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Anglisztika alapszak

Angol szakirány

2017

A HKR 346. § ad 76. § (4) c) pontja értelmében:

„... A szakdolgozathoz csatolni kell egy nyilatkozatot arról, hogy a munka a hallgató saját szellemi terméke...”

NYILATKOZAT

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ALAPSZAKOS SZAKDOLGOZAT

*Az Idő, a Szép Ifjú, és a Költő: Az örökkévalóság
kérdése William Shakespeare szonettjeiben*
*Time, the Fair Youth, and the Poet: The Question of
Eternality in the Sonnets of William Shakespeare*

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INTRODUCTION

In Shakespeare's sonnets there is a particular theme present which one cannot ignore, and which completely interlaces the fabric of the first 126 poems. The constant battle fought by the Poet against the personified figure of Time to eternalise the Fair Youth is the central driving or organising force working within these poems. Its importance is implied even before the beginning of the sequence in the *Dedication* which is "sometimes dismissed as merely a printer's preface" (Burrow 101). The problem with such an attitude is that "the dedication is part of how the book invites its readers to respond to it" (Burrow 101).

The text of the *Dedication* is the following:

TO.THE.ONLIE.BEGETTER.OF.

THESE.INSVING.SONNETS.

M^r.W.H.ALL.HAPPINESSE.

AND.THAT.ETERNITIE.

PROMISED.

BY.

OVR.EVER-LIVING.POET. [...] (Burrow 381)

If we treat the mysterious M^r.W.H. as the Fair Youth to whom the sonnets are addressed, then the first line (especially the word *begetter*) emerges as an interesting echo of the procreation sonnets and of certain themes attached to them. Another intriguing detail is that the Poet is already

ever-living according to the dedication, as opposed to the Fair Youth, to whom *eternitie* only seems to appear as a promise. The question arises: Is that promise kept?

Is the friend truly eternalised by the sonnets? Who is M^r.W.H.? This essay is not necessarily concerned with the question of who M^r.W.H. was in a biographical sense, but rather aims to find an answer to the question: Who or what is eternalised by these poems, and how? The first thing to delineate then is the figure of the Youth, and to show whether he is depicted in a way which would be indicative of an underlying personality. If not, is the Fair Youth to be viewed as an abstraction? What could the Fair Youth possibly stand for in that case?

THE PROMISE OF ETERNITY

Those sonnets which with great pathos promise to eternalise the friend seem to forget about one thing only, the friend himself. As John D. Bernard points out (79), the feature which is strikingly similar between these poems is that each of them “glorifies the poetic act itself” rather than the young friend, therefore they are all “fundamentally egocentric”. This is quite true for these particular sonnets, because they focus more on the Poet and Time and the power relations between the two, than on the Youth himself. The idea that poetry is capable of immortalising something or “the fantasy that poems, although not living things preserve human life” is not a Shakespearean idea originally. The most important precursor for the Poet in this regard was Horace (Kunin 93).

This “Horatian boast of immortality” (Kunin 98) is apparent especially in sonnets number 18, 19, 55, 81 and 107. What we get to know about the friend in the aforementioned poems is that he is “more lovely, and more temperate” than a summer’s day (18), he is fair, beautiful (as in “beauty’s pattern”), and young. In fact, all of these attributes appear in sonnet 18 and sonnet 19

respectively, and three of them are synonymous to each other namely the words *lovely*, *fair*, and *beautiful*. The remaining three poems do not describe the friend in any such terms.

These five poems and what they promise in their closing couplets to the friend have a fascinating arc. The reason why these couplets are so important is that they function almost like signatures at the end of a pact or an agreement. Sonnet 18 is finished with the lines: “So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, / So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.” The presence of future generations appears in sonnet 55 and 81 as well, but the Poet as a figure who – through his art – is capable of giving life is only present here. The way the Poet vows to give life to the Youth by his verse is analogous to the way in which the friend could have begotten a son in the procreation sonnets, and with that would have been able to achieve immortality. In the final line of sonnet 19 this is altered into “My love shall in my verse ever live young”. This line points back to an idea in sonnet 15, where the Poet is concerned that “[...] every thing that grows / Holds in perfection but a little moment”, therefore he intends not only to immortalise the Youth, but also to preserve him in that particular form in which he exists at the moment when the poem is created.

