his own "self" to increasingly larger and more dangerous spheres of community and society.⁶ Ultimately, this movement away from the individual self arrives at an understanding of the world as a violent and corrupt place from which one's only rational escape is to turn inward and find peace within one's mind.⁷

The overall genre or "frame" of the poem is a generic mix of verse satire and verse epistle.

5 All quotations from Wyatt are taken from *The Complete Poems*, ed. R.A. Rebholz (New York: Penguin, 1978). All quotations from Horace are from *Satires, Epistles, Ars Poetica*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library 194 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U, 1991).

6 As Walker states, "the poem begins ... with a series of effects which problematize its connection to his own inventive mind. Given the distance that it will travel in the course of its 112 lines of *terza rima* towards denouncing the Henrician state as tyrannical, it is perhaps no surprise that the poet should seek to disguise the originality of the work, and downplay its claims to literary authority" (308).

7 Waller suggests of Wyatt: "His is the first substantial body of work in the period of England through which the power of the Court speaks as the controller and creator not only of the dominant discourse but of alternatives to it, which however dimly apprehended and unable to find a place within it except by negation, none the less radically disrupt it. Poetry is thus linked not merely to courtly dalliance or personal desire, but to the increasingly ruthless and desperate need to find a place within power" (115). Many scholars, however, have argued that Wyatt's satire, especially his version of the mouse fable, is so close to a simple translation of Horace's that Wyatt provides the same moral of rustic superiority over the perils of city living as Horace does. For example, Mason argues that "the ideal aspiration of the period was to bring philosophy and religion down to the human level and into touch with Nature. This aspiration marks the closest point of contact between the Roman and the Renaissance ideal, for its ultimate source is what I have called the archetypal poem of Horace, the sixth 'sermo' of his second book" (226). Thomson states, "Wyatt now attacks not courtly vice in particular, but that general townish vice to which courtiers are among the most prone. And he now approaches his moral statement not through subjective experience but through a well-known fable. It is as though he has broadened out of a discussion that began with 'Myne owne John Poynz'" (*Sir Thomas Wyatt* 260). Southall suggests, "The criterion of inwardness, digested and consciously formulated, is brought in the satires to the juxtaposition of two ways of life and to the establishment of a preference for that which embraces naturalness even in poverty over that of courtly hypocrisy" (98). Mermel offers a slightly more optimistic comment on Wyatt: that he "goes on to make the case that true inner contentment is available to all who rightly seek it, whether they live in the country, at court, or in town" (73). The desire to locate some position of contentment and peace within the (outside) world seems overwhelming, especially given Wyatt's source material; however, such a philosophy is simply not present within this poem.

As an epistolary satire its purpose traditionally is to educate its reader about the foolishness or criminality of the world and to do so privately, the epistolary nature of the poem allowing for a clearer and more direct message than a more open (and much more dangerous) publication would. Wyatt's poem, however, is not entirely clear in presenting its cautionary message; just as Wyatt's major satirical example is presented in the form of another satirical genre – the beast fable – so the direct source for his poem, Horace's *Satire 2.6*, is qualified by Wyatt's fundamental disagreement with the Roman poet's philosophy (though this difference is not absolutely clear until the end of the poem). Whereas his Roman “model” seeks to educate the reader on the nature of ignorant fools, Wyatt focuses attention on the dominance of Tudor culture and morals by malignant criminals who are aware of and take pleasure in their vices. Thus, Wyatt's Horatian satire of gentle persuasion is effectively framed by a different species of classical satire, in this case by the reliance on the much more direct and harsh satire of a Juvenal or a Persius; indeed Wyatt concludes his poem with a specific reference to the wisdom of Persius's *Satire 3*:

magne pater divum, saevos punire tyrannos

haud alia ratione velis, cum dira libido

moverit ingenium ferventi tincta veneno. (ll. 35-38)

(O mighty Father of the gods! Be it thy will to punish cruel tyrants whose souls have been stirred by the deadly poison of evil lust in no other way but this—that they may look on Virtue, and pine away because they have lost her!)⁸

Persius is interested in punishing individuals only through inward sorrow (“in no other way but

⁸ This selection is from G.G. Ramsay, trans. *Juvenal and Persius*. Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U, 1993).

this”), for corruption from an outside source has no effect on those who already embrace vice; instead, those vicious individuals must suffer inwardly in order to comprehend their error.⁹ In addition, Persius focuses his attention on “tyrants,” criticizing those in power. That Persius waits to criticize the vicious until they cannot save themselves is of utmost importance: they may be able to recognize their error, but they have made their choice. This separates the tyrant from the reader, who still possesses the ability to embrace inwardness and avoid the others' fate.

Wyatt does not provide as clear a criticism of his own monarch, having just been freed from prison by Henry before the writing of his satire. Part of Wyatt's purpose in imitating Horace for much of his poem thus allows the Tudor poet to conceal Persius's message. Persius's influence is visible earlier in Wyatt's satire but it is not as direct as the final plea to God in this poem; compare Persius *Satire* 1, l. 7: “*nec te quesiveris extra*” (look to no one outside yourself) with “My mother's maids,” ll. 97-99: “Then seek no more out of thyself to find / The thing that thou hast sought so long before, / For thou shalt feel it sitting in thy mind.” Wyatt's argument for inward focus resembles that of Persius far more than Horace; while Wyatt imitates Horace's structure, his true message lies with his imitation of Persius.

Wyatt provides a direct translation of Persius, save that his critique is focused on “those wretched fools” (l. 104) that anger his speaker due to their preference for vice:

But to the great God and to his high doom

None other pain pray I for them to be

But, when the rage doth lead them from the right,

⁹ Morford notes that Persius's narrator “imagines the worst punishment for the worst sinner, that is a tyrant (who usually metes out punishment to others) [...] this is to recognize virtue when it is too late to become virtuous” (46).

That looking backward, Virtue they may see
Even as she is, so goodly fair and bright.
And whilst they clasp their lusts in arms across,
Grant them, good Lord, as thou mayst of they might,
To fret inward for losing such a loss. (ll. 105-112)

Wyatt, like Persius, recognizes that his world is not filled only with fools, but also with those who actively embrace vice (and for Persius in particular, destroy others' lives by their vicious actions).¹⁰ Wyatt's lesson is that inwardness will be the inevitable action taken in any situation: it becomes the reader's responsibility to look within himself before he is forced to do so as a consequence for leading a vicious life.

“My mother's maids” begins in an intimate and relatively “safe” moment of self-reflection, as inward as the poem's speaker can be. His first word (“My”) indicates that his successive words are especially meaningful to and definitive of him. This is the most intimate and secure of the perspectives of the poem's frames, and while the narrative frames that exist are larger in scope than the speaker's self, they are defined by that recognition of the self. The speaker recounts his understanding of the world around him – the knowledge he has learned is filtered through his recounting of the mouse fable.¹¹

Wyatt's speaker next moves out in scope and backwards in time even as he moves into

10 Donald Guss argues that Wyatt is preeminently concerned with individuals in power: “Wyatt's concern is with the injustice of powerful men ... Wyatt, then, unlike Horace, raises the question of the moral responsibility of those who so run courts that innocence is helpless there” (6). While Guss's argument is undoubtedly pointed towards Henry, it is important to note that a critique of Henry in the poem is anything but explicit; it is very likely this deniability that provides Wyatt with the ability to provide such a potential criticism of his ruler.

11 Burrow sums up the issue of distance and security: “The distance of place implicit in the epistolary form enables writers to explore disparities in value between where they are and where they want to be” (33). Wyatt wants to be, of course, secure in his own thoughts, but he must also exist in the far more dangerous Henrician court.

another narrative frame, for his initial statement is no longer focused on himself but rather on his “mother's maids, when they did sew and spin” (l. 1). By mentioning his mother and her maids, the speaker turns to a circle of collective identity that no longer includes only himself, but his immediate family – still “safe” for him, but less so – and the servants that supported his household. The frame of the childhood memories of Wyatt's speaker, while appearing to make the story more intimately connected with his own life, actually becomes disconnected by moving further and further out of the speaker's self towards other narrators and their recollections.¹² Even as the speaker refers to individuals with whom he is much more well-acquainted than the reader is, they are not *him* – they are others.¹³ Wyatt is not arguing that one should live as a recluse: there are others in the world, and the truth of the mouse fable is not novel. However, his speaker demonstrates, by way of the fable and the advice following it, that the inward study and acknowledgment of the truth of the maids' lesson is what allows one to survive in a dangerous world.¹⁴

That the speaker discusses a time when the maids “did sew and spin” is also important, for these are the activities of serving women when with other serving women. Wyatt's speaker, a

12 Walker states, “While precisely rooted in the details of Wyatt's life (claiming as it does to be a recollection of a song of his mother's serving women), the poem begins nonetheless with a series of effects which problematize its connection to his own inventive mind” (307-8).

