

Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950)

What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why (1931)

What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why,
I have forgotten, and what arms have lain
Under my head till morning; but the rain
Is full of ghosts tonight, that tap and sigh
Upon the glass and listen for reply,
And in my heart there stirs a quiet pain
For unremembered lads that not again
Will turn to me at midnight with a cry.
Thus in winter stands the lonely tree,
Nor knows what birds have vanished one by one,
Yet knows its boughs more silent than before:
I cannot say what loves have come and gone,
I only know that summer sang in me
A little while, that in me sings no more.

Kim Addonizio (b.1954)

First Poem for You (1994)

I like to touch your tattoos in complete
darkness, when I can't see them. I'm sure of
where they are, know by heart the neat
lines of lightning pulsing just above
your nipple, can find, as if by instinct, the blue 5
swirls of water on your shoulder where a serpent
twists, facing a dragon. When I pull you
to me, taking you until we're spent
and quiet on the sheets, I love to kiss
the pictures in your skin. They'll last until 10
you're seared to ashes; whatever persists
or turns to pain between us, they will still
be there. Such permanence is terrifying.
So I touch them in the dark; but touch them, trying.

“*What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why*” follows the structure of the Petrarchan/Italian sonnet.

It begins with an **octave** (i.e., a unit of 8 lines, or **two quatrains**) that rhymes ABBAABBA, and it ends with a **sestet** (i.e., a unit of 6 lines) that rhymes with some variation of CDE (this specific sestet rhymes CDEDCE).

Where is the **volta** or turning point in this sonnet, and why is it significant?

“First Poem for You” by Kim Addonizio freely uses a technique called **enjambement** (French for “striding over”), which is when the author breaks a line of verse in the middle of a thought so that we need to keep reading the next line in order to understand the complete thought.

Do the following exercise in order to appreciate the author’s use of line-breaks and enjambement in this poem:

This time, as you carefully reread the poem, pause for a fraction of a second at the end of each line before you go down to the following line. Pause in such a way that, for just a moment, you hold your attention lightly on the word or image created within the line—and then you should slide seamlessly to the next line and notice how this line completes the thought or image begun in the previous line. (This can take some practice, because you should not pause so long that you separate one thought into two thoughts. Practice lingering momentarily on the line’s closing word or image, and then finding out how this word or image is connected to what you find in the next line.)

How is your experience of the poem influenced by this kind of reading?

- What effects do you notice the author creates by using enjambement and breaking the lines off in this way?
- Which particular images, words, feelings, or ideas receive emphasis or linger in our minds because of this technique?