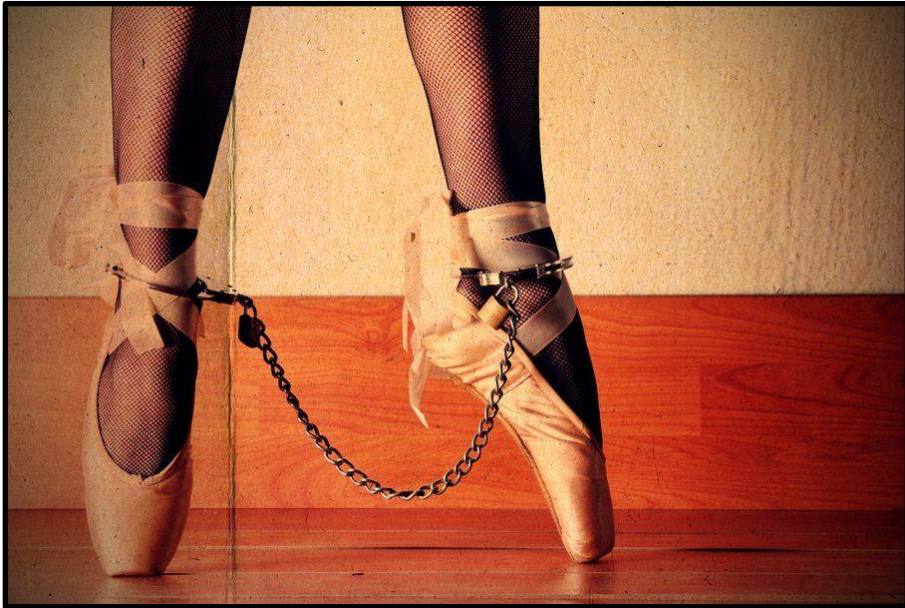


# Dancing in Chains:

## Fixed Forms in Poetry



## Part 2: The Sonnet

MIT Splash  
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# “Fixed Form” or “Prescribed Form”

- Type of poem where various elements of the poem – e.g., length/# of lines, rhyme scheme, meter – are predetermined by convention/rule, not by the poet
- Examples of “Fixed Form” poems:

# “Fixed Form” or “Prescribed Form”

- **Why should I care about all these rules and types of poems?**

# The Sonnet

## GOALS:

- **Learn how the sonnet works as a form of poetry**
  - Characteristics
  - Interaction between form and content
- **See how poets make the form and content “dance” within the rules (or bend or break the rules)**

# A Basic Concept – Rhyme Scheme

- **Rhyme Scheme**

- The pattern of sounds that repeat at the end of a line of poetry
- Designated by lower-case letters

- **EXAMPLE:**

Jack and Jill  
Went up the hill

# A Basic Concept

- **Rhyme Scheme**

- The pattern of sounds that repeat at the end of a line of poetry
- Designated by lower-case letters

- **EXAMPLE:**

The people along the sand  
All turn and look one way.  
They turn their back on the land  
They look at the sea all day.

# The Sonnet

## Historical Development

- First appears in southern Italy, circa 1230
- First major sonnet writer: Francesco Petrarch, in northern Italy, circa 1350
- To Spain, mid-1400s  
England and France, early 1500s  
Germany, early 1600s
- Most popular in England 1590 – 1600
  - Fell out of favor by 1700
  - Revived by Romantic poets 1800 – 1820
  - Used regularly since then

# The Sonnet

## “Fixed” elements of a sonnet

- **Length** – 14 lines
- **Rhyme Scheme** – 2 classic patterns
  - Italian
  - English
- **Meter** – 10 or 11 syllables per line
  - Frequently iambic pentameter



# The Sonnet

## Sonnet Rhyme Schemes

### Italian

a b b a a b b a c d c d c d

OR

a b a b a b a b c d e c d e

### English

a b b a a b b a c d d c e e (Wyatt)

OR

a b a b c d c d e f e f g g (Surrey)

OR

a b a b b c b c c d c d e e (Spenser)

# The Sonnet

8

Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,  
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;  
Round many western islands have I been  
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.  
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told  
That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne;  
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene  
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:

Italian

6

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
When a new planet swims into his ken;  
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes  
He star'd at the Pacific – and all his men  
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise –  
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

English - Wyatt

First fight. Then fiddle. Ply the slipping string  
With feathery sorcery; muzzle the note  
With hurting love; the music that they wrote  
Bewitch, bewilder. Qualify to sing  
Threadwise. Devise no salt, no hempen thing  
For the dear instrument to bear. Devote  
The bow to silks and honey. Be remote  
A while from malice and from murdering.

