

The History of English sonnet

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ABSTRACT: *To illustrate “THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH SONNET” first we get the term ‘sonnet’. The term sonnet perhaps, cannot be better designated by anything than by pointing out its form which, of all the features of it, has remained throughout ages, more or less unchanged, constant: it is a fourteen line poem in iambic pentameter. The term has been derived from the Italian word ‘sonnetto’ which means a ‘little sound’ or ‘little song’. In Italy, at first, the term used to refer to any short poem; but, in course of time, it come to be restricted to a particular form of poem, to a lyrical poem of 14 lines, generally in iambic pentameter. But in further course of time, this feature of the sonnet has also undergone several mutations; for instance, in France, the sonnet is usually written in iambic hexameter.*

This is because the sonnet has had to adjust itself with the features and structure of particular languages and their idiosyncrasies. Apart from its specificity of being a 14-line poem, we can say that the sonnet is a lyric poem, being true to the etymology of its originary term, with musicality and song-like rhythm. Like the lyric, which is also fairly short, the sonnet revolves round a single core emotion. Therefore, we can say that the sonnet differs from the lyric only in form. Compton Rickett beautifully distinguishes between the lyric and the sonnet by highlighting the principal features of the latter: “the tilt and abandonment of the lyric are replaced (in the sonnet) by a more deliberate manner, a more austere treatment. There may be the some intensity of feeling, and an equal scope for fancy, but in one case (i.e. that of the lyric) it affects one like the scent of a wayside flower, in the other (i.e. in the sonnet) like the fragrance of a well-ordered garden” (Compton Rickett, 124).

KEY WORDS: *Sonnet, Lyric, Dictum, Rhythm, Hecatopathia, Eclogues.*

I. INTRODUCTION

I do believe personally that discussion about the concept of “**THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH SONNET**”; its importance in the field of my research is immense. We can seriously theorize the concept of sonnet as an object of contemplation. The relation between sonnet and lyric is the first thing to go through. So at the very beginning of the abstract I personally try to analyze sonnet, then the authors’ concept and finally its nature. The difficulty of defining the sonnet still persists, because, sometimes, the sonnet assumed some other denominations; for instance, Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374) called his sonnets canzone. Again, if we say that the sonnet is a sort of lyric, or that it is a kind of song, yet the difficulty will not be removed. Ronald Peacock rightly says: “The history of the nomenclature within lyric poetry (also) shows changes and mutations, sometimes hidden or arbitrary, sometimes gradual or natural, in the use of forms. Horace called his ‘odes’ carmina, or, as we should say, songs. Petrarch’s sonnets to Laura were called canzone: the term sonnet thus assimilates the Provençal term and indicates in effect a genre of love songs” (peacock, 102). Can the sonnet then be boiled down to a love song? No, because in course of time newer and yet newer themes, besides the love-theme, accrued to the sonnet. Again, there are other forms of poem on the same theme of love on which the sonnet is built. Take, for instance, the German Minnesinger whose universal theme is love and is, like the sonnet in most cases, composed as “homage to a lady”. But, regarding form, the Minnesinger differs from the sonnet very widely.

Should we then identify the sonnet by its length, and say that it is a poem of 14 lines? That will also be unprofitable, because, for instance, the quatorzain is also a poem of exactly 14 lines. But where as any poem of 14 lines is a quatorzain, all quatorzains are not sonnets. Further, as we shall soon see, all sonnets are not of 14 lines. There are sonnets of more than or less than 14 lines. To get out of this pedantic labyrinth, we may simply say that the sonnet is a short poem. But that will also not help us. Because, for instance, in Japan, there is a kind of short poem, known as hokku or haiku, which can certainly not claim to be sonnets. The haiku is a verse form consisting of only seventeen syllables, distributed in three lines: the first line consists of 5 syllables, the second 7 and the third, again, 5. Like the sonnet, the haiku also expresses a single concentrated idea or thought. Many English poets have imitated the haiku form, for diverse themes, such as Ezra pound, Robert Frost, Conrad

Aiken, W.B. Yeats and James Kirkup. An example of haiku from Kirkup's Haiku on the Inland Sea is Being given below (Cuddon, 300):

In the amber dusk
Each island dreams its own night.
The sea swarms with gold.

This is a short, rather very short, poem: but it is in no sense a sonnet. Therefore, the length of a poem is not the only determinant of a sonnet. There is another kind of sonnet, invented by Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-89). In the Preface to his poems (1918), he presented a sort of curtailed sonnets, and called these curtail sonnets. The curtail sonnet consists of only 10 lines, instead of usual 14. Hopkins divided these 10 lines into two stanzas: the first comprising of 6 lines, and the second 4. In addition, there is a short tail-piece which is not longer than half of the length of a line. An example of the curtail sonnet is being given below, from Hopkins' poems (Cuddon, 170-71):

Glory be to God for dappled things –
For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced. – fold, fallow, and plough;
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.
All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise him.

On the other hand, sonnets may be longer than the usual 14 lines sonnets. Thomas Watson (c. 1557-92), for instance, in his Hecatopathia or passionate Century of sonnets (1582), wrote poems of 18 lines, in the rhyme scheme a b a b c c, repeated twice, which he called sonnets. For an instance, the 7th poem of Hecatopathia is being cited below (Kerrigan, 19-20):

Hark you that list to hear what saint I serve:
Her yellow locks exceed the beaten gold;
Her sparking eyes in heaven a place deserve,
Her forehead high and fair of comely mould;
Her words are music all of silver sound;
Her wit so sharp as like can scarce be found;
Each eyebrow hangs like Iris in the skies,
Her Eagle's nose is straight of stately frame,
On either cheek a rose and Lily lies;
Her breath is sweet perfume, or holy flame;
Her lips are more red than any coral stone;
Her neck more white than aged swans can moan;
Her breast transport is, like crystal rock;
Her fingers long fit for Apollo's lute;
Her slipper such as Momus dare not mock,
Her virtues all so great as make me mute;
What other parts she hath I need not say,
Whose face alone is cause of my decay?

Watson's junior contemporary, John Donne (1572-1631), the metaphysical poet, also wrote some poems of 18 lines and claimed them to be sonnets. Donne did not follow Watson's rhyme scheme but invented one for himself: a b a b, c d c d, e f e f, g h g h, i j. For an example, his 'sonnet: the token' which is comprised in his collection of poems, songs and sonnets, is being cited below:

Send me some token, that my hope may live,
Or that my ceaseless thoughts may sleep and rest;
Send me some honey to make sweet my hive,
That in my passion I may hope the best.
I beg noe ribbond wrought with thine owne hands,
To knit our loves in the fantastic straine
Of new-toucht youth; not ring to shew the stands
Of our affection, that as that's round and plaine,
So should our loves meet in simplicity;
Nu, nor the (. 'Oralis which thy wrist infold,

Lac'd up together in congruity,
To shew our thoughts should rest in the seame hold
No, nor the picture, though most gracious,
And most desir'd, because best like the best;
Nor witty lines, which are most copious,
Within the writings which thou hast address.
Send me nor this, nor that, increase my store,
But swear thou thinkst I love thee, and no more.

There is a peculiar type of sonnets, or rather sonnet sequence, where the main sonnet sequence is preceded by another sonnet sequence is preceded by another sonnet sequence, known as crown of sonnets'. Donne's sonnet sequence, holy sonnets, for instance, is preceded by such a 'crown of sonnets' which consists of seven sonnets. These 'crown sonnets' are usually linked together in a peculiar way. In Donne's case, the last line of the first sonnet of the 'crown of sonnets' is the first line of the second sonnet, the last line of the second sonnet is the first line of the third sonnet; and so on. And, further, the first line of the first sonnet.

Sonnets can be of diverse types, as we have so far seen, but the three principal types are the following:

1. **THE ITALIAN OR THE PETRARCHAN, SONNET:** The sonnet originated in Italy in the 14th century, and was perfected by Francesco Petrarca Petrarch (1304-74). He called his poems, now generally known as sonnets, canzoniere. The Petrarchan or Italian sonnet consists of two parts: the octave or octet, rhyming a b b a a b b a and the sestet, rhyming c d e c d e , or c d c d c d, or "a similar combination that avoids the closing couplet".

