

### Sonnet

A fixed form consisting of fourteen lines of 5-foot iambic verse. In the English or Shakespearean sonnet, the lines are grouped in three quatrains (with six alternating rhymes) followed by a detached rhymed couplet which is usually epigrammatic. In the original Italian form, such as Longfellow's "Divina Commedia," the fourteen lines are divided into an octave of two rhyme-sounds arranged abba abba and a sestet of two additional rhyme sounds which may be variously arranged. This latter form tends to divide the thought into two opposing or complementary phases of the same idea.

- A variant of the Shakespearean form is the Spenserian sonnet which links the quatrains with a chain or interlocked rhyme scheme, abab bcbc cdcd ee.
- The English language contains fewer rhyming possibilities than Italian, so the Shakespearean adaptation relieved English poets from the greater difficulty of rhyming in the Italian sonnet format.
- A sonnet sequence is a series of sonnets in which there is a discernable unifying theme, while each one retains its own structural independence. All of Shakespeare's sonnets, for example, were part of a sequence.

(See Quatorzain, Volta)

(See also Anthology, Canon, Companion Poem, Cycle, Lyric Sequence)

### A Brief History of the Sonnet

By the 1200's, the sonnet form (from the Italian sonnetto, "little song") was set well enough to be defined as Italian poets were writing them: 14 lines are divided into an 8-line problem statement that is resolved in the last 6 lines.

In the 1500's, William Shakespeare and many others adapted the form to include two more rhymes at the ends of lines than the Italian form used. Although there is still an echo of the shift in tone in lines 8-9, the last two lines of the English sonnet rhyme together and cap off the previous 12 lines.

Usually about love, sonnets often are written about beauty but also about the effects of time and mortality.

Poets of many languages still write sonnets.

### Questions to ask yourselves about "Let me not to the marriage of true minds" (Sonnet 116 a poem by William Shakespeare)

see: [http://www.poetry-online.org/shakespeare\\_sonnet\\_116\\_marriage\\_true\\_minds.htm](http://www.poetry-online.org/shakespeare_sonnet_116_marriage_true_minds.htm)

- What is the "problem" stated in the first 8 lines?
- In what sense is the problem "resolved" in the last lines?
- Is there a shift in attitude in lines 8 - 9 (the end of the second "stanza" and the opening of the third)?
- What relationship among love, beauty, time, and mortality is depicted by this poem?