

## PORTRAITURE OF UNCONVENTIONALITIES IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS

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**Abstract:** The sonnet is, by definition; a kind of lyric, that is, a spontaneous expression of some strong personal feeling or emotion in musical language. The sonnets written by Shakespeare are largely autobiographical and personal in nature; and each of them expresses a feeling or emotion which is always very strong and often very intense in choice language and possess what is known as the felicity of words and phrase. They have a musical appeal too and there is, in fact, a wide range of melodic effects in them. But the matter does not end here. These sonnets or a large majority of them possesses a dramatic quality also. Drama implies conflict and tension, dialogue and conversation and action and characters. Many of the sonnets in this sequence possess all these characteristics of them. There is a lot of conflict in many of the sonnets, though the conflict takes place in Shakespeare's own mind, a conflict, for instance, between his love and admiration for his friends and his grievance against his friend; and similarly, a conflict between his passion for the dark lady and his resentment against her for her deceitfulness and disloyalty.

**Keywords:** Portraiture, Unconventionalities, William Shakespeare, Sonnet, autobiographical, Shakespearean sonnets

### **Introduction:**

The word "sonnet" is an abbreviation of the Italian word "sonnetto" means a little sound or gentle breeze. Basically it was a short poem recited originally to a musical accompaniment. Like the lyric, it was a single emotion or idea expressed by rhythmic melody; and it differs from the ordinary lyric less in conception than in form, as we see by comparing one of Shakespeare's sonnets on love with one of his songs (in his dramas) on love. In the sonnets, the lilt and abandonment of the lyric were replaced by a more deliberate manner and a more austere treatment. There might be the same intensity of feeling and an equal scope for fancy; but the difference is fairly perceptible. The research is the representation of Shakespearean sonnets and the role of William Shakespeare in writing sonnets. From the very beginning of the poem, I like to introduce the main aspects of the research. I have introduced various critics who

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discussed on Shakespeare and his role in literature. I have also described how he became a poet. I shall discuss on many important poems of Shakespeare and point out different themes and subjects showing his overall treatment on God, love, romance and common natural beauties and his role of enriching his poetry as well.

**Limitation of the Research:** My research topic was “to explore the evolution of sonnets of William Shakespeare and the thematic discussion based on his sonnets selected by me. I think very limited number of research works have been done on William Shakespeare’s sonnets. In this regards it was a kind of challenge for me to undertake good research on Shakespeare. As part of my research I had to evaluate and collect the information on Shakespeare’s sonnets and in parallel I had to study some critical books on concerned topic. I think further research is very essential at different settings and with more elaborate instruments. In this way a more reliable and generalize result may emerge.

**Objective of the Research:** William Shakespeare and his writings especially sonnets have occupied a large area in English literature. Shakespearean sonnets are very important and interesting genres of English literature. It becomes more interesting and attractive when it mixed with romantic and devotional view.. The main objective of my thesis is to find out the different aspects in Shakespearean sonnets. The research will be helpful for me to gather much knowledge about William Shakespeare and his writings especially sonnets. It will also be instructive for students who want to study in English literature. My research will also inspire the students and teachers of English literature to go with further research on William Shakespeare and his writings especially sonnets. However my aim is to represent William Shakespeare to the readers as much as I can.

**Research Methodology:** Research methodology means the way of solving the research problem. It is an integral part of research. There are many kinds of methods and techniques to undertake research work. Of them, I have chosen descriptive cum analytical methods to finish my research work. Most of this research paper is based on descriptive research. It can be explained as a statement of affairs as they are present with the researcher having no control over variable.. The main method in this research is close reading of the eleven selected poems, paying close attention to individual words and lines. In order to get right idea, I took help from some previous interpretations. I also look into internet to get more ideas. Again I have compared and contrasted the poems to find out the similarities and differences among them. My main aim is to get the religious, romantic and devotional aspects of the poems.

### **Review of literature and Discussion**

**What is sonnet?** A sonnet has been defined as a poem consisting of fourteen lines and expressing a single emotion or idea and written according to a particular scheme of which

rhyme is an essential ingredient, though the rhyming is not uniform in all the sonnets. In other words, a sonnet is a short lyric poem of fourteen iambic pentameter lines linked by an intricate rhyme scheme. It is a lyric because it can be turned to a lyre, a musical instrument. Each of its fourteen lines consists of five feet (also known as metres) for which it is called pentameter. Again, each of the feet consists of an unaccented syllable an accented syllable (or sound unit) for which it is called iambic.

