



# THE PREDECESSORS OF SHAKESPEARE IN POETRY

THE RENAISSANCE PERIOD IN ENGLAND  
COINCIDES WITH THE RULE OF QUEEN  
ELIZABETH I, THAT IS WHY ANOTHER NAME FOR  
THIS HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL EPOCH IS THE  
ELIZABETHAN AGE.

Queen Elizabeth was the  
daughter of King Henry VIII and

his second wife Anne Boleyn.



# HENRY MARRIED ANNE BOLEYN AFTER BREAKING WITH ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH OF ENGLAND.



Elizabeth succeeded her half-sister Mary to the throne when she was only 25. Elizabeth was a Protestant, however she had many Catholics among her subjects. The Queen was a remarkable personality: she was thin, red-haired, very clever, she possessed audacity and wiliness, she couldn't help making favourites out of her most handsome courtiers.


AT THAT TIME ENGLAND WAS NOT YET ONE OF THE GREATEST POWERS, THOUGH IT WAS PROGRESSING FAST UNDER THE GOVERNMENT OF THE TUDORS.



Elizabeth needed time to make England a powerful country.

All the chief glories of the Elizabethan Age in literature came after the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588.

Though the Spanish fleet was the finest in Europe, it was outmatched by the smaller and faster English fleet, which was handled by the best seamen in the world.



After that victory the English  
discovered in themselves  
new sources of confidence,  
energy and delight.

All these features were  
expressed in literature.

ENGLISH POETS AT THAT TIME IMITATED FOREIGN MODELS, THE MOST IMPORTANT OF WHICH WAS THE SONNET, THE POETIC FORM WHICH IS ORIGINALLY ITALIAN.



It was brought to perfection by the great Italian poet Francesco Petrarca (1304 – 1374). ( Petrarch is the English spelling of his name.)

A Petrarch sonnet is a poem of 14 lines: two quatrains (4-line stanzas) and two tercets (3-line stanzas). The rhythmic pattern of the quatrains is **abba abba** (the rhymes in both quatrains are the same); the rhymes of the tercets could vary: **cde cde; cdc dcd; ccd eed.**

It is rather difficult to compose a sonnet observing the strict form and alteration of lines.

Besides, in a classical sonnet a thought is put forth in the first quatrain, another thought (contradicting the first) in the second, these two thoughts intersect in the first tercet, usually in the last line of the sonnet.

If the author is skilful enough, he makes the last line the most significant, this word is called **the key** of the sonnet.

THE OUTSTANDING ENGLISH POETS OF THE MIDDLE OF THE 16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY WHO WERE THE FIRST TO BRING THE SONNET INTO ENGLISH LITERATURE WERE

Sir Thomas Wyatt  
(1503 -1542)



Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey  
(1517 -1547).





SIR THOMAS WYATT'S MOST QUOTED POEM IS NOT, STRICTLY SPEAKING, A SONNET, BUT IT MAY SERVE AS AN EXAMPLE OF AN ELABORATE VERSE FORM WITH A STRICTLY OBSERVED RHYME PATTERN:

*The Lover's Appeal*

*And wilt thou leave me thus?*

*Say nay! Say nay! For shame!*

*To save thee from the blame*

*Of all my grief and grame.*

*And wilt thou leave me thus?*

*Say nay! Say nay!*

PURELY ENGLISH FORM OF THE SONNET  
WAS INVENTED BY HENRY HOWARD  
SURREY. IT CONSISTED OF THREE  
QUATRIANS AND A COUPLET: **ABAB  
CDCD EF EF GG.**

*From Tuscan came my Lady's worthy race;  
Fair Florence was sometimes her ancient seat:  
The western isle, whose pleasant shore doth face  
Wild Camber's cliffs, did give her lively heat.  
Foster'd she was with milk of Irish breast:  
Her sire an Earl; her dame of Prince's blood.  
From tender years, in Britain it doth rest,  
With Kinges child; where she tasteth costly food.  
Hudston did first present her to mine eyen:  
Bright in her hue, and Geraldine she hight.  
Hampton me taught to wish her first to mine;  
And Windsor, alas! doth chase me from her sight.  
Her beauty of kind; her virtues from above;  
Happy is he that can obtain her love.*

Later William Shakespeare used this pattern in his verse, and such sonnets were called “Shakespearean”. However, it is wrong, as the real creator of the form was Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey.

Another great innovation of Surrey is **blank verse** ( unrhymed 5-foot iambic), which he used in his translation of virgil’s “The Aeneid”.

Half a century later the Elizabethan dramatists used blank verse, when their characters spoke on the stage of the first professional theatres.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY (1554 – 1586), ANOTHER POET OF NOBLE BIRTH, SEEMED TO HIS CONTEMPORARIES TO EMBODY ALL THE TRAITS OF CHARACTER AND PERSONALITY THEY ADMIRERD.



After studying at Oxford, he travelled widely on diplomatic missions and served at the court of the Queen. He retired from his duties in 1580 and turned to writing literature, just for amusement. He wrote a pastoral romance in prose "Arcadia", a sonnet cycle "Astrophel and Stella", a critical work "Apology for Poetry".

AMONG “NON-ARISTOCRATIC”  
AUTHORS WAS THE GREATEST POET OF  
THE ENGLISH RENAISSANCE EDMUND  
SPENSER  
(1552 -1599).



His father was a cloth-maker, but Edmund had an opportunity of going to Cambridge as a “sizar” - a poor student who paid less for his education than others, but had to serve the richer students during meals. In that way he acquired some intellectual friends, Sir Philip Sidney among them.

In 1580 Edmund Spenser became a secretary to Lord deputy of Ireland, and lived in this country to his death. Sir Walter Raleigh was deeply impressed by Spenser's poem "The Fairie Queen" and he persuaded Spenser to go to London and supervise its publication.

In 1590 the first three books were printed and dedicated to Queen Elizabeth.

(it's worth mentioning that only six books out of the planned twelve were completed.)

Spenser is sometimes called “the poets’ poet” because so many later English poets learnt the art of versification from his works.


He is famous as an experimenter in verse forms, many of which became traditional in England.

He created a sonnet form of his own, the Spenserian sonnet, and the Spenserian stanza which consists of 9 lines, the last line is in 6-foot iambic, while the others are in 5-foot iambic, with the rhymic scheme: **ababbcbcbcc**.

EDMUND SPENSER,  
SONNET LXXV

*One day I wrote her name upon the strand  
But came the waves and washed it away;  
Again I wrote it with a second hand,  
But came the tide, and made my pains his prey.  
“Vain man”, said he, “that dost in vain assay  
A mortal thing so to immortalize!  
For I myself shall like to his decay,  
And eke my name be wiped out likewise”.  
“Not so ( quoth I), let baser things devise  
To die in dust, but you shall live by fame:  
My verse your virtues rare shall eternize,  
And in the heavens write your glorious name,  
Where, whenas Death shall all the world subdue,  
Our love shall live, and later life renew.”*





SPENSER GAVE ENGLISH VERSE A  
MELODIOUSNESS AND HARMONY  
WHICH HAD BEEN UNKNOWN BEFORE.  
AMONG THE ENGLISH POETS WHO  
LATER USED SPENSERIAN STANZA ARE  
ROBERT BURNS, GEORGE GORDON  
BYRON, PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY AND  
JOHN KEATS.