The Self and the Sonnet

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By

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THIS WORK IS DEDICATED TO

MY LATE PARENTS

GRACE & ROLAND,

PHILIP TERRASA S.J.

&

MY LATE AUNT JULIE SANCTIS

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Rajan J. Barrett

INTRODUCTION

'If there be nothing new, but that which is,
Hath been before, how are our brains beguiled,
Which labouring for invention bear amiss . . . '
—William Shakespeare

In the first part of this introduction, I attempt to trace the life of the sonnet in the nearly eight hundred years of its existence[1] so that I am able to show the complexity of chance and choice in what it is and where it is going. Gaps and haziness in what might be considered the history of the origin of this form and its endurance are witness to the fact that the sonnet has survived. I also try to show from the traces of history that the form can move across language and cultures to survive if not thrive in a symbiotic relationship with other forms. In the second part of the Introduction I look at the notions of self that are contested and seek to explain the notion as it keeps coming into being at different points of time. Finally in the third part of this introduction I attempt a model to deal with the self and the sonnet. The sonnet being complex enough, and the self being both complex and elusive, I think that the model will clarify the parameters of the analysis that I propose to use in analyzing the self and the sonnet. Finally, based on this model, I give a plan of the book for dealing with the self and the sonnet.

I. The Sonnet

The sonnet as we know it from English descriptions is a form that comes into prominence with Dante Alighieri (1265-1321)[2] and Francis Petrarch (1304-74).[3] Recognized as a fourteen-line form with a rhyme scheme ABBA ABBA CDC CDC the Petrachan sonnet stands out as a popular form even today.[4] Dante, a little senior to Petrarch, in his manifesto for the Italian, a vernacular with respect to Latin, while arguing for the seriousness of the literature in the vernacular also makes out a case for the sonnet. It is as if by chance that the sonnet survives (and has jumped languages) as even Dante, despite being the first to notice the sonnet, considers it as not having as high a quality as the *ballata* and the *canzone*:

> "Those who have composed vernacular poetry have issued their Poems in many different forms, some in *canzoni*, some in *ballate*, some in sonnets, and others in irregular and inadmissible forms… *Canzoni* by themselves do all that they have to do, unlike *ballate*, which need dancers to keep time and accentuate their form; and therefore *canzoni* should be reckoned nobler than *ballate*, and hence their form should be reckoned noblest of all, since no one can doubt that the *ballata* is of higher quality than the sonnet. What ever features of [poetic] art are found in other forms are included in the *canzone*, but not the other way around. " ***De Vulgari Eloquentia III*** (trans. Sally Purcell *Dante: Literature in the Vernacular*, Manchester, 1981) M. R. G. Spiller *Development of the Sonnet: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge) 1992, 8.

I find it intriguing that there is perhaps some anti-Darwinism or Darwinism (if one could apply the notion to a form) at work, because a form which is rated as the third among the existing forms in a vernacular actually moves across the boundaries of languages and becomes a form that has survived for about seven hundred and seventy years. Dante's recognition of the form, and his documentation of it in *De Vulgari Eloquentia* (1305?) has perhaps paved the way for its recognition. I think it is important to note Dante's role in the recognizing the sonnet and considering it worth theoretical mention. Though his acknowledgement in the practice of writing perhaps starts earlier as seen in his work *La Vita Nova* (1292-1294?).[5] Spiller in *The Development of the Sonnet: An Introduction* draws attention to the role of Dante in the history of Italian literature:

> "Dante's spirited defence of the Italian vernacular—or, more accurately, of the dialect of Italian which he himself spoke, the Tuscan form—in that treatise was an attempt to show that what could be done in Latin could be done in the vernacular: in the course arguing that vernacular poetry could be as serious as Latin, he produced the first theoretical comment on the sonnet briefly, because he intended a fuller analysis in a later part of the work which he did not complete. . . .
>
> . . . the very word 'literature' meant 'that which was written', and thus that which was in Latin, as distinguished from that which was spoken, and thus in the vernacular. The first writer to notice the sonnet theoretically is Dante, and by the time he wrote his treatise *De vulgari eloquentia* (a title that must have sounded paradoxical at the time—'Pop Eloquence' is perhaps the nearest we can get to it) the sonnet had been up and running for seventy years, from 1235 to about 1305." (New York: Routledge) 1992, 8.

However, I think that Dante goes beyond a mere recognition of the form when he chooses to write *La Vita Nova* as it is a book[6] in which the poet persona he creates is a writer of sonnets. *La Vita Nova* discusses the plan of production followed by the actual sonnet and the analysis of it, for most of the book Spiller says:

> "By putting his sonnets inside a commentary, Dante makes himself and his readers continuously aware that the sonnet is in two ways an occasional piece. First, it relates something about a past self, a significant moment, a feeling, a piece of wisdom. Second, it is an event for the author writing it, which demands to be put into proper relation with the past event: now many lyrics do not bother to notice this, and assume, tacitly, as easy continuity between the person writing and the person he or she was at the moment being described; but given the particular focus of the *stilnovisti* upon transformation of the self, writers in the position such as Dante's can become quite obsessed. . ." (New York: Routledge) 1992, 41.

