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Where Meaning Slips: Transgressive Acts and Fluidity in Shakespeare's Sonnets

Shakespeare'in Soneler'inde Transgresyon ve Anlamsal Akışkanlık

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Abstract

This study examines the widespread recognition and popularity of Shakespeare's Sonnets across centuries and among diverse readers. To shed light on their appreciation and enduring reputation, rather than hermeneutic analyses, deconstructive reading will focus on how these seemingly traditional courtly love poems have managed to convey universal issues and concerns across generations. In depicting love, desire, and the destructive power of time, these sonnets do not offer a fixed set of meanings but perform transgressive acts by unsettling and dislocating traditionally acknowledged binary oppositions that depend on hierarchy. The conventional patriarchal erotic zone is problematised when gender binaries are unsettled. Likewise, time, as an antagonist, is reframed when it is reinscribed in a binary opposition between the persona's poetic skills and the procreative potential of his beloved. Derridean conceptual tools such as *différance* and deconstruction will be used to examine how these sonnets resist fixed interpretations by constructing metaphors, paradoxes, and ambiguities. The quest for meaning in these poems is challenged each time a conventional polarity is subverted and reconstructed, as the reader participates in the production of meaning. This paper thus aims to analyse how these sonnets create a rich textual space where meaning is perpetually postponed, built and rebuilt with each reading experience.

Keywords: William Shakespeare, Sonnets, deconstructive reading, binary oppositions, *différance*.

Öz

Bu çalışma, yüzyıllardır birçok farklı okuyucu için popülerliğini korumayı başarmış Shakespeare'in Soneler başlıklı eserini incelemektedir. Geniş bir okuyucu kitlesi tarafından takdir görmesi ve uzun zamana yayılan itibarı söz konusu olduğunda, hermenötik analizlerden çok yapıbozumcu bir okuma bu görünürde saray aşk şiirlerinin nesiller boyu geçerliğini korumuş evrensel temaları nasıl ele aldığını daha doğru analiz edecektir. Aşkı, tutkuyu ve zamanın yıkıcı gücünü tasvir ederken, bu soneler tekil bir anlam sunmaktan çok, hiyerarşik prensip ile kurgulanmış geleneksel ikili zıtlıkları sarsarak transgresif eylemlerin önünü açmaktadır. Bir taraftan da toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri

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arasında kurgulanmış ikili zıtlıkları çözerek geleneksel ataerkil erotik alanı sorunsallaştırmaktadır. Aynı şekilde, karşıt güç olarak algılanan zaman da zaman ve personanın şiirsel becerisi, zaman ve sevgilinin neslini devam ettirme potansiyeli gibi ikili zıtlıklar içinde kurgulanınca bu tip bir okuma ile transgresif eylemlerin odağında değerlendirilmiş olacaktır. Bu şiirlerin metaforlar, paradokslar ve muğlaklık aracılığı ile tekil anlam yaratılmasına nasıl direndiklerini göstermeye çalışmak için bu çalışmada Derrida'nın sunduğu *différance*¹ ve yapıbozum gibi kavramsal araçlar kullanılacaktır. Sonelerde anlam arayışı, okurun anlam üretme sürecinde her defasında geleneksel ikili karşıtlıkları bozarak yeniden inşa etmesiyle sekteye uğratılır. Bu çalışma, sonelerin anlamın sürekli olarak ertelendiği, kurgulandığı ve yeniden kurgulandığı bir okuma deneyimini mümkün kılan zengin bir metinsel uzamı nasıl yarattığını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: William Shakespeare, Soneler, yapıbozumcu okuma, ikili zıtlıklar, *différance*.

When Shakespeare wrote, "Two loves I have," reader, he was *not kidding*.

John Berryman, *The Freedom of the Poet*

INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare's *Sonnets* consist of 154 poems, first published in a quarto in 1609. They were written in the English sonnet form that Shakespeare helped popularize and include some of the greatest individual love poems in the English language. Shakespeare's sonnets have long been celebrated for their emotional resonance and evocative language. Stanley Wells (1985, p. 8) refers to the rich variety of themes as "meditations on matters of universal importance." The poems include personal reflection embedded with complex wordplay and recurring motifs, including youth, decay, creativity, and the pursuit of immortality through art. Together, they form one of the most influential lyric sequences in English literature, conveying emotional depth and enduring interest in interpretation. The 154 sonnets can be divided into three main groups; the first group of 17 poems revolves around a single theme and is commonly referred to as the "procreation sonnets," in which the poetic persona offers an unnamed young man to marry and reproduce so that his beauty and name will not be lost. The second sequence of 108 sonnets presents the narrative of a complex love affair, while the final group is addressed to the so-called "Dark Lady" or "Young Man". These shifting addressees do not simply indicate a series of courtly romances that the reader will resort to when they are in love. However, the poems still reveal a range of emotional and psychological dimensions that continue to resonate deeply with readers for centuries to come.