13 As Crane notes, “The tale of the city mouse and country mouse is probably taken from Horace, *Sermones* 2.6, and yet Wyatt begins by attributing it to his “mothers maydes when they did sowe and spynne.” Thus, the fable of the mouse (and the saying, “Eche kynd of lyff hath with him his disease,” which sums it up) is authorized by both classical literature and folk wisdom, but in failing to acknowledge a classical source that most readers would recognize, Wyatt signals the unreliability of his rustic persona” (155).

14 Crane states that “Wyatt goes to some lengths to show that the truth of sayings is not dependent upon the authority of a particular self. Although sayings themselves are steadfast and true, human beings may not be able easily to participate in that 'trouth.' This is the point of the double authorization in 'My mothers Maydes,' where the exemplum and its sayings are 'steadfast' because they are true for Wyatt, Horace, and for his mother's maids ... these sayings are presented as the hard-won conclusions of painful experience; all of them reiterate the idea that fortune is fickle, friends deceitful, and steadfastness sorely lacking” (155-157).

male and a gentleman (since his mother could afford maids), would surely not have been involved in these activities in any important regard. Thus, he moves further away from the frame of his circle of safety, trust, and knowledge (which he has of himself, but not of others) into a narrative frame focused on the perspective of the opposite gender of a separate social class from a previous generation than that of the speaker.

At the same time, this continued expansive movement through unfolding poetic frames provides safety for the poet through ambiguity and allusion by making the poem's content seem less immediately relevant than it might otherwise be perceived to be: "My mother's maids when they did sew and spin, / They sang sometime a song of the field mouse" (ll. 1-2). Wyatt's speaker describes the fable as a song performed during menial duties long ago during his youth – the song's focus seems disconnected from contemporary significance (and any social or political ramifications that a contemporary piece might have).¹⁵ Wyatt may be able to dodge danger in this regard – not unlike his city mouse – but he is not entirely secure, able to say what he truly desires to say (nor as openly as he may like).¹⁶

Of course, his mother's maids are not the focus of the poem, either; the speaker goes on to unfold yet another frame for his memory by noting that they

sang sometime of the field mouse,

That, for because her livelihood was but thin,

Would needs go seek her townish sister's house. (ll. 2-4)

15 Walker acknowledges, "The formulation '*a* song of *the* feld mowse' implies the precise balance of familiarity and distance between reader and narrative that Wyatt desires to convey" (308).

16 Burrow argues that Wyatt's indirectness creates safety, that the poet's "physical survival depended on his ability to make his language appear to be traditional and nothing to do with him" (40). Walker says that "by identifying [the fable] as a worksong, sung by women simply to pass the time and ease their labours, he reduces the apparent contemporary relevance of the text still further" (308).

This narrative shift transforms the poem's current frame from one of personal reflection into that of an impersonal animal fable, while the poem's speaker essentially disappears during the course of the fable's narration, taking with him the self-reflection that separates him from his fellow courtiers (who resemble the country mouse of the fable). The fable is centered on a female character – moving Wyatt's speaker even further outward from the secure identity of his first “my,” as he turns toward a passive indirect retelling of the maids' fable about a situation of poverty and necessity. Considering the status of the speaker as a gentleman with some financial means, this poverty cannot be a situation directly experienced by the speaker, removing him even further from a state of security and direct self-knowledge as he continues into the tale.

The fable itself moves away from the country mouse's own sense of security and safety. She begins in a cave attacked by storm and rain (l. 6) and quickly turns to thoughts of wealth and luxury in the city. By doing so, the mouse looks for an external solution to her problems by turning inward: she contemplates the value of life not by what she has and who she is, but by what she can gain from others, as she decides to visit her sister in the city. Wyatt notes that she does not trust her sister, but rather “of all this wealth / With her sister her part so for to shape” (ll. 32-33). It is important that the mouse herself, and not her sister in her fantasies, has erred: she has no one to blame for her eventual downfall but herself. Thus, it is one's self which can make the difference between survival and death.

The framework by this point has moved even further away from its initial center on the speaker as a child in a nurturing environment. Wyatt assumes the persona of an unidentified speaker addressing a familiar audience (his friend John Poyntz) about his youth, including

recounting an animal fable (borrowed by Wyatt from Horace) he claims he heard from his mother's servants, moving away from "real" people to a talking country mouse who leaves her home for that of her sister. The further the speaker moves away from his own experiences of youth and early security, the less "safe" the atmosphere becomes. The country mouse, even at home, is at the brink of famine and her home is beaten by rough weather (ll. 6-15). However, when she leaves her cave for the city, the "poor surety" (l. 68) of her home far outweighs the danger of her sister's.

The poem continues to expand in scope; the next frame that appears has the mouse traveling to the city to see her sister. By leaving the relative security of her home, the mouse comes face to face with the dangerous nature of the outside world. Her initial actions upon leaving ironically hint at the threat that awaits: "at this journey she maketh but a jape" (l. 31). This jape (a joke) is contrasted with the city mouse's response to her sister's arrival: she "for fear durst not well appear, / Of every noise so was the wretch aghast" (ll. 38-39). The country mouse's physical departure from her home brings her into a danger that her sister's reaction should have made clear. Instead, she remains oblivious to the peril of her surroundings and the joke she makes earlier, about the distance between her cave and the city, is turned on her; it is not her fantasies that are so nearby, but the consequences of inward ignorance and outward viciousness. The speaker ironically describes the mouse's naïve trust in the wealth of the city for her "that, if she might keep herself in health, / To live a lady while her life doth last" (ll. 34-35). She will not be able to keep herself in health, nor will her life last much longer: the peril of her journey will catch up with her far quicker than she knows.

The next frame unfolded in the mouse fable is the acknowledgment of a third party in the city home, a hidden observer that threatens the apparent (but ultimately absent of) security in conversations and interactions. In the city, the country mouse and her “townish” sister come face to face with a cat:

though th'unwise

Had not yseen such a beast before,

Yet had nature taught her after her guise

To know her foe and dread him evermore.

The towny mouse fled; she knew whither to go. (ll. 55-59)

It is here that the threat of the world becomes apparent; “nature” allows the mice to recognize the threat of the cat, just as innate nature allows Wyatt and his reader to acknowledge the perils of the Tudor court. However, knowing of a danger and reacting to it are two separate issues. The town mouse can survive the cat, hiding by returning inward (most likely a physical return back to her hole) while the country mouse, out of her element and away from the security of her cave (Wyatt says “at home she wished her tho!” [l. 61]), is killed by her natural predator.¹⁷ The cat is always there to kill the mouse, just as it has always been in the city home, hidden until the mice note its presence. In Horace's poem, the mice's feast is interrupted by Molossian hounds that burst in from outside, making an uproar that alerts the mice to flee. Unlike Horace's dogs, the cat does not enter the scene but, as Burrow says, is “always there ... always hiding under a chair to get” the mouse, just as there is an unseen threat that waits to attack the unwary courtier.¹⁸

17 Or at least she is almost killed. Walker notes that the mouse is left “presumably at the point of death, frozen by the poet's failure to complete the story, in an endless moment of dying” (309).

18 Burrow 41.

When the mouse is caught and killed by the cat (ll. 64-69), the scope of the narrative framework is expanded further: the frames of the mouse fable end with the death of the mouse, and a new frame is constructed – the direct epistle to John Poyntz. While the speaker has always been addressing Poyntz in the poetic epistle, he moves here from reflecting upon the knowledge he has gained to educating Poyntz as to the importance and truth of that knowledge. Another framework is now created by this movement: the reader exists explicitly outside the conversation between the speaker and Poyntz, the acknowledged reader. This shift complements the growing progression of scope of the fable narration by pushing the reader outside the “safe” frame of conversation with the speaker; while the mice had a cat watching them, so do Poyntz and Wyatt's speaker have a third-party reader witnessing their conversation. Even in a private epistle, there is the risk of someone else listening in or reading another's words. This risk is especially great in the Henrian court, as Wyatt and Poyntz have their own courtly “cat” watching them in the form of the vicious courtiers that surround the king.

Wyatt's speaker reflects on the danger and error of outward action, recognizing the source of this error as existing within oneself; although the frames of the poem expand in scope away from the intimacy of the speaker's self, they are each resolved by either a reminder and embrace of inwardness or a punishment for embracing the outside world and its vices:

Alas, my Poyntz, how men do seek the best

And find the worst by error as they stray! (ll. 70-71)

Moving outward emotionally at all for Wyatt is “straying” – by looking outside oneself for an answer or safety (an important search for courtiers like Wyatt or Poyntz), one can only be

disappointed (at best) and may very well experience the same sort of violent end as the fable's country mouse.¹⁹ Walker, focusing on the error of life in the city (keeping Wyatt's and Horace's messages concurrent) says that "to be at court was always to be subject to predatory forces, and the freedoms that such a life offered were merely illusory."²⁰ While the country mouse's idea of "the best" is not the same as Wyatt's speaker, as the mouse seeks material gain as an answer to her discomfort and the speaker seeks peace and security, the answer to each situation is the same: a turning inward, a reliance on oneself for truths and security, will provide one with what one truly needs and desires.

