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The Sonnet-Anomaly or Anxiety in Shakespeare's Sonnet 66

One may find all kinds of poetry in Shakespeare. He is the favourite son of Fantasy-Goddess who blessed him, having given him her magic warder, while he, wandering in the wilderness of imagination, creates his own magic everywhere!

Nikolay Karamzin, *Pis'ma russkogo puteshestvennika*¹

Revisiting the world of Shakespearean sonnets at the end of the twentieth century is a risky enterprise, fraught with numerous dangers of reiterating banalities and reviving the clichés concepts. Nonetheless, even such authors as Shakespeare may still lead to the unexplored territory, and his sonnet 66 is precisely the area, which somehow escaped the scholarly attention for centuries.

Sonnet 66 is rarely mentioned by the numerous interpreters, since it does not fall into the traditional generic classification and differs from the rest of Shakespeare's sonnets. For centuries, most interpreters of his sonnets dealt predominantly with the poetic grammar, paying much less attention to the semiotic world of each sonnet. The thematic constant of a sonnet is usually love, and the critics analyzing sonnets have traditionally concentrated upon the possibilities of form, restricted by the rigid 14 lines.² Sonnet 66 formally belongs to the generic kind "sonnet", while thematically it contradicts the definition of the genre. The topic of this work is the generic anomaly of Shakespeare's sonnet 66 and its treatment by several Ukrainian and Russian translators.

Love Alone . . .

A sonnet usually is defined as a lyrical love poem with the special formal organization, but the unusual death theme in this Shakespearean sonnet subverts the genre from within. "Love" is the main characteristic feature of the traditional approach to sonnet, since up to this century "love" was the only method of classifying sonnets thematically. For instance, Shakespeare's sonnets were frequently grouped into the two main categories – those addressed to the Dark Lady and those devoted to the Fair Youth.³ Richard Simpson,⁴ for example, divided Shakespeare's sonnets into those dealing with "imaginative, ideal and vulgar love." He bases his classification on the assumption that Shakespeare "is always a philosopher, but in his sonnets he is a philosopher of love"(6). The

Victorian literary critic was yet unable to accept another philosopher in Shakespeare, the sonnet writer. The post-Sartrean critical consciousness enables to discover the otherness of Shakespearean sonnetic world – Death versus traditional sonnetic Love.

Love versus Other Loves

Despite the fact that the detailed interpretations were bestowed upon other Shakespeare's sonnets, his 66th version of love is mentioned only when some atypical features of sonnets are discussed. Modern critics have acknowledged the formal anomaly of sonnet 66.⁵ Critic C. L. Barber⁶ recognizes in his "An Essay on Shakespearean Sonnets" the formal specificity of this sonnet:

The very different serial movement of sonnet 66 is a revealing exception to prove the rule (12)

Robert W. Witt⁷ includes the sonnet into the category of "universal understanding sonnets... (32, 66, 71-4, 81, 105, 107-8, 115-6, 123-5)" Generally speaking, the critics do not go beyond the acknowledgement of the Sonnet's originality, and always refer to it along with other sonnets which, unlike the 66th, speak about love.⁸

Why Are the Critics Afraid of Sonnet 66?

Nonetheless, it is not the formal peculiarities that create the generic ambiance around the sonnet and intimidate the critics. It is the theme of Death which creates the anxiety in and around the text. The general ethos of the Renaissance was much more optimistic, having restored the ancient paganistic mode and brought to the surface the old attitude towards Death. Along with the Platonian love, the philosophers and artists of the Renaissance era uncovered his Death anxiety. One has to recall Plato's *Republic* and his condemnation of Death as a theme in poets' writings in his ideal state.⁹ Nonetheless, they concentrated on Love. Shakespeare departs from the entire Renaissance tradition in his sonnet 66 dealing with the taboo topic – Death. Thus, violating the rule and speaking about the forbidden, Shakespeare commits his "sonnetic sin". Unlike his predecessors and contrary to his own sonnetic self in other sonnets, Shakespeare commences his unusual sonnetic utterance with the line:

Tyr'd with all these for restfull death I cry.

This address to the readers in the Renaissance period may be easily mistaken for the much later Romantic,¹⁰ nearly Byronic line, being generally so inconsistent with the then prevalent Love ethos.

