

ROUTE 66 AND NO END: FURTHER FORTUNES OF SHAKESPEARE'S SONNET 66

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Abstract:

At the SHINE-conference in Murcia in 1999 I claimed that sonnet 66 has been largely disregarded by Anglo-American critics whereas, in continental Europe, it has been frequently used as a medium of protest in crucial political situations. In the light of more recent findings I will revise this claim and draw attention to English poets and novelists from the Romantic period to Modernism reworking or working with the sonnet with a political thrust.

Keywords: *sonnet 66, rewriting, satire, literary reception*

I.

For almost ten years now I have been following the traces of one particular sonnet by Shakespeare across continental Europe. Sonnet 66: "Tired with all these, for restful death I cry", is, in many ways, a sonnet that stands out from the cycle of one hundred and fifty-four sonnets: it marginalises the central theme of the entire cycle, love, and turns to it only in the last line, actually the last hemistich – a surprising *volta*, which eventually links up this sonnet with all the others and provides a dramatic closure to an argument so far concerned exclusively with the political abuses of the times and the speaker's despair over them. The sonnet seems to belong more to Hamlet and his soliloquy "To be or not to be", to which it is actually linked in a number of verbal echoes, than to the speaker of the sonnets torn between the two loves he has. Moreover, in its relentless anaphoric structure, which completely overrules the conventional division in quatrains, and in the equally relentless parallelism of its stichomythic lines, which piles up at random ever new examples of social abuses without any apparent logical progression, it seems to have little to offer in the way of aesthetic subtlety and versatility appreciated by the lover of Shakespeare's sonnets:

Tired with all these, for restful death I cry:
 As, to behold desert a beggar born,
 And needy nothing trimmed in jollity,
 And purest faith unhappily forsworn,
 And gilded honour shamefully misplaced,
 And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,
 And right perfection wrongfully disgraced,
 And strength by limping sway disabled,
 And art made tongue-tied by authority,
 And folly, doctor-like, controlling skill,
 And simple truth miscalled simplicity,
 And captive good attending captain ill.
 Tired with all these, from these would I be gone,
 Save that, to die, I leave my love alone.¹

No wonder it has found little favour and stimulated little interest with Anglo-American critics and scholars so far. Yet in a continental Europe suffering under Nazism or Stalinism – in Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Russia or the Netherlands – this particular sonnet was singled out again and again as a kind of samizdat text which, protected by Shakespeare's cultural prestige, permitted critics and artists to ventilate their political anger and dismay at the various totalitarian authorities tongue-tying them and corrupting and exploiting the people. Critics lavished praise upon it for its timely message; translators translated it more often and more acutely than any other of Shakespeare's sonnets; artists set it to music or transposed it into novels, theatre performances or films.

The recognition of this asymmetry between the sonnet's reception in the Anglo-American and continental European cultures, between noncommittal disregard on the one hand and passion *engagée* on the other, first set me on my quest for traces of sonnet 66 in the political life of twentieth-century Europe this side of the Channel and provided me with a point of departure for my first travelogue along a European Route 66 linking East and West.² Now, ten years

¹ William Shakespeare, *The Sonnets and A Lover's Complaint*, ed. John Kerrigan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 109.

² "Route 66: The Political Performance of Shakespeare's Sonnet 66 in Germany and Elsewhere", *ShJb*, 137 (Bochum, 2001), 115-131; cf. also the substantially revised and enlarged version in *Four Hundred Years of Shakespeare in Europe*, ed. A. L.

Pujante / Ton Hoenselaars (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003), 70-88. – A sequel to this ongoing travelogue, "Route 66 Continued: Further Fortunes of Shakespeare's Sonnet 66" appeared in "*Not of an Age, but for All Time*": *Shakespeare Across Lands and Ages. Essays in Honour of Holger Klein on the Occasion of His 66th Birthday*, ed. Sabine Coelsch-Foisner / György E. Szönyi (Wien: Braumüller, 2004), 311-315. – To add to my findings on the Continent so far: there is a yet unperformed

and many continental crossings later, I have to qualify my initial perception and I am grateful to the organisers of the Iasi “SHINE” conference for providing me with a chance to adjust the overall picture. Though it is still true that English and American critics and scholars, with the notable exception of Helen Vendler,¹ have had little or nothing to say about sonnet 66,² the picture I drew was a bit lopsided in that I ignored the engagement of Anglo-American creative artists, poets in particular, with Shakespeare’s most political sonnet. Following the hints and advice of friends and colleagues who have travelled along with me on Route 66, I now extend my cross-continental itinerary to take in the British Isles as well. They are European after all, even if separated from us by the Channel and at some distance to the most traumatic phases of recent European history, on which “Tired with all these” thrive. The following is a far from complete account of the uses to which British creative writers have put this sonnet, but travelogues are always selective and highlight particularly significant stations *en route*.

