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SOUNDING OUT SHAKESPEARE: SONNET RHYMES IN ORIGINAL PRONUNCIATION

Abstract. Ninety-six of Shakespeare's sonnets contain rhymes which do not work in Modern English. The divergence cannot be explained by invoking a notion of visual rhyme, but only by recognizing the phonological changes that have taken place between Early Modern English and Modern English. The paper provides a complete account of all the affected line pairs and illustrates the fresh auditory aesthetic that results when the sonnets are read aloud in 'original pronunciation'. Not only rhyme is enhanced: new assonances emerge, and previously unnoticed homophones suggest new possibilities of wordplay. The approach also raises the question of the style in which the sonnets would have been spoken.

Keywords: Shakespeare, sonnets, rhyme, assonance, wordplay, original pronunciation, phonology, Early Modern English.

What is a linguist such as Ranko Bugarski to do, after a lifetime of achievement in linguistics and applied language studies? I suggest he settles down in an arm-chair with a nice glass of Serbian wine and revisits Shakespeare – in which case at some point he will encounter the sonnets. Being a linguist, he will not fail to notice that these poems present us with a problem. And, being a linguist, he will be unable to suppress the urge to solve it. This paper is therefore written to save him the bother – or, at least, as is normal in academic papers, to provide him with a solution to one problem while leaving him with another.

The problem is simply stated. A sonnet of the kind which developed during the Elizabethan period had a clear rhyme-scheme, with the alternate lines of three quatrains rhyming, and the whole concluded with a rhyming couplet. The structure is usually summarized as *ababcdcdefefgg*. Anyone reading Shakespeare's sonnets therefore feels a little discomfited by the fact that, in modern English, the rhymes often do not work. In a poem where rhyme is plainly the be-all and end-all of the genre, the clashing syllables inevitably diminish the aesthetic effect. The last ten lines of the last sonnet (154) illustrate the problem:

The fairest votary took up that fire,
Which many legions of true hearts had warmed,
And so the general of hot desire
Was sleeping by a virgin hand disarmed.
This brand she quenched in a cool well by,
Which from love's fire took heat perpetual,
Growing a bath and healthful remedy
For men diseased; but I, my mistress' thrall,
Came there for cure, and this by that I prove:
Love's fire heats water, water cools not love.

Four line-pairs do not rhyme in present-day British Received Pronunciation.

It is a frequent problem. There are 19 instances in the sonnets where *love* is made to rhyme with *prove*, *move*, and their derived forms. And when we look at the whole sequence, we find a remarkable 142 rhyme pairs that clash (13% of all lines). Moreover, these are found in 96 of the sonnets. In sum: only a third of the sonnets rhyme perfectly in modern English. And in 18 instances, it is the final couplet which fails to work, leaving a particularly bad taste in the ear.

There are three possible explanations. (1) Shakespeare was not as good a poet as we thought, especially when it comes to finding rhymes. (2) Shakespeare is making copious use of visual rhymes. (3) The pronunciation of certain words has changed between Early Modern English and today, so that these lines would have rhymed in Shakespeare's time. I disregard the first explanation, and am totally committed to the third. However, the second explanation needs some examination before eliminating it.

1. Visual rhyme

Might the discrepancies be explained by the notion of visual (orthographic) rhyme – words which end in syllables that have identical (or near-identical) spellings but where the pronunciations differ? Two such notions could be relevant. In an 'eye-rhyme' (or 'printer's rhyme', as it is sometimes called), the endings are homographic but there is nothing phonologically in common: *cough* and *though*. In a 'half-rhyme' (also sometimes called 'slant rhyme'), the two syllables do share some phonological properties: consonants, in such cases as *dish* and *cash*; vowels, in such cases as *saver* and *later*.

