

SYMMETRY IN POETRY

**‘PROPORTION’ IN
ELIZABETHAN POETRY AND MUSIC**

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Abstract: *In this historically oriented essay I discuss the use of 'symmetry', 'proportion' and related terms in the major critical writings of the Elizabethan period in England. These terms oscillate between a very abstract meaning which, in the Humanist context, shows a survival of ancient and medieval, 'quadrival', notions, with cosmological, mathematical and theological implications, and more specific meanings in relation to poetry and music. There they refer to forms of poetical and more narrowly defined metrical structure, in most cases to quantitative meter, which at the time was also applied to music. These contemporary Humanist conceptions of 'symmetry' and 'proportion' existed side by side with emerging more realistic and rational approaches which radically put into question their validity from a 'trivial' perspective.*

The subject of this paper is the Elizabethan period in England, i.e., the age of Shakespeare and Spenser and Sidney in poetry, in the eyes of many the culmination of English literature of all times; but it was also the age of William Byrd, John Dowland and Thomas Morley, the famous madrigalists, lutenists and song-writers, who again represented, in the eyes of many, the most productive period in the history of English music. It was culturally a fascinating time, and the intense cultural activity was based on the newly achieved self-confidence of the nation, mainly due to the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. It was politically a stable society with a strong monarchy and a refined social order, clearly stratified, a highly structured 'body politic' and based on the underlying concept of 'degree', as expressed by Ulysses in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* (I, 3, 75-137): 'degree' implies a principle of proper subordination, of social ranking, of a proper balance in society, everything being in harmony and at its proper place within a highly organized structural frame.

A popular and influential description of this typical Elizabethan situation can be found in E.M.W. Tillyard's short study called *The Elizabethan World Picture*, which first came out in 1943 (with numerous reprints), and although it has been criticised for being too sweeping in its assertion of a unified world picture of the time it still holds true in its basic tenets. The Elizabethan mind, according to Tillyard, was deeply impressed by the notion of order, and it was fascinated by the idea that order permeates the whole universe. A special feature of this sense of order in the universe is the idea of a correspondence among the various levels of creation, i.e. the idea of corresponding planes of order in the universe. The most important of these correspondences are seen to be vertically arranged and to exist among the macrocosm; the commonwealth, or body politic; man, or the microcosm; and the lower creation, including the arts. It is among these planes that the Elizabethans thought to find a network of equivalences and correspondences of structural relationship. We know, of course - and so does Tillyard - that this idea of correspondences and equivalences among planes of existence was not an Elizabethan invention but goes back to the Middle Ages and to antiquity. What we can observe, however, is the fact that the Elizabethans acquired a new attitude to these correspondences. On the one hand, they intensely shared the strong medieval desire for order but, on the other hand, they were far more aware of the complexity of this world and the "fierce variety of real life", as stated in Tillyard's fine phrase (*ibid.*: 107). As a consequence, Elizabethan attitudes became more ambivalent and wavered between an older, quasi-mathematical view of the universe, on the one hand, and a metaphorical one, on the other, which saw only resemblances, and no longer true equivalences, among the corresponding planes. This reduction to a merely metaphorical interpretation of the structural coordination among the planes, of course, undermined the whole conception of a harmonical order in the universe and ultimately led on to modern, more 'enlightened' views of the question. Thus we can see that the Elizabethan period - and this, I think, is, in fact, one of its great strengths - was an intensely transitional period with a fascinating juxtaposition of highly divergent views ranging from late medieval to early modern conceptions. And it will be of interest, I hope, to look at the consequences of this situation for our understanding of contemporary notions of order.