II.

The first trace I follow, pointed in the right direction by a signpost kindly set up for me by Ina Schabert,³ leads me back to the late eighteenth century, to an England in which the revolution across the Channel had kindled a new kind of radical critique of society and infused a strong revolutionary strain into early English Romanticism. One of the poets affected by this was MARY ROBINSON, then a well-known literary and society figure, but soon forgotten and only recently rediscovered by feminist critics in their attempt to counterbalance the male-dominated canon of English Romantic literature. Robinson had been a highly successful actress before she turned to poetry and had starred in a number

play by the German playwright and theatre director Klaus Chatten (b. 1963), who does not only quote the sonnet’s first line in his title, *Müde von alledem schrei ich nach dem Tod*, but uses further lines as subheadings for the five tragicomic soliloquies of five Germans from various walks of life articulating their nausea and frustration, which make up the show; the play-script is available for performance with ‘Verlag für Bühne, Film und Funk’. – For further traces of sonnet 66 cf. the “Supplement: Shakespeares Sonett Nr. 66 in 11 weiteren deutschen Versionen” in Ulrich Erckenbrecht’s - the pioneer of 66 studies – *Grubenfunde. Lyrik und Prosa* (Kassel: Muriverlag, 2007), 174-190.

¹ Helen Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1997), 308-311.

² A recent study of the sonnets by Paul Edmondson and Stanley Wells, *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), 174, confirms this, drawing attention to my own contribution.

³ Private communication; see also Ina Schabert, *Englische Literaturgeschichte aus der Sicht der Geschlechterforschung* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1997), 454f.

of leading Shakespearean roles such as Juliet, Cordelia or Lady Macbeth in Garrick's Drury Lane Theatre. Indeed, her Perdita in a 1779 royal command performance of *The Winter's Tale* was so enchanting that the Prince of Wales (the future George IV) immediately fell in love with her and made her his mistress – to abandon her the year after and pay her off with a pension. With a stage experience of nine Shakespearean plays at her back, it does not come as a surprise that Shakespearean traces should have inscribed themselves into her poetry and novels. Such traces can often be quite hidden and easily overlooked, as is the case with the following poem for which I claim a sonnet 66 subtext:

January, 1795

Pavement slippery, people sneezing,
Lords in ermine, beggars freezing;
Titled gluttons dainties carving,
Genius in a garret starving.

Lofty mansions, warm and spacious;
Courtiers cringing and voracious;
Misers scarce the wretched heeding;
Gallant soldiers fighting, bleeding.

Wives who laugh at passive spouses;
Theatres, and meeting-houses;
Balls, where simpering misses languish;
Hospitals, and groans of anguish.

Arts and sciences bewailing;
Commerce drooping, credit failing;
Placemen mocking subjects loyal;
Separations, weddings royal.

Authors who can't earn a dinner;
Many a subtle rogue a winner;
Fugitives for shelter seeking;
Misers hoarding, tradesmen breaking.

Taste and talents quite deserted;
All the laws of truth perverted;
Arrogance o'er merit soaring;
Merit silently deploring.

Ladies gambling night and morning;
Fools the works of genius scorning;

Ancient dames for girls mistaken,
Youthful damsels quite forsaken.

Some in luxury delighting;
More in talking than in fighting;
Lovers old, and beaux decrepid;
Lordlings empty and insipid.

Poets, painters, and musicians;
Lawyers, doctors, politicians:
Pamphlets, newspapers, and odes,
Seeking fame by different roads.

Gallant souls with empty purses,
Generals only fit for nurses;
School-boys, smit with martial spirit,
Taking place of veteran merit.

