

Karolina Dąbek

"Sonnet VIII" by William Shakespeare in songs of Kabalevsky, Stravinsky and Mykietyń

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Karolina Dąbek

ACADEMY OF MUSIC IN KRAKÓW

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Abstract

Sonnet VIII Music to hear by William Shakespeare belongs to so-called “procreation sonnets”, where the poet insists on a young man to get married and have children. It should grant immortality to him and his youthful beauty to the world. The poem, written in iambic pentameter, reveals the structure of an Elizabethan sonnet. The main emphasis is laid on the last stanza which does not serve anymore as a protective advice, but as a warning. The syndrome of *Sonnet VIII*, understood after Mieczysław Tomaszewski as a “group of constitutive features” is formed here by the following categories: musicality, metaphorism, oxymoronity, rhetoric and erotic ambivalence. The poem has found its musical interpretations in the output of the 20th-century composers: Dmitry Kabalevsky, Igor Stravinsky and Paweł Mykietyń. All songs are both musically and expressively distant from each other, nevertheless each of them reflects an element of the Sonnet’s character. Metaphorism and oxymoronity appear in music of every composer in a very individualized way, which is proved by the analysis of relations between text and music. The sphere of erotic ambivalence is present only in Mykietyń’s song, intended for a male soprano. In a lyrical song by Kabalevsky the musicality and rhetoric

of the poem are especially underlined. In a constructivist approach of Stravinsky (dodecaphony) and Mykietyn (circle canon) analogies to an intellectual game and a net of complex literary metaphors in the poem can be found.

Keywords

Shakespeare's sonnets, Paweł Mykietyn, Dmitry Kabalevsky, Igor Stravinsky, relations between text and music

Over the centuries, the outstanding Shakespeare's masterpiece, his collection of *Sonnets*, resonated in vocal lyrics of many composers from different countries.¹ *Sonnet VIII*, musical from its nature, inspired numerous 20th-century composers in the special way to create their own, original interpretations. The purpose of this paper is to analyze and interpret three musical adaptations of this poem, different in many aspects: songs *Ty-muzyka* (*You-music*) from the cycle *10 sonnets by Shakespeare* op. 52 by Dymitr Kabalevsky; *Musick to Heare* (*Music to hear*), the first of *Three songs from William Shakespeare* by Igor Stravinsky, and the third part of *Sonety Szekspira* (*Shakespeare's sonnets*) by Paweł Mykietyn. The theory of interpretation of the musical composition with text proposed by Mieczysław Tomaszewski will serve as theoretical basis.

Sonnets by Shakespeare Located in the Tradition of the Genre—Introductory Information

Sonnets are one of the most mysterious masterpieces of William Shakespeare; surprisingly little is known about their origin. The collection was published in 1609 and includes 154 poems. Because of stylistic filiations with earlier dramas and poems it is supposed that the majority of

¹ Among Polish artists, his poems were used by, e.g., Tadeusz Baird, Andrzej Czajkowski, Paweł Mykietyn, whose adaptation is discussed in the following article.

them were created in years 1593–1596,² and Samuel Barber claims that *Sonnet VIII*, known from the first words of the poem as *Music to hear*, was written even earlier, in 1585.³ Indicating certain inequalities of the style, as well as punctuation mistakes, specialists claim that Shakespeare did not prepare sonnets to print, so he also did not do proofreading. Perhaps they were written as a kind of poetic etudes, which purpose was not to be published but to develop the author's technique. It is worth noticing that there are doubts concerning authorship of several poems.⁴

The theme of *Sonnets* is love in its different aspects: careful feeling of a man towards his young Friend, or later, love story with Black Lady. Composition of a collection was subordinate to the distinction between two lyrical "you": first 125 poems are addressed to the lad, whereas in sonnets 127–152 a woman is an addressee. In the context of the first part of *Sonnets*, in which delight over the beauty of Friend, according to several interpreters, is not only the expression of platonic love, but it is connected also with the element of homoerotic love, first seventeen poems are treated as a separate group. There, a poet protectively and unselfishly encourages the young man to get married and have children so that Friend could give his beauty to the world and achieve immortality. In metaphoric interpretation of Murray Krieger, it is an attempt to persuade the lad to look into "magical mirror of love" instead of looking into "Narcissus's mirror".⁵ Specialists call this first group of poems "procreation sonnets"⁶ or "marriage campaign".⁷ *Sonnet VIII* of incipit *Music to hear* is one of the poems from this group.

For a long time, Shakespeare's sonnets were considered as work of an autobiographical character,⁸ although the identity of two characters, a boy and a woman, has remained as a pure conjecture until

² S. Barańczak, *Nie igraszka czasu*, [in:] W. Shakespeare, *Sonety*, translation, preface and analysis: S. Barańczak, Poznań 1993, p. 7.

³ S. Butler, *Shakespeare's Sonnets Reconsidered*, London 1927, p. 168.