Certainly, as poetry became less an oral performance and more a private reading experience – a development which accompanied the availability of printed books and the rise of literacy in the sixteenth century – we might expect visual rhymes to be increasingly used as a poetic device. But from a linguistic point of view, this was unlikely to happen until a standardized spelling system had

developed. When spelling is inconsistent, regionally diverse, and idiosyncratic, as it was in Middle English (with as many as 52 spellings recorded for *might*, for example, in the *Oxford English Dictionary*), a predictable graphaesthetic effect is impossible. And although the process of spelling standardization was well underway in the 16th century, it was still a long way from achieving the stability that would be seen a century later. As John Hart put it in his influential *Orthographie* (1569, folio 2), English spelling shows 'such confusion and disorder, as it may be accounted rather a kind of ciphring'. And Richard Mulcaster, in his *Elementarie* (1582), affirms that it is 'a very necessarie labor to set the writing certaine, that the reading may be sure'. Word-endings, in particular, were variably spelled, notably the presence or absence of a final *e* (*again* vs *againne*), the alternation between apostrophe and *e* (*arm'd* vs *armed*), the use of *ie* or *y* (*busie* vs *busy*), and variation between double and single consonants (*royall* vs *royal*). We see many examples of variation even in a single line, as in *Henry IV Part 1* (1.2.5): 'thou has forgotten to demand that truely, which thou wouldest truly know'. This is not a climate in which we would expect visual rhymes to thrive.

'That the reading may be sure'. Poets, far more alert to the impact of their linguistic choices than the average language user, would hardly be likely to introduce a graphic effect when there was no guarantee that their readers would recognize it. And certainly not to the extent found in the sonnets. Given the importance attached to rhyme in this new genre, would anyone write a sonnet in which four of the seven line-pairs are eye-rhymes, as happens in sonnets 72 and 154? Or where there are three line-pairs anomalous (17, 61, 105, 116, 136)? A further 29 have two line-pairs affected. It is unlikely. Even if we allow that there may be the occasional eye-rhyme or half-rhyme, I agree with Helge Kökeritz, who says in his *Shakespeare's Pronunciation* (1953: 33), 'No magic formula exists by means of which we can single out the eye rhymes in Shakespeare'.

If visual rhymes were a regular device, we would expect to see contemporary writers discussing them. But there is no mention of them in Samuel Daniel's *A Defence of Ryme* (1603), for example. On the contrary, there is a wholly auditory perspective in his definition of rhyme: 'number and harmonie of words, consisting of an agreeing sound in the last silables of seuerall verses, giuing both to the Eare an Eccho of a delightfull report & to the Memorie a deepe impression of what is deliuered therein.' It is the ear, not the eye, that is the theme of 16th-century writers. George Puttenham in *The Arte of English Poesie* (1569) heads his Chapter 2.5 as follows: 'How the good maker will not wrench his word to helpe his rime, either by falsifying his accent, or by untrue orthographie.' The auditory effect is paramount: 'our maker must not be too licentious in his con-cords, but see that they go euen, iust and melodious in the eare'. If need be, 'it is

somewhat more tollerable to help the rime by false orthographie, then to leaue an vnpleasant dissonance to the eare'. And he concludes: 'a licentious maker is in truth but a bungler and not a Poet'.

Support for an auditory view also comes from some unlikely places. Benedick is a typical bungler. He is one of several lovers (such as Don Armado and Berowne) who make it clear that rhymes are prerequisite for romantic success, but he acknowledges that he himself is no good at them. 'I can find out no rhyme to "lady" but "baby" ... I was not born under a rhyming planet' (*Much Ado About Nothing*, 5.2.35). This is a half-rhyme, and his use of the example shows that he must have been aware of such phenomena as a poetic strategy; but the example also shows that he does not think of it as a very good strategy. If Benedick dismisses it in his love poem, it asks rather a lot to think of Shakespeare as welcoming it in his.

2. Phonological rhymes

Far more plausible is to take on board a phonological perspective, recognizing that the reason rhymes fail to work today is because the pronunciation system has changed since the 16th century. This principle was used at Shakespeare's Globe in 2004 and 2005, when the company presented *Romeo and Juliet* and *Troilus and Cressida* in 'original pronunciation' (OP), and it was used again in 2010, when the theatre company at the University of Kansas mounted a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Meier, 2010). These productions provided a novel and illuminating auditory experience, and introduced audiences to rhymes and puns which modern English totally obscures. The same thing happens when the sonnets are rendered in OP. In sonnet 154, the vowel of *warmed* echoes that of *disarmed*, *remedy* echoes *by*, the final syllable of *perpetual* is stressed and rhymes with *thrall*, and the vowel of *prove* is short and rhymes with *love*.

