

Advanced Elective Research Paper
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A New Sonnet in the Italian Renaissance Mode

This paper will demonstrate the competence statement, “Can produce a work of art which mirrors the arts of the Italian Renaissance, can explain the work in context, and can describe the methods of production used in the Renaissance and in modern times.”

The Italian Renaissance for the purposes of this paper is the period the thirteenth to the early fifteenth centuries. During this period, one of the many defining characteristic elements was the love and appreciation of reading and writing poetry, particularly love poetry. In this paper, the origins and development of the Italian sonnet will be traced, some of the most renowned poets of the day will be discussed, the specifics of the Italian sonnet will be analyzed, and an original work in the style will be presented. Finally, an analysis of the new work will be conducted, and contemporary applications discussed

In a prior School for New Learning course the author studied poetry, and that class focused particularly on structure, rhythm, and rhyme, and less on content. This is a good extension to what was learned in that course, by adding content to the required format parameters.

By tracing the history and development of the sonnet; showing that the new, original sonnet fits directly into the pattern left for us from the Renaissance poets; and placing the new work in context, the competence will be demonstrated.

The sonnet remains one of the most classic forms of poetry coming from the Italian Renaissance, sometimes called the Petrarchan sonnet. Petrarch's love sonnets to Laura became the model that was to be used for the next three centuries. (Hooker, 1996) The format is very formal, consisting of fourteen lines. The sonnet is in two parts: two quatrains (4-line sections) or octet, and a sestet (6 lines). (Hooker (b), 1996)

In the first octet section, a dilemma or problem is posed. The ninth line traditionally introduces a *volta* or transition from problem to resolution. The meter can be iambic hexameter (10 syllables per line) or Alexandrine meter (12 syllables per line) which was popular in French poetry of the era. (Hooker, 1996)

The rhyme pattern of the Italian sonnet changed over time. Earlier sonnets had *abab abab* for the octet, but this changed to *abba abba* as the standard for later sonnets. The final sestet also is seen with variations, the most common being *cde cde* and *cdc cdc*. It is interesting to note that the standard English sonnet is quite different in meter and rhyme, yet at first Shakespeare tried to emulate the Italian model, to mixed success as he had difficulty finding English words to match the Italian pattern. (Hooker (b), 1996)

This is the format of the sonnet. The question remains, "Why?" Why was poetry one of the defining elements of the Renaissance? Why was the sonnet such a popular form?

In the Renaissance, study and accomplishment in the humanities was very much desired by all who had the leisure and financial means to pursue these studies. These humanities included prose, oratory, philosophical study, and poetry. These all have in common the goal of reaching beyond mere words to demonstrate a truth or ideal. These forms were all considered under the category rhetoric, and as such, to teach, to please and to move were the prime objectives. (Clark, 1922) All these schools of study were valued by the influential of the day, and were valuable to those who did them well, in the form of societal and political connections, patronage and income that could be generated by masters of these forms. (Plumb, 2001)

Renaissance poets were educated, literate people, even if this is to varying degrees. A person had to be literate to write poetry. Those who received an education generally found it based in the classics, meaning the newly rediscovered Roman and Greek works of antiquity. Those educated in the school of humanism were taught to place new emphasis on the individual spirit and given the desire to pursue beauty and art, and the wealth accumulated during this period gave many the leisure time in which to enjoy these things. (Gilbert, 1970)

In particular, Platonic themes were popular topics for poetry. These themes built on the perceived philosophy of Plato regarding the ideals of love. These poems often were written to persons who were married to another, as thinly veiled bawdy messages, or as a way to state intentions and desires for another person indirectly that couldn't be said directly, or that would remain unrequited. (Cheney)

To Renaissance humanists, courtly love had a preeminent place. Love on this plane was pure, noble and could point one to God. It was in this model that love poetry flowered.