The first eight lines, the octave, develop one single thought or idea. But, at the beginning of the sestet, there is a Volta or 'turn' Nevertheless, the sestet actually grows out of the octave, though in a different way, and completes the single thought of the whole poem "the effect of the a b b a a b b a octave is truly remarkable. It is actually a blend of 3 brace-rhyme quatrains, since the middle 4 verse, whose sounds overlap the others and echo their pattern, impress the reader with a similar rhyme pattern, thus, a b b a a b b a. Normally, too, a definite pause is made in thought development at the end of the eighth verse, serving to increase the independent unit of an octave that has already progressed with the greatest economy in rhyme sounds. Certainly it would be difficult to conceive a more artistically compact and phonologically effective pattern. The sestet, in turn, leads out of the octave and, if the closing couplet is avoided, assures a commendable variety with in uniformity to the poem as a whole" (Preminger, 781). Petrarch wrote both in vernacular Italian and in the highly polished Latin. His nearly four hundred canzoniere or sonnets were written in Italian. Keeping aside the point of rhyming, the following two sonnets of his, in translation, may help us understand his style in the sonnet (Arte, 36-37):

I

Oft as in pensive mood I sit and write,
Mid plaint of birds and whisp'ring leafy trees,
Where betwixt flowery banks and river bright
Laughs back in ripples at the ruffling breeze,
She whom heaven hath stolen from my sight,
Whose face though mortal eye no longer sees
Earth cannot hide, in pity of my plight
Rebukes my grief with words more sweet than these –
Velestial words not breathed by mortal breath:
"Ah why consume thy strength ere yet 'tis night
In barren tears and tempest of fierce sighs?
Weep not for me, for by the boon of death
My days were made immortal, and mine eves
Closing, were opened on eternal light."

II

The nightingale that so forlornly weeps
Perchance his little ones or his dear mate,
Whose fiery, tender song insatiate
With sweetness fills the air, his vigil keeps
All night with me, and never tires nor sleeps,
Reminding me of my unhappy fate.
For I, oh foolish, know it now too late,
Death the divinest bloom most quickly reaps.
How blind is he who thinks to stand secure!
Me seemed those fair lamps, than the sun more bright,
Could ne'er be quenched, and leave us plunged in night.

Now do I know my cruel destiny
Would have me learn in tears and agony,
Nought that delighteth May on earth endure.

2. **THE SPENSERIAN SONNET:** The rhyme-scheme of the Spenserian sonnet is quite different from that of the Petrarchan sonnet. Its rhyme-scheme is : a b a b, b c b c, c d c d, e e. it contains four parts: three quatrains and a concluding couplet. The Spenserian sonnet is also called linked sonnet', because of its peculiar rhyme scheme where the three quatrains are linked together: the last line of the first quatrain rhymes with the first line of the second quatrain; and similarly, the last line of the second quatrain; and similarly, the last line of the second quatrain rhymes with the first line of the third quatrain. As in the Shakespearean sonnet, here also the concluding couplet summarizes the argument of the foregoing lines, or binds up the sense of the foregoing lines. The following sonnet of Spenser may illustrate the rhyme-scheme as well as other features of the Spenserian sonnet:

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 eke my name be wiped out likewise.
Not so, quoth I let base 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, when as death shall all the world subdue,
Our love shall live, and later life renew.

3. **THE SHAKESPEAREAN OR THE ENGLISH SONNET:** The Shakespearean sonnet does not vary very much from the Spenserian sonnet. One difference between the Spenserian sonnet and the Shakespearean sonnet is that whereas in the former the quatrains are linked, in the latter they are not. The other difference relates to the rhyme-scheme, the Shakespearean rhyme-scheme being: a b a b, c d c d, e f e f, g g.

Though both Shakespeare and Spenser did not follow the petrarchan division of the sonnet into the octave, and the sestet, yet there is an invisible division of the Shakespearean and the Spenserian sonnets into octaves and sestets, because the arguments in a great number of sonnets of both Shakespeare and Spenser have silent pauses at the eight lines.

Unlike in the Italian form of the sonnet, in the Spenserian and the Shakespeare form, different ideas or thoughts are expressed in the three quatrains; of course each succeeding quatrain grows out of the preceding ones.

The first quatrain may be called the argument which is an explanation of what is going to happen in the following verses. The second quatrain may be called the theme or the central idea which may be expressed directly or indirectly. The third or the last quatrain may be called the dialectic or the logic or the reason that supports the whole argument or the central argument. And the concluding couplet is the 'tie-up' which binds the argument or the theme, and also presents a conclusion. On the other hand, in the Italian sonnet, the theme is developed in two stages. The first eight lines, or the octave, presents the theme or raise the issue, and corresponding doubt, query, etc., and the last six lines, the sestet, "answer the query, resolve the problem, and drive home the point by an abstract comment." Sometimes the octave of the Italian sonnet is divided into two parts or quatrains, as the sestet is divided into two parts called tercets. "the Spenserian and Shakespearean patterns, on the other hand, offer some relief to the difficulty of rhyming in Eng. (English) and invite a division of thought into 3 quatrains and a closing or summing couplet; and even though such arbitrary divisions are frequently ignored by the poet, the more open rhyme schemes tend to impress the fourfold structure on the reader's ear and to suggest a stepped progression toward the closing couplet. Such matters of relationship between form and content are, however, susceptible to considerable control in the hands of a skilled poet, and the ultimate effect in any given instance may override theoretical considerations in achievement of artistic integrity" (Preminger, 781-82).

Since its inception, poets have freely and continuously experimented on the pattern of the sonnet, giving rise to ramifications in the patterns have evolved. But some of these patterns have not been able to attract the fascination of poets or that of the reading public, and so have gone to oblivion.

The rest have enjoyed popularity for a considerably long time. Some of these new patterns are the following:

1. **CAUDATE SONNET:** In it, in addition to the usual 14 lines, a coda or tail', generally in the shape of a half line, is added. Sometimes more than one codas are appended. This type of sonnet was invented by the Italian poet Francesco Bembo (1497-1536). Generally sonnets of this pattern or type are used for satirical purposes. John Milton, for instance, used the caudate pattern in his satirical sonnet 'On the new Forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament' in which two codas occur:

Because you have thrown off your Prelate lord,
And with stiff vows renounced his Liturgy,
To seize the widowed whore Plurality
From them whose sin ye envied, not abhorred,
Dare ye for this adjure the civil sword
To force our consciences that Christ set free,
And ride us with a classic hierarchy,
Taught ye by mere A.S. and Rutherford?
Men whose life, learning, faith, and pure intent,
Would have been held in high esteem with Paul,
Must now be named and printed heretics
By shallow Edwards and out all your tricks,
Your plots and packing, worse than those of Trent,
That So the parliament
May with their wholesome and preventive shears
Clip your phylacteries; though baulk your ears,
And succour our just fears,
When they shall read this clearly in your charge:
New presbyter is but old Priest writ large.

2. **CONTINUOUS OR ITERATING SONNET:** This type of sonnet is not very different from the common types of sonnets, but varies from them in only one respect: in it one (or sometimes more than one) rhyme sound occurs throughout the sonnet. If the same-sounding word or words occur in the rhyming for a number of times in the lines, then the sonnet may be called a continuous or iterating sonnet – it is not essential that the same-sounding word will occur in all the lines and rhyme. For instance, Shakespeare's Sonnet 135 may be called a continuous or iterating sonnet. If such a sonnet is read backward, then we may call it a retrograde sonnet.

3. **CHAINED OR LINKED SONNET:** Here the last word of the preceding verse becomes the first word of the succeeding verse. Here, again, it is not essential for a sonnet to follow this pattern throughout to be called a chained or linked sonnet, but if most of the verse follow this pattern, then that will do.

4. **Crown of sonnets:** "Traditionally a sequence of 7 Italian Sonnets so interwoven as to form a crown' or Panegyrics for the one to whom they (i.e. these seven sonnets, and the other sonnets to which these seven are working as a 'crown') are addressed. The interweaving is accomplished by using the last line of each of the first 6 sonnets as the first line of succeeding sonnets, with the last line of the seventh being a repetition of the opening line of the first.

A further restriction prohibits the repetition of any given rhyme sound once it is used in the crown." (Preminger, 174). An example of the crown of sonnets' had already been given before.

5. **TERZA RIMA SONNET:** the only differentiating feature of this type of sonnet is that its rhyme-scheme follows the terza rima pattern. The terza rima is "A verse form composed of iambic tercets rhyming a b a, b c b, etc., the second line of the first tercet supplying the rhyme for the second, the second line of the second tercet supplying the rhyme for the third, and so on, thus giving an effect of linkage to the entire composition" (Preminger, 847-48).

6. **TETRAMETER SONNET:** Generally, sonnets are written in decasyllabic pentameters. But in tetrameter sonnets, the verses are octosyllabic tetrameters. Shakespeare's Sonnet 145 is a tetrameter sonnet: "Those lips that love's own hand did make.... And sav'd my life, saying – 'Not you'."

Ever since its genesis, the sonnet has been a very popular form of poem. Generally, poets wrote a series of sonnets for a particular person or on a particular central theme, and called the series a "sonnet cycle". The "advantages of the cycle are that they enable the poet to explore many different aspects and moods of the experience, to analyse his feelings in detail and to record the vicissitudes of the affair.

