

Sonnet Form in Dialogue

Reread the lines below which form a type of contest of wit between Romeo and Juliet in their first meeting. Then read the information on the background of the sonnet and follow the directions for analysis.

Romeo: If I profane with my unwortheist hand.
 This holy shrine, the gentle sin in 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.
 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: Aye, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.

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.

Romeo: Then move not while my prayers' effect I take.

The sonnet as a form developed in Italy in the thirteenth century. A century later, Petrarch raised it to its greatest perfection and gave it his own name (the Petrarchan sonnet). Wyatt and Surrey introduced the form to England, but because the rhyme pattern was too confining for English (the Italians allowed no more than five rhymes), it was modified. Because Shakespeare achieved greatest fame with the English sonnet, his name became attached (the Shakespearean sonnet). The petrarchan form consists of two divisions: eight lines with a rhyme scheme of *abba abba* (called an octave) and six lines with varying pattern of *ced cec* or *cde cde* (called a sestet).

The Shakespearean form consists of four divisions: three sets of four lines each (called quatrains) and a pair of rhyming lines (called a couplet) with a usual rhyme scheme of *abab cdcd efef gg*.

Meter for both sonnet forms is usually iambic pentameter which consists of five metrical feet with each foot having an unstressed, stressed pattern.

Analysis

1. Mark the rhyme scheme with letters at the end of each line.
2. Grammatically divide the poem into sections.
3. Scan several lines of poetry to determine the meter. Mark the iambs.
4. Underline all the words which relate to the metaphor of the pilgrim approaching the shrine.