

Terence Marin

Mr. Mantyk

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### Two Journeys via Sonnet by Bruce Dale Wise

There are many factors that make a great journey: the beauty of the sites along the way, the comfort of the travel, and the ability of the host or guide to package it all in a meaningful way. Two sonnets by contemporary poet Bruce Dale Wise of Washington State, “One Has To” and “To a Fellow Traveler,” present readers with two journeys through the winding fourteen lines of the classic English sonnet. But, ultimately one of the two sonnets proves a more satisfying and meaningful journey than the other.

Wise’s two sonnets at first seem very different, but the similarities become apparent after taking a closer look. “One Has To” sounds like a pep talk the poet is giving himself, beginning and ending with the same six words: “one has to keep on striving.” “To a Fellow Traveler,” on the other hand, evokes the imagery of a travel journal, including a Buddhist shrine once visited by Tang Dynasty poet Wang Wei, “tow’ring peaks,” mountains, a waterfall, a lake, and even an exotic creature: a, presumably Chinese, dragon. Taking a second look, there are many similarities too. Both sonnets are written in iambic pentameter, meaning that they have five iambs per line, which works out to approximately ten syllables per line. Further, both have similar rhyme schemes with every other line rhyming for the first three quatrains (sets of four lines) and each poem finally ending with a rhyming couplet (set of two lines).

The most significant similarity between the two sonnets is that both express a journey. In “One Has To” there is a strong sense of the journey through life: trying something, failing, and

then trying again. This feeling of trying over and over again is reinforced by the poet's repetition of the words "one has to" four times over the course of the sonnet. In "To a Fellow Traveler," the journey is more explicit and even the title begins with the implication that one traveler on a journey is speaking to another traveler on a journey.

Understanding then that both are journeys, which one is the better of the two? "One Has To" is the better of the two journeys, and the better poem, for several reasons. Given the confines of the fourteen lines of the sonnet, "One Has To" is able to create a more vivid journey despite the fact that it has less actual imagery than "To a Fellow Traveler." How does it accomplish this curious feat? It relies on feelings that most people, especially those who have ever tried to accomplish anything even somewhat significant, would have experienced. For example, the poem says "no one believes in what one is doing" and "when one's spirit flags, when one's doubt rises / when one seems so distant from the sublime / even in the midst of one more crisis." Readers can immediately and effectively experience the poet's journey through their own journeys where they tried something, failed, and tried again. In "To a Fellow Traveler," however, readers are zipped around an enchanting Buddhist shrine and breathtaking landscape with barely enough time to be enchanted or have their breathes taken away. Most Western readers will not have been to this particular spot as they have been to the spots in "One Has To." Thus, using common themes, "One Has To" creates a more vivid journey.

Additionally, in the same fourteen lines, "One Has To" is able to relate a journey that is farther reaching and feels greater and more significant in its scope than the journey in "To a Fellow Traveler." "One Has To" does this by relying on the journey through time and not necessarily place. This poem feels like it covers a large chunk of time, enough to have tried something significant, failed, and tried again; it's possibly six months, or six years, or even sixty

years. In “To a Fellow Traveler,” it feels like traveling around the world, presumably to China. This is a very far distance, of course. Yet, because of modern transportation technology, such a journey could realistically be done in a couple of days from America, and certainly in no more than a week or two by slower than average means. Since “One Has To” does not deal with space, or perhaps transcends it, only a comparison of the time traveled can be examined. Looking at time traveled then, “One Has To” seems the greater of the two sonnets, spanning up to a lifetime.

In conclusion, the two sonnets by Bruce Dale Wise, “One Has To” and “To a Fellow Traveler,” present two different journeys. The journey in “One Has To” is the better of the two because of its use of familiar sites within the relatively tight confines of the fourteen-line sonnet and because of the greater distance its journey travels through time. “To a Fellow Traveler” could have succeeded more fully if it used its fourteen lines to focus on one facet of the enchanting journey, such as the Shrine of Incense Stored, allowing readers to become familiar with it and travel all the way back to Wang Wei in the Tang Dynasty. That would have certainly been an even greater journey!

**1. Map the essay. Mark the following parts of the essay:**

- Where are the similarities presented?
- Where are the differences presented?
- Where is a general summary of each poem given?
- Where is the better poem revealed?

**2. Does one need to have read the poems to understand the essay and comparison? Why or why not?**

**3. Does the essay writer use first person (I, me, my, we) or second person (you)? What effect does this have?**

**4. What is similar about the way the essay begins and ends?**