

SONNET #1

1. From fairest creatures we desire increase, (a)
2. That thereby beauty's rose might never die, (b)
3. But as the ripper should by time decrease (a)
4. His tender heir might bear his memory (b) (quatrain 1)
5. But thou, contracted to thine own bright eyes (c)
6. Feed'st thy light's flame with self-substantial fuel, (d)
7. Making a famine where abundance lies, (c)
8. Thyself thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel. (d) (quatrain 2)
9. Thou that art now the world's fresh ornament, (e)
10. And only herald to the gaudy spring, (f)
11. Within thine own bud buriest thy content, (e)
12. And, tender churl, mak'st waste in niggarding: (f) (quatrain 3)
13. Pity the world, or else this glutton be, (g) (turn/volta)
14. To eat the world's due, by the grave and thee. (g)

SONNET #29

1. When, in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes (a)
2. I all alone beweep my outcast state, (b)
3. And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries, (a)
4. And look upon myself, and curse my fate, (b) (quatrain 1)
5. Wishing me like to one more rich in hope, (c)
6. Featured like him, like him with friends possessed, (d)
7. Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope, (c)
8. With what I most enjoy contented least; (d) (quatrain 2)
9. Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising, (e)
10. Haply, I think on thee, and then my state, (f)
11. Like to the lark at break of day arising (e)
12. From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate; (f) (quatrain 3)
13. For thy sweet love rememb' red such wealth brings, (g) (turn/volta)
14. That then I scorn to change my state with kings. (g)

Sonnets traditionally come in two types:

(1) The **Italian** (or **Petrarchan**) **sonnet** contains the following features:

An **octave** (eight lines) rhyming **abbaabba**

A **sestet** (six lines) of varying rhyme patterns, such as **cdecde** or **cdccdc**

Sir Thomas Wyatt in the early 1500s first introduced the Italian sonnet into English. It rapidly became all the rage.

(2) The **English** (or **Shakespearean**) sonnet contains the following features:

Three **quatrains** (sections of four lines, also called "staves"): **abab cdcd efef**

A concluding **couplet** (two rhyming lines): **gg**. Sometimes, the concluding couplet after the turn is called the **gemmel**.

Note that, though this type of sonnet is called "Shakespearean," Shakespeare did not invent it. It was actually introduced by the Earl of Surrey and other English experimenters in the 1500s. Normally, the first part of the sonnet introduces a problem or question of some sort, which is developed in the first octave (in Italian sonnets) or the first three quatrains (in English sonnets). Then, there is a change in direction, thought, or emotion called a "**Volta**" or a "**Turn**." The last sestet (in Italian sonnets) or the final couplet (in English sonnets) illustrates this change in direction, thought, or emotion.

ITALIAN SONNET

A
B
B
A (Octave)
A
B
B
A
----- (Volta, or Turn)
C
D
E (Sestet)
C
D
E

ENGLISH SONNET

A
B
A (Quatrain #1)
B
C
D (Quatrain #2)
C
D
E
F (Quatrain #3)
E
F
----- (Volta, or Turn)
G
G (Couplet)

The following is a twentieth-century sonnet written by William Butler Yeats. In Greek legend, as later retold in Ovid's Latin work, the *Metamorphoses*, the God Zeus looked down from the clouds and saw a beautiful young girl named Leda bathing in a pool. Lusting after her, Zeus transformed himself into a giant swan, flew down to earth, and seduced the girl. Leda conceived a half-divine child from this unwilling union--a daughter named Helen of Troyes. William Butler Yeats reworks the material in his own poem, below.

LEDA AND THE SWAN

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
And how can body, laid in that white rush,
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?

A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
And Agamemnon dead.

Being so caught up,
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

1. After a close reading of the poem, what unusual examples of diction do you find in this text?
2. Characterize Leda. Characterize her lover. What does the speaker's attitude seem to be toward these two characters?
3. How does the imagery in the third quatrain change from the first two quatrains?
4. What features of the traditional sonnet does Yeats include? What does he not include?
5. How does the volta or turn change the direction of the poem?
6. What is the "knowledge" that the swan has concerning the future? Why might Leda "put on" this knowledge in addition to "his power"?