**Origin of the sonnets:** The sonnet is Italian in origin. The sonnets properly began to take shape as special metrical form in the hands of an Italian poet in the thirteenth century. While this poet perfected the mechanism of the sonnet, two others, much greater, Italian poets, namely Dante and Petrarch, crowned it with beauty and power. Eventually, the sweetness of the music of the sonnet began to attract the early English poets of the Renaissance; but they did not have the skill to impart the same music to it. Then came Sir Philip Sidney with his soothing sweetness; and he showed what could be done to produce those magical effects which the Italian had produced; and from his onwards the sonnet-form rapidly passed from a metrical experiment into genuine poetry. Subsequently there was hardly any English poet who did not try his hand at sonnet-writing, the greatest among them being John Milton, William Wordsworth, John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelly and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, not to speak of the later Victorians and the poets of the twentieth century. It is also said that sonnet was imported into England by Sir Thomas (1503-1542) and developed by Henry Howard, the Earl of Surry (1517-1547). While Thomas Watt adhered to the Italian or the Petrarchan scheme, introducing only a closing couplet which that scheme did not have, the Earl of Surrey modified the entire scheme, replacing it with three alternately rhyming quatrains, followed by a couplet. In this way the Earl of Surrey renounced the structural balance and the delicately interwoven rhyme-scheme of the original Italian mode. Shakespeare subsequently followed this rhyme-scheme, imparting a new generation and majesty to it. The rhyme-scheme of English, also called the Shakespearean or Elizabethan, form of the sonnet is generally a b a b ; c d c d ; e f e f ; g g . Actually, of course, the credit for introducing the sonnet into English poetry goes to Wyatt and Surrey, with the latter altering the Petrarchan scheme and replacing it with three quatrains and a couplet at the end. But to Shakespeare goes the credit for perfecting the latter form. Later Milton revived the strict Petrarchan form and gave it a new life. After Milton, the sonnet as a form of poetry almost disappeared from England for a century and a half, till the romantic poets (Wordsworth and others) revived it and revived it with such zest that it regained its former glory. There is another variety of sonnet which should also be mentioned here. This is the Spenserian variety which observes the following rhyme-scheme: a b a b ; b c b c ; c d c d ; ee . This form was developed by Edmund Spenser (1552-1599).

**The Development of the English sonnet: Drayton and Daniel:** The English sonneteers did not strictly follow the Italian form of the sonnet. They introduced changes, though they did not alter the sonnet's length which was traditionally described as fourteen

lines. The formal modifications in the sonnet-form, which characterize Shakespeare's sonnets, were first of all introduced by Michael Drayton and Samuel Daniel. Drayton's sonnet, *A Parting*, is a magnificent piece of verse, sure in its handling, at once strong and restrained in its expression of passion. Daniel's work, though less distinguished, is always skilful and pleasing, occasionally touching great height. Daniel, as much as Drayton, paved the way for the much greater sonnets written by Shakespeare, just as Marlowe's handling of the blank verse had paved the way for Shakespeare's much higher achievement in that sphere. These poets had shown the way to sonnet-writing, while Shakespeare's genius attained the peaks.

**Sir Philip Sidney as Writer of Sonnets: Astrophel and Stella:** Two greater names than those of Wyatt, Surrey, Drayton and Daniel deserve to be mentioned in connection with sonnet-writing before we come to the master, namely Shakespeare. They are Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser. Sidney wrote a sonnet-sequence called *Astrophel and Stella* (first published in 1591 and in a complete and authorized edition in 1598). It is believed to be a largely autobiographical work, and written in the heat of Sidney's passion for a girl of nineteenth who, however, was married to another suitor. These sonnets possess a magical quality which is born of their union of hot-blooded passion with super-sensual idealism. The woman for whom Sidney yearned has, in these sonnets, been transfigured and irradiated. Virtue itself takes the shape of his beloved Stella. In Stella's face Sidney reads what love and beauty are. In fact, Sidney's splendid passion draws everything, great or small, into bits flaming orbit in these sonnets which have something of the sweep and cathartic effect of tragedy.

