



READING 3 Evaluate the changes in sound, form, figurative language, graphics, and dramatic structure in poetry across literary time periods.

Sonnet 90 Sonnet 292

Poetry by Francesco Petrarch

Meet the Author

Francesco Petrarch 1304–1374

Francesco Petrarch composed over 300 poems to a woman with whom he never had a relationship. But his innovation on the Italian sonnet form—usually referred to as the Petrarchan sonnet—immortalized both the poet and this mysterious woman.

Although Italian writers had written sonnets before Petrarch, he improved the 14-line poem's structure and wrote in the vernacular of the day, more closely reflecting the way people actually spoke. Petrarch's success established the sonnet as a major poetic form. Petrarch influenced poets throughout Europe, including Elizabethan poets like Spenser and Shakespeare.

From Law Student to Clergyman Petrarch was born in Arezzo, Italy, where his father practiced law. Petrarch's father insisted that his sons study law, so the poet and his younger brother complied until their father died in 1326. By then, Petrarch had developed an interest in classical

studies and, as he described it, “an unquenchable thirst for literature.” After his father's death, Petrarch abandoned the study of law and became a Catholic clergyman.

Living in Avignon, France, then the seat of the exiled papal court, Petrarch held a variety of church positions that provided him with a modest

income as well as free time to devote to literature, classical studies, and extensive traveling.

The Love of His Life On Good Friday in 1327, when he was 22 years old, Petrarch saw a woman in the Church of Saint Clare in Avignon and immediately fell in love with her. For the rest of his life, he wrote and revised sonnets about his unrequited love for a woman he identified only as Laura. Like Petrarch's son and many of his friends, Laura died in the plague that devastated much of Europe in the mid-14th century. Petrarch recorded the date of her death—April 6, 1348—in a copy of a work by Virgil, a classical Roman poet whom he revered. After Laura's death, Petrarch continued to write sonnets reminiscing about her, including “Sonnet 292.” The *Canzoniere*, his masterpiece, is a collection of 366 poems, most of them sonnets that focus on Laura and the themes of unrequited love, desperate love, eternal love, and tragic love.

Poet Laureate of Rome By the time Petrarch was in his mid-30s, his poetry was widely admired in Italy and France. He received invitations from both the University of Paris and the Senate in Rome to be poet laureate. In 1341, he became Rome's first poet laureate since ancient times.

DID YOU KNOW?

Francesco Petrarch ...

- studied law at a university when he was only 12 years old.
- would spend his allowance on classical poetry, which so angered Petrarch's father that he burned most of the books.

(background)
Avignon, France



Author Online

Go to thinkcentral.com. KEYWORD: HML12-334

● POETIC FORM: PETRARCHAN SONNET

In reading sonnets by Spenser and Shakespeare, you've learned about two variations on the sonnet form. Two centuries earlier, Petrarch perfected his own form of the sonnet. The 14 lines of the **Petrarchan sonnet** are divided into two distinct parts.

- The **octave** (first 8 lines) introduces a situation, presents a problem, or raises a question. Its rhyme scheme is usually *abbaabba*.
- The **sestet** (the last 6 lines) is where the speaker comments on or resolves the problem or question. Its rhyme scheme is usually *cdcdcd* or *cdecde*.

Most of Petrarch's sonnets are about love, specifically unrequited love or love from afar. As you read the following sonnets, notice the relationship between the structure and the content of the poems.

● READING SKILL: ANALYZE METAPHOR

One element that makes Petrarch's sonnets so emotionally powerful is his use of metaphor. A **metaphor** makes a comparison between two unlike things. Unlike a simile, a metaphor does not use the word *like* or *as*. For example, the metaphor "in fragile bark on the tempestuous sea" compares the speaker's emotional state to a ship in stormy waters. Writers often use metaphors to help express emotions or convey abstract ideas.

As you read each of Petrarch's sonnets, use a chart like the one shown to record and analyze examples of metaphor.

"Sonnet 90"	
Metaphor	Comparison
"I had love's tinder in my breast unburned"	compares love that hasn't been aroused yet to unburned firewood



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

When does love become OBSESSION?

An obsession is an excessive preoccupation with a single idea or emotion. The theme of obsessive love appears in many movies, novels, and plays, as well as in real-life stories in newspapers and magazines. When exactly does love cross the line and become an obsession?

SURVEY Conduct a survey, asking several people you know to complete the statement "Love becomes an obsession when..." Put a star by the answers you agree with. Then share and discuss the results of your survey.

Love becomes an obsession when...	
1.	you have trouble sleeping
2.	you're distracted all the time
3.	
4.	
5.	



SONNET 90

Francesco Petrarch

Upon the breeze she spread her golden hair
that in a thousand gentle knots was turned,
and the sweet light beyond all measure burned
in eyes where now that radiance is rare;

5 and in her face there seemed to come an air
of pity, true or false, that I discerned:
I had love's tinder in my breast unburned,
was it a wonder if it kindled there? **A**

She moved not like a mortal, but as though
10 she bore an angel's form, her words had then
a sound that simple human voices lack;

a heavenly spirit, a living sun
was what I saw; now, if it is not so,
the wound's not healed because the bow grows slack.

