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## On the relations of language and stanza pattern in the English sonnet

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# ON THE RELATIONS OF LANGUAGE AND STANZA PATTERN IN THE ENGLISH SONNET

## I.

The process of naturalization of the Italian sonnet in English literature is perhaps the most remarkable case of the *transformation of a traditional form when taken over by a foreign nation*. It will be the aim of the present investigation to throw some light on the causes of the different formative attitudes of the Italian and English poets in this development; the results might afford an insight into the forces operative in the constitution of the respective national stanzas.

The difference in structure between the Petrarchan (abba abba cde cde) and the Shakespearean (abab cdcd efef gg) sonnets can be examined from two points of view: either as the outcome of specific *thought-patterns* or as the outcome of specific *prosodic principles*.

Existing research in the comparative morphology of the two sonnet types has been concerned so far almost exclusively with the *arrangement of ideas* inside the stanza. This is a description of the characteristic features of the Petrarchan sonnet given by Robert Hillyer: "... the *octave*, or first eight lines, will express the idea and the primary development, and the last six lines, called the *sestet*, will express the secondary development and the climactic restatement"; and this is his description of the Shakespearean sonnet: "The ideal thought-form for this sonnet would fall into these divisions: first quatrain, statement of the idea; second quatrain, metaphorical development of the idea; third quatrain, secondary development of the idea; couplet, an epigrammatic summing up"<sup>1</sup>.

From the point of view of *prosodic principles*, the difference in scheme of the Petrarchan and the Shakespearean sonnet can be traced back to 3 trends:

- a) A manifold repetition of the same rhyme-sound was abandoned (abba abba > abab cdcd);
- b) the grouping of lines by threes was replaced by a grouping by twos inside the *sestet* (cde cde > ef/ef gg);

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Hillyer: *First Principles of Verse*, Boston 1938, p. 54-55.

c) alternate rhymes superseded the enclosed rhymes of the octet, contributing thus to a grouping of lines by twos inside the octet (abba abba > > ab/ab cd/cd).

*The prevalence of one of two aspects* will differ according to whether we consider a single poem or the historical development of the form. In the critical evaluation of any poem, the thought-pattern will be of primary importance; changes in the rhyme-scheme, however, are apt to be under a stronger influence of the principles of a national versification than of any hypothetical propensity of poets of different nations to "think in different ways". That the impulse of primary importance in the genesis of the Shakespearean sonnet was an impact of the tendencies of English versification on an Italian pattern is evident from the development of the English sonnet during its period of formation.

In an inquiry into the relations of rhyme-scheme and arrangement of ideas, it is impossible to assess an "average thought-pattern" of any author; a symptom of it, however, is the allocation of syntactical pauses inside the stanza. The poet's prevailing habits in arranging the contents of his sonnet can be indirectly detected, if the *percentage of syntactical limits* (full stops, colons, semicolons, marks of exclamation and of interrogation) at the ends of the single lines of the poem is registered.

The Petrarchan sestet (cde cde) was changed into the Shakespearean one (cdcdce or cddcee) by the very first sonneteer, Sir Thomas Waytt, though his arrangement of ideas continued to be Petrarchan:

Line:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
% of stop:	27	59	41	82	37	48	48	86	41	67	82	59	59	100
Rhymes:	a	b	b	a	a	b	b	a	c	d	d	c	e	e

The greater frequency of sentence-limits after line 11 than after line 12 (82 : 59 %) is evidence of a tendency to group the lines of the sestet by threes (3 + 3), not by twos (4 + 2). With the Earl of Surrey, whose rhyme-scheme is fully nationalized already (abab cdcd efef gg), the Italian and English divisions of the sestet are still about equally frequent (73 : 80 %):

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
20	33	27	73	33	40	33	60	40	47	73	80	27	100
a	b	a	b	c	d	c	d	c	f	e	f	g	g

Though the problems of inner composition were far from being solved by that time, the Shakespearean form was codified by George Gascoigne in 1575<sup>2</sup> and accepted as a traditional stanza by the second generation of Renaissance sonnet-writers (T. Watson, E. Spenser, T. Lodge, G. Fletcher, S. Daniel, R. Linche, R. Griffin and others). Those of Elizabethan sonneteers who hesitated between the Petrarchan and the Shakespearean patterns adhered — with the single exception of M. Drayton — to the Petrarchan syntactical pattern even in sonnets written in the Shakespearean sestet form; cp. e. g.:

<sup>2</sup> Cp. the quotation from George Gascoigne in CHEL III, p. 248: Sonnets are foureteyne lynes, every line conteyning tenne syllables. The firste twelve do ryme in staves of foureteyne lines by crosse meetre, and the last two ryming together do conclude the whole."

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Sidney:														
Astrophel	57	83	39	95	48	69	57	96	35	52	100	48	60	100
Barnes:														
Parthenophil	66	85	45	88	65	75	63	78	58	66	73	83	70	100 <sup>3</sup>

The Sonnets of William Shakespeare — the culminating point in this development — were characterized by R. Fischer<sup>4</sup> as English in their rhyme-scheme but Italian in the division of their theme.

Among the specific principles of the Shakespearean sonnet, one is of decisive importance for the thought-pattern: a change in the composition of the sestet. It has become evident that *the change of thought-pattern was preceded by a change in rhyme-scheme*; during its formative period, the inherent thought-pattern of the English sonnet was Petrarchan and it was with a manifest reluctance that it was changed to correspond to the Shakespearean rhyme-scheme. It is very probable, therefore, that prosodic tendencies were the primary agents in this development.