Honest men who can't get places,
Knave who show unblushing faces;
Ruin hastened, peace retarded;
Candour spurned, and art rewarded.¹

At first sight, "January 1795" has little to do with Shakespeare's "Tired with all this": to begin with, it is not at all like a strict sonnet but consists of easy-going four-beat trochaic couplets arranged in eleven quatrains. Nor does Robinson quote from Shakespeare's poem, if one disregards the shared references to beggars, doctors and art which might, after all, be entirely casual. And also the "situation of enunciation" is quite different: where Shakespeare emphatically foregrounds the speaking "I" at the beginning and end of this sonnet, here an "I" referring to his or her emotions is conspicuously absent.

And yet there is a structural parallelism that links Robinson's verses with sonnet 66 and this parallelism is so pointed that her poem indeed reads like a re-make of Shakespeare's, to which it alludes in both theme and structure.² Shakespeare's frame apart (lines 1 and 13-14), both poems enumerate a catalogue of social abuses in an apparently random series of stichomythic lines, constantly juxtaposing and contrasting the self-seeking guile, arrogance and corruption of those in power, the exploiters of the existing social system, with

¹ The poem was first published in the daily *Morning Post*, 29 January 1795; my text is from *Romantic Women Poets: 1770-1838. An Anthology*, ed. Andrew Ashfield (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995), 121f.

² For the distinction between quotation and allusion see *Intertextualität: Formen, Funktionen, anglistische Fallstudien*, ed. Manfred Pfister (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1985), passim.

the exploited underdogs, whose virtues, talents and merits go unrewarded. Moreover, the indictment of social and political perversions in both poems focuses on the precarious plight of the artist and intellectual: In Shakespeare, the meta-poetical turn the poem takes with “art made tongue-tied by authority” (line 9) marks the central *volta* of the sonnet from the first two to the third quatrain; in Robinson’s poem references to “Arts and sciences bewailing” (line 13), to “Authors who can’t earn a dinner” (line 17) and to “Poets, painters, and musicians [...] Seeking fame by different roads” (lines 33-36) constitute the predominant leitmotif that reverberates through this long roll-call of social abuses. The theme of arts and artists culminates in the last line, though with a drastically ironic twist: in “Candour spurned, and art rewarded”, *art* does not refer to the art of poets, painters, or musicians, but to the opposite of *candour*, i.e. to artificiality and scheming artfulness. The only art that thrives in the corrupt social world of the present is artfulness: that is the grim message which frames Robinson’s gallery of images culled with satirical intent from the society pages of the *Morning Post* in which the poem first appeared.¹

In contrast to Shakespeare’s sonnet – as well as to Augustan city satire, which also piles up heterogeneous images of social corruption – there is no satirist persona ventilating his anger and dismay; the satire remains implicit rather in the cumulative effect of the long series of sharply focused images. In this respect, it resembles a poem first published the year before, William Blake’s “London” from *Songs of Experience* (1794). Though Blake does mark his presence in the poem with first-person pronouns, his “I” is a transparent subject of perception and he refrains like Robinson from explicit commentary upon what he sees or hears. In this resides the most important structural difference between sonnet 66 and “January 1795”: where Shakespeare’s sonnet is framed by a speaker whose nausea at the pervasive social injustices triggers a suicidal death-drift from which only the thought of his love saves him in the very last verse, Mary Robinson’s poem – like Blake’s – has to do without love’s saving grace and consolation. In this sense, her appropriation of Shakespeare’s sonnet 66, though lighter in touch and style, is more unrelentingly grim than the original.²

III.

When Mary Robinson engaged in a dialogue with sonnet 66 to rehearse her own litany of social abuses and give a voice to her own frustration and anger,

¹ Schabert, *Englische Literaturgeschichte*, 454.

² In this, Robinson actually anticipates later appropriations of sonnet 66, Lion Feuchtwanger’s for instance, who stripped Shakespeare’s sonnet of the final verse; see my “Route 66” (2001), 121.

Shakespeare's sonnets had just been rediscovered for a general readership. They had been virtually forgotten for more than one and a half centuries and omitted in all the major editions as just not being good enough to count as one of the works of the Great English Bard, when Edmond Malone first reprinted them in 1780 as a supplement to his edition of the plays. Robinson's poem, therefore, has the historical distinction of being one of the first echoes, if not the first, of a body of poetry that was to be canonised and promoted to the highest ranks of *Weltliteratur* under the auspices of English and European Romanticism in the immediately following three or four decades.¹ (I am pleased this distinction goes to a female writer; so far my encounters on Route 66 have been all-male – as if rewriting sonnet 66 were an entirely masculine pursuit!)