The terms Elizabethans were likely to use for their conceptions of that universal order were in no way rigidly defined, and there was certainly no consistency in applying specific terms for specific aspects of that order. What we find most frequently are the terms 'symmetry' and 'proportion', along with 'harmony', 'rhythm', 'number' or 'numerosity'. It would be possible to give many examples of the very general use of these terms in Elizabethan writing, but I shall initially quote only from two texts which are fairly representative. One is by Thomas Campion, who was a poet and musician (as well as a medical doctor); in fact, he is one of the rare cases we find in all Western history of a true 'Doppelbegabung' in the fields of both music and poetry. In his controversial *Observations in the Art of English Poesie* of 1602 we find the well-known phrase: "The world is made by Symmetry and proportion" (Smith, G., ed., 1971: II, 329), and this succinctly expresses one of the dearly held commonplaces of the time. We will come back to Campion. The other quotation is from George Herbert, usually grouped with the so-called 'Metaphysical poets' in the tradition of John Donne and thus writing in the later phase of the period. It is therefore even more interesting to note that he expresses the commonplace without any hesitation and shows no doubts about its validity, quite in contrast to John Donne's scepticism, as will be shown later. Herbert writes in his poem called "Man" (from *The Temple*, 1633):

Man is all symmetric,
Full of proportions, one limbe to another,
And all to all the world besides:
Each part may call the furthest, brother:
For head with foot hath private amitie,
And both with moons and tides. (ll. 13-18)
(Hutchinson, ed., 1953 [1941]: 91)

This is a beautiful description - worthy to be the poetic motto of an International Society for the Interdisciplinary Study of Symmetry -, and it expresses very vividly the idea of a universal interconnectedness of things, the 'brotherhood' of all elements in the universe, and man being the centre of it, closely linked with the cosmos ("moons") and the natural world ("tides"). The terms used for this orderly interrelationship among all elements in the universe are again "symmetry" and "proportion".

I have already pointed out that such a faithful description of the commonplace is rather surprising so late in the period, and even more so from a Metaphysical poet; consequently, I should give an example of the sceptical view which arose at the time and questioned the validity of this world picture. Not surprisingly it comes from John Donne, that arch-critic, who was highly perplexed by the new scientific discoveries in astronomy and other fields and who is a main representative of the new spirit which called into doubt the solidity and stability of the Elizabethan cosmology described before. I quote from his poem called "An Anatomy of the World. The First Anniversary" (1611), from the section called "Disformity of parts", and we can again observe that the central concept Donne uses is that of 'proportion', although he is now arguing against its validity.

For the world's beauty is decayed, or gone,
 Beauty, that's colour, and proportion.
 We think the heavens enjoy their spherical,
 Their round proportion embracing all.
 But yet their various and perplexed course,
 Observed in divers ages, doth enforce
 Men to find out so many eccentric parts,
 Such divers down-right lines, such overthwarts,
 As disproportion that pure form. It tears
 The firmament in eight and forty shares,
 And in these constellations then arise
 New stars, and old do vanish from our eyes. (ll. 249-60)
 (Smith, A.J., ed., 1971: 277)

In this poem the beauty of the world is associated with the idea of proportion, which is conceived in terms of a purity of form manifesting itself in roundness, in a spherical shape (the heavens' "round proportion embracing all"). But the beauty of this proportion is "decayed", or even "gone", and this idea is visualized by vertical and horizontal lines ("down-right lines" and "overthwarts") which destroy the pure roundness of form, and by the image of the 48 Ptolemean constellations of stars falling apart. What destroys the beauty of the cosmos is the experience of variety, diversity, eccentricity and novelty, i.e., essentially the experience of change, and the introduction of this idea of change in the universe implies the introduction of disproportion, as the opposite of its immutability which is now seen to be lost. John Donne was deeply unsettled by the implications and consequences of the Copernican revolution.

