

# SONNET

*a journal of poetry*

VOLUME I

2018

Founded in 2012 by Barbara L. Prescott

# SONNET

*a journal of poetry*

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Volume I

2018

## THE EARLY ITALIAN SONNET

*Il primo sonetto italiano*

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# Inscription

This first volume of SONNET, 2018, is inscribed to the luminaries of the Sicilian *Duecento*, those practical poets in the court of Frederick II, Holy Roman Emperor, who broke with classical and troubadour traditions to create the poetry form of the *sonetto* by using a combination of vernacular, formal Italian, and a unique literary dialect of the court. These writers were a poetic force in the first century of Italian literature.

Little did they know that this new poetry form would dance down the centuries, traveling to England, throughout Europe, and to the Americas, inspiring countless poets, and in those hands flash brilliantly into immortal verse. Bravo, Giacomo da Lentino, Pier della Vigna, Jacopo Mostacci, Giacomino Pugliese, Rinaldo d'Aquino, Enzo of Sardinia, and other poets of the *Scuola Siciliana* whose original verses were lost through political upheaval and the ravages of time.

Despite all attempts by implacable change to eradicate your work and valuable lives, we still know who you were in life, we know of your good character, and we know of your brilliance. We even have a few of your sonnets that have survived all the nonsense of destruction. Through ongoing research, we hope to recover more of your poems and writings. Poets of the *sonetto*, we honor your memory, your lives, and your verses. This first volume of SONNET is for you.





## Amor è uno desio che ven da core

Amor è uno desio che ven da core  
per abondanza di gran piacimento;  
e li occhi in prima generan l'amore  
e lo core li dà nutricamento.

Ben è alcuna fiata om amatore  
senza vedere so 'namoramento,  
ma quell'amor che stringe con furore  
da la vista de li occhi à nascimento.

Che li occhi rapresentan a lo core  
d'ogni cosa che veden bono e rio,  
com'è formata naturalmente;  
e lo cor, che di zo è concepitore,  
imagina, e piace quel desio:  
e questo amore regna fra la gente.

Love is a desire which comes from the heart  
through an abundance of great pleasure;  
but the eyes first generate love  
while the heart nourishes it.

Sometimes, one may fall in love  
without first seeing the loved one,  
but that love which is tuned with great passion  
comes primarily from the sight of the eyes;  
The eyes quickly present to the heart  
everything they see, good and evil,  
as it is formed naturally;  
and the heart, which receives the images,  
contemplates them, and is pleased by that desire:  
and such love reigns among the people.

Giacomo da Lentino

tr. Langley, 1915; Jensen, 1986;

Prescott, 2018

# Welcome

## *Benvenuto, amici del sonetto*

We are delighted to welcome you to this first volume of SONNET, the journal. There is an adventure awaiting you within these pages, and we offer an open invitation to enter the intriguing world of the sonnet and to explore the remarkably beautiful, and oftentimes provocative, history of this most versatile and useful poetry form.

SONNET was created for both the specialized and general reader, student, and enthusiast. We hope you find valuable information as well as new insights, as you explore the journal, into this form of poetry that began humbly as the *sonetto* and through time and tide has since become a powerful poetic structure. The first issue of SONNET is dedicated, for your reading pleasure, to the earliest examples of the Sicilian and Italian sonnet, written between 1220 - 1250 AD by the *Scuola Siciliana*, poets of the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II, centered in Sicily. Some of these poems are rather difficult to find, so we have designed this issue to include the rare first sonnets with an additional list of resources that will provide further, more detailed, information about the earliest years of the sonnet.

The sonnet lives today in many different environments, variations, and genres: poetry, musical lyrics, performance art, rhetoric, fiction, visual art, literary theory, debate, education, the business world, theatre, blogs, news, comedy, street art, and even as graffiti. Looking carefully, you can find the sonnet, in various forms, anywhere in the world. There is no door it will not open, nor any communication area into which it will not venture. It was designed to weave both logic and emotion in structure, and that advantage gives the form cultural and linguistic flexibility.

The sonnet form, by its very nature, is useful and versatile as it integrates the opposing purposes of emotional expression and logical structure to send a message by poetry. In other words, a sonnet is an argument, debate, or complaint in poetic form. Most interestingly, the argument is usually about some strong emotion, particularly love or hate, both subjects in which people have been fascinated throughout human history. Miraculously, this most curious combination becomes very satisfying in a well-composed sonnet. You may say anything you would like in a sonnet, but you say it in specific rhyme and in fourteen lines. It is

not wild emotion unbridled; it is emotion structured to make a point or to pack a punch. At its best, the sonnet holds a powerful message or argument, briefly and elegantly stated. In the case of a Shakespearean sonnet, the message ends in a rhyming couplet punchline. Shakespeare loved his punchlines. In fact, the sonnet is equally at home in a romantic letter or at a business meeting, and it has been used, historically, in both instances as well as in many other situations.

In thirteenth century Sicily where the Italian or Sicilian sonnet originated, probably between 1220-1230 AD, the sonnet was usually written to complain about some aspect of love, yet it was also used extensively in letters to argue a point, to ask advice, to convey information, to express anger, or to exchange insults. Imagine two furious Italian noblemen calling one another vile names in sonnet form as they passed viperous letters back and forth, each more outrageous than the last.

There was some effort and time spent on such endeavors by the Italian literati, particularly by the Tuscan sonnetists of the *Duecento* and *Trecento*. Such letters and poems are extant, though they are often difficult to find in translated form. It can be very amusing to read early Italian sonnet letters, and a recommended place to start is *Rustico Filippi, 'The Art of Insult'* by Fabian Alfie.

In this first annual volume of SONNET, we decided to start at the beginning, to give you, our readers and fellow lovers of poetry, a firm foundation as we consider the sonnet form. We discuss, in this volume, where, when, and by whom, the sonnet was created. Exactly why the sonnet was created is a bit more difficult, but we give that some thought as well.

SONNET is divided into three parts. Part I is composed of three sections: Sonnets (poems), Sonnetists (poets), and Sonnetics (study of sonnets). These constitute the bricks of the journal and have a permanent place in each volume. The three standard areas of focus in Part I may be grouped together or presented separately, but they will always be present. In this, our first, volume, we start with a brief introduction to the sonnet, then delve immediately into the sonnets themselves, presenting most of the thirty-six extant sonnets remaining of those earliest sonnets composed by the *Scuola Siciliana* (Sicilian School) of poetry, with summaries in English. The summary and notes following each sonnet are sourced from Ernest F. Langley's, *The Poetry of Giacomo da Lentino*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1915. Next, we present two rare sonnets by women poets of the *Duecento*, one anonymous but probably by a noblewoman of Frederick's court, and one by Compiuta Donzella, a Florentine poet of the later *Duecento*. Both sonnets give us a rarely found woman's perspective. Finally, we include sonnets by poets of the later *Duecento* whose work was

inspired by the original Frederician sonnetists. Several of those later sonnetists may have belonged to the original *Scuola* as well.

Following the thirteenth-century sonnets, we have the honor to present twenty-eight modern poems. Most of these are sonnets, some in variant form, and most never before published, from poets who have written sonnets throughout their poetry careers or who have only just discovered the sonnet. In this first volume, we also include original poems in other than classic sonnet structure as a nod to the infinite variety of poetic expression originated by the sonnet. These poems are a delight, one and all, and prove that the sonnet, as a vibrant evolving part of the larger world of poetry, continues itself to be a living, growing, and changing, mode of literary expression.

In the section on Sonnetists, we present a biographical sketch of Giacomo da Lentino by Ernest F. Langley, 1915. Next, we note the poetry of women sonnetists in the *Duecento*, briefly comparing their point of view and style with that of their contemporary male poets. Finally, we include several excerpts from Dante G. Rossetti's nineteenth-century classic, *The Early Italian Poets*, 1861.