From a different perspective, this apparent richness and popularity of the sonnets conceal the profound thematic tensions that make them one of the most complex and controversial works of literature. Most of these poems do not sound like traditional courtly romances; they are composite, as many of them foreground some homoerotic desire and misogynistic representation of women. The variety of themes in these poems poses a challenge to the reader; a continuous reading of the sequence is neither easy nor do the sonnets follow an easy narrative pattern. Correspondingly, Paul Edmondson and Stanley Wells (2004) think that "*the individual poems do not hang together from beginning to end as a single unity*" (p. 19). The rapid mood changes might put some strain on the reader, as well: sonnets that posit love as stable and sustaining are juxtaposed with poems of bitter disillusionment; joyful ones are counterposed with others that speak of self-erasure and self-reproach. Another controversy concerns the fact that, although the sonnets are regarded as a classic body of poetry appreciated by most readers, critical attention tends to focus on only a small number of the same poems; like *Sonnet 18* – "*Shall I*

¹ The Derridean term "*différance*" is kept in its original French as its Turkish translation might risk losing its conceptual sensitivity and the specific meaning Derrida intended, which indicates simultaneous process of deferral and difference in meaning, emphasizing that a single meaning can never be fixed or fully present. To preserve its theoretical and linguistic nuances, it is presented in its original form.

compare thee to a summer's day?", Sonnet 55 – "Not marble, nor the gilded monuments", or Sonnet 130 – "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun". So, the question will still be valid in the contemporary reader's mind: how have these sonnets remained so popular over time, and how can the reader appreciate the sonnets at all?

Several reasons explain the enduring popularity of these poems among diverse readers over a long period. For some, the greatness of these poems lies in themes of universal importance, like "quality of life; the power of love and art over time; the power and the fragility of love's illusions; the humiliation of emotional and sexual subjection; the capacity of the soul to transcend the body's frailty" (Wells, 1985, pp. 8-9). These sonnets have been analysed from many different viewpoints for centuries, benefiting from a wide range of theories and conceptual tools. To make sense of these Renaissance sonnets produced in a period when art was sustained by powerful patrons, critics often attempted to interpret them by speculating about the poet's intentions, the identity of the patron, and the ways in which the author's work might have been shaped by such patronage. This form of criticism relied heavily on establishing these biographical and historical connections in order to understand the text more fully. With the emergence of New Criticism, these speculations gave rise to a tendency to read the sonnets on their own terms, paying attention to their context but not necessarily to the author's mind or intention. This practice of reading obviously will require a lot of help from dictionaries, history books, or the conventions of the Renaissance. Still, the elusive metaphors or images might slide away from the grasp of the modern reader.

The long-standing critical and popular appreciation of Shakespeare's sonnets has frequently been attributed to their capacity to articulate what Don Paterson describes as a "characteristic shape of human thought" (2010, para. 21). In seeking to account for the poems' canonical status, Paterson draws attention to the ways in which the sonnets continue to pose interpretive challenges to readers across historical periods. What he identifies as "human thought," however, may be more precisely understood in relation to the persistence of dualistic structures that organise Western modes of thinking. These structures, while often associated with Enlightenment rationalism, are already operative in Renaissance epistemologies, in which scientific paradigms coexist with older scholastic and teleological modes of explanation. Read in this light, the sonnets' engagement with contradiction, hierarchy, and instability reflects not merely a universal psychology but the historically sedimented logic of binary thinking that continues to shape interpretive practices.

Shakespeare crafts his poetry against a backdrop of emotional depth and richness, and by arranging sonnets that seem to stand in opposition, Shakespeare both challenges dualistic logic and lays the limits of binary thinking bare. His attitude toward the entire collection is reflected in individual sonnets as well. The polarities within the sonnets turn out to be not fixed oppositions but mutually dependent legs that collapse and rebuild themselves with each reading. These subject matters and their treatment provide a fertile ground for deconstructive reading, as the sonnets explore slippery binary oppositions like male/female, beauty/decay, time/the poet's power to transcend, and the destructive nature of time/Procreation. In the 154 sonnets, the poet addresses the conceptual instability of these categories, which were gauged in a fixed framework by Renaissance lyric conventions and sonnet traditions. The traditional Petrarchan positioning of genders and desire norms are complicated in Shakespeare's sonnets. This paper argues that Shakespeare's sonnets enact a series of transgressive acts; questioning the patriarchal erotic zone, waging war on time, juxtaposing time with his poetic skills, and creating a new polarity between artistic permanence and temporal decay, yet each attempt at transgression renders itself unstable.

1. Theoretical Background: Binary Opposition, Hierarchy, and Instability:

This deconstructive framework provides a critical lens through which Shakespeare's *Sonnets* may be read as texts that organise meaning through hierarchical oppositions, such as presence and absence, permanence and decay, and speech and silence, only to unsettle and destabilise these binaries from within. The initial operation of deconstruction involves identifying and undoing the binary oppositions

upon which logocentrism is predicated. Central to the process of deconstructive reading is the demonstration that textual meaning is structured through binary logic and depends upon the hierarchical privileging of one term over another. Deconstructive analysis reveals how the subordinated term is devalorised within the text's discursive economy, a process that serves to legitimate logocentric assumptions. With this practice of reading, the binary opposition is revealed as "a false opposition" operating in the service of specific ideological interests (McQuillan, 2000, p. 13). Having made this hierarchy visible, deconstruction does not merely invert the opposition but proceeds to displace the binary system itself. Derrida thus questions the structures and situations that make binary thinking intelligible, emphasising modes of thought that exceed oppositional logic together. Through close attention to textual elements often regarded as marginal or insignificant, deconstruction demonstrates that the text ultimately destabilises its own claims, unsettling the grounds of its apparent coherence. Meaning, thus, emerges not as singular or self-identical but as internally fractured, shaped by contradiction, *différance*, and conceptual instability.