In sonnet 55 the promise manifests itself as “So, till the judgement that yourself arise, / You live in this, and dwell in lovers’ eyes.” Here immortality is not a distant concept which is concerned with the similarly distant future, despite the fact that the Last Judgement is mentioned. The ending notes of the poem, with the last line saying “You live in this” suggest that the friend is already somehow an organic part of the poem, thus an organic part of a cosmic eternity.

In sonnet 81 the same idea evolves into the following closing couplet: “You still shall live (such virtue hath my pen) / Where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men.” This is not the first occasion in which the Poet is – in one way or another – present in the couplet. In sonnet 19 the words “my verse” indicate something similar, but there it is much more implicit, and less

invasive. The Poet instead of praising the virtue of the Fair Youth praises his own poetic abilities. “Self-flattery, often thinly disguised as praise of another, is the keynote of the Renaissance love sonnet. Its central insistence is on the poet's ability to appropriate what is permanent behind the transitory beauty of the beloved and to fix it in words.” (Bernard 79). The self-flattery is indeed quite thinly disguised here by the two brackets. It might intend to create the illusion that what they contain is merely secondary information, but the message is conspicuous. As a result “the poet and the young man together are given perpetual spoken life by posterity until the end of time” (Vendler 363).

This invasiveness of the Poet's presence culminates in sonnet 107. Although the phrase “I'll live in this poor rhyme” does not constitute the couplet it is a cardinal moment in the entirety of the sequence. Especially regarding the fact that in the couplet this is what we discover: “And thou in this shalt find thy monument, / When tyrants' crests and tombs of brass are spent”. Of course the word *monument* does not necessarily refer to a “stone edifice” (Burrow 542) or a grave which presupposes the death of the friend. The Poet's verse is likened to a *monument* which is presumed to be a “written memorial” (Burrow 542) to the Youth before too, in sonnet 81. Furthermore, the phrase *thou shalt* indicates that the friend is still alive and active. The significant change is that in all of the previous poems the final two lines always included either the word “live” or the word “life”, which were associated solely with the Fair Youth, while here it is removed from the couplet and is attached to the Poet instead. Is it possible that it is the Poet who takes life away from the friend? If yes, is he doing that for his own benefit, or could it be an essential step towards the eternalisation of the Youth?

If we want to find answers to those questions, analysing only these five sonnets will not suffice. Although these are the ones which with great vehemence promise eternity to the Fair

Youth, they do not properly represent the sequence as a whole. Therefore, to have a deeper understanding of the friend and to be able to ascertain in what terms the Poet takes life away from the Youth, we must work with a wider scope. The opening line of sonnet 53 (“What is your substance, whereof are you made”) captures the gist of the problem, and points at the very issue which this essay attempts to unravel. It also embodies the struggle of the artist to understand the object of his admiration and the hardships of his endeavour to represent the “worth” of the friend in his verse.

PERSONAL TRAITS OF THE FAIR YOUTH

However, there are very few personal traits in the sonnets which unequivocally describe the Fair Youth and the Fair Youth only. A recurring attribute in the sequence is a sort of **egotism** which seems to characterise the friend. The very first sonnet already points towards this. The lines “But thou, contracted to thine own bright eyes, / Feed’st thy light’s flame with self-substantial fuel” show someone who is absolutely self-centred and therefore fails to recognise the agony of those who surround him. Also, the second half of the quotation alludes to the story of Narcissus from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* ““I am burned by love of myself: I produce and am consumed by flames’ *Met.* 3.464” (Burrow 382). In sonnet 3 this reference is even more straightforward when in line eight “self-love” is mentioned. The last such example in the procreation sonnets appears in sonnet 6 in the form of “Be not self-willed, for thou art much too fair”. The word *self-willed* might have two different connotations. One of them is “obstinate” and the other is “self-obsessed” (Burrow 392), which is a further intensified version of the *self-love* from sonnet 3. In all of these poems the possibility of death is lurking around in some shape or form, but in sonnet 6 the hyphenated “self-killed” in the fourth line is a lot more threatening. *Self-willed* and *self-killed* are phonologically

speaking minimal pairs, which further emphasises the argument of the Poet. If the Youth refuses to breed an heir, then after his death he will be forever lost and it will be his own fault.

Interestingly, this sense of narcissism returns in another cluster of poems later on, in the ‘rival poet sonnets’. In sonnet 82 the Youth is portrayed by the Poet with the following words: “Thou art as fair in knowledge as in hue, / Finding thy worth a limit past my praise”. It is not hard to detect a certain self-conceitedness or vanity on the side of the Youth. In sonnet 84 this escalates to the idea that the Fair Youth is outright “Being fond on praise”.