## II.

Among the three changes which the Petrarchan scheme was subjected to in English literature, we shall try to explain first *the abolition of repetition of rhyme-sounds*. In the Shakespearean octet, rhymes *a* and *b* are repeated twice only, instead of 4 times: *abba abba* > *abab cdcd*. It is not difficult to account for the change if two facts are kept in mind: a) *the difficulty* of rhyme-repetition in the English language, b) *the habitually negative aesthetic evaluation* of this procedure in English poetry. The difference in the rhyming facilities of both literatures is caused by the different linguistic patterns of the Italian and English languages. Italian, being of a more *synthetic* character, has a great number and variety of inflexional endings and of suffixes (in word-formation), which give it considerable advantage over the *analytical* English language:

1. The Italian verb "amare" occurs in 40–50 phonetically different forms:

amo	amavo	amai	amerò	amerei	ami	amassi
ami	amavi	amasti	amerai	ameresti	amiamo	amasse
ama	amava	amò	amerà	amerebbe	amiate	amassimo
amiamo	amavamo	amammo	ameremo	ameremmo	amino	amassero
amate	amavate	amaste	amerete	amereste	amante	amato
amamo	amavano	amarono	ameranno	amerebbero	amando	amata amati

<sup>3</sup> Statistics for the other Elizabethan sonneteers are not quoted to avoid unnecessary details, but they were carefully consulted and their results confirm our hypothesis.

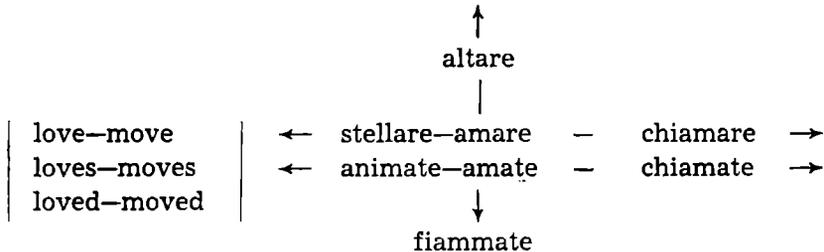
<sup>4</sup> Rudolf Fischer: *Shakespeares Sonnette*, Wien–Leipzig 1925, p. 91f.

The English verb "to love" — which, moreover, is identical with the noun (*amore*) and the adjective (*amoroso*) — occurs in 4 forms only:

love      loves      loved      loving

The number of different lexical units is a quantitative index of the richness of vocabulary in a language and of its semantic possibilities; the number of acoustically different units may be indicative of the *richness of the rhyming vocabulary* in a language and of the corresponding rhyming facilities. If an Italian verb supplies the rhyming vocabulary with 10 times more units than an English verb, the rhyming vocabulary of the Italian (or French) poet must be richer in number than that of his English colleague. The difference in rhyming opportunities is not so great with the other words ending in the same syllable (e. g. the *Dictionnaire des rimes françaises* suffixes in Italian or French word-formation results in an accumulation of words ending in the same syllable (e. g. the *Dictionnaire des rimes française* by Landai and Barré registers about 400 words in *-aine*, 700 words in *-eur*, 1200 words in *-ment*, several thousand words in *-er* etc.)

2. Of a more fundamental importance than the quantitative advantage of a synthetic over an analytical language is the different quality of rhyme-combinations in both types of language. While the English word "to love" rhymes only with words ending in *-ove*, an Italian word makes a rhyme not only with words ending in the same syllable (*amare*, *altare*, *palmare*, etc.), but also with words of totally different cardinal form:



The English rhyming vocabulary is divided into separate *groups* — about 400 in all<sup>5</sup> — of words ending in the same syllable; Italian rhymes form no groups since most words can rhyme with a variety of both inflected and uninflected forms. The rhyming vocabulary of an analytical language is *disjunctive*, that of a synthetic language is *continuous* in character. The English system of rhymes has several disadvantages for the poet:

a) The number of words belonging to the same group is *limited* and

<sup>5</sup> Cp. R. F. Brewer, *The Art of Versification*, Edinburgh 1923, p. 151: "By a broad computation of the possible rhyming combinations of our vowels, diphthongs, and consonants, it has been ascertained that there are upwards of six hundred of them at the rhymester's disposal". Some of the theoretical possibilities, however, do not occur at all, or only once, and are not available to the poet; therefor there are only about 400 groups in the rhyming dictionaries compiled by Brewer or by other prosodists.

cannot be extended: there are only 3 words rhyming with "love" (glove, dove, above — besides a limited number of eye-rhymes, such as move, prove etc.). While the Italian poet has several thousand rhymes in -are, the English poet will exploit all the possibilities given to him, if he has to find 4 rhymes in — ove. Hence the *difficulty* of rhyme-repetition in English.

b) Since the groups of rhyming words are limited and unchangeable in English, they have become strongly conventional and *automatic* through long use. It is far from agreeable, therefore, if a poet, after using two rhyme-words, goes on to resort to further members of the same group. Hence the *dislike* of rhyme-repetition in English.

Besides the synthetic or analytical character of the language, several other factors are responsible for the relative *richness* of the rhyming vocabulary: a) languages differ in the number of combinations into which phonemes enter to form syllables; b) both the number and variety of rhymes are higher in a language with disyllabic rhymes (Italian) than in a language where disyllabic rhymes are an exception (English). — The whole supply of rhymes is not at every poet's disposal. Especially rhyming in inflectional endings is shunned by some schools of poetry; the rhyming resources of a poet writing in a synthetic language are, therefore, strongly subject to changing literary conventions. — *Rhyme repetition* is disagreeable in English not only because of the enumeration of a frequently used and abused series of rhyming words, but also because the semantic associations of "love" with "dove" and "move", or of "womb" with "tomb", have become clichés. In an analytical language, a poet has the doubtful advantage of creating rhyme-links between the semantic nuclei (stems) of words, not between secondary grammatical morphemes (endings); this enables, on the other hand, a stronger influence of a fortuitous acoustic congruence of words (e. g. love-dove) on the development of the poet's idea. — All of these agents, and a few others probably, must be taken into account in any investigation into the causes of a change in rhyme-scheme.

After what has been said on the different rhyming opportunities offered to the poet by his native language, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the suppression of rhyme-repetition was due to *linguistic* causes mainly. The limited number of members of one rhyme-group was felt by Samuel Johnson, e. g., to be responsible for the change in sonnet pattern, though he overrated the number of groups (i. e. of different endings) in English: "The fabric of the sonnet, however adapted to the Italian language, has never succeeded in ours, which, having greater variety of termination, requires the rhymes to be often changed"<sup>6</sup>.

