

## Sundry Sonnets Analyzed

Gideon O. Burton / Brigham Young University

*This sonnet demonstrates the use of the Petrarchan rhyme scheme, as marked. It is also an example of using a lot of enjambment (note that only two lines have final punctuation):*

Her fingers knew the alphabets of rain,  
the spilling heavens, spelling as they fell  
among the hollyhocks. Her lips could tell  
the droplets' pacing as their rhythm framed  
crescendos to be felt but never named  
by children watching sidewalk gutters swell  
against their borders. She could sound the well  
of noons' humidities until the drained  
and flaccid clouds retreated to the east  
beyond the tearing mountain summits. This,  
her testimony of the moistened light,  
and this, the calm recession of the beast.  
A marbled moment, braided with her kiss  
along the shining edges of the night.

A  
B  
B  
A  
A  
B  
B  
A  
C  
D  
E  
C  
D  
E

*The following sonnet demonstrates a descriptive mode of sonnet writing—not about a person, but a food. It also shows a certain vituperative tone that might provoke interest.*

### White Chocolate

White chocolate, oh oxymoron foul!  
No cocoa bean did bless your candy vat.  
We chocoholics taste you and we howl.  
What are you? An albino slab of fat,  
Hydrogenized and sweetened past remorse  
Then peddled with hyperbole and fraud  
To unsuspecting chocophiles of course  
Who'd rather gargle liver oil from cod.  
I've gnawed on better plastic in my day!  
More flavor can be found between one's toes!  
Perverse confection, fit to throw away  
Unworthy of my chocolate sniffing nose  
    White chocolate, a joke not semi-sweet  
    Your coming means our end is near complete.

*The following sonnet shows how it is possible to imitate a passage of scripture or other short text in creating a sonnet:*

### The Eye Hath Not Seen

*An imitation of 1 Corinthians 2:9-10*

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

In holy writ, in prophets' ink, it's said  
the eye with all her searching has not seen,  
nor has the patient ear with patience read,  
nor has it entered hearts both whole and clean,  
those glories, blanket blessings thick and full,  
that he our loving God has long prepared,  
has saved and savored till at last he pulls  
the heavens whole on souls whose hearts are bared  
in pure and simple love for him. And yet  
our gracious master has revealed this boon  
through spirit, holy washing grace, through wet  
and cleansing peace upon us, heaven's tune.

For Spirit searches well and fathoms deep  
to find in us divinity to keep.

*The following sonnet demonstrates how you can make a sonnet that narrates a single memorable event. It is also an example of religious poetry. Note the many concrete images, and the volta (a contrast in tone after the octave—the eighth line):*

### Baptism

A gray and troubled ocean laps around  
my chest, the chilled and murky liquid stings  
my limbs, my skin. My heart, a stone, now sounds  
another fathom: darkens, quiets, sinks.  
Above, the twilight weakly plies the surface,  
grows distant; I drop in ashen silt.  
The downward current traps me with its bias,  
all color black but this my crimson guilt.  
With sudden force, uprushed into the light,  
I burst into the breath of boldest day,  
by hands unseen, with grappling grace and might,  
the murky ice dissolves to passing spray.  
    With calming force he warms a chilling soul;  
    with arms and warmth revives and makes me whole.

*The following sonnet is an example of “ethopoeia,” or character creation, by which one may speak dramatically in the voice of some well known figure—in this case, Jonah.*

#### Jonah

Had I my voice inside this creature’s throat,  
a prayer, small, unequal to the task;  
had I my freedom in the sea to float  
with flailing limbs, the heavens I would ask  
for closing darkness not for darkness close  
and moaning wet, my lack of valor pressing  
me, my soul as sullied as the ghost  
of Ninevah—I almost see confessing.  
But now my mind I doubt as I had God,  
and sink inside the gullet of my guilt  
far grosser than this leviathan odd,  
am swallowed now, whose blood were better spilt.  
Can God who turns the crimson into snow  
Yet fathom one whose life has sunk so low?

*The natural world is an endless resource for poetry. Consider composing a sonnet about the change of seasons, employing vivid metaphors as you go:*

The celibacy of the autumn sky  
recedes so easily with nudging hues  
with tissue wisps of clouds that downward fly  
across the fading azure, darkened blues.  
The night is coming, wet against the leaves  
that paste the windows and the quiet streets.  
It is already nesting under eaves  
and through the fields of corn and ripened wheat.  
I must preserve my vows to know this chill,  
to blend my hair with breezes as I walk  
along the lake, to let the season spill  
its ambers and its skies of winging flocks.  
Above, the shadows germinate and grow,  
and swelling stars pour smoky light below.

#### Snow

It is a shaken spice, a moist and sweet  
Relief to slake the blandness of our souls.  
It is a heavy ripened grain, the wheat  
That in the ether grows until we’re whole.  
It is the feathers of our mothers’ prayers  
Returned fulfilling which the angels shred  
As gossamer, as grace redundant, layers  
Of frozen time as we lay still in bed.  
It is the cracking of the darkest sky  
Soft meteors, the billion stars descend  
All victims cease from aching, asking why  
The dirt, the noise, the gross confusion ends  
What had been frozen thaws beneath its coat  
What weary, rests, while worries grow remote.