As Wyatt's speaker begins to counsel Poyntz, he moves away from his own reflection and recollection; he shifts his focus and understanding of his subject from his own life to that of his readers, both Poyntz and his unacknowledged audience. In fact, this turn quickly moves beyond Poyntz to a recognition of Wyatt's other readers, the third party witnessing his conversation with Poyntz. While Wyatt's speaker refers to Poyntz with the informal "thou," more often the speaker's advice is couched in terms of an audience of "ye" - the second person plural form. Poyntz is not the only individual who can benefit from turning inward to find peace and security, but when the speaker argues for his reader to act, he speaks to a singular audience who is separated by the others by his ability to listen to the speaker's advice. Burrow notes that there are points where a sense of intimacy and inwardness of focus and intent become very present despite

19 Waller examines Wyatt's philosophy, saying, "The court poets look in vain for a newer language by which to reject the social structure which sustains and controls them. Alternative ideologies exist only in the strains and gaps of the text. But speaking through the poetry, where it is ... off its guard, are the fragments of alternative discourses ... But nowhere is there the means explicitly to call into question the structure that holds the whole together. Wyatt may raise the question of where the honest man finds succour at Court – but it is the typical question of one who has lost, or is anxious about losing, his place and is not able to conceive of cultural alternatives" (115-116).

20 Walker 312.

the expanding scope of the poem's frames: "The swoop into the singular from 'Ye do' to 'make plain thine heart' creates an intimacy which goes beyond general piety; it makes us and Poyntz fuse for a moment, as we are intimately asked to do the one thing we must all do, but which we all must do singularly and for ourselves: sort out our minds."²¹ This poem from the speaker to his close friend is hardly a formal epistle, making the informal tense appropriate; instead, Wyatt's speaker acknowledges his unnamed addressees and by doing so recognizes that any social community, even a familiar circle consisting of himself and Poyntz, is not secure.

Once one looks for answers outside his own mind, he has turned to an unsafe environment and his words can be overheard by another party. Wyatt's speaker is not safe in addressing even Poyntz, because the outside world (specifically, their fellow courtiers) can do him harm for conversing with anyone, especially if his conversations focus on criticisms of the court. However, Wyatt is compelled to explain to his friend the virtue of inwardness, even if that means acting in an outward fashion. It is not enough for Wyatt or his speaker to realize the importance of an inward focus; the satirist needs to promote the truth he has discovered to his reader. In the case of Wyatt's speaker, this truth is the necessity of looking in one's mind for the answers one seeks.

Wyatt makes sure to note the varying levels of intimacy, security, and framework that exist to demonstrate the varying states of safety and security offered by each; he states that "each kind of life hath with him his disease" (l. 80).²² Trouble and worry await every individual ("dis-ease" being a discontent of the mind and one's situation as opposed to the strict reading of "disease" as

²¹ Burrow 43.

²² Mermel counters those critics who desire to assign blame to the court and praise to the country: "The entire focus of his argument is, in fact, not upon a particular kind of life—urban, courtly, or rural—but rather upon a certain disposition of mind and the means to attain it ... the source of inner peace is a disciplined mind—not a courtly or rural environment, both of which are equally powerless either to bring tranquility of mind or, just as importantly, to take it away" (74).

plague or illness); what differs, Wyatt suggests, is in how fully one allows himself to suffer from that disease:

Thyself content with that is thee assigned
And use it well that is to thee allotted.
Then seek no more out of thyself to find
The thing that thou hast sought so long before,
For thou shalt feel it sitting in thy mind. (ll. 95-99)

Wyatt's advice here mirrors the progression of his narrative frames: for each movement away from the initial frame of the speaker's self-reflection, there is an opportunity for an inwardly-focused self-sufficiency which one can abide by or ignore. The fact that Wyatt does not define "the thing" in one's mind is important as well, keeping his intended message for Poyntz undefinable for other readers. As Burrow says, "what the 'thing' might be is deliberately left uncertain, kept safely free from the intrusive eyes of courtly misinterpreters."²³ The most inward "thing" of all – what Poyntz or the reader will feel "sitting in [one's] mind" – is kept so secure that Wyatt will not betray it to an unfamiliar or less secure audience. However, as "the thing" is undefined by the speaker, the reader is able to define it as best fitting his own search. In addition, Wyatt's speaker advises Poyntz to "make plain thine heart that it be not knotted / With hope or dread, and see thy will be bare" (ll. 92-93). By making one's heart bare, Wyatt's speaker argues, the error and ignorance that cost the country mouse her life will not plague his reader, and the reader will be able to find more easily "the thing" in his mind.

Wyatt moves a step further to expand the poem's scope from the conversation with Poyntz

²³ Burrow 44.

to acknowledge their courtly surroundings, as his speaker discusses with Poyntz their fellow courtiers – “those wretched fools” (l. 104). The conversation between Wyatt's speaker and Poyntz, witnessed by the reader, is made even less secure by this change of focus. Wyatt changes the tone of his speaker's language as he discusses less familiar subjects, ending his advice abruptly with the statement, “Henceforth, my Poyntz, this shall be all and sum. / These wretched fools shall have naught else of me” (l. 103-104). Wyatt recognizes his other readers as the “wretched fools,” his fellow courtiers, who could be as dangerous to the poet as the cat is to the country mouse. As a result, Wyatt's final lines are no longer advisory, but rather descriptive of the punishment he wishes upon those who continue to seek vice rather than look inwardly.

The next frame in the poem is both more inward and outward in scope than almost any of its predecessors. In this frame, Wyatt's speaker turns to prayer – an intimate action that is as close to the speaker's initial self-reflection as a conversation between two parties (the speaker and God) can be. At the same time, it is outward to a universal degree, since by addressing God the speaker can pray for results beyond the boundaries of his friendship with Poyntz, the security of his childhood, or the dangers of the fickle court. On the one hand, the speaker's prayer can be seen as a cry for relief; on the other hand, the speaker's desire to promote the virtue of inwardness compels him to turn to God for aid in spreading his message.

Wyatt's speaker prays to God “and to his high doom” to edify others – specifically the fools that anger him (l. 105). As a prayer, the poem moves the speaker's scope of attention beyond his conversation with Poyntz to a plea from the speaker to God – an inward discussion to which the reader is made privy in order to complete Wyatt's lesson for his fellow courtiers.

Wyatt's speaker demonstrates outwardly what he does inwardly – and in the final, macrocosmic frame, the difference between inwardness and outwardness is made clear. The speaker embraces virtue to survive in a dangerous world, while praying for God to mete out inward justice to the vicious by forcing them to realize their errors. Wyatt's speaker ultimately asks of God:

None other pain pray I for them to be
But, when the rage doth lead them from the right,
That looking backward, Virtue they may see
Even as she is, so goodly fair and bright.
And whilst they clasp their lusts in arms across
Grant them, good Lord, as thou mayst of thy might,
To fret inward for losing such a loss. (ll. 106-112)

The movement of Wyatt's speaker through the poem from a focus on his own security to examining others' culminates in this prayer for an inward consequence of vice and error. The speaker refers to “them” in his plea, suggesting both “those wretched fools” as well as any readers who have not yet been swayed by his argument for inwardness. It is these ignorant readers who most need to follow the speaker's advice as they have the opportunity to recognize their error before it is too late: the embrace of vice, clasping “in arms across” one's lusts, signifies death with its corpse-like pose, just as the inward fretting marks the point at which one realizes one's spiritual “loss” of virtue. It is this loss which is most significant: without virtue, one will not be able to survive in the dangerous world or defend oneself from vice. By providing counsel to Poyntz and requesting a punishment for others, Wyatt's speaker separates himself and

his friend from their fellow courtiers; the ignorant reader thus has the opportunity to embrace inwardness to find security within his mind or be forced to turn inward to mourn the loss of his virtue.

Wyatt presents an increasingly alarming account of a violent and dangerous world wherein one can find safety and peace only within one's own mind. The plot and structure of the poem reflects this message: as the speaker unfolds the magnitude of his subject from memories of his own youth, he moves through a number of narrative frames away from his self to a mouse fable and then a direct epistle to his friend John Poyntz to examine the potential consequences of life in the dangerous world for the speaker, his friend and others. As his subject expands in scope beyond focusing on his own life, the speaker continually returns inward to examine his understanding of the world in order to resolve the troubles faced by himself or his reader. For Wyatt, the opportunity to turn inward, to be self-reliant and to avoid the temptations offered by the outside world, always exists, and it is necessary for one to do so in order to survive in the world without sacrificing one's virtue; those who do not look inward voluntarily, Wyatt's speaker prays, will be forced to turn inward to recognize the error of their vicious decisions.

