

UDC 821.111-193.3SHA.09:355.015(497.5)"1991"=111

Original scientific paper

Received on 15 November 2006

Accepted for publication on 30 January 2007

"All men are bad and in their badnesse raigne": Shakespeare's Sonnet 121 in Contexts of War

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The paper is concerned with what can be termed a "con-textual" reading of Shakespeare's sonnet 121, published in translation in one of the most popular Croatian daily newspapers in the summer of 1991, when the bloody Yugoslav war was already taking its heavy toll of suffering and death. In the case of Shakespeare's Sonnets, contexts primarily denote the poems within which a particular sonnet is embedded in the 1609 quarto order, but also those texts in relation to which an individual sonnet is made to function at a certain moment of its publication history. This historically situated embodiment of a Shakespeare sonnet deserves attention because it alerts us to the various ways in which universalizing discourse, for which Shakespeare as fashioned by the dominant traditions of Shakespearean criticism has become so in/famous, is deployed in order implicitly to support or additionally legitimize certain political assumptions and national allegiances in times of war. Prompted by the immediate textual environment of the newspaper in which the sonnet was published as well as by the accompanying translator's note, the discussion focuses on the complex semantic nature of this textual event and serves as a painful reminder of what readers of Shakespeare, marked by the difference of their specific cultural situations, are up against.¹

The Croatian translation of Shakespeare's sonnet 121 published on 18 August 1991 in *Večernji list*, one of the most widely read national daily newspapers in what was still just one among the Yugoslav republics,² represents a significant aberration in the reception history

¹ An early version of this paper was delivered at the international conference "Shakespeare and European Politics", held at the University of Utrecht from 4 to 7 December 2003.

² For basic information about *Večernji list* and other Croatian newspapers of the time see Stallaerts & Laurens 1995. At the beginning of their *Dictionary* there is a useful

of Shakespearean texts in Croatia, especially of Shakespeare's "non-dramatic verse". Shakespeare's Sonnets, translated much more often than the narrative poems and the other poems now customarily found in the scholarly editions of Shakespeare's "poetry", would usually first be published in selection in a literary journal and if they passed the test of the most critical segment of the public (which they, for better or worse, usually did), they would find their way into a book. The translation of this particular sonnet, although later included in a book as part of the complete sequence, appeared in a daily newspaper when the bleak prospects of the recent war were daily becoming more obvious to many. I have attempted to trace the obscure paths which the translations of Shakespeare's poems have trodden in order to think about and try to understand the ways in which Shakespeare's Sonnets have been framed by other "texts": metatexts (critical glosses, explanations and interpretations),³ visual texts (illustrations and especially cover illustrations), con-texts (both in and outside the sequence), intertexts – intended and unintended⁴; in a word by what I choose to term, following and in part modifying Genette's propositions, their "transtextual" frames in the broadest possible sense of the word.⁵ Because of its compressed form, the sonnet is always more susceptible to contextual interpretation, more easily embraced, surrounded

chronology which helps to further contextualize the subject of this discussion. Two events perhaps deserve mention here: it was on 25 June 1991 that Croatia declared independence; only two months later Vukovar, a city in Eastern Croatia, near the Serbian border, was attacked.

³ This is one of the interesting aspects of the majority of modern critical editions of the Sonnets, especially those which print their commentary on the same or on the neighbouring page thus unwittingly "fusing exegetical reading and canonical text together" (Iser 2000: 31); cf. Katherine Duncan-Jones's Arden Shakespeare edition (Duncan-Jones 1997) and Colin Burrow's Oxford Shakespeare edition of the Sonnets and poems (Burrow 2002) as the most prominent and the most recent examples. A similar process is at work in some Croatian translations of the sequence.

⁴ For some examples of the latter see my discussion of the Kajkavian translation of Shakespeare's Sonnets in Lupić 2002/3.

⁵ See Macksey's foreword to Genette 1997, especially pp. xviii-xix, for a brief and useful outline of the "general poetics of transtextuality". Genette himself defines the five types of transtextual relations in his *Palimpsestes* (Genette 1982: 7-12).

and finally determined by other texts.⁶ The contiguities of text and context play a central role in our reading of the sequence since the Sonnets almost always come combined with other texts. Such contextual affiliations affect their identity or their semantic potential, thus constantly reminding us that "all the subsequent textual constitutions which the work undergoes in its historical passages" (McGann 1991: 62) matter.

The translation was published in the "weekly supplement for culture and art" ("tjedni prilog za kulturu i umjetnost"), inserted in the middle of the newspaper (pp. 17-24) and entitled "Hrvatski rukopis" (see Figure 1), which means "Croatian Hand" in the sense of handwriting and suggests a direct, almost personal, involvement in what is being written, an expression of what "Croatian Body", body politic as much as anything else, feels. The word "rukopis", however, is ambiguous because it denotes both "handwriting" and that for which the Latin equivalent of "handwriting" is used in English: manuscript. Some readers may detect a deeply ironic quality that characterises the placement of sonnet 121 in this section of the paper. In short, it could be seen as almost parodying (or unconsciously reproducing) what the culture of the manuscript does: the classical text is enveloped in more text, it nestles inside other texts, usually at the centre of the page. Here, however, *the* text is pushed to the margins and at the same time embraced by a larger prose text whose arguments, though not explicitly, seek to be legitimized by the short canonical piece. What makes it additionally ironic is of course the term "supplement", which I offer as a tentative translation of "prilog". In the eighteenth century the poems achieved canonical status via a supplement (Malone's supplement to the edition of Johnson and Steevens, 1780); here the "supplement" is authorized via one of these very poems. The text that embraces the translation of sonnet 121 is entitled "The Praise of Hatred" ["Hvalospjevi

⁶ For an extremely interesting discussion of contexts see Kiséry 2000, especially pp. 133-138. He takes as his subject the random con-texts of microfilm reels and relates these, though not too convincingly in my opinion, to the changes in theoretical and critical fashions, especially new historicism. I am not discussing such "arbitrary connectedness" suggested by Kiséry (2000: 136) – the contiguity of the texts considered here is in my view far from accidental.

mržnji"] and was written by a well-known Croatian poet and intellectual, Dubravko Horvatić. Here is the translation as it appears in *Večernji list*, together with my transcription of the 1609 quarto text:⁷

