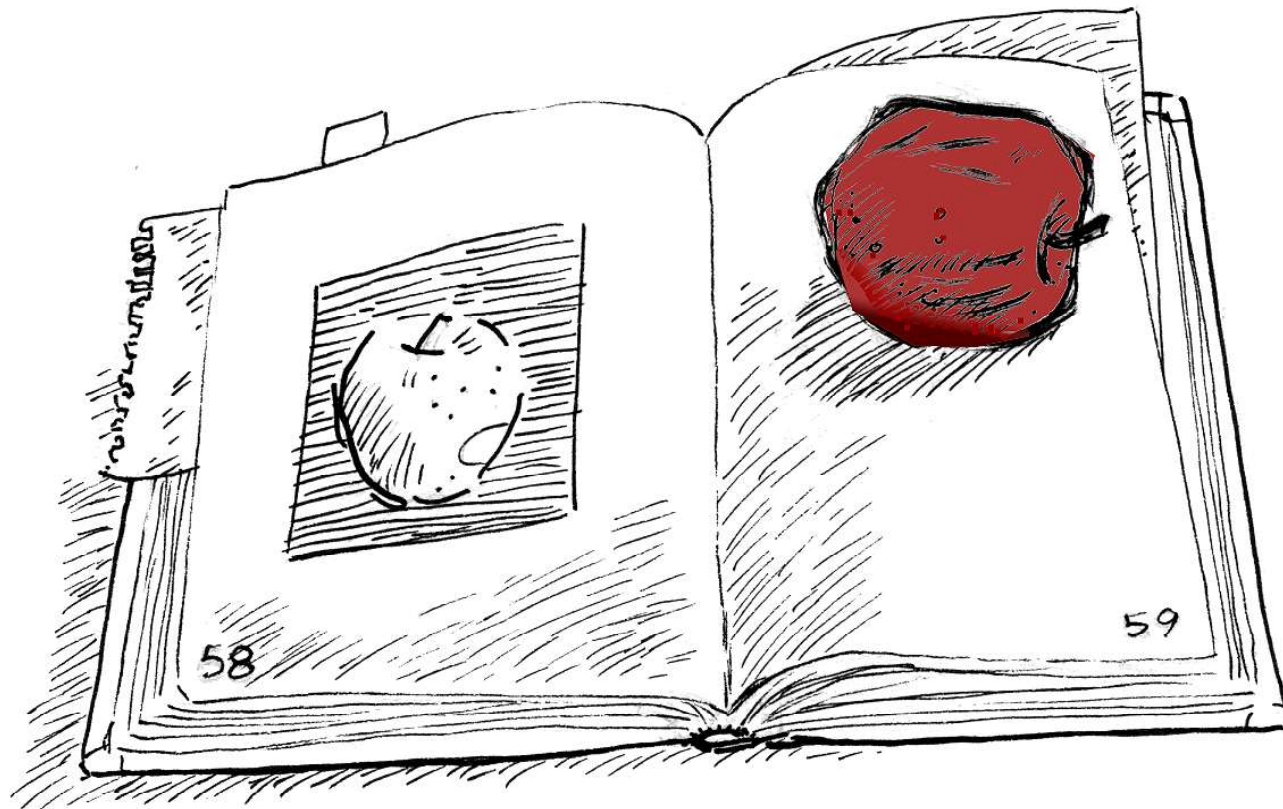


Sonnets



Sonnet Form

Historical Overview

- evolved over centuries; endured for over 700 years
- originally devised as a lyric, developed in southern France, northern Italy
- creation and traditionally attributed to Francesco Petrarch, (July 20, 1304 – July 19, 1374) the Father of Humanism— however it is clear he popularized the form during his lifetime

Defined

- The sonnet is a poem composed with a recognized formula and is concerned with a single thought or theme, and may have a secondary theme.
- The term means little song in Italian

Sonnet Form

Types of Sonnets

Because of its popularity, the poem has transformed over time, retaining important categorizing elements, yet metamorphosing some components.

Common forms:

- Italian sonnet > or Petrarchan sonnet
- English sonnet > or Shakesperian sonnet
- Spenserian sonnet
- Blank sonnet

Sonnet Form

Basic Characteristics of Traditional Sonnet

- fourteen lines
- chosen rhyme scheme and strategic meter
- a turn or shift in theme (referred to as the *volta*)

Important Terms

- octave eight lines || For sonnets the first eight lines carry a theme.
- sestet six lines || The remaining six lines can twist the theme.

- tercet three lines
- quatrain four lines
- couplet two lines

Sonnet Form

Charles Simic || *History*

On a gray evening
Of a gray century,
I ate an apple
While no one was looking.

A small, sour apple
The color of woodfire,
Which I first wiped
On my sleeve.

8



octave:
in this case composed of two quatrains

Then I stretched my legs
As far as they'd go,
Said to myself
Why not close my eyes now

Before the Late
World News and Weather.