Wyatt's Revisions of Horace

The significance of the structure of Wyatt's poem is endorsed by the changes he makes to Horace's version of the fable.²⁴ By altering a number of components of the Roman poet's tale (both slight and central), Wyatt transforms Horace's classical model into a satirical commentary on the limitations of his Roman model's view of human conduct.

Horace wrote his poem in the middle of a successful period of his life, while Wyatt writes his having just barely escaped execution.²⁵ Horace championed the country life as opposed to that of the city because his association with the well-connected figure Maecenas provided him with a Sabine farm, which, in turn, served as his escape from the stress of life in Rome.²⁶ Wyatt, living in exile after a period of imprisonment, has no reward other than surviving; he has simultaneously nothing to celebrate and yet does not openly criticize the king for his treatment of the poet.²⁷ Wyatt has no reason to tout the virtue of country life; his exile from London in 1536 keeps him away from the place of his employment, but he is not out of its influence, since it is the king who sends him to his home in Kent. Thus, Wyatt

24 The most in-depth examination of Horace's mouse fable is David West, "Of Mice and Men: Horace, *Satires* 2.6.77-117," in *Quality and Pleasure in Latin Poetry*, eds. Tony Woodman and David West (London: Cambridge U, 1974), pp. 67-80. West compares Horace's poem to its earlier and later versions by Aesop and Henryson.

25 As Oliensis points out, a similar set of frames exists within Horace's poem as exists within Wyatt's: "The multiple oppositions that frame and structure the tale of the two mice – between wealth and poverty, vice and virtue, danger and safety, servile dependence and manly (mously) independence, city and country – line up with a certain conventional neatness in parallel columns. But in Horace's case, the columns are not parallel but intertwined, and the accounting cannot be so simple. For Horace's country retreat is not just an alternative to but a gift from the city, a crumb, as it were, from the master's table" (50).

26 Oliensis notes that the poem is a kind of celebration: "Its occasion is Horace's delight in his newly acquired Sabine 'farm,' a rustic refuge that enables him to recapture the leisure he once enjoyed within the city of Rome ... [even though] the author of *Satires* 2.6 is a busy man and, in a small way, a public figure. The seven years that have elapsed since his admission into Maecenas' circle ... have transformed Horace from a relative nobody into something of a somebody" (46). However, Burrow says that "Horace insinuates human desires and moral attitudes into locations, and it often looks as though his Sabine farm is the ultimate place of valuable repose. But there's something – it's almost a species of embarrassment, a fear of acquiring definable attitudes and of the publicity which a straight expression of longing brings – which cuts off his meditations on the country from becoming ideals" (30). he urges that Horace fluctuates between celebrating what he has gained and appearing to flaunt those gains.

27 Burrow describes Wyatt's introduction of Horace to a sixteenth-century audience: "These people needed a poet who identified places with values, since home was where they wanted to be; and they needed a poet who could mutedly express hostility to someone to whom he owed everything" (32).

recognizes a danger in the world regardless of one's location: the countryside does not hide one from the most significant threats.

The different situations of the two poets are reflected in their treatments of the classical fable. The narrative frames of the poems are noticeably different; each poet emphasizes or downplays the reason for the fable's appearance in his work. In Horace's satire, the tale is told by his neighbor, a farmer named Cervius, who “rattles off old wives' tales that fit the case” (*garrit anilis ex re fabellas*) specifically to teach others about the perils of wealth (ll. 78-79); just as his country mouse learns a lesson and prospers from it, so does Horace provide his readers with the opportunity to recognize that a valuable lesson is about to be provided.

In Wyatt's poem, the speaker recounts a tale which he claims was told some time in the past by his mother's maids for their own enjoyment (“while they did sew and spin” [l. 1]). This allows Wyatt to separate (or at least to make it seem that) his fable's content is not a critique of his present condition – by stating that it is an old fable told by serving women, Wyatt can claim that it is not a direct analogue to Henry's court. Likewise, Wyatt begins his satire specifically with the mouse fable and moves from the tale into a more direct discussion of his meaning in an epistle to his friend Poyntz; in Horace's satire, the fable occupies the second half of the poem, following an explanation by Horace about why his country farm is preferable to his home in the city. By reversing Horace's structure of lesson/fable to fable/lesson, Wyatt uses Horace's tale to explain precisely why the Roman's initial praise of country life is folly.

The organization of each poem likewise aids in the emphasis (or veiling) of the poet's message. Horace begins with his statements on country versus city life and follows by the example of the mouse fable to demonstrate his point; Wyatt first presents his fable without explaining exactly why he chooses

this tale to recount, and then presents his message to his friend Poyntz after the protagonist of his fable has been captured and on the verge of death. For Horace, the moral at the end of his fable is the moral of the poem; for Wyatt, the fable presents only half of the moral – the rest of Wyatt's lesson comes during his epistolary message as a *response* to the outcome of his fable.

That Wyatt must explain his point further is a statement that Horace's satire can itself be satirized: the Roman's moral is, for Wyatt, not as accurate or explanatory as it needs to be. Wyatt's modifications of the structure of his model, that is, offers an implicit critique of the direct approach used by Horace. Wyatt works more by inference and implication – a veiled sign of the dangers inherent to his situation in the world of Tudor intrigue (from which he, in fact, presently suffers).

Horace argues through his fable that there is a dichotomy of worldly environments: the city is a corrupting place and its inhabitants, like the city mouse, are corruptors of the innocent (present in the poem in the form of the country mouse), while the country is peaceful and free of the stress and vice of the city. Wyatt's moral is that the outside world – that is, anything outside of oneself (or more specifically, one's *mind*), and not specifically the city as in Horace's poem – is not only corrupting but absolutely deadly. While Horace can retreat from the city and enjoy retirement in the peace and quiet he finds on his farm, Wyatt notes the irony of this pastoral fantasy early in his fable, such as when he describes the hardships of his country mouse in her small home. In fact, the initial description of Wyatt's country mouse and her home is a parody of Horace's description of his farm:

Hoc erat in votis: modus agri non ita magnus,

horatus ubi et tecto vicinus iugus aquae fons

et paulum silvae super his foret. (ll. 1-3)

(This is what I prayed for!—a piece of land not so very large, where there would be a

garden, and near the house a spring of ever-flowing water, and up above these a bit of woodland.)

Horace's prayers become a realized curse for Wyatt's country mouse, who possesses a small store of food "stroyed with the flood" (l. 14), the successor to the ever-flowing water desired by the Roman poet. By placing his country mouse in disastrous conditions, Wyatt may very well be responding to the conditional happiness mentioned by Horace, if not mocking the Roman's success when compared to Wyatt's own situation when writing his poem:

si quod adest gratum iuvat, hac prece te oro:

pingue pecus domino facias et cetera praeter

ingenium, utque soles, custos mihi maximus adsis! (ll. 13-15)

(if what I have gives me comfort and content, then thus I pray to thee: make fat the flocks

I own, and all else save my wit, and as thou art wont, still be my chief guardian!)

Horace suggests that the simple rustic life will make him happy, but he also implies here that it might not – and Wyatt points out this inconsistency immediately in his own version of the mouse fable to demonstrate the error and futility of searching for peace in the outside world.

The country mouse appearing at the beginning of each fable is placed in a situation that demonstrates each poet's outlook on the world around him. Horace's mouse lives frugally but does not seem to dislike his place in life, at least at the beginning of the tale (it takes the city mouse to convince the country mouse that the latter lacks something): Horace states that the country mouse lives in a cave, where "roughly he fared, frugal of his store, yet could open his thrifty soul in acts of hospitality" (*asper et attentus quaesitis, ut tamen artum / solveret hospitibus animum* [ll. 82-83]). Wyatt, on the other hand, has the impoverished and weather-beaten aspects of his country mouse's life elaborated upon in great

detail by the speaker:

The stormy blasts her cave so sore did souse,
That when the furrows swimm'd with the rain,
She must lie cold and wet in sorry plight. (ll. 6-8)

The country mouse in each poem also possesses vastly differing stores of food from the other: Horace's mouse manages to hoard oats, beans, raisins, and bacon (ll. 84-85) while Wyatt's has "sometime a barley corn, sometime a bean," though his speaker notes that "her store was 'stroyed with the flood" (ll. 12-14). This difference – Horace's mouse having food and Wyatt's not – alters the reason for which the country mouse travels to the city.