8

But first to arms, to armor. Carry hate  
In front of you, and harmony behind.  
Be deaf to music and to beauty blind.  
Win war. Rise bloody, maybe not too late

4

For having first to civilize a space  
Wherein to play your violin with grace.

2

4

Like as the waves make toward the pebbled shore,  
So do our minutes hasten to their end,  
Each changing place with that which goes before,  
In sequent toil all forwards do contend.

4

Nativity, once in the main of light,  
Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crowned,  
Crooked eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,  
And Time that gave doth now his gift confound.

4

Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth,  
And delves the parallels in beauty's brow,  
Feeds on the rarities of nature's truth,  
And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow.

2

And yet to times in hope my verse shall stand,  
Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand.

English - Surrey

# The Sonnet

## On First Looking into Chapman's Homer

By John Keats

(1816)

Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,  
    And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;  
    Round many western islands have I been  
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.  
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told  
    That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne;  
    Yet did I never breathe its pure serene  
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:  
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
    When a new planet swims into his ken;  
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes  
    He star'd at the Pacific – and all his men  
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise –  
    Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

# The Sonnet

## Sonnet 60

by William Shakespeare  
(circa 1598)

Like as the waves make toward the pebbled shore,  
So do our minutes hasten to their end,  
Each changing place with that which goes before,  
In sequent toil all forwards do contend.  
Nativity, once in the main of light,  
Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crowned,  
Crooked eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,  
And Time that gave doth now his gift confound.  
Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth,  
And delves the parallels in beauty's brow,  
Feeds on the rarities of nature's truth,  
And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow.  
And yet to times in hope my verse shall stand,  
Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand.

# Dancing in the Chains of Sonnet

If I profane with my unworhiest hand,  
This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this,  
My lips two blushing Pilgrims ready stand  
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.  
Good Pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,  
Which mannerly devotion shows in this,  
For Saints have hands that Pilgrims' hands do touch,  
And palm to palm is holy Palmer's kiss.  
Have not Saints lips, and holy Palmers too?  
Aye, Pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.  
O, then, dear Saint, let lips do what hands do,  
They pray (grant thou) lest faith turn to despair.  
Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.  
Then move not while my prayer's effect I take.

-- William Shakespeare (1593)

# Dancing in the Chains of Sonnet

My God, where is that ancient heat towards thee  
Wherewith whole showls of Martyrs once did burn,  
Besides their other flames? Doth Poetry  
Wear Venus' livery? only serve her turn?  
Why are not Sonnets made of Thee? and layes  
Upon thine Altar burnt? Cannot thy love  
Heighten a spirit to sound out thy praise  
As well as any she? Cannot thy Dove  
Out-strip their Cupid easily in flight?  
Or, since thy ways are deep and still the same,  
Will not a verse run smooth that bears thy name?  
Why doth that fire, which by thy power and might  
Each breast does feel, no braver fuel choose  
Than that, which one day worms may chance refuse?

-- George Herbert (1610)

# Dancing in the Chains of Sonnet

My God,

                  where is that ancient heat towards thee  
Wherewith whole showls of Martyrs once did burn,  
Besides their other flames?

                                  Doth Poetry

Wear Venus' livery?

                                  only serve her turn?

Why are not Sonnets made of Thee?

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                                  which by thy power and might

Each breast does feel,

                                  no braver fuel choose

Than that, which one day worms may chance refuse?

# Dancing in the Chains of Sonnet

## Sonnet VII

and what were roses. Perfume? for I do  
forget . . . . Or mere Music mounting unsurely

twilight

                    but here were something more maturely  
childish, more beautiful almost than you.