Bolje biti zao nego na zlu glasu	Tis better to be vile then vile esteemed,
Kad te, premda nisi, kleveću da jesi;	When not to be, receiues reproach of being,
I čestit užitak mre uz takav rasud	And the iust pleasure lost, which is so deemed,
Po tuđem viđenju, ne po našoj svijesti.	Not by our feeling, but by others seeing.
Jer zašto bi tuđe preljubne i zlobne	For why should others false adulterat eyes
Oči pozdravljale objest krvi moje?	Giue salutation to my sportiue blood?
Il zašto mi krhkost krhkiji uhode,	Or on my frailties why are frailer spies;
Pa što dobrim smatram zlim hotice broje?	Which in their wils count bad what I think good?
Ne, ja sam što jesam, a onaj što cilja	Noe, I am that I am, and they that leuell
Na zlodjela moja, samo svoja zbere;	At my abuses, reckon vp their owne,
Dok su oni krivi, možda prav sam zbilja,	I may be straight though they them-selues be beuel
Nek mi čine smradnim mislima ne mjere;	By their rancke thoughtes, my deedes must not be shown
Osim ako jad ne potvrđuju opći –	Vnlesse this generall euill they maintaine,
Svi su ljudi zli i kraljuju u zloći.	All men are bad and in their badnesse raigne.

The translation of sonnet 121 which I invite you to consider here

⁷ See *Večernji list* 35 (18 August 1991), p. 22. The same translation was reproduced when the whole sequence was published in book form two years later; see Maras 1993. The quarto text is quoted from Shakespeare 1968.

seems to mimic the reception history of the Sonnets in Anglo-American cultures. Shakespeare's Sonnets have almost always been read in terms of other texts: notoriously, for instance, in terms of Malone's metatext, i.e. the note he appends in his influential edition of the Sonnets to the dedication from the 1609 volume, where he claims: "To this person, whoever he was, one hundred and twenty six of the following poems are addressed; the remaining twenty-eight are addressed to a lady."⁸ This is the inception of the stories that have dominated the reception of Shakespeare's Sonnets up to our day. They feature the "Young Man", the "Rival Poet", and the "Dark Lady" as natural givens rather than products of critical imagination. Such narratives about the Sonnets are important because they repeatedly stress the need to set a frame within which a sonnet or the whole sequence is then read. The difficult dedication of *SHAKE-SPEARES SONNETS*, perhaps the most puzzling paratext ever to be found in connection with any Shakespearean edition, is just another important instance of a liminal device that influences interpretation. A more explicit one is Lintott's announcement on the very title-page of his edition of Shakespeare's poems that the volume also contains "One Hundred and Fifty Four Sonnets, all of them in Praise of his Mistress".⁹ Lintott's intervention, coming from the early eighteenth century, had its famous precedent in Benson's decision to

⁸ Discussions of Shakespeare's Sonnets rarely note the discrepancy between Malone's 1780 *Supplement* and his own 1790 edition of Shakespeare when this gender division is concerned. The earlier phrasing (Malone 1780: 579), either deliberately or through oversight (Malone's or typesetter's), suggests that "[t]o this person, whoever he was, one hundred and twenty of the following poems are addressed; the remaining twenty-eight are addressed to a lady". This is quite odd, especially if we look at the note accompanying sonnet 127 in the same edition (1780: 682), where the dividing line is obviously elsewhere: "All the remaining Sonnets are addressed to a female." The 1790 edition clarifies this muddle by changing the earlier note (Malone 1790: 191): "To this person, whoever he was, one hundred and twenty six of the following poems are addressed; the remaining twenty-eight are addressed to a lady."

⁹ We should perhaps rightly wonder whether the Mistress Lintott mentions was not a convenient replacement of the many mistresses rather than of the unfortunate Master Mistress, whether, in other words, we ought to be grateful for the happy reduction of promiscuity, as Rollins puts it. When Lintott first advertised his edition in the *Post Boy* (24-27 February 1711), he claimed that the Sonnets were written "in Praise of one of his [i.e. Shakespeare's] Mistresses"; cf. Rollins 1944 II: 243.

meddle with the sonnets as they were found in the 1609 quarto volume. For this discussion it is of particular interest that he decided (if indeed he is to be taken to be responsible for all editorial additions) to give sonnet 121 the ambiguous title "Errour in opinion".¹⁰

All of the examples enumerated above participate in the common pursuit of establishing a contextual frame within which a particular poem is interpreted. Such critical strategies can be related to the conventions of the critical apparatus that since the eighteenth century has become inseparable from the idea of a serious edition of Shakespeare. Although this apparatus was originally intended to protect Shakespeare "from what Malone termed 'modern sophistications and foreign admixtures'" (de Grazia 1991: 10), it simultaneously helped to shape the text itself as the immediate object of critical investigation and to predispose "the reader to specific modes of reading and understanding" (11). The same kind of logic governs other relationships into which the textual object enters: for instance the broader context of the sonnet sequence or the specific situation or eventfulness of the translation under discussion. Such an expressly contextual mode of reading is a very lively strand of modern Sonnets criticism without the appraisal of which it is difficult to say anything sensible about either individual sonnets or the sequence as a whole. It will, for example, be crucial for the interpretation of sonnet 121 whether the text is read in connection with other texts (for example other, neighbouring sonnets from the sequence or sonnets further removed spatially but resonating with similar phrasing or theme), or whether its significance is established in isolation, with occasional reference to the texts invoked by the sonnet and standing outside the sequence (for sonnet 121 this role is played primarily by the Bible).

To Joseph Pequigney, for example, the interpretative context is the sequence and the interpretation of sonnet 121 depends on how the meaning of the preceding sonnets is construed.¹¹ He claims that in sonnet 121 the speaker "justifies the homoerotic component of his bisexual orientation

¹⁰ *Poems: Written by Wil. Shake-speare. Gent.* (London: Printed by Tho. Cotes, and are to be sold by Iohn Benson, 1640), p. 82; facsimile in Klein 1979.