The feasts described in each poem provide insight into each poet's critique of city and country life. Horace provides details of three feasts, the first of which is a dinner at his farm (at which the fable is told) – a meal which takes the place of the feast at Maecenas's to which he had been invited.²⁸ The second meal is served by the country mouse, who is visited by a friend from the city and serves the visitor a simple feast of the foods he has at hand; he "grudged not his hoard of vetch or long oats" (*neque ille / sepositi ciceris nec longae invidit avenae*) in the spirit of friendship and generosity (ll. 83-84). The country mouse further humbles himself and sacrifices the few luxuries of his life in order to make his guest's stay comfortable:

*cum pater ipse domus palea porrectus in horna
esset ador loliumque, dapis meliora relinquens.* (ll. 88-89)

(Meanwhile, outstretched on fresh straw, the master of the house himself ate spelt and darnel, leaving the titbits to his friend.)

²⁸ Oliensis states that "the displacement is a gesture not only of discretion (Horace will never publish the private interactions of Maecenas' circle) but also of authority, enabling Horace to represent himself as the master of his own *domus* ... [the emphasis of this change] is all on Horace's ownership: Horace's hearth, Horace's friends, Horace's slaves" (Oliensis 49).

The city mouse, on the other hand, attempts to seduce the country mouse into living as luxuriously as he does, showing disdain as the country mouse brings out his best:

aridum et ore ferens acinum semesaque lardi

frusta dedit, cupiens varia fastidia cena

vincere tangentis male singula dente superbo. (ll. 85-87)

(varying the fare to overcome the daintiness of the guest who, with squeamish tooth, would barely touch each morsel.)

Not content with the simplicity of the country mouse's life, the city mouse convinces his friend to travel to town to experience life as he knows it (and to serve the country mouse an urban feast, the third example of meals in Horace's poem):

dum licet, in rebus iucundis vive beatus;

vive memor, quam sis aevi brevis. (ll. 96-97)

(While you may, live happy amid joys; live mindful ever of how brief your time is!)

The city mouse's *carpe diem* philosophy acknowledges that death will come to everyone; however, he also argues that it is possible to find happiness before death in material pleasures. While this seems at first glance closely aligned with Wyatt's critical view of the world, there is one major difference:

Horace does not blame material pleasures for the mouse's error; rather, he accuses the city of promoting such a material philosophy.

Wyatt introduces his version of the city mouse first through the filter of fantasy, appearing in a scene of wishful thinking on the part of the country mouse:

"My sister," quod she, "hath a living good

And hence from me she dwelleth not a mile.

In cold and storm she lieth warm and dry

In bed of down. The dirt doth not defile

Her tender food. She laboureth not as I.” (ll. 18-22)

The city mouse does not do the convincing here (save indirectly as a fictional version of herself in the country mouse's imagination). Instead, it is the country mouse that convinces *herself* to leave her home. This change in the poem is pivotal as Wyatt suggests that it is the individual that sends himself or herself into error by looking outward, rather than having external pressures coerce an inherently innocent individual into making mistakes.

The journey to the city is likewise changed in Wyatt's poem to depict more clearly the poet's philosophy on error. In Horace's version, the country and the city mouse travel together for at least a day, as night falls by the time they reach the city walls (ll. 99-100). The country mouse thus must go to some effort to become wayward. In contrast, Wyatt's country mouse jokes about the distance between her home and the city, not even a mile away: “at this journey she maketh but a jape” (l. 31). By closing the distance between the city and the countryside, Wyatt heightens the absurdity of his country mouse's fantasies of urban life when compared with the conditions of her own home – if the city is so easy to reach, why does the mouse live in the country? The answer is that, for Wyatt, error is always close by, and as a result it is a far greater struggle to remain virtuous than to succumb to vice.

The city in each poem has its own atmosphere, consistent with the poet's satirical focus. Horace describes the urban home in which his mice relax as a palace, furnished with elegant red robes and pillows, in order to reflect the materialistic excesses of the city:

rubro ubi cocco

tincta super lectos canderet vestis eburnos,

multaque de magna superessent fercula cena,

quae procul exstructis inerant hesterna canistris. (ll. 102-104)

(where covers dyed in scarlet glittered on ivory couches, and many courses remained over from a great dinner of the evening before, in baskets up hard by.)

There is no real allure in the city home within Wyatt's poem; in fact, no details are provided other than that there is a stool under which the mice spy a cat (l. 53), making the conditions of the city home far less appealing or luxurious than those in Horace's poem. Wyatt's point is that the fantasy of city life is just that, and the country mouse demonstrates through her wishful thinking that inward error can be just as easy to achieve as outward error. Wyatt's city mouse (once she appears outside of her sister's thoughts) is also a polar opposite of the Roman mouse; where Horace's city mouse inspires his country friend to visit the city and experience its varied recreations (ll. 90-97), Wyatt's mouse is a creature frightened of her home: "of every noise so was the wretch aghast" (l. 39). She offers the country mouse – her sister, a much closer relationship than that of the friendship shared by Horace's mice – a toast of "wine so clear" (l. 47) that causes the country mouse to shout and cheer. In fact, Wyatt only states that the city mouse "feasted her, that joy it was to tell / The fare they had" (ll. 46-47) while Horace describes in detail the bustling nature of his city mouse's feast, wherein the mouse runs around like a young waiting-boy tasting each dish before serving to his guest (107-109).

The interruption of each poem's main feast occurs in a unique fashion, providing perhaps the keenest insight into the viewpoint each poet has of courtly life (or even country life). In Horace's poem, an external signal gives the mice ample opportunity to escape from the cause of their alarm: the doors to the house crash open and "Molossian hounds" charge in, barking and bellowing (ll. 111-115).²⁹

²⁹ As Oliensis notes, "The seeming ungraciousness [of Horace's preference for dinner at his home over Maecenas'] is mitigated by the fact that it is not the master of the house (who never puts in an appearance) but his dogs – not the host but his invidiously barking attendants – that drive the country mouse out of the city" (50, n. 37). While the obvious counterpart to Wyatt's cat is King Henry, Wyatt can deny this comparison by claiming that his target, like Horace, is his fellow courtier and not the king.

Wyatt's mice end their feast with the country mouse's own cheer; the poet states that

as she looked askance,

Under a stool she spied two steaming eyes

In a round head with sharp ears. (ll. 52-54)

By transforming the Molossian hounds into a single house cat, Wyatt drastically alters the dynamic of the relationship between the mice and the source of their fear: the cat is the natural predator of the mice, while the dogs are merely loud distractions. "In France," Wyatt's narrator says,

Was never mouse so feared, for though th' unwise

Had not yseen such a beast before,

Yet had nature taught her after her guise

To know her foe and dread him evermore. (ll. 54-58)

It is easy to recognize that the appearance of the cat precedes a much more violent encounter than that between Horace's mice and dogs. By not having the cat make any sound as he approaches the mice (since the country mouse has to spot the cat to notice him, rather than hearing him approach), Wyatt makes the danger faced by the mice much more immediate – the cat at any time could be nearby, ready to pounce on its prey.

The outcome of the city feast in Horace is confusion and fright, but the country mouse is yet provided with the opportunity to recognize that life is less stressful and frightening back in his rural home (ll. 114-117). While they panic from the unforeseen presence of the hounds in the hall, both mice are ultimately unharmed physically and the country mouse can return home with a greater knowledge of the terror of city life. In Wyatt's poem the outcome could not be more different and deadly. When the cat is spotted by the mice, the city mouse immediately flees: "she knew whither to go" (l. 59) to avoid

the clutches of the cat. The country mouse has no such luck, and is left alone against her unfamiliar foe and ends up being caught by the cat:

At the threshold her silly foot did trip,
And ere she might recover it again
The traitor cat had caught her by the hip
And made her there against her will remain
That had forgotten her poor surety and rest
For seeming wealth wherein she thought to reign. (ll. 64-69)

Wyatt's country mouse has no chance to leave the city or even to continue living beyond her encounter with the cat. Her lesson is moot as she cannot learn from or enjoy the mistake she has made in traveling to the city. Wyatt's narrator, on the other hand, foresees no sense of balance or improvement for the gravity of the mouse's error in looking outward beyond herself and her "poor surety." The final line in Wyatt's fable touches on the difference between the expectations of city life in each poem: in Horace, the country mouse manages to taste the luxurious life promised him by the city mouse, while in Wyatt the country mouse does not experience the easy life she *thought* she would (even though it was not promised or even suggested by the city mouse).

The final significant difference between the two poems is the poets' intent of direct versus indirect communication: despite initially hiding his praises to Maecenas as prayers to the gods, Horace *wants* his patron to know that he is thankful for his current social position (or at least, he wants his patron to see that he is publicly thanking him). Fraenkel states that it is "safe to assume that he relied on the sympathetic understanding of those enlightened men [ie., Maecenas and his friends] whom he knew to be capable of seeing the difference between the feeling that lay behind his prayer and the form in

which he expressed them.”³⁰ Oliensis urges that, “the displacement is sufficient to stave off the self-incriminating “thank you” (portraying Horace as a poet for hire) that we might have expected Horace to produce. Moreover, had Horace thanked Maecenas directly, the poem might read as an enforced or ungraciously punctual pay-off of Maecenas' generous gift.”³¹ Wyatt, unlike Horace, has to cloak his criticism in vague messages and recounted folk-tales to make sure that his own patron is not aware of the poet's potential feelings toward him (or at least that he cannot know definitively that Wyatt is criticizing him). Essentially, Wyatt is able to criticize Henry indirectly by focusing on the courtiers that surround the king: the poet relies on the inability of his reader to note an explicit complaint towards Henry, seeking the opposite effect that Horace had intended with his own fable.