14



sestet:
*in this case composed of a quatrain and
a couplet*

Simic, Charles. "History." *The Making of a Sonnet: A Norton Anthology*.
Edward Hirsch and Eavan Boland, eds. New York: W. W. Norton. 2008. Print.

Sonnet Form

- Both the octave and the sestet contain parallel themes, or two stories which are related to one another.
- Typically the octave presents a situation, event, image, or generalization and the sestet presents a reflection or meditation on the previous section, a reaction, or a result.

Sonnet Form

Francesco Petrarch (July 20, 1304 – July 19, 1374)

- not allowed to marry due to clerical duties with the Roman Catholic Church
- it is believed he fathered two children nonetheless
- was a European celebrity from his early writings in Latin
- died of the Plague in his late sixties
- he established common themes in the sonnet form which become traditional elements for hundreds of years

Sonnet Form

The Italian Sonnet

- sonnets must be written about a Beloved
- the Poet writer must be obsessed with the Beloved
- the Beloved cannot be named in the work; they are given a secret name to hide their true identity; the Poet will make puns out of the Beloved's name
- the Beloved is unattainable either because they are already betrothed or they are not interested in the Poet at all; the Poet is beneath their class
- in some cases the Beloved raises the lowly status of the Poet to higher status
- —or condemns him to damnation
- the Beloved is an intense beauty, an Ideal example
- traditionally the Beloved is blonde, blue-eyed
- the Beloved is loved even by Heaven
- the Poet's love is so great he eventually becomes sick with want
- it is acknowledged that love is a trial; a frustration for the Poet
- the Poet falls in love at first sight of the Beloved

Sonnet Form

- in some cases, (as with Petrarch) the Beloved is fated to die an early death.
- the sonnets will immortalize the Beloved on earth
- love is shown almost in a manner of stalking
- idolatry and in some cases intense sensuality and erotic allusions
- love is equal to feudal service between the Poet and the Beloved
- the Poet would kill for the Beloved
- the Poet would kill himself if asked
- Venus (Aphrodite) plays important role here at times
- Cupid (Eros) is often shown as well

Sonnet Form

The various themes and images utilized by Petrarch are referred to as ***Petrarchan conceits***.

These are still used today in various ways, even by pop singers.

- a common conceit is the image of a lover in despair over rejection
- the poet-speaker is shown as a humble, willing servant or slave of the Beloved
- the Beloved is blonde, blue-eyed, pale skin, and bright red cheeks and lips; she is described through stereotype and not realistic metaphors
- when over-used, a conceit becomes cliché, expected

To simplify, these poems can appear, when poorly written, over-dramatic, pathos driven, scenes filled with heaving bosoms, and self-centered whining.

When well-crafted, the poems share a common story of lost love with the reader.

Sonnet Form

The Form's Popularity

- consider these as pop-songs of their day
- the poems were composed in the vernacular Italian, not the academic Latin
- this allows his work to be accessible to the average person
- likewise, Petrarch's main theme deals with the psychology of a spurned lover, a concept anyone can relate to, no matter what social class or occupation

Sonnet Form

The Sonnet Sequence

- Through Petrarch's full collection of poems the concept of a sonnet sequence was created.
- A popular form of writing even in 16th Century England, 200 years later.
- It is crucial to focus was on the unity of the work as a whole.
- The sequence is a *public* declaration of an artist's devotion to a Beloved.
- The original intention was not to just read one of these poems randomly out of sequence, but rather to read the entire collection from beginning to end to see the transformation of the characters and to see a story unfold.
- His manuscript is titled *Rime Sparse*, or in English: *Scattered Rhymes*.
- Also called: *Canzoniere*
- The poems are arranged as if composed in chronological order, but recent studies have shown that he wrote them out of proper sequence.

Sonnet Form

The Story within *Rime Sparse*

- in Petrarch's poems, the beloved is named Laura
- he wrote over 366 poems to her, 317 are sonnets
- the full manuscript is dedicated to her
- the collection evolves to include themes of bereavement over her untimely death, and the lost possibilities to be with her, and memories of her beauty
- a blurring of fiction and reality occur here as well:
 - > he claims she was a real person he saw at a church on April 6, 1327
 - > fell in love instantly
 - > she died on Easter Sunday, April 6, 1348 by the reckoning at that time.
- his love for her was unreciprocated; she never responds in kind
- Laura was already married and turned down all of Petrarch's advances
- it is unknown if the two ever actually spoke (if she really existed)

Sonnet Form

Sonnet One from *Rime Sparse*

- the main theme of collection expressed:
 - > unrequited love
 - > remorse
 - > despair
- establishes introduction to story of a failed love affair, twenty years prior
- poem acts as the thesis of the sequence
- Poet is love-lorn and foolish
- the reader is wise
- Poet is ridiculed by society
- the world is temporal

Sonnet Form

The Italian Rhyme Scheme

A
B
B
A

A
B
B
A

C
D
E

C
D
E

A
B
A
B

A
B
A
B

C
D
C

C
D
C



octave:
in this case composed of two quatrains



sestet:
in this case composed of two tercets