It is a well-known fact that from antiquity the notion of cosmic order, as here put into question by Donne, was closely associated with the idea of music. The Pythagorean conception of a celestial harmony and music of the spheres found its popular early medieval expression in Boethius' phrase of the "harmonia mundana", which had its equivalences - based on the idea of the corresponding planes - in the "musica humana", the harmony in human life, particularly the harmony of mind and body, and the "harmonia instrumentis constituta", i.e., in instrumental music. In the medieval tradition, as a consequence, the most important aspect of music was what was called "musica speculativa", the cosmological aspect of music and its implications for human life. Instrumental music - also called "musica practica" - was of secondary importance only and not considered a serious form of study. Music, as a discipline, was part of the septem artes liberales but, of course, a part of the quadrivium, i.e. associated with astronomy, arithmetic and geometry. That this speculative view of music was still present in the minds of Elizabethans can be seen, e.g., in the phrase which Sir Philip Sidney, the great English courtier, poet and critic, uses in the final paragraph of his influential *Apologie for Poetrie* of c. 1583 (publ.1595), where he talks about the "Plannet-like Musick of Poetrie" (Smith, G., ed., 1971 [1904]: I, 206). And even as late as 1643 we find Sir Thomas Browne as a staunch defender of the old Pythagorean notion when he says, in *Religio Medici* (part II, sect. 9):

For there is a musick where ever there is a harmony, order or proportion; and thus far we may maintain the musick of the Sphears: for those well-ordered motions, and regular paces, though they give no sound unto the ear, yet to the understanding they strike a note most full of harmony. Whosoever is harmonically composed, delights in harmony; which makes me much distrust the symmetry of those heads which declaim against all Church-Musick.

(Sayle, ed., 1927: I, 100f.)

This is not only a classical statement of 'speculative' vs. 'practical' music, but shows, above all, a very interesting use of the word "symmetry". What Browne seems to say is that people who cannot appreciate the harmony, or symmetry, of church music have no symmetry of their heads, which can either be understood seriously, in the sense that these people lack harmony in their minds, or satirically, in the sense that they lack intelligence.

We can see that in these statements music and poetry are closely linked; in fact, they were seen, in the framework of 'speculative music', as being synonymous. Thomas Campion quotes Terence's phrase that poets are those, "*artem qui tractant musicam*, confounding Musick and Poesy together" (Smith, G., ed., 1971 [1904]: II, 329); so poets practice the art of music. The common denominator of the two disciplines was held to be the fact that they both constitute the language, as it were, in which God created the universe. Thus Thomas Browne calls God "the first Composer" (*Religio Medici*; Sayle, 1927: I, 101), and Abraham Cowley, another notorious Metaphysical poet, talks about the creation as "*God's Poem*" (*Davideis* I, l. 451; Grosart, ed., 1967 [1881]: II, 49). The common element of poetry and music is seen in their numerosity which they share with the universe. So Cowley says that the original chaos consisted of "ungovern'd Parts [...] / 'Till they to *Number* and fixt Rules were brought / By the eternal Mind's Poetick Thought" (ll. 453, 455f.; *ibid.*). Similarly Thomas Campion in one of his songs, to which I shall refer later, addresses "th'omnipotent Creator, / Author of number that hath all the world in / Harmony framed" ("Come let us sound", ll. 2f., *A Booke Of Ayres*, 1601).

All these quotations demonstrate that far into the 17th century ideas of harmony, symmetry and proportion were current which closely linked music and poetry with the organization of the universe on a speculative, numerological basis. However, there is also enough evidence, as I was trying to demonstrate by referring to John Donne's poetry, that this harmonical world picture was also radically put into question by some leading intellectuals of the time. What we experience, in the phrase John Hollander used as the title of his influential book, is *The Untuning of the Sky* (1961).

As a consequence, we can observe two rivalling conceptions of art, music and poetry at the time, the first of which is the quadrivial understanding of the arts in speculative, numerical terms. The second, influenced by Humanist developments, takes a practical attitude and basically attributes rhetorical functions to the arts. In other words, music and poetry become associated with the trivium of the *septem artes liberales*, i.e., with

grammar, rhetoric and dialectic. We should keep in mind this distinction between poetry and music understood in a quadrivial, as in contrast to a trivial, context; we will come back to it in the final section of this talk.

So far I have discussed the concept of proportion and its synonyms on a very high level of abstraction, as we find it in the philosophically and art ideologically oriented passages of Elizabethan texts. What we can observe, however, is its appearance also in contexts which do not imply such a highly abstract meaning of the term, and it is a challenge to critics of Elizabethan texts to verify on which level of abstraction the term is used in a specific passage. For it is a characteristic feature of these texts that there is, within short passages, a very smooth transition from the very general to the very specific. An explanation for this very interesting fact can be found in the conception of the corresponding planes referred to earlier: As Elizabethans believed in some form of equivalence of structural principles among the various levels of existence, it was easy and natural for them to move freely among those levels.

