

THE ELIZABETHAN SONNET

Although the sonnet did not originate in England, it nevertheless flourished there in the sixteenth century and reached a high level of perfection. It seems to have been born in the thirteenth century among the Sicilian school of Court Poets¹ who had been influenced by the love poetry of Provençal troubadours. Professor J.W. Lever in his book *The Elizabethan Love Sonnet* argues that the two sources of the Elizabethan sonnets were La Provence in France and the city-states of thirteenth century Italy. The sonnet reached its highest expression in Italy in the fourteenth century in the poems of Petrarch² (1304-1374). Petrarch's *Canzoniere* was a sequence of poems including 317 sonnets addressed to Laura, his idealized beloved. Laura, who became the model of the early Elizabethan sonneteers was presented in the sonnets as fair and at the same time cruel. Petrarch attributes to her such characteristics that she is often seen as a superhuman being.

English sonneteers were not directly influenced by Italian sonneteers but through France where Ronsard (*Amours* 1552, and *Sonnets pour Hélène* 1578), Du Bellay (*Olive* 1549, *Regrets* and *Antiquités de Rome*, 1558) and Marot had been trying their hand at the sonnet. These French

1. The court of Emperor Frederick II. Frederick died in 1250.

2. Full name: Francesco Petrarca.

sonneteers, most of whom belonged to the literary group "La Pléiade," can be said to have provided the direct inspiration to the English poets of the sixteenth century.

Thomas Watson was the first Elizabethan to make a reputation as a sonneteer. Sir Philip Sidney entered the field soon after Watson. Scholars seem unanimous on that the sonnet was introduced in England by Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, in the sixteenth century, and more precisely, in 1530. The start was very difficult because Petrarchan sentiments could not be easily adapted to English tastes. Moreover, there arose a need for discovering a new structure to fit the potentialities and limits of the English language.

Though the sonnet was introduced to England early in the sixteenth century, it must not be thought that the actual 'mass-production' of sonnets started at that early period. In fact, we have to move forward some decades, to 1591, when the period of sonneteering 'mania' started in England. The flood receded in 1598 leaving behind a rich harvest of sonnets. The most important sonnet sequences will be listed later when the period is discussed in some detail.

Here we must emphasize the fact that the term *Sonnet* was very loosely used in England during the sixteenth century. Thomas Watson, for example, often wrote sonnets of eighteen lines. George Gascoigne, a contemporary, in his book *Certayne Notes of Introduction Concerning the Making of Verse or Rhyme in English* gave the following definition of the sonnet:

"Sonnets are of fouretene lynes, every lyne conteyning tenne syllables. The first twelve ryme in staves of foure lynes by crosse metre and the last two ryming together, to conclude the whole."

The fourteen lines are an essential characteristic of the sonnet and the term does not apply to any other sort of poem. E. Hubler in his book *The Sense of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, argues:

"A poem intending to be both unified and intense, must be long enough to permit development, and short enough to allow the reader

a retention of everything his eye takes in from the first to the last words. For this purpose, fourteen lines were found to be right."

According to the Oxford Dictionary, a sonnet is

"a piece of verse (properly expressive of one main idea) consisting of fourteen decasyllabic lines, with rhymes arranged according to one or other of certain definite schemes."

The most outstanding among Elizabethan sonneteers were Wyatt, Surrey, Watson, Sir Philip Sidney, Spenser and Shakespeare. The last three of these are the most important ones. In the following analysis the other sonneteers will be examined in a group and Shakespeare separately. This distinction is warranted first by the common characteristics the sonnets of Wyatt, Surrey, Sidney, Watson and Spenser present, and mainly by the fact that Shakespeare had something new to present in the development of the sonnet during the reign of Elizabeth I.

So far, we have been discussing the origins of the sonnet and its appearance in England. The basic elements have been discussed but we must now turn to the sonnets themselves and study the particular characteristics of the sonnet in Elizabethan England.