The earliest stages in the history of the English Renaissance sonnet bear traces of the difficulties which the Italian rhyme-scheme offered to English poets. In the 16th century, soon after the loss of the inflectional endings of Middle English, the old "synthetic" rhymes subsisted as an archaic mode of rhyming and could be resorted to by the Elizabethan sonneteers. The old and the new technique may be best confronted by comparing Wyatt's and Surrey's versions of Sonnet 109 by Petrarch:

The long love that in my thought I harbour,  
And in my heart doth keep his residence,  
Into my face presseth with bold pretence,  
And there campeth displaying his banner.

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<sup>6</sup> Samuel Johnson: *Lives of the Poets*, Leipzig 1858, p. 104.

She that me learns to love and to suffer,  
 And wills that my trust and lust's negligence  
 Be reined be reason, shame, and reverence,  
 With his hardiness taketh displeasure.  
 Wherewith love to the heart's forest he fleeth,  
 Leaving his enterprise with pain and cry,  
 And there him hideth, and not appeareth.  
 What may I do, when my master feareth,  
 But in the field with him to live and die?  
 For good is the life, ending faithfully.

(Wyatt)

Love that liveth and reigneth in my thought,  
 That built his seat within my captive breast;  
 Clad in the arms wherein with me he fought,  
 Oft in my face he doth his banner rest.  
 She, that me taught to love, and suffer pain;  
 My doubtful hope, and eke my hot desire  
 With shamefast cloak to shadow and refrain,  
 He smiling grace converteth straight to ire.  
 And coward Love then to the heart apace  
 Taketh his flight; whereas he lurks, and plains  
 His purpose lost, and dare not show his face.  
 For my Lord's guilt thus faultless bide I pains.  
 Yet from my Lord shall not my foot remove:  
 Sweet is his death, that takes his end by love.

(Surrey)

Wyatt was enabled to adhere to the strict Italian pattern by availing himself of both inflectional endings (-eth: fleeth, appeareth, feareth) and of suffixes (-er: harbour, banner, suffer, displeasure; -ence: residence, preference, negligence, reverence); 11 out of the 14 rhymes are of this type, which is normal in the inflectional Italian language, but has been archaic and primitive in English poetry since the 15th century. Surrey was the first to understand what opportunities were given to the English sonnet-writer: he gave up the repetition of rhymes and rejected inflectional rhymes in favour of the modern way of rhyming. In later years, English poets grew accustomed to using specifically English opportunities of devising a series of repeated rhymes, i. e. the more numerous rhyme-groups. This new attitude is evident as early as 1594, in *Diana* by Henry Constable: in his Petrarchan sonnets, the percentage of inflectional rhymes is even lower than in his Shakespearean sonnets (13 : 25 %); this is due to the higher formal standard of his Petrarchan sonnets.

It is not impossible that the dislike of rhyme repetition may have been one of the agents which prevented the English poets from writing *sonnets redoublés* and crowns of sonnets, which enjoyed considerable popularity in Romance literatures (together with the forms based on rhyme-repetition, such as the French *laisses monorimes* or the Spanish *arte de maestría mayor*). The difficulties offered by the French rhyme-scheme to the English poets may be responsible e.g. for the unrhymed first version of Du Bellay's sonnets, undertaken by Edmund Spenser some time after 1569. Other poets were provoked to isolated feats of virtuosity in forms which indulged in the repetition of rhymes to the utmost, using two different rhyme-sounds only: Wyatt (ababababababab + an unrhymed 15th line), Surrey (abab abab aba baa), *Gorgeous Gallery of Gallant Inventions* (abba abba abba bb) etc. The *exaggeration of obvious difficulties* is a very frequent and symptomatic by-path of development which usually does not result in establishing new forms.

### III.

The two remaining changes of the sonnet-pattern — division of the sestet into 4+2 lines instead of 3+3 lines, and substitution of enclosing rhymes by alternate ones — are, in our opinion, the effects chiefly of two prosodic principles: a) a tendency of English poetry to *group the lines by twos*: the Petrarchan pattern abba abba cde cde (4+4+3+3) was changed into ab/ab cd/cd ef/ef gg ([2+2] + [2+2] + [2+2] +2); b) a tendency to *avoid larger distances* between rhyming words.

It could be demonstrated that the distichic tendency is not only a well-marked characteristic but also a principle of considerable importance in the development of the English sonnet — especially during the Renaissance period<sup>7</sup>. It did not escape the attention of prosodists: "And no English poet would be likely to think of tercets when a quatrain plus couplet could suggest itself. Quatrains and couplets English poetry knows in legions, both by themselves and as parts of various stanzaic forms; but tercets, in comparison at least, are non-existent . . . We have, too, positive evidence that Wyatt, as far as poetry is concerned, found it very difficult to think in threes. Professor Saintsbury has called attention to his failure with *terza rima* — at least as *terza rima*"<sup>8</sup>. The *binary* construction is not limited to English sennets; it is characteristic of the autochthonous *stanzas of Germanic nations* (e. g. Nibelungenvers, ballad, measure, heroic couplet). A *ternary* construction, on the other hand, was proclaimed by E. Stengel — from his Germanic point of view — to be the base of *Romance strophics*: "Die Grundsätze der kunstmässigen romanischen Strophe älterer Zeit waren bereits Dante (vgl. Boehmer: Über D.'s Schrift De vulgari Eloquio, S. 27 ff.) bekannt. Sie gipfeln in der obligatorischen 3-Teiligkeit. Diese läst sich im Keime auch bereits deutlich in den ältesten Formen erkennen, wenn sie auch noch in den späteren volkstümlichen Liedern nur selten durchgeführt ist"<sup>9</sup>. Needless to say, these are generalizations which have a relative value only.

The distichic trend of English poetry culminated in several *anomalies* of sonnet-structure with some of the British poets, such as the pattern abab cc dede ff ghgh ii in Thomas Watson, ababbb ccddee ff in T. S. Coleridge, aabcbd deedeaa in Robert Southey, abab cdef deef ff in William Morris, and occasionally in a series of seven couplets aabcbcddeeffg; the occurrence of this pattern in European poetry was summed up by W. Mönch. „... sie tritt erst später vornehmend im Englischen Sonett bei Robert Herrick, William Cartwright, John Lyly, dann in der europäischen Romantik bei einzelnen Sonettisten wie W. v. Humboldt und im deutschen Expressionismus auf."<sup>10</sup> As is evident, this extreme in the distichic form was limited to the poetry of the Germanic nations.

