

## Sample Sonnets

### European and English Traditions

#### **Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374)**

Those eyes, 'neath which my passionate rapture rose,  
The arms, hands, feet, the beauty that erewhile  
Could my own soul from its own self beguile,  
And in a separate world of dreams enclose,  
The hair's bright tresses, full of golden glows,  
And the soft lightning of the angelic smile  
That changed this earth to some celestial isle,  
Are now but dust, poor dust, that nothing knows.

And yet I live! Myself I grieve and scorn,  
Left dark without the light I loved in vain,  
Adrift in tempest on a bark forlorn;  
Dead is the source of all my amorous strain,  
Dry is the channel of my thoughts outworn,  
And my sad harp can sound but notes of pain.

Translated by Thomas Wentworth Higginson

#### **Pierre de Ronsard (1524-1585)**

When you are very old, at evening, by the fire,  
Spinning wool by candlelight and winding it in skeins,  
You will say in wonderment as you recite my lines:  
"Ronsard admired me in the days when I was fair."  
Then not one of your servants dozing gently there  
Hearing my name's cadence break through your low repines  
But will start into wakefulness out of her dreams  
And bless your name—immortalised by my desire.

I'll be underneath the ground, and a boneless shade  
Taking my long rest in the scented myrtle-glade,  
And you'll be an old woman, nodding towards life's close,  
Regretting my love, and regretting your disdain.  
Heed me, and live for now: this time won't come again.  
Come, pluck now—today—life's so quickly fading rose.

Translated by Anthony Weir

### **Sir Philip Sydney (1554-1586)**

No more, my dear, no more these counsels try;  
O give my passions leave to run their race;  
Let Fortune lay on me her worst disgrace;  
Let folk o'ercharged with brain against me cry;

Let clouds bedim my face, break in mine eye;  
Let me no steps but of lost labour trace;  
Let all the earth with scorn recount my case,--  
But do not will me from my love to fly.

I do not envy Aristotle's wit,  
Nor do aspire to Caesar's bleeding fame;  
Nor ought do care though some above me sit;  
Nor hope nor wish another course to frame,

But that which once may win thy cruel heart;  
Thou art my wit, and thou my virtue art.

### **Edmund Spenser (1552 or 1553-1585)**

One day I wrote her name upon the strand,  
But came the waves and washed it away:  
Again I wrote it with a second hand,  
But came the tide, and made my pains his prey.

Vain man, said she, that dost in vain assay  
A mortal thing so to immortalize!  
For I myself shall like to this decay,  
And eek my name be wiped out likewise.

Not so (quoth I), let baser things devise  
To die in dust, but you shall live by fame:  
My verse your virtues rare shall eternize,  
And in the heavens write your glorious name;

Where whenas death shall all the world subdue,  
Our love shall live, and later life renew.