The Elizabethan sonnets reveal the prevailing tendency in England of borrowing ideas, imagery and themes from foreign works particularly French and Italian. This is seen in the borrowed plots in the plays of Shakespeare, for example. During the first years after the introduction of the sonnet in England, most English sonneteers did nothing but translate French and Italian sonnets and canalize them to the limited reading public in England.

It took some time for the Elizabethan sonneteers to free themselves from the influence of their foreign models. In most sonnets of the period we observe practically all the characteristics of the Petrarchan sonnet. The Petrarchan adoration of the lady is very effectively borrowed and represented by Elizabethan sonneteers who often describe their beloved as having eyes like the sun and lips like roses. Her basic characteristic, however, is her extreme cruelty. She is beautiful, chaste, honourable, proud

and invariably cruel. The tendency to borrow from Petrarchan models is clearly seen in Samuel Daniel's sonnet *Fair is my Love and Cruel as she is Fair*. In this sonnet the lady is described as extremely modest and chaste:

Her brow-shades frown, although her eyes are Sunny
 Her smiles are lightning, though her pride despair,
 And her disdains are gall, her favours honey.
 A modest maid, deck'd with blush of honour,
 Whose feet do tread green paths of youth and love.

The lady in this sonnet is characteristically Petrarchan and this shows the extent of the hold Petrarch had on the minds of the English sonneteers. Like Petrarch, the Elizabethans too, could not conceive of a submissive lady who readily responded to her lover's advances. The lady had to be cruel and the lover her slave, willing to serve her without getting the least return from her. She is described as an indifferent creature, unwilling even to cast a glance of sympathy at her subservient lover. Samuel Daniel claims that the love and slavery of the lover is derived only from the lady's cruelty and her stubbornness in not accepting his love. In *Fair is my Love and Cruel as she is Fair*, we can see the 'need' for the lady to be cruel, well illustrated. In the couplet the poet admits:

For had she not been fair, and thus unkind,
 My Muse hath slept and none had known my mind.

One of the basic characteristics of the Elizabethan sonnets is their subject. In the Petrarchan sonnets, love was the prevailing theme, and this seemed to be the main subject for the early Elizabethan sonneteers, too. We have many Elizabethan sonnets describing the poet's emotions, his anxiety and despair as a result of his lady's cruelty, but all sonnets of this sort are an expression of the lover's constant love for his mistress. Sir Philip Sidney follows foreign models very closely. His appeals to sleep, the moon, the nightingale etc., resemble the apostrophes of foreign sonneteers too closely. The result is that he cannot claim originality in his poetry. In

his sonnet *Come, Sleep; O Sleep! the certain Knot of peace*, the poet is unable to sleep while he has image of his beloved in his mind and lies restless in his bed thinking of her. He addresses sleep:

And if these things, as being thine by right,
Move not thy heavy grace, thou shalt in me,
Livelier than elsewhere, Stella's image see.

The lover's passionate expression of love, however, was not the only theme of Elizabethan sonnets. In them we observe a variety of themes, though the theme of love predominates. Religious sonnets are rather common as well as sonnets of friendly adulation. In his sonnet *Leave me, O Love, which reachest but to dust*, Sidney expresses his ardent desire to abandon earthly things and love, and follow God's love: "And thou, my mind, aspire to higher things!" He concludes with the powerful couplet:

Then farewell, world! Thy uttermost I see:
Eternal Love, maintain thy life in me!

This sonnet illustrates the fact that Elizabethan sonneteers had started to free themselves from the strict thematic limits of the Petrarchan sonnet and did not confine themselves to the subject of love.

When discussing the theme of religion in Elizabethan sonnets, we should mention in passing the religious sonnets of John Donne (1573-1631) and those of John Milton (1608-1674). Donne's poetry falls outside the limits of the Elizabethan period, and certainly outside the Elizabethan sonneteering age, which can be roughly placed between 1590 and 1600. Yet Donne's religious sonnets cannot be ignored since he is a near contemporary of the Elizabethan sonneteers. Donne wrote his sonnets round 1610. A typical religious sonnet is No. VII of the *Holy Sonnets* where Donne asks God for grace to repent before it is too late. The final couplet:

Teach me how to repent; for that's as good
As if thou hadst seal'd my pardon with thy blood.