Thus, perhaps, Dante does more than mention it theoretically; he also practices the art of sonnet writing rather successfully as can be seen from the text. However, his comments on the sonnet as a critic seem to be restrained, and possibly kept within the opinion of his day. His poetic practice though, perhaps, lets him experiment with the form and explain it, modify it and add the dimensions of the *donna angelicati* (which means an angelic lady/woman) the three various voices and divisions of structure that enriched the complexity of arrangement of the sonnet.[7] Dante as a scholar-poet[8] was aware of the probable creator of the sonnet form, who was not really Tuscan or Florentine but Sicilian - Giacomo da Lentino (now Lentini) [9] as the name of the place is changed) (1188 - 1240).[10] The fact that the sonnet is not really of Italian birth but Sicilian probably would be disconcerting to the twenty-first century for whom Sicily is intrinsically Italian. Dante, however, in his own age and date, acknowledges the debt that Italian Literature has to pay to the Sicilian when he says "whatever poetry the Italians write is called Sicilian. . . " More significantly, Dante's vernacular poetry and his defense of vernacular Italian, and specifically Sicilian literature, in his *De Vulgari Eloquentia* (Bk. I, Ch. XII) shows his indebtedness to Fredrick's courtiers and the Emperor himself. [11]

It seems possible though that the creator of the sonnet, Giacomo da Lentino[12] is mistaken, forgotten or considered not important enough in comparison with those who came later and perfected the art like Dante and Petrarch.[13] It is worth noting, I think, that Petrarch seems to stand at the head of the tradition for many in the stream of English Studies, and they often consider Petrarch as the one who invented the sonnet, probably the

sonnet, as they know it, is his. Dante's contribution to the establishment of the sonnet as a form worth considering is something that is probably glossed over too. Nevertheless, Petrarch's sonnets influenced and were the prototype of the English Renaissance Sonnet in its inception. This probably accounts for the kind of parenthood he is credited with in relationship to the English sonnet. Chaucer, having translated a sonnet of Petrarch, is probably the first to import the sonnet to England though not in sonnet form. Spiller notes Chaucer's role:

> "Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1458) who translated a sonnet of Petrarch into English, but not into sonnet form, and the Marqués de Santillana, Inigo Lopez de Mendoza (1398-1458), . . . between 1438 and his death wrote forty-two sonnets in Spanish, avowing in the title of the collection that they were '*sonetos fechos al italico modo'*— sonnets made in the Italian style. Chaucer having declined to use the sonnet form, the Marqués has the credit of writing the first sonnet outside Italy, sixty years after Petrarch's death. Then again a lull and not until the 1520s did the sonnet become established in Britain, France and Spain." (New York: Routledge) 1992, 64.

This lull, which Spiller points out, perhaps could be explained in various ways. It seems paradoxical that the lull was probably the silent churning out of the sonnet form in a world that was rapidly transforming itself in language and thought. The fact that the Renaissance was making a difference in Europe also affected the notions of form—both physically in sculpture and art as well as in poetry. This seems to have become a conscious concern of creativity. To me, the anthropocentric notion that makes the human being into a 'form creating being' explains the break in the lull and retrospectively explains the silent inner stabilizing which probably was taking place with regard to the sonnet.

To me, the notion that the human subject could alter form, namely, the world and the word, seems to be a strong argument that explains experiments with form. It is this idea that resulted in a radical shift in notions of what the self was. Breaking up old notions of the self and notions of poetry seem to have gone hand in hand with the refashioning of other forms such as political and geographical boundaries. The notion of having different identities, being linguistically different and at the same time capable of adaptation and borrowing seems to have become easier as tracing the sources of the self to forms that were perhaps not linked up with the Roman Empire, made the borrowing less difficult. This implies that being vernacular was a boon to assert difference and newness. Being vernacular was also a way of asserting an anti-imperialism that was new and fearless. I think it is important to remember that the sonnet was not in

the hands of the poor and the common, but was a form that was used by those who made laws and reshaped the world—the elite who could transform the world. Breaking away in form was the desire if not the reality of political practice that was taking place at about this time. Though, the tradition would later perhaps follow in the Roman way, there seems at this time a carelessness for the rigidity of sticking to form or rejecting a form because the newer notions of collectivity had not yet hardened into national and cultural identities as they later did. Paradoxically though, this position of flexibility, borrowing and adaptation would be subverted with the establishment of the sonnet. This can be seen in the desire to be considered Petrarchan or anti-Petrarchan or both.

At the same time aggrandizing the culture and vying with other linguistic identities seem to be also a notion that perhaps exists and the confidence that comes about with being able to borrow, and yet not lose identity, appears to be somewhere subtly hidden in the borrowings that take place here. The notion of being able to borrow from a secular part of culture seems also to have perhaps a hand in bringing the form to fruition. The independence of the languages, the growth of the vernacular press, and the translating of *The Bible* into the vernacular too perhaps made it easier to subvert the notions of empire that had continued through the hand of the Church. Though these reasons might seem speculative, there was an expansion in the notions of the self and the world. This seems to me especially so, with the expansion of the world as the Europeans knew it because of the Americas to the West becoming a reality which altered their perception of the world radically. The Copernican revolution too, perhaps, made it possible for people to dare to experiment with form as notions of space and time itself were changing rapidly between the medieval and the modern world of the High Renaissance[14] in the late fourteenth century. The notions that forms were not permanent and that one could adapt a form as one would adapt dress or furniture seems a possibility that was a part of changing the forms available. The ideas that were Biblical and religious were breaking up in form to give rise to secular notions of what the world was. These were based on observations and experience as opposed to blind belief and notions that God was the author of form. Now man as a 'form creating being' could bring into being and recreate form.