A different attribute which is linked to the Fair Youth is **lasciviousness** or sexual promiscuity. The first instance when the Poet refers to this is in the second sonnet. However, the words “lusty days” can simply indicate the age of the friend and his fertility. In other procreation sonnets there are also numerous possible references to autoeroticism, especially in sonnet 4 (but the *self-willed/self-killed* pair from sonnet 3 is also among the examples). The opening lines of the poem are already suggestive, but the ninth line is quite straightforward: “For having traffic with thyself alone”. The couplet of sonnet 9 “No love toward others in that bosom sits / That on himself such murd’rous shame commits” might refer to masturbation too, as it is proposed by Burrow (398). Later on in sonnet 40 the lasciviousness of the Youth is expressed far more explicitly. In the sixth line we see “I cannot blame thee, for my love thou usest” (*love* meaning lover) and in the closing couplet the Fair Youth is called “Lascivious Grace”. The same theme continues in sonnets 41 and 42.

There also seems to be some sort of a shame hovering around the figure of the Fair Youth, supposedly because of his deeds. However, nothing specific is ever mentioned in the poems. We do not get to know what that “anything” is (57), committed by the friend, in spite of which the Poet “thinks no ill” of him (57). The same goes for the “self-doing crime” mentioned in sonnet 58.

Sonnet 120 starts with “That you were once unkind befriends me know”, but again no particulars are given.

A similar theme is discussed in those sonnets which focus on the friend’s **social interactions** and on the ways in which those interactions are perceived by the community and the Poet himself. The first such poem in the sequence where the Poet is critical of the Fair Youth in this sense is sonnet 33. The Youth is depicted as the Sun, who “Anon permit the basest clouds to ride / With ugly rack on his celestial face”. The poem concludes with “Suns of the world may stain, when heaven’s sun staineth”. Through this, the Poet deprives the Youth of “that distinct superiority” (Kaula 53) which was granted to him before, and brings him down from his elevated position by implying that he is not the only sun, but one of many. The same conceit continues in sonnet 34, but there the Poet is affected by the friend’s offence too (“To let base clouds o’ertake me in my way”). The absolution finally arrives with sonnet 35; however, it has its consequences. The Poet corrupts himself by “Authorizing [the Fair Youth’s] trespass with compare”, meaning that he justifies the sins of the friend by means of the elaborate imagery he uses in lines 2-4. This might make us question the integrity of the Poet. “By his sophistry of excuse exerted on behalf of the young man, he becomes an accomplice (his word is *áccesary*) in the friend’s sin.” (Vendler 185) In the ninth line it is mentioned that the Youth has a “sensual fault”, which could be yet another reference to his lecherous nature.

In sonnet 69 we may observe that the very same people who compliment the beauty of the Fair Youth with “outward praise” calumniate him for his deeds. They associate “the rank smell of weeds” with the Youth. Yet the last line implies that it is the “soil” in which he grows that causes the unpleasant odour. This suggests that the problem does not necessarily originate from the friend, but rather from those with whom he keeps company. Helen Vendler points out that there is a

“confrontation here between the Platonic conviction that a beautiful body necessarily betokens a beautiful mind, and the Christian conviction that solely by a man’s deeds may his inner beauty be measured” (320). The accusations against the friend are dismissed by the Poet in sonnet 70 as “slander’s mark” and the Fair Youth is re-established as “pure” and “unstained”.

In some of the poems the friend seems to appear as a **rigid** character, who ignores the Poet and looks at him with disdain. Sonnet 49 sets the tone for this kind of poems, of which there are quite a few. The Poet prepares himself “Against that time (if ever that time come) / When [he] shall see [the Youth] frown on [his] defects” and also “Against that time when [the Youth] shalt strangely pass, / And scarcely greet [him] [...]”. What is intriguing here is that it is *time* against what the Poet prepares, rather than the Fair Youth. It is not the friend who is vilified, but *time* who appears as a “formidable antagonist” against whom the Poet can “assert the force and constancy of his devotion” (Kaula 45). These are the kinds of dynamics which best describe this group of poems. Either the Poet provides a scapegoat or he takes away or reduces the blame which weighs on the friend.

The opening lines of sonnet 88 is an echo of the first two lines of sonnet 49: “When thou shalt be disposed to set me light, / And place my merit in the eye of scorn”. However, in both poems we encounter hypothetical situations. They show the concerns of the Poet regarding the future, therefore they reflect more on the insecurities of the Poet, than on the character of the Fair Youth. The difference between the two poems is that here it is the Poet who takes the blame (still hypothetically), but again he seems to corrupt himself in order to protect the Fair Youth (“Upon thy side against myself I’ll fight”).