In Sonnetics, we present several informational articles. "In the Beginning" presents a concise history of the sonnet from 1220 to 1250 AD as it was created and used in the *Scuola Siciliana* of poetry engendered in the court of the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II, near Palermo, Sicily. You will be introduced to Giacomo da Lentino, the notary, lawyer, and courtier, who invented the Sicilian sonnet, as well as to other member poets of the *Scuola*, notably Pier della Vigna and Jacopo Mostacci. Their stories are filled with the vivid color of thirteenth-century Italian drama yet do not end particularly well, as far as we can tell, from the indistinct fragments of history. In retrospect, these were brilliant poets and thinkers, and we owe them the courtesy of reintroducing their work and honoring their lives in the twenty-first century. They changed the direction and structure of poetry, and those changes they created, if not most of their poems, have lasted to modern day.

Next, we are entirely delighted to offer the classic 1922 article by Dr. Ernest Hatch Wilkins, "The Earliest Sonnet." His detective research identified the poem which is arguably the first sonnet ever written. Next is an essay by the foremost sonnet historian and linguist, Dr. Ernest F. Langley of MIT, who delved with great scholarly detail during the early twentieth century in the poetry of Giacomo da Lentino, the creator of the sonnet, as well as with the poetry of the *Scuola Siciliana*. This essay is presented in two parts, one focusing on Lentino's life, the other on his poetry, and both come from Dr. Langley's rarely found masterpiece, *The Poetry of Giacomo da Lentino*, 1915. Following is a "A Note on Language Use in the *Scuola Siciliana*" by Adolf Gaspary, translated by Herman

Oelsner in 1901 and next an article on the “Strambotto, the Octave, and Chaos in Fourteen Lines.” Finally, “Considering the Invention of the Sonnet,” continues Wilkins’ original and brilliant detective work of the early twentieth century. Relevant sources for these articles are found in the section, *Bibliography & Sources Cited*, to avoid redundancy.

In Part II, we get a bit creative. This part constitutes the mortar to our bricks of the preceding section. The articles in this part of the journal will vary in each volume, being appropriate to the current theme of the journal. In this, our inaugural volume on Early Italian Sonnets, we have included a sonnet seminar with foundational instructions to create an early Sicilian sonnet in modern English, an article on the practical aspects of sonnet writing and reciting in the field of rhetoric and debate, a chart of sonnet variations with which to experiment and enjoy, and a musical score which features early sonnet lyrics, “The Lost Falcon: *Lo Sparviero fuggito*.” Most interestingly, the lyrics were written by an anonymous Italian woman sonnetist of the thirteenth century.

In Part III, we include book reviews and a selection of resources in English and Italian: books, articles, online sites, organizations to join, places to visit around Chicago where the sonnet may be heard and read, and other ways and means to learn about the sonnet’s impact on poetry and upon our modern lives. Best of all, many of these resources are fun to explore. We’ve also included *Submission Guidelines* to SONNET and encourage poets, scholars, and sonnet enthusiasts to submit poetry, articles, letters, and reviews to the journal. Finally, we send our acknowledgements and heartfelt appreciation to those scholars whose early and later detective work inspired us to begin our winding path toward the creation of SONNET.

We complete this first volume by giving the final word to Pier della Vigna through a poem which encapsulates the beauty and versatility of the sonnet in the Italian *Duecento*.

We hope it is only the beginning of your quest into the dimensions of this intricately beautiful and astonishingly varied poetry form. We also invite you into the culture of the Frederician Court as Giacomo and his *Scuola* share their experiences through the time traveling vehicle of the sonnet. As you read the words of these sonnetists by linking to their thoughts and sharing their vision, may your hearts and minds join together with theirs, across the centuries. To this end we have included an initial inscription to the writers of the *Duecento* who introduced this new poetic form titled *sonetto* and whose work is a testament to the power of creatively melding opposites.

As a tantalizing preview, the editors of SONNET want you to know that we will dedicate Volume II, 2019, to the sonnets and cantos of Dante Alighieri, as well as to sonnetists of the early *Trecento*. SONNET will

accept submissions for Volume II starting May 2019. Following our Dante volume, we will explore the sonnets of Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch), Renaissance women sonnetists, and the Shakespearean sonnet. We are also considering such diverse themes as Sci-Fi sonnets, sonnets at Oxford, sonnets of Arthurian Romance, the sonnets of Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning, sonnets in modern music, and American sonnets. Stay tuned for some unusual and intriguing volumes.

Please note that we use both British and American English spelling conventions within SONNET, and the names of thirteenth-century poets may be cited in variant Italian spellings and forms as they are found in original sources and manuscripts. All illustrations and sketches are from *The Medieval Face: A Collection* by Barbara L. Prescott ©2018.

We invite you, lovers of the written word, to an adventure through the historical, cultural, social, romantic, and most curious world of the sonnet. Once finding yourself on this poetic journey, you may further discover the structures, voices, and uses of the sonnet to be endlessly fascinating. We hope, by exploring this world through the journal and beyond, you will be inspired to read new sonnets, search for rare sonnets in other languages, or in archives, study the weaving of sonnets and culture, or perhaps, best of all, to write sonnets of your own. With a most heartfelt welcome, we wish you the joy and adventure of sonnet poetry.

*The Editors*



# *Writing a Sonnet: Some Thoughts on Style*

Roman James Hoffman

There is something perennially refreshing about a sonnet. Situated between the two extremes of classic epic verse at one end and contemporary free verse at the other, the sonnet's fourteen lines seem to be the perfect length for the seeds of a poetic thought to be sown and nurtured to blossom. The potency of this characteristic brevity no doubt owes its effectiveness to the formulaic qualities which govern its composition: lines of iambic pentameter (ten-syllable lines broken into five "feet" with a du-DUM stress pattern) ordered to a strict rhyme scheme.

Now then, I'm fully aware that your free-verse poet scribbling away furiously in Starbucks may scoff at the traditional formal qualities demanded of the sonnet, claiming that such rigorous demands inhibit the free flow of his "creativity." I certainly remember espousing such sentiments in a younger incarnation, but since those days I have come to be of the opinion that:

- 1) an ability to write in a variety of poetic forms is the mark of a true wordsmith;
- 2) a thorough familiarity with the conventions of the sonnet form (even if not applied to a sonnet itself) will certainly provide any would-be poet with a conceptual vocabulary from which his poetry cannot help but benefit;
- 3) a thorough familiarity with the conventions of the sonnet form equip the would-be poet, as well as the passive consumer of poetry, with a conceptual vocabulary that enables him to truly appreciate a rich genre of poetry which includes the likes of Milton, Shakespeare, Spenser, Wordsworth, as well as more modern names such as Auden, e.e. cummings, Seamus Heaney, and Carol Ann Duffy.

Surely, no better defence for the particular pleasures of the sonnet can be found than Wordsworth's *Nuns Fret Not at Their Convent's Narrow Room*. The poem is a sonnet itself and beautifully describes (rather than the form's strictness inhibiting creativity) that the poet should revel in testing,

through the application of poetic skill and knowledge of language, the very fracture points of the form to the furthest extent possible so that the weight of his particular poetic intent or vision can be communicated. More pointedly, we may wish to modify a phrase from William Blake and instead write that those whose imagination is restrained is done so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained.

***Nuns Fret Not at Their Convent's Narrow Room***

by William Wordsworth

*Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room;  
And hermits are contented with their cells;  
And students with their pensive citadels;  
Maids at the wheel, the weaver at his loom,  
Sit blithe and happy; bees that soar for bloom,  
High as the highest Peak of Furness-fells,  
Will murmur by the hour in foxglove bells:  
In truth the prison, into which we doom  
Ourselves, no prison is: and hence for me,  
In sundry moods, 'twas pastime to be bound  
Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground;  
Pleased if some Souls (for such there needs must be)  
Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,  
Should find brief solace there, as I have found.*

**William Wordsworth (1779-1850)**

Now then, looked at in more detail, we see that this poem is a *Petrarchan Sonnet*. This category of sonnets, Italian or Petrarchan, is composed of two parts: an *octave* (composed of eight lines) and a *sestet* (composed of six lines). The rhyme scheme of the octave has a nested *abba abba* structure; however, the rhyme scheme of the sestet can vary, usually being *cdecde*, *cdccdc* or, in the case of the above poem, *cddccd*. The beginning of the ninth line is called the *volta* (the turn) and marks the point where a contrasting point of view or change of mood is introduced into the poem. In the case of *Nuns Fret Not...*, it signals the moment that the previously cited examples of the way other people flourish within restrictions is applied to the poet himself and the way poetic expression can flourish within the stringent format of the sonnet.