<sup>7</sup> This assertion is based on a detailed analysis of the development of the Elizabethan sonnet, which will be published in a separate essay and where this tendency proved to be of central importance.

<sup>8</sup> Walter L. Bullock: *The Genesis of the English Sonnet Form*, PMLA 38—1923, p. 736.

<sup>9</sup> E. Stengel: *Lehre von der romanischen Sprachkunst* (Grundriss der romanischen Philologie H—I, Strassbourg 1902), p. 81.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Mönch: *Das Sonett*, Heidelberg 1955, p. 17.

It remains to account for this specific tendency of Germanic versification. This can be done by way of hypothesis. The difference in prosodic principles between the Romance and the Germanic literatures is an essential one: syllabic v. accentual verse. The fundamental law of syllabic verse — besides the fixed number of syllables per line, which is felt as a neutral and inconspicuous background — is *the obligatory bi-partite intonation-contour of longer lines*, (such as are used in the sonnet). An obligatory caesura divides the line into two equivalent half-lines, the first ending in a semicadence ( — / ), and the second one in a cadence ( — \ )<sup>11</sup>. The semantic relation of both sections is very often complementary as well: the idea (X) — or part of a complex idea — is introduced in the first half, and qualified (X') or concluded in the second half of the line:

Quand vous serez bien vieille,   au soir à la chandelle,	A	A'
Assise auprès du feu,   dévidant et filant,	B	B'
Direz chantant mes vers,   en vous émerveillant:	C	C'
Ronsard me célébrait   du temps que j'étais belle.	D	D'
Lors vous n'aurez servante   oyant telle nouvelle,	E	E'
Déjà sous le labour à demi sommeillant,	F	F'
Qui au bruit de mon nom   ne s'aïlle réveillant,	G	G'
Bénissant votre nom   de louange immortelle.	H	H'
Je serai sous la terre,   et fantôme sans os	I	I'
Par les ombres myrteux   je prendrai mon repos:	J	J'
Vous serez au foyer   une vieille accroupie,	K	K'
Regrettant mon amour   et votre fier dédain.	L	L'
Vivez, si m'en croyez,   n'attendez à demain:	M	M'
Cueillez dès aujourd'hui   les roses de la vie.	N	N'

(Ronsard: *Sonnet pour Hélène*)

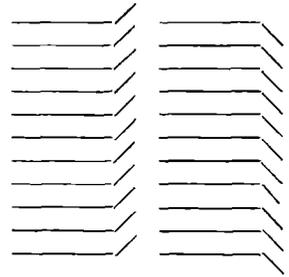
By an introduction of the thought (X) or of its attributes (x') in the first half-line an expectation of further development is formed, expressed by the semicadence: the fulfilment of the expectation in the second half is accompanied by a conclusive cadence. *The semantic pattern of a French line may be different, but the intonation-patterns is obligatory in syllabic verse.*

Since Wyatt and Surrey, English sonnets have been written in accentual pentameters, which are capable of the same bi-partite intonation as the Italian endecasillabo or the French alexandrine, but where this pattern is *not obligatory* and is a stylistic possibility rather than a prosodic principle. Sonnet 66 by Shakespeare, e. g., has a strongly antithetical structure:

Tir'd with all these,   for restful death I cry,	— /	— \
As to behold desert   a beggar born,	— /	— \
And needy nothing   trimm'd in jollity,	— /	— \

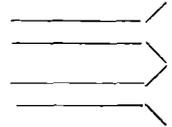
<sup>11</sup> We refrain from using the terms "rise," "fall" and the like, since we are not concerned with details of the actual phonetic realization of the conclusive or continuity cadence in different languages, but with its final or non-final function.

And purest faith | unhappily forsworn,  
 And gilded honour | shamefully misplaced,  
 And maiden virtue | rudely strumpeted,  
 And right perfection | wrongfully disgrac'd,  
 And strength | by limping sway disabled,  
 And art made tongue-tied | by authority,  
 And folly — doctor-like — | controlling skill,  
 And simple truth | miscall'd simplicity,  
 And captive good | attending captain ill:  
 Tir'd with all these, | from these would I be gone,  
 Save that, to die, | I leave my love alone.



This sonnet by Samuel Daniel, however, is written on different principles:

Unto the boundless Ocean of thy beauty,  
 Runs this poor river, charged with streams of zeal;



Returning Thee, the tribute of my duty,  
 Which here my love, my youth, my plaints reveal.  
 Here, I unclasp the Book of my charged Soul;  
 Where I have cast the accounts of all my care:  
 Here, have I summed my sighs. Here, I enrol  
 How they were spent for thee! Look! what they are!  
 Look on the dear expenses of my youth.  
 And see how just I reckon with thine eyes!  
 Examine well, thy beauty with my truth!  
 And cross my cares, ere greater sums arise!  
 Read it, Sweet Maid! though it be done but slightly:  
 Who can shew all his love, doth love but lightly.

(S. Daniel: *To Delia I.*)

In this sonnet, binary relations between the two halves of a line are not nearly so prominent as those between whole lines, which, in consequence, are grouped by twos: in line 2, the idea is fully expressed which was introduced in line 1, line 4 extends the idea expressed in the line 3, etc. And what is of greater importance, the binary intonation-contour is extended to cover two lines: the odd lines end in a semicadence and the even lines in a cadence. The single couplets are changed into *prosodic units* (actual or potential) of a nature akin to the ballad measure or the heroic couplet. In a series of lines constructed on this principle, a *binary impetus* is created, operating in those lines too, which are not complementary (just as regular sequence of unstressed and stressed syllables is potentially present even in those feet of iambic verse, where the actual rhythm is different):

Because God put His adamant fate  
 Between my sullen heart and its desire,  
 I swore that I would burst the Iron Gate,  
 Rise up and curse Him on His throne of fire.  
 Earth shuddered at my crown of blasphemy,  
 But Love was as a flame about my feet:  
 Proud up the Golden Stair I strode, and beat  
 Thrice on the Gate, and entered with a cry, — etc.