The next lines confuse the critics even more, mediating social anxiety of high intensity. The Renaissance singer of Love is transformed into the "Byronic rebel" or the "angry man" of the next century whose anger is directed at the imperfect world:

As to behold desert a begger borne,
And needie Nothing trimd in iollitie
And purest faith unhappily forsworne,
And guilded honor shamefully misplast...

The poet longing to die in the anaphoric statement of the sonnet is transformed into the most powerful critic of the world around him whose energy and vigour contradict the passive resignation in the initial address. The desire to abandon society is juxtaposed against the intention to change it.

What is significant that after the first five lines, filled with the pessimistic vision of the world, there begins another fictional universe which suggests some concrete circumstances and their poetic interpretation:

And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,
And right perfection wrongfully disgrac'd,
And strength by limping sawy disabled...

The key words of the next 3 lines are: Virtue, Perfection, Strength.

They suggest some concrete references to some real events that had occurred in Shakespeare's time and angered the poet. Unable to name them directly, the poet resolves his anxiety in the subversive sonnet. The 9th line of the sonnet explains the poetic strategy:

And art made tung-tide by authoritie...

Despite the fact that the author uses the abstract denoting signs, they are what Peirce would call "sinsigns",¹¹ i. e. leading to the Other, more concrete and understandable descriptions, such as:

And Folly (Doctor-like) controuling skilll

Who is this mysterious doctor named "Folly"?

Some Mysteries Deciphered

In 1972 R. J. C. Wait¹² provided some answers in his work *The Background to Shakespeare's Sonnets*. According to the scholar, there were some real historical events which inspired Shakespeare to write this atypical sonnet. In Wait's view, the "Folly" Doctor's name is Roderigo Lopez, a Portuguese doctor who used to be the personal physician to the Queen and an alleged double agent who presumably served for England and Spain. Dr. Lopez is claimed a victim of his own careless talk about

the embarrassing disease of Essex who, in revenge, decided to get rid of him. Dr. Lopez was tried and on Jan. 29, 1594 was committed to the Tower. The Lopez case apparently was on everybody's lips at that time, and Shakespeare could not have been silent about it. Despite the fact that Shakespeare's role in the case remains unknown, it is quite plausible that sonnet 66 is a discrete reference to the Lopez trial. Nonetheless, what stand does he take? On whose side is the poet exposing injustice?

The same researcher claims that 1594 was also the year of the plague epidemics when the theatres were closed, and Shakespeare's more traditional podium – theatre and play – were denied to him. The poet uses the genre of sonnet for channelling his anger. On the surface sonnet 66 does not arouse any suspicions. It begins with death and ends with the address to the beloved, while the inner composition contains the socio-political statement:

1. Sonnetic Frame
2. Ode-like Content
3. Subtext

The abstract philosophical categories are juxtaposed against the concrete characters, such as: I, Maiden, Doctor, Captaine, Love-Beloved Woman.

The signs of the text other than a sonnet are inside the sonnet, and they are the capitalized key words of a concrete and abstract reference: Nothing, Folly, Doctor, Truth, Simplicity, Captaine.

Some of those textual markers could have been probably better understood by Shakespeare's contemporaries, while the twentieth century reader loses an enormous portion of the intended information. Wait's historico-biographical hypothesis may be helpful in uncovering some of the coded message, while the rest may never become known. In any case, Wait's discovery sheds new light on the mystery of the 66th sonnet. Even within the economy of the most economical poetic genre, Shakespeare is able to protect his text from the censors and carry some undesirable message to the readers. Its full complexity is lost for the modern critics and, moreover, for the translators of this atypical sonnet.

The Lost and Acquired Meanings in Translator's Readings of the Atypical Sonnet

A translator is the second creator who gives another life to the artistic text, each new interpretation adding new semiotic dimensions. Translation is a creative act of making another fictional universe around the existing world of original meanings. The possibilities to create new fictional worlds are embedded in the endless opportunities hidden in the language itself.

The device of *displacement*, i.e. the selection of particular interpretation as opposed to others and shift in the textual semantic order, enables the translator to produce a new text with each new translation effort. This work deals with some interpretative attempts which had introduced several other worlds around sonnet 66.

In Shakespeare we read:

Tyr'd with all these for restful death I cry...