This conflict is further aggravated in sonnets number 92, 93, 94, 95 and 96. The main issue which stands in the focus point of this cluster of poems (similarly to sonnet 69) is the **clash between**

the internal and external values of the Youth, to which the Poet in the sequence mostly refers to as the friend's "truth" and "beauty". We find the manifestation of this dilemma in the couplet of sonnet 92: "But what's so blessèd fair that fears no blot? / Thou mayst be false, and yet I know it not." As it was in the previous poems, this is mere speculation on the side of the Poet. In fact, there is no actual information on the friend in this poem, nor any indication in regards to his conduct or behaviour towards the Poet. Sonnet 92 only reveals the deepest fears of the Poet, which is that the Youth might abandon him.

In the subsequent poem the same theme continues, and the Poet appears as a "deceivèd husband". The Youth is depicted as *Eve's apple* through the biblical allusion present in the couplet, therefore the Poet must take the role of Adam the archetypal deceived husband (Vendler 400). However, the first line gives the Poet away in the exact manner as it did in sonnets number 49, 88 and 92. Sonnet 93 opens with "So shall I live, supposing thou art true" which illustrates that essence of uncertainty which has been troubling him in the aforementioned poems as well. He attempts to justify this lack of certainty by saying:

In many's look the false heart's history
Is writ in moods and frowns and wrinkles strange;
But heaven in thy creation did decree
That in thy face sweet love should ever dwell. (93)

As it is put by Vendler "The categories organizing the sonnet are external qualities like *face, looks, eye, beauty, show* on the one hand, and internal qualities like *heart, thoughts, virtue, true* on the other. (400)" It is important to point out, that the Youth is not Eve in this scenario, but *Eve's apple*. Therefore he is not the deceiver himself nor is he an agent, but rather the desired object which

passively undergoes the action. It is *heaven* (which can be understood as either a metonymy for God, or can refer to *nature* as in: “A woman’s face with nature’s own hand painted, / Has thou [...]” (20)) who created him, and commanded “That in [his] face sweet love should ever dwell”.

Sonnet 94 is probably one of the most enigmatic poems from the sequence. This is the only poem from the entirety of the Fair Youth sonnets in which both the Poet and the Youth are absent. In that sense sonnet 7 is quite similar (“Lo in the orient when the gracious light”), but even there the friend appears in the couplet (“So thou, thyself outgoing in thy noon”). The poem is also unique from a structural point of view which is caused by the sharp volta-like split after the eighth line. As a result “The sonnet contains two mini-poems [...]” (Vendler 403). Despite the fact that there is no explicit reference to the Youth in sonnet 94 (with the usual words denoting him as *thou*, *thee*, *thy*, *my love* etc.), thematically speaking the poem is closely bound to the surrounding sonnets. In its content it is much like a biblical parable, and, interestingly, the flower-odour argument of sonnet 69 reappears in the couplet. The way this poem differs from most of the flower-odour/canker-bud poems is that the flower which is violated here is not a rose, but a lily. “For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds; / Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds” (Sonnet 94). The friend often appears in the sequence as a rose, but never as a lily (the Youth’s hand are likened to lilies in sonnet 99, but he himself never appears as the flower), which might suggest that the poem is either not directed against him, or this is yet another effort from the Poet to wash the Fair Youth white.

The subsequent sonnet (95) is also connected to those which accuse the Youth of lasciviousness. As opposed to the previous sonnet, this is obviously addressed to the friend, which is apparent from the first three lines: “How sweet and lovely dost thou make the shame, / Which, like a canker in the fragrant rose, / Doth spot the beauty of thy budding name?” This poem is seemingly much more direct in regards to the sins of the Youth, with “several exclamations of

dismay” (Vendler 408). However, this dismay is undermined in lines 9-10: “O, what a mansion have those vices got, / Which for their habitation chose out thee”. These two lines recall the image of the Fair Youth as the passive apple which suffered the action in sonnet 93. Again, it is *those vices* that choose him and not the other way around. This idea is supported by the couplet in which the Poet bids the Youth to be cautious to not to abuse “this large privilege” which was given to him, referring to the power which is granted to the friend by his beauty.