*Religious subjects offer endless opportunities for poetry. In the following sonnets note how a form of the word “blood” is in each line. Also note the contrasting tone of this and the next sonnet:*

If not the blood, why then the marrowed pith  
of living bone. If not the bloody sweat,  
why then the very pores he bled with.  
The scraping knees, the vast and bloody debt,  
the warp of godly blood through dirty flesh,  
divinity upended, bloody deed  
and bloody plan and yet the cankered mesh  
of time and blood and earth and gaping need.  
If nothing else I know his leaking blood  
so much my own, the bloody beating flush  
of each our bloody actions, thick as mud  
and bending hellward in its bloody mush  
O Jesus! Turn this blood to spirit wine.  
The press is strong, its oil exceeding fine

I know that he will come. Like fruit grown sweet,  
unnoticed on the limbs of weighted trees;  
like butter melting over steaming peas;  
like every good and common joy; like thirst  
that grows, then ebbs with swallowed water pure;  
like morning after night has done its worst,  
beyond what I believed I could endure;  
the breath of God like thawing winter snow,  
alive and streaming, though it comes unseen.  
He comes, and even glaciers start to flow.  
He comes, as greys and browns now yield to green.  
The father of my soul, its life and spring,  
returns, removing all December’s sting.

*An imitation of the sacramental prayer:*

#### Bread

O God, Eternal Father, in the name  
of Jesus Christ, thy slain and risen Son--  
that we who, heavy laden, full of blame  
may through His spirit find our woes undone;  
recalling His weak body, frail as ours,  
that long before Golgotha’s final trial  
had passions known, disease, fatiguing hours,  
the strains all human flesh must know awhile;  
that we His name may take into our lives  
as emptied Jesus did His father’s breath;  
that He, His words obeyed, may us revive  
as His commands insure our souls from death--  
Bless, we pray, this sweet and saving bread,  
for we shall live who but for Him were dead.

*Humorous sonnets can take many forms:*

Spam

Third cousin to a pig and twice removed,  
It oozes, goopy, from its squarish tin;  
Thick film conceals the lard with which its grooved,  
Intestines pureed mottle its pink skin.  
Would ancient man have glorified the spam,  
In pictographs preserved its conquest sure?  
Or would they shrug at its smooth texture, bland—  
No boxy graphic to make spam endure?  
In industry the spam is thrift itself:  
No bones or organs spill aside as scrap.  
Once salted, lives for decades on a shelf;  
Discerning palates know its kind from crap.  
    Maligned, despised, yet all the while consumed  
    If spam's eternal, earth itself is doomed.

Love's Lungs

Back then balloons were not an easy matter.  
In ancient times they had to kill a goat,  
Extract its large intestine (or its bladder),  
Some lumberjack would huff, the ball would bloat.  
Today some weakling florist turns the gas,  
And presto, a bouquet of mylar orbs!  
Farewell those rites of manhood to be passed  
When gifts so swelled no time nor sweat absorb.  
True valentines their own balloons must fashion,  
Must find a cow or rhino to dispatch,  
Must find the guts to well express his passion,  
To show his love that florist's met his match.  
    She'll know your love by just how well you blew:  
    Believe me, this procedure's tripe and true.

Shop Vac: A Sonnet

No kitten Kirby I, no devil red;  
Such toys are made for sniffing dainty dust  
A shop-vac I, by two horse powers fed  
Inhaling concrete boulders is my lust.  
Beware, don't leave your children in my reach  
Nor in my range allow the family mutt.  
Wet gunk or dry, my nuclear nozzle's speech  
Persuades all matter enter in my gut.  
Does gravel, nails, and muck fill your garage,  
Embarrass you and cause no end of danger?  
What if a stray ten-penny nail did lodge  
Deep in the insole of some passing stranger?  
    If Santa brought you me, he brought you luck,  
    The present that will always, gladly, suck.

Sonnet: A Toast to Toast

Of all the snacks that beckon in the night  
When tummies growl and gnawing hunger calls,  
But one can satisfy my famished plight  
And summons me to stumble through the halls.  
Oh piece of bread, so humble in your slice  
What magic turns your skin from white to brown?  
What arrogant aromas do entice  
When toaster pops and butter coats you down!  
With cinnamon and sugar or with jam  
I dress you in the ornaments of sweet  
More sated, I, than proverb's happy clam  
When crispy, hot and warm my lips you meet.  
    Of every night-time meal you are the most;  
    I honor you, great food, whose name is toast.

Mucus

Lugubrious and patient as he slimes  
His dark and viscous weight within my head.  
He tugs his bitter taffy mass in crimes  
Of pressured pain and dripping dread.  
A hundred tissues bruised with blasting blows,  
And yet he lingers, stranding strands of crust;  
Gelatinous stalactites, grainy flow,  
Replacing brains with miles of muck and must.  
In sour thickness smears my throat and lungs,  
His wiggling jelly clogs each passageway  
I cough up goeey golf balls on my tongue;  
In rasping pleas my alveoli pray.  
    My phlegmy enemy, you shall not run:  
    With antihistamines I end your fun.

Goodbye, My Love

I trusted you and now it's torn apart:  
My happiness, and worse, my trusty truck.  
You broke my new transmission and my heart,  
And now my cash skeedaddles with my luck.  
Oh, Cherry, one part reckless, one divine  
You turned my motor once I do confess  
But now there is the matter of this fine—  
I'm dubious our gears again will mesh.  
The wilted pistons are as good as dead  
And so is my affection, dear, it's true  
I picture your sweet face beneath my tread  
These things aren't fixed with kisses and some glue.  
    Forget the church, I'm going off to Napa  
    And as for you and me—it's in the crapper.