In his early works, most notably *Of Grammatology*, Derrida argues that Western metaphysical thought, from Plato and Aristotle onward, has been structured through a system of binary oppositions governed by what he terms a "violent hierarchy," as Jonathan Culler (1989, p. 85) phrases it. The Western tradition tends to "divide conceptual material into categories of binary terms (e.g., Man, Woman; Black, White; Voice, Silence; Speech, Writing, etc.)" (McQuillan, 2000, p. 8). These oppositions are never neutral; they operate through the systematic privileging of one term over the other. In other words, these pairings do not constitute genuine oppositions, but they function as hierarchical arrangements that stabilise meaning by subordinating one term to its privileged counterpart. A constitutive instance of this logic is the longstanding philosophical privileging of speech over writing within Western thought. Logocentrism, whose underlying mechanisms Derrida seeks to expose, operates strictly through such oppositional structures. Since Plato, speech has been understood as offering immediate access to thought, encapsulated in the notion of *s'entendre parler*¹, or the self-presence of consciousness in speech. Writing, by contrast, has been construed as a secondary, derivative mode of representation, incapable of conveying consciousness directly and therefore relegated to a subordinate position within the binary. On this basis, Derrida characterises the Western episteme as fundamentally phonocentric, grounded in the metaphysical assumption that speech guarantees presence, while writing signifies absence, mediation, and loss. In the sonnets, the poetic persona elevates writing as a means of resisting Time, associating it with his poetic skill; however, this claim is problematised by the fact that writing, like all signifying practices, remains vulnerable to temporal decay, and thus cannot guarantee the transcendence it promises.

Following Derrida's critique of phonocentrism and hierarchical opposition, it seems evident that binary thinking is not an isolated philosophical mechanism but an omnipresent structuring principle of Western discourse. Thus, "any Western text caught up in this form of structuration depends upon a series of assumptions about binary oppositions" (McQuillan, 2000, p. 8). The history of Western thought, as Cixous & Clément (1986, p. 63) further points out, is "the history of this constructed inequality passing for fact, and so the history of the West is a history of patriarchy or phallogocentrism (privileging the phallus)." In this set of configurations, hierarchical difference is naturalised rather than interrogated. Crucially, such oppositions do not reflect an ontological reality but function as representational strategies sustained through repetition, habitualisation, and what Derrida (1997, p. 13) terms sedimentation in *Of Grammatology*. Through these processes, culturally contingent hierarchies are presented as self-evident or natural conditions of human existence. Binary oppositions thus operate not to describe lived reality but to produce and stabilise the identity of the privileged term within the opposition. Logocentrism names this operation, designating a system in which meaning, presence, and authority are consistently aligned with the privileged term *logos* at the expense of what is marked as

¹ It refers to the experience of hearing oneself while speaking. Derrida uses *s'entendre parler* to describe the illusion of immediate self-presence traditionally attributed to speech, an illusion he deconstructs by demonstrating that even self-hearing is structured by *différance*. It is generally opposed to writing, which is seen as secondary, absent, or derivative.

secondary, excessive, or derivative. As Cixous & Clément (1986, p. 63) demonstrates, this logic extends beyond the speech/writing opposition to include gendered binaries in which “*logos* (speech, meaning, sense) is privileged over the feminine ‘*pathos*’ (emotions, feelings, non-sense)”, reinforcing asymmetrical relations of power within discourse.

Logocentrism is “a form of metaphorisation” (McQuillan, 2000, p. 11); all words function metaphorically, allowing one term to stand in for another. Derrida’s critique targets the structuralist assumption that language operates as a closed and self-regulating system; instead, he deconstructs logocentrism by interrogating the relation between sign, signifier, and signified. Richard Rorty (1995) also argues that Derrida’s critique was “marked by an explicit break with the assumptions of structuralism” (p. 166). Within the traditional model of signification, the “‘sign’ has always been comprehended and determined, in its sense, as sign-of, signifier, referring to a signified, signifier different from its signified” (Derrida, 1997, p. 152). Derrida challenges this hierarchy by proposing that the signifier can never fully coincide with its signified but only sets in motion a freeplay of signifiers linked through an open-ended chain rather than oriented toward a final reference point. This logic is embodied in Derrida’s term *différance*, which combines “deferral” and “difference” to articulate how “meaning can never be fully present since it is always deferred” (Derrida, 1988, p. 147). Accordingly, in “the flow of language,” the signified is continually displaced, such that “signified always already functions as a signifier” (p. 7). Meaning and value, therefore, cannot be grounded in an origin or ultimate truth but emerge as effects of the *logos* sustained by the metaphysical tradition. Whereas structuralist criticism privileges underlying structure as the organizing centre of textual meaning, deconstruction seeks instead to decentre the text by exposing the instability of its signifying processes. Read in this light, Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* foreground the freeplay of signification by persistently deferring stable meaning through figurative excess, temporal slippage, and the instability of lyric address, thereby rendering *différance* not merely a theoretical abstraction but an operative textual practice.