**William Shakespeare, 1564-1616. Wrote some plays and some poems.**

Historically, the Petrarchan sonnet was imported onto these shores from Italy and over time it evolved to suit the needs of the English language. Notably, the construction of the octave altered to an *abab cdcd* rhyme scheme, something which suited the vocabulary of English more than the

Petrarchan *abba abba* rhyme scheme. As Italian has a more uniform vocabulary, it is easier to accumulate the required amount of rhyming words. More so, the very idea of the octave/sestet was recast into three *quatrains* (four-line stanzas) topped off with a couplet. This gives us the *abab cdcd efef gg* rhyme scheme known as the *Shakespearean Sonnet*. These days William Shakespeare is known more for his plays. However the man himself wished to be remembered for his poetry, and these poems are recommended reading for anyone who wishes to understand the poetic potency of the sonnet and the sheer romance it came to characterize. Here is his famous *Sonnet 18*.

*Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.  
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;  
And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimmed;  
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,  
Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,  
When in eternal lines to Time thou grow'st.  
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.*

Notice that despite the different rhyme scheme to the Petrarchan sonnet, there is still a *volta* to be found on line nine, beginning, *But thy eternal summer...* Here is where the poem finds the resolution to the question asked in line one and the essential difference of the poem's subject and a summer's day is revealed: the beauty of the person described will not fade like the beauty we witness in nature.

All in all, whether you choose to write a Petrarchan sonnet or a Shakespearean sonnet, the important things to remember are that each of those fourteen lines should be in iambic pentameter and ordered in a strict rhyme scheme which is somewhat different for each type. Characteristically, the Petrarchan sonnet rhymes *abbaabba cdecde/cdcdcd* or a variation thereof, and the classic Shakespearean sonnet rhymes *abab cdcd efef gg*. Don't forget that ending couplet. Most importantly, the *volta* (or change) is essential to sonnet structure, usually occurring between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> lines. With those structural rules in hand, you are free to express emotion to your poetical heart's content. Write a sonnet.

## Giacomo da Lentino (ca. 1188 - 1250 AD)

### I

Molti amadori la lor malatia  
portano in core, che 'm vista nom pare;  
Ed io nom posso al celar la mia  
ch' ella nom pala per lo milo penare;  
Però che son sotto altrui signoria,  
nè di meve non ò neiente a fare,  
Se non quanto madonna mia voria,  
ch' ella mi pote morte, e vita dare.  
Su' è lo core, e suo sono tutto quanto,  
a chi non à consiglio da suo core,  
non vive infra la gente como deve.  
Cad io nom sono mio nè più nè tanto,  
se non quanto Madonna è de mi fore,  
ed un poco di spirit ch' è 'n meve.

Many lovers keep their passion concealed in their hearts, but this poet cannot do so, since being completely in his lady's thrall, he no longer has command over himself. The man who does not take counsel from his heart lives unworthily. He himself is guided only by his lady from without and by a little spirit within. (Langley, 1915)

*Editorial Note: 1: All Scuola Siciliana sonnet summaries, unless otherwise noted, are sourced in Langley, 1915. 2: "Molti Amadori" is argued to be the first sonnet written. It was composed by Giacomo da Lentino ca. 1220 AD at the court of the Frederick II Hohenstaufen (1194-1250), in Sicily.*

*Source Manuscript: A 333 (Notaro Giacomo)*

*Octave: ABAB, ABAB. Sestet: CDE, CDE.*

## II

Lo giglio, quand' è colto, tost' è passo,  
da poi la sua natura lui no è giunta;  
ed io, da che son partuto uno passo  
da voi, mia donna, dolemi ogni giunta.  
Perchè d'amare ogni amadore passo,  
in tanta alteze lo mio core giunta;  
così mi fere Amore là 'vunque passo,  
com' aghila quand' a la caccia è giunta.

Oi lasso me, che nato fui in tal punto,  
c'unque no amasse se non voi chiù gente;  
questo saccio, madonna, da mia parte.  
In prima che vi vidi ne fui punto,  
servivi ed inoravi a tutta gente;  
da voi, bella, lo mio core non parte.

As the lily fades when broken from its stem, so the poet suffers when parted from his lady. Surpassing the love of all other lovers, his heart soars to the loftiest heights, and as the eagle overtaking its prey, so is he wounded by Love. Woe to him if he ever loved another lady. As soon as he saw her, his heart was pierced, and he will now never cease to love her.

*A 333 (Notaro Giacomo)*

*Equivocal rimes throughout the entire sonnet.*

### III

Sicome il sol che manda la susa spera  
e passa per lo vetro e no lo parte,  
e l'altro vetro che le donne spera,  
che passa gli ochi e va da l'altra parte;  
così l'Amore fere là ove spera  
e mandavi lo dardo da dua parte;  
fere in tal loco che l'omo non spera,  
passa per gli ochi e lo core diparte.

Lo dardo de l'Amore, là ove giunge,  
da poi che dà feruta, sì s'aprende  
di foco c'arde dentro e fuor nom pare.  
E due cori insieme ora li giunge,  
de l'arte de l'Amore sì gli aprende,  
e face l'uno e l'altro d'amor pare.

As the sun penetrates the glass without breaking it, and as the mirror's reflection passes through the eyes, so Love sends his dart through the eyes and pierces the heart. When Love's arrow strikes, it kindles a flame, unites two hearts, and fills them with love.

*A 334 (Notaro Giacomo)*

*Equivocal rimes as in "Lo giglio."*

## IV

Donna, vostri sembianti mi mostraro  
    isperanza d'amore e benvolenza,  
    ed io sovr' ogni gioia lo n' ò caro  
    lo vostro amore e far vostra piagenza.  
Or vi mostrate irata; dumqu' è raro,  
    senza ch' io pechi, darmi penitenza;  
    e fatt'avete de la penna caro,  
    come nochier c' à falsa canoscenza.

Disconoscenza ben mi par che sia,  
    la conoscenza che non à fermeze,  
    che si rimuta per ogni volire.  
Dumque nom siete voi in vostra balia,  
    nè in altrui c' aia ferma prodeze,  
    e non avete bon fine al gioire.

The poet reproaches his lady for first awakening his hopes by her encouragement, and then tormenting him by her irresolution and disfavor. Such behavior reveals her ignorance and promises her no happiness in love.

*Editorial Note: There is a play on the word "penna" which the poet uses to refer to "pen" as well as to a "sail," the miserly misuse of both represents the lady's ungenerosity, variable temperament, and lack of affection, characteristics that will bring misfortune to her life and bring lack of future success in love. Do these words signify a premonition, a curse, or both?*

A 365 (Notaro Giacomo).

Sestet: CDE, CDE

## V

Ogn' omo, c'ama, dè amar lo suo onore  
e de la donna, che prende ad amare.  
È folle chi non è conoscidore  
che la natura dè l'omo isforzare.  
E non dè dire ciò ch' egli ave in core,  
chè la parola non pò ritornare;  
e da la gente n'è tenuto migliore  
chi à misura nelo suo parlare.  
Dumque, madonna, mi voglio sofrire  
di far sembianti a la vostra contrata,  
chè la gente si forza di maldire.  
E facciol perchè nom siate blasmata;  
chè l'omo si diletta più di dire  
lo male che lo bene tale fiata.

Every lover should respect his own honor and that of his lady, and beware of revealing too openly the secret of their love; for once the word is spoken, it cannot be recalled, and the man who shows self-constraint in his words is the more esteemed. Therefore, the poet, when he meets his lady, will hide his feelings to avoid the malicious slander in which men are prone to indulge.