⁴ S. Barańczak, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁵ M. Krieger, *A Window to Criticism: Shakespeare's Sonnets and Modern Poetics*, Princeton 1964. Translation of the citation from: K. Podrygajło, *Sonety Szekspira i ich trwanie w muzyce Pawła Mykietyna*, "Res Facta Nova" 11 (2010), p. 308.

⁶ R. Dyboski, *O sonetach i poematach Szekspira*, Warszawa 1914, p. 31.

⁷ J. Sito, *Wstęp*, [in:] W. Shakespeare, *Sonety*, transl. into Polish by J. Sito, Warszawa 1982, p. 9.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

today. In the context of the discussed poem, it is worthy to mention several hypotheses regarding the identity of Friend. From the sonnets themselves, what Stanisław Barańczak notices, we discover that he was a much younger man than an author, obtaining fortune and high social status; a beautiful lad of quite instable lifestyle.⁹ The additional premise is the mysterious dedication of the whole collection,¹⁰ what suggests that Friend had name and surname starting from letters W. and H. Two the most probable candidates would be Henry Wriothesley, the third earl of Southampton (1573–1624) and William Herbert, the third earl of Pembroke (1580–1630).¹¹ They both fit the description and the poet dedicated each of them his earlier works. A researcher specialized in Elizabethan period and Shakespeare, Alfred Leslie Rowse, believed that the first sonnets (according to the scholar, written in 1592) were commissioned by the family of Earl of Southampton that were worried about the young men.¹² Indeed, William Herbert would be too young for marriage. At the beginning of the 20th century, however, scholars have departed from the interpretation of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* on the basis of biographical facts, paying attention to literary fiction based on conventions of Renaissance sonnets.

Sonnet, which has many limitations and technical difficulties that are challenging for the artist, is traditionally regarded as a test of poetic skills. The Italian model originating from Petrarch consists of fourteen verses grouped in two quatrains of rhymes abba abba and two with a double terza rima (cdc cdc) or triple rhythm (cde cde).¹³ The main difficulty with this arrangement is the selection of quadruple and triple rhymes; the greater compositional freedom is the issue of the division of octave and sestet. However, Shakespeare used in his sonnets an English model (also called Elizabethan or Shakespeare), introduced in the early Renaissance by Thomas Wyatt and Henry

⁹ S. Barańczak, *op. cit.*, pp. 10–12.

¹⁰ "To the onlie be getter of / These insuing sonnets / Mr W.H. all happinesse / And that eternitie / Promised / By / Our ever-living poet / Wisheth / The well-wishing / Adventurer in / Setting / Forth / T.T."

¹¹ S. Barańczak, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

¹² J. Sito, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

¹³ J. Sławiński, *Sonet*, [in:] *Słownik terminów literackich*, ed. M. Głowiński, T. Kostkiewiczowa etc., Wrocław 2002, pp. 517–518.

Howard, in which the scheme: three quatrains and distich uses only simpler double rhymes (abab cdcd efef gg). The scheme of this sonnet seems to be easier from a technical point of view. However, as Barańczak notices:

[...] If a poet, just like Shakespeare, wants the bounding frame to remain in a continuous but varying form and intensity of conflict with its contents, the Elizabethan model turns out to be paradoxically more difficult than the Italian model.¹⁴

Therefore, the Polish poet and translator indicates the necessity to balance the weight of the last double verse (culminating point, conclusion, crucial argument) with the earlier, describing stanzas. In the assumed scheme, Shakespeare reaches the effect of variability through using enjambment, inversion, pauses, cycles and another syntax structures that can suggest other than Elizabethan division of the stanza.¹⁵

Sonnet VIII by William Shakespeare. Analytical Remarks

Sonnet VIII by William Shakespeare takes the form of rhetorical monologue of the lyrical subject, that is addressed to the addressee. According to the convention of analyzing this poem in the context of other “procreation sonnets”, it is recognized that this addressee is one of the heroes of the sonnets: Friend (as he is referred to in this article). It should be emphasized, however, that in the poem itself there is no term that could imply the addressee’s gender: the lyrical subject addresses him in the second person, using the word “thou”—this fact permits a variety of interpretations of the work. Based on the text itself, the relationship between these two characters can be described: it is a relation between a master and a student, in which the learned and experienced protector persuades and gives advice, and at the very end he even warns the young man, apparently resisting and reluctant to persuade. As Barańczak suggests, besides the author himself and an addressee of his words, the character of this sonnet, maybe peripheral,

¹⁴ S. Barańczak, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

¹⁵ M. Schlauch, *Zarys wersyfikacji angielskiej*, [in:] *Poetyka. Zarys encyklopedyczny*, ed. M.R. Mayenowa, L. Pszczołkowska, Wrocław 1958, p. 38.

is also Time.¹⁶ The threat of vanishing of beauty and happiness is particularly marked in the conclusion of the whole poem: “Thou single wilt prove none”. In Polish translations, we can find solutions such as “w nicość obrócisz Twą samotność srogą” (in English: “in nothingness you will turn your severe loneliness”, transl. by Maria Sułkowska), “równa śmierci droga samotnika”, (“equal with death [is] the way of solitary”, transl. by Włodzimierz Słobodnik) or “kto samotny—nic zeń nie zostanie” (in English: “who [is] lonely—nothing will remain after him”, transl. by Stanisław Barańczak). According to Helen Vendler, this phrase contains even the element of sneer.¹⁷ The original text of *Sonnet VIII* by Shakespeare is presented in table 2.