Translated by Anthony Mortimer

Analyze Visuals ►

In what ways does the drawing on page 337 resemble Petrarch's Laura?

A PETRARCHAN SONNET

Reread lines 1–8. What situation does Petrarch describe in this octave?

14 the wound's . . . slack: I still ache with love for her, even though her beauty has faded. Petrarch alludes to Cupid, Roman god of love, often portrayed as an archer whose arrows pierce the heart and cause someone to fall in love.



Head of a Woman (1472),
Leonardo da Vinci. Inv.: 428E.
Gabinetto dei Disegni e delle
Stampe, Uffizi, Florence.
© Scala/Art Resource, New York.

SONNET 292

Francesco Petrarch

The eyes I spoke of once in words that burn,
the arms and hands and feet and lovely face
that took me from myself for such a space
of time, and marked me out from other men;

5 the waving hair of unmixed gold that shone,
the smile that flashed with the angelic rays **B**
that used to make this earth a paradise,
are now a little dust, all feeling gone.

And yet I live, hence grief and rage for me,
10 left where the light I cherished never shows,
in fragile bark on the tempestuous sea.

Here let my loving song come to a close,
the vein of my accustomed art is dry,
and this, my lyre, turned at last to tears.

Translated by Anthony Mortimer

B ANALYZE METAPHOR

What idea or emotion does Petrarch convey through the use of metaphors in lines 5–6?

11 bark: sailing ship; **tempestuous:** stormy.

14 lyre (lir): a stringed instrument that poets traditionally plucked to accompany the oral performance of their poetry.

Comprehension

1. **Clarify** In “Sonnet 90,” how has the speaker’s beloved changed since he first fell in love with her?
2. **Clarify** What has happened to the speaker’s beloved in “Sonnet 292”?
3. **Paraphrase** In your own words, what is the poet saying in lines 12–14 of “Sonnet 292”?



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Literary Analysis

4. **Examine Petrarchan Sonnet** In the **octave** of “Sonnet 90,” the speaker describes the experience of falling in love. How does Petrarch use the **sestet** to develop a more complicated view of love? Cite details in your answer.
5. **Interpret Lines** Reread lines 10–11 of “Sonnet 292.” What feeling does Petrarch express through the **metaphor** of being left “in fragile bark on the tempestuous sea”?
6. **Draw Conclusions** What ideas does Petrarch convey in these sonnets about the nature of beauty, poetic inspiration, and love at first sight?
7. **Analyze Metaphors** Review the chart you created as you read. What characteristics of love and the speaker’s beloved are emphasized through the metaphors in these two sonnets?
8. **Make Judgments** Is each speaker truly in love with the woman he describes, or is he really just experiencing obsession? Support your opinion with examples from the sonnets.
9. **Compare Texts** Reread Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 130” on page 330. Some of his imagery is intended as a parody of Petrarch’s sonnets. Using a chart like the one shown, pick out examples of Petrarchan imagery from “Sonnet 90” and “Sonnet 292” that Shakespeare pokes fun at in “Sonnet 130.”

Petrarch’s Image	Shakespeare’s Parody
“the sweet light beyond all measure burned / in [her] eyes”	“My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun”

Literary Criticism

10. **Historical Context** A Petrarchan scholar said that Petrarch’s expressions of love were nothing more than “a great fiction to compensate for a real state of affairs in which it was a man’s world and a violent one at that.” If Petrarch were writing today, how might he alter his portrayal of women?

When does love become **OBSESSION**?

Love is not always returned when given. Why do some people obsess over a person who does not love them?

Universal Themes in Love Poetry

*"Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
That valleys, groves, hills, and fields,
Woods, or steepy mountain yields."*

—Christopher Marlowe,
from "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love"

The speaker in "The Passionate Shepherd" does his best to convince his lover to return his affections. But love can be complicated, as becomes apparent when reading the rest of the poems in this section (pages 314–337). Each of these poems makes a point or comment about love that could be considered universal, yet none of the poems look at love from the same angle. What is the main message about love that each speaker conveys? Which speaker develops his ideas most fully?

Writing to Compare

Write a three-to-five paragraph essay comparing two or more of the poems you have read in this section, focusing on the theme of each poem and the literary devices used to develop the theme.

Consider

- how you would summarize the theme of each poem (Keep in mind that the final couplet in a sonnet often comments on the situation or question raised in the first 12 lines.)
- the use of literary devices such as symbolism, imagery, metaphor, and simile
- which poem you feel most successfully develops its central theme

Extension

LISTENING & SPEAKING

Choose a poem from this section and rewrite it using modern language and modern imagery, but be sure to retain the poem's original theme. Deliver your poem to your class by reading it aloud in an expressive voice. Then, listen attentively while your classmates deliver their poems. Take notes as you consider each poem's content. Jot down key words and phrases, questions you have, and points you want to share with the speaker, such as things you liked about the poem or improvements. After listening to all of your classmates' poems, discuss which ones work best in their modern form and why.



WRITING 15C Write an interpretation of a literary text. **LISTENING AND SPEAKING 24A** Listen responsively to a speaker by framing inquiries that reflect an understanding of the content.