

“England in 1819”

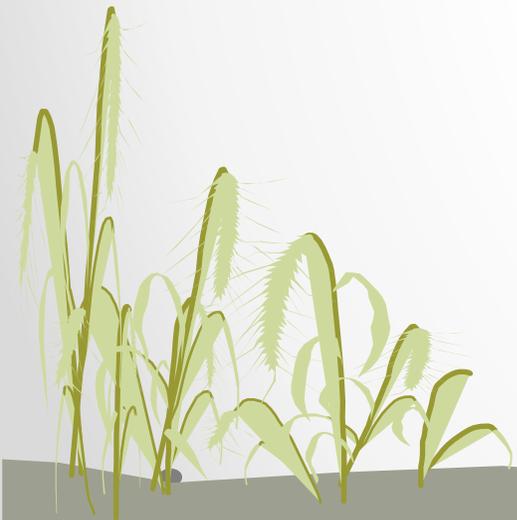
Percy Bysshe Shelley



Petrarchan Sonnet

The Italian or Petrarchan sonnet (named after the 14th-century Italian poet Petrarch) falls into two main parts:

an **octave** (eight lines) rhyming *abbaabba* followed by a **sestet** (six lines) rhyming *cdecde* or some variant, such as *cdccdc*.



An old, mad, blind, despised, and dying King;
Princes, the dregs of their dull race, who flow
Through public scorn,—mud from a muddy spring;
Rulers who neither see nor feel nor know,
But leechlike to their fainting country cling
Till they drop, blind in blood, without a blow.

a
b
a
b
a
b

A people starved and stabbed in th' untilled field;
An army, whom liberticide and prey
Makes as a two-edged sword to all who wield;
Golden and sanguine laws which tempt and slay;
Religion Christless, Godless—a book sealed;
A senate, Time's worst statute, unrepealed—
Are graves from which a glorious Phantom may
Burst, to illumine our tempestuous day.

c
d
c
d
c
c
d
d

Petrarchan Sonnet

OCTAVE

SESTET

“England in 1819”

SESTET

OCTAVE

Commentary on “England in 1819”

- The time is out of joint, and as if to mimic this the sonnet inverts octave and sestet.
- Alliteration: “country cling ... blind ... blood ... blow ... starved ... stabbed”
- As the poet surveys the nation, the accumulated wrongs pile up and Shelley creates a list from the abuses of the system.
- The vivid image of the bloated leech that finally drops off the body through its own weight
- We notice that the image of apocalyptic resurrection is only a hope—the promised ‘day’ remains dependent on the verb ‘**may**’.



Down with 'em! Chop 'em down
my brave boys. give them no quarter
they want to take our Beef & Pudding
from us & remember the more
you kill the less poor rates you'll
have to pay so go it lads show your
courage & your Loyalty!



Sources

- M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey G. Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 10th ed., Wadsworth, 2011. (Slide 2)
- David Fairer, “The Sonnet,” *Romanticism: An Oxford Guide*, edited by Nicholas Roe, Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 292-309. (Slide 5)