¹¹ See Pequigney 1985. Pequigney's focus has a long tradition beginning, according to Rollins (1944 I: 304), with Jordan's *Shakespeares Gedichte* published in 1861, where it is suggested, in Rollins's paraphrase, that "121 very likely indicates that the poet had

against adverse critics" (201) while drawing attention to the fact that "the text is replete with words of sexual import, with 'pleasure,' 'false,' 'adulterate,' 'sportive,' 'blood,' and 'frailty' all given pertinent bawdy glosses by Partridge" (99). For him therefore "[a]ny mystery about what form the sexuality takes should be dispelled once the sonnet is viewed in its proper contexts: the adjacent sonnets and Part I as a whole":

Each and every one of the hundred twenty poems before Sonnet 121, as well as the five that follow it in Part I, deals, without exception, with the protagonist's preoccupation with the youth. How starkly anomalous Sonnet 121 would be if it treated of something else, as it would if the persona were defending his own carnal relations with anyone, or ones, other than the friend, and with whom, in that case, the sonnet would be uniquely unconcerned. It does not address him, but the sonnets at either side do; and by doing so they make it even more improbable that he is, in the interval, forgotten. (99)

Pequigney insists on the contexts in his more recent contributions too. For instance, in connection with sonnet 73 he opposes his approach to that of the anthologists, who "almost invariably print it out of context, unyoked by violence from its neighbors, and they thereby deprive it of its connective function and a dimension of its meaning" (Pequigney 2000: 285). That dimension of meaning which seems to interest Pequigney the most is again "the homoerotic character of the love exchanged between the older and the younger friend" and in order for it to be revealed the entire sequence must be taken into account. This is diametrically opposed to the formerly dominant practice of viewing the Sonnets as isolated artefacts, an approach which still seems to be espoused by Harold Bloom, who sees the

heard rumors directed at himself of an unworthy suspicion which, indeed, later critics sometimes revived (see II, 232-239)". The pages in the second volume Rollins refers to are devoted to the question of homosexuality and the Poet's relationship with the Friend. Rollins himself in the final comment on this sonnet draws attention to the context of the sequence, especially an earlier sonnet (35.5) and its claim that "all men make faults" (1944 I: 306). To others line 10 with the mention of "thy sensuall fault" may however prove more alluring.

Sonnets as "a rough series of isolated splendours" and claims that "[t]he aesthetic strength of the Sonnets has little to do with their appearance in a sequence, as more seems to be lost than gained when we read them straight through in order" (Bloom 1987: 1). Reading the sonnets as a sequence is not really equal to reading them "straight through in order"; the complex contextual relationships are not "orderly" in this sense.

Though Pequigney's arguments are often very convincing and painstakingly corroborated by frequent reference to the Sonnets, his final conclusion about sonnet 121 is disarming in its readerly ardour: it takes the form of an almost ecstatic exclamation reclaiming Shakespeare as a figure that "goes beyond Freud" (1985: 100) and defends "homosexuality" in Biblical tones: "No, I am that I am" (101). Yet it is mainly thanks to the influence of Pequigney's conclusions that sonnet 121 got included in *The Columbia Anthology of Gay Literature*, where the Sonnets are, naturally, seen as exploring a passionate affair (involving a physical relationship) between (two) men. The comment on the sonnet that interests us here is revealing: "However, the affair has had one vital affect on the poet, and that is to allow him to defend without care of consequence his own actions and the course of his desire. [...] He affirms 'I am that I am.'"¹²

It has however been suggested that any reduction of this difficult sonnet (as it is frequently described) to "a single theme, be it reputation, sexuality or self-knowledge, can be dismissed as oversimplification".¹³ The adjective "difficult" is often coupled with another: "major". G.

¹² See Fone 1998: 190.

¹³ Weiser 1978: 144. The reputation of the speaker (formerly usually written of as the reputation of "Shakespeare") as the central concern of sonnet 121 also belongs to the earliest interpretations of this poem – usually understood as Shakespeare's defence of his theatrical profession against the Puritans; cf. Rollins 1944 I: 304-305. Sexuality in relation to sonnet 121 will in different modern editions of the Sonnets be present to different degrees. It plays a prominent part in Burrow's glosses: for him *vile* "can carry a charge of sexual sin"; *frail* to him "implies weakness and susceptibility to passions, especially to sexual desires"; *rank* in line 12 is for him primarily "sexually depraved" and only secondarily "overabundant to the point of decay" (2002: 622 – incidentally, I'm still wondering why he decided to print *esteemèd* and *deemèd* thus producing eleven syllables in the lines). G. Blakemore Evans (1996: 233-234) also pays considerable attention to "sexual enjoyment", and an older but still often quoted edition is similarly

Wilson Knight, for instance, describes sonnet 121 as both "crucial" and "difficult". In his discussion of "the integration pattern" in Shakespeare's Sonnets he sees "some kind of beyond-good-and-evil claim" asserted in sonnet 121 (1955: 49), thereby moving not just beyond Freud, as is the case with Pequigney, but apparently beyond Nietzsche too. Further, Wilson Knight seems to offer an odd fusion of what could be called the contextual approach (represented by Pequigney) and the isolated-splendour approach (epitomised by Bloom), when he writes: "Whatever we think of the story, in so far as there is one, there flowers from its soil some of the world's greatest love-poetry. From this nettle-bed of vice, we pluck the flower, genius" (22).¹⁴

In his own twenty pages long approach to this sonnet David K. Weiser concentrates on "the gap between 'I' and 'they'" (1978: 148), recognising antithesis as the figure that pervades the entire sonnet (149) – something that Vendler will suggestively describe as "an amazing counterdance" (Vendler 1997: 514). This contrast between "I" and "they", this dominant antithetical pattern, Weiser argues, is thematically relevant since it establishes a moral opposition in which the speaker claims moral superiority (150-151). The sonnet's formal affinity with the Bible, antithetical structure being "a central feature of Biblical style", will, to Weiser's mind, further reinforce similarities with the central thematic preoccupation of Biblical texts: their "concern with moral judgment" (161). The evaluative terms found in

explicit about "sexual vitality" (Ingram & Redpath 1964: 278). Duncan-Jones approaches the matter in a much more tentative manner (one cannot help wishing she had done the same when claiming to be the first in proposing some textual solutions or retaining some original features of the 1609 text, like the reproduction of the notorious pair of empty parentheses in sonnet 126): to her the sonnet is "a reflection on false reputation, and on the corrupted judgements of those who disseminate damaging rumours about the speaker" (1997: 352), while the only mention of "sexual" is not only bracketed but also followed by a question mark when *so deemed* in line 3 is glossed as "judged to be (sexual?) pleasure" (352). John Kerrigan (1986) is even more reticent in this respect. Although endorsing the possibility of sexual depravity as a meaning active in line 5 (1977: 408), Booth's edition excludes the potential bawdiness of *will* and *count* in line 8 (410).

