

Paraphrase and Analysis Exercise

In this exercise you will write a three- to five-page explication of a poem that begins with a brief (three to five sentences *maximum*) paraphrase of the poem. (In the examples below, the paraphrase is underlined.) You should choose a poem we have *not* discussed in class (and please don't write on either of the two poems below). The rest of the paper should develop an argument about, or "reading" of the poem (the argument, or thesis in the example below is **boldfaced**) that is based on things in the poem that *cannot be paraphrased easily* (imagery, metaphor, meter, alliteration, syntax, rhetorical figures, diction, allusions to myth and history, symbolism, irony, etc.). Many of the handouts on my web page will be useful to you, as will the *Oxford English Dictionary* (second ed.), and a standard glossary of literary terms. If you write about a translation or adaptation of a Petrarchan poem (or other poem that is a translation or adaptation), you may want to consult that poem (preferably in the Durling translation). If your poem is the length of a sonnet, or shorter, please preface your paper with a transcription of the text.

Please do not consult secondary literature as you work on your analysis—the purpose of this exercise is for you to show that you can use the basic tools of literary interpretation and analysis. Feel free to consult dictionaries and general reference works for help in tracking down historical references and literary allusions, but do not consult monographs, journal articles, or web sites on your poem. Feel free to use information in the footnotes and editorial headnotes of our anthology. Do not, under any circumstances, consult a sparknotes.com analysis of your poem.

Please note my formatting notes (boldfaced, in brackets) in the examples below. For other formatting questions, please consult the *MLA Handbook*.

You do not need to underline the paraphrase and boldface the thesis in your own paper.

Example 1

Harry Le Roi

Dr. Johnson

English 150-07

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The Rejection of Metaphor in Shakespeare's Sonnet 18

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date;
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimmed.
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:
 So long as men can breathe or eyes can see
 So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

[The poem is quoted here in block quotation format, which should be used any time you quote more than three lines of text. Note that the quotation is indented and justified left (*not* centered on the page)—it appears exactly as it appears in the book. Because it is a block quotation, quotation marks are *not* required around the poem. Quotations are *not* italicized. (If the poem has line numbers or footnotes in your book, you don't need to reproduce them in the quotation.)]

Shakespeare's Sonnet 18¹ follows the so-called "procreation sonnets," in which the poet urges his young friend to marry and have children so that his beauty will be preserved in his offspring.² In Sonnet 18, the poem's speaker responds to the young man's refusal to procreate by declaring that he, as a poet, will set himself to the task of immortalizing the young man in verse instead. Beginning with a gently teasing question, "Shall I compare

¹[Note: Quotation marks are not required when referring to Shakespeare's sonnets, though they are required for titles of most short poems, such as Tennyson's "Ulysses." The titles of long poems are italicized, as in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*.]

²[Note: The biographical, contextual, and historical information necessary for reading a poem should be stated as briefly as possible—preferably in a single sentence. You are not writing an encyclopedia entry on Shakespeare—you're analyzing one of his poems, and that should be your central focus.]

thee to a summer's day?," the poet insists instead that the young man's beauty transcends nature itself, and is immortal, because the speaker has decided to write poetry about the young man. **The poem derives much of its power from the fact that this plan—a plan that questions the usefulness of metaphor as a poetic tool, at least in this instance—is not revealed until the final couplet, yet the structure, diction, and rhetorical strategies of the poem have, upon later reflection, laid the groundwork necessary for immortalizing the young man in verse.**

The poem's success depends on a structural tension between the first twelve lines, which contemplate the problems involved in comparing the young man to "a summer's day" (1), and the final couplet, which reveals that the poem itself has been composed in order to ensure the young man's immortality. The speaker emphasizes the timelessness of the young man's beauty by contrasting it with a meteorological ideal of beauty and calm: the young man is not only "more lovely," and "more temperate," he also will not suffer summer's decline into autumn and winter, metaphors for the young man's own decline into old age and death. A less effective poem would simply compare the young man to the characteristic brightness and calm of a summer's day; here, one of the most important poetic devices—metaphor—is rejected, and the reader's sense of the youth's transcendent beauty is paradoxically heightened as the poet exposes the problems and contradictions inherent in figurative language: a summer's day might be beautiful, but that beauty is also a reminder that such beauty is not permanent; a summer's day will always become a winter's day eventually. The poet's bold rejection of metaphor is surprising to the reader, and it demands a solution that only the poet can provide, but not until after he has asserted the immortality of the youth, and enhanced the reader's sense of his own status as a poet

who is so powerful that he doesn't need to use metaphor.