The confusion between the Renaissance and the Reformation perhaps removed constraints because of the availability and access to the new forms and systems of knowledge among the elite circles. This in turn brought in a dynamism and energy which wanted to take on the world anew. Availability of resources through printing and travel made it possible to be more flexible and a new form adapted to one's own

vernacular was perhaps looked at as a way of enriching the language rather than a threat that besets most well established linguistic and literary communities that do not have their self confidence in place. This happy lack coupled with a groping for identity perhaps also adds a dimension to taking up a form that seems to have been well established but not current for about fifty years. This makes the sonnet 'nascent' in the literal meaning of being brought into existence with a future potential.[15]

I think the most important moment was a moment of confusion, coupled with confidence and wonder. This possibly made the sonnet, cocooned in the lull, find a space again in countries and languages other than the one in which it originated. The confidence of being vernaculars, like the Italian, also reduced the space between each other. This is perhaps because the notion that they who borrowed were not contending with a long established classical tradition which had inhibited their freedom of choosing a form. The gulf between the vernaculars, they were borrowing the form into, no doubt had identitarian problems the country they were adopting the form from—as the Roman Empire was virtually Italian. However, though the people were Italian, the language, which was classical and hegemonic, was Latin, a close ally of Italian, but still maintaining a distinct vernacular identity by its dialects. Thus, the adoption of the form perhaps was initially fraught with a bit of trepidation, because of the proximity of the Italian to Latin. Nevertheless, paradoxically, this vernacular was perhaps less inhibiting as they were borrowing from a vernacular, like their own, which had now found a new life. The sonnet, though, was already a part of Europe for about three hundred years. In spite of the sonnet pre-dating Petrarch by nearly a hundred years, Petrarch's formative role seems to be firmly established in the genesis of the sonnet. It is also inerasable in the linearity that the history of the Sonnet consolidates.

There are instances of attributing the invention of the sonnet to Pier della Vigna,[16] the Secretary of State of Fredrick II of Sicily, this probably, shows how power and status have played their part.[17] It is no doubt true that the sonnet did have a courtly birth at the hands of Giacomo da Lentino in 1224[18] but the influences that surrounded him were of a liberal minded and inventive ruler Fredrick II. Fredrick II has, besides sonnets that he wrote, a scientific treatise on avian life to his credit.[19] In fact the first sonnets are called Frederican Sonnets.[20] Most of the Frederican sonnets are by Giacomo da Lentino.[21] It is only by conjecture that we can infer that Giacomo da Lentino was influenced by Fredrick II and vice versa. Fredrick II also merited being excommunicated three times though he died a Roman Catholic. His treaty with the Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil[22] seems

pragmatic, bold and defiant in a theocratic medieval world. He and his quest for a secular government independent from the hand of Rome were probably reasons for his excommunication.[23] It is in this atmosphere that the sonnet was born. The sonnet considered as an Italian form itself becomes suspect when we consider its Sicilian birth. There was no standard Italian at the time when both the Sicilian and the other dialects of Italy jostled together as vernaculars in relation to Latin.

According to Wilkins the latter half of the thirteenth century was marked with the rise of Florentine and Tuscan "cultural primacy":[24]

> "In this period most of the influential writers who chose to write in any form of the spoken language of Italy were Tuscan, and the Tuscan dialect, somewhat Italianized (that is, somewhat modified by the influence of non-Tuscan dialects and of Latin) came to be generally recognized, except in Piedmont, Liguria, Lombardy, and Venetia, as the normal vernacular language for literary use. Before the end of the following century the unquestioned literary supremacy of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio completed the establishment of Italianized language of all Italy. From this point on it is to be assumed that the language of the vernacular verse and prose to be considered is fairly to be called Italian, except in cases in which some statement to the contrary is made. . . ." (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press) 1954, 25.

It is at this time that we find the notion of a common Italian language desired by no one less than Dante himself. As Wilkins mentions:

> "In Italy, Dante distinguishes fourteen main dialects, and asserts that each of them has many local variations. No one of these dialects, he says, is worthy to be used for literary purposes: it is necessary, therefore, that a common Italian language be devised, a language that should be worthy to be called illustrious." (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press) 1954, 55.

Lentino, an *il Notaro* of the King of the Holy Roman Empire, Frederick, was probably fluent in Arabic and other languages just like Frederick himself, who also has sonnets attributed to him.[25] The importance of Giacomo da Lentino in the creation of this form is evident from the fact that there are about twenty five sonnets attributed to him. Spiller considers this evidence enough for the attribution of the invention to Lentino.[26] The surprising thing is that this evidence survives to show that probably Giacomo da Lentino was perhaps indeed the inventor. There are just about two sonnets attributed to Piero della Vigna.[27] That itself does not clinch the issue conclusively of who the innovator of this robust and

resilient form is. I consider it robust as it can take on a variety of subjects and its resilience is seen in English Literature itself after it takes on a dynamic existence in the twentieth century.[28] Though we do not know with absolute certainty who the inventor of the sonnet is, it is worth observing that the sonnet's Sicilian origins are not pure Sicilian either. The sonnet appears to be a hybrid. Half the form is said to have a native Sicilian origin in the eight-lined *strambotto* of the peasants. The six lines grafted on to it are said to be of the Arabic *zajal*. Paul Oppenheimer throwing light on the origin of the sonnet comments:

> ". . . in writing the earliest sonnets Giacomo did not borrow from the troubadours' eight-line *canzone* for the octave of this poems, or indeed from Provençal literature at all, but from the eight-line *strambotto*, familiar as a song form among thirteenth-century Sicilian peasants–so that we must today, if we wish to be accurate about the matter, regard the sonnet as Italian, and even Sicilian, in origin. In his 1915 essay, Wilkins speculates that the sestet of Giacomo's sonnets may have derived from the Arab *zajal*, a rhyming stanza popular with the Arabs living in Sicily in Giacomo's time. Wilkins abandons this idea as "negligible," however, in a subsequent essay, in which he argues that the sestet came to Giacomo in a burst of sheer inspiration. No research done since 1915 has revealed an alternative source of the sestet, nor has anyone challenged Wilkins' opinion." (New York: OUP) 1989, 171.

However, there seems to be a hint that the division between the octave and sestet are due to the musical elements of the sonnet. John Fuller in *The Sonnet* discusses the *strambotto* and points out the possibility of the musical division of the sonnet:

> "The open from of octave shows the likely origin of the sonnet in the *strambotto* in its normal Sicilian form—the eight-line *canzuna* sung by Sicilian peasants but not actually recorded until later than the time of Fredrick II. Type 2 sestets hint a similar origin from the *strambotto*, but Wilkins believes that type I is earlier, and anyway the six-line canzuna is very rare. Wilkins follows Rajna in thinking the sestet simply a stroke of inspiration, and some critics (e.g. Praz) believe that this relationship between octave and sestet is due to a change of tune in the sonnet's original musical setting." (London: Methuen) 1972, 4-5.