The situation is totally changed when we reach Modernism. By then, Shakespeare's sonnets had gained an undisputed place both in the national and international canon of lyrical poetry. Still, "our" sonnet, sonnet 66, continued to be largely disregarded and that for two reasons: it had little or nothing to contribute to what had become the main focus of interest in Shakespeare's cycle of sonnets, their concern with gender and sexuality, and the generalising abstraction of its argument and the examples that substantiate it went against the grain of modernist and imagist poetics. But even here, on what seems to be unfertile ground, "Tired with all these" struck a few roots.

Helen Vendler, author of *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (see note 3), to my mind the best book ever written on Shakespeare's sonnets, directed me to the first of them.² Two years before his death, in a letter to his admired poet colleague and *confidante* Dorothy Wellesley, WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS writes about his growing sense of isolation. This is not just a matter of personal frustration or old age but has a crucial political dimension – his disenchantment with the way the Irish Free State, whom he had served as senator from 1922 to 1928, had, to his mind, betrayed the national revolutionary principles. Yeats saw this betrayal epitomised in the posthumous denigration of Roger Casement. He was one of Yeats's heroes and martyrs of the Irish Revolution and his diaries, proving him guilty of the high treason for which he had been executed by the British in 1916, were, according to Yeats and others, mere fabrications. Actually they were not, but Yeats firmly believed in them being forgeries and fought for Casement's rehabilitation in a number of poems and letters at that time, and the frustrations of this struggle filled him with passionate anger. It was in this context that Shakespeare's sonnet 66 began to haunt him, as he writes in his letter dated 21 September 1937:

¹ See my postface essay, „Mein Lebenszins, er liegt in dieser Schrift“, in: William Shakespeare, *Die Sonette. Zweisprachige Ausgabe*, translated by Christa Schuenke (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999), 174-196, here 174-78.

² Private letter (22 May 2006).

You say I seem far away – I am far away from everybody & everything. Something happened to me in the darkness some weeks ago. It began with those damned forgeries – I have the old Fenian conscience – death and execution are in the day’s work but not that. Everything seems exaggerated – I had no symptom of illness yet I had to take to my bed. I kept repeating that Sonnet of Shakespeare’s about ‘Captive good’ – I felt I was in utter solitude. [...] I have come out of that darkness a man you have never known – more man of genius, more gay, more miserable.¹

His “rage”, as he called it in a number of letters and poems of this period, chimed in with the anger and nausea of Shakespeare’s sonnet and made the repetition of its litany of indictments into a private ritual for acting out and working through his frustrations. Such repetitive rituals actually play an increasingly important role in Yeats’s late poetry. It often takes the ritualistic form of naming and “enumerating” – “What can I but enumerate old themes?”² –, of summoning one by one and line by line, as in Shakespeare’s sonnet, what he hates or what he loves, as if calling up the objects of his love or hatred were some magical way of coping with them.³

IV.

Yeats remembered and re-called sonnet 66 in a moment of personal and political crisis – and so did VIRGINIA WOOLF in the last years of her life. On 22 June 1940, little more than half a year before drowning herself in the river Ouse in March 1941, she noted in her diary: “I feel, if this is my last lap, oughtn’t I to read Shakespeare.”⁴ “My last lap”: the phrase reaches out beyond her deeply disturbed mental state which brought about this sense of an impending end to her individual life and it embraces the sense of Europe as she loved it being on its last lap with the Nazi persecution of the Jews on the Continent and the swastika bombers flying over her head towards London. By that time she had already embarked on what was to be her last novel, *Between the Acts*, published posthumously in July 1941. And the novel she was writing – a country house novel set in mid-June 1939, at the brink of World War II – shows that she did

¹ See *Letters on Poetry from W.B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1964), 122f. I quote from the database IntelLex edition of the *Collected Letters*, ed. John Kelly (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002), Accession Number: 6785., which corrects the mistaken date of the letter in the earlier edition, 28 January 1937.

² “The Circus Animals’ Desertion“, in: *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1950), 391f, here 391.

³ Particularly impressive examples of this are “Why should not old men be mad?“ (388f) and “The Stateman’s Holiday“ (389f).

