

Sir Thomas Wyatt: Poems Summary and Analysis of 'The Lively Sparks'

<p>The lively sparks that issue from those eyes Against the which ne vailleth no defence Have pressed mine heart and done it none offence With quaking pleasure more than once or twice. Was never man could anything devise The sunbeams to turn with so great vehemence To daze man's sight, as by their bright presence Dazed am I, much like unto the guise Of one stricken with dint of lightning, Blinded with the stroke, erring here and there. So call I for help, I not when ne where, The pain of my fall patiently bearing. For after the blaze, as is no wonder, Of deadly "Nay" hear I the fearful thunder.</p>	<p>Summary The sonnet opens with the narrator explaining how he has been dazzled by the eyes of the lady. There is no defence against their bewitching 'sparks' which have penetrated his heart, but without damage. He is overcome with the power of her gaze and experiences 'quaking pleasure'. He is overwhelmed to the point of confusion, and feels as if he has been struck by lightning. He appears to stumble and fall in the light, and calls for help as he has lost his bearing. He does begin to feel pain as he falls, but bears the discomfort with fortitude. He realizes that the light which has enchanted him is followed by the deadly rumble of thunder.</p>
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Analysis

The sonnet uses a variety of types of light to describe the gaze of the lady. The light is initially 'sparks', which could be said to wane as quickly as they appear. Even these brief flashes cause the narrator to seek cover; which he does not find. The sparks pierce his heart, but, at this point, do not damage it. Feeling the need to take cover should indicate that the narrator will not be able to stand a harsher radiance. Her love is then compared to sunbeams, but the 'vehemence' or harshness goes beyond the gentle warmth of an English summer's day. He is overcome by this, as if stunned by a bolt of lightning. The lightning comparison sees him weak and defenseless - blind, disoriented and confused. The narrator bears the strike with fortitude, and awaits the inevitable 'fearful' consequences of his love; as thunder follows lightning, so there may be 'deadly' penalties for this relationship. These are clever allusions to the condition of love as would be appreciated by the Tudor court; an initial attraction may lead to love, which may in turn lead to vulnerability and public shame or social weakness.

Wyatt flexes the structure of the sonnet here as the division between the sestet and the octave is organized through the use of caesura and enjambment in line 8. This enhances the proximity of one idea to the other. This idea is echoed in the metaphors used as the closer lightning is to thunder, the more dangerous the consequences are

<p>Shakespeare 138</p> <p>When my love swears that she is made of truth I do believe her, though I know she lies, That she might think me some untutor'd youth, Unlearned in the world's false subtleties. Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young, Although she knows my days are past the best, Simply I credit her false speaking tongue: On both sides thus is simple truth suppress'd. But wherefore says she not she is unjust? And wherefore say not I that I am old? O, love's best habit is in seeming trust, And age in love loves not to have years told: Therefore I lie with her and she with me, And in our faults by lies we flatter'd be</p>	<p>Quando il mio amore giura d'esser tutta fedeltà io voglio crederle, anche se so che mente, perché possa pensarmi un giovane immaturo che del mondo ignora l'arte sottile del fingere. Così con vanità pensando che mi creda giovane, anche se sa che in me il meglio è tramontato, candidamente accetto la sua lingua menzognera - e così da entrambi la pura verità è taciuta. Ma perché ella non dice di essermi infedele? E perché anch'io non le dico d'esser vecchio? No, l'amor si veste meglio se simula fiducia e l'età in amore non vuol conoscer anni. Per questo con lei mento e lei mente con me, e nei nostri errori ci lusinghiamo mentendo.</p>
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Commentary

Sonnet 138 presents a candid psychological study of the mistress that reveals many of her hypocrisies. Certainly she is still very much the poet's mistress, but the poet is under no illusions about her character: "When my love swears that she is made of truth, / I do believe her, though I know she lies." He accepts without protest her "false-speaking tongue" and expects nothing better of her. Cynically, he too deceives and is comforted by knowing that he is no longer fooled by the woman's charade of fidelity to him, nor she by how young and simpleminded he presents himself to be.

In a relationship without affection or trust, the two lovers agree to a relationship based on mutual deception. Both agree never to voice the truth about just how much their relationship is built on never-spoken truths: "But wherefore says she not she is unjust? / And wherefore say not I that I am old?" Note that the sentence construction in these two lines is identical, similar to how both the poet and the woman identically feign lying when each knows that the other person knows the truth.

The main theme of the concluding two lines is lust, but it is treated with a wry humor. The poet is content to support the woman's lies because he is flattered that she thinks him young — even though he knows that she is well aware of just how old he is. On the other hand, he does not challenge her pledges of faithfulness — even though she knows that he is aware of her infidelity. Neither is disposed to unveil the other's defects. Ultimately the poet and the woman remain together for two reasons, the first being their sexual relationship, the second that they are obviously comfortable with each other's lying. Both of these reasons are indicated by the pun on the word "lie," meaning either "to have sex with" or "to deceive": "Therefore I lie with her and she with me, / And in our faults by lies we flattered be."

<http://www.shakespeareweb.it/sonetti/shakespeare>