This of course is not the major opinion and the origin from the *zajal* and *strambotto* too is not considered too seriously by scholars in fact Wilkins in a footnote about the Frederican sonnet says:

> "There is no agreement as to the source—if any–of the sonnet. The identity of the octave with the Sicilian form of the *strambotto* is too striking to be overlooked–but there is no documentary evidence of the existence of the *strambotto* in the Frederican period. The sestet rhyme-scheme CDECDE may possibly reflect an Arabic model. It is often asserted that the sonnet is a detached *canzone* stanza: but there does not exist among the Frederican *canzone* any stanza that is at all similar to the sonnet." (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press) 1954, 18-19.

However, one has to consider that Wilkins' work is in 1915[29] and his opinion seems to have altered substantially as he dismisses the Arabic origin and says that the sestet came to Lentino in a sudden 'burst of inspiration.'[30] The fact that Oppenheimer takes it up in 1989 and does not delve into the politics that post-colonialism posits is worth considering. Oppenheimer might have exposed what he considers the birth of the modern mind more with the inclusion of the non-European / post-colonial as constituting an essential of what becomes modern and Wilkins' dismissal of the Arabic is indeed a serious moment that needs to be examined when one considers that the Arabs preserved the Greek classics. I think it is important to take note of what the German Historian Freidrich Heer says when he points out the contribution of the Arabs to the world in *The Medieval World: Europe 1100 - 1350:*

> "In this expanding Europe of the twelfth century there was such curiosity and so great a thirst for knowledge that the intellectual and cultural treasure Islam had to offer exerted an immense attraction. This treasure was nothing less than the intellectual wealth of Greek antiquity, augmented by the glosses and commentaries of Islamic scholars from the near East and the Mediterranean, masters in a vast and flourishing "empire of learning" which stretched from Persia and Samarkand by way of Baghdad and Salerno to Toledo. Arab (and Jewish) translators and commentators helped to make the heritage of philosophical and scientific writings left by Plato and Aristotle and their disciples available to the West. Not only in Spain, but also in southern France, Sicily and southern Italy, there were men who welcomed these contacts and kept the lines of communication with Islam open.
>
> . . . The culture they acquired there had many elements derived from pagan antiquity and the non-Christian world of the Orient, strands which threaded themselves into a brightly-coloured tissue to adorn not only the humanism of Chartes but also the courtly culture of the Angevin Empire. . . . The poets and natural philosophers of the Italian Renaissance of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had their predecessors in the humanists, Platonists, natural philosophers, poets and theoretical exponents of the *ars amandi* (the art of loving in the courtly, civilized fashion, governed by strict rules) of the twelfth century, who had shown themselves so readily

> receptive of such alien material. Similarly, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the foundations of modern scientific thought were being laid, philosophers and natural scientists (Nicholas of Cues, Leibnitz, Galileo, Issac Newton, Boyle and Locke) constantly looked back to what had been learned in the open Europe of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries." (tr. from the German by Janet Sondheimer (New York: Mentor) 1961, 19.)

In fact, the understanding of the modern European mind has a lot to do with the Arabs specially when there is an exodus to study Arabic and read Aristotle in Arabic in the tenth and fourteenth century leave alone learning new mathematics. It would be hard to say that the birth of the modern mind was not influenced by the mathematics of the Arabs. What Landeg White states in his introduction to *The Lusíads* as the editor calls for reflection as the epic is written by a Portuguese Sonneteer, Luis Vas de Camões who is vitriolic about Islam. I think that the fact that there were other epic writers who wrote sonnets from Dante to Spenser is a point worth considering; Camões is interesting because he is part of the enterprise of colonialism, fighting as a soldier in the Gulf of Cambay, and suffering poverty and other kinds of miseries like losing an eye. How much this Portuguese national poet is a part of the mainstream European mind is called into question and how much is this mind shared with the worlds that were not quite 'modern' or European will continue to be an issue. White's elaboration on the Muslim in medieval Spain subtly seems to raise this issue:

> "Yet not long before, in the tenth and eleventh centuries, students had been flocking to Muslim Andalusia to read Aristotle in Arabic with commentaries by Averroes, to study Galen, to learn the use of the astrolabe, to benefit from the new mathematics (since the reign of Henry I our chief tax collector had been known as chancellor of the exchequer: the reference is to abacus, the chequered cloth, which made it possible to calculate in tens and Units). Andalusia was a centre of learning in all its branches, the civilized heart of the Medieval world, a place of culture and architectural splendour, and of greater religious tolerance than any society which followed it" (Oxford: OUP) 1997, xix.

The Arab in many ways probably stood as an alternative to the cultural and political colonialism of the Holy Roman Empire. The relationship between the Arabic and the European mind might not have been seen in the light of what might have appeared to Wilkins or even Camões in the colonial structures of their day. Camões wrote of the Arabic and the colonial subject with the air of a colonizer. His intolerance of the colonized

in *The Lusíads* is remarkable. Landeg White in his introduction to his translation of *The Lusíads* draws attention to this point:

> "The most troublesome aspect of *The Lusíads* to the modern reader must surely be Camões' treatment of Islam . . . . Camões's hostility is disturbing. Muslims are consistently presented as *astuto, falso, enganoso, malicioso, pèrfido, sagas, torpe,* and *gentes infernais*. The only *fiel* Muslim is Monsayeed from Morocco, who turns Christian after helping Gama escape from Calicut. Yet these adjectives, together with the fact that Camões consistently labels all Muslims as 'Moors' suggests a great deal. " (Oxford: OUP) 1997, xviii-xix

Oppenheimer seems to brush aside the Arabic as not constituting the birth of the modern mind when he considers what Wilkins sees in the sestet of Giacomo as an inspiration. Spiller seems to think that the sestet is a 'masterstroke of the sonnet's invention: the decision to use a *sirma* of six lines'. He further adds:

> "The six-line *sirma* was common in *canzoni*, and it was his genius to see that six added to eight preserves in words the principle of difference between the two parts of binary structure which was originally the melodic requirement of the Provençal *canso*" (New York: Routledge) 1992, 16.

