The Renaissance and the Elizabethan Period:

The Renaissance in Europe was in one sense an awakening from the long slumber of Dark Ages with its re-entrance into the world of secular inquiry, self reliant spirit that characterized the life and culture of classical antiquity. The growth of the language of literature provided the native tongues of Europe a new voice. It foreshadowed the approaching Renaissance with its note of freedom from and protest against medieval style. The literary development enforced the intellectual movement. Renaissance Humanism provoked the renewal of English poetry after a period of sterility. The freedom provided by the Renaissance philosophy led the poets as well as the dramatists to experiment with form. During the Renaissance, different forms of poetry emerged such as the **lyric, elegy, tragedy and pastoral**, when the Italian Renaissance began to wane, its greatest poetic export—the ballad and the sonnet found their way into English through Sir Thomas Wyatt. Influenced by the beauty of Italian verse, Wyatt introduced the Italian fashion of lyric poetry determined to remodel the style. It is worthy to note that Italian poetry of the sixteenth century had itself been an adaptation and imitation of the poetry of Provence of Southern France. The whole movement had found its great master in Petrarch, who throughout his 14 career wrote mostly sonnets of perfect beauty in praise of his nearly imaginary beloved Laura. Earl of Surrey, along with Wyatt, is credited with introducing the sonnet form into English. Though Wyatt adopted Petrarch as his model for writing poetry, he experimented with the Petrarchan rhyme scheme. Surrey, on the other hand, perfected the rhyme scheme of Wyatt and introduced blank verse into English literature, which is a variation that he did not invent but helped immensely to popularize. The second phase of English Renaissance was not like the first. In this period poetry is characterized by a number of frequently overlapping development. The introduction and adaptations of themes, models and verse forms from other European traditions and classical literature, the emergence of Elizabethan song tradition, the court poetry and verse-based drama are some of the most important developments. A new kind of poetic form in the Elizabethan period was introduced by Edmund Spenser. He definitely adopted the classical tradition, but in his hands, it acquired a definite and perfect English character. With ‘The Shepherd’s Calendar’, Spenser introduced a new kind of poetry with his masterly hand, known as Pastoral (poetry that seeks to present an idyllic rural life). Spenser took its source from Theocritus’s ‘Idylls’ and Virgil’s ‘Eclogues’. Pastoralism was one of the themes to dominate English Elizabethan literature and ‘The Shepherd’s Calendar’ intensified a condition that was already in the process of consolidation. The poetry of Spenser marks both a great and a new beginning in English poetry. ‘The Faerie Queene’, Spenser’s masterpiece, is an allegorical and complex verse. Other verse compositions of Spenser include ‘Amoretti’ and ‘Epithalamion’. ‘Amoretti’, the sonnet sequence has contributed a lot to the Elizabethan sonnet sequence. The two other great sonneteers of the age are Philip Sidney and Shakespeare. The period was characterized by a remarkable number of sonnets with a note of personal emotion and feeling of love. Sonnets emerged as independent poems as well as part of sequences. “The sonnet sequence was a major draw for many of the poets of the time, with Shakespeare, Spenser, Sidney, Drayton and Daniel being its most famous exponents.” Petrarchan sonnets contains an octave and a sestet. Shakespearean sonnets have three quatrains and a couplet. Shakespeare wrote 154 sonnets in all with themes like time, love, fidelity, death, immortality, art and the artist, and friendship..etc.