The last poem from this group is sonnet 96. It follows the pattern which we have seen in the last four sonnets, and it is saturated with the same sort of uncertainty as well. The sonnet starts with the lines: “Some say thy fault is youth, some wantonness, / Some say thy grace is youth and gentle sport.” The recurring theme of lechery is present here also, but the contradictory nature of the remarks shows that it is almost impossible to reach any kind of consensus when it comes to the character of the Fair Youth. This is reinforced in lines 7-8: “So are those errors that in thee are seen / To truths translated, and for true things deemed.” The key word here is *translated*, but the Youth is passive in this poem too. The imagery which appears just before these lines suggests that it is others who translate the Youth’s errors and the Youth does not deceive anyone purposefully (“As on the finger of a thronèd queen / The basest jewel will be well esteemed”). The closing couplet of this poem is identical to that of sonnet 36 and the text is as it follows: “But do not so; I love thee in such sort / As thou being mine, mine is thy good report”. It is a warning for the Youth not to abuse his position, just like in the previous sonnet, but it also implies that the friend has never abused his power so far. The connection between sonnet 96 and sonnet 36 is that in both poems there is a kind of shame involved, but in the latter the Poet takes the blame for whatever they committed presumably together (“So shall those blots that do with me remain”(36)).

Interestingly, the Poet might be one of those who try to translate the errors of the Youth into “truths”. The intriguing by-product of his attempt is the oxymoron. We encounter one immediately in the twelfth line of the first sonnet, in the form of “tender churl”. Similar ones appear in the procreation sonnets including “Unthrifty loveliness” and “beauteous niggard” (4), where even *unthrifty* and *niggard* contradict each other. Later in sonnet 35 we see the phrase “sweet thief” and in sonnet 40 “gentle thief” with the previously mentioned phrase “Lascivious Grace”. In the opening line of sonnet 41 something which is reminiscent of this emerges with the passivity trope that we saw in sonnets number 93, 95 and 96 (“Those pretty wrongs which liberty commits” (41)). In sonnet 42 as an exception the oxymoron denotes two people, the Youth and the lady with the phrase “Loving offenders”.

We examined these poems in order to see whether there are any distinctive traits which can be unequivocally assigned to the Youth or not. Yet these poems do not clarify much about the personality of the friend. The ambiguity surrounding the persona of the Youth (the possible disjunction between his inner and outer features) shadows our understating of him. The friend being depicted as narcissistic (his unwillingness to breed an heir, therefore being inconsiderate of those who surround him) in the procreation sonnets can reflect on the urgency of the Poet to secure some sort of enduring form of him. His self-conceitedness in the rival poet sonnets might be the way the Poet’s insecurities are coming to surface. The Fair Youth’s sexual promiscuity is often linked to the accusations of others, but the only poems which might reinforce those accusations are sonnets number 40, 41 and 42 (with the love triangle of the Youth, the Poet, and the lover). Whenever he is portrayed as being rigid towards the Poet the whole scenario is hypothetical. The way the friend is represented in these poems by the Poet does not help to delineate his figure either. The Poet seems to be eager to conceal the failings of the friend, but nothing is ever specified regarding his

sins. The complete lack of agency from the side of the Youth makes him particularly obscure and renders us completely unable to judge his character.

The issue at hand is that we will not find M^r.W.H. in the sonnets, because the Poet will not let us find him. We will never know about his inner qualities, because the Poet himself is constantly questioning whether he can ascertain anything about them, so he is reluctant to incorporate the topic in his verse (“Yet eyes this cunning want to grace their art; / They draw but what they see, know not the heart.” (24)). The only thing which he can truly judge about the addressee of the sonnets is his physical appearance, and the Poet seems to be much more keen on preserving that, than any of the Youth’s inner personal traits.

BEAUTY AND THE FAIR YOUTH

The sole reason why the beauty of the Youth is ever questioned is that his beauty is transitory (“Then of thy beauty do I question make, / That thou among the wastes of time must go.” (12)), and will fade with time to completely disappear, but its truth value is never doubted (as opposed to “So is it not with me as with that Muse / Stirred by a painted beauty to his verse” (21)). Initially the Fair Youth is approached by the Poet with arguments urging him to beget a son so that “thereby beauty’s rose might never die” (1). According to Kerrigan (74) “Shakespeare drew his arguments in favour of breeding from a model letter by Erasmus”. Kerrigan also points out that Erasmus’s work must have suggested to the poet that “the arts of literary imitation and of reproducing likeness have traditionally been compared to the resemblance which nature frames between a father and his son” (74). As opposed to Erasmus, however, the Poet “does not claim

marriage will make the young man happy. The woman who will bear his heir exists solely for this function, not as the man's companion or confidante." (Gardiner 334)