Though it is not my purpose to dwell on the post-colonial/non-European, one cannot but help notice this obvious gap or rather bypassing of a section of the world which was so much a part of Giacomo's own day. Wilkins withdrawing his statements on the *zajal* seems to be an influence of not being able to decide on how to acknowledge the legacy of the modern in a world that was not European, where colonialism was at its twilight but still seemed to have been beneficent to the colonial subject. It is difficult, however, not to notice that Oppenheimer touches upon an interesting moment in human consciousness and rejects what probably also constitutes the birth of the modern/postmodern.[31] Though Smart illuminates the attitude of mind that might have pervaded the medieval Christian world, I think that it is important to consider what Spiller and Oppenheimer have to say. This too, after post-colonial theory coming into being around the early eighties, creating a greater sensitivity to cultures that are not European. However, when J. G. Nichols in the introduction to his translation *New Life* points out the similarity of culture between the Islamic and Christian, he is sympathetic to the similarities and differences of medieval cultures. Thus, Oppenheimer might have to reassess the modern mind and the sonnet in conjunction with what J. G. Nichols' understanding about the human mind is concerned. As Nichols points out:

> "A great part of the value of the book arises from our recognition that we are in the presence of a culture very different from our own. There was a tradition, in Christian society; love-sickness was regarded not as literary fiction but as a genuine illness, one which required treatment from the medieval versions of our psychiatrists, counsellors, and doctors . . . " (London: Hesperus) 2003, xxiv.

Further, one notices that even Spiller seems oblivious of the post-colonial as there is no mention of the Portuguese sonnet in relation to the colonial world. Fuller mentions Camões but includes him as part of the chapter on the Italian sonnet without his Portuguese origin being mentioned in *The Sonnet:*

> "It will be evident that the possible varieties of sestet are very great (Equola, and most Italian *prosodists* indeed, say that any order may be followed in the sestet), but these are among the most popular: of Petrarch's 317, for instance, 116 are of type I and 107 are of type 2 and 67 of type 3; of Camões's 196, 102 are type I and 56 type 2." (London: Methuen) 1972, 4.

That the Portuguese sonnet existed side by side with colonial expansion and ideology is perhaps missed out. Oppenheimer too does the same as the development of the Portuguese sonnet is shrouded in the conquest of Portugal by Spain a little after Camões dies in 1580.[32] For instance, if one has to consider Keats as part of the modern mind then he probably straddles both the classical and the post-colonial in his 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer. '[33] Nevertheless, I think that instead of, missing the moment that is worth wrenching open, Wilkins, Oppenheimer and Spiller expose the grand facade of this bit of courtly poetry having a strand of the local peasant *strambotto* and the Arabic *zajal.* It is thus left for other post-structural/colonial critics to explore this fissure for a better investigation of the history of the sonnet and the modern mind. I feel that the robustness and versatility of the sonnet form is derived from this hybridization. Being a hybrid at inception, and polished in the courts of Europe, it might have become popular. In other words, we might claim that the courtly tag marketed this product abroad to make it fashionable. This is especially true when the sonnet gets inducted into the English scene according to Peter Hyland in *An Introduction to Shakespeare's Poems:*

> "During the latter part of the reign of Elizabeth the writing of poetry had become fashionable in the court, and a significant number of nobles prided themselves upon their talent and literary sophistication. They wished only to impress their peers, however, and their poems were circulated in

> manuscript amongst their aristocratic and powerful friends. They would have considered as contemptible the idea of exposing their writings to the masses through print. These poets were 'amateurs' in the original sense of the word, which did not have the derogatory implications of superficiality or ineptitude that it sometimes has today. They wrote their poems for a very privileged 'market' of consumers, who were admirers, not buyers. So at its highest social levels the literary marketplace hardly looked like a marketplace at all, since texts were circulated with the specific intention of keeping them away from a large readership. Literary documents were produced for and passed around inside elite groups within the court and within aristocratic families and circles (sometimes called 'coteries') and such manuscript circulation was emulated by groups in other powerful environments such as the Inns of Court, the universities, and wealthier middle-class house- holds. Harold Love calls such circulation 'a mode of social bonding', and says the 'choice of scribal publication in preference to print might well be dictated by a sense of identification with a particular community and a desire to nourish its corporate ideology'[2] Particularly in elite groups the circulation of literary texts became a means both of transmission and of control of the ideas, beliefs and attitudes, the aesthetic and ideological positions that defined the specialness of the group. For the aristocratic writer literary manuscripts became a means of negotiation or endorsement of status within the community of power; that is, they earned not money but cultural capital." (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan) 2003, 23.[34]

It is significant and also interesting to note that the troubadours probably mastered *zajal* writing. A. S. Ash in the introduction to *Dante and his Circle and the Vita Nouva* (a rearranged and modernized translation of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's work) says:

> "One school of thought traces this poetry (Provençal) to the Iberian peninsula, where love poetry was flourishing. Out of a tradition of formal Hispano-Judaic poetry came an interesting mixed form—classical poetry that ended with *kharja*, a kind of punch line, a few lines spoken in Mozarabic, the Romance based street language used by Christians in Arab-dominated Spain. these lines often purported to be the response of the woman addressed in the poem to the poet. The *muwashshaha* ("girdled") form employed verse and refrain with end rhymes and internal rhymes, and was used for the poetry of love. Another form, the *zajal*, written in classical Arabic or classical Hebrew, had no *kharja* or *markaz* (refrain). Around 900 A.D., a blind Hispano-Arabic poet named Mocadem, who lived near Cordoba, wrote personal poems in the forms of *zajals* and *muwashshahas*. This new erotic poetry broke with convention to introduce the idea of expressing one's emotions publicly, celebrating the self. Other Western Arab poets who explored this new vein of self-expression included Ibn Hamdis of Sicily, Ibn Rashiq of Qayranwan, Ibn

> Zaydun of Cardoba, Mu'tamid, King of Seville, and Ibn Ammar, Ibn Quzman, a troubadour, excelled in the *zajal* form." (Santa Barbara: Bandanna Books) 1993, 15-16.