The evidence for OP has been described elsewhere (Kökeritz 1953; Crystal 2005, 2008) and needs only to be briefly summarized here. The spellings provide one clue. What is the evidence for *achieve* rhyming with *live* and *taste* rhyming with *last* (with a short /a/ vowel, as in northern British English)? The words are sometimes spelled *atchive* and *tast*. Puns provide more evidence. How do we know that *tongue* rhymed with *song*? Because of puns like *tongues* and *tongs* (e.g. in *Twelfth Night*, 1.3.96). But the most important source of information is in the writing of the orthoepists and grammarians, who often tell us which words rhyme and which do not. The writers do not always agree, illustrating differences in their temperaments and regional backgrounds, as well as the periods at which they were writing (1650 to 1750), but they nonetheless provide an account which shows what the possibilities were. For example, Ben Jonson, better known as a

playwright than as a grammarian, wrote an *English Grammar* in which he gives details about how letters should be pronounced. How do we know that *prove* rhymed with *love*? This is what he says about letter *O* in Chapter 4. 'It naturally soundeth ... In the short time more flat, and akin to *u*; as *cosen. dosen, mother, brother, love, prove*'. And in another section, he brings together *love, glove* and *move*.

This is not to deny, of course, that other pronunciations existed at the time. That is a normal experience, especially when people from very different linguistic backgrounds end up living near each other, as was the case in 16th-century London, which had seen a dramatic growth in population (reaching 400,000 by 1650). Thus, just as we find today two pronunciations of such words as *again* (rhyming with both *main* and *men*), *says* (rhyming with both *lays* and *Les*), *often* (with or without the 't'), *schedule* (with 'sh' or 'sk'), and hundreds more, so in 1600 we find alternative pronunciations for *gone* (rhyming with *alone* and *on*), the *-ly* ending on adverbs rhyming with *be* and *eye*, and so on. *Love* may actually have had a long vowel in some regional dialects, as suggested by John Hart (a Devonshire man) in 1570 (and think of the lengthening we sometimes hear from singers today, who croon 'I lurve you'). But the overriding impression from the orthoepists is that the vowel in *love* was short. It is an important point, because this word alone affects the reading of 19 sonnets, as these rhyme pairs illustrate: *love / prove* (9, 32, 39, 72, 117, 136, 151, 153, 154), *loved / proved* (116), *love / approve* (70, 147), *love / move* (47), *love / remove* (116), *beloved / removed* (25), *loving / approving* (142), *loving / moving* (26), *love thee / prove me* (26), *love her / approve her* (42).

Several other rhymes are illustrated several times in the sonnets, and a complete list is given in the Appendix to this paper. Each of the following sets illustrates a particular phonological change, with the Modern English value given first followed by the Early Modern English value. (Note that postvocalic /r/ was pronounced at this time.) The = symbol means 'has the vowel of'. The sonnet number in which the example occurs is shown in parentheses.

2.1. Vowel quality differences

- /ʌ/ > /ɒ/ *tongue* = *song* (17, 102) and *wrong* (89, 112, 139); *young* = *wrong* (19)
- /ɒ/ > /ɑ/ *was* = *glass* (5) and *pass* (49); *war* = *bar* (46); *wanting* = *granting* (87); *warmed* = *disarmed* (154)
- /ɜ/ > /ɛ/ *convertest* = *departest* (11); *convert* = *art* (14); *deserts* = *parts* (17); *desert* = *impart* (72)

- /i:/ > /ɛ:/ *ear* (8) and *appear* (80) = *bear*; *near* = *elsewhere* (61); *clear* (84) and *appear* (102) = *everywhere*; *dear* (110) and *near* (136) = *there*; *speak* = *break* (34); *defeated* = *created* (20); *defeat* = *great* (61); *key* = *survey* (52)
- /ɜ/ > /ɒ/ *worth* = *forth* (25, 38, 72, 103); *word* = *afford* (79); *words* = *affords* (85, 105)
- /ɑ:/ > /ɛ:/ *are* = *prepare* (13), *compare* (35), *care* (48, 112, 147) and *rare* (52)
- but *are* also had a pronunciation with /ɑ:/, so the alternative direction of change is possible
- /ʊ/ > /ʌ/ *fulness* = *dullness* (56)
- /i/ > /ɛ/ *privilege* = *edge* (95)
- /ɜ/ > /ɛ/ *herd* = *beard* (12); *were* = *bear* (13) and *near* (140)