Within the context of Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*, such a framework enables a deconstructive interrogation of lyric voice, presence, and poetic self. The sonnets repeatedly invoke binaries: presence and absence, permanence and decay, speech and silence, masculinity and femininity, only to unsettle their apparent stability. Read through Derrida’s critique of logocentrism, the lyric “voice” of the sonnets can no longer be understood as a transparent site of self-presence but rather as a textual effect marked by *différance*, deferral, and internal contradiction. This destabilisation of binary logic not only complicates claims to unified meaning but also reveals how the sonnets simultaneously reproduce and undermine the metaphysical assumptions upon which lyric subjectivity traditionally rests. Deconstruction, therefore, provides a critical lens through which Shakespeare’s sonnets may be read as texts that expose the instability of the very oppositions on which they appear to rely.

2. Transgression, *Différance*, and the Instability of Meaning in Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*

As Davis and Schleifer (1986, p. 299) assert, deconstruction is a concept that focuses on the “instability of meaning.” Their assertion rings true when deconstruction, as a mode of reading, is applied to Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*. From a Derridean vantage point, his poems poetise the freeplay as he creates a new ground where he dislocates and destabilises the traditional givens, man and woman, in a courtly romance or a love poem. In one of his most renowned sonnets, *Sonnet 20*, Shakespeare embodies a male poetic persona. At the outset of the poem, he speaks out his love seemingly to his traditional opposition, to a woman. With the opening of the poem, the poetic persona addresses his lover as a beautiful woman whose “face with Nature’s own hand painted” (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet 20*, line 1). Yet, with the second line, Shakespeare problematises the binary opposition and leaves the ground for the freeplay of signifiers. In his compound word, in “master-mistress of my passion,” he combines two opposing polarities in the position of a signifier, that is, “master-mistress” to refer to a newly created signified which bears in itself the combination of two opposing signifieds. Yet, even in this regard, the ground is slippery as he brings paradoxical references together. He constantly reinscribes not only the

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traditional binary oppositions but also the freeplay or the specificity he creates. The male beloved is feminised, undermining heterosexual norms.

At a preliminary level of reading, the poems seem to consolidate the traditional love discourse. The poetic persona refers to his beloved as the one having "[a] woman's gentle heart", and "[a]n eye more bright than" the other women (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet* 20, lines 3–5). In these excerpts, the poetic persona attributes such exaggerated feminine qualities as tender, temperate, and mild to his beloved. On the other hand, his beloved is of a different nature than that of other women. His beloved's heart is gentle, "but not acquainted / With shifting change, as is false women's fashion" (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet* 20, lines 3–4). Yet soon his beloved is disclosed not to be a woman but "[a] man in hue, all hues in his controlling" (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet* 20, line 7). By attributing hyperbolically feminised qualities to a male beloved, Shakespeare simultaneously feminises the object of desire and destabilises the patriarchal logic of heterosexual erotic discourse. While this discourse is formally invoked, it is strategically assigned to produce a homoerotic space that unsettles the normative polarity between masculine and feminine positions. In doing so, the sonnets blur the boundaries traditionally assigned to gendered attributes, a strategy that parallels the logic of cross-gendering, or cross-dressing, more commonly associated with Shakespearean drama. As Wixson (2001) observes, the erosion of gendered clarity in acts of cross-dressing functions to valorise ambiguity, thereby further destabilising already fragile gender distinctions (p. 241). Similarly, Berek (2004) argues that cross-dressing is fundamentally "incompatible with absolutism" (p. 361), a claim that illuminates how the sonnets, like cross-dressed bodies on the early modern stage, resist fixed sexual and gender identities and instead perform within a space of productive indeterminacy.

Apart from reversing the binary opposition in a traditional love relationship, Shakespeare "reinscrib[es] the terms of a hierarchy" as it is disclosed via a deconstructive literary analysis (Davis & Schleifer, 1986, p. 302). In *Sonnet* 20, to the traditional patriarchal polarities of man and woman, he adds another third element as his beloved is attractive to both man and woman. His beloved not only "steals men's eyes" but also makes "women's souls amazeth"; thus, this beloved becomes the epitome of both male and female beauty (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet* 20, line 8). His beloved, in other words, has become a space which provides a place for the freeplay of signifiers; man/woman. In the last quatrain, the poetic persona refers to the process of his beloved's creation; his beloved was first created as a woman, yet when Nature fell in love with her, She decided to change her into a man for Her taste: "And for a woman wert thou first created, / Till Nature as she wrought thee fell a-doting" (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet* 20, lines 9–10). Nature, being associated with the feminine, falls in love with the beloved while creating her, which annihilates the traditional binary opposition in love poetry. The poem tries to assert a male essence, but linguistic play reveals gender as unstable, composite, and rhetorical. The "thing" meant to stabilise male identity ironically exposes its contingency. Here, Shakespeare deactivates the straightforward relation between the signifier (man/woman) and their signified. Yet, Nature presently finds a solution and adds male genitals to create a man for Herself. Interestingly, the beloved is regarded as the masterpiece of Nature, who is feminine. Another binary opposition seems to be deconstructed here as the poetic persona's beloved is created by a feminine agent rather than a male creator. Attempts to stabilise gender fail as the sonnet's language already blends gender. Whether the sonnets are gendered clearly or not is controversial for critics like William Nelles (2009) who tries to identify the number of gendered sonnets as follows: "there are 15 sonnets to or about a man, 20 to or about a woman, 8 that specifically addresses or discuss both men and women, and 111, about 72% of the total, that are entirely unmarked for gender" (131). From this numerical data, one thing is certain: Shakespeare activates different codes of meaning in his depiction of the beloved and paves the way for the plurality in reading the poems.