(Gilbert, 1970)

As the sonnet developed, some characteristics became common for the Petrarchan love sonnet. Generally a male poet wrote to a female love interest, although as we shall see, this was not always the case. The object of the sonnet could have a classical name such as Stella (stars), as a way to immortalize the subject. The object's various attributes would be praised in superlatives, with the poet's feelings being described in extreme images of pain and discomfort. The poet may promise that this love will be immortalized through the sonnet, which is not good because it is well written, but rather because the love object's merits alone insure immortality.

(Delahoyde, 1996)

Petrarch (1304-1374) is called the Father of Humanism. He strove to seek out, preserve and study the Latin and Greek classical literature that had almost been lost. His works give focus to the developing quest of humanism: What is the purpose and role of mankind? He wrote a very famous series of sonnets to a woman he named Laura, who may have had that name, or it may be a twist on the Italian word for gold or golden (*l'oro – l'aura*). (Gilbert, 1970)

In Petrarch's sonnets to Laura, whom he never won over as she was married and faithful to her husband, he discusses his feelings of love and their emotional, intellectual and spiritual consequences in contradictory verses. In these early sonnets, Petrarch talks about suffering for this love and being spiritually distracted, in agreement with Augustine's writing, with which he

was very familiar. Early sonnets were not always the happiest of themes or outcomes. (Hooker, 1996)

*Era il giorno ch'al sol si scoloraro
per la pietà del suo factore i rai,
quando ì fui preso, et non me ne guardai,
chè i bè vostr'occhi, donna, mi legaro.*

It was the day the sun's ray had turned pale
with pity for the suffering of his Maker
when I was caught, and I put up no fight,
my lady, for your lovely eyes had bound me.

*Tempo non mi pareo da far riparo
contra colpi d'Amor: però m'andai
secur, senza sospetto; onde i miei guai
nel commune dolor s'incominciaro.*

It seemed no time to be on guard against
Love's blows; therefore, I went my way
secure and fearless-so, all my misfortunes
began in midst of universal woe.

*Trovommi Amor del tutto disarmato
et aperta la via per gli occhi al core,
che di lagrime son fatti uscio et varco:*

Love found me all disarmed and found the way
was clear to reach my heart down through the eyes
which have become the halls and doors of tears.

*Però al mio parer non li fu honore
ferir me de saetta in quello stato,
a voi armata non mostrar pur l'arco.*

It seems to me it did him little honour
to wound me with his arrow in my state
and to you, armed, not show his bow at all.

We see clearly the anguish that this love causes for Petrarch, who ends with the sad note that his feelings are unrequited. Although Petrarch was not the first sonnet writer, his sonnets reached a never before achieved level of popularity, culminating in his crowning as poet laureate in Rome. Also it is important to note that a great deal of love poetry did not celebrate the love between husband and wife, which was more often than not a uniting of family fortunes and title, rather than a union based on love. (Bayer, 2000)

Michelangelo Buonarotti, in addition to his prodigious skill with sculpture and painting, was also a highly skilled poet, writing on a number of topics, including love poetry to both women and men.

*S'un casto amor, s'una pietà superna,
S'una fortuna infra dua amanti equale,
S'un'aspra sorte all'un dell'altro cale,
S'un spirito, s'un voler duo cor governa;*

If one chaste love, if one divine compassion,
If one destiny is equal for two lovers,
If one hard fate of the one is felt by the other,
If one spirit, if one will guides two hearts;

*S'un'anima in duo corpi è fatta eterna,
Ambo levando al cielo e con pari ale;
S'amor c'un colpo e d'un dorato strale
Le viscer di duo petti arda e discerna;*

If one soul in two bodies makes itself eternal,
Lifting both to heaven with a single wing,
If Love in one blow and one golden arrow
The hearts in two chests can burn and tear;

*S'amar l'un l'altro, e nessun se medesmo,
D'un gusto e d'un diletto, a tal mercede,
C'a un fin voglia l'uno e l'altro porre;*

If the one loves the other and neither loves himself,
With one pleasure and one delight, to such a measure
That one and the other desire to reach a single end:

*Se mille e mille non sarien centesimo
A tal nodo d'amore, a tanta fede;
E sol l'isdegno il può rompere e sciorre.*

Thousands and thousands would not make a hundredth
Of such a knot of love, or of such a faith:
And only anger could break and untie it.