Yet we see the Poet as he gradually retreats from his efforts to convince the friend from sonnet 15 onwards. His focus shifts from eternalising the Youth through his bloodline to eternalising the Youth through lines of verse. One of the possible reasons for this might be that "what will be preserved of the friend [by a son] is not his full, unique identity but merely his 'sweet semblance' (13) or outward image" as it is put by Kaula (48). Also, procreation could be deemed insufficient, because "the young man's image is supposed to be exactly reproduced in the face of his child, but he has received that image from his mother ("Thou art thy mother's glass") rather than from his father" (Kunin 97). These two views are of course quite contradictory. The first question which ensues is: Does the poet really want to convey the "unique identity" of the friend? From what we have established so far, it seems he is doing the opposite. The second question is the following: Is he trying to create an exact reproduction of the face of the Fair Youth?

If he does, then the fact that there is not one blazon in the entirety of the sequence which would depict the Fair Youth's physical or external features, is quite surprising. The only poem which gets close to being a blazon is sonnet 99:

The forward violet thus did I chide:
'Sweet thief, whence didst thou steal thy sweet that smells,
If not from my love's breath? The purple pride,
Which on thy soft cheek for complexion dwells,
In my love's veins thou hast too grossly dyed.'
The lily I condemnèd for thy hand,
And buds of marjoram had stol'n thy hair. (99)

Even if we examine all 126 sonnets, it is rather challenging to find any physical attributes which would distinctly belong to the friend. His beauty is praised in almost every single poem. Yet we never get to know what the colour of his eyes are, or what the shape of his lips are alike. The fact that he is continuously called fair in the sonnets might imply that his hair is blonde, but there are passages which contradict even that (“And sable curls all silvered o’er with white” (12)).

THE ROLE OF ABSTRACTIONS IN ETERNALISATION

Thus, nothing specific is offered concerning the appearance of the Fair Youth, just the way nothing specific was offered in regards to his personality. Instead, what we get is a set of words which are used in connection with the friend to such an extent that they function much like epithets in the poems, denoting him. The three most common ones are *fair*, *sweet*, and various forms of the word *beauty*. If we only count the instances in which these words refer to the Youth, then *fair* appears twenty-nine times, while *sweet* has forty-one occurrences, and *beauty* has altogether fifty-four. Again, out of these three words two are synonymous with each other, namely *beauty* (or *beauteous*) and *fair*. We saw a similar phenomenon in the poems which promise eternity to the friend (there the three words were *lovely*, *fair*, and *beauty*). As it is noted by Vendler “*Sweetness* and *beauty* are two of Shakespeare’s constituting categories of value, standing respectively for inward *virtue* and outward *show*.” (98) *Beauty* is also frequently paired up with *truth* (sonnet 14 is one example of many), which stands for the same concept as *sweetness* does.

Now, the one element which is shared by all of these words is that they all refer to abstract concepts. Therefore, the Youth is defined by abstractions. What are the implications of this? The Poet refuses to portray the “unique identity” of the friend, and also to “exactly reproduce” the image

of the Fair Youth, because that would result in something which is just as ephemeral or short-lived as the friend's actual physical body. If he gives us the specific outlines of the friend, he simultaneously offers something which is too exact, therefore he limits the imagination of the reader.

This is best illustrated by the Poet's critical attitude towards the sister arts, particularly his stance regarding the art of painting. Renaissance paintings such as portraiture or landscape paintings were essentially mimetic. If we study such a work of art, we do not imagine the subject's face in any other way than it is painted. It is there, it has its set form, and it has been materialised long before we even set our eyes on it. The first instance in the sequence which shows the Poet's disparaging opinion on the matter is in sonnet 16:

Now stand you on the top of happy hours,
And many maiden gardens, yet unset,
With virtuous wish would bear your living flowers,
Much liker than your painted counterfeit (16)

Later the issue is revisited during the course of the rival poet sonnets. He criticises other poets in the closing couplet of sonnet 82 with the words: "And their gross painting might be better used / Where cheeks need blood: in thee it is abused." The Poet is eager to distinguish himself from them in the first two lines of the following poem: "I never saw that you did painting need, / And therefore to you fair no painting set." (83) Painting here primarily refers to the excessive use of linguistic ornaments, but the fact that the Poet expresses his views in these terms is quite revealing; alternatively of course, this can also refer to cosmetic 'painting' or make-up. This theme is present in the first line of sonnet 20 as well: "A woman's face with nature's own hand painted, / Has thou the master mistress of my passion". Here, we find no criticism, but what is painted by *nature* is the

Fair Youth's face or body which is again transient. Thus, descriptive or mimetic poetry which in its essence is similar to the art of painting is deemed inadequate by the Poet for the purpose of eternalisation.

