

Petrarch's Love Sonnets

Back in the 1300's, before card stores and chocolate manufacturers all conspired to commercialize the true spirit of love, passion, and romance, Francesco Petrarch literally wrote the book on infatuation. The collection of Italian verses, *Rime in vita e morta di Madonna Laura* (after 1327), translated into English as Petrarch's Sonnets, were inspired by Petrarch's unrequited passion for Laura (probably Laure de Noves), a young woman Petrarch first saw in church.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Head-over-heels in love with Laura, Petrarch wrote 365 sonnets, one passionate poem a day dedicated to his true love. Considered the first modern poet because of his interest in individuality, the Italian poet perfected the sonnet during the 14th century. The sonnet, a lyric poem of 14 lines with a formal rhyme scheme, expresses different aspects of a thought, mood, or feeling.

When Love within her lovely face appears

now and again among the other ladies,

as much as each is less lovely than she

the more my wish I love within me grows.

I bless the place, the time and hour of the day

that my eyes aimed their sights at such a height,

and say: 'My soul, you must be very grateful

that you were found worthy of such great honour.

From her to you comes loving thought that leads,

as long as you pursue, to highest good,

esteeming little what all men desire;

there comes from her all joyous honesty

that leads you by the straight path up to Heaven—

already I fly high upon my hope.'

Petrarch was one of a triad of Florentine literary artists who best summarized Italian thought and feeling of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance (Dante and Boccaccio being the other two). Laura, whose name he was to immortalize in his lyrics, inspired him with a passion that has become proverbial for its constancy and purity.

Oh blessed be the day, the month, the year,
the season and the time, the hour, the instant,
the gracious countryside, the place where I was
struck by those two lovely eyes that bound me;
and blessed be the first sweet agony
I felt when I found myself bound to Love,
the bow and all the arrows that have pierced me,
the wounds that reach the bottom of my heart.
And blessed be all of the poetry
I scattered, calling out my lady's name,
and all the sighs, and tears, and the desire;
blessed be all the paper upon which
I earn her fame, and every thought of mine,
only of her, and shared with no one else.

Sonnet Assignment for September 24, 2020

Read each of Petrarch's three sonnets above three times, paying attention to the sounds and ideas presented. Then study each sonnet individually; begin by reading line by line to analyze closely. Take notes on the literary devices used, tone, diction, and any other comment worth noting.

Then, answer the following for each sonnet. You may write your answers on the poem, but make sure you have all the answers for each poem so you can discuss them in class.

1. Who is the speaker (not necessarily the poet!)?
2. What is the occasion?
3. Draw a line between the octave and the sestet. What ideas or questions are presented in the octave?
4. Where is the volta? How does this shift the mood?
6. What ideas are given in response in the sestet?
7. If you are familiar with these terms, how do imagery, literary devices and diction enhance the development of these ideas?