This was written to Tommaso de' Cavalieri who, despite the idealistic platonic and heavenly aspirations on the surface of the text, realized what Michelangelo was trying to say, and by all accounts the emotion went unshared. We can read the anguish and pleading in the poetry, and the contradictory elements of pain and pleasure that are common features of Italian sonnets. (Hooker (b), 1996)

Vittoria Colonna (1490-1547) was one of the most influential female sonnet writers of all time. She wrote Petrarchan verse on themes of loss and longing likely inspired by her husband's frequent absence while at war, and his subsequent death. She remained fiercely independent, having wealth and no children, and retired to a convent as a lay guest where she

continued writing her poetry, which became more spirituality-based although tinged with elements from Reformation thought. (Brundin, 2005)

*Vivo su questo scoglio orrido e solo,
quasi dolente augel che 'l verde ramo
e l'acqua pura abborre; e a quelli ch'amo
nel mondo ed a me stessa ancor m'involo,*

*perchè espedito al sol che adoro e colo
vada il pensiero. E sebben quanto bramo
l'ali non spiega, pur quando io 'l richiamo
volge dall'altre strade a questa il volo.*

*E 'n quel punto che giunge lieto e ardente
là 've l'invio, sì breve gioia avanza
qui di gran lunga ogni mondan diletto.*

*Ma se potesse l'alta sua sembianza
formar, quant'ella vuol, l'accesa mente,
parte avrei forse qui del ben perfetto.*

I live on these dreadful and lonely rocks
like a grieving bird who loathes the green trees
and fresh water; I shun those walking this earth
I love; I am escaping from myself.

Here I am immediately with him;
and when I cannot feel the Sun I long
to touch, I can turn my thoughts away from
all else and ready my wings to seek him.

A sudden wind; my eager wings beating,
I reach him, and know deep, if fleeting, joy
far surpassing any earthly pleasure.

If I could see his face and body as
I can command and lose myself in dreams,
I would know something of God's perfection.

Again, we see heavenly visions, and artistic descriptions of nature. There is contradiction between the wretched cliff and the bird of sorrow, and the ardent, happy joy that surpasses every delight. The last half of the octet finally gives us the subject, which is that of her deceased husband, with whom she desires to be reunited. We note a rhyme variation in the sestet (in the Italian), also the alliteration in the octet is interesting. It gives a howling wind sound to the reading of the lines.

In the sonnet created for this project, the truth of Shakespeare's difficulty was proved, as Italian has many more words that sound alike than English does, being made up of many different languages. I was not able to say what I intended by strictly following *abba abba* rhyming, so have adapted to *abba cddc* to retain the flavor, if not strictly the rules of the Italian sonnet. This is not unlike the development of the form through several hundred years as famous poets chose to go their own way (a humanist ideal) and because of their popularity and recognition, their forms were copied and made the new standard. The new work:

North Meets South.

When first we met it was as if the heav'ns above¹
Had parted and all time below had ceased to move.
Yet he to South and I to North must soon remove²
Too short a time to say if we might fall in love.

From far away we send our thoughts and dreams each day
As if the greatest distance might be overcome.
While wondering how strong emotion can become
When all there is comes written neatly on a page.³

There comes a day when Fate will have a part to play⁴
A business trip that comes so unexpected might

Just be the answer to this lonely love affair.

A happy day! Emotion starts anew today.
We two now pledge our lives to evermore unite.
We find each other answers to our fervent prayers.⁵

¹ The heavenly, other-worldly aspect of the emotion is invoked.

² The quandary of the distance between the lovers is revealed.

