

Module 4: Examining Love, Friendship, and Power
Topic 2 Content: The English Sonnet



The English Sonnet

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Sonnet 29
by William Shakespeare

(1) When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,	<p>quatrain</p> <p>couplet</p>
(2) I all alone beweep my outcast state	
(3) And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries	
(4) And look upon myself and curse my fate,	
(5) Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,	
(6) Featured like him, like him with friends possess'd,	
(7) Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,	
(8) With what I most enjoy contented least;	
(9) Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,	
(10) Haply I think on thee, and then my state,	
(11) Like to the lark at break of day arising	
(12) From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;	
(13) For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings	
(14) That then I scorn to change my state with kings.	

Here is an example of an English sonnet, also known as a Shakespearean sonnet.

"Sonnet 29" by William Shakespeare

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweep my outcast state
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possess'd,
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
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From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

The English sonnet is made up of fourteen lines of iambic pentameter, meaning that there are five units of unstressed and stressed syllables in each line. Its structure consists of three four-line stanzas called quatrains, followed by a rhyming couplet of two lines.

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(1)	When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,	a	a
(2)	I all alone beweep my outcast state	b	b
(3)	And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries	a	a
(4)	And look upon myself and curse my fate,	b	b
(5)	Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,	c	c
(6)	Featured like him, like him with friends possess'd,	d	d
(7)	Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,	c	c
(8)	With what I most enjoy contented least;	d	d
(9)	Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,	e	e
(10)	Haply I think on thee, and then my state,	b	f
(11)	Like to the lark at break of day arising	e	e
(12)	From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;	b	f
(13)	For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings	f	g
(14)	That then I scorn to change my state with kings.	f	g

To determine the rhyme scheme, look at the last word of each line. The lines that rhyme are identified using the same letter. For the first quatrain, "eyes" would be identified with the letter *a*. The next word is "state," which does not rhyme with "eyes" and would therefore be identified with the letter *b*. The next word is "cries," which rhymes with "eyes" and should thus be marked with the letter *a*. Any line that does not rhyme with a preceding line would be marked with the next letter of the alphabet. The general rhyme scheme for an English sonnet is abab, cdcd, efef, gg. However, in Sonnet 29, Shakespeare slightly modifies the standard rhyme scheme by repeating the *b* rhyme. Thus, the rhyme scheme of Sonnet 29 is actually abab, cdcd, ebeb, ff.

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 - (12) From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
 - (13) For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings
 - (14) That then I scorn to change my state with kings.
- problem**
- volta**
- solution**

The English sonnet is structured so that the first half of the sonnet, or the first two quatrains, describe a situation or problem that is resolved in the last quatrain and final couplet. This couplet usually offers a summary or a new take on the ideas presented in the preceding quatrains. Typically there is a turn, also called a *volta*, that further signals that the new idea or solution is coming. Frequently, English sonnets deal with the theme of love.

In Sonnet 29, the first two quatrains describe the problem: The speaker is feeling low and depressed about his life. He wants things he does not have and envies those who have the things he desires. In the beginning of the last quatrain, you will find in the *volta* that the speaker happens to remember his "sweet love" and is filled with joy. In the final couplet, the speaker appreciates the "wealth" that he has and no longer thinks about changing places with someone else, even a king.