A similar subject is treated by John Milton, who wrote much later. In his famous sonnet *On his Blindness*, Milton, who became blind in his forties, expresses his pain at the loss of his eyesight, "that one Talent which is death to hide" which God has given him to serve Him with. Soon, however, his moral and religious sense prevails and he decides to accept his fate and "Bear his mild yoke," because those who are patient also serve God: "They also serve who only stand and wait." Milton also wrote political sonnets. Thus, by the middle of the seventeenth century, the sonnet had extended to subjects beyond the strict limits set by the Petrarchan sonnet.

During the first years after the introduction of the sonnet in England, sonnets were written and distributed in manuscript to the poet's friends who read and enjoyed them either privately or in company. In the early years, sonnets were not published and only few were included in *Tottel's Miscellany* published in 1557. Later, however, a very important development took place, namely the publication of sonnets in sequences, and this became the accepted practice during the last years of the sixteenth century. The publication of sonnet-sequences started with Thomas Watson's *Passionate Centurie of Love*. The real beginning of the period of publication of sonnets sequences was marked by the appearance of Sidney's sequence *Astrophel and Stella* in 1591 (written 1580-3). In this sequence, Astrophel is Sir Philip Sidney himself and Stella is Lady Penelope Rich, with whom he was in love. This publication was followed by others, like Edmund Spenser's *Amoretti* (c. 1594). This sequence uses a linked rhyme scheme, *abab bcbc cdcd ee*. Samuel Daniel's *Delia* was published in 1592 and Michael Drayton's *Ideas Mirrour* in 1594. This 'mania' was often the subject of mockery. Ben Jonson in *Every Man in his Humour* makes Master Matthew, the Town Gull boast of his ability to write poems:

"I am melancholy myself, divers times, Sir, and then do I no more but take pen and paper presently, and overflow you half a score, or a dozen of sonnets at a sitting."

This is a justified claim since the sonnet had lost much of its value due to overproduction. One could go as far as say that the law of supply and

demand operates in poetry as it does in the field of economics. When the market gets more than it demands the price (value) falls. When a poem is written because it has to, it is likely to be of lesser value than one which is written spontaneously as a result of a moment's inspiration. In his sonnet 31 (*Idea*) Drayton describes the effect the flood of sonnets had on the ears of his contemporaries:

Since sonnets thus in bundles are impressed,
And every drudge doth dull our satiate ear.....

There exists a basic distinction between the Petrarchan and the Elizabethan sonnet, and this is the rhyme scheme. The Petrarchan rhyme scheme is *abbaabba cdecde*, and this was often used by Elizabethan sonnet writers. The first eight lines, the *octave* or *octet*, state a problem, ask a question, or express emotional tension. The last six lines, the *sestet* resolve the problem, answer the question, or relieve the tension. The rhyme scheme of the sestet varies and can be *cdecde*, *cdccdc* or *cdedce*. The Elizabethan rhyme scheme, on the other hand, is different. It is *abab cdcd efef gg*. So here we have three quatrains and a final couplet. The couplet at the end of the sonnet is a characteristically English development. The couplet is a very significant development because it serves to summarize the subject and give the short poem a powerful conclusion. Sir Philip Sidney in his sonnet *With how sad steps, O moon, thou climb'st the skies!* asks the moon:

Are beauties there as proud as here they be?
Do they above love to be loved and yet
Those lovers scorn whom that love doth possess?
Do they call 'virtue' there – ungratefulness?

The final couplet here is very effective because it beautifully summarises

the theme of cruelty of mistresses on the moon and on the earth. It will be noticed, however, that the couplet is not self-contained but the final statement begins in the twelfth line. The couplet in Shakespeare's sonnets has much greater impact, as will become evident when Shakespeare's sonnets are discussed.