At the same time each individual sonnet lives as an independent poem" (Cuddon, 646-94). Cuddon has listed a number of sonnets cycles : "Dante's Vita Nuova (1292-94) in which there are extensive prose links; Petrarch's Canzoniere (c. 1328-74); du Bellay's L'Olive (1549); Ronsard's Amours (1552); Sidney's Astrophil and Stella (1591); Spenser's Amoretti (1595); Shakespeare's Sonnets (1609); Donne's holy Sonnets (1635-39); Wordsworth's Ecclesiastical Sonnets (1882); Rossetti's The house of Fame (1881); Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Sonnets from the Portuguese (1850); Rilke's Sonnet on Orpheus (1923)" (Cuddon, 647).

From this list, which is certainly not exhaustive, it is clear that the sonnet has enjoyed popularity throughout centuries. And only at the beginning of the twentieth century, has the sonnet begun to lose public favour. The sonnet form has also been greatly abused, thanks, perhaps to its popularity and brevity that have invited even unskilled hands that have drowned the sonnet in utter confusion. Curiously enough, the sonnet, again, has also had protests through another sort of sonnet, called 'anti-sonnet'. Beauty and Matchett write about the anti-sonnet: "there is even an old tradition of the anti-sonnet, which attempts freshness through denying the usual images, as is Shakespeare's sonnet 130 ('My Mistress' eyes are nothing like the sunne'), through adopting supposedly shocking directness, as in Edna St. Vincent Millay's Sonnet Beginning 'I too beneath your moon, almighty Sex/Go forth at nightfall crying like a cat'" (Beauty, 328-29). Nevertheless, Beauty and Matchett further write: "The abuses should not be counted against it; when it has been well handled, the form has produced some of the finest brief poems in English" (Beauty, 329).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main aims and purpose of the present study "English Literature and Sonnet" are the following:

- To Set up a new outline in this field;
- To propose new way for the salvation of the problems etc.

THE HISTORY OF THE SONNET

The sonnet originated in Italy in the 13th century; and developed when the spirit of the dolce stil novo (sweet new style) in poetry was raging the country. It is generally held that it was Giacomo da Lentino (Preminger, 782) or Jacopo da Lentini (The Penguin Companion to literature, vol. 2, p. 469) who flourished in the early part of the 13th century, invented the sonnet form. Lentino or Lentini was a poet and a notary at the court of Frederick II. He wrote 14-line hendecasyllabic poems rhyming a b a b a b a b, c d e c d e, thus dividing the poem into two parts, each of seven lines. The central theme of his poems is that he is a vassal of a lady and offers devotion to her, but receives from her only derision and disdain. As the poems are Provençal in inspiration, the love that the poet speaks of is chivalrous. His poems bear witness to his technical ingenuity and to the depth of his love. Most of his poems are now in oblivion, but that once he could influence other poets is evident from the fact that even Dante quotes him in his *De vulgari eloquentia* and mentions him in the *Divine Comedy* (Purgatory, xxiv). However, Lentini or Lentino is now remembered chiefly for his invention of the sonnet form. We do not know for certain if Lentini had any 'rough-hewn' model for his sonnet, or whether he drew elements from some sources, for his sonnet. But scholars generally agree that the Sicilian *strambotto* may be the source of Lentini's sonnet. The *strambotto* is a one-stanza poem of eight lines, rhyming variously. But the most popular rhyming form was a b a b a b a b. The Sicilians, the Tuscans and the French used the *strambotto* for satirical purposes, but the Italians used it for amorous and sentimental themes. It may be noted here that even before Lentini, the *strambotto* was prevalent in Italy, though the poets there did not rigidly follow the eight-line canon of the *streamline*.

In Italy, poets wrote *strambotto* in more or less eight lines. However, what Lentini especially did was that he added to the 2-quatrains Sicilian *strambotto* a double refrain of six lines or tercets, making the poem one of 14 lines. Thus, the Sicilian *strambotto* became the octave or octet of the later-day sonnet. The word *strambotto* derived from two Sicilian words: *strambo*, meaning 'squint-eyed' or 'sideling glancing'; and *motto*, meaning 'dictum'. But the etymology of the word *strambotto* had nothing to do with the themes of the *strambottos*. Scholars think that the extra 6 lines that Lentini added to the eight-line Sicilian *strambotto* were drawn from Tuscany where the Sicilian Octave (the *strambotto* of eight lines) was transmogrified into the six line poem. However, the 14-line hendecasyllabic *canzone* or sonnet that Lentini invented by combining the Sicilian 8-line *strambotto* (octave) and the Tuscan 6-line *strambotto* (sestet) rhymed a b a b a b a b, c d e, c d e. This pattern of the *canzone* or sonnet was also followed by Lentini's contemporary poets, such as abbot of Tivoli, Jacopo Mostacci, Piero delle Vigne, Monaldo d'Aquino and others. Though Lentini invented the sonnet form, the form was perfected by another Italian poet, Guittone d'Arezzo (1230-1294) of Tuscany. He was the most influential poet of Tuscany, and for that matter, of Italy. Guittone d'Arezzo was influenced, like Lentini before him, by the spirit of the *dolce stil novo* or, simply, *stil novo* introduced into Italian Poetry by Guido Guinizelli (c.1235-1276) in the thirteenth century. Guinizelli was a student of law and became a judge. After he was exiled for political reasons, he composed his *Rime* which, actually, ushered in the spirit of the *dolce stil novo* in a big way in Italy. In this sense, Guinizelli's collection of poems or sonnets called *Rime* has great importance in the history of the sonnet.

The intensity and sweetness of Guinizelli's poems reach their height when he expresses his "ecstatic adoration of his lady". This aspect of his poems has certainly influenced the sonnet down the ages, the sonnet being the expression of intense love for a beautiful lady, in a specifically structured poem, Guinizelli's influence was so great that along with Lentini, Guinizelli is also mentioned in Dante's *Divine Comedy* (Purgatory or Purgatorio, xxvi). To come back to Guittone d'Arezzo, at the age of about 25, he had undergone a religious conversion, and entered the order of the knights of the Virgin Mary. Before that, he composed secular poems,

but after the conversion, his poems were saturated with religious favour. His collection of poems, *Canzoniers*, contains a number of canzone or sonnets that are harsh, obscure and extravagantly artificial.

Nevertheless, his concern for stylistic beauty perfected the sonnet form that was earlier invented by *Lentini*. *Guittone d'Arezzo's* most important contribution to the pattern of the sonnet was his invention of the hitherto unknown a b b a a b b a octave. *Dante* (1265-1321) used this rhyme- Scheme in his *vita Nuova* and *Canzoniere* or (sonnet-sequence) and *Petrarch* (1304-1374) followed his rhyme-scheme in his *Canzoniere* or (Sonnet-sequence) and *Petrarch* (1304-1374) followed his rhyme-scheme in his *Canzoniere*. Through *Dante's* and *Petrarch's* preferences, this pattern of the octave remained very popular for a long time. The canzone or sonnets of both *Dante* and *Petrarch* are conspicuous for their intensity of love and the artificiality of style. *Dante* addressed his sonnets to his lady-love *Beatrice*, and *Petrarch* to his beloved *Laura*. Their loves were not carnal, but purely Platonic. Besides *Dante* and *Petrarch*; *Guido Cavalcanti* (1259-1300) of Florence also composed about 50 canzoni and some sonnets, following their instances. All these were written on the theme of love. *Cavalcanti's* works intensified the spirit of the still novo. The spirit of the still novo and the fashion of the sonnet continued to remain in Italy till the 16th century. *F.T. Prince* wrote about the influence of the sonnet in Italy and about the appreciation of it. "The sonnet had emerged as a new poetic force in the dolce stil novo of the thirteenth century. *Cavalcanti* and *Dante* had revealed in it a magic of the intellect and the senses, but in very brief compass. *Petrarch* completed its evolution with 300 sonnets of sustained and deeply felt beauty; in their kind they have never been equalled. The sixteenth-century Italians, led by *Bembo*, took up the literary effort where *Petrarch* had left off; they strove to enrich and elevate the form, loading their verse with reminiscences, not only of *Petrarch*, but of *Horace* and *Virgil*." (*Jones*, 165). However, the Italian masters used the sonnet form "for love-poetry and more particularly for that semi-platonic and semi-religious devotion to the lady or *Donna* which subsequently became a cliché of love poetry" (*Cuddon*, 643). The Italian poets did not only write isolated or independent sonnets, but also sonnet-sequences. The sonnet-sequences of such masters as *Serafino all'Aquila* (1466-1500), *Pietro Bembo* (1470-1547), *Michelangelo* (1475-1564), *Baldassar Castiglione* (1478-1579) and *Torquato Tasso* (1544-1595) and such other poets are beautiful creations, and once were very popular. *Bembo's* sonnet Sequence, *Gli asolani*, is a dialogue on non-platonic love. *Michelangelo's* sonnet-sequence, *Rime*, contains some sonnets of beauty, in spite of the fact that they lack technical accomplishment, their beauty depending on the ideas expressed through them. These sonnet-sequences, alter on, inspired poets to write similar sonnet-sequences.