Translating the line in modern English one may see it as:

Tired with life for restful death I call...

The famous Russian translator, Boris Pasternak,¹³ treats it in the following way:

Измучась всем, я умереть хочу
(Tortured by all, I wish to die)

The idea of death is preserved in the Russian version, while the reason for death expressed in the original is less emphasized in Shakespeare. Pasternak's choice of the word "Tortured" instead of, "Tired" suggests a new semantic field, a meaning of higher intensity which overemphasizes the original idea. Shakespeare's "cry" for death is a rhetorical hypocritical "call" for death which may not necessarily imply the genuine desire to die. On the contrary, Pasternak's "wish to die" is much more direct and sincere which may be read literally.

The same line is given another poetic life in its Ukrainian version by Sviatoslav Hordyns'kyi:¹⁴

Я кличу смерть, нестерпне вже буття.
(I am calling for death, unbearable is my being or my existence)

Hordyns'kyi emphasizes death which is secondary in the original, and, unlike Shakespeare, the Ukrainian translator places the explanation of the wish to die to the periphery of the utterance. As a result of such rearrangement the anaphoric statement of sonnet 66 acquires more emotional intensity. The movement of the poetic line is more rapid in translation. Moreover, the translated line is more categorical and terse due to the rearrangement of the parts of the anaphoric statement.

Another Russian translator Samuil Marshak¹⁵ provides his version of the first Shakespearean line:

Зову я смерть. Мне видеть нестерпно,
(Calling death I. I cannot bear the sight of)

Much like Hordyns'kyi, Marshak changes the sonnetic rhythm, but his line cannot be read on its own, requiring the other line to be completed semantically. Many critics claim that Marshak "improved" the original, but

he obviously allows himself the shift of sonnetic melody, adjusting it more to the needs of the Russian language where the centre of the utterance is usually at the end of the sentence.¹⁶ Thus, Shakespeare's ending of the anaphora had to be placed at the beginning to observe the grammar.

D. Palamarchuk¹⁷ provides another interpretation of the same Shakespearean line in Ukrainian which is the most precise rendering of the original in another language:

Стомившись, вже смерті я благаю,
(Tired, already death I desire)

This translator preserves not only all the original semantic fields of the anaphoric line but even their order in Shakespeare's sonnet. The only novel element in the Ukrainian version is the additional sign «вже» — "already" which may be treated as insignificant *semiotic prefix* or a connection between the two basic semiotic fields of the line:

Tired with all these вже (already) for restful death I cry

Instead of the more customary *displacement technique*, Palamarchuk allows himself to insert the semiotic prefix "already" that does not affect the original in any significant manner. Practically speaking, his is the most sensitive reading of Shakespeare and faithful reproduction of the original in another language.

Ihor Kostets'kyi,¹⁸ unlike Palamarchuk, follows a more traditional translation technique of displacement. This is his version of the same Shakespearean line:

З усього стомлен, кличу безрух — Смерть
(With all tired I call paralysis and death)

Shakespeare commences his sonnetic utterance with the message — "tired", while Kostets'kyi chooses to emphasize another semantic field — "with all". His line acquires a darker, Byronic color, evoking more visual associations than in the original. Shakespearean line has more of an epistolary quality, while the modern Ukrainian translator introduces the other world, with the impact of modern technology and changed perception of art and being. Kostets'kyi's interpretation is much more personal, revealing the self of the modern translator more than the personality of the English Renaissance poet. It is a plea of a modern artist, confused and abandoned in the strange modern world of space exploration, computer technology and civilization on the brink of its own Death. Only about four centuries separate the English Renaissance poet and the modern Ukrainian translator, but this span of time is filled with such numerous and grandiose transformations in society and art that the creative universe of the modern artist adumbrates Shakespeare's world and his time. The universal and omnipresent motif of Death acquires new

meaning. His is a totally new text having modern anxieties. His is a plea to the civilized man to save humanity facing its own destruction.