Sonnet VIII is a strophic poem, built on the English model of sonnet, preserving its typical scheme of rhymes (abab cdcd efef gg). In the poem, various rhetorical terms (rhetorical question, metaphor, oxymoron, paradox, comparison, parallels) are added, that on the one hand increase the rhetorical character of the text, and on the other build tension and emphasizes internal oppositions and contradictions. Analyzing the structure of a poem, it is possible to notice that it was built from three unequal parts on the basis of the thesis—antithesis—synthesis: in the first two stanzas, the lyrical subject describes the sadness of Friend, listening to music, and recognizes its cause, that is lonely life. In the next stanza, by introducing a clear contrast of character, he paints a picture of a happy family, and in the final stanza he points out the solution while respecting the consequences of the wrong choice (Tab. 1).

stanza	verses	part	description
I and II	1–8	thesis	lonely life as the cause of sadness
III	9–12	antithesis	family life brings happiness
IV	13–14	synthesis	conclusion-warning

Tab. 1: Scheme of construction of *Sonnet VIII* by William Shakespeare.

¹⁶ S. Barańczak, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

¹⁷ H. Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, Cambridge 1999, p. 79.

William Shakespeare— <i>Sonnet VIII</i>	Transl. Stanisław Barańczak	Transl. Kacper Podrygajło
<p>Music to hear, why hear'st thou music sadly? Sweets with sweets war not, joy delights in joy. Why lovest thou that which thou receivest not gladly, Or else receivest with pleasure thine annoy?</p>	<p>Głos jak muzyka mając, czemuż przy muzyce Smutniejesz? Słodycz słodzi, szczęście uszcześliwia: Ty zaś porządek rzeczy wywracasz na nice, Gdy tylko przykrość cieszy cię, a zgrzyt ożywia.</p>	<p>Gdyś muzyką dla uszu, czemu słuchasz jej w smutku? Miód się z miodem nie kłoci, radość rada radości; Dlaczego więc kochasz przebiegi tych nut ku Swemu niepocieszeniu lub z lubością—ból gościsz?</p>
<p>If the true concord of well-tuned sounds, By unions married, do offend thine ear, They do but sweetly chide thee, who confounds In singleness the parts that thou shouldst bear.</p>	<p>Jeżeli w małżeńskie pary połączone tony Zgodnymi dwudźwiękami ucho twoje kołają – Czynią ci tylko wyrzut, że kanony Pisane na dwa głosy pragniesz śpiewać solo.</p>	<p>Jeśli dobre współbrzmienie, czysty strój zgodnych dźwięków, Zaślubionych akordem, dziwnie razi twe ucho – Słodko gani cię tylko, że nie słyszeć chcesz wdzięk Wielogłosu, gdy solo brzmisz samotnie i głucho.</p>
<p>Mark how one string, sweet husband to another, Strikes each in each by mutual ordering, Resembling sire and child and happy mother, Who, all in one, one pleasing note do sing.</p>	<p>Słuchaj, jak struna, gdy ją dłoń grajka potrąca, W drugiej strunie znajduje harmonijne echo – Ojca z matką i dzieckiem więź równie gorąca Zespala w jedność, kiedy śpiewają z uciechą;</p>	<p>Zważ jak słodkim jest mężem jedna struna dla innej, Gdy w harmonii wzajemnej się ze sobą stapiają: Ojca, dziecka i matki szczęśliwości rodzinnej Są zaśpiewem i jedno, choć troiście śpiewają –</p>
<p>Whose speechless song, being many, seeming one, Sings this to thee: "Thou single wilt prove none."</p>	<p>I strun tak wiele w jedno bezślowne przesłanie Wciąż śpiewana dla ciebie: "Jeden sam – będziesz niczym".</p>	<p>Pieśń bez słów tej jedności, która głosy trzy liczy, Śpiewa ci: "Kto samotny—nic zeń nie zostanie".</p>

Tab. 2: *Sonnet VIII* by William Shakespeare—original text, poetic translation into Polish by Stanisław Barańczak and word-to-word translation by Kacper Podrygajło.

In the construction of *Sonnet VIII*, leading to the end can be clearly seen: the earlier pictorial arguments and mild affirmations are brought to the last, accented verse, which is not only an instruction, but also a warning.