30 Fraenkel 141.

31 Oliensis 48.

Inwardness in Wyatt's Lyrics

The struggle to maintain a Stoic philosophy of inward peace in a courtly world in which language itself has been obscured and corrupted is the burden of many of Wyatt's best-known lyrics as well as his formal verse satires.³² These poems often present a speaker whose struggle is with and within the corrupt lexicon of the Henrian court, which has become a sort of Hobbesian arena of survival and futile communication that Wyatt can explain only in the ironic mode he inherited from the example of Chaucer. As Waller phrases it, Wyatt is “a late medieval moralist adrift in a new, seemingly amoral world which is intent on using traditional moral commonplaces to justify a ruthless *realpolitik*.”³³ The divide between Wyatt's speakers and the other characters of his poetry certainly supports this statement, though Wyatt the poet is unwilling to articulate this idea so openly. Wyatt invents in each lyric an ironic persona whose utterances often conclude in questions or sarcasm that turn on the multiple meanings of the terms that define courtly life.

These inventions not only protect the poet himself from reprisal by the authorities that legislate what Wyatt portrays as a brutal world of miscommunication and radical linguistic degeneration, but also serve to turn the solution to this predicament to the reader. As Waller points out, poetry in the early sixteenth century is “linked not merely to courtly dalliance or personal desire, but to the increasingly

32 For an examination of Wyatt's philosophy in his lyrics, see Patricia Thomson, “Sir Thomas Wyatt: Classical Philosophy and English Humanism,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 25.2 (1962): 79-96. It is important to note that this philosophy is not specifically “Wyatt's” any more than is his advice to Poyntz to find “the thing ... sitting in thy mind” (“My mother's maids” ll. 98-99). As Crane suggests, “Wyatt does not depict this 'thing' as something that comprises or even is a part of an essential self. Instead, it remains a foreign object that he feels almost physically sticking in his mind” (156). The foreign presence of the “thing” or the “truth” in one's mind is not something separate from the individual so much as it is a universal truth, something that does not belong to Wyatt or Poyntz but rather to everyone, provided he seeks it properly (by turning inward). Ross discusses in great detail the self-critical and sometimes dishonest (or at least not bluntly honest) speaker in Wyatt's lyrics, focusing on the paradoxical nature of his simultaneously powerful and powerless persona (Ross 201-202).

33 Waller 114.

ruthless and desperate need to find a place within power.”³⁴ Crane, however, notes the external pressures on Wyatt's inward focus: “To the humanist, the courtly self is frivolous, insubstantial, and inevitably hurt and frustrated. To the courtier, the humanist subject is safe, but imprisoning and even, ultimately, deadening. Wyatt's “internal distantiating,” his peculiarly modern view of the self, is thus a result of his implication in both the humanist and courtly systems.”³⁵ While Wyatt does not view his inward turn as “deadenning,” he neither allows for himself the possibility of life outside the court. Lerer states that for Wyatt “shifts in syllable or word are shifts in meaning. Mistaking a phrase, a word, a line, a proverb results in mistaking the intention of the speaker or the writer.”³⁶ Lerer's comment is primarily in regards to Wyatt's prose *Defense to the Judges*, but applies to his lyrics also: he argues here Wyatt defends his true meaning against the misinterpretations of others.³⁷ However, Wyatt is counting on the potential for misinterpretation, so that he can more effectively argue that his intention was for some other meaning in his poems and statements.

Perhaps the clearest example of Wyatt's concern with both his language and his position in the Tudor court is “What vailleth truth,” an ironic reflection on the meaning of “truth” in a viciously self-centered world. The poet's opening question forces the reader to contemplate the dilemma of the courtier: “What vailleth truth, or by it to take pain[?]” (ll. 1) His word choice of “vailleth” is central here:³⁸ “vailleth” has several meanings, each of which hints at a truth about the court.³⁹ On the one hand, Wyatt's speaker asks what *vails* (prevails or profits) or *avails* truth (that is, what makes it effective or successful), if it leads to injury or harm. The poem thus begins questioning whether or not it is

34 Waller 115.

35 Crane 153.

36 Lerer 189.

37 Ibid.

38 The following definitions appear in the *OED*.

39 Crewe discusses the metrical connections between many of Wyatt's word choices in this first stanza, such as “steadfastness” and “craftiness” as well as “plain” and “fain.” He argues that Wyatt, despite arguing against “doubleness,” ultimately leads his reader to that doubleness, unable to avoid it in the language of the court (29).

worthwhile, or even possible, to pursue truth. On the other hand, the speaker asks what *veils* (hides) truth, and what injuries arise from such stealth or ensuing confusion?⁴⁰ In addition, “vail” can also mean to lower oneself or to bow in respect, in which case, Wyatt's speaker asks: “To what does truth defer?”

Through the ambiguity of his question, Wyatt makes clear his fundamental concern for the court without pointing specifically at one target: the individual who believes that truth will avail is bound to “take pain,” while the veil of deception, the route Wyatt's fellow courtiers have chosen, that hides truth and intent from others will further injure those who are not alert. This paradox is for Wyatt the nature of life within the Henrian court (and life in general, as in “My mother's maids”); one can either subject others to pain through falsehood or be a recipient of others’ machinations.

This dilemma is also central to “There was never file,” in which Wyatt presents his reader with a speaker that questions the significance of his own identity, arguing that he is nothing more than an object that has been used and manipulated by his fellow courtiers.⁴¹ As in “What vailleth truth,” Wyatt repeats in various grammatical forms a word – this time “file” – and shifts its usage slightly with each repetition, creating meanings that overlap one another without making any one clearer than the others. This variation resembles also the frames within “My mother's maids” that serve to demonstrate the tenuous safety that exists in the varying social circles of family, household, friendship, and court. The evasion of clarity here provides a puzzling demonstration of the difficulty in recognizing the difference that exists between inward truth and outward appearance.

40 Waller states, “Wyatt's poetry articulates a losing battle against an enormously powerful collective power determined to control access to and forbid participation in the dominant discourse except on terms dictated by itself” (114). Rather than despair of his losing position, Wyatt repeatedly argues for the only “escape” possible, the inward approach that allows an individual to remain a part of the court while existing morally apart from it.

41 Crane states that “Wyatt sees the supplemental relationship of good and bad as a condition of the universe in the face of which man can only react as a passive sufferer. Such suffering, however, is not entirely bad, since it is what makes the self present to itself (as feeling) and to others (as the poems engendered by those feelings)” (157). That is, if Wyatt (the speaker or the poet) were anything more than a passive object or sufferer at the hands of other courtiers, if he participated in its deceit, then he would be unable to locate, let alone articulate, the moral alternative to courtly schemes.

The opening lines of the poem form a framework of multiple meanings that serves to hide Wyatt's true intent (much like the initial frames of his second satire):

There was never file half so well filed
To file a file for every smith's intent
As I was made a filing instrument
To frame other, while I was beguiled. (ll. 1-4)

The first potential meaning of “file” here⁴² is that of the metal tool used to smooth down the rough edges of other materials; Wyatt suggests this usage by his reference to a “smith's intent” and “a filing instrument,” as a smith would use such a file for any number of purposes. In turn, Wyatt's speaker notes that he has been “made” to work more effectively than any conventional smith's tool; however, he also states that he is not made to “file” but to “frame other,” raising the question of whether or not he actually is a “file” after all. Another definition of the term is “whore,” a definition that reflects Wyatt's opinion of the deceitful nature of the courtier, being used and removed from the circle of favor when his purpose on a particular diplomatic mission or service to the court had been accomplished. In conjunction with this is the definition of “file” as “worthless person” or “rascal,” a sense of the term for Wyatt as full of distaste for his position as being a courtly whore. Further, “to file” could also mean “to defile” or to render something dirty or foul (in terms of morally corrupting and physically soiling). Wyatt certainly considers his position one in which he has been trained to be a defiler (although his speaker notes he was “beguiled” into doing so), deceiving others as a diplomat to further his king's agenda. These multiple definitions of the term “file” provide Wyatt with the ability to mask his criticisms of the court and its inhabitants, with readings of the poem revealing simultaneously supportive and critical meaning in the poem.