¹⁴ Knight is silently alluding to what Hotspur says in *Henry IV, Part One* (2.3.8-9; Bevington 1987: 172): "'Tis dangerous to take a cold, to sleep, to drink; but I tell you, my lord fool, out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety."

this sonnet will be recognized as "of distinctively Biblical origin" (160). Occasionally resorting to the surrounding sonnets Weiser constructs an interpretation significantly different from Pequigney's, enabling us thus to realize once again that reading a particular sonnet in terms of its neighbours does not amount to reaching the same interpretation. It is true that in his opinion too "the sonnets adjacent to 121 remind us [that] the speaker has sacrificed his good name for the approbation of his beloved" (Weiser 1978: 153-154), but the conclusion that "Shakespeare's purpose was not to challenge traditional morality but to present himself (or an aspect of himself) favorably in its light" (161) and to "achieve self-discovery through the wider recognition of moral law" (162) is not reconcilable with the Shakespeare who goes beyond Freud and Nietzsche exclaiming: "I am that I am". Even when read as a sequence, the Sonnets, although not *only* the Sonnets, will motivate different critics to construct different, even fundamentally opposed narratives.

When we look at the Croatian translation of sonnet 121 and its material context, the first thing we notice is that it is equipped with an interpretative note provided by the translator. Since it is in many ways typical of some traditional beliefs about Shakespeare's Sonnets, it is worth quoting in full:

Shakespeare's sonnets are a lyric diary without dates and a drama of his personal life without a formal structure. The cruel flow of time and the decay of beauty are constant concerns of these pearl-like lines, with wise remarks about the loveliness of nature and the harmony of the universe, about many-faced evil and human ingratitude, about countless social injustices – all strung along in passing. But the most deeply engraved is the sorrow for the irrecoverable loss of ever-elusive youth.

This biographical sonnet is one of the most difficult and mysterious of Shakespeare's poems. Some think that in it the poet says what he thinks about his own morality (or about his undistinguished profession of actor; or his friend with whom he identifies).¹⁵ Honestly and honourably he entertains a high opinion of himself because he knows himself too well;

¹⁵ The point about the identification with the friend originates with Pooler, as witnessed

but he also knows others too well to subject himself or his pleasures (or his poor vocation in the theatre where the Puritans first laugh during the performance only to scold him later; or the beloved young man) to their judgment.

William Shakespeare was born in 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon, where he also died in 1616. His ashes lie in Holy Trinity Church, and his verse in the heart of the whole world.¹⁶

The author of the translation to which the note is appended is Mate Maras, a prolific Croatian translator well-known for his insistence on using the twelve-syllable line in his translations of the Sonnets (and Shakespeare's verse in general) rather than the iambically patterned hendecasyllable which more or less established itself as the norm for Croatian verse translations of Shakespeare. The expansion of the line is motivated by the desire to make the verse more natural, colloquial and more readily intelligible. The translation of this particular sonnet represents, in this respect, a remarkable achievement. In it, the opposition between "I" and "they" receives strong emphasis and, save for two instances, the effect is

by Rollins (1944 I: 305): "Pooler (ed. 1918) thinks the subject is 'some particular slander' of Sh. or his friend: If his friend, Shakespeare identifies himself with him and writes as if the case were his own."

¹⁶ *Večernji list* 35 (18 August 1991), p. 22. All translations from Croatian in this paper are mine. I have endeavoured to reproduce as much of the syntactical and lexical peculiarity of Maras's prose as possible. The Croatian text is as follows: "Shakespeareovi su soneti lirski dnevnik bez datuma i drama o vlastitu životu bez formalne strukture. Okrutno protjecanje vremena i propadanje ljepote neprekidno se provlače kroz te biserne stihove; usput se nižu mudre opaske o ljupkosti prirode i skladu svemira, o mnogolikom zlu i ljudskoj nezahvalnosti, o bezbrojnim društvenim nepravdama. Ali najsnažnije je urezana tuga zbog nepovratnog gubitka mladosti i svega neuhvatljivoga što je prati. Ovaj biografski sonet jedna je od najtežih i najzagonetnijih Shakespeareovih pjesama. Neki smatraju da u njemu pjesnik kazuje što misli o svome moralu (ili o neuglednom glumačkom pozivu; ili pak o prijatelju s kojim se poistovjećuje). Iskreno i časno on sebe visoko cijeni jer se predobro poznaje; ali on i druge ljude vrlo dobro poznaje da bi sebe ili svoje užitke (ili svoje bijedno zvanje u kazalištu gdje se puritanci smiju na predstavama da bi ga potom ružili; ili pak voljena mladića) podvrgnuo njihovu sudu. William Shakespeare se rodio 1564. u Stratfordu na rijeci Avon; tu je i umro godine 1616. Njegov prah leži u Crkvi Svetoga Trojstva, a njegovi stihovi u srcu cijeloga svijeta."

comparable to what is found in the English version. These two significant differences of effect concern the problematic "I am that I am" and the verb "maintain" from the concluding couplet. The translation makes the Biblical reference less explicit by interpreting "that" as "what": "I am what I am", thus drawing attention to "what" rather than "who" the speaker is. Instead of "maintain" we find, interestingly, the verb "confirm"; its deployment in the conclusion of the sonnet leaves readers with the impression that "all men" are indeed bad and that the conditional nature of this general statement signalled by the crucial "unless" is less ambiguous than it may at first appear. This point will prove important when the sonnet is more closely examined in relation to the texts that encompass it.

The interpretative and biographical note quoted above functions as the first and most immediate context among the many which relate to and surround sonnet 121 in this specific textual environment. It should be noticed right away that although the sonnet itself makes no direct or even indirect mention of any "friend" of the "poet", the note rests entirely on what is not "in" the sonnet but what is regularly brought to bear on its meanings from its "original" or conventional contextual situations. Why should the sequence figure so prominently in a note appended to a translation of an isolated sonnet and how is one to reconcile the insignificant position given to the sonnet on the page and in the newspaper with the grand claims for Shakespeare's omnipresence and immortality? This and other questions, as for instance the difficulty to explain the co-existence of "his pleasures" and "the beloved young man" while avoiding any explicit sexual reference, are sooner or later bound to enter the reader's mind. The difficulty is compounded by the presence of the illustrations which, on the page where the sonnet is printed, feature two women: one above the sonnet and given a much more prominent position than the other that has, surprisingly, found herself under the very title "SONET 121", thus introducing additional confusion in terms of gender (see Figure 2).¹⁷

The supplement in which the translation appeared is provided with illustrations of women (or a single woman?) throughout, very often