In terms of versification, the Elizabethan sonnet is usually written in the iambic pentameter, in which some variations of the rhythmic pattern are permitted in the English variant.¹⁸ In *Sonnet VIII*, Shakespeare uses this opportunity and at some point breaks the monotony of evenly repeated jamb feet. The iambic scheme appears in some verses (e.g. “Or **else** receivest with **pleasure thine annoy?**”);¹⁹ in others, modifications of the basic rhythm are introduced (e.g. the initial inversion of the accents in verse 1: “**M**usic to **hear**, why **hear’st** thou **music** **sadly?**”). The heterogeneity, metric irregularity, and moving median in the first stanza (verses 1:4+7, verse 2:5+5, verse 3:4+7, verse 4:7+3) is supposed, according to Vendler, to mirror the trouble of lonely life, not having family.²⁰

Character of *Sonnet VIII*. An Attempt to Sketch a Syndrome

How Mieczysław Tomaszewski indicates,²¹ if we want to analyze musical interpretations of a poem, firstly we have to make an attempt to sketch its syndrome, i.e. “characteristics of constitutive features”. In *Sonnet VIII* by Shakespeare, the following categories are primarily visible: musicality, metaphoricity, oxymoronicity, rhetoric and erotic ambivalence.

Musicality. The whole *Sonnet VIII* is full of words and phrases connected with music. As Kacper Podrygajło writes, this poem “owes to music not only metaphors and rhetoric props, but also its origin.”²² There is no specific type of music pointed out, however, nor sound or performance (what part of the instrument are the strings in the sonata?). To her description Shakespeare does not use defining adjectives, but rather verb-noun constructions, such as “concord of well-turned sounds”, “one string [...]

¹⁸ M. Tarlinskaja, *Shakespeare and the Versification of English Drama, 1561–1642*, London 2014, pp. 5–6.

¹⁹ Bolded text means that syllable should be accentuated.

²⁰ H. Vendler, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

²¹ M. Tomaszewski, *Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh Goethego w pieśniach Zeltera, Schuberta, Schumanna i Liszta*, [in:] *Wiersz i jego pieśniowe interpretacje. Zagadnienia tekstów wielokrotnie umuzycznionych. Studia porównawcze*, ed. Idem, series “Muzyka i Liryka”, vol. 3, Kraków 1991, pp. 84–102.

²² K. Podrygajło, *op. cit.*, p. 335.

strikes each in each”, therefore he emphasizes the very essence of music, its universality. In other words, we do not know what it is, but we know how it works: it speaks directly to the feelings. This lack of specifying of music in the poem allows for its ambiguous, and metaphorical understanding.

Metaphoricity. The music is the base of several crucial metaphors for the *Sonnet VIII*: the addressee himself resembles music; the harmony of married life or two vibrating strings is contrasted with the solitary song. It is significant to use the contrast of multiplicity (“many”) and singularity (“one”), which become oxymoronic and metaphorical unity (“one in one”, “being many, seeming one”) because both these categories coexist in music: unison is the perfect alignment, the consistency of multiplicity and the highest consonance. It is worthy to mention Vendler’s note at this moment, who points out the existence of significant wordplay: “singles”, “singleness” and “sing”.²³

Oxymoronicity. The oxymoronic situation is particularly marked in the first two stanzas of the poem. The addressee himself resembles music (verse 1), he is the same sweetness and joy—but at the same time he is unlike it, he fights, he has arguments with it, he creates dissonance. He loves her (verse 4), while the sounds make him tired annoyed; the music makes him feel sad, and harmony harms his ears (“offend [his] ear”). Another oxymoron as following: can “the true concord of well-tuned sounds” really hurt? The stubbornness and indifference of a young man to marriage, as Joel Fineman observes, is yet another inexplicable paradox in the world of harmony and unity presented in the sonnet.²⁴

Rhetoric. It is about some rhetoric, persuasive tone of speech, which purpose is to persuade the addressee that the author is right. In this case, it is connected with didactic or pedagogical character: the master teaches and gives his student advice. Vendler indicates that in the poem we can find construction typical for rhetorical form: single rhetorical question (verse 1), two pleonastic claims (verse 2) and double question (verses 3 and 4).²⁵ Rhetorical terms used in the poem are displayed as arguments.

²³ H. Vendler, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

²⁴ J. Fineman, *Shakespeare’s Perjured Eye: The Invention of Poetic Subjectivity in the Sonnets*, London 1986, p. 258.

²⁵ H. Vendler, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

Erotic ambivalence. It is a feature of the majority of the Shakespeare's cycle, but the sex of the addressee can be pointed out without doubts only when lyrical subject talks about him in third person. As I have mentioned above, in *Sonnet VIII*, the sex of the addressee was not indicated *expressis verbis*, and lack of grammatical features allows to interpret poem in different ways. What is worth mentioning in this moment is there is one more indefiniteness in the poem: harmony of family is created by a father, a child and a happy mother (verse 1), but before (verse 9) "husband to another" can be understood as marriage but also as partnership of two men, and Fineman interprets it in this way.²⁶ In the context of queer critique,²⁷ it would be indication of sexual identity of the *Sonnets'* author, written in the text.