A small parenthesis may be opened here to introduce briefly the third important type of sonnet, the Miltonic. The rhyme scheme here is exactly the same as that of the Petrarchan sonnet but there is no break in thought between the octave and the sestet. There is no question and answer or contrast. The same argument is continued throughout.

It has become a commonplace to say that Shakespeare's plays were by far superior to those written by any of his contemporaries, and of course to any plays written by British dramatists since then. One can go into another area and validly claim that his sonnets are certainly the best produced in the Elizabethan era. In the following analysis the sonnets of Shakespeare will be examined in some detail and they will be used as the basis for the discussion of some other general characteristics of the Elizabethan sonnet which can be better illustrated through these sonnets. In examining Shakespeare's sonnets one has first to see where Shakespeare differed from other Elizabethan sonneteers. In Shakespeare's sonnets we observe a basic innovation, that is the fact that he usually celebrates his love for a young nobleman instead of a beautiful lady. The 154 sonnets Shakespeare wrote, were dedicated to "Mr. W.H." who is supposed to be either the Earl of Pembroke or the Earl of Southampton. We need not suppose that this "friendship" implies a homosexual relationship, and Professor Lever argues that such a relationship between a poet and a young friend was very common in Elizabethan England. Shakespeare wrote 126 sonnets for the young nobleman, 28 for his "dark mistress" who is the "cruel lady", and two sonnet-translations from Italian texts. They may be considered the greatest body of love-poetry in the English language. Though the dates of Shakespeare's sonnets are not definitely known, they were most probably written between 1593 and 1599. According to Francis Meres, Shakespeare's sonnets were first circulated among the poet's

friends in 1598 and they were published for the first time by Thomas Thorpe in 1609.

Shakespeare did introduce something new into the sonneteering tradition in England. This innovation may be the extension of the range of subject and also the sincere expression of his feelings. In sonnet 130 he ridicules the Petrarchan stereotyped mistress:

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 is as rare
 As any she belied with false compare.

He builds up a very unattractive picture of his mistress, the so-called "Dark Lady", and she is presented as a person who would never attract but invariably repel lovers. And yet, her lover is not disillusioned; on the contrary, he loves her very much. So the whole theory of a "fair" lady is deflated. No mention of her cruelty is made, but one can guess she is a sweet creature with a manageable character. In this sonnet Shakespeare ridicules the idea of a fair lady being the *sine qua non* of a sonnet. He has marked his own way and is not going to pay lip-service to any 'models' imported from abroad.

Shakespeare introduced a variety of subjects in his sonnets. One of these is lust which is described in sonnet 129, one of the most powerful arguments presented in Shakespeare's sonnets:

Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame
 Is lust in action, and till action lust
 Is perjur'd, murd'rous, bloody, full of blame,
 Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust,
 Enjoyed no sooner but despised straight,
 Past reason hunted, and no-sooner had,
 Past reason hated, as a swallowed bait,
 On purpose laid to make the taker mad;
 Mad in pursuit, and in possession so,
 Had, having and in quest to have, extreme,
 A bliss in proof, and prov'd, a very woe,
 Before, a joy propos'd; behind, a dream.
 All this the world well knows, yet none knows well
 To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

This sonnet achieves its impact on the reader through a number of effective devices. The subject of the first sentence 'lust in action' appears in the second line, after the reader has felt its absence from the first line. Another device is the use of sharp words like "perjur'd", "murd'rous", "bloody", and "Savage, extreme, rude, cruel", which drive the message home. Contrast is yet another device as in lines 6 and 7 where "Past reason hunted", is contrasted to "Past reason hated". Also in line 5 we have "Enjoy'd" contrasted with "despised". Another contrast is found in line 12 where we have: "Before, a joy propos'd; behind, a dream." The basic characteristic of this sonnet is that although it is an argument, it nevertheless contains no difficult words or ideas. Every statement is simple, precise, and to the point, thus making the whole very cogent. Shakespeare does not make excessive use of alliteration which, if used without due restraint, is likely to sound like poetry written by village fair poets. Shakespeare has an admirable sense of balance which keeps him within the bounds of the acceptable, and within those limits he creates his masterpieces.