We find similar arguments in Sir Philip Sidney's *The Defense of Poesy*: "Only the poet, disdainful to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, doth grow, in effect, into another nature, in making things either better than nature brings forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature [...]". Sidney also argues that poets "to imitate borrow nothing of what is, has been, or shall be; but range, only reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be and should be." (*English Essays: Sidney to Macaulay*) The emphasis here is on poetic *invention* or the power of verse to recreate the object in a form in which it never existed before.

Furthermore, it is not just the body of the Youth which is transitory and mutable in its character, but also beauty as a concept. What we perceive as aesthetically pleasing or beautiful changes both in a diachronic sense, but also from one place to another. Consequently, representing a particular materialisation or instance of beauty is insufficient when one's aim is to make something eternal. As it is pointed out by Kaula "A recurrent danger to the relationship is that the friend, in being 'woo'd of time' (70) or the fashions of the age, will permit himself to be absorbed by the public world, adopting its changeableness [...]" (53). This is the reason why the Poet strives to establish the constancy of the friend's beauty and juxtapose it with "the fashions of the age" throughout the sequence. The topic is touched upon in the first eight lines of sonnet 124:

If my dear love were but the child of state
It might for Fortune's bastard be unfathered,
As subject to time's love, or time's hate,

Weeds among weeds, or flowers with flowers gathered.

No, it was builded far from accident,

It suffers not in smiling pomp, nor falls

Under the blow of thrallèd discontent,

Whereto th' inviting time our fashion calls. (124)

Eternalisation in verse is then incompatible with any form of mimesis. Also, from what we have established so far it seems that only an abstract idea can be truly eternal, therefore the Poet has no choice, but to recreate the Fair Youth according to that. In this sense the Poet does take life away from the Fair Youth. When one is converting a living person into an abstraction through poetry it is inevitable to lose a sense of liveliness or vitality.

THE FAIR YOUTH AS AN ARCHETYPE

Kaula notes that the young friend's "symbolic status is further enlarged through his being identified metaphorically not only with the objects of highest prestige in the corresponding planes of being, such as the rose, gold, jewel, sun, and kingship, but also with time values of mythic variety" (47). The poems which best illustrate this idea are sonnets 68 and 106. Sonnet 68 opens with the line: "Thus is his cheek the map of days outworn, / When beauty lived and died as flowers do now". The Fair Youth appears as the epitome of anything and everything beautiful that ever existed. Thus, he is a bridge between the present and the past ("In him those holy antique hours are seen" (68)). Moreover, the friend is juxtaposed with that fleeting *beauty*, that simply *lived and died*, which implies that the Youth might be able to defy death and with that *time* as well (the two are often used synonymously in the sequence). By this the Poet "draw[s] upon the myth of the Golden

Age to exalt the friend as the final, isolated remnant of unfallen nature” (Kaula 47). The same theme reappears in sonnet 106 in the following lines:

Then in the blazon of sweet beauty’s best,
Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow,
I see their antique pen would have expressed
Even such a beauty as you master now.
So all their praises are but prophecies
Of this our time, all you prefiguring,
And, for they looked but with divining eyes,
They had not skill enough your worth to sing (106)

As opposed to the procreation sonnets, which only promised immortality, these two sonnets truly capture the essence of the eternal. The Fair Youth is not only a figure who was born at a certain point in history and will live on forever from that point onwards. John D. Bernard notes that the “friend is defined as the archetype” of “divine beauty” (81). Similarly, Schalkwyk states that the Poet’s “declaration that ‘you alone are you’ [in sonnet 84] is thus declaring: ‘you are the standard by which we measure what beauty is, by which beauty gets its name’” (261). Thus the Fair Youth appears as someone who in a way always existed and always will.