Dymitr Kabalevsky—*Ty-muzyka (You-music)*

Dymitr Kabalevsky wrote the cycle of songs *10 sonnets by Shakespeare* op. 53 for basso and piano in 1950.²⁸ Probably the main reason for creating the vocal cycle was the fact that he read the sonnets translated by Samuel Marszak. According to Joanna Piwowarska, the translation of the whole collection, published in 1948, became the epoch event in the history of reception of Shakespeare's sonnets in Russia in the 20th century.²⁹ The author explains that earlier, 19th-century translations were characterized as conventional, had "more beautiful" style and eliminated the complicate metaphors. On the other hand, Marszak tried to preserve the features of the original text in layers of picturizing, style and form and semantics. However, it is possible to notice his original interpretation and characteristics of poetic style of translation (Tab. 3).

²⁶ J. Fineman, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

²⁷ A. Burzyńska, *Gender i queer*, [in:] *eadem*, M.P. Markowski, *Teorie literatury XX wieku. Podręcznik*, Kraków 2007, p. 463.

²⁸ D.G. Daragan, *Kabalevsky, Dmitry Borisovich*, [in:] *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. S. Sadie, vol. 13, London 2001, p. 299.

²⁹ J. Piwowarska, *Pośród dysonansów i harmonii. Rosyjskie przekłady Sonetu 29 Williama Shakespeare'a*, [in:] *Kłamiwe posłanie. Lektury sonetów Shakespeare'a*, ed. M. Gibińska, A. Pokojska, Kraków 2005, pp. 224–225.

William Shakespeare	Translation by Samuel Marszak
<p>Music to hear, why hear'st thou music sadly? Sweets with sweets war not, joy delights in joy. Why lovest thou that which thou receivest not gladly, Or else receivest with pleasure thine annoy?</p>	<p>Ты - музыка, но звукам музыкальным Ты внемлешь с непонятной тоской. Зачем же любишь то, что так печально, Встречаешь муку радостью такой?</p>
<p>If the true concord of well-tuned sounds, By unions married, do offend thine ear, They do but sweetly chide thee, who confounds In singleness the parts that thou shouldst bear.</p>	<p>Где тайная причина этой муки? Не потому ли грустью ты объят, Что стройно согласованные звуки Упреком одиночеству звучат?</p>
<p>Mark how one string, sweet husband to another, Strikes each in each by mutual ordering, Resembling sire and child and happy mother, Who, all in one, one pleasing note do sing.</p>	<p>Прислушайся, как дружелюбно струны Вступают в строй и голос подают, - Как будто мать, отец и отрок юный В счастливом единении поют.</p>
<p>Whose speechless song, being many, seeming one, Sings this to thee: "Thou single wilt prove none."</p>	<p>Нам говорит согласье струн в концерте, Что одинокий путь подобен смерти.</p>

Tab. 3: *Sonnet VIII* translated into Russian by Samuel Marszak.

In the translation of *Sonnet VIII* into Russian, Samuel Marszak preserves the rhymes and stanzas, and he also tries to translate the content precisely, keeping musical metaphors and oxymorons, although he simplifies their character. Let us pay attention to the concrete differences: rhetoric question from the first stanza of the original text have equivalents in the Russian translation in the second stanza; feeling of “not understood longing” (“непонятною тоской”), absent in the original text, appears replacing the oxymoronical context of the phrase “sweets with sweets war not, joy delights in joy”, and the ambiguous relation “sweet husband to another” is translated as friendship.

In the musical interpretation of *Sonnet VIII*, Kabalevsky uses text in Marszak's translation, without introducing any modifications. The form of the song can be described as strophic, based on the scheme ABA'C. In music, two contrast expressive categories are noticed: lyricism (in parts A and A') and drama (in parts B and C). In the following parts, clearly distinguished through the change of character, texture and key, they will be presented alternatively, but every time quite differently: in the lyrical parts, we will find the lullaby or arabesque character, and in the dramatic parts: sombre and serious. The composer follows the strophic construction of the text, separating the succeeding stanzas by instrumental fragments: between stanzas I and II, it is a one-tact pause, and the rest of them are separated by longer interludes. It adds different dramaturgy to the construction, built here on the base of waving of tension and relaxation, where the main accent is found in the episodes of drama expression.