42 The following definitions appear in the *OED*.

Wyatt also obscures his meaning through the use of varying levels of specificity in regards to his narrative personae in the lyric poems. The more realized and defined his speaker becomes, the less direct is Wyatt's criticism of the court within that poem.⁴³ The most intimate portrait of Wyatt's lyric speaker, in terms of personal reflection, may be in "They flee from me," whose speaker reflects on the nature of the court by explaining his spurned love. Wyatt explores the details of the speaker's former trysts to mask his criticisms of the duplicitous character of his fellow courtiers (and, perhaps, of that speaker himself). The speaker notes of his previous loves:

I have seen them gentle, tame, and meek
That now are wild and do not remember
That sometime they put themselves in danger
To take bread at my hand; and now they range
Busily seeking with a continual change. (ll. 3-7)

At its most superficial level, these lines indicate nothing more than a change in the kind of relationship that exists between the speaker and his former lovers. However, this "continual change" suggests also the deceit and lack of steadfastness that Wyatt sees in his fellow courtiers and court ladies. Wyatt's speaker here implies that his lovers' changing nature is the reason for the end of his various trysts, but this is ironic: his own nature has been no less changing, or else he would not have enjoyed so many lovers. The only difference here is that the speaker suggests he is different, putting aside the "seeking" for inward focus. Just as within "My mother's maids," Wyatt's critique is that the search outside oneself, rather than within, leads only to vice and, inevitably, danger.

This "change" is contrasted with the speaker's account of his previous relationship with one of

⁴³ Lerer argues that frames of inwardness exist even between poet and poem, separating Wyatt from his speakers even further: "Wyatt's speakers look not so much at the interiorities of subject formation as they look sideways at the invasions of privacy and the intrusions of a lover, a censor, or a reader. The way to read Wyatt ... is thus as a voyeur himself – as the intruder on the private space of lyric and epistolary writing" (165).

the women, which focuses on the intimacy and physicality of their tryst and serves as the counterpart to the threat of the constantly-changing court environment:

Thanked be fortune it hath been otherwise
Twenty times better, but once in special,
In thin array after a pleasant guise,
When her loose gown from her shoulders did fall
And she me caught in her arms long and small,
Therewithal sweetly did me kiss
And softly said, “Dear heart, how like you this?” (ll. 8-14)

The most important quality of this meeting (the “this” mentioned by the woman) is the honesty shared between the speaker and his love; while in the present women avoid him and seek the danger of the court, in this memory the layers of caution and security that separates Wyatt and his speakers from the other courtiers are removed as easily as the woman's gown. Truth shared between two individuals, without worry of influence or deception from other parties, is the closest potential interaction to the inward reflection that Wyatt champions as the only successful approach to courtly life, just as the advice to Poyntz in “My mother's maids” becomes clearer in that intimate frame between the poet and his friend.⁴⁴

Wyatt's speaker is similarly reflective in “There was never file,” though here the speaker defines himself as an object and an instrument, something used and “made” but *not* an entity that can act on its own. The speaker is powerless to act without the influence of others, save to narrate his experience:

⁴⁴ Estrin argues that the woman “challenges the masculine desire for form by assuming the form of the pursuer” that renders the speaker impotent (133). Later, she states that, in this poem, “the breakdown of gender distinctions results in the abandonment of language” (136). However, it is not the breakdown or removal of gender distinctions or roles that causes the speaker any concern; instead, it is the abandonment of truth and honesty for the duplicity of the court that renders him powerless to act within it, other than inwardly.

But reason hath at my folly smiled

And pardoned me since that I me repent

Of my lost years and time misspent:

For youth did me lead and falsehood guiled. (ll. 5-8)

Wyatt's speaker has in the sonnet's octet been "so well filed" (l. 1), "made" (l. 3), "beguiled" (l. 4), "pardoned" (l. 6), led by youth (l. 8), "guiled," (l. 8), had his folly "smiled" at (l. 5), his time "misspent" (l. 7), and his years have been "lost" (l. 7). By emphasizing his position as a passive object, Wyatt's speaker cannot act save to turn inward, to separate himself morally from all those forces that have transformed him into the filing instrument he has become. This is only possible for the speaker after he repents his previous life. By realizing within what the consequences of his error were, the speaker's reason has "pardoned" him for being the "file" he was. He takes an active role in his own life by rejecting the vicious passivity that previously defined him.

When Wyatt's speaker refers to his youth, he mentions specifically that he was "guiled" and "beguiled" rather than being merely led to folly or error: this distinction carries with it a sense of malice for the speaker from his teacher(s). To beguile is to deceive and betray, and Wyatt makes it clear that his speaker's relationship with others is based on a level of duplicity and enmity – the speaker was "made a filing instrument" for a reason, and it was not for his benefit. As a result, Wyatt's speaker was led to rely on one thing: what he *sees* (i.e., outward appearance) as opposed to what might be *real* (inward truth) – he recognizes that there is and will be a difference between the two within the court. He cannot be sure that another's inward self is the same as his or her outward appearance, but the speaker *can* believe what he sees:

Yet this trust I have of full great appearance:

Since that deceit is ay returnable,

Of very force it is agreeable

That therewithal be done the recompense. (ll. 9-12)

His trust is firmly set in the knowledge that the court will remain filled with deceit and deception; the speaker indicates that the price of such duplicity is that the courtiers who practice it will receive it themselves. The speaker says, “that deceit is ay returnable,” meaning that the courtier's deceit can easily be paid back with further deceit (“therewithal be done the recompense”). While Wyatt's speaker was led astray in the past by the vicious cycle of linguistic and sexual infidelity, he has realized his errors and has been pardoned for them by reason. In contrast, those who embrace guile and falsehood are forced to suffer falsehood against themselves, or worse, as with the country mouse of Wyatt's fable, whose ignorance and deceit costs her her life. Wyatt argues here, as he does throughout his lyrics, for inwardness as the only solution to the problem of maintaining a moral life in a vicious court; his speaker in this poem avoids the punishment of returnable deceit by embracing reason and rejecting the errors of his youth. Each of Wyatt's lyrics suggests that the only suitable outcome to the dilemma presented is one of moral separation through inward focus, allowing the Stoic courtier to remain physically within the court while not participating in its deceitful intrigue. This is at least the ideal to which Wyatt aspires, although in reality this philosophy would not be nearly as easy to live by in the Henrian court.

In “What vailleth truth,” the last third of the poem reflects Wyatt's Stoic philosophy on courtly behavior, especially in regards to the difference between seeking inwardness and outwardness and the results of embracing each:

Deceived he is by crafty train

That meaneth no guile and doth remain

Within the trap without redress

But for to love, lo, such a mistress

Whose cruelty nothing can refrain.

What vailleth truth? (ll. 10-15)

Wyatt here provides the example of the unwary courtier – similar to the country mouse in “My mother's maids” – to demonstrate the importance of recognizing both the duplicity of the court and the value of embracing truth despite its accompanying hardship. In the penultimate line, Wyatt focuses on the courtier's unnamed mistress, “Whose cruelty nothing can refrain,” meaning that the cruelty of his mistress is so great that nothing can “refrain” (that is, hold back) her from any action, and he also implies that “nothing” is the lyrical “refrain” (or response) of the courtier to that mistress – the only means of combatting such deceit is to turn inward, denying any outward response to the court.

Wyatt's argument in the poem is that the truth about the court is that “truth” is absent or at least separate from it, and that there is a difference between “truth” and “courtliness.” These final lines emphasize that point by demonstrating the difference between inwardness and outwardness. Wyatt's final question, however, is not necessarily one that suggests despair: by asking for the last time what *vailleth* truth, he implies that the Stoic's hardship is the very thing that strengthens inward truth (by forcing it to prevail within) for those who embrace it, rather than allowing it to defeat them. Indeed, the final two lines restate the dilemma of Wyatt's speaker: while appearance and outwardness can be recognized, that does not provide an individual with hidden, inward truth, which cannot be so easily witnessed by another. As a result, Wyatt's speaker has separated himself from his beguiling fellow courtiers in order to observe the court's goings-on as a spectator and outsider, rather than as a

participant unable to differentiate between appearance and reality. He states:

Then guile beguiled plained should be never

And the reward little trust forever. (ll. 13-14)

Here, Wyatt doubles the intensity of the “guile”; “guile beguiled” is the product of the courtiers' machinations turned on themselves. “Plained” here means both “made obvious” and “complained [of]” – Wyatt's argument is that his fellow courtiers have trapped themselves in their cycle of deception and should never make it clear that they are treating one another with falsehood and guile, lest they suffer the fate of the country mouse. At the same time, the poet states that they cannot complain about any such treatment at the hands of others, because they are no less guilty than anyone else. The reward received by each of these courtiers for his actions is then “little trust forever” – the same trust each places in anyone else.

This “little trust” given and received by the courtiers is the poet's acknowledgment that his speaker still exists as both a part of and apart from the court. The speaker may recognize and despise its deception and falsehood, but he (as well as Wyatt the poet) nonetheless has been affected profoundly by it. He can believe only in the “full great appearance” of others, giving “little trust forever” to all else. One may know his own self, but that knowledge cannot extend to others, and so Wyatt's “little trust” is all that he may offer outwardly to others.