Yet if not flower, tell me softly who

be these haunters of dreams always demurely  
halfsmiling from cool faces, moving purely  
with muted step, yet somewhat proudly too

are they not ladies, ladies of my dreams  
justly touching roses their fingers whitely  
live by?

                    or better,

                                    queens, queens laughing lightly  
crowned with far colours,

  thinking very much  
Of nothing and whom dawn loves most to touch

wishing by willows, bending upon streams?



# Dancing in the Chains of Sonnet

## God's Grandeur

by Gerard Manley Hopkins  
(1877)

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
It will flame out like shining from shook foil;  
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil  
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?  
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;  
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;  
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil  
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;  
And though the last lights off the black West went  
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs –  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

# Dancing in the Chains of Sonnet

## Acknowledgments

by Vikram Seth  
(1986)

My debts are manifold and various;  
First, Stanford University  
Where, with progressively precarious  
Nurture, my tardy Ph. D.  
Has waxed, and waxes, lax and sickly.  
Second, to friends who've read this, quickly  
Advised me to desist and cease,  
Or burred, "What a masterpiece!"  
Or smoothed my steps with sage suggestion.  
Third, to John and Susan Hughes  
For refuge, friendship, ears, and views.  
And, fourth, to you, who did not question  
The crude credentials of this verse  
But backed your brashness with your purse.

# Dancing in the Chains of Sonnet

## Sonnet

by Elizabeth Bishop  
(1979)

Caught – the bubble  
in the spirit-level,  
a creature divided;  
and the compass needle  
wobbling and wavering  
undecided.

Freed – the broken  
thermometer's mercury  
running away;  
and the rainbow-bird  
from the narrow bevel  
of the empty mirror,  
flying wherever  
it feels like, gay!

# Dancing in the Chains of Sonnet

## Joy Sonnet in a Random Universe

by Helen Chasin

(1968)

Sometimes I'm happy: la la la la la la la  
la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la  
la la la la. Tum tum ti tum. La la la la la la  
la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la  
Hey nonny nonny. La la la la la la la la la la  
la la la la la la la la la la la. Vo do di o do.  
Poo poo pi doo. La la la la la la la la la la  
la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la  
la la. Whack a doo. La la la la la la la Sh-  
Boom, sh-boom. La la la la la la la la la la la  
la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la la  
la la. Dum di dum. La la la la la la la la la la  
la la la la la la la la la. Tra la la. Tra la la  
la la la la la la la la la la. Yeah yeah yeah.

# The Sonnet

## Francesco Petrarca

(“Petrarch”)

1304 - 1374



- Scholar and poet
- Major player in the development of the Italian Renaissance
- Traveled extensively throughout Europe
- Did not invent the sonnet form, but made it popular

# The Sonnet

## Sonnet 132

by Francesco Petrarca  
(1304 – 1374)

If it's not love, then what is it I feel;  
But if it's love, by God, what is this thing?  
If good, why then the bitter mortal sting?  
If bad, then why is every torment sweet?

If I burn willingly, why weep and grieve?  
And if against my will, what good lamenting?  
O living death, O pleasurable harm,  
How can you rule me if I not consent?

And if I do consent, it's wrong to grieve.  
Caught in contrasting winds in a frail boat  
On the high seas I am without a helm,

So light of wisdom, so laden of error,  
That I myself do not know what I want,  
And shiver in midsummer, burn in winter.

# The Sonnet

## Sonnet

by Billy Collins  
(2003)

All we need is fourteen lines, well, thirteen now,  
And after this one just a dozen  
To launch a little ship on love's storm-tossed seas,  
Then only ten more left like rows of beans.  
How easily it goes unless you get Elizabethan  
And insist the iambic bongos must be played  
And rhymes positioned at the ends of lines,  
One for every station of the cross.

But hang on here while we make the turn  
Into the final six where all will be resolved,  
Where longing and heartache will find an end,  
Where Laura will tell Petrarch to put down his pen,  
Take off those crazy medieval tights,  
Blow out the lights, and come at last to bed.