*Editorial Note: Lentino departs from the formal chivalrous tone of Provençal poetry to express his genuine feelings in the vernacular of the bourgeoisie. Was this to underscore his own roots, or was his lady of the bourgeoisie as well?*

*B 411 (Notar Giacomo). It appears here under Lentino's name.  
Sestet: CDC, DCD*

## Tenzone II (Sonnets XXVIII - XXX)

### Does Love Exist?

Jacopo Mostacci, Pietro della Vigna, Notar Giacomo

#### XXVIII Jacopo Mostacci

Solicitando un poco meo sapere,  
e conlui voglendomi dilatare,  
un dubio che mi misi ad avere,  
a vui lo mando per determinare.  
Ogn' omo dice ch' Amor à podere,  
e gli coragi distringe ad amare;  
ma eo no lo voggio consentire,  
però ch' Amore no parse ni pare.

Ben trova l'om una amorosa etate,  
la quale par che nasca di piacere,  
e ciò vole dire on che sia amore.  
Eo no li saccio altra qualitate;  
ma ciò che è, da vui lo voggio odere;  
però ve ne faccio sentenzatore.

Mostacci questions the common belief that Love has power and forces hearts to love, for no one has ever seen Love. Men see an amorous state produced by pleasure, and this accords with the poet's belief, but in his uncertainty, he refers the question to the other two poets, Pietro and Giacomo.

*F 94 (Jacopo Mostaçço).*

*Sestet: CDE, CDE (D=A)*

## **XXIX Pietro de la Vigna**

Però ch' Amore no si pò vedere  
e no si trata corporalmente,  
manti ne son di si fole sapere  
che credono ch' Amore sia niente.  
Ma po' ch' Amore si face sentire  
dentro dal cor signoreggiar la gente,  
molto maggiore presio dè avere  
che se 'l vedessen visibilmente.

Per la vertute de la calamita,  
como lo ferro atrae no si vede,  
ma s' lo tira signorevolmente;  
e questa cosa a credere m'invita  
ch' Amore sia; e dami grande fede,  
che tutor sia creduto fra la gente.

Pietro replies that it is folly to deny the reality and power of Love, for, though he cannot be seen or touched, yet he can be felt ruling over the heart. The fact that one cannot see the power by which the loadstone draws the iron confirms his faith in the invisible existence of Love.

*F 95 (Petro de lauigna).*

*Sestet: CDE, CDE (E=B)*

### **XXX Notar Jacopo da Lentino**

Amor è un disio che ven da core  
per abondanza di gran placimento;  
e gl' ochi in prima generan l'amore,  
e lo core li dà nutricamento.  
Ben è alcuna fiata om amatore;  
senza vedere so 'namoramento;  
ma quel amor che stringe con furore,  
da la vista degl' ochi à nascimento.

Chè gl' ochi rapresentan a lo core  
d'ogni cosa, che veden, bona e ria,  
com' è formata naturalmente;  
e lo core che di zo è conepitore,  
zo che imagina e place, quel disia;  
e questo amore regna fra le gente.

Giacomo declares that Love is a desire coming from the heart through intense delight. It is the eyes that first engender Love, and the heart that feeds it. Sometimes, it is true, a man becomes enamored without seeing the object of his passion, but the overpowering kind of love arises from that which his eyes behold. For the eyes represent the object to the heart, and the heart, conceiving a desire, finds delight therein; and this is the Love that holds sway among men.

*F 96 (Notar Jacopo da Lentino). CDE, CDE (C=A)*

## *Sonnets of the Later Duecento*

### **Guerzo di Montecante (ca. 1250)**

Se alcun volesse la cagion savere  
Perchè aggio obliato il dire in rima,  
El l' bel cantare, ch' eo solea far prima,  
Diro llo in un Sonetto al meo parere.  
Chè veggio d' ora in ora il ben cadere,  
E profundare; e l' mal sormonta in cima:  
Onde l' meo core si consuma e lima,  
Sì che niente più non può valere.  
Or non vi sento più alcun remeggio,  
Sol che veder finire l'universo:  
E quest' è l'argomento, che in ciò veggio.  
Da po' che il bene è profundato o perso,  
Null' altra cosa domando, nè cheggio,  
Che il fragil mondo vederlo sommerso.

### **He Is Out Of Heart With His Time**

If any man would know the very cause  
Which makes me to forget my speech in rhyme,  
All the sweet songs I sang in other time, -  
I'll tell it in a sonnet's simple clause.  
I hourly have beheld how good withdraws  
To nothing and how evil mounts the while:  
Until my heart is gnawed as with a file,  
Nor aught of this world's worth is what it was.  
At last there is no other remedy  
But to behold the universal end;  
And so upon this hope my thoughts are urged:  
To whom, since truth is sunk and dead at sea,  
There has no other part or prayer remain'd,  
Except of seeing the world's self submerged.

**Mazzeo di Ricco (ca. 1250)**

Chi conoscesse sì la sua fallanza,  
Com' uom conosce l' altrui fallimento,  
Di mal dire d' altrui avria dottanza  
Per la pesanze del suo mancamento.  
Ma per lo corso della iniqua usanza  
Ogni uom ci crede esser di valimento;  
E tal uomo è tenuto in dispregianza,  
Che spregia altrui, ma non sa ciò ch' i' sento.  
Però vorria, che fosse destinato,  
Che ciascun conoscesse il suo onore.  
E l' disinore, e l' pregio, e la vergogna.  
Talotta si commette tal peccato,  
Che s' uomo conoscesse il suo valore,  
Di dicer mal d' altrui non avria sogna.

**Of Self-Seeing**

If any his own foolishness might see  
As he can see his fellow's foolishness,  
His evil speaking could not but prove less,  
For his own fault would vex him inwardly.  
But, by old custom, each man deems that he  
Has to himself all this world's worthiness;  
And thou, perchance, in blind contentedness,  
Scorn'st *him*, yet know'st not what *I* think of *thee*.  
Wherefore I wish it were so ordered  
That each of us might know the good that's his,  
And also the ill, - his honour and his shame.  
For oft a man has on his proper head  
Such weight of sins, that, did he know but this,  
He could not for his life give others blame.

**Bartolomeo di Sant' Angelo (ca. 1250)**

Eo son sì ricco della povertate,  
Che i' poria fornir Roma e Parise,  
Genova, Pisa, Fiorenza, ed Assise,  
Asti, Venezia, Padua, civitate;  
Perch' i' ho di possession tante fiata  
Tra nihil e niente, ed altre guise,  
Che i' recoglio all' anno com' si dise  
Fra nulle e cica ben mille carrate.  
Ed ho in danari liberi ed in gioie  
Che val ben cento cifre, e fine ne gotta;  
E sovra ciò gli amici empio di vento.  
Si che per sprendre assai non mi spavento,  
Pur ch' i' briganti vegnan a dirotta,  
A mia ricchezza tollen tutte noie.

**He Jestes Concerning His Poverty**

I am so passing rich in poverty  
That I could furnish forth Paris and Rome,  
Pisa, and Padua, and Byzantium,  
Venice and Lucca, Florence and Forli;  
For I possess in actual specie,  
Of nihil and of nothing a great sum;  
And unto this my hoard whole shiploads come,  
What between naught and zero, annually.  
In gold and precious jewels I have got  
A hundred ciphers' worth, all roundly writ;  
And therewithal am free to feast my friend.  
Because I need not be afraid to spend,  
Nor doubt the safety of my wealth a whit: -  
No thief will ever steal thereof, God wot.

**Bonaggiunta Urbicani (ca. 1250)**

Chi va cherendo Guerra, e lassa pace,  
Ragion è che ne parta penitenza:  
Chi non sa ben parlar, me' fa, se tace:  
Non dica cosa, altrui sia spiaccenza.  
Chi adasta lo vespaio, follia face;  
E chi riprende alcun senza fallenza  
E' fra cent' anni si trova verace;  
Chi ha invidia di se, d' altrui mal penza.  
Se voi sapeste quel ch' io so di voi,  
Voi n' avereste gran doglienza al core,  
E non direste villania ad altrui.  
Però ne priego ciascuna di voi,  
Se averte il mal, tenetelo nel core;  
Se nol volete udir, nol dite altrui.