One interesting case of a less abstract, though still fairly general, use of the term proportion can be found in the most extensive British poetological essay of the period, in Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie* of 1589. This work, which is the finest critical study of the period after Sidney's *Apologie*, is conceived in three books comprising altogether seventy-four brief chapters. The second book is called "Of Proportion Poetical" and contains eighteen chapters, the first of which is definitional. As it is a typical case of the strange way Elizabethans used to argue I will quote from it more extensively. Puttenham starts off by saying (Smith, G., ed., 1971 [1904]: II, 67f.):

It is said by such as professe the Mathematicall sciences, that all things stand by proportion, and that without it nothing could stand to be good or beautiful.

(This is the Pythagorean position referred to before.)

The Doctors of our Theologie to the same effect, but in other termes, say that God made the world by number, measure, and weight; some for weight say tune, and peradventure better.

(This is the creation myth already mentioned; we will later come back to the question of 'weight' and 'tune'.)

For weight is a kind of measure or of much conueniencie with it [...]. Hereupon it seemeth the Philosopher gathers a triple proportion, to wit, the Arithmetical, the Geometricall, and the Muscicall.

(This is a reference to the quadrivial context of music and proportion.)

And by one of these three is euery other proportion guided of the things that haue conueniencie by relation [...].

(This again implies the idea of correspondence and equivalence. Puttenham gives a few examples of these relations and continues:)

Of all which we leaue to speake, returning to our poetick proportion,
(of which he has not yet spoken!)

which holdeth of the Musical, because, as we sayd before,
(That was much earlier, in the first book.)

Poesie is a skill to speake & write harmonically: and verses or rime be a kind of
Musickall vtterance, by reason of a certaine congruities in sounds pleasing the eare,
(This is the Terentian commonplace referred to before, of poetry being a form of
music.)

though not perchance so exquisitely as the harmonickall concents of the artificial
Musicke, consisting in strained tunes, as is the vocall Musike, or that of melodious
instruments, as Lutes, Harpes, Regals, Records, and such like.

(What Puttenham is saying here is that vocal and instrumental music are more pleasing
in sound than poetry is. It is interesting to note that he is now suddenly talking about
music from a practical, 'trivial' perspective - he refers to actual sounds - and no longer
from the 'quadrivial' viewpoint which has so far prevailed in this definitional chapter.
The chapter comes to an unexpectedly quick ending by Puttenham saying:)

And this our proportion Poetickall resteth in fivie points: Staffe, Measure, Concord,
Scituation, and Figure, all of which shall be spoken of in their places.

All of these are aspects of metrics and prosody which turn out to be the - essentially
quite traditional - subject matter of the rest of this Second Book of Puttenham's *Arte*.

What this fairly detailed discussion of the initial chapter to Puttenham's metrics can
demonstrate, I hope, is the fact that Elizabethans had little critical originality and their
heads full of commonplaces which they found it difficult to put into logical
relationships. I also hope that the passage will demonstrate the difficulties which we
find as modern critics to disentangle that typically Elizabethan knot of clichés and to
talk sensibly about the views of the time.

Thus the remaining 17 chapters of Puttenham's Second Book show that what he really
means by 'proportion poetickall' is metrics and prosody, and so he discusses rime, stanza
forms, and the structure of verse, including the problem of the adaptation of classical
quantitative meter for English poetry, which stimulated the most heated critical debate
of the time and to which I will come back. A very interesting chapter of the book is
devoted to what Puttenham calls "Proportion in Figure" and where he discusses, and
gives examples of, poems whose "ocular representation" appears in such a shape that
the verses are "by good symmetrie reduced into certaine Geometricall figures" (ibid.:
II, 95). Thus we find circular, triangular, cylindrical poems, and it is interesting to note
that Puttenham here discusses an aspect of poetry which is rarely discussed at all, and
never in the context of metrics, but which fits in very well under his overall heading of

'proportion poetical.' We can see that his use of the term is fairly general and that, in this respect, he is not restricting himself to traditional metrics only. But at the same time he is not using it in such a universal, abstract and philosophical sense as we have found it used before.