Sonnet 20 urges readers to orient themselves towards a space where a freeplay of signifiers takes place. The poetic persona seems to acknowledge the so-called impossibility of his attachment to his beloved anymore with the "addition" that Nature has made to his beloved (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet* 20, line 11). However, in the octave part, he again takes refuge in his beloved's love as he announces,

"Mine be thy love," while leaving the sexual pleasure to women with his beloved as he asserts, "thy love's use their treasure" (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet 20*, line 14). The poetic persona's beloved appeals to both "women's pleasure" and also to the poetic persona's spiritual side in the beloved's love (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet 20*, line 13). As Helen Vendler (1994, p. 2) observes, "*Sonnets* go far outside the originating discourse." Shakespeare's double entendres create ruptures and fractures in the traditional signification and bring together two incompatible layers of reading in the same poems.

Two of the questions that W. H. Auden (1963, p. 51) formulates in order to critique poems and Shakespeare's sonnets are: "What does he [the poet] conceal from the reader?" and "What does he conceal even from himself?" Via a deconstructive analysis, what Shakespeare tries to conceal from both the reader and himself can be brought to light. Shakespeare problematises the starting point or the origin of the traditional love poems. In *Sonnet 20*, he starts the poem by attributing feminine qualities to his male beloved. He starts with a male body and writes beautiful love poems by feminising this body, which has "[a] woman's face" and [a] woman's gentle heart" (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet 20*, lines 1-3). In other words, Shakespeare refashions a beautiful male body into a female being. He creates an erotic discourse by starting from the wrong leg of the binary (male body). Thus, he destabilises the straightforward relation between the origin and the telos. In the wake of starting from a male body, he reaches a seemingly traditional end.

Critical attempts to account for Shakespeare's representation of divided desire often oscillate between biographical explanation and textual analysis. In *The Freedom of the Poet*, John Berryman claims that "when Shakespeare wrote, 'Two loves I have,' reader, he was not kidding" (1976, p. 316), a remark that sheds light on the kind of poetic world Shakespeare constructs. In the paragraph Berryman devotes to Shakespeare, he turns to *Sonnet 144*, in which the speaker figures desire through the apparent opposition of two lovers, one male and one female. Berryman approaches the sonnet primarily through a biographical lens, reading it as an extension of Shakespeare's personal experience. He insists that poetry is composed by "actual human beings" and that significant portions of it are closely tied to the poet's life, reiterating his claim that Shakespeare's declaration of "two loves" should be taken literally (p. 316). Yet Berryman's formulation itself invites a double entendre. While one register of his argument aligns poetry with confession, the other opens the possibility of reading the sonnet not as autobiographical disclosure but as a linguistic and structural representation of division. From this perspective, *Sonnet 144* exposes the operative logic of Western thought that organises meaning and "divide[s] conceptual material into categories of binary terms, such as man/woman, white/black, voice/silence, speech/writing, etc." (McQuillan, 2000, p. 8).

Two loves I have of comfort and despair,
Which like two spirits do suggest me still
The better angel is a man right fair,
The worser spirit a woman coloured ill.

(Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet 144*, lines 1-4)

Shakespeare's lexical and figurative choices critically expose the instability of supposedly opposed terms, revealing that such couplings are not true opposites but hierarchical constructions in which one term is consistently privileged over the other. Read from a Derridean perspective, the formulation of "two loves" functions less as a declaration of fixed identities than as a challenge to the decorum of logocentric thought. Rather than resolving desire within a stable opposition, Shakespeare poeticises the freeplay of signification by dislocating and destabilising what Derrida terms the "violent hierarchy" that governs binary structures. Within this destabilised space, opposites are neither simply opposed nor reconciled but reconfigured in what may be described as a third space that exceeds the limits of binary categorisation. Shakespeare's loves are thus neither exclusively male nor female but simultaneously invoke and unsettle both positions. In Koskimies' (1970) wording, it is "a fusion of the feminine and the

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masculine" (p. 262). The speaker's reference to his "two spirits," figured as both angel and devil, further underscores this refusal of fixed moral or gendered polarity (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet 144*, lines 2-6-7).