**Of Contenance In Speech**

Whoso abandons peace for war-seeking,  
'Tis of all reason he should bear the smart.  
Whoso hath evil speech, his medicine  
Is silence, lest it seem a hateful art.  
To vex the wasps' nest is not a wise thing;  
Yet who rebukes his neighbor in good part,  
A hundred years shall show his right therein.  
Too prone to fear, one wrongs another's heart.  
If ye but knew what may be known to me,  
Ye would fall sorry sick, nor be thus bold  
To cry among your fellows your ill thought.  
Wherefore I would that every one of ye  
Who thinketh ill, his ill thoughts should withhold:  
If that ye would not hear it, speak it not.

**Rustico di Filippo (ca. 1250)**

Quando Dio messer Messerin fece,  
Ben si credette far gran meraviglia,  
Ch' uccello e bestia ed uom ne sodisfece,  
Che a ciascheduna natura s' appiglia.  
Che nel gozzo anitrocco l contrafece,  
E nelle reni giraffa somiglia,  
Ed uom sembra, secondo he si dece,  
Nella piacente sua cera vermiglia.  
Ancor rassembra corbo nel cantare,  
Ed è diritta bestia nel savere,  
E ad uomo è somigliato al vestimento.  
Quando egli il fece poco avea che fare,  
Ma volle dimostrar lo suo potere,  
Si strana cosa fare ebbe in talento.

**Of The Making of Master Messerin**

When God had finished Master Messerin,  
He really thought it something to have done:  
Bird, man, and beast had got a chance in one,  
And each felt flattered, it was hoped, therein.  
For he is like a goose in the windpipe thin,  
And like a cameleopard high in the loins;  
To which, for manhood, you'll be told, he joins  
Some kinds of flesh-hues and a callow chin.  
As to his singing, he affects the crow;  
As to his learning, beasts in general;  
And sets all square by dressing like a man.  
God made him, having nothing else to do;  
And proved there is not anything at all  
He cannot make, if that's a thing He can.

*Modern Sonnets*  
& *Poems*

*Roman James Hoffman*

**A Perfumed Crown / The Scent of Flesh**

Did not carnations bring a smile to lips  
that learnt this foreign tongue? A prize it was to  
procure delight, which like the petals soon flew  
from dreamt of land to Heaven's waiting kiss.  
No shame these flowers bore; but fragile bliss  
broke under blame and silent judgments then grew  
to stain this smile with sin we handed love to...  
as buried thorns the perfumed crown eclipsed.  
The melody of Yesterday now sits  
atop a mocking mound of memories.  
And as the labours bitterly assess  
their worth, the disappointed eye commits  
to fresh desire: to accompany  
the scent of flesh which haunts the emptiness.

*May 2015*

## **Event Horizon**

The burning kiss of tongues of fire, tempts  
and mocks the subtle body's noble aim;  
enticing faith full hearts into attempts  
to lie in exile's bed in passion's name.  
Inside the open wound of emptiness,  
with sacred smile and blood red lips replete,  
a heart that wears the marks of Death's caress  
surveys the ruins of love it thought complete.  
As twilight dawns the shame worn thin renews  
its name, and that which would be majesty  
conceals disgrace in thoughts known to a few  
and mourns the tired half life of ecstasy.  
How poor the trade we beggars make, of prayers  
come true for smiles of those that do not care.

*Roman James Hoffman is a British writer, poet, and literary critic whose work is concerned with esoteric aspects of reality as they intertwine love, life, and literature.*

## ***Cate Millican***

### **Overabundance**

The vanilla-walled den is bare but for  
A plaid quicksand couch and the mantle-piece  
Lined with nine ticking clocks beside the door,  
Tick tick ticking without a moment's peace:  
The travelling case with a broken clasp,  
And shining needle chasing round bare oak,  
One labors through seconds it can't quite grasp  
While cheap white plastic blinks every loud stroke.  
Fat blunt red fingers fade to glowing night,  
And the desk clock's dwarfed by a long-passed date  
As the hot pink flower won't stay upright,  
Silver encased gold swirls its fluid rate,  
And the pendulum swings to quarterly chime...  
But none are the same so you can't tell time.

*Cate Millican hails from the American Midwest where she is lucky enough to work surrounded by books. She has too many ideas, and, sadly (ironically), not enough time to write them.*

## **Barbara Prescott**

### **Reliquary**

I've agreed to it, I've set the course line  
circling, twirling, around itself in time  
and tide. I cannot stop it now, this rhyme  
of danger, anger, stranger, symbol, sign.  
As is Persephone's sublime design  
cross-coded by Hade's conniving,  
so is my substance struggling, surviving,  
this relentlessly cold art of onslaught.

I am eternal, graced well with curses;  
the light, lilting, gifts of Persephone  
given carelessly to me as she passed  
laughingly, singing seasons, casting verses  
to all who love her, star eyes of honey.  
These are mine now. Eternal eyes, at last.

*Barbara Prescott is an author, poet, and literary critic. She writes articles for several literary journals and is currently creating her first mystery series featuring Elizabeth Barrett Browning.*

# *Giacomo da Lentino: His Life*

Ernest F. Langley

About Giacomo da Lentino, the chief poet of the Sicilian School, we have no contemporary accounts. Any attempt at a biography must be confined to a few facts and a moderate amount of reasonable hypothesis for which the basis is to be found in the *canzonieri* themselves, in a few notarial documents written by the hand of Giacomo or mentioning his name, in the insecure inferences to be derived from the poems themselves, and finally, in the references to him made by men of his own century, though of a later generation.

From the earliest manuscripts we learn that Giacomo was a notary. He was almost always styled Notaro Giacomo or Giacomo Notaro. In the three oldest *canzonieri*, where his name occurs in the rubrics fifty times, in forty-nine cases it is in the form of Notaro Giacomo; in only one case (B 55) do we have Notar Jacomo dallentino. The almost complete absence, however, of da Lentino in the rubrics can raise no doubt about the poet's birthplace, as he mentions it specifically himself in the canzone *Maravigliosamente*, ll. 61-63:

Lo vostro amor, ch'e caro,  
donatelo al Notaro,  
ch' e nato da Lentino.

And again in *Madonna mia*, a voi mando, ll. 53, 54:  
Per vostro amor fui nato,  
nato fui da Lentino.

From the old *canzonieri* we also perceive the prominence of Giacomo in his group, a prominence revealed by the comparative productiveness of his muse and the importance of his literary relations. Codex A has under his name sixteen canzoni, one *discordo*, and eight sonnets; B has eleven canzoni, one *discordo*, and sixteen sonnets; C has five canzoni. Rinaldo d'Aquino, the poet of Giacomo's generation represented by the next largest number of attributions, has in the Vatican Ms. (A) eight canzoni, in B three, and in C, seven. In other words, a total of fifty-eight attributions for Giacomo and only eighteen for Rinaldo. In the Vatican codex, Barb. (F) we find the Notary associated in a *tenzone* with Pier de la Vigna and the imperial falconer Jacopo Mostacci. Elsewhere we find him respectfully

addressed by the Abate di Tivoli in a series of sonnets discussing the nature of love; and, according to the theory proposed by Monaci, he was probably in literary correspondence with Arrigo Testa, Tiberto Galliziani da Pisa, Rugieri d'Amici, Rinaldo d'Aquino, and Guido delle Colonne. Especially significant are the words of the anonymous author of canzone No. 72 in A, who selecting the Notary as the acknowledged master of amorous song, "quegli ch'e d'amor fino," sends him his love complaint, asking him to sing it every morning "infra la gente." The search for documentary evidence of a notary bearing the name of Giacomo da Lentino, contemporary of Pier de la Vigna and consequently of Frederick II, was rewarded by Zenatti's discovery of two privileges of Frederick II drawn up by Giacomo. One, 3 dated March 1233, near Policoro, a town in Basilicata, is the deed of gift to Frederick's son, Conrad, of the town of Gaeta and several fiefs of the Abruzzi; the other, dated June 1233, at Catania, confirms to the abbot and monks of San Salvatore the privileges granted to their monastery by the Norman kings, by Henry VI and Constance. Both refer to Giacomo in the words "*per manus Jacobi de Lentino notarii et fidelis nostri scribi.*" A more recent important discovery by Garufi afforded the means of identifying other documents drawn up by Giacomo.