**Spenser as Writer of Sonnets: "The Amoretti":** Spenser imparted distinction to the sonnet-form of poetry by his sonnet-sequence called *The Amoretti* consisting of 88 sonnets, published in 1595. These sonnets are also autobiographical love poems which describe Spenser's wooing of a man by the name of Elizabeth Boyle to whom he subsequently got married. The sonnets in this sequence are permeated by an undertone of melancholy which is blended with a frank and sensitive delight in the beauty and splendor of things.

**The culmination of the Sonnet-Form in Shakespeare's Hands:** The culmination of the Elizabethan sonnets comes with Shakespeare's 154 sonnets, addressed largely to a young friend and partly to a mistress who has come to be known as the dark lady (because she was not a blonde, a fair-complexioned woman but a brunette, a woman of a dark or brown complexion). These sonnets are the overflow of his life and mind. In an English modification of Petrarch's form, Shakespeare created a series of poems comparable only to those of Petrarch. All that goes between fades into insignificance. These two writers transfused their inner life into the sonnet. It is only by means of such a comparison that we can see how much the sonnet-form needed a new imaginative impulse, and how Shakespeare was able to give it. The sonnets are complex works of art and as such, they have both perfect harmony of expression and loftiness of subject. They reveal a true and perfect sense of melody. Coleridge defined great poetry as "right words in the right place", and the sonnets have their greatness.

The right words are those which make for music, for the long-drawn harmonies and rhythmic roll of sounds that linger on the ear and haunt our memory. Much sounds in every line of the sonnets and lift us up to Paradise; music informs each one of them, each is an instance of unique verbal felicity such as possible only for the greatest. Shakespeare's sonnets are remarkable for their verbal felicity also. They are perfect in their manner as well as in their manner. From the first to the last his sonnet is the “ --- **Adventurous song That with no middle flight intends to soar.**”

The power of the language is taxed to its utmost: it can do more; its merit is a means of poetic expression, as an instrument for the expression of a thousand varying shades of emotion, must stand or fall by such passage as these—**“Take all my loves, my love, yea, take them all; What hast thou, then more than thou hadst before; No love, my love that thou mayst true love call: All mines were thine before thou hadst this more. Was it the proud full sail of his great verse? Bound for the prize of all-too-precious you, that did my ripe thoughts in my brain rehearse, Making their tomb the wherein they grow? (Sonnet No.40)**

These lines and the like illustrate Shakespeare's felicity of expression. And such passages are not the exception; they can be picked up at random. There is the pervading element of beauty in the sonnets viewed as one lone continuous work; and we shall find a parallel excellence in them if we disintegrate this collection of units and examine the poems individually. Each conforms, in a very remarkable degree, to what we may call the main canon of sonnet-writing, the principle which guides all who attempt this form of art. The sonnet, in Wordsworth's phrase, is a “scanty plot”, the poet cannot expatriate at will. He is combined, confined within the brief limits of fourteen lines, and in that tiny space must achieve his effect. Hence, he cannot afford to introduce variety of themes: he must deal with some one idea; his work must be wrought round a single motive, a single dominating emotion that informs the whole and links the verses in the closest sequence and logical connection. Now, the Shakespearean sonnet is built pre-eminently on this principle. It is exactly what Rossetti calls “a moment's monument”.

According to Irving and Marshall, “ Each word is exactly fitted to its place; each touch tells; each phrase echoes what has just preceded and is echoed by what immediately follows: so that there is a gradual progression of ideas that advance from point to point till the climacteric pause is reached and the moral enforced. Each is a masterpiece of compression, intensity, symmetry. *Sonnets*, to use Matthew Arnold's definition of poetry, are a criticism of life. Some of the sonnets are obviously artificial, verbal essays in the conventional sonneting of the period. This is especially true of the dark woman series. In these poems, the merit is purely artistic. We can analyze a single sonnet and point out how the rhythmic beauty of the verse is built up: how the magic and melody of sound are achieved by alliteration, balance, and what not. But it is not possible to disintegrate and dissect the thousand and one touches which bring

home to us the fact the poet who speaks to us is wise, with wisdom from which nothing is hid. And, so we must leave each to discover for himself how and why the sonnets of Shakespeare are a revelation, a commentary on all things, a mirror held up to the human soul and reproducing all its phrase. "O Menander and life! Which of you copied the other?" Sublette praise or more perfect, no artist ever received; and it is the praise that we must lay at Shakespeare's feet after reading these, his **Sonnets**.