Other Elizabethan sonneteers often make an exaggerated use of imagery and metaphor as well as of special poetic devices like alliteration, assonance and puns to strengthen the effect of their sonnets. Shakespeare,

an acknowledged master in the use of appropriate images, is able within the confined space of a sonnet, to create a picture, often several, and pass on this picture to the reader in very vivid colours. In his childhood, Shakespeare wandered in the beautiful countryside round Stratford-upon-Avon and the scenery was deeply engraved in his mind. His study of the beauties of nature, coupled with his sensitive eye, ear and nose, combined in enabling him to "absorb" a scene in its entity. In sonnet 18, "Shall I compare thee to a summer's Day?", Shakespeare makes a close comparison between the beauty of the young man and the beauty of nature. The young nobleman's beauty is superior to that of nature, because:

Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
 And summers's lease hath all too short a date:
 Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
 And often 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 in time thou grow'st
 So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
 So long lives this and this gives life to thee.

The whims of nature are very delicately touched upon, yet the effectiveness of the lines is not in the least diminished. The impact of the two lines "Sometime too hot.... dimm'd", is strengthened because the sun is referred to as an object, "the eye of heaven" and then he becomes personified by being referred to as "his."

A prominent place in Shakespeare's well equipped laboratory of poetic technique is occupied by the couplet which in the hands of this great virtuoso has proved a powerful instrument. Shakespeare uses the couplet in his plays when he wants to mark the end of a scene or to emphasize the soliloquy or the speech of a character. In the sonnet, the couplet is used to

wind up the discussion which thus ends in a very epigrammatic way which cannot fail to impress the reader. In the above sonnet, the poet's friend is going to be immortal because the poem will make him so. This may have been a prophecy by Shakespeare who sensed that his lines would become immortal and be as vivid nowadays and in the future as they were when he wrote them about four hundred years ago.

Shakespeare's agility in the art of verse-making is seen in that when he chose, he could overwhelm a sonnet with imagery which, however, did not make his sonnet fail as a work of art. This is brought out by sonnet 73:

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few do hang,
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west;
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
In me thou seest the glowing of such fire,
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed whereon it must expire
Consum'd with that which it was nourish'd by.
This thou perceiv'st which makes thy love more strong
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

In the above sonnet, the division into three quatrains and a couplet is very clearly seen. Each quatrain develops its own subject through a powerful image. In the first quatrain the poet, who is growing old, compares himself to autumn when trees lose their leaves and human beings their vitality. In the second couplet he compares himself to the end of a day, when sunset is about to put an end to it. In the third, the comparison is to a dying fire which in trying to survive, burns itself out. The couplet gives coherence to the rest of the poem, because the poet winds up the points

made by expressing the view that one must try to lead as exciting a life as one can, because youth is very short and old age comes very soon. "That" in the last line may be taken to refer to "life" not to "youth". The second possibility is more likely if one considers the whole atmosphere of Elizabethan sonnets where youth and vitality played an important role. Loss of vitality would, of course, ultimately lead to death, but the one does not closely follow the other. This sonnet also illustrates Shakespeare's "economic" style. In fourteen lines he has been able to develop fully the theme of the loss of youth and conclude it with a mighty couplet which bears the seal of the great sonneteer.

Legal terminology was very popular among Elizabethan sonneteers. In fact, every Elizabethan gentleman had a little knowledge of law. Shakespeare is an expert in the use of legal terms in his plays and sonnets. In sonnet 87, *Farewell! thou art too dear for my possessing*, we see how Shakespeare uses legal terms with such ease and precision as if he had them at his fingertips. The word "dear" in the first line is too obvious a pun:

Farewell: Thou art too dear for my possessing,
And like enough thou know'st thy estimate.
The charter of thy worth gives thee releasing;
My bonds in thee are determinate.

Words like *estimate*, *charter*, *releasing*, *bonds*, *determinate* are legal and business terms which if used by another poet would probably have spoilt the quality of the poem. This is certainly not the case with Shakespeare.

