

Reading the Renaissance Lyric

Poetic Terminology

Italian (Petrarchan) Sonnet

- 1 octave + 1 sestet (14 lines)
- Rhyme scheme: abba abba cde cde or abba abba cdc cdc (other variants are possible)
- Line 9 generally contains a “turn” (Italian *volta*) in which the subject of the poem shifts, often from problem to resolution

English (Shakespearean) Sonnet

- 3 quatrains + 1 couplet (14 lines)
- Rhyme scheme: abab cdcd efef gg
- A *volta* generally occurs in the couplet.

Most Common Metrical Feet

- Iamb: unstressed syllable followed by stressed syllable (e.g. *the door, again*).
- Trochee: stressed syllable followed by unstressed syllable (e.g. *golden*).

Iambic Pentameter

- Five iambic feet (10 syllables).
- There is generally a pause called a *caesura* in the middle of the line.
- To vary the rhythm, some non-iambic feet may occur, but the majority of feet must be iambic, and there may be no more than five feet.

Blank Verse: Unrhymed Iambic Pentameter

Petrarch (1304-1374), Rime 140

Love, who reigns in my thought and keeps his principal seat in my heart, comes like an armed warrior into my forehead, there places himself and there sets up his banner. She who teaches me to love and to suffer and who wishes that reason, modesty and reverence should restrain my great desire and burning hope, thrusts aside and disdains our ardour. Wherefore Love in terror flies to my heart, abandoning all his enterprise, and laments and trembles; there he hides himself and no more appears without. What can I do, when my lord is afraid, except stay with him until the last hour? For he makes a fine end who dies loving well.

Prose translation from the original Italian by Patrick Cruttwell, *The English Sonnet* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1966), p. 9.

Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542)

 The long love that in my thought I harbour,
 And in mine heart doth keep his residence,
 Into my face presseth with bold pretence,
 And therein campeth displaying his banner.
5 She that me learneth to love and to suffer,
 And wills that my trust, and lust's negligence
 Be reined by reason, shame, and reverence,
 With his hardiness takes displeasure.
 Wherewith love to the heart's forest he fleeth,
10 Leaving his enterprise with pain and cry,
 And there him hideth, and not appeareth.
 What may I do, when my master feareth,
 But in the field with him to live and die?
 For good is the life, ending faithfully.

Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1517-1547)

 Love, that liveth and reigneth in my thought,
 That built his seat within my captive breast ;
 Clad in the arms wherein with me he fought,
 Oft in my face he doth his banner rest.
5 She, that taught me to love, and suffer pain ;
 My doubtful hope, and eke my hot desire
 With shamefaced cloak to shadow and restrain,
 Her smiling grace converteth straight to ire.
 And coward Love then to the heart apace
10 Taket his flight ; whereas he lurks, and plains
 His purpose lost, and dare not shew his face.
 For my Lord's guilt thus faultless bide I pains.
 Yet from my Lord shall not my foot remove :
 Sweet is his death, that takes his end by love.

John Donne (1572-1631)

“A Valediction Forbidding Mourning”

As virtuous men pass mildly away,
And whisper to their souls to go,
Whilst some of their sad friends do say,
“Now his breath goes,” and some say, “No.”

5 So let us melt, and make no noise,
No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move ;
‘Twere profanation of our joys
To tell the laity our love.

10 Moving of th’ earth brings harms and fears ;
Men reckon what it did, and meant ;
But trepidation of the spheres,
Though greater far, is innocent.

15 Dull sublunary lovers’ love
—Whose soul is sense—cannot admit
Of absence, ‘cause it doth remove
The thing which elemented it.

20 But we by a love so much refined,
That ourselves know not what it is,
Inter-assurèd of the mind,
Care less, eyes, lips and hands to miss.

Our two souls therefore, which are one,
Though I must go, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
Like gold to aery thinness beat.

25 If they be two, they are two so
As stiff twin compasses are two ;
Thy soul, the fix’d foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if th’ other do.

30 And though it in the centre sit,
Yet, when the other far doth roam,
It leans, and hearkens after it,
And grows erect, as that comes home.

35 Such wilt thou be to me, who must,
Like th’ other foot, obliquely run ;
Thy firmness makes my circle just,
And makes me end where I begun.