I quoted from Puttenham's first chapter of his Second Book in order to demonstrate the typically Elizabethan jumping among levels of abstraction which is due to their thinking in terms of correspondences. Another fine example, which equally shows the ambiguous use of the term proportion in contemporary writing, is the first chapter of Thomas Campion's *Observations in the Art of English Poesie*. I have already quoted from this essay, the well-known phrase, "The world is made by Symmetry and proportion" (Smith, G., ed., 1971 [1904]: II, 329), as an example of the cosmological aspect of 'proportion' in Elizabethan thinking. Campion subsequently quotes Terence, as already indicated, saying that poets practice the art of music. He then goes on and asks:

What musick can there be where there is no proportion obserued? Learning first flourished in *Greece*; from thence it was deriued vnto the *Romaines*, both diligent obseruers of the number and quantity of sillables, not in their verses only but likewise in their prose.

(Smith, G., ed., 1971 [1904]: II, 329)

We again observe that smooth transition from a very abstract to a far more specific use of the word proportion, namely, what it obviously means in this last quotation is the structuring of verse on the basis of quantitative principles, as was the Greek and Roman practice. That this is the sense Campion had in mind is emphasised by a passage only a few lines before where he postulates that "in a verse the numeration of the sillables is not so much to be obserued as their waite and due proportion" (ibid.). And, again, the ensuing chapters of Campion's essay - as of Puttenham's - bear out the implied meaning of the term as it is used in the introductory chapter: namely, Campion's *Observations* turn out to be the strongest contemporary defense of the use of quantitative principles in English poetry and music against the use of rhyme, which was seen as a rude and barbaric poetic device. So there can be no doubt that for Campion the word 'proportion' basically implied the application of quantitative principles in actual music and poetry, but he was Elizabethan enough to see reflected in those actual sounds more universal structural principles.

Campion applied his theoretical views to his musical practice, and we find evidence in his songs which demonstrate his conceptions of 'proportion' based on quantitative principles. The concluding song, "Come let us sound with melody the praises", of his *Booke Of Ayres* of 1601 is the only song, however, which strictly follows a quantitative pattern, namely the pattern of the Sapphic stanza form. This means that in the music there are only two time values - long and short - and that their distribution speaks out, as it were, the Sapphic line. Campion also makes sure that not the notes only, but the syllables of the text as well, precisely follow the pattern of longs and shorts. This

congruence of music and poetry on the rhythmical level was his idea (but not his only, it was a common idea) of the identity of the two art forms. The text of "Come let us sound" is equally suited to this form of presentation as it praises - as I have already quoted - "th'omnipotent Creator, / Author of number that hath all the world in / Harmony framed". (See the example on the following page.)

This is the kind of music that most Elizabethans would have accepted as observing 'proportion'. The basic principle governing such a view is that there should be, in a 'proportionable' use of music and poetry, a clear structuring of time, based on its durational aspect; i.e., the underlying idea was that time should be filled out in an orderly pattern. This view that proportion implies the structuring of the duration of time finds its expression also in an interesting passage from William Webbe's *Discourse of English Poetrie* (1586) where the author maintains that "meeter or verse" should be "proportionable to the tune whereby it is to be reade or measured" (Smith, G., ed., 1971 [1904]: I, 268). This statement reminds one of the use of the word 'tune' in the Puttenham passage which we have looked at. In this case, 'tune' does not mean 'melody', as we would expect from modern usage, but Webbe makes sure in a later passage that he is talking about "tune or stroke" (his words) (ibid.: I, 272). So what he refers to is a form of measuring, and we can detect a similarity between what Webbe says and what Campion says when he talks about "waite and due proportion", as we have seen. Whether this form of measuring the duration of time is exclusively the form we know from the classical quantitative patterns is an interesting question to ask because the notion of 'stroke' implies regularly recurring isochrony - equal lengths of time stretches - which we do not find in the quantitative patterns. Thomas Morley, famous madrigalist of the period and influential printer, defines 'stroke' as "*a successiue motion of the hand, directing the quantitie of euery note & rest in the song with equall measure*" (Morley, 1969 [1597]: 9). So we are led to believe that 'proportion' - on top of referring to the quantitative patterns, as we find it in "Come let us sound" - also referred to the stroke of regular timing as it was practiced in the *tactus* - this is what Morley in fact describes in his definition - i.e., a form of measuring time which is a forerunner of modern bar measuring but distinguishes itself from it by its durational rather than accentual character. (For a detailed discussion see Bernhart, 1993, esp. Ch. V.)