2.2. Diphthong / pure vowel differences

- /eɪ/ > /a/ *waste* (30) and *haste* (123) = *past*; *taste* = *last* (90) (note that in these cases the vowel is /a/, not /ɑ:/), *grave* = *have* (81)
- /eɪ/ > /ɛ/ *greater* = *better* (119)
- /i/ > /ə/ *wind* = *find* (14, 51)
- /aʊ/ > /o:/ *brow* = *mow* (60)

2.3. Vowel quantity differences

- /i:/ > /ɛ/ *field* (2) and *steeled* (24) = *held*; *counterfeit* = *unset* (16) and *set* (53); *even* = *heaven* (28, 132); *least* = *possessed* (29); *feast* = *guest* (47); *fever* = *never* (119); *East* = *West* (132); *evil* = *devil* (144); *fiend* = *friend* (144) and *end* (145); *lease* = *excess* (146)
- /u:/ > /ʌ/ *noon* = *son* (7); *tomb* = *come* (17) and *dumb* (83, 101); *brood* = *blood* (19); *doom* = *come* (107, 116, 145); and the *love* examples above
- /ɑ:/ > /a/ *unfathered* = *gathered* (124)
- /i:/ > /ɪ/ *achieve* = *live* (67)
- /ɛ/ > /e:/ *dead* = *o'er-read* (81)
- /ɛ/ > /e:/ *said* = *allayed* (56)
- /ɛ/ > /e:/ *sheds* = *deeds* (34) (*shed* is spelled *sheed* in the Quarto text of *Henry VI Part 3*, 1.4.161)
- /ɒ/ > /o:/ *gone* (4, 31, 45, 66), *one* (36, 39, 42, 105), and *anon* (75) = *alone*; *none* = *one* (8, 136) and *stone* (94); *loan* = *one* (6); *nothing* = *a-doting* (20). On the other hand, *gone* (5) and *groan* (50) = *on*, with a short vowel, and *moan* = *upon* (149). This leaves it unclear whether we should go for a long or a short vowel when we find *moan* = *forgone* (30) and *gone* (44, 71). In my OP reading of the sonnets (Crystal, 2005), I opted for the long vowel. Note also other cases where a long /o:/ is shortened: *moment* = *comment* (15) and *boast* = *cost* (91).

2.4. *Stress differences*

In 17 cases, the final syllable of a polysyllabic word, unstressed in Modern English, rhymes with a stressed monosyllabic word ending in /əɪ/, indicating a stronger stress and a similar diphthongal quality in Early Modern English: *memory* (1) and *dignity* (94) = *die*; *majesty* (7), *alchymy* (33), *gravity* (49), *remedy* (62), and *history* (93) = *eye*; *memory* = *sky* (15); *melancholy* = *thee* (45); *wantonly* = *dye* (54); *jealousy* = *pry* (61); *jollity* = *cry* (66); *majesty* = *fly* (78); *prophecies* = *eyes* (106); *subtleties* = *lies* (138); *remedy* = *by* (154). A similar stress difference is heard in *temperate* = *date* (18) and *perpetual* = *thrall* (154).

2.5. *Consonant differences*

In just a few cases, the rhyme works because the consonant quality changes. Four of the instances are sibilant devoicing, /z/ > /s/: *was* = *pass* (49); *raised* = *defaced* (64); *is* = *this* (72) and *amiss* (151); but note also *nothing* = *a-doting* (20), where the fricative has become a plosive (as in many modern regional accents).

3. **New auditory effects**

The following extracts from sonnets 32, 36, and 83 illustrate the way the above rhymes work well in OP:

But since he died and poets better prove,
Theirs for their style I'll read, his for his love.

Let me confess that we two must be twain,
Although our undivided loves are one:
So shall those blots that do with me remain,
Without thy help, by me be borne alone.

This silence for my sin you did impute,
Which shall be most my glory being dumb,
For I impair not beauty being mute,
When others would give life, and bring a tomb.

My opening illustration from sonnet 154 provides a further example.

This paper has so far dealt solely with rhymes in the sonnets. But it is not only the rhymes which gain from an OP reading; fresh assonances are revealed too. Take this extract from sonnet 55, where the underlined syllables echo each other:

When wasteful war shall statues overturn,
And broils root out the work of masonry,
Nor Mars his sword nor war's quick fire shall burn
The living record of your memory.

