

Poetry Notes:

Theme: A statement about life a particular work is trying to get across to the reader. A theme is a sentence revealing the “so what” of the work. A topic is one word.

Free verse: poetry that does not have a regular meter or rhyme scheme.

Stanza- a division of poetry named for the number of lines it contains

Couplet- two line stanza

Tercet or Triplet – three line stanza

Quatrain – four line stanza

Quintet – five-line stanza

Sestet – six-line stanza

Septet – seven- stanza

Octave – eight line stanza

The English, Elizabethan, Shakespearean sonnet –

William Shakespeare (1564- 1616)

History: We do not know when Shakespeare composed his sonnets, though it is possible that he wrote them over a period of several years, beginning, perhaps, in 1592 or 1593. Some of them were being circulated in manuscript form among his friends as early as 1598, and in 1599 two of them—138 and 144—were published in *The Passionate Pilgrim*, a collection of verses by several authors. The sonnets as we know them were certainly completed no later than 1609, the year they were published by Thomas Thorpe under the title *Shake-speares Sonnets*.

The architecture: English, Elizabethan, or Shakespearean

Note to self: (short and squatty)

- 14 line poem written in iambic pentameter with three quatrains and a couplet. (ta DUM, ta DUM, ta DUM, ta DUM, ta DUM)
- Each line has 10 syllables

- Three quatrains: four line stanza
- 1st quatrain: poet projects the subject, presents a problem or issue
- 2nd complicates or develops it
- 3rd further develops it
- final rhyming couplet – resolution or punch-line often marked by wit
- The rhyme scheme is abab, cdcd, efef, gg
- Volta or Turn: is a logical emotional shift by which the speaker is enabled to take a new, or altered, enlarged view of subject. It comes at the beginning of the thirteenth line.
- Close: the last two lines must rhyme and must get out of the dilemma or situation you've spent twelve lines detailing. Often resolved with wit through a flash of insight or irony.

Themes of sonnets:

Shakespeare's 154 sonnets, taken together, are frequently described as a sequence, and this is generally divided into two sections. Sonnets 1-126 focus on a young man and the speaker's friendship with him, and Sonnets 127-52 focus on the speaker's relationship with a woman. However, in only a few of the poems in the first group is it clear that the person being addressed is a male. And most of the poems in the sequence as a whole are not direct addresses to another person. The two concluding sonnets, 153 and 154, are free translations or adaptations of classical verses about Cupid

By the time Shakespeare wrote his sonnets, there was also an anti-Petrarchan convention, which satirized or exploited traditional motifs and styles.

As far as common themes to be found in Shakespeare's sonnets go, look for the idea of **importance of immortality**, of achieving **continuance through offspring and through art**, particularly verse. Look at **love as a compensating factor for the failures and disappointments** in the Speaker's life. Notice the attention given to the **temporary nature of all things** and the **need to think for the future and for the sake of posterity**. Look at the element of **time as the great destroyer**, notice the preference of nature/the natural over art/the embellished/the artificial, and so on.

Sonnet XVIII (18) Addressed to the Young Man

Quatrain 1 (four-line stanza)

A Shall I compare thee to a summer's **DAY**?..... If I compared you to a summer day

B Thou art more lovely and more temper**ATE**:..... I'd have to say you are more beautiful and serene:

A Rough winds do shake the darling buds of **MAY**,..... By comparison, summer is rough on budding life,

B And summer's lease hath all too short a **DATE**:..... And doesn't last long either:

Comment: In Shakespeare's time, May (Line 3) was a summer month.

Quatrain 2 (four-line stanza)

C Sometime too hot the eye of heaven **SHINES**,..... At times the summer sun [heaven's eye] is too hot,

D And often is his gold complexion **DIMM'D**;..... And at other times clouds dim its brilliance;

C And every fair from fair sometime de**CLINES**,..... Everything fair in nature becomes less fair from time to time,

D By chance or nature's changing course un**TRIMM'D**;..... No one can change [trim] nature or chance;

Comment: "Every fair" may also refer to every fair woman. who "declines" because of aging or bodily changes

Quatrain 3 (four-line stanza)

E But thy eternal summer shall not **FADE**..... However, you yourself will not fade

F Nor lose possession of that fair thou **OWEST**;..... Nor lose ownership of your fairness;

E Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his **SHADE**,..... Not even death will claim you,

F When in eternal lines to time thou **GROWEST**:..... Because these lines I write will immortalize you:

Couplet (two rhyming lines)

- G** So long as men can breathe or eyes can **SEE**, Your beauty will last as long as men breathe and see,
G So long lives this and this gives life to **THEE**. As Long as this sonnet lives and gives you life.

The rhyme scheme is as follows:

- First stanza (quatrain): ABAB
- Second stanza (quatrain): CDCD
- Third stanza (quatrain): EFEF
- Couplet: GG.

Petrarchan (Italian) Sonnet (1307 – 1374) Italian poet

Francesco Petrarca, usually referred to as Petrarch (1304-1374), is generally regarded, along with Dante and Boccaccio, **as the father of humanism** in Western Europe. He was responsible for bringing to light many of the works of the classic poets, historians and orators of ancient Rome. He was also an outstanding poet in his own right. He wrote about a **woman named Laura** with whom he fell deeply in love, even though she not return his affections.

Petrarca wrote 365 sonnets, many of them dedicated to Laura. The exact relationship of Petrarca to the historical Laura remains almost as mysterious as Shakespeare's relation to the "Dark Lady" of his sonnet series.

- limited to 14 lines,
- organically divided into an octave (8-line grouping) rhyming abba/abba,
- A sestet (grouping of the 6 final lines) in which several rhyme schemes were permitted.
- The meter, although it can vary in some instances, is primarily iambic pentameter (5 feet per line).
- The octave rather presented and developed the problem/argument/issue/subject/them and was followed by what is called the volte or turn.
- Structurally speaking, therefore, the first 8 lines provided the subject and sufficiently amplified it, and the last 6 lines (the sestet) provided the resolution.

Octave (8 lines), then Sestet (6 lines)

The Octave's rhyme scheme is constant as follows: abbaabba

The Sestet's rhyme scheme can go a number ways but cannot contain more than 3 additional rhymes than the two used in the octave. Some examples of patterns used for the sestet follow:

cdecde, cddddc, cdccdc, ccddee

Petrarchan sonnets differ from the Shakespearean in the layout of the verse quatrains and couplets versus octaves and sestets yet all sonnets are united in their use of iambic pentameter.

The first of the three poems describes their first meeting on Good Friday in 1327

Era il giorno ch'al sol si scoloraro

**It was the day when the sun's heavy rays
Grew pale in pity of his suffering Lord,
When I fell captive, lady, to the gaze
Of your fair eyes, fast bound in love's strong cord.
No time had I wherein to make defense
Or seek a shelter from Love's sudden blows;
I walked secure, no harm perceiving, whence
My griefs began amid the general woes.
Love found me all disarmed, and through my eyes
Where tears are wont to flow, he saw the way
Wide open to my heart. His arrow flies
And strikes the mark where it must ever stay.
Scant honor his to wound me thus, nor show
To you, well armed against him, even his bow!**

Spenserian sonnet – Edmund Spenser (1552- 1599) English poet

ababbcbccdc (turn) ee – rhyme scheme – inspired by his epic poem *The Faerie Queen*.