¹⁷ As I have already noted, the translation of this sonnet was republished in the complete translation of the sequence in 1993. Interestingly, the illustrations in that volume,

depicting the female body in a suggestively erotic posture and half undressed (as for instance on the first page of the supplement; see Figure 1). The illustrator – the reader learns from the interview on pp. 20-21 – is Antun Motika,¹⁸ an artist whose central artistic preoccupations include "love, woman, God, suffering, glory" (20). In the words of an art critic quoted on the same page, Motika's art knows "no Him, and no Her": "To love and to lose oneself in the thin line. Lines are the tools of love! Drawing is Eros." When asked why his constant preoccupation is woman, Motika answers in the following way: "Love is immortality. [...] Immortality is a woman, carries her in itself [or perhaps: carries it in herself; I. L.]" (20). Then he goes on to say: "A woman needn't be beautiful in order for one to feel how she vibrates within, the bringer of wonder; she can be beautiful and yet you will feel nothing [...]. I have lost the feeling for the woman's enchanting smell. I no longer paint." (20) Earlier in the interview he describes the first years of his professional career, spent in the traditional, patriarchal environment of Mostar (in Herzegovina), where he observed

executed by a different artist, similarly complicate the neat divisions of the sequence established by the interpretative notes which the translator provides for each sonnet. For instance, the English and the Croatian texts of sonnet 121 are in this edition separated by a leaf with illustrations on both sides: one of a woman with a baby in a cradle behind her back, another of a man in a position that suggests both pillorying and (if one is to judge from what looks like a female breast) heterosexual coitus. See Figures 3 and 4.

¹⁸ It is curious, in the light of what I said above in connection with the word "supplement", that the artist's surname translated into English means a "hoe". Students of Shakespeare will no doubt think of this implement as a likely companion to the rake and the spade which Steevens quotes from Prudentius and uses to describe Malone's editorial work on the Sonnets (Johnson & Steevens 1793: vii-viii): "We have not reprinted the Sonnets, &c. of Shakspeare, because the strongest act of Parliament that could be framed, would fail to compel readers into their service; notwithstanding these miscellaneous Poems have derived every possible advantage from the literature and judgement of their only intelligent editor, Mr. Malone, whose implements of criticism, like the ivory rake and golden spade in Prudentius, are on this occasion disgraced by the objects of their culture. – Had Shakspeare produced no other works than these, his name would have reached us with as little celebrity as time has conferred on that of Thomas Watson, an older and much more elegant sonneteer [*sic*]." I would not, of course, subscribe to Steevens's opinion but simply could not let pass unmentioned the unexpected kinship of these words in the context of the Sonnets and the controversies besetting them from the beginning of their "canonical" existence.

and desired women, only more intensely titillated by the fact that their own desires were repressed.

Such quintessential heterosexual longing and the fascination with what is not normally considered beautiful but is still extremely exciting would no doubt be much more readily associated with the sonnets such as 130 ("My Mistres eyes are nothing like the Sunne") and others that seem explicitly to deal with women. That, however, may be too much to expect. The visual element of this discursive field functions, if due attention is given to it and if it is considered from an informed critical position, as another intrusion of the themes that frequently figure in the Sonnets, thus over and over again relocating the provisional boundaries set between an individual sonnet and other texts, and contributing to a continuous dislocation of the reader: at whatever site readers decide to anchor themselves, they will be asked to reconsider and question the stability of their interpretative position. Such dislocations are not reconcilable with Benson's claims about the Sonnets (and the rest of what his volume contains): "in your perusall you shall finde them *Seren*, cleere and elegantly plaine, such gentle straines as shall recreate and not perplexe your braine, no intricate or cloudy stuffe to puzzell intellect, but perfect eloquence" ("To the Reader", Klein 1979: 4).

This potentially rewarding uncertainty of position is, however, threatened by the dominant semantic designs of the network of discourses spread across the issue of the newspaper where sonnet 121 is embedded. If anywhere, "the embeddedness of cultural objects in the contingencies of history" (Greenblatt 1990: 164) is evident here. The specific ideological and cultural moment intrudes on the reader from the front page on, constantly and persistently refusing to be ignored. The tanks on the front page (see Figure 5) as well as the headlines reporting a "New Aggression Against Croatia": a massacre in Bjelovac, fierce fights around Okučani, the death of a news reporter, disillusionment about the possibility of peace, the request that recruits be released from the JNA (Yugoslav People's Army)¹⁹ – all of them testify to what it was that had to preoccupy everybody the most.

¹⁹ How impossible it seems now to translate Herbert's anagram on *Mary* and *Army* into Croatian, as the inappropriateness of connotation outweighs the appropriateness of phonetic identity: *armija* (army) and *Marija* (Mary).

Crime, slaughter, acts of violence and death constantly intermingle with appeals to ceasefire and truce, but without much hope. The extremities of war and peace, in the literal sense, here intermix somewhat in the fashion of the typical scenario found in early modern poetry of love, where war and peace are always at strife, always involved in a combat for the same patch of space (be it the cheek suffused with red and white, passion and virtue, or some other, more explicit opposition between immoral and moral – the antithesis whose importance for sonnet 121 has already been stressed). The text that most immediately envelops and semantically contaminates the translation of sonnet 121 is no exception. Written by Dubravko Horvatić and entitled "The Praise of Hatred" ["Hvalospjevi mržnji"], it is furnished with a smaller title above offering the equation "Serbian writers – war criminals" ["Srpski pisci – ratni zločinci"]. This text deals more directly than any other around the sonnet with "being vile" and "vile esteemed". Its primary interest is the question of identity, with the insistence on saying "I am that I am" and with representing "others" and their "adulterat eyes" (which in Shakespeare, as we know, always can mean both "eyes" and the plural of "I"). The subject of Horvatić's discussion (and Horvatić himself is a "poet, prose writer and essayist"; cf. Stallaerts & Laurens 1995: 110) is the eternal one of the sovereignty and autonomy of the Croatian language and its literary traditions, a question that will be argued *ad nauseam* throughout the nineties. Another prominent concern of his piece is with what is "ethical" and "moral". Certain leading Serbian intellectuals are seen here as, though not perhaps committing crimes themselves, still inciting others to crimes and hence aiding the aggression against everything that is Croatian.