The harmonious picture of a happy family in the third stanza of the sonnet is found in part A' as musical realization in the swinging movement of the accompaniment. What is interesting, almost identical material became the basis for the development of the oxymoronic stanza I (part A) that tells us about sadness and longing. It should be noted, however, that these fragments differ significantly only at the end (not including the change of accompaniment that becomes arabesque). While the musical character of the stanza III is a certain unity, in the earlier one we can see a clear crack: on the word “torment” (verse 4: “муку”) the harmony changes abruptly from F major chord to far distant C minor (the whole piece is maintained in C major),

what emphasizes the oxymoronic meaning of the text—music symbolizes joy and suffering at the same time (Ex. 1). A particular kind of musical narrative accompanies the verses of stanza II, where drama is even more deepened than in the musical elaboration of the final stanza. Accompaniment, turning into a low, gloomy register, becomes austere, maintained in chords, and vocal part begins to sound less like singing, and more like expressive recitative. This change of character can be attempted to translate as a desire to emphasize the rhetoric of the text, but it appears that it results more from the overriding need for musical contrast than from the content of sonnet itself. Although menacing warning at the end of *Sonnet VIII* does not lose anything in the Russian translation, Kabalevsky presents it more in character of moral that the culmination point.

Ex. 1: D. Kabalevsky, *Ty-muzyka*, (*You-music*) from the cycle *10 sonnets by Shakespeare* op. 52, bb. 3–11.

Igor Stravinsky—*Musick to Heare*

Three songs from William Shakespeare for mezzo-soprano, flute, clarinet and viola were written in 1953; Stravinsky lived in the USA at that time. Dedication of the composition is quite unusual; on the score we can read: “Dedicated to Evenings on the Roof”. These “Evenings on the Roof” is the original name of concerts of contemporary music, having been organized until today and belonging to the cycle “Monday Evening Concerts” in Los Angeles, during which Stravinsky’s compositions were also performed. During one of them, on the 8th of March 1953, Robert Craft led the world premiere of *Three songs from William Shakespeare*.³⁰ According to Richard S. Ginell, the composer himself during these concerts discovered the 12-tone music, what had a huge impact on his later art.³¹

The song cycle from 1953 is one of the earliest works in which Stravinsky used the pre-compositional concept of the series,³² but treating the dodecaphonic principle quite freely. The first song, *Musick to Heare*, is based on a twelve-tone series in which some sounds are repeated (a total of eight different sounds, see: Ex. 2). This series, in the spirit of the Weber’s music, contains transformations of smaller cells inside (the motif from the second tact is the retrograde of first three sounds), is the basis for more or less strict transformations. Presentations of dodecaphonic material take place in the linear way, independently in each part, so that the sounds of different variants or transpositions of series can be found in the vertical plan. In addition to dodecaphonic material, the composer also uses diatonic scale-based passages (in the clarinet and viola).³³

³⁰ L. Erhardt, *Igor Strawiński*, Warszawa 1978, p. 328.

³¹ Richard S. Ginell, *Los Angeles: Monday Evening Concerts Face the Future*, [online] <http://www.newmusicbox.org/articles/Los-Angeles-Monday-Evening-Concerts-Face-The-Future/> [accessed: 06.02.2017].

³² A. Jarzębska, *Strawiński Igor*, [in:] *Encyklopedia muzyczna PWM. Część biograficzna*, ed. E. Dziębowska, vol. 10 (*Sm–Ś*), Kraków 1979.

³³ Detailed analysis of the musical material of the song can be found in the article: M. Akane, *Proportional Exchange in Stravinsky’s Early Serial Music*, “Journal of Music Theory” 1997, No. 2, pp. 230–231.



Ex. 2: I. Stravinsky, *Musick to Heare* from the cycle *Three songs from William Shakespeare*, bb. 1-4.

Parts of voice and instruments create maundering, appearing and disappearing lines of the clear melodic shape, but quite foggy, irregular rhythmic pattern; because of that, the rhythm of the whole song is monotonous, without any clear stops of the musical narration. Akane Mori distinguishes five segments, which are equal with subsequent instrumental introduction and musical adaptation of four stanzas of the text.³⁴ Indeed, in its monotony of atonal-dodecaphonic flow of sound several subordinating and distinguishing features can be noticed: descending passage of intervals, stop on the longer values and *diminuendo* of the phrase at the end of the strophe. The author indicated also the material and metric relativity between segments lying outside and inside, precisely between I and V (instrumental introduction and final stanza), and II and V (first and third stanza).

It seems that Stravinsky, creating the song based on the strict pre-compositional assumptions,³⁵ forms the holistic verbal-musical structure in the arbitral way, not guided by the internal dramaturgy of the text. However, he derives from the poem and emphasizes certain meaningful associations for the musical interpretation. The text of *Sonnet VIII* in the first of the *Three songs* is used unchanged with one exception: the composer repeats the words “with pleasure” in verse 4. It is also worth noting that the only expressive mark in the whole song is *dolce*, appearing twice in the instrumental part accompanying the words “joy delighths in, why lovest thou that thou thou receivest not gladly” (Ex. 3). The composer probably desires to bring out here and underline one of the elements of paradox: the clash of what is beautiful and pleasant in music, with the annoying and irritating. In the midst of a syllabically treated vocal line, that sometimes has more recitative than singing character (repetition of the sixteenth-tones),

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

we should pay attention to the words of the last stanza: “many”, “one” and “thee”—all spread out on short, sixteenth-note melismas. Exploiting these concrete words emphasizes their mutual metaphorical relationship.

