**William Shakespeare(1564-1616)** – I won’t give you a lengthy biography of William Shakespeare. You’ve likely already read about him in previous English classes. There is a brief biography on p. 273 of your textbook. In addition to his plays, Shakespeare authored a **sonnet sequence**, consisting of 154 sonnets. Most of these are addressed to an intelligent, good-looking young man, encouraging him to settle down with a wife and children, so he can inspire his offspring to carry on his talents.

**Sonnets** - If we were in class, I would start this with a brief lecture about **sonnets**. I’m going to sum that up here, so you know what you are looking at.

Sonnets were initially written in Italy, by a writer names Francesco Petrarca. He developed the basic format of a 14-line poem. He typically divided his 14 lines into two segments. The first segment consisted of 8 lines (**octave**), the second was made up of 6 (**sestet**). He used the rhyme scheme *abbaabba* *cdecde.* Sonnets following this rhyme scheme and structure are called ***Petrarchan***.

Now, it is important to understand a little about Shakespeare’s time period, so that you understand how **sonnets** ended up being popular in England. The time period these works come from is called The Renaissance (1485-1625). The word *Renaissance* derives from the French word *nee*, which means “Re-birth.” The Renaissance was a time of renewed interest in learning and the arts (music, poetry, drama, painting). If you remember from our discussion of the Middle Ages (the last era we covered, before Spring Break), toward the end of that era, people were moving into towns and cities. Also, the economic power shifted toward a larger, more assertive middle class. With this shift, more families had time to invest in learning, plus they had more money to spend on leisure activities and on educating their children. As a cultural movement/era, the Renaissance began in Italy, and slowly moved north, eventually reaching Great Britain.

Much like the cultural shifts that occurred in the Renaissance, literary styles that originated in Italy eventually spread north, gaining popularity as far north as Great Britain. Writers like William Shakespeare adopted Petrarch’s **sonnet** form, making subtle changes to develop what is now known as Shakespearean sonnet form.

Shakespeare’s sonnets, still based on the concept of a 14-line, lyric poem, originated a different rhyme scheme and organizational structure for the stanzas. Shakespeare typically uses *abab cdcd efef gg* as the rhyme scheme. He divided his sonnets into 3 **quatrains** (4 lines of poetry), followed by a 2-line **couplet.**

**Literary Terminology** –

**Sonnet** – a 14-line lyric poem, that focuses on a single idea or thought. (Lyric means that it rhymes)

**Sonnet Sequence**-a series of sonnets linked by theme or person

**Rhyme Scheme** – the pattern of rhyming words at the end of lines of poetry

**Couplet** – 2-line stanza of poetry

**Quatrain** – 4-line stanza of poetry

**Sestet** – 6-line stanza of poetry

**Octave** – 8-line stanza of poetry

**Turn** – the shift in focus or thought in a sonnet. (In many sonnets, the first stanza(s) will pose a problem/question, then the sonnet will turn in the final stanza to respond or resolve the problem/question.)

**Sonnet 29**

* Stanzas – Shakespeare typically divided his sonnets into 3 quatrains and a final couplet. There is no extra space between stanzas. SOMETIMES, you can look at punctuation to help (lots of times there are periods/sentences for each stanza).
* We look at rhyme scheme/stanzas because it helps us break down the poem into smaller segments as we analyze the meaning. It’s easier to analyze 4 lines at a time, than all 14.
* The final couplet is where Shakespeare sums up/resolves the issue he has described in the previous 3 stanzas.

**William Shakespeare**

When, in disgrace with Fortune and men’s eyes, A

I all alone beweep my outcast state, B

And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless1 cries, A

And look upon myself and curse my fate, B

Wishing me like to one more rich in hope, C

Featured like him, like him with friends possessed, D

Desiring this man’s art, and that man’s scope2, C

With what I most enjoy contented least; D

Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising, E

Haply3 I think on thee, and then my state, F

Like to the lark at break of day arising E

From sullen4 earth, sings hymns at heaven’s gate; F

For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings G That then I scorn to change my state with kings. G

1 **bootless** - futile

2 **scope** *n.*  range of perception or understanding

3 **haply** *adv.* By chance

4 **sullen** *adj.* gloomy; dismal

**Sonnet 116**

**William Shakespeare**

* Rhyme Scheme – I’ve labeled it for you, and underlined the last words of each line, so you can see it. I know, sometimes the words do not EXACTLY rhyme. That’s usually called a half rhyme, or a forced rhyme. Sometimes that is used to draw attention to what the poem is saying, because your brain automatically stops and looks at the spot where the rhyme is not perfect.
* Stanzas – This sonnet has a period (.) at the end of each stanza.

Let me not to the marriage of true minds A

Admit impediments.1 Love is not love B

Which alters2 when it alteration finds, A

Or bends with the remover to remove. B

Oh no! It is an ever-fixed mark C

That looks on tempests and is never shaken; D

It is the star to every wandering bark,3 C

Whose worth’s unknown, although his height be taken.4 D

Love’s not Time’s fool, though rosy lips and cheeks E

Within his bending sickle’s compass5 come. F

Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks, E

But bears it out even to the edge of doom.6 F

If this be error and upon me proved, G

I never writ, nor no man ever loved. G

1 **impediments** *n.* obstacles

2 **alters** *v.*  changes

3 **star . . . bark** – the star that guides every wandering ship:

The North Star

4 **Whose . . . be taken** - whose value is unmeasurable; a

Although navigators measure its height in the sky.

5 **compass** – range; scope

6 **doom** – Judgment Day

**Questions –**

1. With whom is the speaker in Sonnet 29 in “disgrace”?
2. What overall effect does this disgrace have on the speaker’s state of mind?
3. According to line 12 of Sonnet 29, what causes the shift in the speaker’s mood?
4. How would you describe the shifting moods in the sonnet?
5. Identify two images in Sonnet 116 that show the effects of time.
6. Compare the effects of time on love with the ideal of love in the poem.

**Sonnet 130**

**William Shakespeare**

This sonnet is a parody of Petrarchan sonnets, which tended to overly glorify the woman who was the beloved of the speaker. Shakespeare is NOT saying the object of his affection is ugly. He is saying that she is normal, and he loves her all the same.

My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun, A

Coral is far more red than her lips’ red. B

If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun, A

If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head. B

I have seen roses damasked1, red and white, C

But no such roses see I in her cheeks. D

And in some perfumes is there more delight C

Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.2 D

I love to hear her speak, yet well I know E

That music hath a far more pleasing sound. F

I grant I never saw a goddess go;3 E

My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground. F

And yet, by Heaven, I think my love as rare G

As any she belied4 with false compare. G

1 **damasked** - variegated

2 **reeks** - emanates

3 **go** - walk

4 **belied** – misrepresented

**Questions –**

1. How are the mistress’s eyes, lips, cheeks, breath, and voice inferior, according to Sonnet 130?
2. Why does the speaker say she “treads on the ground”?
3. In Sonnet 130, what does the final couplet say about the speaker’s feelings?
4. What general truth does the couplet suggest?
5. In his sonnets, Petrarch worshiped his mistress. Why would Sonnet 130 be called anti-Petrarchan?