Just as Shakespeare destabilises gendered and moral binaries through the figure of the "two spirits," he extends this logic of transgression to another foundational opposition of Western thought by staging time itself as an antagonistic force that resists containment and mastery. Time is "a cosmic power which operates on all levels of creation and keeps them in constant flux, relentlessly destroying everything it produces" (Kaula, 1963, pp. 45-6). Apart from deactivating the traditional erotic discourse by feminising the male body of his beloved, he also embodies the same transgressive act when he is trying to establish polarities between time and himself and time and his poetic skills. In the polarities he creates, he wages war on time, calling it a "bloody tyrant" (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet 16*, line 2). He recognises time as a destructive agent as he openly reveals: "nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make defence" (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet 12*, line 13). He tries to defy the destructive power of time on his beloved when he asserts that "[l]ove's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks / Within his bending sickle's compass come" (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet 116*, line 19). Time here is not an absolute chronological entity but a destructive agent that distorts presence, identity, and meaning as follows: "When I do count the clock that tells the time / And see the brave day sunk in hideous night" (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet 12*, line 1-2). Although time is presented as a measurable entity, counting hours and the clock, this action means loss, as well. Seeing time pass is equated with seeing decay; visibility means destruction in the lines that follow: "Then of thy beauty do I question make / That thou among the wastes of time must go" (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet 12*, lines 9-10). The beloved of the poetic persona is not preserved by presence; instead, presence guarantees loss. By exposing time as destructive, unstable, and internally contradictory, the sonnets transgress the metaphysical assumption of continuity, permanence, and origin. The poetic persona, thus, speaks to time, challenges it, appeals to it, and stages a rhetorical act that tries to exceed natural limits. Yet, the poetic persona still seems to be dependent on time to define beauty and value. By giving time personality, the poetic persona attempts resistance, but this personification at the same time creates a co-dependent relationship. In other words, time gives poetry its subject, which is beauty endangered, thus undermining the poet's claim to triumph over time.

Temporality in Shakespeare's sonnets does not appear merely as a destructive force but also makes the claims about permanence dysfunctional. In *Sonnet 19*, time is portrayed as a consuming and brutal wild animal that exerts power over any living being. Time is "[d]evouring" and it can even "[p]luck the keen teeth from the fierce tiger's jaws" (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet 19*, lines 1-3). The poetic persona orders time to save his beloved: "But I forbid thee one most heinous crime / O, carve not with thy hours my love's fair brow" (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet 19*, lines 8-9). The poetic persona paradoxically acknowledges time's power and contradicts the metaphysical desire for permanence. In the couplet, the poetic persona defies the power of time by exalting the power of his poetry as he challenges: "Yet do thy worst, old time; despite thy wrong / My love shall in my verse ever live young" (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet 19*, lines 13-14). In a teleological interpretation, it can be taken for granted that the art of poetry resists time; yet the preservation of beauty here is linguistic and not corporeal. In other words, poetry does not defeat time, but it defers loss by relocating time's violence into language, where preservation becomes an effect of *différance* rather than true endurance. This similar idea makes itself more explicit in *Sonnet 60*, where time is embodied as a repetitive device without an origin. Time is likened to waves as both succeed one after another: "Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore, / So do our minutes hasten to their end" (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet 60*, line 1-2). Paradoxically, the concept of birth already contains decay. Time is cyclical but not redemptive, and these lines act like manifesto commitments: "And time that gave doth now his gift confound / Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth" (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet 60*, lines 8-9). Time is not a linear entity here, but it operates through substitution, beginning and ending collapse into each other, which mirrors Derrida's chain of signifiers. It can be concluded that time is figured as an endless process of replacement that problematises the idea of origin, continuity, and absolute meaning, but mapping temporality onto *différance* itself.

Shakespeare offers a way to escape the annihilating force of time, which is procreation, most explicitly in the sequence conventionally referred to as the Procreation Sonnets (1–17). These sonnets appear to function as a strategy of resistance, extending beauty and life beyond the temporal limits of the individual body. In *Sonnet 1*, the speaker asserts that the beloved's "beauty's rose might never die," provided that through procreation "[h]is tender heir might bear his memory" (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet 1*, lines 2, 4). Similarly, *Sonnet 2* advances the claim that although the beloved's own beauty will inevitably be eroded by age, it may be preserved in a future generation, allowing him to declare: "[t]his fair child of mine / Shall sum my count, and make my old excuse" (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet 2*, lines 10-11). In this formulation, procreation is imagined as a strategy of replication through which the beloved can outlive time by reproducing versions of himself. The speaker's insistence culminates in a direct appeal that frames reproduction as an act of love itself: "[m]ake thee another self for love of me, / That beauty still may live in thine or thee" (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet 10*, lines 13-14). It can be inferred that procreation operates as a means of deferral, postponing absence or loss through the continuation of generations. Yet, Shakespeare problematises the heterosexual practice of procreation by unsettling its normative gender assumptions. Procreation and maternal functions traditionally assigned to a female body are requested of the male beloved, which would mean feminising him with the mission of reproduction. This transgressive act subverts the erotic heteronormativity supporting the continuation of the lineage. The instability of gendered coding becomes particularly evident when, at moments of urging reproduction, Shakespeare creates imagery conventionally associated with the womb rather than the male body. In *Sonnet 6*, the speaker urges the beloved "[m]ake sweet some vial; treasure thou some place / With beauty's treasure ere it be self-killed," implicitly aligning the male body with a womb-bearing function (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet 6*, lines 3-4). Shakespeare wavers in his representation of the beloved by unsettling the masculine and feminine codes; thus, he defies stabilising gender within a single register and function. Robert Matz (2010) also identifies the fact that "the construction of masculinity and femininity [...] cannot be understood independently from one another" (p. 483). Procreation here rather becomes a site of transgression where the masculinity and femininity converge, coincide, and/or perplex one another, which paves the way for plurality, fluidity, and unsettling of logocentric structures.