The image displays a musical score for a vocal piece. It consists of three systems, each with a vocal line on a single staff and a piano accompaniment on two staves (treble and bass clef). The lyrics are written below the vocal line. The score features various time signatures (3/8, 4/8, 3/8, 4/8) and dynamic markings such as *dolce*, *poco sf p*, and *sim.*. The lyrics are: "sweets warre not, joy..... de - lights in joy: Why lov'st thou that which thou... re - ceav'st..... not glad - - ly Or else re - ceav'st with..... plea - sure, with plea - sure thine an - noy?.....".

Ex. 3: I. Stravinsky, *Musick to Heare*, bb. 12–22.

Paweł Mykietyń—*Music to hear, why hear'st thou music sadly?*

The cycle *Shakespeare's Sonnets* for male soprano and piano by Paweł Mykietyń was created in 2000. The idea to use these poems appeared at the time when Mykietyń was working on music to *Hamlet* directed by Krzysztof Warlikowski;³⁶ although *Sonnets* were not written for the

³⁶ K. Podrygajto, *op. cit.*, p. 318.

theatre, they were used there. The composer, just starting his married life, dedicates songs to his wife Kasia. Marcin Gmys, pointing to the multitude of auto-citations present in the work, assumes that they can be a kind of “settlement” or “farewell” with the achievements of the composer’s previous life.³⁷

Ex. 4: P. Mykietyń, *Music to hear, why hear'st thou music sadly?* From the cycle *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, bb. 1–6.

The construction of the third song from Mykietyń’s *Sonnets* is based on the traditional form: in shredded, delicate matter, a “strictly polyphonic four-voices transposing circular canon” is hidden³⁸: polyphonic

³⁷ M. Gmys, *Eros z Tanatosem w tle*, [in:] P. Mykietyń, *Shakespeare's Sonnets for Male Soprano and Piano*, Kraków 2007, p. 52.

³⁸ E. Szczecińska, *Mykietyń—szkic do portretu*, “Tygodnik Powszechny” 2008, No. 36, p. 23.

formula circulates through the sixteen keys from quarter to quarter (Ex. 4). How Kacper Podrygajło notices, it is a type of “imitative eternity”³⁹. From the baroque tradition, the effect of echo is borrowed, that is obtained thanks to repetition of motifs. When it comes to texture, it is difficult to recognize here lines typical for polyphony; both in part of piano and soprano we rather have something like points (distanced, irregular, discontinuous sixteenth-notes), creating vibrating, torn sound effects. Using pauses, the composer divides the words and even particular syllables of the text. The next stanzas of the poem are treated as a whole entities, separated by purely instrumental sections. In the macro-scale, there are two parts: the first one uses all four quatrains, and the second one only the last stanza. Their reciprocal proportionality is a result of the incredible multiplication of words in the last, shortest stanza (120 words emerge from only 16): each word is repeated four times, and the ending, “Thou single wilt prove none” returns three times after which we have “Thou single” and “single”. However, not all of the four repetitions of the word have the same weight—they return with quieter and quieter dynamics, creating the gradually more distant echo (Ex. 5). In the last part, there is a visible slowdown of the musical narrative, the thinning of the texture and its transfer to another dimension (the pianist presses silently and stops the keys of the lower register of the piano, resulting in the resonant aliquot space). The altered harmonic context slowly stabilizes (on the dominant without resolving to E \flat minor). At the end, the single sounds of the piano are completely melted and the last words only resonate with the accompaniment of aliquot tones.



Ex. 5: P. Mykietyn, *Music to hear, why hear'st thou music sadly?*, b. 70, soprano part.

³⁹ K. Podrygajło, *op. cit.*, p. 337.

A vocal part, as Podrygajło indicates, “is created as a selective, melodic citation from alt voice of the canon: selected sounds are just isolated from the context and rhythm is added according to the metric of a poem”.⁴⁰ In this musical material, unregulated and seeming messy, certain words are clearly highlighted and underlined. The ending of the oxymoronical rhetoric question of the first stanza, “with pleasure thine annoy?” is put into music as ascending diatonic passage, ending with the high *a*²; in the similar way, the words “sweet husband to another” are arranged, but these are the ascending chromatic passage. On the sixteenth-tone repetition of the same note, creating the effect of piano echo, the word “singleness” sounds (Ex. 6). According to Podrygajło, it is a musical illustration of the marriage, stigmatized in the poem.⁴¹ What is noticeable is also musical highlighting of the metaphorical unity in multiplicity: on the words “each in each” and “all in one” there is synchronism of chords of piano and voice.

