

*Era il giorno ch'al sol si scoloraro  
per la pietà del suo factore i rai,  
quando ì fui preso, et non me ne guardai,  
chè i bè vostr'occhi, donna, mi legaro.  
Tempo non mi pareva da far riparo  
contra colpi d'Amor: però m'andai  
secur, senza sospetto; onde i miei guai  
nel commune dolor s'incominciaro.  
Trovommi Amor del tutto disarmato  
et aperta la via per gli occhi al core,  
che di lagrime son fatti uscio et varco:  
Però al mio parer non li fu honore  
ferir me de saetta in quello stato,  
a voi armata non mostrar pur l'arco.*

Sonnet #3 "It was the Morning"		Prose paraphrase
It was the morning of the blessed day Whereon the sun in pity veiled his glare For the Lord's agony, that, unaware, I fell a captive, Lady, to the sway	A B B A	It was in the morning of the blessed Good Friday (Apr.6, 1327) that I, unknowingly, fell a captive to the sway of your swift eyes. At that time, the sun, in pity for God's agony, veiled his glare.
Of your swift eyes: that seemed no time to stay <b>The strokes of Love:</b> I stepped into the snare Secure, with no suspicion: then, and there I found my <b>cue</b> in man's most <b>tragic play</b>	A B B A	I seemed to have no time to resist the stroke of Cupid (the god of love), so with no suspicion, and feeling secure, I stepped into the snare of love. It was then and there that I found my cue in man's most tragic play.
<b>Love</b> caught me naked to his <b>shaft</b> , his <b>sheaf</b> , The entrance of his ambush and surprise Against the heart wide open through <b>the eyes</b> ,	C D D	Cupid caught me and found me naked to his shaft and sheaf. My eyes became the entrances for his ambush and surprise, and the wide-open gate to my heart (and your eyes became my gate to your heart).
The constant <b>gate</b> and <b>fountain</b> of my grief: How craven so to strike me stricken so, Yet from you fully armed conceal his bow!	C E E	However, your eyes (and my eyes) were the fountain of my grief. How carving I was! Concealing from his full-armed bow, Cupid strikes me stricken.

*Era il giorno ch'al sol si scoloraro  
per la pietà del suo factore i rai,  
quando ì fui preso, et non me ne guardai,  
chè i bè vostr'occhi, donna, mi legaro.*

It was the day the sun's ray had turned pale  
with pity for the suffering of his Maker  
when I was caught, and I put up no fight,  
my lady, for your lovely eyes had bound me.

*Tempo non mi pareo da far riparo  
contra colpi d'Amor: però m'andai  
secur, senza sospetto; onde i miei guai  
nel commune dolor s'incominciaro.*

It seemed no time to be on guard against  
Love's blows; therefore, I went my way  
secure and fearless-so, all my misfortunes  
began in midst of universal woe.

*Trovommi Amor del tutto disarmato  
et aperta la via per gli occhi al core,  
che di lagrime son fatti uscio et varco:*

Love found me all disarmed and found the way  
was clear to reach my heart down through the eyes  
which have become the halls and doors of tears.

*Però al mio parer non li fu honore  
ferir me de saetta in quello stato,  
a voi armata non mostrar pur l'arco.*

It seems to me it did him little honour  
to wound me with his arrow in my state  
and to you, armed, not show his bow at all.

## I. The Italian (or Petrarchan) Sonnet:

**Francesco Petrarca** (July 20, 1304 – July 19, 1374), known in English as Petrarch, was an Italian scholar, poet and one of the earliest Renaissance humanists.

The basic meter of all sonnets in English is iambic pentameter, although there have been a few tetrameter and even hexameter sonnets, as well.

The Italian sonnet is divided into two sections by two different groups of rhyming sounds. The first 8 lines is called the *octave* and rhymes:

a b b a-----a b b a

The remaining 6 lines is called the *sestet* and can have either two or three rhyming sounds, arranged in a variety of ways:

c d c d c d  
c d d c d c  
c d e c d e  
c d e c e d  
c d c e d c

The exact pattern of sestet rhymes (unlike the octave pattern) is flexible. In strict practice, the one thing that is to be avoided in the sestet is ending with a couplet (dd or ee), as this was never permitted in Italy, and Petrarch himself (supposedly) never used a couplet ending; in actual practice, sestets are sometimes ended with couplets (Sidney's "Sonnet LXXI given below is an example of such a terminal couplet in an Italian sonnet).

The point here is that the poem is divided into two sections by the two differing rhyme groups. In accordance with the principle (which supposedly applies to *all* rhymed poetry but often doesn't), **a change from one rhyme group to another signifies a change in subject matter**. This change occurs at the beginning of L9 in the Italian sonnet and is called the *volta*, or "turn"; the turn is an essential element of the sonnet form, perhaps *the* essential element. It is at the *volta* that the second idea is introduced, as in this sonnet by Wordsworth:

## **William Wordsworth (1770 – 1850), born in England.**

**"London, 1802"** by William Wordsworth

Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour:  
England hath need of thee: she is a fen  
Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,  
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,  
Have forfeited their ancient English dower  
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;  
Oh! raise us up, return to us again;  
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.  
*Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart;*  
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:  
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,  
So didst thou travel on life's common way,  
In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart  
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

Here, the octave develops the idea of the decline and corruption of the English race, while the sestet opposes to that loss the qualities Milton possessed which the race now desperately needs.