(R. Brooke: *Failure*)

The semicadence after line 2 takes on the function of a cadence, though there is no fundamental semantic difference between the pauses after lines 1, 2 and 3.

The two types of intonation-pattern may be based on the *different function of caesura* in syllabic and in accentual verse. In French (or Italian), the syllables of a line are divided in a fixed and unchanging proportion (6 + 6, 6 + 7) by the caesura, which, moreover, is preceded by the principal stress of the half line; caesura is the *prosodic pivot* of the line, supported both by the primary and the secondary principles of French verse (syllabism and stress). In French, the prosodic prominence of caesura is strong enough to enforce a mid-line pause even in lines of a different syntactic and semantic division:

Quand reverrai-je, hélas, de mon petit village	caesura after the 6th syl.
Fumer la cheminée? et en quelle saison	caesura after the 6th syl.
Reverrai-je le clos   de ma pauvre maison, ...	caesura after the 5th syl.

(Du Bellay: *Regrets*)

In English poetry, caesura is accompanied by no obligatory prosodic features: neither the distribution of stresses nor the syllabic pattern of the line are dependent on it. The prosodic prominence of the mid-line pause is not strong enough to prevail over the syntactic pattern of the line; caesura in English poetry follows the natural division of line according to sense and very often loses its fixed position and prosodic value in consequence:

If thou survive   my well-contented day,	caesura after the 4th syl.
When that churl Death   my bones with dust shall cover	caesura after the 4th syl.
And shalt by fortune   once more re-survey	caesura after the 6th syl.
These poor rude lines   of thy diseased lover,	caesura after the 4th syl.
Compare them   with the bettering of the time,	caesura after 3rd syl.
And though they be outstripp'd   by every pen, etc.	caesura after the 6th syl.

(Shakespeare: *Sonnet 32*)

It would not be difficult to keep the caesura after the 4th syllable in lines 5 and 6 (after "with" and "be"); this division of line, which corresponds to the principles of French verse, would be contradictory to those of English versification. In English, the *syntactic* and *semantic* value of caesura is more prominent than its prosodic relevance. Owing to this difference in function, the prosodic validity of the English caesura is not strong enough to underly an obligatory bi-partite intonation of the line — not even in the English Renaissance sonnet, which often has a strong tendency to antithetical construction of lines.

By some prosodists, a binary intonation-contour is considered to be the basic principle of every verse, the specific difference between free verse and prose<sup>12</sup>. This opinion is based on the definition of a clause by Serge Karcevski: "La phrase est une unité de communication actualisée. Elle n'a pas de structure grammaticale propre. Mais elle possède une structure phonique particulière qui est son *intonation*. C'est précisément l'intonation qui fait la phrase". The intonation of any clause is, in Karcevski's opinion, of a bi-partite character: "Toute phrase intellectuelle, pas trop courte, tend a se scinder en deux parties ou membres de phrase... La direction est montante dans la première partie et descendante dans la seconde"<sup>13</sup>. It is

<sup>12</sup> "The basis of verse is the bi-partite intonation: every line is divided by intonation into two sections. This intonation-pattern is regularly repeated throughout the poem and it is the principal factor distinguishing verse from prose" (Josef Hrabák: *Úvod do teorie verše*, Praha 1956, p. 13).

<sup>13</sup> Serge Karcevski: *Sur la phonologie de la phrase* (Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Prague 4-1931), p. 190.

very probable that the regular intonation-contour characteristic of the clause and indicative of its linguistic independence will be even more conspicuous in verse and of considerable relevance to its integrity. In syllabic lines of a certain length, the bi-partite intonation-contour is accomplished *within one line* and imparts to it a *prosodic independence*. In accentual verse, this is not always the case: though some lines comply with this pattern (e. g. in sonnet 66 by Shakespeare), in other cases the binary intonation-contour is accomplished within a pair of lines (e. g. in the sonnet by S. Daniel), joining them into an acoustic unit, and finally there are poems — e. g. in blank verse — where the binary pattern is not evident at all.

The possibility of different patterns imparts a *potential independence* to a line of the English sonnet and — in some types of verse — an *obligatory independence and unity to the distich*; hence the grouping by twos which is reflected in both syntax and rhyme-scheme. In the poetry of Romance nations, lines are always independent units and can be grouped by threes.

Several secondary theoretical issues are suggested by the different prosodic principles of the Romance and Germanic versifications:

a) In French or Italian syllabic verse, the end-line pause, following the cadence, will be of greater momentum than the mid-line pause after the semicadence. This relation of the two pauses is by no means so emphatic and inevitable in English verse, where not every end-line pause has the full concluding validity, and where caesura, not being obligatory and automatic, is more conspicuous. In consequence, English prosodists are not always certain about the *relative prominence of the two pauses*: "Discussion of this point involves the problem of whether the line-end pause is longer than the mid-line pause. Suffice it to say that whatever the nature of the line, verse in which run-on lines are frequent — which means most English verses except that of the late seventeenth and earlier eighteenth century — plainly treats the line-end pause though it were not conspicuously different in length from other pauses<sup>14</sup>."

b) In accentual English (or German) distichic verse, the validity of verse-limits after the even lines should prevail over that after the odd lines and this should affect the concomitant elements as well, especially the rhyme. While rhymes after any of the lines of the Italian sonnet are equivalent *the even rhymes are more prominent than the odd ones* in the binary type of the English sonnet (this tendency may account for the omission of the odd rhymes in some of the song-like binary forms, e. g. in ballad measure: abcb). In the sonnets of the Romance nations, *equivalence of end-line pauses* makes it possible to rhyme any two lines; in some types of English poetry, the difference in cadence at the end of even lines and of that at the end of odd lines is an obstacle to any other than an alternate rhyme-scheme (abab). (In French poetry, a slight difference in the cadence of the two interpolating pairs of rhymes is achieved by the alternation of masculine and feminine rhymes, e. g. AbBA.)

