

Renaissance Methods of Imitation: Summary and Examples

Gideon Burton

Brigham Young University

Four general strategies were employed in Renaissance imitation: addition, subtraction, transposition, and substitution. Although the following examples take place mostly on the level of a line of poetry, these strategies were viable on any level of discourse: within a word; within a phrase, clause, or line; within a paragraph; within a major section or segment of a text; or, within a whole work. Two lines from a song by John Dowland will serve as our model for imitation, in the text box:

Come, heavy Sleep, the image of true death,
And close up these my weary, weeping eyes.

1. Addition

A. Addition to the FORM

by synonymia, adding like concepts in parallel fashion to make a pair or series

Come, heavy, solemn, saving Sleep, the image of true death,

by using a conjunction (like “and”)

Come, heavy Sleep, the image and the emblem of true death,

by using polysyndeton

And therefore come, heavy and solemn and saving Sleep

by using an apposition

And close up these my weary, weeping eyes, the portrait of my woe.

by adding additional metrical feet

Come quickly, heavy Sleep, the image of true death, [hexameter]

consider also adding rhyme or adding meter, if there is none

B. Addition to the CONTENT

by using hyperbole

Come, heavy Sleep, you daily dose of death,

And seal forever these, my weeping eyes.

by using topics of invention

Come, heavy Sleep, you harbinger of rest [antecedent/ consequence]

Come, heavy Sleep, so many sing your praise [witnesses]

Come, heavy Sleep, with all your rosy dreams [subject/ adjuncts]

Come not, oh heavy Sleep, though come you will [contradiction]

Leave me, oh Sleep, the image of true death, [contraries]

2. Subtraction

A. Subtraction from the FORM

by removing descriptive or redundant words or expressions:

Come, ~~heavy~~ Sleep, ~~the image of true death~~, Come, Sleep

And close up ~~these~~ my ~~weary, weeping~~ eyes. And close up my eyes

by asyndeton (omitting conjunctions):

Come, heavy Sleep, the image of true death, Come, heavy Sleep, the image of true death,

~~And~~ close up these my weary, weeping eyes. Close up for me these weary, weeping eyes.

B. Subtraction from the CONTENT

by understatement or meiosis

Come, welcome rest, no labor for the soul

by ellipses or other schemes of omission

Come, heavy Sleep, the image of true death,

And do your work upon my weary eyes.