Similarly, Wyatt ends his ballade “They flee from me” with a turn that simultaneously celebrates the honesty of the past while it unfolds a lasting dilemma for Wyatt's speaker and his unnamed lover in the deceptive present. He suggests that they have been separated physically, but their moral differences are far more important:

It was no dream: I lay broad waking.

But all is turned thorough my gentleness
Into a strange fashion of forsaking.
And I have leave to go of her goodness
And she also to use newfangleness.
But since that I so kindly am served
I would fain know what she hath deserved. (ll. 15-21)

That “it was no dream” implies that he had expected the memory of his tryst to be false or imaginary when compared to his current situation. However, he continues, “all is turned thorough my gentleness / Into a strange fashion of forsaking,” suggesting that it is the present and not the past that should be considered unreal or surreal, since the truth he had previously experienced has been transformed in the present into falsehood. That it is the speaker's “gentleness” that has brought about this change is ironic: virtue cannot have ended his tryst, but rather the other courtiers' deceit has separated him from the women he loved (in a “strange fashion of forsaking”) - which is why they now flee from Wyatt's speaker, who remains “gentle.” “Gentleness” and “virtue” here are separate, with the former suggesting a courtly attribute, and one that has brought about the end of the speaker's relationship. His “gentleness” is then not necessarily a trait worth possessing, and one which even he forsakes as he attempts to turn inward, fleeing morally from his former loves as much as they do physically and socially from him.

The honesty the two lovers shared brings about the end of their relationship: both Wyatt's speaker and the woman come to embrace the court, the speaker as an inwardly-focused spectator, the woman as a deceptive participant. The woman follows the fashion of deception shared by many of the courtiers, while the speaker accepts this shift in other's behavior without becoming deceptive himself;

this speaker, like Wyatt's in "There was never file," can trust in outward appearance alone. In fact, the speaker is given the chance to change as the woman has changed; he says, "I have leave to go of her goodness / And she also to use newfangleness" (ll. 18-19). It is her goodness – the truth she shared with the speaker in the past – that allows him to separate himself from her now, when she has forsaken that truth for the "newfangleness" of danger and wild action. Wyatt's speaker's "going" is akin to his transition in "My mother's maids" as they are both inward movements: he is separated because of his Stoic outlook, and the woman's "newfangleness" is her embrace of courtly life and everything Wyatt argues against in his epistolary lines to Poyntz in his second satire.

The speaker continues to emphasize the difference between himself and his former loves by stating, "I so kindly am served" – an ironic admission, as he is not served "kindly" at all by a woman who now flees from him, denying their previous relationship, although he is served in "kind" – his previous treatment of those women have now been turned against him. Wyatt's speaker is given the chance to escape the wild and "newfangled" environment that the woman has embraced. She, however, remains within that duplicitous circle, and the speaker asks: "I would fain know what she hath deserved." He claims he has remained honest and constant, and he ironically inquires as to the reward or punishment of the woman for becoming dishonest, since that transformation is for the speaker (and Wyatt) far less worthy than steadfastness, something that the speaker of this poem may not necessarily embrace any more than his lovers.

Wyatt's separation of his speaker from his beloved in the poem – and the transition of their relationship from one of honesty to one of emotional detachment – serves for the poet as an analogy for a growing separation from truth and a turn towards deception and "change" in the court. This becomes evident in the trend towards "newfangleness" (as even the speaker's former love abandons truth for it) as

does the shift early in the poem from the women's being “gentle, tame, and meek” to becoming “wild.” While Wyatt's speaker does not change as everyone else does, he must accept that others' change; even though he can remain truthful or honest does not mean everyone else can.⁴⁵ The only option for the speaker (whether he wants it or not), just as in “My mother's maids,” is to turn inward and attempt to remove himself morally from the court's games of deception, offering nothing to his fellow courtiers beyond that separation.

Wyatt's argument for Stoic inwardness extends beyond “My mother's maids” to his lyric poetry, using ambiguous language and narrative personae to create frames that mask his criticisms of the court.⁴⁶ At no point in any of these poems does Wyatt argue for any approach other than inwardness and moral isolation from the other Henrician courtiers. Through the construction of layers of meaning (both to create it and hide it), Wyatt demonstrates the courtier's need to turn inward in order to survive in the vicious courtly environment.

45 Waller argues that “the pain of a poem like ‘They Flee from Me’ arises not only from thwarted power but from an inability to formulate any more creative alternative to that permitted by the Court, either on the erotic or the political level” (118). Waller is correct that Wyatt has no alternative to the Court itself. However, Wyatt *does* have one alternative to his outward status – the turn inward, where the Court has no power over the individual self.

46 Thomson argues that “a man's philosophy is not to be judged from occasional love poems which may involve the adoption of fictional attitudes” (“Classical Philosophy” 96). However, when one combines the philosophies espoused in these lyrics with the argument of the satires, Wyatt's Stoicism becomes clearly visible.

Conclusion

Wyatt's "My mother's maids" provides a critique of the Tudor court and its inhabitants, revealed within a series of Silenus box-like narrative frames which demonstrate decreasing levels of personal intimacy and security felt by the speaker within increasingly larger spheres of society. The broader the scope of the poem's frames, the more violent the results: the country mouse in the fable is killed by a house cat, while the speaker of the poem curses his fellow courtiers in the epistle following the fable. Wyatt argues that the only profitable solution is for an individual to turn inward, allowing that person to remain within the court but not having to sacrifice himself to the deceit of his fellow courtiers.

This criticism extends beyond the poem to attack Horatian satire; Horace's *Satire 2.6*, the model for Wyatt's work, suggests that the most successful response to the vice of city life is one of retreat from the city to the countryside. Wyatt rejects Horace's argument in his own satire, demonstrating the folly of such a suggestion. Complete retreat from the court makes it impossible for one to continue to exist within it, something Wyatt, a courtier and diplomat, must do in order to make a living. Wyatt's criticisms of his fellow courtiers and the court itself, in the number of frames built around frames of the poem's structure that grow increasingly larger and more dangerous in scope, serve to satirize Horace's poetic progression from disguised to more open praises of his own patron. Horace wants to thank his financier as much as he wants to educate his reader as to the solace of the country, while Wyatt is forced to obscure the clarity of his criticisms even as he attempts to edify his own audience of the folly of trusting in the court.

Wyatt's critique also reappears in a number of his lyric poems, often in the same manner of frame-within-frame narration as in "My mother's maids," to demonstrate a growing sense of danger

within the world as one moves further and further outward from his or her own self. The less concrete Wyatt is in establishing his speaker's identity and that speaker's place within the court, the more direct and unveiled his criticisms can be. However, as Wyatt's speaker becomes more defined within a specific poem, the more hidden the poet's message becomes; the ambiguity of the poem protects the speaker from direct attack or criticism himself – a danger that, as Wyatt suggests in “My mother's maids,” is potentially fatal. After all, Wyatt's satires were written during his exile in Kent, after a short period of imprisonment during which the poet supposedly saw Anne Boleyn executed. The danger of which he wrote was intensely real for him. Safety exists only inwardly, where an individual's ideas cannot be twisted by the deceit of others and where that individual can trust in more than appearances.

Ultimately, Wyatt's Stoic philosophy is most explicit in *The Quyetete of Minde*, his translation of Plutarch's *De Tranquillitate et Securitate Animi*, in which the poet's argument for an inward focus is most clearly explained and greatly detailed. The work concludes with an affirmation of Stoic steadfastness that best states Wyatt's aim in these poems:

It can no wyse by sayde/whyle I lyue this I wyll nat suffre/lette it be so/but this I may
saye whyle I lyue/this I wyll nat do/I wyl nat lye/I wyll vse no crafty deceites for to
compasse men/I wyll nat begyle/I wyll nat disceitfully lye in awayte. this syns it is in
vs/it is a great help to them [d.i^v] that lyfte them selfe vp to the surety of mynde/in
which maner lyke as botches be in the body/so is a naughty conscience in the soule/as
that that leueth repentaunce/busely prickyng and pulling the minde.⁴⁷

While this is Wyatt translating Plutarch, it is a mirror of his arguments in “My mother's maids” and his lyrics: “I wyl nat lye,” “I wyll vse no crafty deceites for to compasse men,” and “I wyll nat begyle” all suggest an inward mindset very different from the outward focus of the poet's fellow courtiers, and one

47 Muir and Thomson 461.

which he claims is necessary in order to survive within the dangerous Tudor court. Further, these statements all stress a desire not to act outwardly so as not to create error within oneself, a “naughty conscience in the soul” and “repentaunce/busely prickyng and pulling the minde.” The outward action is rejected by Plutarch and Wyatt while inward consequences remain, as in the rest of Wyatt's works, the sole consideration for a Stoic.

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