Thomas Campion, *A Booke Of Ayres* (1601), Nr. 21;
aus: Fellowes-Dart, Hrsgg. (1965 ff.), Bd. 4 & 13 (1969).

21. COME LET US SOUND WITH MELODY

- . - - - . . - . - - (3x)

- . . - -

VOICE

First system of the musical score. It features a vocal line (VOICE) and a lute accompaniment (LUTE). The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature (C). The lyrics are "Come let us sound with me - lo - dy the prai -". The lute part consists of two staves, treble and bass, with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. The music is in a simple, homophonic style typical of early 17th-century lute songs.

LUTE

Second system of the musical score. The vocal line continues with the lyrics "- ses Of the kings' King, th'om - al - po - tent Cre - a - tor,". The lute accompaniment continues with the same two-staff format. The melody is simple and the accompaniment provides a steady harmonic foundation.

Third system of the musical score. The vocal line concludes with the lyrics "Au - thor of num - ber that halb all the world in har - mo - ny fram - ed." The lute accompaniment continues with the same two-staff format. The piece ends with a final chord.

Come let us sound with melody the praise
 Of the kings' King, th'omnipotent Creator,
 Author of number that hath all the world in
 Harmony framed.

Heav'n is his throne perpetually shining.
 His divine power and glory thence the thunders.
 One in all, and all still in one abiding,
 Both Father and Son.

O sacred Sprite, invisible, eternal,
 Everywhere, yet unlimited, that all things
 Canst in one moment penetrate, revive me,
 O holy Spirit.

Rescue, O rescue me from earthly darkness.
 Banish hence all these elemental objects.
 Guide my soul that thirsts to the lively fountain
 Of thy divineness.

To round off this discussion I will come back to our earlier observation that the Elizabethan age was of a strongly transitional character and that it exhibits a juxtaposition of competing art ideological positions. We have observed two camps in this dispute, one of the traditionalists and idealists who adhered to the venerable conceptions of Pythagorean and Platonic origin in their various forms and representing the established Elizabethan world view of an ordered universe; and the other of a far more progressive persuasion which was affected by scientific discoveries of the age and a more rationalist approach to the issues involved, including scepticism and a decidedly realistic and empirical mind, alongside with notions of 'naturalness' and practicality as against notions of 'artificiality' and speculation in the other camp.

We know that this dispute found its most tangible expression in the controversy over rhyme versus quantity in poetry and music, and what I am trying to say is that this dispute was closely linked with the notion of 'proportion', which was held to be most directly reflected in quantitative verse. We find a number of references in the critical texts of the period which demonstrate the dispute and thus connect it with the concept of 'proportion.' In Campion, for instance, we find the following sentence:

The eare is a rationall sence and a chiefe iudge of proportion; but in our kind of riming what proportion is there kept where there remains such a confused inequalitie of sillables?

(Smith, G., ed., 1971 [1904]: II, 330)

Thus, for Campion, rhymed texts show no internal structuring of the sequence of syllables and therefore lack 'art'; they demonstrate no awareness of the need to shape the line 'proportionably', and they are thus like prose.