In the 15th and the 16th centuries, the Italian sonnet sailed to Spain, Portugal, France, the Netherlands, Poland and England. Some time later, the sonnet moved to Germany, Scandinavia, Russia and to some other countries of the world. The sonnet has been so applauded by the people of the whole world that there have been very few languages in the world in which poets have not tired their hands at sonneteering. From Italy, the sonnet first moved to Spain, with the help of the Spanish poet *Marquis de Santillana* (1398-1458). But it took some time for the sonnet to establish itself in Spain. The Spanish poets and dramatists of Spain who helped the sonnet take roots in dramatists of Spain who helped the sonnet take roots in the soil of Spain were *Juan Boscan* (1490-1552), *Garcilasode la Vega* (1503-1536) and *Lope de Vega* (1562-1635) From Spain, next, the sonnet travelled to Portugal with the helping hand of *Antonio Ferrera* (1528-1569), and there it flourished at the hands of *Camoes* (1524-1580) and *Anthero de Quental* (1842-1891). From Spain and Portugal, the sonnet now was brought to France by *Clement Marot* (1496-1544) and *Mellin de Saint Gelais* (1491-1558). It was in France, for the first time, that the Petrarchan form of the sonnet lost its hold on poets. It was *Joachim du Bellay* (1522-1560) who deviated from the Petrarchan form of sonnet and invented his own form of sonnet, and wrote three famous non-Italian sonnet sequences: *L'Olive*, *regrets*, and *Antiquites de Rome* (Translated by *Spenser* as the *Ruins of Rome*). Thanks to *pierre de Ronsard* (1524-1585) and *Philippe Desportes* (1546-1606) – both of them designated 'Prince of poets' - the Sonnet had a heyday in France. The former in his sonnets pour *Helene* and the latter in his *Amours* raised the sonnet to its perfection. *Ronsard* and *Desportes* were instrumental in transporting the spirit of the sonnet to England in the 16th century. In France, *Francois de Malherbe* (1555-1628) introduced a new rhyme-scheme into the sonnet: a b b a a b b a, c e d e d e, or c c d c c d. *Malherbe* also introduced the alexandrine or the twelve-syllable line in the sonnet in the 16th century. The sonnet could not sustain its popularity for long in France. In the 18th century, the sonnet saw its declining popularity throughout Europe, and therefore also in France. In the 19th Century franc, the sonnet had its revival, thanks to the efforts of *Theophile Gautier* (1811-1872) and *Baudelaire* (1821-1867), and once again reached its new height of popularity at the hands of such poets as *Heredia*, *Lecomte de Lisle*, *Valery*, *Mallarme* and *Rimbaud*.

From France, the sonnet travelled to Germany, but the movement was slow. The German poets *GR. Weckherlin* (1584-1653) and *Andréa's Griphius* (1616-1664) were inspired by the sonnetry in France, and composed many sonnets. But their efforts to popularize the sonnet soon fell through, and for about half a century, there was no demand for sonnets in Germany. In the 18th century, *Gottfried Burger* (1747-1794) tried to revive sonnetry in Germany, and he was followed in his mission by some romantic poets such as *Schlegel*, *Eichendoiff*, *Tieck* and others. In the 19th Century, the sonnet reached its height of beauty at the hand of *August*

Graf von Platen (1796-1835) whose sonnet *Aus vending* is simply superb. Like wise, in the 20th century, the mystical sonnet sequence of Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926), *Sonette an Orpheus* (1923), and the sonnets of R.A. Schroder have demonstrated the height of beauty that the sonnet can reach in the German language. The sonnet was not very late to come to England: it came there in the first half of the 16th century. England was then being flushed with the spirit of the Renaissance humanism. The God-centred consciousness of the medieval England gave way to man-centred consciousness. Man now found divinity or divine qualities in man himself, as is evident in Hamlet's wondering at man: "what a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculties! In form and moving, how express and admirable! In action, how like an angel! In apprehension, how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals!" this deification of man brought in its wake enlightened awareness about the most potent and excellent quality of man, the universal element of humanity: love, particular the love between man and women. And this love found its most fitting expression in the sonnet. England is geographically not far off from France, and so the verve of the sonnet soon reached the Dover beach for the waiting Englanders. It is generally held that Henry Howard, the Earl of Surry (1517-47) and Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-42) were the pioneers of sonnetry in the 16th Century England. But it should be borne in mind that the *dolce stil novo* of the Italian hendecasyllabic lines in English through his poetry. Skelton was a narrowly orthodox priest and tutor to Prince Henry (later Henry VIII). He was a master of metre, and is now known particularly for his 'Skeltonic verse' - a generally 3-stress line. To take an example of the Skeltonic verse from his *Cloyn Clout*:

"What can is avayle
To dryve forth a snayle,
Or to make a sayle
Of an herynges tayle."

Through Skelton was a priest, he did not hesitate to write beautiful verse in praise of beautiful and noble ladies. He also invented the 'pausing line', an example of which may be taken from his *Morality play Magnificence*:

Two faces in a hood/covertly I bear
Water in the one hand/and fire in the other,
I can feed with a fool/and lead him by the ear;
Falsehood-in-Fellowship/is my swom brother.

With all these, Skelton prepared the ground for the sowing the seed of the sonnet. Therefore, F.T. Prince is right when he wrote that "Wyatt was not wholly an innovator (of the sonnet), for his songs continued a long and flourishing tradition" (Edward, 13). Prince here must have had the contributions of Skelton behind his mind. Through England borrowed the spirit of the sonnet from France, the pioneer poets of England who wrote sonnets imitated the Italian or Petrarchan form. But the Italianate form did not squarely fit into the English language, and so it had to be reconstructed or restructured to dovetail it into the natural rhythm of the English language. It may be mentioned here that the Latin an Italian languages allow for the much more diversification of the rhyming in poetry than the English language. However, in English, the rhythm of the 'pausing line' is more natural, and so the English poets had to keep this in mind while writing sonnets. FT. Prince wrote in this regard: "If we look at Wyatt's adaptations or translations from the Italian we may see the pressure of the form (of the Italian sonnet) upon the native (English) rhythm of the 'pausing line'. In all his sonnets there are more or less self-contained, antithetically-balanced lines, in which a marriage is effected between the pausing rhythm and the pattern of the original" (Edward, 13-14). As a diplomat, Wyatt frequented the French and Italian courts and thus got himself acquainted with the French and Italian sonnetry. But he was more attracted by the Italian and Italianate form of sonnet for the English language.

Nevertheless, he made some variations in the Italian or Petrarchan form of the sonnet. In the Italian sonnet, there are the octave and the sestet, which are, as if, two independent poems about the same theme or idea that unites the two parts or 'poems' of the sonnet, or at the least, the two stanzas of the sonnet. Wyatt did not follow this Petrarchan scheme of two stanzas of the sonnet; he rather took the first twelve lines of the sonnet as a complete poem. Further, Petrarch did not use any final emphasis (the concluding couplet), but Wyatt "accidentally or deliberately chose to end most of his sonnets with a couplet, and thus helped to give a special character to the Elizabethan sonnet" (Sampson, 118). This emphasis - the summarizing end-couplet - was retained even Shakespeare. In addition to this change in the Italianate sonnet, Wyatt's contemporary, Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey, introduced another variation in it. Surrey did not follow the Petrarchan or Italian octave-sestet structure, but divided the first twelve lines into three quatrains, retaining the final couplet of Wyatt unchanged. Surrey had a brief life of only 30 years, as in 1547 he was arrested on a trumped-up charge of treason and executed. But within this short life, he could bestow upon the English sonnet a permanent form and elegance of beauty, for which reason, in the Elizabethan period, he was taken to be a better poet than Wyatt. The perfection of his metre, Propriety of diction, rationality of syntax, and the urbanity, control, precision and clarity of his thought process gave his poems, particularly his sonnets, a permanent place in English Literature. Surrey's

quatrains and his rhyme-scheme were retained by Shakespeare : a b a b, e d c d, e f e f, g g. And this form was also adopted by the Elizabethan literary circle as the standard form of the sonnet.