Shakespeare constructs another polarity by opposing time to his own artistic and poetic skills. Time is personified as the principal antagonist threatening the beloved's beauty, and his poetry is posited as a counterforce to bring eternity to him. However, this eternity remains fundamentally linguistic rather than ontological. Ted Hughes (1991) identifies how Shakespeare in *Sonnets* "not only wants to make himself clear but also wants to prove, with words alone, like a man in the dock in the court, immediately, his heart's truth" and underlines that "this is the central problem" (p. 55). By entering an antagonistic relation with time, Shakespeare applies two transgressive strategies at a time; he feminises the male beloved by depicting him as more aesthetically refined than a conventional female ideal, and he feminises himself by assuming the role of the generative mother of poetic lines. Shakespeare exploits this gendered coding to unsettle normative distinctions. In *Sonnet 15*, the beloved is figured as "most rich in youth," yet perpetually endangered by temporality, "[w]here wasteful Time debateth with Decay" (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet 15*, lines 10-11). The speaker's response "[a]nd all in war with Time for love of you, / As he takes from you, I ingraft you new" appears to promise regeneration, yet this "ingrafting" occurs only within text and language (lines 13-14). What poetry produces is not preservation of presence but a deferral of loss, in which the signified body is replaced by textual substitution. This logic is reinforced in *Sonnet 21*, where the speaker grounds endurance in the act of writing itself, claiming to be "true in love but truly write"; truth, here, resides not in essence but in inscription (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet 21*, line 9).

The deferral becomes more explicit when Shakespeare combines two strategies he proposes against time: procreation and his poetic skills, as in *Sonnet 17*: "[b]ut were some child of yours alive that time, / You should live twice, in it and in my rhyme" (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet 17*, lines 13-14). The promise of "living twice" reveals an inherent contradiction: both modes rely on substitution rather than

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continuity. The beloved survives not as himself but as an iteration, either as a child or as a poem; thus exposing the metaphysical desire for permanence as dependent on repetition without origin. *Sonnet 18* further dramatizes this tension. He compares his beloved to a summer day and concludes that his beloved is much more beautiful than it: "[s]hall I compare thee to a summer's day? / Thou art more lovely and more temperate" (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet 18*, lines 1-2). He firmly asserts that time will not be able to destroy his beloved's beauty, as follows: "[b]ut thy eternal summer shall not fade" (line 9). He ensures his beloved that with his lines, his beloved will become eternalised with the following lines: "[w]hen I eternal lines to time thou grow'st" (line 12). In the octave part, he reassures his beloved's eternity via his own lines as follows: "[s]o long as men can breathe or eyes can see, / So long lives this, and this gives life to thee" (lines 13-14). Still another outstanding example is in *Sonnet 116*; he challenges the might of time as he ensures his beloved that "[l]ove alters not with his [time] brief hours and weeks / But bears it out even to the edge of doom" with the help of his lines (Shakespeare, 2010, *Sonnet 116*, lines, 11-12). In the octave part, he is even more assertive than all his other sonnets: "[i]f this be error and upon me proved, / I never writ, nor no man ever loved" (lines 13-14). From a Derridean perspective, then, these sonnets do not have the means to defeat the destructive power of time, but they can only serve to reclaim its being textually. In this textual space, the aim of immortality with poetic skills can only be deferred; it can never be fully present.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, although meaning may be crucial to a teleological hermeneutic practice that aims to convey the Word, it cannot hold the same importance in deconstructive practice analyzing the lyric voice. Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, among the most popular and controversial love poems, resist being seen as bearers of a fixed "significant freight of meaning," as Helen Vendler (1997, p. 13) notes. Rather, Shakespeare creates a ground of freeplay by dislocating traditional signifiers/signifieds and establishes a new poetic discourse in which meaning is continuously deferred and reinscribed through linguistic play. As this study has argued, Shakespeare composes a textual space in which logocentric binary oppositions are challenged and hierarchical understanding is unsettled.

In the sonnets analysed, the traditional erotic zone, gender, and hierarchical structures between time and poetic skill are challenged. These binaries are neither consolidated nor juxtaposed but dislocated, unleashing a space for the freeplay of signifiers. Once the male beloved is feminised within the patriarchal polarity of man and woman, Shakespeare problematises the taken-for-grantedness of gender as an ontological entity and emphasises performativity. Shakespeare's approach to binaries is evident in his relation to temporality as well. Time is depicted in a negative light; it is destructive and adverse. By creating polarities between time and his beloved's beauty and between time and his poetic skill, Shakespeare feminises his beloved by urging him to procreate to overcome the destructive power of time. Another strategy to triumph over time is writing poems; that is, he feminises himself as the creator of lines. Yet, in this construct, the poetic persona and his beloved, and the poetic persona and his art, vacillate between presence and absence, and/or sovereign or subordinate.

Ultimately, Shakespeare's *Sonnets* create a space that allows a free play of signifiers and signifieds by design, letting meaning flow without final closure. In a Derridean sense, these poems emphasize *différance* as their organizing principle; they permit instability to unfold within any binary opposition configured, which generates diverse ciphers of reading and interpretation. Berryman's statement that "when Shakespeare wrote, 'Two loves I have reader,' he was not kidding" gains a new perspective; here, the two loves refer not only to the two objects of desire but also to the simultaneous nature of language and a textual space that resists attaining definitive meaning, ensuring the sonnets' ongoing popularity and universal appeal.