Besides this, the deeper structure of the *strambotto* and the *zajal* though forgotten, make it adaptable to other languages and rhythms. This is inbuilt into the sonnet form from its invention. I tend to think that these elements keep the form alive even today, as instead of the courtly we have the classical status given by time, tradition and critical opinion to the sonnet that markets its popularity today.

The elasticity that is derived from its hybridization makes the sonnet 'other language adaptable/friendly.' It is probably this particular reason that would lead to the growth and adaptability of sonnet in the twentieth century and the possibility that it might grow in the twenty- first will be. This elasticity is seen in the *Sijo*-Sonnet of Korea:

> "Like *haiku* the *sijo* is nature oriented. There are three lines, each averaging 14-16 syllables with a total of 44-46 syllables. Each line has a specific focus; the first line introduces a situation or problem, the second line includes a development, the third line resolves tensions created in the first line or resolves the problem in the first line. Again we must note that Oriental languages tend to be unstressed. Each piece must be self-explanatory, requiring no title. Below is an example:
>
> Time without pause, whirls around us in nature's hungry breath, today reaches into bowls of tomorrow with claws of yesterday, we are reborn minute by minute in the dance of our soliloquy."
>
> 2001 Chantaclair's Parlor (http: //www.chantaclair.com/Poeticforms.htm)

The *sijo*-sonnet might be an example to prove the point that there is a local verse form that hybridizes with the sonnet form. However, there are other forms which are oriental and are like wise compatible.

The Chinese Sonnet[35] and its rhythm intermingling with the *dun* and the *lüshi* seems to have had a predecessor in Gerard Manley Hopkins's sprung rhythm, which he used for the sonnets asserting the spoken rhythms of English. Lloyd Haft alludes to him while discussing the Chinese Sonnet. He says:

> "As to our first question — what the Chinese sonnet is — perhaps we can best begin by reviewing our knowledge of what the non-Chinese sonnet is. One immediate result was that the time-honored forms of Classical Chinese poetry would no longer work, as they were based on the syllabic rhythms of the older language, often prescribing a fixed number of syllables per line. Modern Chinese poets responded to this problem by experimenting with European poetic forms, including the sonnet. One of

> the most famous modern Chinese poets, Bian Zhilin (1910 -), writes a sort of Chinese 'accentual' verse. In his translations from Shakespeare, for example, each line in Chinese can be divided into five syllable-groups (called in Chinese *dun* or 'pause-units'), corresponding to the five 'feet' in Shakespeare's line, though the overall number of syllables in the Chinese line varies considerably. By contrast, another famous Chinese translator of Shakespeare's sonnets, Liang Zongdai (1904-1983), maintains an equal number of syllables per line: twelve, reflecting his admiration for the French alexandrine as well as, undoubtedly, a throwback to the isosyllabic Classical Chinese tradition. Another leading Chinese poet who thinks in terms of *dun*, though not very fanatically, is China's leading woman poet, Zheng Min (1920-). That conversation was really the catalyst that decided me to study the Chinese sonnet in more depth. Zheng Min's 19-poem cycle is a veritable synopsis of the Chinese sonnet from its earliest days to the present. As I have discovered in the course of my research, the sonnet form is now enjoying a remarkable revival in Chinese poetry. In other words: the sonnet is now one of the most 'Chinese' poetic forms!" (http://www.iias.nl) (http://www.iias.nl/iiasn/newslet.html)

It seems to me that the g*aza*l-sonnet too is a form worth considering because perhaps to many the sonnet seems to be a variation of the gazal. According to Len Anderson there are American poets like Adrienne Rich and W. S. Merwin who have written *ghazals*.[36] *Ghazal* (pronounced "ghuzzle") is an Arabic word that means "talking to women" and was developed in Persia in the 10th century ACE from the Arabic verse form *qasida*. A traditional Ghazal consists of five to fifteen couplets, typically seven. [37] The seven couplet *ghazal* could perhaps be considered a sonnet. Elaborating on the style of the *ghazal* Anderson says: Each couplet should be a poem in itself, like a pearl in a necklace. There should not be continuous development of a subject from one couplet to the next through the poem. The refrain provides a link among the couplets, but they should be detachable, quotable, grammatical units. There should be an epigrammatic terseness, yet each couplet should be lyric and evocative. [38] Thus, this too is an interesting form when we consider that sonnets are sometimes written in couplets and the *ghazal* was about three centuries older than the sonnet, which is probably something that was not unknown to Giacomo da Lentino. A sonnet 'Leisure' by W. H. Davies[39] perhaps is a good example of what might be considered as a sonnet coming close to the *ghazal.*

It might seem puzzling as to how the sonnet was ushered in with its humble roots. It might have been shocking that the courtly poets used the vernacular Italian—actually a Sicilian dialect—to bring in the new kind of poetry. We have before us another side of history, which shows the sonnet

as courtly. This could likely be the alternative story that made it sell. Spiller mentions that *eloquentia* was the training that those skilled in issues of court had to master but in the vernacular this classicist rhetoric might have not sold except that the French Provençal poets were already a model and Lentino probably had used the canzone with its division to formulate what became the combination of the octave and the sestet. [40]