Among the ancient archives of the Tabulario di S., Maria delle Moniali of Messina, Garufi found a document of May 5th, 1240, in which the name of Giacomo appeared in autograph signature as witness, and in which he is mentioned as *Iacobus de Lentino domini Imperatoris notarius*. From the handwriting of the autograph, Garufi was able to identify the hand of Giacomo in two other imperial documents of 1233, the originals of which he examined. One of these (Bohmer-Ficker, 2020) lacks the name of the notary who drew it up; the other (Bohmer-Ficker, 2030) was written *per manus Jacobi notarii*. B.-F., 2020, was dated Messina, June 1233; apart from the place and the date, it offers us no new facts about Giacomo. B.-F., 2030, was dated Palermo, September 1233. As the notary "Jacobus" mentioned in it is the same person as the "Jacobus de Lentino" of B.-F., 2017 and 2022, and as no other Jacobus appears byname as imperial notary for the year 1233, it seems highly probable that the "Jacobus notarius" of the document (B.-F., 2029), written at Castrogiovanni, in the centre of Sicily, August 14th of the same year, was also Giacomo da Lentino. In any case the four other documents already mentioned, B.-F., 2017, 2020, 2022, 2030, prove that Giacomo as notary followed the Emperor in the journey that he made from Policoro, in Basilicata, to Palermo, by way of Messina and Catania, from March to the end of August 1233.

If the Emperor stopped in August at Castrogiovanni, Giacomo da Lentino would naturally be with him, and he would naturally be the "Jacobus" to whom was delegated the task of drawing up the letters patent

(B.-F., 2029) in which Frederick approved of the terms that Gregory LX had made between him and the Lombard towns.

It was Pier de la Vigna that had brought to the Emperor in Sicily the news of this compromise effected by Gregory, and it was he also that carried back to the cardinals the letter from Frederick written by the hand of his poet friend, the notary Giacomo. Would not this meeting at Castrogiovanni, as Garufi suggested, be a most opportune time for Pier and Giacomo to become acquainted, and might it not have been very fittingly then and there that they, poets both of them, as well as imperial officials, replied to the question on the nature of Amore proposed by Iacopo Mostacd (Tenz. 1)? And might not Pier on his return to Rome in the same year have served as the natural intermediary between Giacomo and the Abate di Tivoli?

Between September 1233 and the Spring of 1240, we have no further documentary mention of Jacobus de Lentino. This long silence raises two questions: (1) Did Giacomo accompany the Emperor any farther in his travels? (2) Was he merely a temporary imperial notary, serving at Frederick's court in 1233 alone? In attempting to decide the first of these questions it is well to recall the itinerary followed by Frederick during the remainder of the year 1233. At Palermo, where Giacomo wrote B.-F., 2030 in September, the imperial court remained for at least part of October; thence it moved to Girgenti, Butera and Syracuse, arriving about the end of the year at Giacomo's native town Lentino, where a parliament (solemn eoloquium) was to be held. Even if we assume that the privilege of September (B.-F., 2030) is the last official duty performed by Giacomo as imperial notary, it is at least highly probable that he would have taken advantage of the Emperor's itinerary to visit again his native place Lentino as one of Frederick's honored officers. But there is no evidence that his imperial duties now cease. Some at least of the five extant documents written between October 12 and the arrival at Lentino may very well have been drawn up by the hand of Giacomo, and he may have continued in the Emperor's employment long after Frederick passed on from Lentino to Messina, January 1234. But it may seem strange that Giacomo should remain for the following six years in the Emperor's employment and that we should find no mention of his name in the large number of existing imperial documents written during that time. Yet it is frequently the case that the name of an imperial notary, after appearing in the documents for a time, is not found again for several years. Thus Jacobus de Catania appears as imperial notary in documents for 1220 and 1221, then not again till 1227, after which there is another silence till 1231, when he appears for the last time. Letters patent usually lacked the notary's name, and one may read, for example, all the documents for the year 1234 in Huillard-Breholles without finding a mention of the notary who drew them up. In

the spring of 1240 we have four documentary mentions of a Jacobus de Lentino. The Emperor, writing from Lucera in Apulia, April 3, to Guillelmus de Anglono, "justitiarius Sicilie citra flumen Salsum," acknowledges the receipt of some mules delivered to him "per predictum nuntium tuum Jacobum de Lentino." Again, on April 29th, Frederick writes from Coronata to the "provisorem castrorum in Sicilia citra flumen Salsum " about supplies necessary for the fort of Carsiliato, near Lentino, under the command of Jacobus de Lentino. And finally, on May 10th, writing from Foggia, he authorizes Obertus Fallamonachus, secretus for all Sicily, to deliver to Jacobus de Lentino the supplies necessary for the fort of Carsiliato. Meanwhile, on May 5th, Jacobus de Lentino "domini Imperatoris notarius" had appeared as witness in Messina.

So we have in the spring of 1240 the name Jacobus de Lentino applied to a person, or to persons, performing three different imperial duties in the same jurisdiction, Eastern Sicily. Could this notary, this envoy, and this governor of a fortress be one and the same person? In other words, might a Jacobus de Lentino, who had traveled with the Emperor as notary in 1233, be sent from Messina to the Emperor at Lucera as envoy, arriving about the first of April, 1240; at the same time, or shortly after, represent to Frederick the needs of the fortress of Carsiliato entrusted to his charge; on April 29th and on May 10th be mentioned in the authorization for the supplies desired; and, meanwhile, on May 5th be back in Messina, where he signed his name as imperial notary? The name is identical, the conditions of time and place are met perfectly; it was exceedingly common for a notary to be chosen as *nuntius*.

So far everything is reconcilable. But one objection to such an hypothesis may still be raised: would a notary be in command of a fortress? Or, putting it in other words: would the governor of a fortress sign himself as imperial notary? To remove this objection, it must be borne in mind that an imperial notary of the thirteenth century was a man representing the educated class and one who, besides his notarial duties, might be used in a number of forms of service to his ruler. A search for close parallels shows us that Henry, provost of Aix-la-Chapelle, was a notary of the Emperor's and was referred to in Huillard-Breholles, V, 281, under March 1239, as Heinricum Aquensem prepositum, notarum et fidelem nostrum. Another case is that of the unnamed notary provost of Verden mentioned June 1245 in the words: "Datum per manus magistri [name left blank] praepositi Werdensis, imperialis aulae notarii " (B.-F. 3479; H.-B., VI, 306).

We do not at all presume that it is proved that the three references to a Jacobus de Lentino in 1240 all pertain to our notary poet; it has merely been shown that this is at least a possibility that cannot be totally ignored. Should this possibility be a fact, it would show that Giacomo in 1240 was

not in the feeble state of advanced age, as he was able to act as envoy and carry the responsibilities of active military command. As envoy to the Emperor's court at Lucera he would have the opportunity of meeting both Pier de la Vigna and Jacopo Mostacci, and this year would be as plausible a date as 1233 for the *tenzone* between the three. Moreover in April of 1240, Frederick held at Foggia a general parliament to which were summoned the representatives of the cities of the kingdom, and this too would afford Giacomo an opportunity, though by no means the first or only one, of interchanging poetical courtesies with some of his distinguished contemporaries. Though we are left uncertain as to how long the Notary lived, he is at least referred to as already dead in the sonnet "Di penne di paone" (Ms. A 682), written presumably between 1250 and 1270, the period when Bonagiunta, the probable object of the satire, was known as a new singer (*novo canzonet*-6).