The death anxiety of the modern translator appears as more sincere than the rhetorical decorum of the Renaissance poet. Shakespeare calling for death at the beginning of the sonnet "changes his mind" in the span of 13 lines. The Epicurean spirit prevails over the pessimistic thoughts. For Shakespeare, being and loving, and being present in this world despite its imperfections is of vital importance. The therapy of the 13 lines returns him to the optimistic world of Love and Life, while Kostets'kyi's sonnetic voice is the voice of the post-Freudian man struggling with the complexes of the past, present and anxiety of the future. In contrast, the Renaissance man appears to be more natural and mentally healthier. His cry for death is a mood, rather than a state, a challenging statement to provoke communication and not the last note of a depressed modern man, tired of speaking and living. On the whole, sonnet 66 is a witty remark of a genius still open to numerous interpretations and sustaining the ongoing discourse about the "all these" and Death.

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Notes

1. Николай Карамзин, *Письма русского путешественника* (Москва: Издательство Художественная Литература, 1964) 572-73 in *Избранные произведения*, *ibid.*
2. Satyprasad Sengupta, *Some Aspects of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Calcutta: Jaanodaya Press, 1966); Richard Simpson, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (London: Trubner & Co., 1968) 1-6.
3. Edward Hubbler et als, *The Riddle of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963); Roman Jacobson, and Laurence G. Jones, *Shakespeare's Verbal Art in the Expence Spirit* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970); David Stevenson, ed. *The Meditations of William Shakespeare* (New York: Vintage Press, 1965) 32-48; Gerald Willen & Victor B. Reed, ed. *A Casebook on Shakespeare's Sonnets* (New York: Thomas G. Cromwell Co., 1934); Dover Wilson, *An Introduction to the Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963).
4. R. Simpson, see above n. 2.
5. Raymond Alden, ed. *The Sonnets of Shakespeare* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1916) 168; Harold Bloom, ed. *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987) 12.
6. C. L. Barber, "An Essay on Shakespearean Sonnets" in H. Bloom, ed. see above n. 5 (5-29).
7. Robert W. Witt, *Of Comfort and Despair, Shakespeare's Sonnet Sequence* (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik Universität Salzburg, 1979) 134-5.

8. Hallet Smith, *The Tension of the Lyre* (San Marino, Ca.: Huntington Library, 1981).
9. Plato, *Republic* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing Co., 1974), book 3, 56-7.
10. Northrop Frye, "Lord Byron" in his *Fables of Identity* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1963) 168-93; Paul Graham Trueblood, ed. *The Flowering of Byron's Genius* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1945); P. G. Trueblood, *Byron's Political and Cultural Influence in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Atlantic Highlands, N. J.: Humanities Press, 1981).
11. Charles Peirce, *Semiotic and Significs, The Correspondence between Charles S. Peirce and Victoria Lady Wilby* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1977), 32.
12. R. J. C. Wait, *The Background to Shakespeare's Sonnets* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1972) chapter VII.
13. Boris Pasternak (1890-1960), a famous Russian translator and poet, became known as the translator of Byron, Keats, Shelley and Shakespeare. He experienced persecution in Stalin's and Krushchev's eras. In the West he is mainly known as the author of the famous *Doctor Zhivago* which brought him the Nobel Prize and more conflicts with the Soviet state; more see: B. Pasternak, *I Remember* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1959); *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, ed. by Margaret Drabble (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 742-43.
14. Святослав Гординський, «Шекспірові сонети» in *Українська Шекспірія на Заході* (Edmonton: Slavuta, 1987), 65.
15. Samuil Marshak (1887-1964) a popular translator and a beloved children's poet who brought the world of English poetry to the wide audience of young readers. He translated Burns, Blake, Keats, Kipling, Milne, Shakespeare's sonnets and Wordsworth, as well as Belorussian, Armenian, Lithuanian and Ukrainian poets. More see in *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (London: Collier MacMillan Publishers, 1974) vol. 15, 499; С. Маршак, *Сонети Шекспира* (Москва: Советский Писатель, 1949) 78.
16. В. Н. Комиссаров et al, *Пособие по переводу с английского языка на русский* (Москва: Высшая Школа, 1965), 26-34.
17. Д. Паламарчук, *Уільям Шекспір: Сонети* (Київ: Дніпро, 1966), 96.
18. Ігор Костецький, *Шекспірові сонети* (Мюнхен, «На Горі», 1958), 54; a poet, translator, theatrical critic, translator of T. S. Eliot, Novalis and Shakespeare, for more see *Encyclopedia of Ukraine* (München: Logos, 1959), 1147-8.