³ The pain of the long-distance relationship and its futility is explained.

⁴ The *volta* or turn.

⁵ A happy ending, the Fate and the heavens given credit.

This new work embodies Renaissance ideology in all of the important ways. It speaks of longing for what seems that it cannot be. It speaks of love in a more Platonic or spiritual sense, rather than a physical attachment, although that may be implied. God and eternity are strong themes in the sonnet. (Hooker (b), 1996)

There is a current website, www.csonnet.org, that puts together a bi-annual collection of sonnets by contemporary writers. The topics now range broadly from love to war to death. A few poets are still sometimes following the strict rhyme conventions from old, yet many poets have created their own patterns. The meter is almost always iambic pentameter instead of the Alexandrine verse. This seems to roll off the tongue in English a little better. Here is a sample sonnet by Margaret Menamin, who is a published poet, although not an English professor.

My Wake

Well, here I am, laid out in Sunday best,
these damn pretentious clothes I never wore.

There's all my scheming kinfolk. What a bore.
There sits my son—as usual, pants unpresed—

hoping he's going to land a big bequest.
There sits my daughter with her paramour,
and there is Connie, that abysmal whore,
buried in rouge and loudly overdressed.

There sits my lawyer in his pinstripe vest,
licking his lips and crooked to the core—
he's bled me dry and hoping for some more.
The undertaker's greedy as the rest.

They'll cry hard water when they read my will.
I've left it all to Murphy's Bar and Grill.

In this example, we have a light subject, despite being about the author's death.

The poet has chosen here to follow very strict rhyming patterns, although it should be noted that more often than not in contemporary sonnets the last sestet is divided the Shakespearean way instead of the Petrarchan way. For English-speaking poets, Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey began translating Petrarch into English in the 16th century, and began writing their own sonnets. This paved the way for Milton and Shakespeare, who then adapted the format for their own uses. (Hed, 2010) In true humanist form, poets continue to adapt the structure to best convey their own thoughts.

Even though this sonnet is contemporary, we can see humanist elements in it.

There is much in the way of honest appraisal of those attending the wake. Even though derogatory terms are used to describe most characters mentioned, the overall tone is non-

emotional. It is what it is – a very humanist point of view. There is the traditional conflict, and the resolution comes in the very last line. This is traditional since Petrarch.

So we have discussed the development of the Italian sonnet as popular during the Renaissance, along with its structure and form requirements. We have traced the history from Petrarch onward to even present day, and explored the subject matter of traditional and non-traditional sonnets. We also researched the role of poetry, and of all the rhetoric arts, to the leading citizens of the Italian city/states. We dissected the construction of the traditional love sonnet, and viewed examples of various sonnets and points of view from the Renaissance until present day. And a new work mirroring the style and flavor of a Petrarchan sonnet has been presented.

The sonnet of the Italian Renaissance became so popular, that it has persisted both in intact forms and in modern interpretations from the fourteenth century until today. The formal structure lends itself to clever word plays and yet keeps the message succinct. Courtly love, while not popular in that incarnation today, nevertheless fills the thoughts of many persons, particularly on holidays and other occasions. Courting still can contain romantic elements such as sonnets. *Amoré* is as strong today among all humans as it was to the Renaissance Italians, and the sonnet is a much loved vehicle for expressing these feelings.

Annotated Bibliography

Bayer, Andrea. "Art and Love in the Italian Renaissance". In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–.

http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/arlo/hd_arlo.htm (November 2008)

This is a publication of the Metropolitan Museum of Art by a curator in the Department of European Paintings. The Met is a very respected authority on matters of art and its place in history and culture. This reference was used to back up claims regarding marriage versus love, and the point of view of the Met is that much of the artistic endeavors of the Italian Renaissance celebrated love, but not marriage which was something quite different.

