The Sonnet Form(s)

Rod Freeman
Italian Sonnet Form
Blest be the day, and blest be the month and year,
Season and hour and very moment blest,
The lovely land and place where first possessed
By two pure eyes I found me prisoner;

And blest the first sweet pain, the first most dear,
Which burnt my heart when Love came in as guest;
And blest the bow, the shafts which shook my breast,
And even the wounds which Love delivered there.

Blest be the words and voices which filled grove
And glen with echoes of my lady’s name;
The sighs, the tears, the fierce despair of love;

And blest the sonnet-sources of my fame;
And blest that thought of thoughts which is her own,
Of her, her only, of herself alone!

Joseph Auslander, trans.
Francis Petrarch (1304-1374)

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Joseph Auslander, trans.
English Sonnet Form
Alas! so all things now do hold their peace,  
Heaven and earth disturbed in nothing.  
The beasts, the air, the birds their song do cease,  
The night's chare the stars about doth bring.

Calm is the sea, the waves work less and less:  
So am not I, whom love, alas, doth wring,  
Bringing before my face the great increase  
Of my desires, whereat I weep and sing

In joy and woe, as in a doubtful ease.  
For my sweet thoughts sometime do pleasure bring,  
But by and by the cause of my disease  
Gives me a pang that inwardly doth sting,

When that I think what grief it is again  
To live and lack the thing should rid my pain.
Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1517?-1547)

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<th>English Sonnet Form</th>
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<th>Spenserian</th>
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54
Of this world's Theatre in which we stay,
My love lyke the Spectator ydly sits
Beholding me that all the pageants play,
Disguysing diversly my troubled wits.

Sometimes I joy when glad occasion fits,
And mask in myrth lyke to a Comedy:
Soone after when my joy to sorrow flits,
I waile and make my woes a Tragedy.

Yet she beholding me with constant eye,
Delights not in my merth nor rues my smart:
But when I laugh she mocks, and when I cry
She laughs, and hardens evermore her hart.

What then can move her? if nor merth nor mone,
She is no woman, but a senseless stone.
Edmund Spenser (c. 1552-1599)

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John Milton (1608-1674)

XIX
When I consider how my light is spent
Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide
Lodg'd with me useless, though my soul more bent

To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest he returning chide,
"Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?"
I fondly ask. But Patience, to prevent

That murmur, soon replies: "God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts: who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
Is kingly; thousands at his bidding speed

And post o'er land and ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and wait."
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Shakespearean
Spenserian

A a — quatrain
b b (argument)
a a
b b
c b — quatrain
d c (variations/
c b comments/
d c development)
e c — quatrain
f d (variations/
e c comments/
f d development)
g e — couplet
g e (clinched and rebutted)
From fairest creatures we desire increase,
That thereby beauty's rose might never die,
But as the riper should by time decease,
His tender heir might bear his memory:

But thou, contracted to thine own bright eyes,
Feed'st thy light'st flame with self-substantial fuel,
Making a famine where abundance lies,
Thyself thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel.

Thou that art now the world's fresh ornament
And only herald to the gaudy spring,
Within thine own bud buriest thy content
And, tender churl, makest waste in niggarding.

Pity the world, or else this glutton be,
To eat the world's due, by the grave and thee.
**Shakespearean Sonnet**

**Sonnet 1**

From fairest creatures we desire increase,
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Elizabeth Barrett Browning  (1806-1861)

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of being and ideal grace.

I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for right.
I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.

I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints. I love thee with the breath,

Smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.

—Sonnets from the Portuguese (1850)