Although the poem does not reveal its awareness of itself as an immortalizing work of art until the final couplet, the poem's diction recognizes the relationship between the young man's beauty and eternity early on—and it does so in a way that allows the poet to create meaning based on the connotations of words, rather than on metaphors and images. The word “temperate” (2), which was commonly applied to both people and the weather in Elizabethan English (*OED* 1-3a), presumably points to the young man as someone who is “gentle, mild, forbearing . . . moderate” (*OED* 1). But the word also has etymological associations to the Latin *tempus*, or “time” (*OED*, *sub* “temper”), as in the English cognates “temporal” and “temporary.” The word thus combines the youth's mildness with the idea of eternity in a way that resonates in line 12, where the young man grows “in eternal lines to time.” The transition to the couplet's revelation of the poem's status as agent of immortality is given great force in the ambiguity of the word “lines.” The word may imply genealogical lines (as in “lineage”), which are necessarily being fulfilled in poetry, because the young man has refused to marry and make his own genealogical lines through procreation. But the poem itself is composed of “lines” of poetry, and the ambiguity dissolves the distinction between these two very different things. The word “lines” is also suggestive of rope, and it is possible to view the young man as being bound eternally to the poem. And there is a possible allusion to the Fates in Greek mythology, who cut the thread of each person's fate in relation to the length of his or her life (*OED* I.ii.g). If the young man's line of fate is eternal, it will never be cut.

The poem's use of anaphora in lines 5-6, 10-11, and 13-14 also contributes a linguistic and rhetorical, rather than a figurative and metaphorical, effect to the poem. The

first anaphora (“And often is his gold complexion dimmed; / And every fair from fair sometime declines,” 6-7) emphasizes the fact that all temporal beauty will fade (“*every* fair from fair declines”), and suggests an eternal, and ominous cycle of “ands” from which beauty cannot escape, as one of Macbeth’s final speeches suggests: “Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow / Creeps in this petty pace from day to day / To the last syllable of recorded time” (5.5.19-21). The second anaphora (“Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow’st, / Nor shall death brag thou wand’rest in his shade,” 10-11) emphasizes (especially tied to the “not” in line 9) the poet’s powerful negation of death, which is presented here as a personified figure, or another metaphor that is being turned away. The second anaphora is also a kind of negation of the first anaphora, and constitutes the second part of the poet’s pseudo-logical progression: All beauty fades, but your beauty will not, because it will live in my verse. The third anaphora, which repeats the phrase “So long” in the final couplet, provides a final, emphatic declaration of immortality, not only because the young’s man’s beauty will live as long as people can read this poem, but because that period of time, as the poet defines will be *very* long (if we read “so” as an intensifier). The words themselves, though very short, contain the same long “o” vowel that forces the reader to slow down, and to give a greater amount of time to repeating two words that represent a sort of linguistic eternity within themselves.

The poet’s rejection of metaphor heightens the reader’s awareness of his poetic prowess, because it shows us how many other tools this poet has to express his love for the young man. But because this is only one sonnet in a series of 127 on this topic, Shakespeare will have plenty of time to pursue metaphor elsewhere. But Sonnet 18 is a reminder that the poem itself is the ultimate metaphor for the people and ideas it reflects.

WORKS CITED

Shakespeare, William. *The Riverside Shakespeare*. G. Wilson Knight, ed. New York:
Houghton Mifflin, 1974.

Example 2

Richard M. Nixon

Dr. Johnson

English 150-07

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Rethinking Petrarch's White Doe: Wyatt's "Whoso list to hunt"

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

Sir Thomas Wyatt's "Whoso list to hunt," which is often described as a translation of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* 190, depicts a speaker informing his friends (or anyone within earshot) that he knows where to find a deer if they are interested in hunting it. He declares that he has exhausted himself in pursuit of this game, and suspects that any efforts to subdue it will be futile, especially because the deer wears a necklace identifying her as the property of Caesar, and indicating that she is wild, even though she seems tame. **The poem is more an adaptation than a translation of the Petrarch sonnet, and Wyatt's changes considerably amplify the tensions inherent in the traditional Petrarchan theme of the unapproachable object of desire. In the Wyatt poem, the speaker reflects not only a**

genuine desire for the deer, but a bewilderment at the difficulty involved in attaining it, and a cynicism about the idea of the hunt altogether.