A very skillful poet can manipulate the placement of the *volta* for dramatic effect, although this is difficult to do well. An extreme example is this sonnet by Sir Philip Sidney, which delays the *volta* all the way to L 14:

## **Sir Philip Sidney (1554 – 1586), born in England.**

**"Sonnet LXXI"** by Sir Philip Sidney

Who will in fairest book of Nature know  
How Virtue may best lodged in Beauty be,  
Let him but learn of Love to read in thee,  
Stella, those fair lines, which true goodness show.  
There shall he find all vices' overthrow,  
Not by rude force, but sweetest sovereignty  
Of reason, from whose light those night-birds fly;  
That inward sun in thine eyes shineth so.  
And not content to be Perfection's heir  
Thyself, dost strive all minds that way to move,  
Who mark in thee what is in thee most fair.  
So while thy beauty draws the heart to love,  
As fast thy Virtue bends that love to good.  
*"But, ah," Desire still cries, "give me some food."*

Here, in giving 13 lines to arguing why Reason makes clear to him that following Virtue is the course he should take, he seems to be heavily biasing the argument in Virtue's favor. But the last line L14 the *volta* powerfully undercuts the arguments of Reason in favor of Virtue by revealing that Desire isn't amenable to Reason. \*\*\* (Shakespeare has also done this by moving the volta to the final couplet lines 13, 14.)\*\*\*

There are a number of variations which evolved over time to make it easier to write Italian sonnets in English. Most common is a change in the octave rhyming pattern from a b b a--a b b a to **a b b a--a c c a**, eliminating the need for two groups of 4 rhymes, something not always easy to come up with in English which is a rhyme-poor language. Wordsworth uses that pattern in the following sonnet, along with a terminal couplet:

### "Scorn Not the Sonnet" by William Wordsworth

Scorn not the Sonnet; Critic, you have frowned,  
Mindless of its just honours; with this key  
Shakespeare unlocked his heart; the melody  
Of this small lute gave ease to Petrarch's wound;  
A thousand times this pipe did Tasso sound;  
With it Camoens soothed an exile's grief;  
The Sonnet glittered a gay myrtle leaf  
Amid the cypress with which Dante crowned  
His visionary brow: a glow-worm lamp,  
It cheered mild Spenser, called from Faery-land  
To struggle through dark ways; and when a damp  
Fell round the path of Milton, in his hand  
The Thing became a trumpet; whence he blew  
Soul-animating strains--alas, too few!

## II. The Spenserian Sonnet:

Name: Edmund Spenser  
Birth Date: c. 1552  
Death Date: January 16, 1599  
Place of Birth: London, England  
Place of Death: London, England  
Nationality: English  
Gender: Male  
Occupations: poet

The Spenserian sonnet, invented by Edmund Spenser as an outgrowth of the stanza pattern he used in *The Faerie Queene* (a b a b b c b c c), has the pattern:

a b a b b c b c c d c d e e

Here, the "abab" pattern sets up distinct four-line groups, each of which develops a specific idea; however, the overlapping a, b, c, and d rhymes form the first 12 lines into a single unit with a separated final couplet. The three quatrains then develop three distinct but closely related ideas, with a different idea (or commentary) in the couplet. Interestingly, Spenser often begins L9 of his sonnets with "But" or "Yet," indicating a *volta* exactly where it would occur in the Italian sonnet; however, if one looks closely, one often finds that the "turn" here really isn't one at all, that the actual turn occurs where the rhyme pattern changes, with the couplet, thus giving a 12 and 2 line pattern very different from the Italian 8 and 6 line pattern (actual *volta* marked by italics):

"Sonnet LIV" by Edmund Spenser

Of this World's theatre in which we stay,  
My love like the Spectator idly sits,  
Beholding me, that all the pageants play,  
Disguising diversely my troubled wits.  
Sometimes I joy when glad occasion fits,  
And mask in mirth like to a Comedy;  
Soon after when my joy to sorrow flits,  
I wail and make my woes a Tragedy.  
*Yet she, beholding me with constant eye,*  
Delights not in my mirth nor rues my smart;  
But when I laugh, she mocks: and when I cry  
She laughs and hardens evermore her heart.  
What then can move her? If nor mirth nor moan,  
She is no woman, but a senseless stone.

### **III. The English (or Shakespearian) Sonnet:**

William Shakespeare **Birth:**

William Shakespeare was born in April, 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, about 100 miles northwest of London. According to the records of Stratford's Holy Trinity Church, he was baptized on April 26. It was customary to baptize infants within days of their birth, so the traditional birth date of Shakespeare is April 23rd, St. George's day, the patron saint of England.

William Shakespeare **Death:**

William Shakespeare died in Stratford on April 23, 1616 and was buried on April 25, 1616.

The English sonnet has the simplest and most flexible pattern of all sonnets, consisting of 3 quatrains of alternating rhyme and a couplet:

a b a b  
c d c d

e f e f

g g

As in the Spenserian, each quatrain develops a specific idea, but one closely related to the ideas in the other quatrains.

Not only is the English sonnet the easiest in terms of its rhyme scheme, calling for only pairs of rhyming words rather than groups of 4, but it is the most flexible in terms of the placement of the *volta*. Shakespeare often places the "turn," as in the Italian, at L9: \*\*\*(*Shakespeare has also done this by moving the volta to the final couplet lines 13, 14.*)\*\*\*

### "Sonnet XXIX" by William Shakespeare

When in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes,  
I all alone beweep my outcast state,  
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,  
And look upon myself and curse my fate,  
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,  
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,  
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,  
With what I most enjoy contented least,  
***Yet in these thoughts my self almost despising,***  
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,  
(Like to the lark at break of day arising  
From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven's gate,  
For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings,  
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

### "Sonnet XVIII" by William Shakespeare

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 dimm'd;  
And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimm'd;  
**But thy eternal summer shall not fade**  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;  
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st 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.