

THE SONNET

FROM: *THE MAKING OF A POEM*

1. It is a poem of fourteen lines, usually iambic.
2. There are two kinds of sonnet, with very different histories behind their different forms: the Petrarchan and the Shakespearean.
3. The Petrarchan sonnet is Italian in origin, has an octave of eight lines and a sestet of six. The rhyme scheme of the octave is *ababcdcd* and of the sestet *cdecde*.
4. The Shakespearean sonnet was developed in England and has more than just surface difference from the Petrarchan.
5. The rhyme scheme of the Shakespearean sonnet is *ababcdcdefeg*. There is no octave/sestet structure to it. The final couplet is a defining feature.

Petrarch, influenced by Dante, wrote love poems to Laura. These witty poems full of longing made “a narrative out of a necklace of short poems.”

A feature of the Italian sonnet is the octave and sestet: “One strong opening statement of eight lines followed by a resolution to the emotional or intellectual question of the first part of the poem.”

Thomas Wyatt was one of the first Englishmen to adapt the sonnet “to his own uses and talents.” He and Surrey moved the sonnet “away from the slightly more intellectual and argumentative Petrarchan form, gave a new resonance to the ending, through the often declamatory couplet. By Shakespeare’s time, this couplet was often the loudest, most powerful part of the sonnet.”

“Shakespearean sonnet, with its three quatrains and final couplet...allowed a fairly free association of images to develop lyrically toward a conclusion...the Petrarchan sonnet as Milton used it in ‘On His Blindness,’ with all the dignity of proposal and response.”

The sonnet can “suggest narrative progress through its sequence structure while...it is capable of the essential lyric qualities of being musical, brief, and memorable.

**Read the following sonnets, annotate, and briefly paraphrase.
Write your own sonnet.**

Shall I Compare Thee To A Summer's Day?

Shakespeare #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 dimm'd;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;
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.

Sonnet 73

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou seest the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west,
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed whereon it must expire
Consumed with that which it was nourish'd by.
This thou perceivest, which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

Ozymandias

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert ... Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works ye mighty and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

■ Percy Bysshe Shelley

Edna St. Vincent Millay

What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why,
I have forgotten, and what arms have lain
Under my head till morning; but the rain
Is full of ghosts tonight, that tap and sigh
Upon the glass and listen for reply;
And in my heart there stirs a quiet pain
For unremembered lads that not again
Will turn to me at midnight with a cry.
Thus in the winter stands a lonely tree,
Nor knows what birds have vanished one by one,
Yet know its boughs more silent than before:
I cannot say what loves have come and gone;
I only know that summer sang in me

On His Blindness

When I consider how my light is spent
Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide
Lodg'd with me useless, though my soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest he returning chide,
"Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?"
I fondly ask. But Patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies: "God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts: who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
Is kingly; thousands at his bidding speed
And post o'er land and ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and wait."

John Milton

The Haw Lantern

The wintry haw is burning out of season,
crab of the thorn, a small light for small people,
wanting no more from them but that they keep
the wick of self-respect from dying out,
not having to blind them with illumination.

But sometimes when your breath plumes in the frost
it takes the roaming shape of Diogenes
with his lantern, seeking one just man;
so you end up scrutinized from behind the haw
he holds up at eye-level on its twig,
and you flinch before its bonded pith and stone,
its blood-prick that you wish would test and clear you,
its pecked-at ripeness that scans you, then moves on.

Seamus Heaney

Sonnet XLIII: Elizabeth Barrett Browning

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
I love thee to the level of everyday's
Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints,--I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life!--and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.

Bright Star : John Keats

Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art--
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,
The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors--
No--yet still stedfast, still unchangeable,
Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever--or else swoon to death.

Holy Sonnet VII: At The Round Earth's Imagin'd Corners

**At the round earth's imagin'd corners, blow
Your trumpets, angels, and arise, arise
From death, you numberless infinities
Of souls, and to your scatter'd bodies go;
All whom the flood did, and fire shall o'erthrow,
All whom war, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,
Despair, law, chance hath slain, and you whose eyes
Shall behold God and never taste death's woe.
But let them sleep, Lord, and me mourn a space,
For if above all these my sins abound,
'Tis late to ask abundance of thy grace
When we are there; here on this lowly ground
Teach me how to repent; for that's as good
As if thou'hadst seal'd my pardon with thy blood.**

John Donne