Geniřletilmiř zet

Shakespeare'in *Soneler* isimli seçkisi ilk kez 1609 yılında dördü¹ bir baskıda yayınlandı. 154 adet şiirden oluşan bu görünürde aşk şiirlerini üçe ayırabiliriz. İlk 17'si "Üreme/Çoğalma Soneleri²" olarak adlandırılabilir çünkü bu sonelerde şair sevgilisine zamanın yıkıcı etkilerine karşı koymak için üremesini, neslini sürdürmesini tavsiye eder. 108 adet soneden oluşan ikinci bölüm şiirler karmaşık aşk ilişkileri, tutku, şiirsel yetenekler ve zamanın yıkıcı etkilerini konu alır. Son bölüm ise Genç Erkek veya Kara Leydi³ olarak adlandırılan sevgilisine yazdığı sonelerden oluşmuştur. Shakespeare'in bu şiirleri yüzyıllar boyunca pek çok okuyucu için bir klasik eser olarak görülüp beğenilmiş ve hâlâ etkisini sürdürmektedir. Hermenötik eleştiri kuramları, Yeni Eleştiri ve Biyografik Eleştiri gibi birçok akım, *Soneler*'in yüzyıllara yayılan bu derin etkisini anlamaya çalışırken, anlamın, metnin, bağlamın ya da şairin hayatının izlerini bu şiirlerde sürmüşlerdir. Tüm bu eleştiri kanonu şüphesiz literatüre büyük katkı sağlamıştır.

Tüm bu eleştirel birikimin üzerine, bu çalışma *Soneler*'in zenginliğini tekil ve sabit bir anlam kurgulama prensibinden uzak kalarak, okuyucunun her deneyiminde ve şiirlerle etkileşiminde yeniden şekillenen çoğulcu ve akışkan bir metinsel uzam yaratabilme gücüne dayandırmaktadır. Bu makale, bu kompleks ve kendini sürekli yenileyen uzamı değerlendirebilmek için Derrida'nın ikili zıtlıklar, yapısökümcü okuma ve *différance* gibi kavramsal araçlarından yararlanmaktadır. Bu süreçte de şiirler yaygın kurgulanan ikili zıtlıkları sorunsallaştırırken, aralarındaki hiyerarşik yapıyı da açık etmektedir.

Çoğunluğu klasik aşk şiirleri görünümünde olan birçok sonenin, yapısökümcü bir bakış açısıyla okunduğunda, bu şiirlerde şairin kullandığı metaforlar ve paradoksal ifadeler aracılığıyla erkek/kadın ya da varlık/yokluk gibi ikili karşıtlıkların etkisini yitirdiği; ataerki bir erotik alanın sorgulandığı ve daha akışkan, çoğulcu anlamların üretildiği görülmektedir. Sonelerde sorgulanan bir diğer ikili zıtlık da personanın kendi şiirsel becerileri ile zaman arasında kurguladığı hiyerarşik ilişkidir. Bu ikilik içerisinde zaman yıkıcı ve karşıt bir güç olarak gösterilirken, ancak şairin yaratacağı eserlerle alt edilebilir olduğu kurgulanıyor gibi görünse de buradaki ikili zıtlığın ontolojik olarak kabul edilemeyeceği ve ancak metinsel uzamda kalacağı da yine yapısökümcü bir okuma ile kendini gösterebilir. Son olarak, bu çalışmanın ele aldığı bir diğer grup sonede de yine zamanın yok eden, güzelliği solduran özelliğinin karşısında şair sevgilisine üremesini, neslini devam ettirmesini tavsiye ettiği bir ikili zıtlık kurgulasa da erkek olarak tanımladığı sevgilisinden bunu istemesiyle bu karşıtlık da yıkılmış olur.

Bu çalışmada mercek altına alınan bir diğer ikili zıtlık da zaman ile şairin kendi sanatsal ve şiirsel yetenekleri arasında kurduğu ilişkidir. Sevgilinin güzelliğini ve gençliğini tehdit eden zaman karşısında şair şiirini ve şiirinin ölümsüzlüğünü sunar. Ancak bu ölümsüzlük yine tamamen dilsel alanda gerçekleşir; diğer bir taraftan da normatif cinsiyet ve toplumsal kodlamaları sarsar. Şöyle ki, erkek sevgiliyi geleneksel kadın idealinden daha estetik ve daha duyarlı resmederken kendisini de şiirlerinin üreticisi, annesi rolünü üstlenerek kurgular. Cinsiyetler üzerinden işleyen bu strateji ikili zıtlıkların belirsizleşmesini sağlayıp onları kaygan bir zemine taşırken, anlam da dil aracılığıyla sürekli yeniden biçimlenir. Böylelikle, zıtlıkların hiyerarşik bir prensiple kurgulamaya çalıştığı ilişki modelinde metin sürekli evrilir ve dinamik bir yapıda kendini yeniden oluşturur. Bu açıdan bakıldığında, soneler normatif düzlemde kurgulanabilecek tüm beklentileri alaşağı ederken, sürekli dönüşen, anlamın ertelendiği ve tam bu noktada yeniden kurgulandığı çok katmanlı edebî bir uzam oluşturur.


¹ Quarto

² The Procreation Sonnets

³ Dark Lady

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