

How do Whitman's "*O Captain! My Captain*" and Wyatt's "*My Galley, Charged with Forgetfulness*" use metaphor to shape meaning?

Metaphors are 'figures of speech' that are used to broaden the meaning of an idea, giving subtle inferences and hidden messages. Walt Whitman's 19th century American poem, "*O Captain, My Captain*", employs this device to voice his opinions of President Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War. We can infer this, despite him not clarifying it, because of the context of the poem, which is a tribute to Lincoln after his death in 1865. He is clearly idolised by Whitman, who calls him "Captain" and "Father" in the poem. Sir Thomas Wyatt was England's pioneering sonneteer; as an early 16th century English sonnet, "*My Galley, Charged with Forgetfulness*", is an extended metaphor of a ship used to portray his ideas about his "lord", King Henry VIII. This poem never explicitly declares this to be the intended meaning, but, because of the context of the poem and the language choices, the reader can infer it. Both use seafaring metaphors to represent their views about the leaders of their time periods.

Both poems use nautical metaphors to describe ships and boats that are weathered, representing the theme of hard struggle. For example, Whitman's context and use of the line "the ship has weather'd every rack" suggests the 'Ship' is the people of America in the aftermath of the Civil war. The use of personification, giving the ship human characteristics (suggesting it is "grim and daring"), suggests that it is more than a metaphor to him and that, like America, it should be loved. He uses the ship to suggest that they have seen hardship and have been tainted by it, despite that they stand together and survive as a union. Wyatt perhaps uses the ship to describe his time in Tudor court. He is implying that the "galley, charged with forgetfulness, through sharp seas in winter nights" is like the rocky, dangerous threat of being part of the court and knowing the King. Wyatt himself was arrested and captured during his time in parliament, allegedly having an affair with Anne Boleyn, and blamed this on being a 'knight of the shire' (in modern terms, an M.P.). Wyatt personifies the ship, saying that it is "charged with forgetfulness" - which of course an inanimate object cannot be, again suggesting that he has deeper love for the ship. Vessels are traditionally personified as women by sailors, 'her' and 'she', as they grow attachments to them because they spend so much time on them.

Both poems' content suggests a questioning of faith. Wyatt's poem suggests that the narrator, most likely Wyatt, feels he has been deserted by god. He uses "my lord" in the poem to depict a being that demonstrates "cruelness", "readiness" and "fearfulness". One could assume that this is a formal title to address his King. As the "lord" is written in lower case, this supports the idea that he is addressing someone in a position of authority and not an almighty presence - God - as this idea would be written with a capitalised beginning to show this benevolent ruler. However, it does imply that he could be describing God and that the poem is about moving away from religion as the poem is criticising the leader. If he is addressing God, the lowercase letter, as opposed to the uppercase, could support the idea of a loss of faith as he could be demoralising God by using a slightly condemning and degrading method of writing his name. Wyatt writes "Drowned is Reason". The abstract noun ("reason") and the verb are both capitalised and this is the only time Wyatt does this in the poems, suggesting a deeper, more powerful meaning than is appears. It means that he has lost his reasoning so he will not find a solution to his problem, yet he finds "comfort" in this.