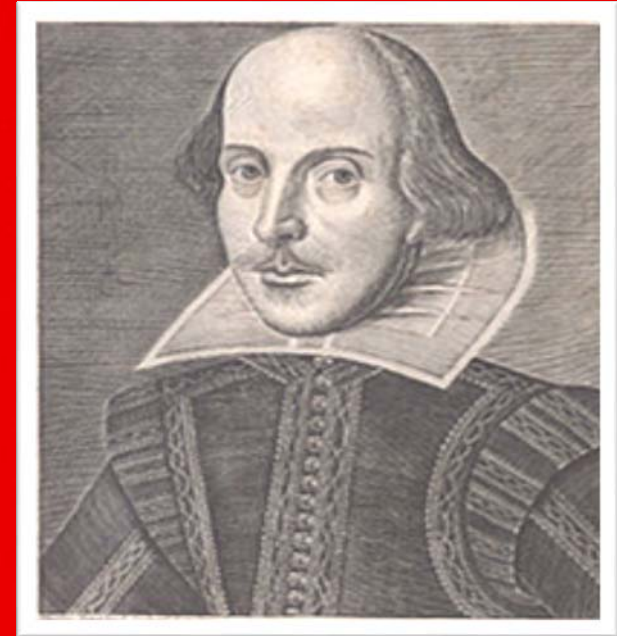


# Shakespeare's Sonnets



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# The Sonnet

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- It is a fourteen-line poem which may be variously rhymed
- It was introduced in England by a group of **Court poets** during the reign of Henry VIII
- Petrarch was considered a model by sonnet writers
- Love sonnets were collected in **sonnet sequences**
- ***Astrophil and Stella*** (1591) started the vogue



# Petrarch vs Surrey

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- Surrey translated many Petrarchan sonnets
- His great innovation was to change the structure of the Italian sonnet

## Italian sonnet

1st quatrain *abba*

2nd quatrain *abba*

1st tercet *cdc*

2nd tercet *cdc*

## English sonnet

1st quatrain *abab*

2nd quatrain *cdcd*

3rd quatrain *efef*

couplet *gg*

- The English sonnet is composed by **three quatrains** and a final **couplet**



# Shakespeare's Sonnets

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- They were published in 1609
- They are 154 in total
- Most of the sonnets were written between 1593 and 1599
- Possibly they were written to the Earl of Southampton
- Each sonnet is composed by three quatrains and a final couplet
- The rhyme scheme is *abab cdcd efef gg*



# The Characters

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- Their identity is uncertain
- **Fair youth**: his role in the sequence is fundamental
- **Dark lady**: a flesh-and-blood woman
- **Rival poet**: a disturbing factor in the poet's affection for the fair youth



# The Themes (1)

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## Love

- A variety of feelings
- Old motifs come to new life
- The *marriage sequence*
- It is seen as both spiritual and physical

*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.*

(Sonnet 116)



# The Themes (2)

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## Time

- It is the arch-enemy of all mankind
- It destroys all the beauty and goodness in the world
- The poet suggests two ways of opposing Time: procreation and poetry

*Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date*

*(Sonnet 18)*

