

Elizabethan Sonnet and Sonneteers

The Sonnet is the most popular form of English literature. It originated in Italy and was properly shaped by Petrarch and Dante. It made its way to England through the work of Wyatt and Surrey. Wyatt followed Petrarchean tradition. He imparted emotion and passion, fervour and enthusiasm to Sonnet. Surrey carried on this tradition with some modifications. He introduced a new form that was later practised by Shakespeare. His Sonnets are Love Sonnets but they are characterised by a note of melancholy. Really it is Wyatt and Surrey who introduced personal notes and popularised the vogue of Sonnet writing.

When Wyatt and Surrey declined, Sidney rose as a shining star. His 'Astrophel and Stella' contains 108 sonnets. They are full of love and vigour. Sidney was in love with Penelope Devereux, who became the wife of Lord Rich. These sonnets relate that broken love. She is Stella, the star, and Sidney is Astrophel, the passionate lover of the star. They also reveal a true lyric emotion. They are not merely a literary pose. They are all an effusion of real passion which is visible in every sonnet. Though, Sidney's originality cannot be accepted quite literally, he may justly be called the great Elizabethan Sonneteer except Shakespeare. **M.A. HAQUE**

After the publication of 'Astrophel and Stella', there was a rich harvest of Sonnets. Spenser composed 88 sonnets and named them 'Amoretti'. His sonnets are addressed to Elizabeth Boyle, the beloved of the poet. They are full of genuine love and give an expression to his feelings in an unaffected manner. There is neither the complaining tone of Shakespeare nor the unquietness of Sidney's love. They tell story of love without sin or remorse. They embody a purity of tone and reveal that distinct quality which has been called 'maidenliness of Spenser'. In spite of some charges, his sonnets represent the best

of Elizabethan tradition.

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Henry Constable and Daniel are two other important Sonneteers of the age. Constable wrote a number of Love sonnets and Christianized them by the name of Diana. He is often ingenuous, sometimes graceful and always conventional. Daniel depended more on foreign inspiration and followed Tasso's model. His 'Delia', a collection of sonnets, is addressed to an imaginary mistress who remains invisible, inaccessible, cold and unknown. He is never story and passionate. Berners is quite opposite to Daniel. He is always frozen and his heart finds expression in "Perthenophil and Partthenophe".

William Shakespeare is the ^{brightest} greatest star in the galaxy of Elizabethan Sonneteers. He, along with Sidney and Spenser, elevated and glorified the profession of sonnet writing. A collection of his 54 Sonnets is dedicated to a certain 'Mr. W.H.'. These sonnets display the literary quality of the first rank. They are unique in depth, breadth and resistance of passion. They are unmatched in their mastery of a rich and sensuous phraseology. **M.A. HAQUE**

Another Elizabethan Sonneteer of importance and prominence is Michael Drayton. His well known sonnet sequence is 'Idea'. His imitative appeal to night, to his lady's fair eyes and his classical allusions remind of Rosard and Desportes. He is often vulgar like Berners. Other Sonneteers of the age were imitators of Petrarch. Lodge's "Philis", Fletcher's "Tears of Fancy", Percy's "Celia", Lynch's "Dellia" and Smith's "Cholris" are poor in stuff and purely imitative in character.

Thus, we see that a great number of sonnets were composed in the Elizabethan age. The Elizabethans were masters of versification. They broke the Petrarchian sonnet into three quatrains concluded by a couplet.

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The conventional love with genuine passion and sincerity was their theme. The mistress was often cold and cruel. The lover lamented, implored and was often at the point of death. The flight of imagination enabled the poets to see Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.