The repeated *a*-qualities of the vowels in *waste* /wast/, *war* /wɑ:r/, and *work* /wɜrk/ give the lines a novel auditory aesthetic.

Or note what happens when we read sonnet 53, with its repeated instances of *one* /o:n/. Apart from the fresh resonance in line 3, there is a new pun in line 4: *one/own* now neatly opposes *lend*. And the assonance continues into *Adonis* in line 5.

What is your substance, whereof are you made,
That millions of strange shadows on you tend?
Since every one hath, every one, one shade,
And you, but one, can every shadow lend. pun on own?
Describe Adonis, and the counterfeit
Is poorly imitated after you;
On Helen's cheek all art of beauty set,
And you in Grecian tires are painted new:

4. New readings

Wordplay is an often noticed feature of the sonnets, notably in the *Will/will* effects of sonnet 136, so it is fascinating to come across places where an OP rendition brings to light a possible new reading. Note the effect in line 5 of sonnet 95, for example. The words *vice* and *voice* would have sounded exactly the same, both pronounced /əɪ/. (The *Romeo* prologue has a similar pun: *loins* and *lines*.)

That tongue that tells the story of thy days
(Making lascivious comments on thy sport)
Cannot dispraise, but in a kind of praise,
Naming thy name, blesses an ill report.
Oh what a mansion have those vices got [voices]
Which for their habitation chose out thee,

And what might be made of the homophony between *o'er*, *hour* and *whore*, all pronounced /o:r/, in sonnet 63? (This pun is frequently used in the plays – most famously when Jaques describes Touchstone's observations in *As You Like It* (2.7.33), which made him laugh for an hour.)

Against my love shall be as I am now
With Time's injurious hand crushed and o'er-worn, [whore-worn?]
When hours have drained his blood and filled his brow [whores?]
With lines and wrinkles, when his youthful morn
Hath travelled on to age's steepy night...

Might we also read such a pun into sonnet 124, talking about his love?

It fears not policy, that heretic,
 Which works on leases of short-numbered hours, [whores?]
 But all alone stands hugely politic,
 That it nor grows with heat, nor drowns with showers.

These are interesting questions which, in editions of the sonnets that ignore an OP perspective, are not even mentioned as possibilities.

The options in pronunciation available in Early Modern English also raise general questions about how the sonnets would have been read aloud. The tendency of the time to drop 'h' at the beginning of words (without any implication of a lack of education, as is found today) would have offered people the choice of a casual or a colloquial reading. *H*-dropping was certainly common, as we know from such Shakespearean usages as *an Hebrew*, *t'hold*, *Ercles*, *th'harmony*, *Abram* (*Abraham*), *dungell* (*dunghill*), and many more. So should we drop *h*'s in an OP reading of the sonnets? Doubtless there were those who declaimed their sonnets in a consciously poetic style, 'mouthing' rather than speaking (as Hamlet recommends) 'trippingly', and carefully pronouncing all the *h*'s. But it is difficult to imagine a poetic style for the opening of sonnet 40, with its markedly colloquial syntax:

Take all my loves, my love, yea, take them all;
 What hast thou then more than thou hadst before?

Would someone who has just said 'mi luv' and 'yeah' pronounce *hast* and *hadst* with full-blown *h*'s? Holofernes (*Love's Labour's Lost*, 5.1.19) would have insisted on the spelling being fully pronounced. But would your average lover? Were sonnets spoken in a highly poetical style or in a more colloquial way? This is another of the intriguing questions raised by an OP perspective which will stop any armchair linguist from falling asleep. (I did warn you, Ranko.)

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APPENDIX

This is an index of all the rhymes in the sonnets which do not work in Modern English Received Pronunciation. The = symbol means 'has the vowel of'.