It is worth returning, at this point, to the zeugmatic statement with which the translator of the sonnet closes his note: "His [i.e. Shakespeare's] ashes lie in Holy Trinity Church, and his verse in the heart of the whole world." Why would these particular lines, and especially their translation, repose in the heart of the whole world? That they should do is expected to be taken without question. This is neither the first nor the last time that the word "Shakespeare" has an almost religious aura around it: as the priest and the congregation who before the reading from the Gospels (in the Catholic ritual at least) make marks on the forehead, the lips and the heart, where the Word is intended to repose, so Shakespeare's words

repose in the heart of humanity like the words of the litany or a public prayer. Right below the note, the long text on Serbian intellectuals repeats not just the words of the translator and his final recourse to humanity – to the heart of the whole world, but also the words that appear right above the translator's note, in the concluding lines of Shakespeare's sonnet 121, "confirming" for the third time that "all men are bad": "They are all equal. The only difference is that some of them incite people to commit crimes, others order the crimes to be committed, and still others commit them. Against humanity." ["Među svima njima stoji znak jednakosti. Samo, jedni potiču na zločine, drugi ih naređuju, a treći izvršavaju. Protiv čovječanstva."]²⁰ This triple division that ends in sameness is the third of the three frames that merge into a single, forceful statement: all men are bad, where "all" means, necessarily, "the others". Or, in the words of one of the interpreters of Shakespeare's Sonnets:

[T]he couplet has further impact by providing a dismaying alternative community, one which would not be moved by the rest of the sonnet because its members lack the internalized gaze of a shaming authority and thus lack shame. Such a community would be one in which "All men are bad, and in their badness reign"; [...]. This alternative community is a version of the nightmare of no difference [...].²¹

There is not much more to be said, although it may be expected that the historicity of my own position and the specificity of the "eye" that looks and reads would require me to offer some final, conclusive comment. This actual hand and the actual "eye" are, on the contrary, factors that force me away from the argument and demand to be heard in a different key in the closing paragraphs of a paper in which they hoped to assume a privileged position at the beginning. As I am looking at this newspaper now, confronted with the sonnet once again, one-to-one (121), something painful stirs within me: it troubles me and refuses to speak, I am torn by the

²⁰ Dubravko Horvatić, "Hvalospjevi mržnji" ["The Praise of Hatred"], *Večernji list* 35 (18 August 1991), p. 22.

²¹ Engle 2000: 195.

conflict that exists "between experience and any possible language".²² In 1991 I was in Bosnia, the country where I soon witnessed the horrible war and where, in some form, the news I am now reading in this newspaper initially reached me. I remember now how important the release of the recruits seemed then to me and my family, how a person very close to me was waiting to be called up by the JNA, then the only official "army", and how everybody dreaded it. Does it matter for the reading of this sonnet that his death coincided with the formal beginning of my studies of English literature and that other tragedies, personal no doubt and mine, had already happened? Can these experiences, re-membered and therefore textual, play a significant part in the con-texts of the Sonnets? Set beside this personal history, the Sonnets for me fade in importance. Yet they will never be able to escape the personal histories of their readers, for they themselves always invite readers to breathe them and give them new life – as in sonnet 18 ("Shall I compare thee to a Summers day?") and its numeric counterpart 81 ("Or I shall liue your Epitaph to make"), to take examples that first come to mind. So much life has been breathed into these poems, and so much sorrow; it has been rightly noted, though in a somewhat different context, that they deal more eloquently with the painful than the pleasurable aspects of love (cf. Smith 2003: 7). To sacrifice this intimate dimension often at the heart of the Sonnets may mean to achieve "the wider recognition". But such wider recognition matters little when, to reverse the propositions of sonnet 121, "to be" must always mean "not to be".

It will always remain an open question to which extent contexts can rightfully be seen as constitutive of the meaning of "texts" and how much attention the Shakespeares articulated within other linguistic and literary traditions can reasonably claim. One insight which should by no means be left hastily behind is that contexts are and will remain important since, as it has been repeatedly pointed out, "context is [always] content" (McGann 1991: 84). That different cultural contexts ought also to remain equally

²² Emig 1997: 220. To assume a more critical attitude to what my discourse attempts to address, the reader is encouraged to see the whole of Emig's short but here highly relevant contribution.

important in such Shakespearean constitutions is another point that seems still to be in need of justification. Hence the contextual situation of the Yugoslav war and this little Shakespeare poem "Croatianed" and forced into the page like an embarrassing afterthought are comparable to the contextual situations of what some like to call Shakespeare's "homeland and his native tongue",²³ and are therefore deserving of equally serious and sustained treatment. What is more, the brutal realities of the war I witnessed will to me, against my will, always remain more deeply impressed in the memory than the general cataclysm of World War II, their contextual power and historical palpability as relevant as the forties were to Olivier or September 11 to those who suddenly and closely felt what massive destruction, death and fear mean. They will thus always be much more important to the way I approach not just Shakespeare but texts in general. It is, I suppose, a simple reiteration of the belief that "texts are worldly, to some degree they are events, and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted" (Said 1983: 4).

What is particular and individual often hurts more and this preoccupation with particularity, individuality, the cruel idiosyncratic anecdote of history and the significant moment of the past may have marked this discussion to a degree that some readers might find a little irritating. We judge what is significant, it is true, and we choose which past to single out for special attention. Yet I want it to be understood that such a procedure and the necessary choice it imposes are not intended as an irresponsible collapsing of "the great variety of readers" to which the First Folio editors appeal into a single reader. Quite the contrary: my responsibility could hardly anywhere be greater than it is here since my intention is to remind that the great variety of readers always consists of individual, particular readers whose voices are to be taken also as crooked but indispensable ciphers in the great "accompt" unless the great variety is not to become great uniformity. It is said of books that they have their

²³ Kennedy 2001: 251. For a somewhat impatient reflection on "the native hue of revolution" and the predicament of "foreign Shakespeare scholars" see Lupić 2004.

fates: they are hurt by time, destroyed or deformed by history. The texts these books contain seem to exist in a different, more malleable and more persistent mode. Still, it is essential that their identity, like the identity of their readers, whatever we imagine it to be or however we decide to circumscribe or expand it, should remain distinct.