Shakespeare is a master in handling the sonnet and even when he intentionally uses poetic devices for their own sake, he nevertheless creates a work of art, combining surface beauty with full meaning under the surface. This is the case in sonnet 30:

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,

I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
 And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste.
 Then can I drown an eye, unus'd to flow,
 For precious friends hid in death's dateless night,
 And weep afresh, love's long since cancell'd woe,
 And moan th'expense of many a vanish'd sight.
 Then I can grieve at grievances foregone,
 And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er
 The sad account of fore-memoaned moon,
 Which I new pay as if not paid before.
 But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
 All losses are restor'd, and sorrows end.

This sonnet is a literary exercise in which the poet shows his skill in using technical poetic devices like alliteration and assonance. Alliteration is used in the first two lines with the *s* sound stressing "silent thought". In line 3, we have assonance with the deep-sounding "with old woes new wail my dear time's waste". Alliteration again in line 7 with the *l* sound and again assonance, alliteration and repetition, in lines 9-12. It would be overpraising Shakespeare to say that the deep meaning does not suffer as a result of the poet's emphasizing the surface details. The above is, however, one of the best examples of poems where "technical" beauty is combined with a satisfactory "internal" beauty.

Shakespeare, unlike other Elizabethan sonneteers was an innovator in the sense that he uses the sonnet to express the most profound and subtle truths. In writing about love, he does not use commonplace clichés which appeal only to the hearts of the uninitiated. His love poems are full of profound meaning. Sonnet 116, deals with the nature of true love:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
 Admit impediments. Love is not love
 Which alters when it alteration finds,
 Or bends with the remover to remove.
 O, no! it is an ever fixed mark,
 That looks on tempests and is never shaken;

It is the star to every wand'ring bark,
 Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
 Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
 Within his bending sickle's compass come;
 Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
 But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
 If this be error, and upon me prov'd,
 I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.

The kind of love described here is not physical, but platonic love which is described as "the marriage of true minds". The repetition of the words "alters", "alteration" and "remover", "remove" are intended to contrast with the idea expressed in the second quatrain that true love is "an ever-fixed mark". This sonnet is a predecessor to Donne's witty sonnets. This is a technique which Donne adopted and led to the highest point of perfection. Shakespeare does not use any 'conceits' which the 'Monarch of Wit' as Donne has been called, does. The whole argument leads to the paradoxical statement in the couplet of the above sonnet:

If this be error, and upon me prov'd,
 I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.

The argument seems cogent and the conclusion valid and yet it conceals a trap. The poet 'forces' the reader to accept his argument because the reader cannot deny the two self-evident facts that the poet *has* written and men *have* loved before. This is a point which stresses the connection attempted above, between Shakespeare and Donne. The paradoxical conclusions of most of Donne's love poems may have had their source of inspiration in Shakespearean sonnets like the one discussed above.

In the above analysis we saw that Elizabethan sonneteers owed much to Petrarch. This dependence was often considered too great and Sir John Davies, a severe contemporary critic of the sonnet attacked it. In 1596 he wrote a sonnet to a friend in which he inveighed against the "bastard sonnets which some rhymers daily begot to their own shames and poetry's disgrace." Shakespeare, too, did not escape Sir John Davies' censure. He

was accused of using legal terminology in "affairs of the heart." It is true that the Elizabethan sonnet can be considered to have had its roots in Petrarch's poetry, but this does not mean that the Elizabethan sonneteers were mere imitators, poets of no talent or originality of thought. On the contrary, they must be given credit for their skill in assimilating the Petrarchan ideology and technique and grafting it into English tastes and fitting the sonnets within the limits of the English language which is less musical than the Italian. They had to overcome great difficulties created by the lack, in English, of long and deep-sounding words which abound in Italian. They had to make up compound epithets and use alliteration and assonance in order to overcome their basic problem. Despite the above difficulties, a new body of poetry, the Elizabethan sonnet, was created and it formed the foundation stone on which subsequent successful sonnets by great poets like John Donne and John Milton were based.