However, in this way, with the aid of Skelton, Wyatt and Surrey, the sonnet took its office in the Elizabethan literary world. Incidentally, in 1575, George Gascoigne, the playwright and sonneteer, defined the (Elizabethan) sonnet thus: "Sonnets are fourteen lines, every line containing ten syllables. The first twelve to rhyme in staves of four lines by cross metre, and the last two rhyming together do conclude the whole" (Cuddon, 644). The Elizabethan period was the heyday of the sonnet, and most of the poets of that period tried their hands in sonnetry, and many of them composed some beautiful sonnet-sequences. Some of the famous sonneteers of the Elizabethan period were: Sir Philip Sidney (1554-86), Samuel (1562/3-1619), Thomas Lodge (1558-1625), Henry Constable (1562-1613), Michael Drayton (1563-1631), Edmund Spenser (1527-1599), and of course, William Shakespeare. We shall deal to some extent with these sonneteers who wrote beautiful sonnet-sequences, some of which are : Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*; Daniel's *Delia*; Lodge's *Phyllis*; Constable's *Diana*, Drayton's *Idea's Mirror*; and Spenser's *Amoretti*; but the most splendid sonnet-sequences is that of Shakespeare.

The craze of the sonnet came to a halt as the 16th century passed by. Neither the poets of the Jacobean period (1603-1625) nor those of the Caroline period (1625-1649) showed interest in sonnet writing. Ben Jonson (1572-1637), the noted dramatist, for instance, was not at all interested in the sonnet. Nevertheless, some very beautiful sonnets were composed in both the periods, John Donne (1572-1631), the metaphysical poet, in his *Songs and sonnets*, published some very beautiful sonnets. He also introduced variety in the form of the sonnet. Curiously, Donne did not always stick to the 14-line length of the sonnet. For instance, his sonnet 'The Token' (cited before) is a 18-line sonnet, like some of the 18-line sonnets of Thomas Watson's *Hecatompithia* (instance cited above). But the rhyme-scheme of Donne differed from that of Watson, as we have already seen.

The causes of the decline of the sonnet after the Elizabethan age are very difficult to identify. Perhaps the reasons lie in the change in the spirit of the English people and in their changed attitude toward life. The Elizabethan age was followed by the Puritan age (1620-1660). The Puritan movement wanted to reform the prevailing moral ways of the people. The Elizabethan England was essentially pagan and sensual; and so it had an atmosphere in which the sonnet found a fertile ground. On the other hand, in the puritan age, the chivalry, the romantic love, the flirtations, the hypocrisy in love, etc. that Elizabethan age borrowed from the medieval age and nursed them, withered away. And, consequently, the sonnet starved for want of its staple food love and its concomitant chiaroscuro of emotions. Further, contrary to the abundance of optimistic spirit of the people of the Elizabethan age, the people of the puritan age (in the Stuart period) were pessimistic, suffering from an inalienable free-floating gloom. In such an atmosphere, only metaphysical poetry could thrive, and it actually did, but no sonnet. The spirit of the Puritan age can be gauged from such works as Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. True, many of the major works of Shakespeare were written in the transition period, i.e., in the period between the Elizabethan and the Puritan Periods, but, but it must be borne in mind that these works were done in the limping Elizabethan spirit. In that rational, moralistic and pessimistic Puritan age, a tribe of metaphysical poets came up : Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Marvell, Waller, Denham, Cowley, Crashaw, Davenant and such others. Some of these metaphysical poets also composed a few beautiful sonnets and sonnet cycles. Not that, in the puritan period, there was no scope at all for lighter veins. For even in that tolerable gloom of the Puritan age, the Cavalier poets, such as love lace, suckling, Carew, Harrick, and such others wrote poems in lighter veins, perhaps, in protest against the prevailing puritan and gloomy spirit; but none of them, for reasons unknown, preferred the sonnet form.

DURATION OF SONNET

The sonnet had to hibernate for about fifty years, after which John Milton (1608-74) came up to revive the sonnet, through for a short while. But even he did not write a sonnet-sequence, but only a few sonnets, the cause of which may be his non-challenge for the sonnet form. Curiously, he did never write sonnets on the theme of love, perhaps, because he himself experienced the aridity of this universal passion. Milton wrote sonnets only on special occasions – to celebrate an occasion, to memorise an event, to glorify a person, etc. – and so his sonnets may be called occasional sonnets. A sonnet of Milton's may be cited below, for getting a taste of his sweet-sounding sonnets:

On His Blindness

When I consider how my light is spent,
Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide
Lodged with me useless, through my soul more bent
To serve therewith my maker, and present
My true account, lest He returning chide;
'Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?'

I fondly ask: but Patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, 'God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts. Who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best: his state
Is kingly: thousand at his bidding speed,
And post o'er land and ocean without rest;
They also serve who only stand and wait.

Milton always used the same rhyme-scheme for the octave: a b b a, a b b a. but he used different rhyme-schemes for the sestet: c d e c d e, c d c d c d, etc. with variations even in these. After Milton, the sonnet again went into hibernation; this time for about a hundred years, for during the whole of the 18th century, poets did not show any interest in sonnetry – maybe they thought it was too old a form of poetry – and consequently, only a few good sonnets were composed, such as Thomas Gary's 'Ode on the Death of Richard West', Thomas Warton's 'To the River London', William Bowles's 'At Ostend', etc. the sonnet was taken up once again – this time with considerable enthusiasm – in the romantic Period, perhaps thanks to the superfluity of passions of the poets as well as of the people of that period. Most of the major poets wrote sonnets, and wrote them beautifully. Keats, Shelley and Wordsworth, amongst others, have left for us many inspiring sonnets, but those of Wordsworth are undoubtedly the best. Wordsworth wrote two sonnet cycles, entitled 'The River Duddon and Ecclesiastical sonnets', but unfortunately, both have come croppers. On the other hand, some of his individual sonnets – and he wrote a good number of such sonnets – are certainly memorable, such as '(Sonnet) Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802', 'TO Toussaint L'Ouverture', and 'On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic'. A representative sonnet of Wordsworth is being cited below:

Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802.

Earth has not anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This City now doth, like a garment wear
The beauty of the morning, silent bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautiful steep
In his first spender, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! The very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

Like Milton, Wordsworth had no predilection for love as the theme of the sonnet, and used the sonnet form for diverse purposes, writing only very few sonnets on the theme of love. He stuck to the 14-line sonnet form, again like Milton, but used various rhyme-schemes, the principal one being a b b a, a b b a, c d c d, c d.

Keats also wrote a large number of sonnets, at least compared with the number of his other poems. Like Wordsworth, Keats also used various themes and rhyme-schemes for the sonnet. Some of his sonnets are permanent treasure-troves of the English poesy, such as "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" and 'Bright Star! Would I were steadfast as thou art'. He composed a sonnet on the sonnet itself, which is being cited below:

Sonnet on the Sonnet

If by dull rhymes our English must be Chain'd,
And, like Andromeda, the sonnet sweet
Fettered, in spite of pained loveliness,
Let us find out, if we must be constrain'd,
Sandals more interwoven and complete
To fit the naked foot of Poesy:
Let us inspect, the Lyre, and weight the stress
Of every chord, and see what may be gain'd
By ear industrious, and attention meet;
Misers of sound and syllable, no less
Than midas of his coinage, let us be
Jealous of dead leaves in the bay wreath crown;
So if we may not let the Muse be free,
She will be bound with garlands of her own.

One of the other poets of the Romantic period who wrote some sonnets is Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822). Two of his splendid sonnets are 'Ozymandias' and 'England in 1819'. But Shelley was not very fond of the sonnet. His 'Ozymandias' is being quoted in full below:

Ozymandias

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert, near them on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command.
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed.
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, Ye mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

During the last part of the 18th and the early part of the 18th centuries, there was a resurgence of the sonnet, not only in England (in the Romantic period) but also in almost the whole of Europe – especially in Italy, France and Germany. In Italy, Ugo Foscolo (1778-1827) and Carducci (1835-1907) composed some beautiful sonnets, as in France Gautier (1811-72) and Baudelaire (1821-67) did. Baudelaire's sonnet 'Meditation' is being quoted below (as translated by Joanna Richardson):

Meditation

Be wise, O my affliction, be serene.
You called upon the evening; now it falls:
Obscurity envelops all the town,
To some brings peace, to other brings ordeals.
While the vile multitude of common men,
Whipped on by unrelenting festivals,
Lay up regrets, like servile citizens,
Come you affliction, far from carnivals,
Give me your hand. See the dead Years lean down,
In dated dress, from balconies in heaven;
Behold regret rise from the deep, unbowed;
The sun sleeps underneath an arch, and die,
And, trailing in the East, like a long shroud,
Listen, my dear: sweet Night walks through the sky.