Brundin, Abigail. "Colonna, Vittoria" (2005). Italian Women Writers Library. University of Cambridge. <http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/efts/IWW/BIOS/A0011.html>

Abigail Brundin is a scholar from Cambridge University who submitted an essay to the collection of the University of Chicago library. As such, it has been peer reviewed. Material in the essay was used for a perspective on Vittoria Colonna, and this information is readily available from other reputable sources as well.

Cheney, Liana. "Italian Renaissance Art". University of Massachusetts. Lowell. MA.

http://faculty.uml.edu/CulturalStudies/Italian_Renaissance/7.htm

Dr. Liana Cheney is professor of art history at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell. The materials accessed are part of her materials for class. From this article was gleaned the varied emotions and conventions of the content of the sonnets, as well as an understanding of the difference between love interest and love connection.

Clark, Donald Lemen. "RHETORIC AND POETRY IN THE RENAISSANCE" (1922). Columbia University Press. New York.

<http://digitalcase.case.edu:9000/fedora/get/ksl:clarhe00/clarhe00.pdf>

Dr. Clark was a professor at Columbia University. His work focuses mostly on the rhetorical conventions of English poetry, but does contain a discussion of the large influence of the

Italian Renaissance. It is a scholarly and reputable manuscript. The concepts of oratory and rhetoric purposes of poetry have been included from this source.

Delahoyde, Michael. "Renaissance Sonnets" (1996). Washington State University. Pullman, WA. <http://www.wsu.edu/~delahoyd/ren.sonnets.html>

Mr. Delahoyde is affiliated with Washington State University as a professor. This source is one of his online materials in good academic style. It is a good dissertation on the conventions of the sonnet as made traditional by Petrarch and gave insight into the variations in the sonnet form.

Gilbert, Bill. "The Book" (unpublished) (1970). The University of Kansas. Lawrence, KS. http://vlib.iue.it/carrie/texts/carrie_books/gilbert/

Bill Gilbert was a professor at the University of Kansas, and this source is his life's work. It was never published during his life, and posthumously a colleague of his made it available on the University of Kansas' website. It is well-researched and well-respected by his colleagues. For this paper, there was not much new except a fuller understanding of some of the ingredients of the love sonnet.

Hed, Greer. "Poetic Form in the Early Italian Renaissance" (2010). Suite101.com. Italian Sonnet: Poetic Form in the Early Italian Renaissance. <http://www.suite101.com/content/the-italian-sonnet-a196457#ixzz155KP8vCv>

Suite101.com is a website for writers and readers to share materials. It is not an academic site, yet the writing for the retrieved article is well done. Yet the material gained for this project was only to trace the migration of the sonnet form from Italy to England, to Shakespeare and to modern day, which was readily available from many sources. This source presented the material in a very direct and succinct way which was helpful for development of this paper.

Hooker, Richard. "Literary Arts: Italian Renaissance" (1996). World Civilizations Series. Washington State University. Pullman, WA. <http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/REN/LIT.HTM>

Hooker (b), Richard. "Michelangelo: Selected Poetry" (1996). World Civilizations Series. Washington State University. Pullman, WA. <http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/REN/MICHEL1.HTM>

Richard Hooker is a professor of literary arts at Washington State University, and these are reference materials he has put together for his students (and any others interested). They

are done in academic style, and even though others may submit materials, those materials are reviewed and must meet certain standards to then be included. The first reference gave much about the sonnet format, Petrarch, and the connection with humanism. The second was translations of some of Michelangelo's sonnets, translated by Hooker himself, with commentary about Michelangelo's apparent homosexuality and his own feelings about it as evidenced in his poetry.

Plumb, J. H. "The Italian Renaissance". Mariner Books (2001). New York

This source is one of the texts for the course. From it was gained a general sense of the role of the arts in society, who participated, and how society at large was involved in the arts and in poetry.

<http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Italian/Italianpoetry.htm> (Assorted poems translated)

This is a collection of Italian poetry through 1600, translated by A. S. Kline in 2004. The general themes and models of Italian sonnets came through in these translations as models for my own sonnet.