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"SVI SU LJUDI ZLI I KRALJUJU U ZLOĆI": SHAKESPEAREOV SONET 121 U KONTEKSTIMA RATA

Rad se bavi svojevrsnim "kontekstualnim" čitanjem Shakespeareova soneta 121, objavljenog u hrvatskom prijevodu u *Večernjem listu* 1991. godine. Kad je riječ o Shakespeareovim Sonetima, onda kontekst prije svega označuje pjesme među kojima se pojedinačni sonet nalazi u redosljedu kakav donosi kvarto-izdanje iz 1609. godine, ali i one tekstove u vezu s kojima se pojedini soneti izravno dovode tijekom njihove sudbine u tisku. Ovo povijesno jasno ukotvljeno ozbiljenje Shakespeareova soneta zaslužuje pozornost jer nam omogućuje da unutar uskog okvira sagledamo

različite načine na koje se univerzalistički diskurz šekspirološke kritike – po kojem je postala toliko poznata, a dijelom i ozloglašena – upotrebljava kako bi se implicitno poduprle ili dodatno legitimirale određene političke pretpostavke i nacionalna svrstavanja za vrijeme rata. Neposredno potaknut tekstualnim okvirom dnevnih novina u kojima je prijevod soneta objavljen kao i pratećom prevoditeljevom bilješkom, rad se usredotočuje na složenu semantičku narav ovog tekstualnog događaja te konačno služi kao mučan podsjetnik na pitanja s kojima se čitatelji Shakespearea, obilježeni razlikama svojih specifičnih kulturnih situacija, suočavaju.

Keywords: Shakespeare's Sonnets, sonnet 121, contextual reading, Croatian translation

Ključne riječi: Shakespeareovi Soneti, sonet 121, kontekstualno čitanje, hrvatski prijevod

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Sraz li

ZAGREB, 18. KOLOVOZA 1991.

Broj 23



Večernji list
TJEDNI PRILOG ZA KULTURU I UMJETNOST

17
Večernji list (NEDELJA, 18.VIII.1991.)

Ilustrirani prilogi u ovom broju: Antun MOKIĆA

KRATKA POVIJEST SRBIJANJSKE MITOMANIJE U FRANCUSKOJ

Suvremenom smrtosnosu jugoslavensku krizu nelič je tako objavljenim uspravno Francuzima, liče možda nego drugim narodima Evrope. Naravno, ne govoreći o svim Francuzima, ali držim da to vrijedi za većinu Francuza. U jednom ovakvom tekstu nije moguće izostati nje rasloze za to, Francuski interesi, ekonomski, politički i kulturni, ranjiviji za se i opredmeti, naravno, najvećom drugu političku devotnostog i čitava našeg dvadesetog stoljeća, tako da su mogli izmisliti i savi knjižni pogled na realan život Srbije, kasnije SHS, odnosno Jugoslavije. Francuska je, naravno, pozna prirodno, završila svoju evropsku politiku na prateštvo s onim zemljama koje su se suprotstavljale prostranu Njemačke prema istoku, i to ne samo u posljednja dva stoljeća. Ona je sveobuhvatno, kao što se zna, počeznala i u rusku carevinu iz uglavnom istih razloga. I kada je Srbija izšla iz rasloze turške imperatne sila, ta sigurno devotnostog i početkom dvadesetog stoljeća svojim uspostavljanje straza u značajnu silu na Balkanu, ne bi se moglo reći da se to dogodilo bez pomoći i Francuske. I to je sada, umjesto Turaka, bila potrebna i Srbija za održavanje ravnosti prema njemačkom kolosku.

Inicijator uspostavljanja rješive veze s Francuzom bio je Garibaldi, koji je, poznato je, kao istaknuti srpski političar shvatio i plan razvoja buduće srpske države na Balkanu, međući, naravno, i na integraciju južnih Slavena pod srpskim vodstvom. Srpske, dakle, nade, u Francuskoj tradicionalnog zaljubljenika: uzajamna koristi od takva stanja polazila su očiglednom. Francuska je djelovala svojim ekonomskom, finansijskim mišići, ali i kulturnim, a Srbija je otkrivala Francuskoj svoju slavu, herojsku, mitografsku prošlost. Sve u svjetlosti «vlastite» žrtve umika gipsosovaca, «sirnog hajduka»... Postala je tako uzor herojske. Čak i u ovom kratkom tekstu mora se napisati koliko i kakvi su autori sudjelovali u tom postlu. Moglo bi se sakupiti jedna čitava zbornica djela objavljenih u Francuskoj koja govore i



antanta shvatio je u svrhu obrane od tzv. centralnih vlasti Malu antantu. Svi uspjesi Srbije, SHS i kasnije Jugoslavije moraju se velikom dijelom pripisati takvoj pomoći. Sve je to omogućilo i usavršenje jedne, mora se kazati, čuvene nacionalne samopouzdanje u Srbiji. Ali, već u drugoj polovini devetnaestog stoljeća započela su i oni francuski pisci, koji su raspoznavanje pisati o Srbima, kako su to uspjeli preobratiti u karakter. Čini mi se da je E. Denis najbolji formulator ba starije «Le Brindavani una nepatitulu exaltation». U narječju citiranom tekstu gospođin Laboulaye naglašava ba slična mišljenja: «L'instinct d'honneur d'un d'ancien patriote...» - No, tak počinje pobude u ovom postskom rezu i u svjetlu samopouzdanje razbuktava lakom snagom da gramo i memento-ritmo. Ona je najbolje osjetila na zemljotresu stancama knježevica Mica. U svojoj revoli «Zvezda od 25. maja 1892. Mica pila...» To nesantimentalne rusko-balkanske rase hrtac je naša budućnost i onog Jugoslavstva. Stoga, on ne čuim biti izgaden ni po kojem evropskom, uslovi, jer, nisi! Ho, rusko-balkanska čuoka je u stvaranju i prvot formaciji. Uprimo pogledaj u svu našu rase: iz takva stana, u takvoj atmosferi, a takvom egzaltacijom reoli se postom, barbarizacijom, i prenu, barbarizacijom balkanskog hajduka! Vrijelo je da i s tim srpski pisci Hana Kostomajec i njegova kava Mica i zentizam nisu paš s njezaba, nego su iznikli iz

SRITONOSI SRIPSURDI

slave Srbiju. Ograničen prostom navest tu samo naka.

Jok 1896. profesor Laboulaye objavio je knjigu pod naslovom «Eudes contemporaines sur l'Allemagne et les pays slaves» u kojoj međućim, čitali i ovo:

«Dakle, to želela tražiti stari, misao Srbina ide daleki od nezavisnosti, on misli na svoju braću u Evropi. Hercegovinu, Bugarsku, Dalmaciju, govoreći u rodoljubna pjesma, ratne i mirne da se jednog dana porovno rodit Dubavno carstvo i ono zna gdje da bi se sjedilo top carstvo i ono zna gdje ne pozna Konstantinopol. On ne želi srpskom gradu, ni čitavom, ni u hurski grad, Bistri, za njega je to, Carigrad, grad cara, čitavi grad Srbije, bavećile vlasti Srba».