Baudelaire into two quatrains, and a sestet, divided into two equal parts, each part consisting of three lines. The other French poets who produced outstanding sonnets were Lecomte de Lisle, Valery, Mallarme and Rimbaud. In Germany, the sonnet form was much used by such romantic poets as Tieck, Eichendorff, and August Graf vonPlaten-Hallemunde whose Sonnette a us Venedig Richard the perfection of the sonnet form. After yet another pause, this time of about three decades, in the Victorian period (1837-1901), the sonnet form was again preferred by some of the poets of England. Several sonnet sequences were composed in this period are: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Sonnets from the Portuguese (1847-50), Robert Bridge's The Growth of Love (1976), D.G. Rossetti's

The house of Life (1881) which consists of one hundred and three romantic and sensual sonnets, and George Meredith's Modern Love (1862) which is a sequence of 50 sonnets and which is the "Tragic masterpiece" of the poet. In the addition to these, Rossetti's sister, Christian, also composed some very beautiful sonnets, and a very short sonnet sequence of only three sonnets, of her unhappiness. In the Victorian period, some experiments were done on the form of the sonnet. George Meredith did not follow the usual 14-line form of the sonnet, but used 16 lines for his sonnets. Such sort of amplification of the sonnet was not new, because, as we have seen, Milton used 18lines in some of his sonnets, and Shakespeare wrote at least one sonnet of 15 lines.

The most interesting experiment on the sonnet form, in the Victorian period, was done by Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-89) who during his life-time had been almost anonymous. In the sonnet, he combined the alexandrine or the twelve-syllable line with his own invention of the sprung rhythm. The sprung rhythm is a peculiar form of rhythm which is quite different from the traditional patterns of rhythm. In his preface to poems (1918), Hopkins himself wrote about the sprung rhythm: "(It) is measured by feet of from one to four syllables, regularly, and for particular effects any number of weak or slack syllables may be used. It has one stress, which

falls on the only syllable, if there is only one, or, if there are more, than scanning as above, on the first, and so gives rise to four sorts of feet, a monosyllable and the so-called accentual trochee, Dactyl, and the First Paeon (Paeon is a foot of one stressed and three unstressed syllables). And there will be four corresponding natural rhythms, but nominally the feet are mixed and any one may follow any other” (Cuddon, 651-52). Hopkins’s sonnets, such as ‘Carrión comfort’, ‘Justus quidem tu es Domine’ are simply superb. An example of Hopkins’s experiment on prosody may be taken from the first lines of four of his poems:

“No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,
I wake and feel the feel of dark, not day.
Patience, hard thing! The hard thing but to pray, and
My own heart let me none have pity on; let”.

In the 20th century, even the lingering interest in the sonnet was left out in the cold. Very few poets have composed sonnets in this century; and those who have done, have done very scantily. Only three poets can be counted as major sonneteers of this century in the English Language. Rupert Chawner Brooke (1887-1915) of England, Robert frost (1874-1963) of the USA, and Wystan Hugh Auden (b. 1907), the English-born poet of the USA. Brooke was a ‘war poet’, but composed some very beautiful sonnets. Robert frost, through he did not experiment on the form or pattern of the sonnet, wrote some novel sonnet. And Auden, who is recognized as one of the major poets of the 20th century, also wrote a number of splendid sonnets. He wrote sonnets on public affairs, and on famous men, such as A.E. Houseman, Rimbaud and Edward Lear, and not on personal Affairs or on love. Besides, Dylan Thomas, Robert Lowell and George Barker also wrote sonnets, and experimented with the form of the sonnet. But the account of the sonnet in the 20th century will not be complete without any mention of another major poet, the Irish-English poet, William Butler Yeats (1865-1939). He wrote very few sonnets (or only one?), but has left the indelible mark of his poetic skill and his experiment on th form of the sonnet in his sonnet or sonnets. His sonnet, ‘The Folly of being Comforted’ is very beautiful. It has rhyming couplets and is divided onto three parts: sestet, sestet, and a concluding rhyming couplet. The sonnet which first appeared in the *Speaker* in 1902 is being cited in the following page:

The Folly of Being Comforted

One that is ever land said yesterday:
‘Your well-beloved’s hair has threads of grey,
And little shadows come about her eyes;
Time can but make it easier to be s=wise
Through now it seems impossible, and so All that you need is patience.
Heart cries, ‘No,
I have not a crumb of comfort, not a grain.
Time can but make her beauty over again:
Because of that great nobleness of hers
The fire that stirs about her, when she stirs,
Burns out more clearly. O she had not these ways
When all the wild summer was in her gaze.’
O heart! O heart! If she’d but turn her head,
You’d know the folly of being comforted.

In the contemporary times, the sonnet is not much is demand. This is true not only of England, but also of the rest of the world. In Germany, for instance, very few sonnets have been composed after Rilke’s *Sonette an Orpheus* (1925). However, to conclude this chapter, we may say that down the centuries, the sonnet has proved itself to be a very powerful form of poetic expression, and that it has undergone much experimentation so far. LA. Cuddon very justly wrote: “During over 7100years, the ‘narrow room of the sonnet’ has been adapted to a remarkable variety of experiment and development and also to an astonishing range of feeling and themes” (Cuddon, 646).

THE ELIZABETHAN SONNETRY

It is a generally- and, perhaps, rightly-held that Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-42) and his literary disciple and colleague, Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey (1517-47) – “the two chieftain” in “a new company of courtly makers” of Henry VIII’s reign- were the harbingers of the sonnet into the English language. But as the earliest English sonnet form was Italian or Italianate, we may say that Wyatt deserves more praise than surrey for introducing the sonnet in England. It was actually Wyatt who brought the sonnet form from Italy, as he came across the opportunity of doing so. He was born at Allington Castle in Kent, Studied at Cambridge for some time, held some court appointments, and then went on diplomatic missions to the Courts of France, Italy and Spain –The countries which were, by then, as we have seen, already influenced by the sonnet form. Through he got acquainted with the French and the Spanish sonnet as well, Wyatt was influenced by the sonnets of Italy, and held the Italian form as his model for sonnet writing. Perhaps, Wyatt’s unconsummated love-affairs, from

1526-to 1532, with Ann Boleyn whom Henry VIII ultimately married, inspired him to write sonnets on the theme of love that was the theme of all the Italian or Italianate sonnets. Besides sonnets, Wyatt wrote lyrics and satires, and also translated from Plutarch. Some of his sonnets and other poems were published in Richard Tottel's (d. 1594) *Songs and Sonnets Written by the Right Honourable Lord Henry Howard Late Earl of Surrey and others* (1557), better known as *Tottel's Miscellany*. Through initially this book went through subsequent publications, the number of his sonnets and other poems increased phenomenally. In its 1587 edition, the book contained 310 poems, in all, of which 81 belonged to Wyatt, and only 36 to Surrey. This fact may vouchsafe for the superiority of Wyatt to Surrey as a poet.

Wyatt did not always write in regular metre, but sometimes in irregular metre, and yet his sonnets were very striking. But as regards arguments, ideas and themes, Wyatt showed no originality, for most of his sonnets are either translations of the sonnets of Petrarch and his followers, or imitations of their sonnets. Further, he could not introduce new themes into the sonnet, as later on, Milton and Wordsworth, for instance, did. Nevertheless, he has shown intensity of passion, subtlety of modulation of tone, and sincerity of feeling in his sonnets. "in the sonnets, whether he is translating or imitating, Wyatt is committed by his Italian models to rather more elaborate figures of speech. The effect is, sometimes, a loss of force and immediacy. But the best of sonnets (e.g. *my galee charged with forgetfulness*, *whoso list to hunt*, *Farewell Love*) have all the qualities of his best lyrics, with an additional richness. The critics have, on the whole, underrated them" (Daiches, 566).

Following the Italian model, Wyatt's sonnets comprise the octave rhyming a b b a a b b a, and the sestet rhyming variously, but generally c d e c d e. In most of Wyatt's sonnets, the octave poses a question which the sestet answers; but in some, the octave expresses one aspect of the same. Wyatt had a difficult time in following the Italian model, because the Italian sonnet demands repeated rhymes which are easy to find in the Italian language, but which are very difficult to find in English. It is for this reason that some of the English adopters of the Italian form introduced changes in the Italian or Petrarchan model. For instance, some sonneteers employed the rhyme-scheme a b b a a c c a for the octave. In addition, Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey, introduced a quasi-independent and rhymed concluding or summarizing couplet, as a result of which the whole rhyme-scheme of his sonnet was a b b a c d c d e f e f g g, and this very rhyme-scheme was adopted by Shakespeare. Wyatt added yet another feature to the sonnet: he introduced the 'pausing line' as the verse. The 'pausing line' is a self-contained and antithetically balanced line, examples of which can be found in the following sonnet of Wyatt's:

I fynde no peace/and all my war is done;
I fear and hope, / I burrne and freeze like ice;
I fly above the wynde/yet can I not arise;
And nought I have/and all the world I seize on;
That loseth nor locketh/holdeth me in prison
And holdeth me not, / yet can I escape nowise;
Not letteth me lyve/ nor dye at my devise,
And yet of death/ it gyveth none occasion.
Without eyen, I see; / and without tongue I plain;
I desire to perish,/and yet I aske for helthe;
I love another, / and thus I hate myself;
I feed me in sorrowe/and laugh in all my pain;
Likewise displeaseth me/ both death and life;
And my delight/ is causer of this strife.

