SONNETS NOTES

Sonnet: a lyric poem of fourteen lines, following one or another of several set rhyme schemes. The sonnet as a form developed in Italy probably in the thirteenth century. Petrarch, in the fourteenth century, raised the sonnet to its greatest Italian perfection and so gave it, for English readers, his own name.

The form was introduced into England by Thomas Wyatt, who translated Petrarchan sonnets and left over thirty examples of his own in English. Surrey, an associate, shares with Wyatt the credit for introducing the form to England and is important as an early modifier of the Italian form. Gradually the Italian sonnet pattern was changed, and since Shakespeare attained fame for the greatest poems of this modified type, his name has often been given to the English form.

The two characteristic sonnet types are the Italian (Petrarchan) and the English (Shakespearean). The first, the Italian/Petrarchan form, is distinguished by its bipartite division into the octave and the sestet: the octave consisting of a first division of eight lines rhyming

\[ \text{abbaabba} \]

and the sestet, or second division, consisting of six lines rhyming

\[ \text{cdecde, cdcdec, or cdedce.} \]

It might be said that the octave presents the narrative, states the proposition, or raises a question; the sestet drives home the narrative by making an abstract comment, applying the proposition, or solving the problem.

The English (Shakespearean) sonnet, on the other hand, is so different from the Italian (though it grew from that form) as to permit a separate classification. Instead of the octave and sestet divisions, this sonnet characteristically embodies four divisions: three quatrains (each with a rhyme scheme of its own) and a rhymed couplet. Thus the typical rhyme scheme for the English sonnet is

\[ \text{abab cdcd efef gg} \]

The couplet at the end is usually a commentary on the lines that came before, an epigrammatic close. The Spenserian sonnet combines the Italian and the Shakespearean forms, using three quatrains and a couplet but employing linking rhymes between the quatrains, thus

\[ \text{abab bcbc cdec ee} \]

Another form of poetry from the time is a style called the villanelle, which has a total of nineteen lines composed of six stanzas. Five stanzas have three lines each, and the last, sixth stanza has four lines.

Characteristics of a villanelle:
- 1st line of the 1st stanza is repeated as the last line of the 2nd and 4th stanzas
- 3rd line of the 1st stanza is repeated as the last line of the 3rd and 5th stanzas
- 1st line is also repeated as line 18
- 3rd line is repeated as the last line of the poem.

Refrain – lines repeated
Stanza – sections of poetry separated from others (paragraphs in prose)
Blank Verse – Poetry without a rhyme scheme; but has a distinct meter
Sonnet 130

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;
I grant I never saw a goddess go;
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground:
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

Meter: Iambic Pentameter
Rhyme Scheme: abab cdcd efef gg (Shakespearean)