The part which *intonation* played in the *development of the English sonnet* can be traced from the very beginning of Elizabethan sonnet-writing. The first sonneteer, Sir Thomas Wyatt, adhered to the Italian rhyme-scheme of the octet (abba abba) without, however, being able to achieve every time the necessary binary intonation and prosodic independence of each line:

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<sup>14</sup> James Routh: *The Theory of Verse*, 1948, p. 63.



portant reason for the Classicist *sonnetophobia* was probably worded by the leading German critic of the epoch, Johan Christoph Gottsched, who complained that sonnet was changed from a "Sinngedicht" into a "Singgedicht"<sup>16</sup>. The supremacy of the musical principle was appreciated by the *Romantic* poets. Other reasons may have counted as well: the difficulty and complexity of the stanza may have been felt as a disadvantage in the period of Classicism (with its predilection for simpler and clearer forms) and as a recommendation in the Renaissance, Baroque, and Romantic eras.

For a conclusive verification of our hypothesis, the development of the sonnet in other non-syllabic versifications will be of importance. The first question to be answered is: if accentual verse with its absence of obligatory caesura is responsible for the change of sonnet-pattern in English literature, why did not a similar development take place in *German* poetry? In our opinion, this change was not necessary in German poetry, because German sonnets were originally — ever since Opitz and Gryphius — written in alexandrines, the only measure which, in German too, has an obligatory caesura; even before the very first German sonnet was written, alexandrine and the sonnet seem to have been associated in theory by some of the lost pre-Opitzian handbooks of versifications<sup>17</sup>. Of the great Slavonic literatures, *Russian* sonnets are written in accentual pentameters and might be expected to show some symptoms of the binary tendency. This expectation is not disappointed, since the standard sonnet-form in Russian is abab abab ccdede: "In the Russian sonnet, the stanza structure is strictly observed. It consists of two quatrains employing alternate rhymes, followed by a six-line stanza, divided into two tercets and using three rhymes, in which a rhyming couplet is followed by two alternate rhymes. The six-line stanza can also be a tail-rhyme stanza. The metre is the five-foot iambic line"<sup>18</sup>. — Accentual sonnets of the smaller European nations (Dutch, Scandinavian, Czech, etc.) are not of primary relevance for our research, owing to the greater prestige of foreign models and, in some cases, owing to the belated development at a time when the creative era of the sonnet was over.

The second linguistic influence which might have furthered the change of enclosed rhymes into alternate ones in English poetry is the evident dislike of rhyme-schemes where the *distance between rhyming words* exceeds one line (abba). Enclosed rhymes, which are so popular with the French or Italian poets, are almost unknown in autochthonous English stanzas: abababcc (Chaucerian stanza), ababbcbccc (Spenserian stanza) etc. The probable cause of this phenomenon is the slighter *relative prominence* and

<sup>16</sup> Cp. M ö n c h, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

<sup>17</sup> Cp. Bruno M a r k w a r d t: *Geschichte der deutschen Poetik I*, Berlin—Leipzig 1937, p. 28—29. „Und da weiterhin auch Ernst Schwabe von der Heydes Poetic von 1616, eine mit theoretischen und sprachlich-metrischen Hinweisen erläuternd bereicherte Gedichtsammlung, die bereits mit der Erörterung von Reimfragen das Eingehen auf den Alexandriner und die Sonettform verbunden haben dürfte, endgültig i Verlust geraten und uns nur mittelbar und unzulänglich durch Opitzens Rückverweise bekannt ist...“

<sup>18</sup> B. O. U n g e b a u n: *Russian Versification*, Oxford 1956, p. 83.

*prosodic relevance* of English rhymes when compared with those of the French and Italian poets. While rhyme is one of the most conspicuous features of the poetry of Romance nations, the acoustic and semantic relevance of rhyme, and line-end in general, is not very great in English poetry (cp. the popularity of blank verse).

An explanation of the change in sonnet-pattern by linguistic agents does not exclude the part played by *historical* factors in this development. A complex interplay of both personal and collective influences may have resulted from the fact that almost every possible form is represented in the sonnet production of each nation — in different frequencies, however, and in different functions. In Romance literatures, binary sonnet-patterns exist, side by side, with the ternary ones, each of the two types having a specific stylistic and social value. The first type is represented by the song-like Sicilian sonnets with alternate rhymes, the second type by the artificial Provençal forms with enclosed rhymes. Some of the Italian poets devised intermediary forms, but in written poetry, the ternary form prevailed. French sonnet-writers (Marot, Ronsard etc.) resumed one of the features of the song-like pattern by introducing a binary rhyme-scheme into the sestet, though the traditional division into two tercets was preserved: ccd eed (i. e. cc deed) and ccd ede (i. e. cc dede). By doing so, they introduced a couplet into the introductory lines of the sestet — not into the concluding ones, as in the English type, perhaps owing to the fact that an antithetical conclusion of the stanza could be effected within the space of the last line.

In English poetry too, the influence of traditional forms may have furthered the development. G. Saintsbury<sup>19</sup> called attention to the fact that the English sonnet corresponds in length, and to a certain extent in rhyme-scheme, to two rhyme-royal stanzas (ababcc dedeeff). Professor Walter F. Schirmer<sup>20</sup> hinted at the influence of some of the exceptional sonnets of Petrarch, ending in cdd cdc and cdd dcc and translated into English by Wyatt, J. S. Smart<sup>21</sup> detected the possibility of an inspiration by the form of Fazio degli Uberti, while W. L. Bullock<sup>22</sup> found models for the Surrey-Shakespearean pattern in the Italian collection *Raccolta dei Ginuti*. Though the impulse of traditional forms may have contributed, at a propitious historical moment, to open new ways, the general trend of development and the possibility of a permanent reception of one of the numerous forms must have been predetermined by less fortuitous moments. As has been shown, the linguistic agents are very likely to have played a decisive part in predetermining the development.

