The Sonnet Tradition

|           | Francesco Petrarca  
|           | *Il Canzoniere* or 
|           | *Rime Sparse* (written 
|           | from 1330 – 1374)  
|           | Thomas Wyatt  
|           | *In Tottel’s Miscellany*  
|           | (1557)  
|           | Philip Sidney  
|           | *Astrophil and Stella*  
|           | (1591)  
|           | Wm. Shakespeare  
|           | *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*  
|           | (1609)  
|           | Mary Wroth  
|           | *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*  
|           | (1621)  
| **Form** | Italian or Petrarchan 
|           | sonnet:  
|           | ABBAABBA (octet)  
|           | Various sestet patterns  
|           | CDECDDE  
|           | CDCCDC  
|           | 366 poems in a clear 
|           | sequence  
|           | Italian sonnet, mostly  
|           | Wyatt translates (with his own focus) Petrarch and writes about thirty of his own sonnets using an octet followed by tercets; he often uses “eye-rhymes.”  
|           | Lots of experimentation with the sonnet form (Sonnet 1 is in hexameters, for example)—usually a octet with various rhyme schemes in the sestet  
|           | 154 sonnets likely in a sequence  
|           | English or Shakespearean 
|           | sonnet:  
|           | ABABCDCDEFEFGG (three quatrains and a couplet)  
|           | Three variants: Sonnets #99, 126, and 145  
|           | Uses over twenty variations of the English and Italian sonnet (more even than her uncle, Philip Sidney) including a critically acclaimed Italian *corona* in the midst of *Urania*  
|           | 110 poems (Folger version: 103 are sonnets); Newberry version has 83 sonnets and 20 songs  
| **Content** | love poems  
|           | male narrator  
|           | idealized beloved  
|           | both in appearance 
|           | and in virtue  
|           | unattainable, chaste 
|           | beloved  
|           | pure, platonic love 
|           | for the unattainable beloved leads to the love of God  
|           | The beauty of a mistress “more chased than chaste”  
|           | the woman’s beauty isn’t very predominant  
|           | the lady is often cruel in her treatment of her love as well as faithless and wily; this is not accepted lovingly  
|           | Wyatt’s ladies tend to be less pure than Petrarch’s. Although they are still beautiful, and still physically unavailable, they are often flirtatious, even cruel.  
|           | autobiographical roman a clef  
|           | focus on “wit” and poetic innovation  
|           | melancholic and idealizing like Petrarch combined with humorous impatience and self-justification  
|           | rejects Petrarchan asceticism: unlike Petrarch, Sidney does not reject the body (see Sonnet 71)  
|           | includes some ironic interpretation of Petrarch: woman who is absent is present in spirit while the woman when present is more absent than ever (see Sonnet 106)  
|           | focus is one of moral bleakness  
|           | his sequence doesn’t have a title (most are named after women)  
|           | longest English sequence by almost 50%  
|           | one of the only to address sonnets to a man—who, unlike the female beloved, is idealized  
|           | sexually available female beloved  
|           | some question the status of his collection of sonnets as a “sequence”  
|           | presumed to be autobiographical but less identifiable than others  
|           | Themes:  
|           | marriage and reproduction  
|           | death and immortality  
|           | homoeroticism  
|           | friendship  
|           | dishonesty  
|           | disillusionment  
|           | misogyny  
|           | reversal of the traditional roles of beloved and lover  
|           | female narrator who is dynamic, inflamed by love and desire, and often frustrated  
|           | emphasis on the internal struggle of the lover  
|           | no focus on physical appearance and male beloved is not idealized  
|           | female protagonist examines her identity—separate from a man  
|           | roman a clef (autobiographical)  
|           | explores the sexual double standards of the time  
|           | often express a cynical and bitter view toward love with an emphasis on avoiding it altogether  
|           | the enslavement by love is truly torturous—not a indulgent melancholy like others closer to the Petrarchan tradition  
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