An effort has been made to add to our meagre information about Giacomo by trying to identify two passages in the canzoni with definite historical events or conditions. A vague comparison in stanza v of La 'namoranza to a battle fought "on land or sea" was used by Cesareo 2 to construct the theory that Giacomo wrote the poem in 1205, thus placing his poetical career in a period much earlier than is usually accepted, but the impossibility of this assumption has been clearly shown by Torraca. Another passage, stanza V of Ben m'e venuto, refers to conditions in Italy when, in the mind of an imperial adherent, Florence was filled with pride and Pisa was dreading strife with the "orgogliosa gente." The most plausible time for this condition of affairs, according to Borgognoni and Torraca, was about 1246 and 1248. In the former year the Florentine Guelphs showed dissatisfaction at Frederick's appointment of a podesta, and in 1248 they were overcome by the Ghibellines. In 1245, more-over, Pisa was included in the excommunication issued by the pope against Frederick and his partisans.

If this view were correct, we should have evidence of Giacomo's life extending at least to the year 1248, a fact not in the least surprising when we have the document of 1240, referred to above, bearing his signature. But Torraca's conclusions were opposed by Sanesi, who contended that Pisa had always been devoted to the Empire, and that it is not necessary to come down as late as 1245 to explain the Notary's statement, which does not contain any allusion to the pope or the Guelphs, but simply means: "imitate Pisa who is judicious and prudent, and fear a comparison or resemblance to proud people." Sanesi, moreover, saw in the allusion to the carroccio of Milan, a reference to the battle of Cortenuova, 1237, thus agreeing with the interpretation first proposed by Gaspary.

Pelaez opposed the theories of both Torraca and Sanesi, regarding the reference as a vague one that might have referred equally well to the

period between 1210 and 1230. This is perhaps the safest conclusion. We have then just two trustworthy dates for Giacomo's life, 1233 and 1240. No definite time can be given for his birth, but it must have occurred before 1210. His end is veiled in silence. Did he survive Pier de la Vigna and Frederick, and live to see the tragic end of the Hohenstaufen cause, or did he die before his emperor? We cannot say. In any case, the dates we possess and his literary associations show him to be one of the very earliest Italian poets whose verse has come down to us.

The influence of Giacomo and the esteem he enjoyed in the thirteenth century are attested by a reference in the sonnet of Chiaro Davanzati's, "Di penne di paone e d'aitre assai," in which Bonagiunta da Lucca is satirized as the crow falsely donning the brilliant peacock plumage of the Notary, then no longer living; and this accusation is in harmony with the words of Bonagiunta in *Purg.*, xxiv, 55-60:

' O frate, issa veggio,' disse, ' U nodo  
Che il Notaro e Guittone e me ritenne  
Di qua dal dolce stil nuovo ch' i' odo.  
Io veggio ben come le vostre penne  
Diretro al dittator sen vanno strette,  
Che delle nostre certo non awenne.'

Here Giacomo is chosen by Dante as the chief representative of the Sicilians, who, like their followers Guittone and Bonagiunta, were prevented by the shackles of conventionality and artifice from attaining the sincerity and spontaneity of the *dolce stil nuovo*.

[*Editorial Note: Please consult the source below for Langley's manuscript, and other, references.*]

Langley, Ernest F., *The Poetry of Giacomo da Lentino*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. London: Humphrey Milford. Oxford University Press, 1915, pp. xiii-xxii.

# *Strambotto, the Octave, and Chaos in Fourteen Lines*

Barbara L. Prescott

As we delve deeper into the origins of the thirteenth century *sonetto*, we may consider its partial lyrical parentage in the Provençal *canso*. Yet, the sonnet hints strongly of a relation to another earlier literary form as well, namely the *strambotto*, an Italian folk song composed in eight lines, as a hendecasyllabic, alternately rhymed, stanza. The *strambotto* was sung in the vernacular, i.e., the spoken language of common folk, the majority population.

The origins of the Italian *strambotto* (in Tuscan, *rispetto*) are uncertain, but it is thought to have existed in Sicily in the twelfth century and slightly later in Tuscany. In its Sicilian form, the stanza consists of eight lines in alternate rhyme, as in the following example:

	Rhyme Pattern
Darrieri a sa finescia ogni matina	a
La rinnina vi veni a risbiggiari;	b
Aspetta a bui la rosa damaschina,	a
Aspetta a bui li giggiu pi sparari.	b
Nun còddanu li stiddi a la matina,	a
Si 'un vi vièninu prima a salutory:	b
Cu' è ca viri a bui, ruseda fina,	a
L' armuzza si la senti spicccicari.	b

*Outside that window every morning the swallow comes to waken you; the damask rose waits for you, the lily waits for you before it opens. The stars do not set in the morning until first they have come to greet you: who ever beholds you, little rose so fine, feels his heart riven.* (tr. Wilkens 1956: 8)

Did Lentino adopt the structure of this Italian folk song to be the eight-line octave of the original *sonetto*, also written in vernacular Sicilian? Lentino's *sonetto* was divided into an octave and sestet, as Italian sonnets are normally structured today. The original octave had eight lines, was hendecasyllabic (eleven syllables), and was alternately rhymed in an *ababab* pattern. Clearly, the similarity of the original *sonetto* octave, as

developed by Lentino, to the traditional vernacular *strambotto* is not coincidental. The relation between both forms is clear.

By examining the similarities to existing poetry and songs of the period and their relation to the creation of the *sonetto Siciliano*, we are given a clearer picture of exactly how and why the sonnet developed. Within the folk culture of thirteenth century Sicily, we find charming love songs in the vernacular, which Lentino often heard. The concise eight-line stanzas of those vernacular songs could be easily transferred to the first part of the *sonetto*, the octave, in which the poet presents his case. In the hands of the lawyer and notary da Lentino, emotion was expressed in the form of legal argument, a structure in which Lentino and the courtier-poets of Frederick's court were well versed. The *sonetto* was a melding of folk song, literary structure, legal argument, and the lyricism of love expressed in a melding of vernaculars. Miraculously, it worked. The sonnet was born and remains to this day within multiple literary traditions.

I believe this poetry form continues to thrive because it draws on the strengths of lyricism within clear structure involving both literary and popular culture, balances logical argument with enthusiasm of emotion in song as it attracts the ever-popular theme of love, and it does so in language that is easily understood and spoken. The counterbalance between the wild expressions of love as they are contained and structured by logic is irresistible. We sense the strain as emotion is held in containment. The tension, when balanced well, is the very essence of attraction and resolution.

The sonnet arrived at a time in European cultural history when the dominant theme of high love in art, music, philosophy, and literature was confronted with the emergence of the rational sciences, a stated ideal of the Frederician court. This interweaving of opposites, coalescing in the unique "Science of Love," provided fertile ground for the emergence of a new poetry form in which the heart and mind could be harmoniously counterbalanced. The birth of the sonnet was most welcome in the receptive conditions of Frederick's court. It was a perfect fit. From its historic roots to modern day, the sonnet provides the poet with an opportunity and means to vent feeling within a contained literary space. Edna St. Vincent Millay expressed this as "*chaos within fourteen lines.*" Indeed, the sonnet is the perfect poetic vehicle to safely express emotion, argument, or the chaos inherent in life experience, particularly as we argue with ourselves. Thank you, W. B. Yeats.