The image shows a musical score for a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is on a single staff with a treble clef. The lyrics are "sin - gle - ness the parts that". The words "sin - gle - ness" and "the" are underlined. The piano accompaniment consists of two staves: a right-hand treble clef staff and a left-hand bass clef staff. The right-hand staff has a treble clef and contains several measures of music with accents (v) above the notes. The left-hand staff has a bass clef and contains fewer notes, with accents (v) above some notes. The number "23" is written in the left margin of the piano part. A vertical red line is on the right side of the page.

Ex. 6: P. Mykietyń, *Music to hear, why hear'st thou music sadly?*, b. 23.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

Conclusion

Heading to the end, I would like to sketch several deductions that can be made thanks to analysis presented above. Three interpretations of *Sonnet VIII* by William Shakespeare are musically and expressively distant from each other: while Kabalevsky's art has its provenance in conventional approach to form and tonality, Stravinsky leaves these conventions to use the dodecaphonic rules, and Mykietyń's individual approach to the traditional patterns should be associated with so-called "surconventional" esthetics. In spite of these differences, all of the songs mirror at least some element of character of the Shakespeare's poem.

Every composer follows the strophic pattern of the poem, but creates his own dramaturgy. Mykietyń, who changes and deforms more than the remaining composers, paradoxically the most faithfully reconstructs the dramaturgical idea of displacing the central accent on the last stanza; in the song of Polish composer, every word is said clearly and resounds in the musical space, whereas the previous stanzas pass quickly and their meaning can get lost in the fragments of words and syllables.

It is challenging to lose the musical character of the poem in the genre of song. Because of that, in each discussed piece this musicality is certainly present. Particularly, Kabalevsky emphasizes this category, what is made by composing the whole song based on the typical for music, contrasting kinds of expression: lyricism and drama. The purpose of the music is to speak directly to the feelings, what differs it from the songs of Stravinsky and Mykietyń, who yet in the sound material create a kind of intellectual, mathematical riddle, based on the constructivist rules. Their approach, however, is specific equivalent of the literacy game, a web of complicated metaphors in the poem.

What is implied by described relation between text and music in the songs, metaphoricality and oxymoronicity are the features that every composer finds in *Sonnet VIII* and shows in the poem in his individual way. In Mykietyń's and Stravinsky's songs, even composing the music to the poem or techniques and material provided can be a metaphorical answer for *Sonnet VIII*. In circular, closed canon of Mykietyń's song, Marcin Gmys sees "a parabola of love, the only force «able to spin the

world».⁴² Podrygajło understands musical echo used by Mykietyń as an illustration of Shakespeare's "unity in multiplicity"⁴³ ("being many, seeming one")—analogously, we can interpret consequently monotonous texture of maundering melodic lines of voices and instruments in the whole song by Stravinsky.

On the other hand, in Kabalevsky's music it is possible to find one more feature of a poem: rhetoric. It is especially visible in the fragments of the dramatic character: stopping of the narration and change of character leads the listener's attention to the sense and rhetoric form of the stanza III and the last one. Also in Mykietyń's composition, this feature is emphasized in musical arrangement of the last stanza.

Only the Polish composer responds to the erotic ambivalence of the poem. Mykietyń writes his piece for male soprano, and by this gesture he wants, according to Gmys, to "preserve something from «hermaphrodite» aura of the literacy archetype".⁴⁴ Let us recall that in the song enigmatic "sweet husband to another" is highlighted (ascending passage through the chromatic scale). The composer, however, claims: "Choosing sonnets and creating my cycle I did not take notice of the sexuality of their author. Finding the beauty inside of them, I desired to express it in the original way".⁴⁵

Using the terminology proposed by Mieczysław Tomaszewski,⁴⁶ it can be said that *Sonnet VIII* by Shakespeare represents the expressive type of the poem, and in the analyzed songs relations between text and music have character of convergence: composers do not follow strictly the text, but these both layers are not mutually neutral or contradictory. Every song displays chosen features of the poem differently, allows to read and understand it individually in the musical arrangement. As Kacper Podrygajło writes:

⁴² M. Gmys, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

⁴³ K. Podrygajło, *op. cit.*, p. 340.

⁴⁴ M. Gmys, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

⁴⁵ P. Mykietyń, *Patrzę w głąb swojej duszy*, an interview with B. Tumiłowicz, "Muzyka 21" 2003, No. 5, p. 16.

⁴⁶ M. Tomaszewski, *Słowiecnie Szymanowskiego według Tuwima*, [in:] *idem, Nad pieśniami Karola Szymanowskiego. Cztery studia*, Kraków 1998, pp. 49–76.

Persisting in it [i.e. music—K.D.] is a survival for the poem,⁴⁷ preserving the form that every commentary inevitably melts in its own words. Resigning from singing, it is impossible to “save *Sonnets* from deformation”, however, the paradoxical nature of poetry allows to assume that we can come closer to it—previously going a little away.⁴⁸

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⁴⁷ Underlined by K. Podrygajło.

⁴⁸ K. Podrygajło, *op. cit.*, p. 307.

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