

Shakespeare was a poet before he became famous for being a dramatist. There are many things that make Shakespeare's playtexts unique, but the use and beauty of his poetry in the plays is perhaps the most obvious thing that sets him apart. This doc is my way of walking you through how Shakespeare turns poetry into drama.

Sonnet (Shakespearean): a tightly-structured, 14-line poem with the **rhyme scheme** ababdcdefeg in **iambic pentameter**. Shakespeare's Sonnets usually contain 3 quatrains and a rhyming couplet, which define the movement in the meaning. A **quatrain** is a unit of 4 lines; a **couplet** is a unit of 2 lines.

Here is one of Shakespeare's most famous Sonnets:

u / u / u / u / u /

If I | profane | with my | unwor | thiest hand

Shakespeare's most poetic lines don't just discuss matters of the heart, they follow its rhythm.

This holy shrine, the gentle sin is **this**:

My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready **stand**

To smooth that rough touch with a tender **kiss**.

Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too **much**, 5

Which mannerly devotion shows in **this**;

For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do **touch**,

What is the conceit running through the sonnet?

And palm to palm is holy palmers' **kiss**.

Have not saints lips, and holy palmers **too**?

Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in **prayer**.

10

O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands **do**;

They pray, grant thou, lest faith turn to **despair**.

Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' **sake**.

Shakespeare often uses rhyming couplets to sum up all that comes before.

Then move not, while my prayer's effect I **take**.

Shakespeare tends to reserve the form of the Sonnet to communicate feelings of love for another. "What if," he must've thought, "I have my actors share the speaking of the Sonnet as if it were dialogue for the stage?". He then decides it might look something like this:

ROMEO

[To JULIET] If I profane with my unworthiest hand

This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this:

My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand

To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

JULIET

Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,

5

Which mannerly devotion shows in this;

For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,

And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.

ROMEO

Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?

JULIET

Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.

10

ROMEO

O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do;

They pray, grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.

JULIET

Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.

Shakespeare allows R&J to share the final couplet, culminating in a climactic kiss.

ROMEO

Then move not, while my prayer's effect I take.

Below are three more Sonnets from *R&J* that function as monologue or dialogue. For homework, do the following to each:

(1) Use a dashed line to divide the quatrains and the couplets.

(2) Write the corresponding letter at the end of each line to indicate the Sonnet's rhyme scheme.

(3) For the first two, paraphrase (put into your own words) the Sonnet in the box to the right. For the third, define the conceit (extended metaphor) that runs throughout the poem-speech and its implications ("The conceit of... implies...").

Two households, both alike in dignity, —
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene, —
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny, —
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean. —
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes — 5
A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;
Whose misadventured piteous overthrows —
Do with their death bury their parents' strife. —
The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love, —
And the continuance of their parents' rage, — 10
Which, but their children's end, nought could remove, —
Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;
The which if you with patient ears attend,
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend. —

Now old desire doth in his death-bed lie, —
And young affection gapes to be his heir; —
That fair for which love groan'd for and would die, —
With tender Juliet match'd, is now not fair. —
Now Romeo is beloved and loves again, — 5
Alike betwitched by the charm of looks,
But to his foe supposed he must complain,
And she steal love's sweet bait from fearful hooks:
Being held a foe, he may not have access —
To breathe such vows as lovers use to swear; — 10
And she as much in love, her means much less
To meet her new-beloved any where:
But passion lends them power, time means, to meet
Tempering extremities with extreme sweet. —

This last one takes on an irregular form, so don't be fooled. You're not dividing quatrains this time; you're dividing rhyming couplets.

Read o'er the volume of young Paris' face, —
And find delight writ there with beauty's pen; —
Examine every married lineament, —
And see how one another lends content —
And what obscured in this fair volume lies — 5
Find written in the margent of his eyes.
This precious book of love, this unbound lover,
To beautify him, only lacks a cover:
The fish lives in the sea, and 'tis much pride —
For fair without the fair within to hide: — 10
That book in many's eyes doth share the glory,
That in gold clasps locks in the golden story;
So shall you share all that he doth possess,
By having him, making yourself no less. —