

Characteristics of the sonnet assignment

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Characteristics of the sonnet At one point in our lives, we all wonder what is a sonnet. A sonnet is a short poem that is slightly misunderstood and has fourteen lines in iambic pentameter with a meticulously patterned rhyme scheme. The sonnet has a reputation for being very complex, and hard to understand at times. Contrary to the popular belief, sonnets do not need to fit one specific rhyme scheme. The two most common sonnets are the Italian or Petrarchan sonnet, named after Francesco Petrarch an Italian poet, and the English or Shakespearean sonnet, which was developed first by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey.

The first type of sonnet is Italian or Petrarchan. Many of the Italian sonnets, follows the rhyme scheme ABBA, ABBA, CDE, CDE or CDECDE, CDCCDC, CDEDCE. The significant distinction between an Italian sonnet and an English sonnet is the way the poem develops. Italian sonnets commence with an eight line octane, which introduces a difficulty, a metaphor, or a question, and concludes with a six line sestet, which answers or broadens upon the octane.

In the Italian sonnet “ What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why” Edna St. Vincent Millay, illustrates a human situation in the octane. “ 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”(1-8).

And a parallel natural circumstance in the sestet “ 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/A little while, that in me sings no more” (9-14). It is very rare to have a rhymed couplet in an Italian sonnet.

The second type of sonnet is, the Shakespearean, or English sonnet. The Shakespearean sonnet follows a different set of rules. It has quatrains and a couplet, and follows the rhyme scheme: ABAB, CDCD, EFEF, and GG.

The couplet plays a central role, usually occurring in the form of a conclusion, elaboration, or even defense of the previous three stanzas, often creating an epiphrenic excellence to the end. In “ My Mistress’ Eyes Are Nothing Like the Sun” contains fourteen lines with ten syllables per line, and follows Shakespeare’s famous iambic pentameter meter scheme. Every line has five accents of sound, followed by the iambic pentameter. This form gives the poem a lovely rhythm, similar to all of Shakespeare’s masterpieces. The first twelve lines compare the speaker’s mistress unfavorably with nature’s charms.

However, the finishing couplet veers in a surprising direction. He utilizes each quatrain to build up to his final point made in the last couplet. For instance, the initial quatrain consists of four different comparisons of the speaker’s sweetheart. Each likeness or lack thereof is characterized in one line. For example, the speaker describes his mistress’ eyes in line one, “ My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun:”(1) her lips in line two, “ Coral is far more red than her lips’ red;” (2) and so on. In conclusion, these two very different poems contain many similar and dissimilar elements.

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First, they are all written in sonnet form. Second, they are each 14 lines long and are written in iambic pentameter. The rhyme scheme is different for each one as well as the rules. English sonnet uses quatrains and a couplet, while the Italian sonnet utilizes octave and sestet. Cited Work St. Vincent Millay, Edna. *The Norton Introduction to Literature*. Ed. A. Booth, J. P. Hunter, K. J. Mays. 9th ed. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. , 2005. 1030. Shakespeare, William. *The Norton Introduction to Literature*. Ed. A. Booth, J. P. Hunter, K. J. Mays. 9th ed. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. , 2005. 1034.