CYCLICALITY IN THE SONNETS

In addition, if we consider some of the other objects with which the Fair Youth is identified metaphorically, namely the *rose* and the *sun* as it is suggested by Kaula (47), we might find that those images have similar temporal implications as sonnets 68 and 106. Although both

the *sun* and the *rose* are depicted as fleeting and fragile in the sonnets, they are cyclical in their nature. Roses are perennial flowers, and even though they are not immortal they return year after year. What is intriguing about the fact that the young friend is identified as the *sun* or occasionally identified with *summer*, is that both of those are closely bound to *time* as a concept. The *sun* is in a way *time* itself. Days and hours are defined by the course and the cyclicity of the *sun* (“Even of five hundred courses of the sun” (59)), and years are defined by the succession of the seasons. Through this imagery the Fair Youth is united with what seemed to be the ultimate enemy of both the friend and the Poet, *time*.

Furthermore, cyclicity in the sonnets is not just a feature which is embodied in certain metaphors, but it is also an important underlying element in the dynamics of the entirety of the sequence. The Poet constantly revisits similar themes and imagery, creating a multiplicity of leitmotifs. The same effect is achieved by the repetition of the words *fair*, *sweet*, and *beauty*. This underlying cyclicity is best illustrated in sonnet 105, which in a way also appears to be the *ars poetica* of the Poet:

Therefore my verse, to constancy confined,
One thing expressing, leaves out difference.
‘Fair, kind, true’ is all my argument,
‘Fair, kind, true’ varying to other words;
And in this change is my invention spent,
Three themes in one, which wondrous scope affords. (105)

John D. Bernard points out that the Poet “is engaged in a search not merely for the moral truth of his friend, a search doomed to failure, but for a *style* that may attain a constancy beyond the material and moral vicissitudes of human existence” (77).

However, this style is not only indicative of the Youth and of the abstractions linked to the figure of the Youth. We can by no means separate the created style from its creator. This is even acknowledged by the Poet himself in sonnet 76:

Why write I still all one, ever the same,
And keep invention in a noted weed,
That every word doth almost tell my name,
Showing their birth, and where they did proceed? (76)

John D. Bernard notes that “The singleness of style constitutes a poetic personality, as if the poet could create an identity by the sheer repetition of the same words, till those words approximate his name [...]” (82).

CONCLUSION

As we have established, the Poet does take life away from the friend, because abstraction is essential when one’s aim is to eternalise. Also, as it is illustrated by sonnet 82, some of that life is obtained by the Poet himself, consequently the Poet is eternalised by his poems. From what we gathered we do not get to know someone in the figure of the Fair Youth, because portraying a living person’s complexity (his *unique identity* or creating the *exact reproduction* of his face) is only possible through mimetic poetry, which is inadequate for the purpose of eternalisation. Definite outlines are limiting and beauty is an ever-changing concept. Procreation is deemed insufficient too, because only immortality can be achieved by it, thus the Poet turns from persuading the friend to procreate, to recreating him in verse. Therefore, if we treat the Youth as being identical to M^r.W.H., then the promise which appears in the *Dedication* remains unfulfilled.

Instead, the young friend is defined by a plethora of abstractions. The reason for this and for his obscure nature might be that he is not recreated after one particular person, but he might stand for anyone or anything that ever been close the heart of the Poet. This is well illustrated in the following extract:

Thou art the grave where buried love doth live,
Hung with the trophies of my lovers gone,
Who all their parts of me to thee did give;
That due of many, now is thine alone.
Their image I loved I view in thee,
And thou (all they) hast all the all of me. (31)

The focus is not necessarily on who is loved, but rather on the fact that the Poet *loves*. In this sense the sonnets really are “fundamentally egocentric” (79) as it was pointed out by John D. Bernard. Hence the Fair Youth evokes certain concepts and ideas in the readers of the sonnets (primarily he is the archetype of beauty), but his figure is never too exact. It might seem to be slightly problematic to associate these poems with the art of painting after everything that has been said. The sonnets in their nature are nothing like paintings after all. Yet reading them is much like painting a picture. The mind of the reader is a canvas and as readers we are prompted by the abstractions which are offered to create our own paintings. The “worth” of the Fair Youth “inheres not in the accidents of age or sin but in a metaphysical essence accessible to the loving imagination alone” (Bernard 77). This is the reason why the sonnets and the Youth are eternal, because the poems do not limit the *loving imagination* of the audience. These works enable the readers to project their own ideas of beauty and of the Fair Youth on the canvas, and both can be repainted over and over again. As it is pointed out by Robert Weimann: “It was Ben Jonson who first said that Shakespeare ‘was not of

an age, but for all time’.” (19) This is possible because Shakespeare in the sonnets created something which in its essence is universal, and although M.F.W.H. is not eternalised, the Fair Youth does indeed “dwell in lover’s eyes” (55).

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