Wyatt's poem, like Petrarch's, uses the idea of the hunt as a metaphor for the poet's pursuit of an idealized object of amorous desire. But whereas the metaphor of the hunt is diminished in Petrarch's poem (the speaker contemplates the deer more than he actually hunts her), Wyatt emphasizes the arduousness of the "vain travail" that makes him "so sore" (3), and that leaves him with a "wearied mind" (5), and "fainting" (7). The cluster of words related to work amplify Petrarch's *lavoro* (6)—which he is actually *leaving behind* so he can follow the deer—and they also balance the ways in which pursuit is both physically and mentally demanding. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "sore" included not only the modern sense of sore muscles, but also "mental suffering . . . grief" (sb. 1.6). "Fainting" also suggests not only physical exhaustion, but emotional exhaustion, or the swoon of a romantic lover such as Chaucer's Troilus (the *OED* indicates that this would have been the primary meaning in Tudor England). Wyatt thus makes the poem more physical and more introspective at the same time. He has combined the reality of the courtly hunt with the inner struggles of courtly love in a way that exposes the realities and dangers involved in both.

Wyatt also transforms Petrarch's virtuous and chaste deer into a more ethically ambiguous creature. Whereas Petrarch's speaker contemplates a "white doe," Wyatt's speaker contemplates only a "hind." In Petrarch's Italian "white" is "candida," a word that has strong connotations of purity and innocence, as in one of the more archaic meanings of the English cognate "candid" (*OED* 2.b). The sign around the doe's neck is encrusted only with diamonds (suggesting eternal beauty, but also steadfastness and coldness), not

topazes (a common symbol for chastity in Renaissance art),³ as in Petrarch. The deer in Wyatt's poem is not viewed as an object of virtue, but simply as an unattainable object of desire. Because the deer is not idealized, and because she is probably not chaste, the tension between the speaker and the object of desire is increased: he cannot have her, but not because of her virtue. It is, instead, Caesar that stands in his way. Caesar in Wyatt's poem is probably not God, as in Petrarch's version, but a king in the temporal world—perhaps Henry VIII, if the common belief that the doe represents Anne Boleyn, with whom Wyatt is supposed to have had an affair, is correct. Regardless of the poem's historical background, Wyatt's failure to idealize the doe results in a cynicism about the realities of court life: The lover is not contending with God for the doe, but with his fellow courtiers, and with his king, and this results in a more immediate, and more physically dangerous set of consequences for the speaker.

Although Caesar is an obstacle to the speaker's pursuit of the doe, the doe presents dangers of her own. The extent to which the warning spelled out at the end of the poem comes from Caesar or from the doe is unclear: "*Noli me tangere*, for Caesar's I am / And wild for to hold, though I seem tame" (13-14). The lack of punctuation in the manuscript version of the poem makes it unclear where the quotation marks should be put. Are both lines on the necklace, or only the Latin tag? Is the second line a warning coming from the doe herself? A great amount of weight rests on the penultimate word: "seme." Is she wild, or tame, or both? The problem is not only that the speaker cannot have her, but that he cannot know what her own desires are. Although the conventional Petrarchan lady by

³[Source: Dictionary of Symbols?]

definition refuses to return the lover's affections in order to preserve her chastity, the lady in Wyatt's poem might actually love him in return, but cannot act on it, or will not act on it.

Wyatt offers us, then, not the dream vision of Petrarch, but a dramatic realization of the futility of pursuing a love object at court: "sethens in a nett I seke to hold the wynde" (8). The image may refer to the speaker's inability to catch the deer—he ends up with only wind in his net. But the force of "I seke" also suggests a continued effort of vain pursuit—he is doggedly chasing not the deer, but the wind, because experience has shown him that they are equally impossible to catch. Why does the speaker continue the hunt? Why doesn't he just put the net away? In the middle of the poem the speaker indicates that he wants to "leve of" ("leave off") (7), or not participate in the hunt any longer, but the rest of the poem continues the speaker's contemplation of the deer and the futility of pursuing her. As a courtier, leaving the court, and leaving the pursuit is perhaps not an option. He must remain, and continue to engage in activities that he is beginning to view not only as futile and unsatisfying, but dangerous. Ultimately, the poem serves as a message of counsel to his fellow courtiers. If he cannot leave this dangerous environment, he can at least warn others about the dangers he perceives there.

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