



**THE POETRY
OF RENAISSANCE
(ELIZABETHAN POETRY)**

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The English poetry of Renaissance developed under the influence of Chaucer's traditions, folk songs and Italian verse forms. Two common themes in 16-th century poetry were the relationship between men and women, and the treachery and hypocrisy of courtly life. Many imitators of Chaucer appeared after his death in 1400, but few are of great interest. More than a century had to pass before any further important English poetry was written. Queen Elizabeth ruled from 1558 to 1603, but the great Elizabethan literary age is not considered as beginning until 1579. Before that year two poets wrote works of value. The sonnet becomes a very important poetic form in Elizabethan writing. The sonnet, a poem of fourteen ten-syllable lines, came from the Italian of Petrarch. The first examples in English were written by Sir Thomas Wyatt, and the form was then developed by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, they are often mentioned together, but there are many differences in their work. Both wrote sonnets, which they learned to do from the Italians; but it was Wyatt who first brought the sonnet to England. Surrey's work is also important because he wrote the first blank verse in English. Surrey's blank verse is fairly good; he keeps it alive by changing the positions of the main beats in the lines. In the form of the sonnet Wyatt mainly followed the Italian poet Petrarch (1304-74). In this form, the 14 lines rhyme abbaabba (8) + 2 or 3 rhymes in the last 6 lines. The sonnets of Shakespeare are not of this form; they rhyme abab cdcd efef gg. Before and during Elizabethan age, the writing of poetry was part of education of a gentleman, and the books of sonnets and lyrics that appeared contained work by numbers of different writers. The prominent date, so called milestone in the development of the English poetry was an anthology called Tottel's Miscellany [miscellany = selection]. This collection of poems, "Songes and Sonnets, written by the ryght honorable Lorde Henry Howarde, late Earl of Surrey, and others" ("Песни и сонеты, написанные достопочтенным лордом Генри Говардом, покойным графом Серрей и другими") was published in 1557. This book of poems is called after its publisher's name "Tottel's Miscellany" («Сборник Тоттеля»), or "Tottel's Songes and Sonnets". It contains 40 poems by Surrey and 96 by Wyatt, there are 135 poems by the other authors. Sir Thomas Wyatt was a popular member of the court of Henry VIII (1509 - 1547) and was often sent on diplomatic missions overseas. However, he was twice arrested, once in 1536 with the fall of Anne Boleyn, Henry's second queen, and again in 1541 with the fall of his patron, Thomas Cromwell. Perhaps his first arrest was because he had been Anne's lover before her marriage to the king. Whatever the reasons, he was fortunate to regain the king's favour. On the second occasion he was charged with treason and imprisoned in the Tower of London. Wyatt's verse, essentially English but much influenced by Italian verse forms, was written to be passed - and sometimes sung - among friends at court. Wyatt has left us some good lyrics. Here is part of a lover's prayer to his girl:

And wilt thou
leave me thus That
hath loved thee so
long In wealth and
woe among; And is
thy heart so strong
As for to leave me
thus? Say nay (no)!
Say nay (no)!

What do you think, did these popular sonnets and lyrics express real feelings, or were they just poetic exercises? Some are very fine indeed. Imagine, the narrator of the following poem is in prison.

They Flee from Me

They flee from me, that sometime did me seek, With naked foot stalking in my chamber. I have seen them, gentle, tame, and meek, That now are wild, and do not remember That sometime they put themselves in danger To take bread at my hand; and now they range, Busily seeking with a continual change. Thanked be fortune it hath been otherwise, Twenty times better; but once in special, In thin array, after a pleasant guise, When her loose gown from her shoulders did fall, And she me caught in her arms long and small, Therewithall sweetly did me kiss And softly said, «Dear heart, how like you this?» It was no dream, I lay broad waking. But all is

turned, thorough my gentleness, Into a strange fashion of forsaking; And I have leave to go, of her goodness, And she also to use newfangleness. But since that I so kindly am served, I fain would know what she hath deserved.

al (l.13): immediately after that Thorough (l.16): through,

because of (archaic)

Strange... forsaking (l.17): new and unusual kind of desertion

leave (l.18): permission

newfangleness (l.19): absence of loyalty in love, always changing kindly (l.20): naturally (with

ironic suggestion of «unkindly» in a modern sense)

I fain would (l.21): I would kike to (archaic)

Who could «they» be? (Friends at court? Women?) Who do you think «she» could be? (His wife? A mistress? A Symbol for friends?)

The complaints of a forsaken lover were conventional in the Italian poetry that influenced Wyatt. However, Wyatt's poems sound direct and personal as though the 'voice' of the poem was not only that of a 'dramatic persona' (a character in a fictional work) but of Wyatt himself. In Tottel's Miscellany, where the chief works of the poet were published for the first time, the editors made alterations to Wyatt's rhythms to make them smoother. For example, line 3 became: «Once have I seen them gentle, tame and meek».

«I have seen them» probably sounded too abrupt to the editors; the original line only had 9 syllables instead of ten. Modern critics argue that Wyatt's rhythms are deliberately rough: they give the poems dramatic impact.

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