Surrey, the disciple of Wyatt, so to say, was born in a great family of England, and was educated along with the Duke of Richmond, the bastard son of King Henry VIII, in English and French courts. Afterwards Surrey married the daughter of the Earl of Oxford. In 1545, at the siege of Montreuil, he saw active service and was wounded. In the following year he was falsely charged of treason and was beheaded in 1547. In his brief life, he translated Books II and IV of Virgil's *Aeneid*, and also wrote a small number of sonnets, most of which appeared in *Tottel's Miscellany* along with Wyatt's sonnets and poems, in 1557, i.e. about seven years before the birth of our poet Shakespeare. True, Surrey produced fewer sonnets, but nevertheless, it was he who could influence his contemporary and succeeding sonneteers much more than Wyatt himself could. "His poetry is smoother and more graceful than Wyatt's but less strong; some poems seem exercises rather than declarations of love" (Daiches, 263). Surrey's poems and sonnets are distinguished by their "urbanity, control, clarity and precision" (loc. cit.). Further, we should not forget that it was Surrey who actually invented the English or Shakespearean sonnet form proper, though, we must admit, before him Wyatt invented the concluding couplet of the English or Shakespearean sonnet.

The following sonnet of Surrey may give us an idea about how his sonnets read:

Set me wheras the sunne doth parche the grene,
Or where his beames do not dissolve the yse:

In temperate heate where he is felt and sene:
In presence prest of people madde or wise.
Set me in Hye, or yet m lowe degree:
In longest night, or m the shortest daye: thickest be:
In clearest skye, or where clowdes thickest be:
In lusty youth, or when my heeres are graye.
Set me in heaven, in earth, or els in hell,
In hyll, or dale, or in the fomyng flood:
Thrall, or at large, alive where so I dwell:
Sicke, or in health: in evil fame, or good.
Hers will I be, and only with this thought
Content my slef, although my chaunce be nought.

After Surrey, sonnet-writing certainly continued to be in vogue, but there was no remarkable sonneteer till Edmund Spenser (1552-1599) sat down to compose sonnets. He was born in East Smithfield, London, and attended Merchant Taylor's School where the great educationist and humanist Richard Mulcaster was the headmaster, and where Thomas Kyd and Thomas Lodge once read. After taking M.A. degree of Cambridge in 1576, Spenser became secretary to John Young, Bishop of Rochester, and thus became acquainted with Sir Philip Sidney after whose death he wrote the famous pastoral elegy *Astrophel* in Sidney's memory. Spenser is remembered for his three other great works: *The Shepherd's Calendar*, *Eclogues*, and the ambitious *Faerie Queene* most of which was burnt by fire caused by the Irish insurrection of 1598. Next year, he died in distressed circumstances. Spenser's sonnet sequence is entitled *Amoretti*, it contains eighty-nine sonnets, of which only one is in the Shakespearean form, and the rest are in the form invented by him. His own rhyme-scheme for the sonnet I s a b a b b c d c c d c d e e, where by he mingled couplets and separate verses, and also bound the three quatrains together in a very subtle way. Spenser wrote the sonnets of *Amoretti* on the theme of his love and courtship with Elizabeth Boyle whom he married as his second wife." *Amoretti* is a distinguished sonnet-sequence reflecting the various stages of the courtship, while individuality is given by Spenser's characteristic union of courtly sentiment with praise for the institution of marriage, found too in *The Faerie Queene*. The style of the sonnets is musical and decorated, and the language at times shows traces of that archaisms found more notably in the *Faerie Queene*" (Daiches, 494).

The following sonnet of Spenser may illustrate the form, and show the beauty of his sonnets:

My Lady's presence makes the Roses red,
Because to see her lips they blush for shame.
The Lily leaves, for envy, pale become;
And her white hands in them this envy bred.
The marigold the leaf abroad doth spread;
Because the sun's and her power is the same.
The Violet of purple colour came,
Dyed in the blood she made my heart to shed.
In brief all flowers from her their virtues take;
From her sweet breath, their sweet smells do proceed.
The living heat which her eyebeams doth make
Warmth the ground, and quickeneth the seed.
The rain, wherewith she watereth the flowers,
Falls from mine eyes, which she dissolves in showers.

That Spenser was influenced by Sir Philip Sidney (1554-86) is evident from the fact that just after Sidney's death, Spenser wrote a pastoral elegy, *Astrophel*, in his memory. Sidney, one of the finest sonneteers of the Elizabethan world, has become immortal for his sonnet sequence *Astrophel and stella* which contains one hundred and eight sonnets. Besides this sonnet-sequence, he also wrote a few other sonnets, but these are of lesser quality than those of *Astrophel* and *Stella*. Sidney was the eldest son of Sir Henry Sidney, three times Lord Deputy of Ireland. He went to Christ Church, Oxford, but left the institution without taking any degree, and travelled over Europe, and soon became a brilliant member of Queen Elizabeth's court. For his personal beauty, sweet demeanour, brilliant conversation, sparkling wit and undaunted chivalry, he became the beau ideal of the young generation. Besides the sonnets, he wrote *The Lady of Mary*, a masque, in honour of the queen, and published it in 1578. After some quarrels with the Earl of Oxford, he left the Court for ever, and stayed with his dearest sister, the Countess of Pembroke, for whose amusement he wrote *Arcadia*.

Astrophel and Stella is a 'Semi-autobiographical, semi-fictional story of human passion'. In the sonnets contained in it, he showed his mastery of the Petrarchan form of the sonnet. His mastery of the sonnet-form was so great that as a sonneteer he was, perhaps, second only to Shakespeare. Sidney generally followed the Italian

mode, but separated the octave from the sestet, through there is seldom any distinction between the content of the octave and that of the sestet.

He also introduced some interesting variations in the pattern of rhyming of the octave and the sestet. He mostly used the Petrarchan octave, rhyming a b b a , b a b a, and sometimes, ababbaba or a b a b, b a a b, etc. on the other hand, his sestet commonly rhymed c d c d e e. Sidney's sonnets are notable for their sincere passion, restraining and shaping control, and lofty inspiration. The following sonnet from Astrophel and Stella may illustrate the form, movement and beauty of Sidney's sonnets in general:

Stella, since thou so right a Princess art
Of all the powers which life bestows on me,
That are by them ought undertaken be,
The first resort unto that sovereign part;
Sweet for a time gives respite to my heart,
Which pants as though it still should leape to thee;
And on my thought give the Lievetenacie
To this great cause, wich needs both with and art
And as a queen, who from her presence sends
Whom she employs, dismiss from thee my wit,
Still to have wrought that thy own will attends,
For servants shame of Masters blame doth sit.
O let not Fools in me thy works approve,
And scorning say, see what it is to love.

Bernabe Barnes (c. 1569-1609), a prolific poet, was also a sonneteer of considerable importance, in the Elizabethan period. He was greatly influenced by Sidney, particularly in his Parthenophil and Parthenophe a sonnet-sequence. Barnes was the son of the bishop of Durham. Besides the above-mentioned sonnet-sequence, he wrote a century of religious sonnets: *Divine Century of Spiritual Sonnets*. Some critics think that Barnes may be a candidate for the 'rival poet' in Shakespeare's sonnets, and this may vouchsafe for his fame as a poet and, especially, for his mastery of sonnetry. A representative sonnet of Barnes is being quoted below:

What can these wrinkles and vain tears portend,
But their hard favour and indurate heart?
What shew these sighs, which from my soul I send, but endless smoke, raised from fiery smart?
Canst thou not frame those eyes to cast a smile?
Wilt thou with no sweet sentence make me blest?
To make amends wilt thou not sport a while?
Shall we not once with our opposed eyne
In interchange send golden darts rebated
With short reflexion, 'twixt thy brows and mine,
Whilst love with thee of my grief hath debated?
Those eyes of love were for love to see,
And cast regards on others, not on me!

As Barnes wrote beautiful sonnets principally on the theme of religious sentiments, so Michael Drayton (1563-1631) wrote a sonnet-sequence on the theme of his early love with Anne Goodere, the youngest daughter of sir Henry Goodere and later wife of sir Henry Rainsford. Drayton was a close friend of Shakespeare, like Ben Jonson. His sonnet-sequence was published in 1594 under the title *Idea's mirror*. It shows his mastery of the sonnet form and the intensity of his love for Anne. Anne's marriage shocked him so much that he did never marry. One of Drayton's most famous sonnets begins with the line: since there's no help, come let us kiss and part.' This line may remind one of Browning's poems '**The Last Ride Together**':

I said – then, Dearest, since 'tis so, since now at length my fate I know,
Since nothing all my love avails,
Since nothing all my love avails,
Since all, my life seemed meant for, fails,
Since this was written and needs must be –
My whole heart rises up to bless
Your name in pride and thankfulness !
Take back the hope you gave, - I claim only a memory of the same.