⁴ *The Diaries of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth Press, 1984), vol. 5: 1936-1941, 298.

read and re-read Shakespeare on her last lap indeed.¹ It is made up of many voices recording the history of England during a village fête complete with Miss La Trobe's open-air theatre performance of "Scenes from English history"², and these voices resonate with quotations from, and allusions to, the canon of English literature from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* to T.S. Eliot's *Waste Land*. Of course, the great national poet Shakespeare epitomising this tradition stands out in this; references to four of his texts in particular are shot through the various voices and hold them together the way leitmotifs do in music or patterns in tapestry.

In each case, no more than a snippet of text is quoted, but each one evokes the whole original context and together they highlight the predominant moods and motifs of the novel. From *The Tempest* (I.ii.285) Miss La Trobe's pageant takes up "*Dispersed are we*", a phrase that with each repetition (pp. 59f and 116-119) gains richer connotations of social disintegration and diaspora; from *King Lear* (IV,vii,76) Giles takes up "I fear I am not in my perfect mind" (p. 53 and 110), hinting at mental disintegration and madness; from another of the late plays, *Troilus and Cressida*, from Troilus' despair over Cressida's betrayal (V.ii.181-85), come the three words "*orts, scraps and fragments*" (pp. 111, 112, 114), which powerfully evoke the vision of the entire cosmos disintegrating and falling to pieces, together with all social order and individual integrity, and foreground the intertextual patchwork of this novel made up indeed of orts [splinters], scraps and fragments.

At a crucial point in the novel, just after a thunderstorm has disrupted the last act of the historical pageant, the one dedicated to the present, there is an interior monologue or fragmented chorus shared by the voices of performers and members of the audience. And it is in this context, that sonnet 66 resurfaces once again:

[...] Here they came. And the Pilgrims. And the lovers. And the grandfather's clock. And the old man with a beard. They all appeared. What's more, each declaimed some phrase or fragment from their parts ... *I am not* (said one) *in my perfect mind* ... Another, *Reason am I* ... *And I? I'm the old top hat* ... *Home is the hunter, home from the hill* ... *Home? Where the miner sweats, and maiden faith is rudely strumpeted* ... *Sweet and low; sweet and low, wind of the western sea* ... [...] (p. 110)

¹ She began working at *Between the Acts* in April 1938; a diary entry of 17 Dec. 1939 tells us that she is reading "Dadie's Shakespeare [i.e. her friend George Rylands' anthology of Shakespearean excerpts, *The Ages of Man: Shakespeare's Image of Man and Nature*, 1939], & notes overflow into my 2 books."

² Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts*, ed. Stella McNichol, with introduction and notes by Gillian Beer (London: Penguin, 1992), 51.

The one verse of Shakespeare's sonnet evoked here, verse 6: "And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted", recalls the entire sonnet, its bitterness and its death drift, in a world where there is no romantic love to forestall suicide. Moreover, this verse, which inflicts upon the reader the most violent of the sonnet's eleven *exempla* of a savage social world and the only one that immediately addresses sexual abuse, strikes a particularly dire note in Woolf's chorus of voices chanting of romantic love gone sour and all coherence gone. Mind you, the quotation is not exact; none of the voices actually recall what they have deeply internalised and made their own with any philological precision. Instead of "And maiden *virtue* rudely strumpeted" we get: "and maiden *faith* is rudely strumpeted". It is the very imprecision of individual memory with its lapses and distortion which weaves the Shakespearean verse even deeper into the novel's fabric of allusions: "maiden *faith* rudely strumpeted" brings Shakespeare's generalised image of rape closer to a specific rape narrative, the myth of Procne and her innocently trusting sister Philomela, who is raped by Procne's husband Tereus. The story of the sisters' rape, mutilation and Ovidian metamorphosis into swallow and nightingale reverberates through the novel in repeated allusions to Swinburne's "Itylus" poem (p. 67, 70, 71) and is further recalled in the many swallows who constantly sweep across the country house and its barn.¹ This superimposition of Shakespeare's sonnet with Ovid's tale – and Sophocles' lost play on the two raped and mutilated sisters and Shakespeare's early tragedy *Titus Andronicus* reworking the horror – deepens the resonances of sonnet 66 within Woolf's novel and confirms once again that Shakespeare's voice is not summoned here as that of a reassuring and consoling authority of English traditional order. It is the voice of the late Shakespeare rather, a Shakespeare rehearsing his disillusionment and angst, and the orts, scraps and fragments saved by Woolf from his poetic cosmos are like Eliot's *Waste Land* "fragments" – "shored against my ruins", one of them being, not coincidentally, Procne's swallow song: "*Quando fiam uti chelidon* – O swallow swallow".²

V.