A 1893. godine objavio je gospodin Herce Thiers knjigu «La Serbie, son passé et son avenir» s preporučivom gospođinom Edmond Laboulaye, profesora porodičnog prava na Olska de France i Bana Instituta. To je knjizi prelozila i geografika karta Dufourca carstva. Treća prednja to knjigu, vidjeti ba kartu da bi se shvatilo s koliko simpatijom on piše o Srbima i Srbiji.

Pocetni putopisac druge polovine devetnaestog stoljeća Charles Yriarte na preporučivom za Beču, Borsni naših osam dana u Zagrebu, kojim posuđuje nekoliko stranica u svojoj knjizi «Souvenir et Hercegovine» - izjednača i pozivanje za vrijeme ustanka. Grad mu je bio, usadom, glavni vrhac sa Srbije, ali, u «Čini se, usadom, da ovde postoje neki naci-



Pitar Sotari
Sogodin

je gruno još ovisna o Mađarskoj, dok je slovenska grupa, otvoreno rečeno, vezana u Austriju».

He radi se, dakle, o narodu, nego o grupi koja se samo u Zagrebu i njemu bližini, okolišni smisla Hrvatstvom.

Moglo bi se, dakako, citirati mnogo sličnih primjera, ali moramo štedjeti prostor. Namjera je moja pokazati samo na dva ili primjera kako je Srbija uspjela shvatiti svoj propagandum u Francuskoj shodno »aprecijativnu mišići in formacija», koje će sve do danas uspostviti francusko videnje i razumijevanje Srbije. To je propaganda evitista narodu u prvot polovine našeg stoljeća. Nažalost, takvu srpsku mišići imala Hrvatska. Hrvatska nije shvatila taku spolnu »aprecijativnu mišići pozitivnih sponora koji bi u francusku javnost boravile od našta i naše anti-hrvatske propagando, pa je stoga, rečimo, tavi na srpsku javnost propagande postila. Prvo, imala narodoš Drugog svjetskog rata, protiv Hrvatske, koje »aprecijativnu, fatalistične, žentije, imala mnogo uspjeha. Sve ono što je pisalo o Hrvatskoj u Francuskoj od Napoleonaevog krije, preko službena Kvaternik, pa do Mitrovićevih veza s Baronski i Tausandovim te »jugoslavenski odobara» su više-manje, sad »aprecijativnu, sad važnije prigodne veze. Ona su izvala i naše i kerilne Hrvatskoj, ali teško bi ih bilo uspostviti »aprecijativnu i onim što je imala i još danas ima Srbija».

Francuska je, dakle, kao ostalom većim dio »aprecijativnu, potpomogla razvoj Srbije u jednom devetnaestog stoljeća. Većna zapadna

Načelnik na 18. str.

Figure 1: Title-page of the "weekly supplement for culture and art", Večernji list (18 August 1991).

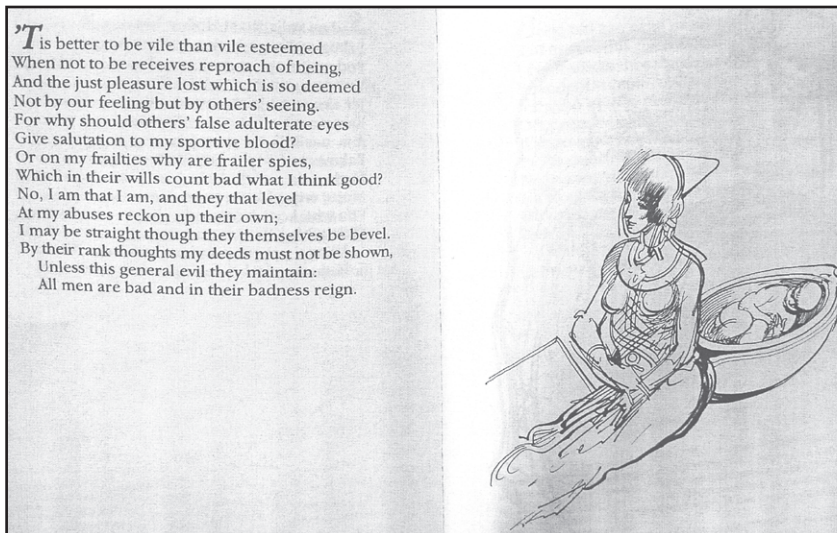


Figure 3: Illustrations made by Rudolf Labaš for Mate Maras's translation of Shakespeare's sonnet sequence (1993).

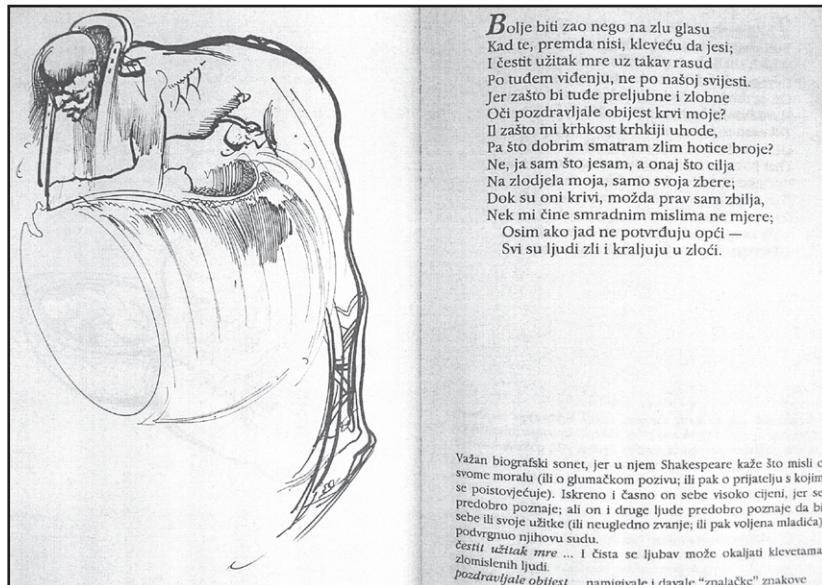


Figure 4: Illustrations made by Rudolf Labaš for Mate Maras's translation of Shakespeare's sonnet sequence (1993).



Figure 5: Front page of *Večernji list* (18 August 1991).