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It has always seemed to me that iconic poems such as Shakespeare's sonnets invited – almost compelled – rewriting in other forms, where they could be tested for endurance, grated as it were against different linguistic registers and other, more eclectic ranges of reference; where they could be made to wake up blinking in the modern world. Let us imagine them overtaken by new media (film, tabloids), new technology ('fast forward'), or bumping anachronistically into Pascal and Dorian Gray as well as the classical Ovid and the biblical Adam and Eve. Moreover, it seemed to me that the discipline of the haiku (taking the strict 5-7-5 syllable structure seriously) presented one, if extreme, possibility. The haiku bursting at the seams, bouncing off slogans and catch-phrases, trying anything that might achieve concentration without (too much) simplification. Hoping to follow sometimes in the furrow of the original image, while regretting the music: impossible to echo on this scale. And – here unlike the pure-bred haiku – using all the resources of pure punctuation (dots, dashes, italics for emphasis) and abbreviations ('OK' is OK here) to keep within the chosen bounds. Smuggling in discreet quotations; even, cheekily, quotations from elsewhere in Shakespeare. The Shaiku have been a long-term project; they have gone through many revisions (and we hope, improvements) over the years; rewritings rewritten. Reading Shakespeare's sonnets again will always suggest another idea, another phrase which could be turned to account. But accounts have to be closed at some point; and here I do so.

From SHAIKU

94 *They that have power to hurt and will do none*

Such self-possession:
you must admire it...until
the image shatters.

95 *How sweet and lovely dost thou make the shame*

So even scandal
leaves you unscathed? Fast forward
to Dorian Gray...

96 *Some say thy fault is youth, some wantonness*

You seduce them all;
Red Riding Hoods. But get this:
I'm with the bad wolf!

97 *How like a winter hath my absence been*

No summer this year;
no autumn; no you. And now
real winter's coming...

98 *From you I have been absent in the spring*

What are spring, summer,
without you to quicken them?
Just birds and flowers.

99 *The forward violet thus did I chide*

What's more, most flowers
have stolen what they flourish
flagrantly from you.

100 *Where art thou, Muse, that thou forget'st so long*

Muse! I call on you
once, twice, a third time—make sure
my love is a star.

101 *O truant Muse, what shall be thy amends*

What do you say, Muse?
(Silence will get us nowhere).
Make him immortal.

102 *My love is strengthened, though more weak in seeming*

Don't think I love you
less if I say less. I just
don't want to bore you.

103 *Alack, what poverty my Muse brings forth*

Improve on you? Not
possible. I start to write;
stop to gaze again.

104 *To me, fair friend, you never can be old*

Can it be three years?
You haven't changed; that, or I
can't bear to see it.

105 *Let not my love be called idolatry*

'Fair, kind, and true' is
(yes), my mantra. Rare to find
these three together.

106 *When in the chronicle of wasted time*

All the praise ever
lavished on loveliness is
dumbfounded by you.

107 *Not mine own fears, nor the prophetic soul*

Queens, moons, come and go,
war and peace waver; love lights
the brink of being.

108 *What's in the brain that ink may character*

Who needs novelty?
We have loved (and will) despite
time's standing orders.

109 *O, never say that I was false of heart*

Untrue to you? I'm
not perfect, but faithful to
your own perfection.

110 *Alas, 'tis true, I have gone here and there*

OK: I sold out
to the stage. But from now on
it's got to be you.

111 *O, for my sake do you with fortune chide*

Blame my trade, not me—
one gets like that. All I need
is your indulgence.

112 *Your love and pity doth th'impression fill*

I couldn't care what
anyone thinks—except for
you, my oracle.

113 *Since I left you, mine eye is in my mind*

I see the world now
with your watermark: nothing
exists without you.

114 *Or whether doth my mind, being crowned with you*

Is this my failing,
or your doing?—mine, no doubt,
needing you too much.

115 *Those lines that I before have writ do lie*

I'll use time's language
to say 'now is best': knowing
there can be better.

116 *Let me not to the marriage of true minds*

No limits to love:
a star, it stands outside time.
Look: I'm telling you.

117 *Accuse me thus: that I have scanted all*

I have fled from you,
stupidly, and stayed away;
desperate to know...

118 *Like as to make our appetites more keen*

I've made myself sick
with medicine, trying to
keep this love contained.

119 *What potions have I drunk of siren tears*

I was poisoned by
corrosive love; then found the
cure—go back for more.

120 *That you were once unkind befriends me now*

Knowing no better,
we traded love for pain; love's
gift was forgiveness.

121 *'Tis better to be vile than vile esteemed*

Gossip! Those who share
(I quote) 'this glassy essence'
should never throw stones.

122 *Thy gift, thy tables, are within my brain*

I don't need records
to remember you. My whole
body remembers.

123 *No, Time, thou shalt not boast that I do change*

What are present, past,
to me? I measure myself
by time's outlaw, truth.

124 *If my dear love were but the child of state*

We stand alone: fear
neither plot nor accident.
Others take what comes.

125 *Were't aught to me I bore the canopy*

Never calculate;
you'll lose. There's only one love:
unconditional.

126 *O thou, my lovely boy, who in thy power*

As if nature were
trying to prove you ageless;
but don't believe it.