> "The stanza fell into two not necessarily equal parts, called fronte and *sirma,* each with its own musical phrase. Each of these might again break into two, but then the second half repeated the first: the *fronte* had two *pedes* (pes means 'a foot') and the sirma had two versus The major break between fronte and sirma was called the *dies* or *volta* ('turn') in Italian. The possible patterns, which would in Provençal be musically articulated, were thus:
>
> I a + I b : II - pes+pes+sirma
> I : II a + II b - fronte + versus + versus
> Ia+Ib:IIa+IIb - pes + pes + versus + versus
> and the simplest, not much used ,
> I : II - fronte + sirma
>
> The fourteen-line sonnet, as da Lentino invented it, breaks the same way:
>
> I a + I b : II - 4lines+4+6
> I : II a + II b - 8 lines + 3 + 3
> Ia+Ib:IIa+IIb - 4 lines + 4 + 3 + 3
> I : II - 8 lines + 6.
>
> What was a musical framework in Provençal becomes a syntactical structure in Italian, and has determined the parameters of the sonnet from the thirteenth century to the present day. We cannot prove this debt, but no contemporary poetic form exists which is closer to the sonnet than the canzone stanza. Da Lentino wrote several *canzoi,* and it is interesting that none of them use a fourteen-line sonnet scheme as a stanza; in particular, no *fronte* has eight lines rhyming ABAB ABAB. If da Lentino's choice was deliberate, what better way to signal that the sonnet was not a wandering *canzone*- stanza than by giving in a *fronte* that actually appears in no *canzone*, but which recalls a very common one—twenty-two extant *canzoi* begin with a four-line f*ronte* rhyming AB AB." *Development of the Sonnet: An Introduction* by M. R. G. Spiller (New Y: Routledge) 1992, 16.

It follows from this, the gloss that this kind of courtly usage gave to the sonnet, marketed it with a courtly stamp. At the same time it subverted the hierarchy that a courtly form would stand for by using the local folk forms and the vernacular. The courtly gloss probably still markets it today as it seeks parity with the courtly medieval romances. These local forms, the *strambotto*[41] and the *zajal*, might not have been recognized as such as it seems that the sonnet looked like a variation on the *canzone* as mentioned

above. Whether or not Lentino was conscious of the politics of language he was employing, as Spiller seems to assert,[42] it was perhaps unavoidably present. It seems to me that when Dante named his work *de Vulgari Eloquentia* (1305?) he was aware that a subversion of the tradition was taking place and a new literature was on its way. This speaks volumes for Dante as a scholar-poet-theoretician because he could see value in a form even though it originated from the forms of the common people and though he himself looked at it as aesthetically third in order.[43] Dante having been tormented himself by politics[44] seems also to have been aware of the politics that language and form played in the history of a literature. The vernacular was used as a harbinger of a new form and elevating the vernacular to a worthy form of poetry and Dante's title itself is proof of the same. However, the sonnet also had its Latin adherents. In fact Petrarch himself makes an attempt to write sonnets in Latin, which made it an interesting form that existed in the languages of the imperial master and the native subject at the same time. Ignacio Navarrete says:

> "Here, in the context of vernacular poetry, Petrarch abandons the combination of piety and independence with which he had characterized imitation of the classical authors. Instead, predecessors become dangerous and imitation an unavoidable snare for the unwary poet. In contrast to his earlier admission of casually reading minor authors and studying the major ones until they became part of him, he now denies ever being an imitator, and where similarity to a model was earlier explained on a genetic basis, Petrarch now resorts to the mimetic imitation of a similar reality, or even happenstance, to account for the resemblance of his works to Dante's.
>
> In the same letter Petrarch also emphasizes his turn to Latin and away from the vernacular, attempting to elevate himself above Dante, who had followed just the opposite path in his career. Dismissing the notion that he is envious of Dante's popularity, Petrarch becomes shrill and unconvincing: "How can someone who does not envy Virgil envy anyone else, unless perhaps I envied him the applause and raucous acclaim of the fullers or tavern keepers or woolworkers who offend the ones they wish to praise, whom I, like Virgil and Homer, delight in doing without? I fully realize how little the esteem of the ignorant multitude carries weight with learned men" (3. 2056). Forgetting his republican principles, Petrarch here resorts to the tropes of *vituperatio*, portraying himself as a literary aristocrat appealing even in the vernacular to the more cultivated tastes of those who can appreciate Virgil and Homer (which is to say few indeed, as Petrarch himself probably did not know Greek). This letter, written at roughly the same time as his letters on imitation, gives us a very different image of Petrarch, struggling not with the ancients but with the living legacy of a more recent poet. The transparent defenses against Dante reveal the identity of his true poetic father and force Petrarch to employ

> every sort of reproach in his rhetorical warehouse." *Orphans of Petrarch: Poetry and Theory in the Spanish Renaissance.* (Berkeley: University of California Press) 1994, 13-4. http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft30000518/

One has to remember that the relationship of Latin to Italian dialects is something that probably no two languages share, at least today. This relationship seems much closer than any classical language has to those it has influenced. Sometimes these are mythified as originating from the classical language. An example for this is Sanskrit and Modern Indian Languages, which do not really imply that they are derivative, but it is locally (not scientifically) believed that they originate from Sanskrit. With Latin, the Greek influence and the existence of vernaculars growing along with Latin would make such claims difficult. Interestingly the sonnet writers would write both in Italian and Latin proving much of what I want to say. I think it is also important to remember that there was the Latin Vulgate as well, which was used by the clergy and by scholars like Thomas Aquinas. This was not classical Latin, but had its space somewhere between the classical and the vernacular.