Drayton's *Idea's Mirror* was so popular that it was reprinted several times from 1594 to 1619. The sonnets of this collection are in the Shakespearean form which Drayton preferred. He used alexandrine in some of his sonnets, and also introduced other variations in the English or Shakespearean sonnet. In the skill of employing the English or Shakespearean form, he was, perhaps, second only to Shakespeare. The following sonnet of Drayton will show the form and beauty of his sonnets in general:

Taking my pen with words to cast my woe,
Duly to count the sum of my all cares,
I find my griefs innumerable grow,
The reckonings rise to millions of despairs;
And thus driving of my fatal hours.
The payments of my Love I read and cross:
Subtracting, set my sweets' units my sour;
My joy's arrange leads to my loss.
And thus mine eyes a debtor to thine eyes,
Which by extortion gaineth all their looks:
My heart hath paid such grievous usury!
That all their wealth lies in thy beauty's books,
And all is thine which hath been due to me,
And I a bankrupt, quite undone by thee!

Drayton's other works include: the *Harmony of the Church* (1591), the *Shepherd's Garland* (1593), *Endimion and Phoebe* (1595), *Matilda* (1594), the *Legend of Great Cromwell* (1607), etc. Samuel Daniel (1562/3-1619) was a poet and also a man of letters. He was born in Somerset and matriculated from Oxford in 1581. Daniel found Court patronage and maintained Court connection till his death. Though he was not a great poet, he sometimes wrote very well. He is best known for his sonnet-sequence, *Dalia*. His other writings include:

The *Complaint of Rosamund* (1592), the *Tragedy of Cleopatra* (1594), to the Countess of Tieqjord, and to the Countess of Cumbtilund (1599), the *Queen's Arcadia* (1605), *Heymen's Triumph* (1615), etc. the following sonnet of Daniel well reveal some of his poetic qualities and the form of his sonnets in general:

Let other sign of paladins and knights,
In aged accents, and untimely words,
Paint shadows in imaginary lines,
Which well the reach of their high wit records:
But I must sing of thee and those fair eyes.
Authentic shall my verse, in time to come,
When yet the unborn shall say, "Lo, where she lies!
Whose beauty made him speak, that else was dumb."
These are arks, the trophies I erect,
That fortify their name against old age;
And these thy sacred virtues must protect,
Against the dark, and time's consuming rage.
Though the error of my Youth they shall discover,
Suffice they show I lived, and was thy lover.

Daniel preferred the English or Shakespearean rhyme-scheme: a b a b c d c d e f e f g g. His sonnets reveal appropriate emotion, well chosen words and, sometimes, beautiful images. Henry Constable (1562-1613) was a minor sonneteer like Barnabe Barnes and Samuel Daniel. Constable was educated at St. John's College, became a Roman Catholic and settled in Paris. He wrote only one sonnet-sequence, *Diana: the Praises of His Mistress*, and published it in 1592. This sonnet-sequence consists of only 23 sonnets written in the style of Sir Philip Sidney. Constable sometimes followed the rhyme-scheme of Daniel. The following is one of his best sonnets:

To live in hell, and heaven to behold;
To welcome life, and die a living death;
To sweat with heat, and yet be freezing cold;
To grasp at stars, and lie the earth beneath;
To trade the maze that never shall have end
To burn in sighs, and starve in daily tears;
To climb a hill, and never to descend;
Giants to kill and quake at childish fears;
To pine for food, and watch the Hesperian tree;
To thirst for drink, and nectar still to draw;
To live accurs'd, whom men hold blest to be;
And weep those wrongs which never creature saw;
If this be love, if love in these bounded,
My heart is love, for these in it are grounded

Besides all these sonneteers, there were some other minor sonneteers in the Elizabethan age, such as Giles Fletcher, Lodge, Fluke Greville, William Percy, Nicholas Breton, Peele, Bartholomew Griffin, and, of course, George Gascoigne. Griffin was a lawyer-sonneteer of some reputation, particularly for his collection of

poems, Fidessa. George Gascoigne (c. 1530-77) had considerably influenced in the world of Elizabethan sonnetry. In 1573, his collected sonnet – a sort of connected sonnet – was published under the title a Hundred Sundry Flowers, and the collection was well received by the public. This sonnet-sequence is historically very important “for anticipating, in its groups of connected sonnets, the form of the sonnet-sequence which was to become so popular in the, Elizabethan period” (Daiches, 203-4).

CONCLUSION

The Elizabethan people were thirsty for music, and wanted the beauty of modulating tunes, and so the sonnet could easily find a place in their hearts. The popularity of the sonnets was so great that it became a fashion to write sonnets of all grades. And yet, we must say that the English persons were not as enthusiastic for the sonnet as the Italians or the French were. F.T. Prince justly wrote: “the sum total of sonnets in English from the sixteenth century to the present day, including those in ‘Shakespearean’ form or otherwise irregular, would be but a fraction of those in Italian or French” (Jones, 164). One of the causes of this comparatively low production of sonnets in the Elizabethan Period may be that the sonnet form did not well fit into the structure of the English language. To quote F.T. Prince: “it is clear that the extreme facility in English” (Jones, 164). Prince further wrote about the facility of the sonnet form in Italian and consequent production of sonnets in that language: “Rhyme in Italian is so musical and expressive that this intricate form proved capable of almost endless employment from its invention in the 13th century. By the late sixteenth century, there existed an enormous mass of Italian sonnets of all kinds, amorous, didactic, satiric, occasional” (Jones, 164). Another cause of the comparatively low production of sonnets in the Elizabethan period may be that most of the poets of that period heavily engaged themselves in drama, as the Elizabethan age was outstanding an age of drama.

However, low the production of sonnets in the Elizabethan period may be compared to the production of that of Italy and France or of any other country, the English sonnets of that period are certainly a precious possession of the literature of the whole world. Yet, it must, at the same time, be admitted that a great amount of the Elizabethan sonnets could not touch the mark. Derek Traversi wrote about the Elizabethan sonnets: “Not all the poems are in any sense equal in interest. A high proportion clearly consist of little more than literary exercises, addressed either to a patron of letters or, especially in the case of the later numbers, to an Imaginary and conventional mistress” (Ford, 186). However, the Elizabethan sonnets, in general, are distinctive for their varieties, mellifluousness, sincerity of passion, etc., - particularly the sonnets of Sidney, Spenser, and, of course, Shakespeare. No genre of English poetry have been so popular, since the days of Chaucer, as the sonnet. The Elizabethan poets heavily experimented, as none else nowhere so much did, on the form and the content of the sonnet, and thus raised the sonnet to its possible perfection. They tried it on all passions; they modulated the tune of it in diverse ways; and they assayed the elasticity of the form of it; and thus they shaped the sonnet as a very pert vehicle of expressing a broad spectrum of emotions, including complex ones. And this perfection of the sonnet occurred firstly at the hand of Edmund Spenser, for which reason George Sampson says that “Spenser is the true father of the Elizabethan sonnet” (Sampson, 126). As Spenser invested the sonnet and thus perfected it with his musicality, so Shakespeare sharpened it with his musicality, so Shakespeare sharpened it with his musicality, so Shakespeare sharpened it with his wit, and beautified it with his ingenious artistry.

Again, complementarily, Shakespeare himself was perfected by the iron rules of the sonnet. The necessity of crisp expressions, unexpected turns, emotional intensity, occasional complex emotion, etc. of the sonnet contributed much to the development of Shakespeare as the greatest dramatist of the world. Derek Traversi elaborated on this point; “the very fact that the sonnet form itself is strictly limited, not merely by strictly limited, not merely by structural considerations but by strict conventions covering theme and expression alike, afforded in varying degrees, in attitudes ranging from simple adherence to a highly ambiguous irony”. All these possibilities, thus set in a narrow and apparently confined form, contributed greatly to extending the scope of Shakespeare’s art. Above all, it is possible that the linguistic discipline associated with the sonnet form and imposed by it upon his natural Elizabethan exuberance was a decisive factor in the formation of this mature style. It encouraged the association of compression with depth of content and variety of emotional response to a degree unparalleled in English, giving simultaneous point and intensity to the expression of personal feeling. “These new tendencies in verse and rhythm were accompanied in the sonnets by the exploration of fresh themes. The most important of these look forward, like so much in the parallel linguistic development, to the ‘problem’ plays which inaugurated the tragic period. They are concerned above all with the relationship of individual experience, and especially of the personal ties of love and friendship, as the most intimate and intense manifestations of that experience, with time. This is familiar ground in Renaissance poetry, and it is therefore not surprising that Shakespeare’s first approach to the theme seems to have been through the sonnet form” (Ford, 187-88).

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