As always, Sir Philip Sidney is the finest critic of the period, and so also with respect to this issue. He took a neutral position in the quantitative controversy and accepted both forms of verse - rhyme and quantity - but made a distinction, depending on the subject matter of the text, as to where they should be applied. This is the relevant passage from his *Apologie*:

[...] not speaking (table talke fashion or like men in a dreame) words as they chance-ably fall from the mouth, but peyzing each syllable of eache worde by iust proportion according to the dignitie of the subiect.

(Smith, G., ed., 1971 [1904]: I, 160)

Thus Sidney here distinguishes two forms of reading verse, one negligent, paying no attention to words and syllables, "table talke fashion", one could say, a form of verse delivery unconcerned about the signifier; and the other 'proportionable', "peyzing each syllable" ("peyzing" means 'weighing', and we remember Campion's use of the notion of 'weight'). Sidney considers this form of reading, which is signifier-oriented, observes syllable weights and thus shapes the verse line internally into a durational pattern, as apt for dignified subjects. Thus, according to Sidney, it is a matter of decorum where poets and musicians should apply 'proportion' and where not. Dignified subjects expect a 'quadrivial' form of delivery, lower subjects a 'trivial' one. The first is quantitative, observing 'proportion', the other is accentual, observing nothing, only following the natural 'inclination' of the words (as was the most common contemporary expression for 'accent').

I will try to give a demonstration of these two different forms of verse delivery, which, at the time, were obviously practiced side by side, by reading a Sidney poem in two different ways. It is Nr. 12 from the *Old Arcadia*, one of Sidney's experiments in quantitative meter. It again follows the pattern of the Sapphic stanza, and the subject is a praise of immortal beauty beyond death and of the power of love to ensure eternal life for the soul. For this truly sublime topic Sidney chose a dignified verse form whose quantitative pattern I will now try to realize in my first reading of the text.

- . - . - . - . - . (3 times)
- . - . - .

If mine eyes can speake to doo harty errande,
Or mine eyes' language she doo hap to judge of,
So that eyes' message be of her receaved,
Hope we do live yet.

[...]

Yet dying, and dead, doo we sing her honour;
So become our tombes monuments of her praise;
So becomes our losse the triumph of her gayne;
Hers be the glory.

If the senceless spheares doo yet hold a musique,
 If the Swanne's sweet voice be not heard, but at death,
 If the mute timber when it hath the life lost,
 Yeldeth a lute's tune,

Are then humane mindes priviledg'd so meanly,
 As that hatefull death can abridge them of powre,
 [...]?

(Ringler, ed., 1962: 30f.)

It would take the craftsmanship of a trained actor, which I am not, to perform this poem in the true spirit of its authorial intention. But my reading may have given you an idea of what a 'proportionable' reading in Elizabethan terms could have been like. My second reading will simply follow the word accents in a form of verse delivery which is now common practice but which, most likely from what we have heard, would have been considered inappropriate for the chosen subject by Elizabethan traditionalists. (For a more detailed discussion of these comparative readings see Bernhart, 1993: 296-299.)

It is a well-known fact of English literary history that the whole quantitative movement, and in particular Campion's condemnation of rhyme, was severely, and successfully, attacked by Samuel Daniel's *Defence of Ryme* of 1603. This meant the end of the 'hot' phase of Humanist poetology in England and also the end of the hot phase of 'proportionable' verse writing. The attack was launched in the spirit of the new realism and of 'naturalness' and - maybe most importantly - of a national English defense against foreign influences which many began to consider as a form of alienation from the roots. Thus actual poetry and music based on the contemporary idea of 'proportion' is rarely found after the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603. But the 'Elizabethan' conceptions of 'proportion' and its contemporary synonyms on a more abstract level lived on, far into the 17th century, as we have already noticed. It is a remarkable fact that only during the culmination period of the Elizabethan age, when it produced its most impressive and lasting works both in poetry and music, we also find attempts to realize materially, in actual texts, what generations of scholars had talked and speculated about in art ideological terms. This is a sign, I believe, of the extraordinary cultural strength of the period, but we have to realize and accept that it was only a historical episode which came to an end when more solid and pragmatic minds began to dominate the scene.

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