## *The Versatile Sonnet*

A helpful list of classic sonnet structures, variations of classic structures, and exciting new forms that have been created from the thirteenth century to the present and which continue to develop as the matrix of the sonnet blossoms into new paradigms.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Composition</b>	<b>Rhyme &amp; Meter</b>	<b>Pivot or Volta</b>
<u>Blues Sonnet</u> 19 <sup>th</sup> century American	4 Blues stanzas followed by a heroic couplet	AAa BBb CCc DDd ee, iambic pent.	DDd or variable
<u>Curtal Sonnet</u> 19 <sup>th</sup> century England	Petrarchan sonnet shortened $\frac{3}{4}$ proportionately to a sixain,* followed by a quatrain followed by a half line.	abcabc defde L1 - L10 iambic pent. L11 iambic trimeter	Between sixain and quatrain
<u>Petrarchan or Italian Sonnet</u> 14 <sup>th</sup> century Italian	Octave (8 lines) posing question followed by sestet (6 lines) providing resolution	abbaabba cdecde or cdccdc or cdcdcd	Unravels slowly between octave and sestet
<u>Sicilian Sonnet</u> 13 <sup>th</sup> Century Italy	Octave (8 lines) posing question, followed by sestet (6 lines) which provides resolution	abababab cdcdcd or cdcede	Unravels slowly between octave & sestet

## Book Reviews

**Kizer, Carolyn. *Mermaids in the Basement: Poems for Women*. Copper Canyon Press: Port Townsend, 1984. ISBN: 0914742817. 106 pages.**

This grounded, yet larger-than-life volume of Carolyn Kizer's poems was compiled from multiple sources, including three out of print books and various publications, and divided into seven sections ranging in theme from *Pro Femina* to *Chinese Love* to *Myth: Visions & Revisions*.

Some of these poems stem from deeply personal places — pieces for friends as the end draws near, or that could only be written once the father in the dusty reading room had closed his eyes for the last time — but they are all the more impactful for their unembellished honesty. Verses about mythological figures are somehow reeled in and fitted to a page, feeling more tangible than the poems about life, love, and nature that are rooted in reality but approach a delicate otherworldliness as Kizer's phrases transform them into something new.

Kizer's poetry spans a wide range of forms and structures. Very few of them rhyme and she lets her evocative wording flow freely between one line and the next. Though it's actually based on a classical Chinese model, I chose to highlight the seventh installment in *A Month in Summer* below, to emphasize that sonnets can be found in many forms, even when the rhyming pattern or fourteen line structure is absent.

### SEVENTH DAY:

Some friends come to visit for a few hours.  
My daughter Laurel picked roses for them, dozen  
after dozen, until the garden was stripped of  
ripening flowers. It was a relatively easy winter.  
The aphids seemed to be under control this year.  
One must not allow one's self to become superstitious  
about the tremendous, massive florescence of roses,  
nor about the great numbers of pregnant women.  
It doesn't necessarily mean that the days of the world  
are numbered; merely that the life-impulse is putting  
forth an extra effort, just in case.

**Reviewed by Cate Millican**

**Barnstone, Tony. *Pulp Sonnets*. Illus. Amin Mansouri. North Adams, MA: Tupelo Press. First paperback edition, September 2015. ISBN: 978-1-936797-62-2. 140 pages.**

This illustrated book of sonnets is not for the faint of heart. Tony Barnstone, poet, and Amin Mansouri, artist, have collaborated on a stark, striking, entirely raw, mythic poetry adventure through the dark pits of the underworld, filled with casually cold assassins, ink penned & morally disheveled women, murder-is-fun executions, crass conniving thugs, sexual exploitation, and worse. We might call this illustrated book of dark poems, written in vintage gangster slang, a crossover graphic poetry-novel. As such, it extends the boundaries of the sonnet.

Most of the poems are written in Shakespearean sonnet structure with the telling couplet punchline. There is evidence of several Petrarchan sonnets in octave and sestet arrangement, and more than a few sestets are classically Italian in their *cdecde* rhyme.

Truth be told, I didn't care for most of these poems, some not in the least. Yet there are several sonnet gems here. Barnstone knows his Petrarchan and Shakespearean structures inside out (no pun intended) and uses them to paint a thoroughly disturbing picture of his own dark mythic gangsta underworld. Still, Shakespeare certainly might have approved of this modern crossover. He, too, loved a good punchline. Below is one of the gems hidden in *Pulp Sonnets*. Note the *volta* in line nine, and the Italian sestet.

### **18. From Tempest to Othello**

Algernon, or as I dub him, Algie,  
got tossed into the drink and drank a lung  
or two of salt water and ocean algae,  
but here's the little thing that has me hung:  
we live in Chi-town - no salt water for  
a thousand miles - so tell me how this fellow  
sucked sea? I'm stumped. I knock on Rose's door.  
"Culture tonight," she says, takes me to Othello.  
Uh-huh, I know. O-what-o? It's a play.  
I ain't from Cultureville. I'm from Chicago,  
like Al Capone. But Rose has got some great gams  
so I will play her way, though I should say  
just like that fellow in the play, Iago  
(or was it Popeye?) "I ams that I ams."

**Reviewed by Barbara L. Prescott**

**Thompson, Ruth. *Woman with Crows*. Saddle Road Press: Hilo, 2013. ISBN: 9780983307280. 115 pages.**

Ruth Thompson's book of folkloric poetry paints a new fantasy on every page, her words dripping with bitter ocean salt and tides thick with worlds. Some of the eight sections cover more mundane topics – her father's deafness, her fat zumba teacher, and the things in her grandmother's garden — but the vast majority of them are of dark, fantastical things.

Some mythological figures such as Kali, Persephone, and the River Styx are familiar at first glance, as are fairy tale favorites Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty, but each is presented with a twist: Rapunzel is the witch while it is Jill who chops, chops, chops at the beanstalk. Thompson spends the other pages detailing the fates of women stolen underwater by the finnmenn, hungry ghosts that cannot die, and things that bend over the bed at night with chains of tear slime. They are concise, each word vital to paint the tangible atmosphere in each poem, which are tangible, visceral, and not always for the faint of heart. Few of the poems rhyme and Thompson employs a different structure for each tale, as needed.

Considering this journal, special note must be made of the poem *Inventor of the luVailean Sonnet*, written about her Irish Great-Aunt Lucy, poet-laureate of Long Beach, California. The poem below is also one of the few non-mythic poems, a subtle sonnet variation near the end of the book.

**Packing for the Journey:**

One morning she comes up knowing  
that she can only take the big snake  
and the cactus with her in the car –  
that she has to leave all the animals behind  
because the car is packed full of everyone's things  
so there is only room for the sleeping coils  
of the great shadowed snake in her basket  
and the aguaro with its two arms sticking upright  
which is suspended from a hanger  
in the back window.  
And she knows why the snake is there.  
But she wonders about the cactus.

**Reviewed by Catherine Shilka**

## *Submission Guidelines*

SONNET is an annual journal, published in December of each year, which considers all aspects of sonnet poetry: sonnets, sonnetists, and sonnetics (the study of sonnets). We encourage submissions of original sonnet poetry, short stories in which sonnet poetry or poets are featured, research articles on the varied aspects of sonnet poetry, including history, literary criticism, cultural and social effects, modern sonnet poetry, poets, or any other topic in which sonnet poetry figures prominently. We encourage book reviews, editorials, and yearly poetry events in which our readers may be interested.

All submissions for publication should conform to the *MLA Handbook*, 8th edition (New York: Modern Language Association, 2016), include a list of works cited, and normally should be 2000-2500 words. If notes are included, please use end notes (not footnotes). Reviews of books should be 300-500 words. Submissions of original poetry should include permission to print. We accept up to ten poems per submission. Short stories have a 2500 word limit. Submissions should be formatted in Microsoft Word. Decisions take three to six months. Authors are notified by email in response to the original submission email.

All email submissions should be sent to [augustpressinc@gmail.com](mailto:augustpressinc@gmail.com), with a copy also sent to [bprescott125@gmail.com](mailto:bprescott125@gmail.com), including the words SONNET SUBMISSION in the title.

The second volume of SONNET, to be published in December 2019, will feature the sonnets of Dante Alighieri and his contemporaries as well as his modern literary descendents. Critical essays should be attuned to this topic to be considered for publication.

Thank you for your interest in SONNET, and we look forward to welcoming you into our journal family.

Barbara L. Prescott, Editor  
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In Volume II  
2019  
**Sonnets of Dante**

Featuring the works of  
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with  
Critical Essays  
Sonnets  
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Sonnets in the City  
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