#### IV.

The radical change in sonnet-pattern with some English poets, though best accessible to outward observation, was not the only outcome of prosodic differences between the Italian and English languages. The total *historical position and stylistic value* of the stanza in the two literatures was influenced by the specific qualities of the versifications.

In British poetic tradition, the sonnet, originally modelled to suit the syllabic verse of Romance nations and subsequently only adapted to English versification, has always been a *foreign* form with a limited vigour and range. This is how Professor Schirmer summed up the position

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<sup>19</sup> George Saintsbury: *A History of English Prosody I*, London 1923, p. 307–308.

<sup>20</sup> Walter F. Schirmer: *Das Sonett in der Englischen Literatur*, Anglia 49-1926, p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> J. S. Smart: *Sonnets of Milton*, London 1924, p. 17 f.

<sup>22</sup> W. L. Bullock, *op. cit.*, p. 729 f.

of this stanza in Elizabethan poetry: "... die dichterische Konzeption in der Sonettform und also die Einheit von Gehalt und Form, doch nur in den seltensten Fällen verwirklicht war. In unserem Falle natürlich nur soweit es England betrifft. Bei einem Rückblick auf die elisabethanische Sonett-dichtung muss dies der beherrschende Eindruck sein, und es ist bezeichnend, dass die Bedeutung der grossen Dichter Shakespeare, Spenser, ja selbst Sidney, nicht auf ihrer Sonettproduktion, sondern auf anderen Dichtungen beruht. Auch haben sie nur einen kleineren Teil ihrer dichterischen Kraft der Sonettdichtung gewidmet — also ganz anders als Italien, anders auch als Frankreich. Die zahlreichen Dichter aber — die Daniel, Constable, Barnes, Lodge (der Oberplagiator), G. Fletcher, Barnfield, Tofte, Griffin (um von Geringeren zu schweigen), — die sich des Sonetts mehr oder weniger als Hauptäusserungsmediums bedienten, erstickten unter der oft rohen und ungefügten Nachahmung einer fremden Haltung die Äusserung jenes Geistes der Zeit, auf deren ungebrochenem Ausdruck in anderen Dichtungsformen der Glanz der elisabethanischen Literaturepoche beruht. Immerhin, das englische Sonett, der Surrey-Shakespearesche Typ, war geschaffen; dass auch diese Form nicht Form im höchsten Sinne war, bewies die kommende Zeit durch die verhältnismässig spärliche Nachfolge"<sup>23</sup>. Another symptom of the exceptional position outside the main current of poetic tradition was the habit of using the term for all kinds of short lyrics, a habit persisting down into the 17th century: "The long continued misuse of the word illustrates the reluctance of the Elizabethans to accept the sonnet's distinctive principles"<sup>24</sup>.

As a result of the tension between a Romance stanza-pattern and Germanic versification, the *stylistic modifications* of the stanza are different in the two groups of literatures. Bi-partite lines are a rule in the Italian and French sonnets; instead of the *one obligatory* binary intonation-contour, there are two *potential* ones in English: both the two half-lines and the two lines of a distich can become parts of one complex bi-partite intonational whole. *A wider range of variants* of the sonnet-form is therefore possible in English literature than in the literatures of the Romance languages. Very roughly speaking, there are 4 cardinal forms of the English sonnet, according to intonation (disregarding the rhyme-scheme):

- I. a sonnet with a conspicuous binary intonation of both line and distich;
- II. a sonnet without either;
- III. a sonnet with a grouping of lines by twos but without a distinctive caesura;
- IV. a sonnet with binary intonation of single lines but without any obvious grouping of lines by twos.

Each of the four types has its own *emotional atmosphere*, since intonation is of primary importance in creating it: "The emotional effects of a verse-rhythm are, in the first place, dependent on the intonation-pattern of the line"<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> W. F. Schirmer, *op cit.*, p. 16—17.

<sup>24</sup> Sidney Lee: *Elizabethan Sonnets I*, London 1904, p. 249.

<sup>25</sup> B. V. Tomashevski: *Stich i jazyk*, Moskva 1958, p. 32.

Type I is represented by the antithetical Renaissance sonnet, e. g. the sonnet by Sidney. By the regular twofold recurrence of semicadence followed by cadence (—/—\—/—\ ) an *elegiac* tone, common to the strongly cadenced forms (e. g. elegiac distich, ballad measure), is imparted to this type. The emotional value of this rather frequent type is attributed to the English sonnet in general by some critics: "In der Tat bringt das Kunstreiche der Form, deren enge Grenzen den Ausdruck nur einer Stimmung erfordern, das Sonnet in den Bereich der elegischen Dichtung, einer kontemplativ-emotionalen, nicht aber einer rein emotionalen"<sup>26</sup>.

In the irregular type of sonnet (type II), the symmetrical intonation-pattern with its emotional undertones is suppressed, the thought progresses in a quiet way suitable for *descriptive* or philosophical poetry. The Petrarchan sonnets of Wordsworth, which are of this type, are denoted by Professor Schirmer as "beschreibendes Sonett", the German Romantic sonnet is characterized as "zur Poesie gewordene Philosophie".<sup>27</sup> The static, monumental variety of this type was used by Dante Gabriel Rossetti in *The House of Life* and characterized in the introductory sonnet:

A Sonnet is a moment's monument, —  
 Memorial from the soul's eternity  
 To one dead deathless hour. Look that it be,  
 Whether for lustral rite or dire portent.  
 Of its own arduous fullness reverent:  
 Carve it in ivory or in ebony  
 As Day or Night shall rule; and let Time see  
 Its flowering crest impeared and orient.  
 A sonnet is a coin: its converse to what Power'tis due: —  
 Whether for tribute to the august appeals  
 Of Life, or dower in Love's high retinue  
 It serve, or, mid the dark wharf's cavernous breath,  
 In Charon's palm it pay the toll to Death.

