

The Sonnet

The sonnet is a lyric poem originated in Italy between the XII and then XIII century. **Petrarch** was one of the bigger Italian sonneteers and he proved most influential on the sonnet's subsequent history.

The first English sonneteer was **Thomas Wyatt**, who discovered the sonnet form during his travels in Italy; he translated Petrarch's sonnets and wrote 30 examples of his own. His iambic pentameter was ingeniously varied or simply clumsy. Wyatt shared credits with his friend **Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey** for introducing the sonnet form into England.

The sonnet consists of 14 lines following one or another of several set rhyme-scheme. It is a dialectical construct which allows the poet to show two related but differing things to the reader in order to communicate something about them.

There are three types of sonnets differing on the *divisio*:

- **Italian (or Petrarchan) Sonnet**. Invented by Francesco Petrarch. It is divided into two sections by two different groups of rhyming sound: **octave (a b b a a b b a)** and **sestet (c d c d c d/c d d c d c/c d e c d e)**. A change from one rhyme group to another signifies a change in subject matter. This change is called *volta* (turn): at the *volta*, the second idea is introduced.
- **Spenserian Sonnet**. Invented by Edmund Spenser. It has the pattern **a b a b b c b c c d c d e e**. The "abab" pattern sets up four-line groups, each of which develops a specific idea; the three quatrains develop three distinct but closely related ideas.
- **English (or Shakespearean) Sonnet**. Developed by Henry Howard. It consists of three quatrains of alternating rhyme (**a b a b - c d c d - e f e f**) and a couplet (**g g**). Each quatrain develops a specific idea, but one closely related to the ideas in the other quatrains