It is an intriguing fact that the sonnet's survival today is in the languages not only of the subjects but of the subjects' subjects, or the vernacular's vernacular. The Bangla, Gujarati, and the Marathi sonnets could be considered as excellent examples to validate the aforesaid statement. At one time these were languages which were considered vernaculars to the Sanskrit and the English languages. That today they are considered modern Indian languages perhaps proves Oppenheimer's thesis that the sonnet and the birth of the modern mind have a lot to share. India itself has been built on a modern political paradigm, and the languages are considered modern Indian languages, thus the notion of having a modern mind and using the sonnet should be considered. However, whether Oppenheimer considers this the modern mind is still a question as the post-colonial is perhaps missing in his world that creates the modern mind. I think it is also important to note that there were those who wrote a sonnet in Latin hexameters asserting the imperial prerogative of a classical language. John Fuller says:

> "A sonnet could be written in Latin hexameters (there is one by Stephen Aelieus of 1535) but that kind of rhythm is crippling. The flexibilities of the iambic pentameter tradition are more than adequate, given the sonnet's prosodic structure. Nor is there very much left to do with this structure that has permanent significance for the form." *The Sonnet* (London: Methuen) 1972, 35.

From all that I have gathered about the genesis of this complex form which has as the veneer, the structure of the canzone and the probable *strambotto* and *zajal* as deeper forms, it appears to me that the likeness to the canzone and courtly form established the sonnet in Europe as an acceptable form and the *strambotto-zajal* combine made for the hybrid that was adaptable to a number of different languages and cultures. The intricacy of form with these three known ancestral forms and the subsequent innovations with argumentation and division, as far as the content was concerned, further adds complexity to this form. To a twentieth and twenty-first century world that probably accepts the Petrarchan as the sonnet form, this history unmasks the seeming simplicity of its acceptability. Contrary to the exalted status of the Petrarchan sonnet lies the fact that there was a lot of variety before Petrarch established himself as a poet or the form of the sonnet as we know it today.

I have attempted to make a short survey of what others have to say about the form and the processes that were involved in changing it. Don Paterson makes a mention of the classical form of the sonnet saying:

> "Guittone d'Arezzo (1230-94) was the first to use what we now think of as the classical Italian form of the sonnet, dividing its fourteen lines into two stanzas, rhymed ABBAABBA CDCDCD. Dante (1265-1321) and Petrarch (1304-74) brought it to an early perfection in the sonnet-cycles *Vita Nuova* and *Canzoniere* respectively, and established an early tradition for its subject matter – love. The sonnet has almost become synonymous with the love poem in the popular imagination; but things were never this straightforward, even early in the form's history." (London: Faber) 1999, xi.

Spiller commenting on Petrarch says:

> "In genealogical terms, he is the fourth generation of sonneteers: Giacomo da Lentino and his fellows invent the form about 1235, and establish its structure and principles, giving it a courtly and rather abstracted voice of learned pleading; they are followed by Guitonne d'Arezzo and his disciples, writing in the troubled emergence of the central and northern Italian city-states in the mid-century, who bring the sonnet closer to the daily life of the piazza, and speak of all the multifarious concerns of the citizens, from the bawdy of backstreet girls to the drums of war, with a particular emphasis, because of Guitonne's own powerful voice, upon practical morality and virtue. Then, when Guittone had still many years left of his long life (he died in 1294), another group of poets arose, self-consciously aiming in a different direction from the Guittonians, and proclaiming themselves writers in 'a sweet new style' . It is these writers of the *dolce stil nuovo* who gave the sonnet its musicality, a generation before Petrarch: they made it sing." (NY: Routledge) 1992, 28.

I find it interesting that in the early days of the sonnet there was the hand of Dante and the *stil novists* in adding to what was the courtly tradition of the sonnet form. The notion that the sonnet was a love lyric owes a lot to Dante and his tradition. A. S. Ash in introduction to *Dante and his Circle with the Vita Nuova:*

> "Dante's treatment of love deserves special comment. Kenneth Clark says that courtly love, the chivalrous code of a man's submission to an unapproachable woman, "was entirely unknown to antiquity. . . this would have seemed to the Romans or to the Vikings not only absurd but unbelievable. " Where did such an idea come from? Dante's ideal of love appears to owe no more than a patina of holiness to mairolatry, worship of the mother of Jesus. The short answer is Provence; Dante knew the Provençal poets Arnaut Daniel, Bertran de Born, Giraut de Bornelh, Folquet of Marseilles and the Italian troubadour Sardello well enough to include them in his Commedia. These were only a few of the four hundred known troubadours who spread the ideal of courtly love." (Santa Barbara: Bandanna) 1993, 14-5.

Dante had the thematic division of his sonnets into two parts and this was followed by Petrarch and a number of others. Significantly the *volta* or turn at the ninth line gave architectural space for an antagonist voice to be incorporated into the sonnet. However, this was just the beginning of more complexity within the sonnet. Dante in *New Life* explains his art:

> "This sonnet is divided into two parts. In the first part I give a greeting and ask for a reply. In the second part I say what it is that needs a reply. The second part begins: Already the third hour." (London: Hesperus) 2003, 6.

In other places Dante speaks of the subdivisions of the sonnet in the same text, for example, he says of another sonnet: "This sonnet can be divided into four parts. . . " (London: Hesperus) 2003, 20. Besides from Dante's time the *donna angelicata* probably became a part of the tradition of sonneteering. Spiller draws attention to the change in the sonnet:

> "Now, the sonnet is too short to be a philosophical instrument – for that the *canzone* was reserved – but its smaller space proved ideal for one kind of experience that, for the *stilnovisti*, was emotionally and spiritually crucial: the salute, the Lady's greeting. The word salute, the ordinary term for a greeting, carries, etymologically the sense of 'salvation'. Now, if the Lady mediates the radiance of God to her admirer, then when she acknowledges him, with a word or even a glance she gives salute in two senses: she greets and saves in one moment." (New York: Routledge) 1992, 30.