

THE POETICS OF THE COLOUR “WHITE” IN THE SONNETS OF SHAKESPEARE
AND RAUF PARFI

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Abstract: The poetics of colour have often been studied in literary criticism, folklore studies, and comparative literature. Comparing how two poets use colour within the same genre allows for meaningful conclusions. This article explores the poetics of the colour white in the sonnets of Shakespeare and Rauf Parfi.

Keywords: colour, poetics, comparative literature, sonnet, Shakespeare, Rauf Parfi, artistic expression, contrast, portrait, quatrain.

In sonnet artistry, colour holds a unique place. Poets use the same colour differently, and likewise, different poets use the same colour for specific poetic purposes. Philosopher and poetry theorist Abu Nasr Al-Farabi, in his work “Philosophical Questions and Their Answers” responds to the question “What is colour?” by stating: “Colour is the boundary of what makes a shiny object shiny; it is expressed on the surface of objects.”[1;74]. Colour is something visible to the human eye, found in nature, and humans replicate the colours they see in nature using various materials — for instance, dyeing fabric. Colour is a visible marker, and understanding it first requires sight. Since ancient times, people have attributed symbolic meanings to colours based on their effects on life. White, for example, has been perceived as a symbol of purity, innocence, and the transition from one world to another — a perception that is also reflected in literature. Thus, studying the poetics of white in the sonnets of Shakespeare and Rauf Parfi carries special significance.

In the sonnet 12 of Shakespeare, white is used for comparison:

When I behold the violet past prime,
And sable curls all silvered o’er with white;
When lofty trees I see barren of leaves,
Which erst from heat did canopy the herd...[7]

In this context, Shakespeare uses the phrase "silvered o’er with white" to figuratively depict the natural process of aging, symbolized by the graying of hair. Here, white is not portrayed as a symbol of beauty or purity, but rather as a representation of the passage of time, mortality, and inevitable decline.

In the sonnet 99 the colour white is used as a symbol of Beauty and Envy:

The lily I condemned for thy hand,
And buds of marjoram had stol’n thy hair;
The roses fearfully on thorns did stand,
One blushing shame, another white despair. [8]

In this sonnet, Shakespeare accuses the flowers of stealing the beauty of the beloved. In particular, the white rose is depicted as representing "white despair," as it attempts to imitate the purity of the beloved, but this attempt fails. In this context, white symbolizes innocence, elegance, and unsuccessful imitation. The poetic irony lies in the fact that even nature itself cannot match the beauty of the beloved, through which Shakespeare portrays a unique, direct, and unparalleled beauty that transcends natural beauty. In the sonnet 99, focused on flowers, Shakespeare uses white and intensified “whiter” to express clarity and depth in the beloved’s beauty. Creating a floral portrait of the beloved, Shakespeare uses colour to highlight physical traits. The term “white” (then intensified as “whiter”) isn’t merely for poetic meter but serves to emphasize purity and delicacy.

In Shakespeare's 127th sonnet, white is portrayed as a social construct and a reflection of changing beauty standards. Although Shakespeare does not directly mention white in this sonnet, its meaning is implied. Shakespeare critiques how beauty standards once favored whiteness (fair skin, fair hair), but now darker features (dark skin, dark hair) are preferred. In this context, white symbolizes traditional beauty, and its diminishing significance reflects cultural changes, possibly offering commentary on race or social class:

In the old age black was not counted fair,
Or if it were, it bore not beauty's name;
But now is black beauty's successive heir,
And beauty slandered with a bastard shame. [9].

In Rauf Parfi's sonnet "Daryo mavjlariga yozilmish g'azal" ("A Ghazal Written to the Waves of the River") the colour "white" symbolizes tranquility and beauty in nature. The word "white" modifies "cloud," conveying calmness. Parfi chooses not to use "black" or even "bluish," as "blue" would have overlapped semantically with "sky." "This word did not fully match either the rhythm or the meaning. Because the word "sky" was used as a synonym for "blue", it took the place of the adjective 'white'."

Qamishlar shivirlar daryo tomonda,
Ko'kda oq bulutlar kezar bemajol.
Bir tirik nafasat borliq, jahonda,
Kimgadir elanar, qilar iltijo. [3;34]
The English translation of the sonnet:
Reeds whisper near the river's flow,
White clouds drift in the calm above.
A living grace in the world does glow,
That calls to someone with pleading love.

The poet describes a serene landscape — a calm, poetic space. The poet masterfully explains a picture of nature; in his description. However, at the end of the sonnet, the sorrow of the lyrical hero is expressed:

Qaltirab porlaydir bir chiroq g'arib,
Bir qushcha sayraydir ruhim ichinda,
Bir qushcha yig'laydir meni axtarib.
The English translation of the sonnet:
A lonely lamp flickers and glows,
A bird sings from within my soul,
A bird weeps, seeking what it knows.

Despite the peace outside, the speaker's soul is restless. Through "contrast", Parfi juxtaposes outer calm and inner suffering, and white becomes a critical element in building that image.

Boshida qora qish, oppoq bahorlar,
Yuragi yarim-u, butun iymoni,
Talotum olamni shivirlab chorlar. [3;34]
The English translation of the sonnet:
At the start — a black winter, white springs,
A torn heart, yet a whole belief sings,
Whispering storms call the world's ear,
A poet's fate laid bare in fear.

In the sonnet named "Abdulhamid Sulaymon Cho'lpon" Rauf Parfi reflects on the tragic fate of the poet Cho'lpon using colour opposites. Here, "black winter" and "white springs" symbolize

despair and hope. “White” (oppoq) is an intensified form of “white” (oq), achieved phonetically, adding emotional depth. “-lar” is used not only for metrical fit but also to underscore spiritual contrast.

While Italian and French sonnets follow a 4+4+3+3 structure, English sonnets typically use 4+4+4+2. Rauf Parfi’s sonnets follow the former, Shakespeare’s the latter. In both poets’ works, the placement of white within the sonnet structure offers interpretive insight: in the first sonnet analyzed, white appears in the initial quatrain; in the second, it occurs in the first tercet. In one, white represents cloud colour; in another, it symbolizes the season of spring, referencing blossoming trees. In both cases, the colour white symbolizes meaning derived from its natural context.

In Parfi’s sonnet “Muhabbat” (“Love”) white appears metaphorically in a phrase:

Afsus-nadomatning bordir-ku cheki...

Sening gunohingni yuvsin ko’z yoshim...

Ayni jasoratdir har qanday sevgi,

Sanga oq yo’l tilar mening bardoshim.

The English translation of the sonnet:

There is a limit to regret and shame...

Let my tears wash away your sin.

Every love is a kind of brave flame,

My patience prays for your white road to begin.

Here, “white road” implies a path of redemption. Tears become the medium of spiritual cleansing.

The metaphor of washing away sin with tears aligns with the philosophy of repentance.

Conclusion. Both Shakespeare and Rauf Parfi, though from different eras and cultures, use the colour white effectively in their sonnets to elevate the artistic quality of their poetry. They apply white to represent innocence, beauty, contrast, and emotional depth, using it symbolically and metaphorically across varied poetic contexts.

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