- achieve = live (67)
alchemy = eye (33)
anon = alone (75)
appear = bear (80)
appear = everywhere (102)
are = care (48, 112, 147)
are = compare (35)
are = prepare (13)
are = rare (52)
beloved = removed (25)
boast = cost (91)
brood = blood (19)
brow = mow (60)
clear = everywhere (84)
convert = art (14)
convertest = departest (11)
counterfeit = set (53)
counterfeit = unset (16)
dead = o'er-read (81)
dear = there (110)
defeat = great (61)
defeated = created (20)
desert = impart (72)
deserts = parts (17)
dignity = die (94)
doom = come (107, 116, 145)
ear = bear (8)
East = West (132)
even = heaven (28, 132)
evil = devil (144)
feast = guest (47)
fever = never (119)
field = held (2)
fiend = end (145)
fiend = friend (144)
fulness = dulness (56)
gone = alone (4, 31, 45, 66)
gone = on (5)
grave = have (81)
gravity = eye (49)
greater = better (119)
groan = on (50)
haste = past (123)
herd = beard (12)
history = eye (93)
is = amiss (151)
is = this (72)
jealousy = pry (61)
jollity = cry (66)
key = survey (52)
lease = excess (146)
least = possessed (29)
loan = one (6)
love = approve (70, 147)
love = move (47)
love = prove (9, 32, 39, 72, 117, 136, 151, 153, 154)
love = remove (116)
love her = approve her (42)
love thee = prove me (26)
loved = proved (116)
loving = approving (142)
loving = moving (26)
majesty = eye (7)
majesty = fly (78)
melancholy = thee (45)
memory = die (1)
memory = sky (15)

moan = forgone (30)	taste = last (90)
moan = gone (44, 71)	temperate = date (18)
moan = upon (149)	tomb = come (17)
moment = comment (15)	tomb = dumb (83, 101)
near = elsewhere (61)	tongue = song (17, 102)
near = there (136)	tongue = wrong (89, 112, 139)
none = one (8, 136)	unfathered = gathered (124)
none = stone (94)	wanting = granting (87)
noon = son (7)	wantonly = dye (54)
nothing = a-doting (20)	war = bar (46)
one = alone (36, 39, 42, 105)	warmed = disarmed (154)
perpetual = thrall (154)	was = glass (5)
privilege = edge (95)	was = pass (49)
prophecies = eyes (106)	waste = past (30)
rased = defaced (64)	were = bear (13)
remedy = by (154)	were = near (140)
remedy = eye (62)	wind = find (14, 51)
said = allayed (56)	word = afford (79)
sheds = deeds (34)	words = affords (85, 105)
speak = break (34)	worth = forth (25, 38, 72, 103)
steeled = held (24)	young = wrong (19)
subtleties = lies (138)	

Dejvid Kristal

OZVUČAVANJE ŠEKSPIRA: RIME IZ SONETA U IZVORNOM IZGOVORU

Rezime

Devedeset šest Šekspirovih soneta sadrže rime koje se u modernom engleskom jeziku ne podudaraju. Ta odstupanja ne mogu se objasniti pozivanjem na pojam vizuelnih rima, jer on podrazumeva standardizovan pravopis kakav, prema svedočenju pisaca iz XVI veka kao što su Džon Hart i Ričard Malkaster, nije postojao u ranom modernom engleskom. Važnost rima kao auditivnog fenomena ističu autori kao što su Džordž Patenam i Samjuel Danijel. Jedino zadovoljavajuće objašnjenje može se naći u prepoznavanju fonoloških promena koje su se odigrale između ranog modernog engleskog i modernog engleskog. U ovom tekstu razmatra se dokazni materijal u prilog 'izvornog izgovora': pored rima i igara reči, mnogo toga može se naučiti iz načina pisanja, kao i iz ortoepskih i gramatičkih rasprava XVI veka. Ovaj rad sadrži celovito objašnjenje svih naizgled nepodudarnih rima

u parovima, uz grupisanje razlika na osnovu kvaliteta vokala, varijacija između diftonga i čistih vokala, kvantiteta vokala, naglaska na završnom slogu i konsonantskih varijacija. Iz glasnog čitanja soneta u izvornom izgovoru proističe jedna nova auditivna estetika. Time se ne usavršava samo rimovanje, nego izranjaju i nove asonance, a ranije neprimećeni homofoni nagoveštavaju nove mogućnosti za igre reči. Ovaj pristup nas podstiče i na stilističko razmatranje nivoa formalnosti na kojem su soneti mogli biti izgovarani.

Ključne reči: Šekspir, soneti, rime, asonanca, igra reči, izvorni izgovor, fonologija, rani moderni engleski

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