The latest traces of sonnet 66 I have found – with a little help from Ulrich Erckenbrecht, the first traveller on Route 66³ – in the writings of an English poet was in W.H. AUDEN'S quite substantial body of criticism. He first engaged

¹ See Gillian Beer's commentaries in her edition of *Between the Acts*, pp. xxvii and 138f.

² T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems. 1909-1963* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 79 [*The Waste Land*, verses 430 and 428].

³ Ulrich Erckenbrecht (ed.), *Shakespeare Sechshundsechzig: Variationen über ein Sonett*, zweite, erweiterte Ausgabe (Kassel: Muriverlag, 2001), 104f.

publicly with Shakespeare's sonnet cycle in a series of lectures on Shakespeare he gave at the New York School of Social Research in 1946-47. Though he dedicated an entire lecture to the sonnets, he did not, however, respond to sonnet 66 in any particular way.¹ But his own personal copy of Shakespeare's *Complete Works* (in George Lyman Kittredge's 1936 edition), which he used for preparing his talks, speaks a different language: here sonnet 66 belongs with twenty-three others marked and highlighted by him with a check or cross. Moreover, in some of the sonnets he underlined certain words he found particularly significant, and there is no other sonnet where there are anywhere near as many underlined words as in sonnet 66.² Obviously, this sonnet stirred something in him, and this was further confirmed when, in 1950, he published his five-volume anthology of *Poets of the English Language*: twenty-five of Shakespeare's one hundred and fifty-four sonnets made it into this collection, among them "Tired with all these".³ Finally, when in 1964 he prefaced the Signet Classic edition of the sonnets, he made explicit what he had found so particularly moving and powerful about this sonnet for such a long time.⁴ He singles it out – together with sonnet 129, which, in contrast to 66, has always been at the centre of critical attention – for special praise. The context in which he underscored these two sonnets is a discussion of the particular virtues of the Shakespearean sonnet form and of Shakespeare's masterly ways with it:

[...] there are certain things which can be done in the Shakespearean form which the Petrarchan, with its sharp division of octave and sestet, cannot do. In Sonnet 66, "Tired with all these, for restful death a cry," and 129, "Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame," Shakespeare is able to give twelve single-line *exempla* of the wretchedness of this world and the horrors of lust, with an accumulative effect of great power.⁵

What Auden praises sonnet 66 for, its "accumulative effect of great power" achieved through itemising "*exempla* of wretchedness" in syntactically and metrically parallel lines, actually informs some of his greatest satirical

¹ See W.H. Auden, *Lectures on Shakespeare*, reconstructed and edited by Arthur Kirsch (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), 86-100.

² *Lectures on Shakespeare*, 350f.

³ W.H. Auden (ed.), *Poets of the English Language* (New York: Viking, 1950), vol. 2, 159.

⁴ W.H. Auden, "Introduction" to *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, Signet Classic edition (New York: New American Library, 1964). I quote from W.H. Auden, *Forewords and Afterwords*, selected by Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), 88-108.

⁵ *Forewords and Afterwords*, 96.

poems of this period, from “The Unknown Citizen” to “The Chimeras”.¹ They may not be sonnets and, on the other hand, his own sonnets, striving towards a conversational tone, avoid such a “66 structure”, but we seem to sense in his satirical catalogues something of Shakespeare’s anger, frustration and dismay rehearsed in sonnet 66.

VI.

My encounters on the English lap of Route 66 have been rather fleeting and few and far between, you may think. That may well be so: I have found nothing as dramatic and spectacular as the uses sonnet 66 was put to by critics and artists on the Continent. As we have seen, the presence of this sonnet in English literature is latent and subliminal rather – but cutting deep nonetheless, even deeper than in some of my continental examples. Perhaps I should change my metaphor at this point. I feel less like a traveller now exploring the outer reaches of this sonnet’s power to give a voice to political dismay and protest, and more like a physicist watching an atom flit through his spectroscope: invisible though it is, it makes the gas flare up for the fraction of a nanosecond, illuminating in its trace the field to become invisible again. I invite my fellow scientists to join me in the search for such traces and illuminations.

¹ W.H. Auden, *Collected Shorter Poems, 1927-1957* (London. Faber and Faber, 1966), 146 and 311.