Rhyme-scheme, though not of primary importance in the typology of intonation-patterns, is not an irrelevant circumstance. The Petrarchan pattern, where every line has its structural independence, is suitable for both type I and type II. The Shakespearean rhyme-scheme, by supporting the final cadence of single lines and binary intonation of the distichs, is not very suitable for sonnets with irregularly divided run-on lines, such as e. g. the sonnets of some Romantic poets:

Read me a lesson, Muse, and speak it loud  
 Upon the top of Nevis, blind in mist!  
 I look into the chasm, and shroud  
 Vaporous doth hide them, — just so much I wist  
 Mankind do know of hell; I look o'erhead,  
 And there is sullen mist, — even so much  
 Mankind can tell of heaven; mist is spread  
 Before the earth, beneath me, — even such,  
 Even so vague is man's sight of himself!  
 Here are the craggy stones beneath my fest, —

<sup>26</sup> W. F. Schirmer, *op. cit.*, p. 21, 20.

<sup>27</sup> W. F. Schirmer, *op. cit.*, p. 21, 20.

Thus much I know that, a poor witless elf,  
I tread on them, — that all my eye doth meet  
Is mist and crag, not only on this height,  
But in the world of thought and mental might!

(John Keats: *Written upon Ben Nevis*)

It is not improbable that this conflict between run-on lines and strongly cadenced Shakespearean rhyme-scheme was one of the reasons why Romantic poets resumed the Petrarchan scheme and why Keats himself was induced to attempt a reform of the sonnet: "I have been endeavouring to discover a better Sonnet Stanza than we have. The legitimate does not suit the language over well from the pouncing rhymes — the other [ababedcd-ededgg] appears too elegiac — and the couplet at the end of it has seldom a pleasing effect".<sup>28</sup> The proposed form abca bdeabce fef avoided both a more than threefold repetition of a rhyme ("pouncing rhymes") and a symmetrical grouping of lines by twos with its "too elegiac" effect.

The intermediary forms — type III exemplified by Daniel's sonnet and type IV exemplified by sonnet 66 by Shakespeare — are of a less distinctive semantic value and of rarer occurrence. It is needless to say that "pure types" are comparatively rare, most of the English sonnets being a *mixture of several tendencies*, usually with an evident prevalence of one pattern. Even the few tentative hints at a typology of the English sonnet are perhaps sufficient to demonstrate the validity for stanzas too of what was stated by B. Tomashevski for single lines: "Almost every measure has several variants according to the emotional effects it produces, though the range of each measure is limited by possibilities which are its own".<sup>29</sup> It may be added that the possibilities are largely dependent on the linguistic principles of the national versification, and that the emotional effect is potential only, consisting in a possibility of supporting or contradicting contents of a certain type.

The presence or absence of binary intonation-pattern is not the only factor productive of a specific morphology of the sonnet in English literature. Of considerable consequence is also the *versatile preeminence of mid-line pause and end-line pause*. In poems where mid-line pause is more prominent than end-line pause, the half-line — or any part of line — ends in cadence and the line in semicadence. This run-on principle was used in the Sonnets from the Portuguese by E. Barrett-Browning:

And O beloved voices upon which  
Ours passionately call, because ere long  
Ye brake off in the middle of that song  
We sang together softly, to enrich  
The poor world with the sense of love, and witch  
The heart out of things evil, — I am strong,  
Knowing ye are not lost for aye among  
The hills with last year's thrush, God keeps a niche  
In heaven to hold our idols; and albeit  
He brake them to our faces, and denied

<sup>28</sup> John Keats: *Works V* (ed. Buxton-Forman), 1901, p. 58 f.

<sup>29</sup> B. V. Tomashevski, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

That our close kisses should impair their white,  
I know we shall behold them raised, complete,  
The dust swept from their beauty, — glorified  
New Memnons singing in the great God-light.

(E. Barret-Browning: *Futurity*)

Another specific result of English prosodic tendencies is the possibility of pushing the main structural principles of the sonnet-form into the background. The division of the stanza is made *less conspicuous* by the homogeneous typography of the poem and *less consistent* by the frequent running-on of lines from one quatrain (tercet) into another and by the breaking-up of quatrains into couplets in the Shakespearean form. The validity of the rhyme-scheme is impaired by the conventional and inconspicuous English rhymes (e.g. eye-rhymes) and the relative weakness of end-line pause. The formal pattern of such relaxed types of the English sonnet, such as *The Windhover* by G. M. Hopkins, may become almost non-apparent, at first sight, to foreign readers who were brought up on the clearly outlined sonnets of their native literatures:

I caught this morning morning's minion, king-  
dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding  
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding  
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing  
In his ecstasy! Then off, off forth on swing,  
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding  
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding  
Stirred for a bird, — the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!  
Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here  
Buckle! and the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion  
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!  
No wonder of it: sheer plod makes plough down sillion  
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,  
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

(G. M. Hopkins: *The Windhover*)

The type of versification into which a stanza is transferred is responsible not for its morphology only, but also for its *relation to other stanzas* and to non-strophic poetry, i.e. for the *relative function* of the stanza among the poetic forms of the respective literature.

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Conclusion. The results of the present analysis have offered an example of the complex relations into which a prosodic form enters if transferred into a foreign literature: "From the historical point of view, the metre is determined by two agents: by the literary tradition and by the form of the language. Thanks to the impact of literary tradition, under certain historical circumstances, the metrical forms imported from outside may not correspond to the specific tendencies of the language".<sup>30</sup> The impact of *literary traditions* and of both English and foreign traditional stanzas

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<sup>30</sup> B. V. Thomashovski, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

has been subjected to a minute research by previous writers on the genesis of the Shakespearean sonnet. The aim of the present analysis was to afford an insight into the workings of the second agent. The results have proved, in our opinion, that *prosodic qualities of the language* were of primary importance in the genesis and the resulting semantic possibilities of the English sonnet.

The concrete forms a stanza-pattern takes on in a national literature have proved to be determined by the prosody of the language, in much a similar way as the concrete realizations of a metre. While *metre* is dependent on the phonemic qualities of the *word* chiefly (stress, quantity of vowels, word-limit etc.), a *stanza* is under a stronger influence of the phonemic qualities of the *sentence* (e.g. intonation). A research into the relations between metre and the rhythmical possibilities of a language is well established; the present paper is an attempt at an investigation of the methods which are applicable in analysing the relations of language and stanza.