**Unconventionalities in William Shakespeare's Sonnets:** It has generally been believed that the majority of Shakespeare's sonnets are personal confessions to a greater extent than those of any other contemporary poet; but, according to an eminent critic (Sir Sidney Lee), this autobiographical element in Shakespeare's sonnets is slender. In Shakespeare's own time, a critic had tried to prove that Shakespeare owed a lot to the ancient poet Ovid, an ancient Roman writer (43 B.C- 18 A.D) not only in the writing of his sonnets but also in the writing of his two verse tales *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucre*. That critic had described, in 1598, Shakespeare's sonnets as "sugared" and had said that the sweet witty soul of Ovid lived in the mellifluous and honey tongued Shakespeare. And, indeed, there is much in Shakespeare's thinking in the sonnets which show obvious signs of Ovidian influence. Not only that. Ovid was only one of the poets who inspired most of these sonnets. Others, who only influenced Shakespeare, through English translations of course, were Petrarch, Ronsard, and Desportes, while such English contemporary poets as Sidney, Watson, Constable, and Daniel seem to have stimulated Shakespeare's sonnetting in much the same way as historical writings, romances, and dramas written by contemporary as well as older writers, influenced the writing of his plays.

Sir Sidney Lee gives concrete illustrations to demonstrate that Shakespeare's sonnets abound in adapted or imitated ideas and concepts. The adaptation and the limitations have generally been manipulated with great skill so that they almost produce an impression of originality. Shakespeare himself certainly contributes more to the writing of his sonnets than he utilizes the material provided by others. Yet his indebtedness to others is seldom in doubt. In fact, we might even take the following two lines from one of his sonnets as a statement or an acknowledgement of his debt to others: **So all my best is dressing old words new, Spending again what is already spent. (Lines 11-12 of Sonnet 76)**

Shakespeare's borrowings from others in his writing of his "sugared sonnets" are substantial enough to contradict the view that in them, as a whole, he tried to "unlock his heart" (this phrase was used about Shakespeare by Wordsworth). Only a few of these sonnets can justly be regarded as spontaneous and personal cries of the soul. It cannot be denied that the souls in which Shakespeare reproaches himself with sin, or in which he gives expression to a feeling of despondency, do at times produce in us the impression of autobiographical confession. But the energetic lines in which he seems to reveal his inmost thoughts and meditations are often adaptations of the less emphatic and less coherent utterance of other poets of his time. It would be even true to say that the ethical or emotional themes of many of

Shakespeare's sonnets are to found in the sonnets of almost all the Elizabethan poets who tried their hands at sonnet-writing. For instance, Shakespeare's didactic and uplifting sonnet (129) about the dangers of lust treats, with wonderful force and insight, of a subject to be found in many of the sonneteers of the time; and it may have owed its immediate inspiration to Sir Philip Sidney's sonnet on the subject of "desire".

Each of these forms of the sonnets has its own merits. The original Italian or Petrarchan form, with its division into octave and the sestet, provides an opportunity to an author to express the ebb and flow of his thought or reflection. The Spenserian and the Shakespearean forms make for a swifter movement of thought and feeling; and the couplet at the end makes it possible for the author to impart sharpness to the closing lines. The Miltonic form lends a greater unity to the basic Petrarchan form by permitting the octave to run into the sestet; and its long sentence-structure suits large verbal gesture made with an air of impersonality. However, the Miltonic form did not attract many followers. It was the Shakespearean or the English form which mostly prevailed among the English poets. Only one thing is common to all the sonnets, and that is the limited length of fourteen lines, though Shakespeare has also written one sonnet but only one, consisting of fifteen lines. Another common point is that the sonnet in England has always been written in decasyllabic lines, each in iambic pentameter and conforming to one or the other of the rhyme-schemes specified above. Within exact metrical limits, the English sonnet has shown a great variety of rhythm. No two English poets have written a sonnet in exactly the same way.

Shakespeare deviates from the conventional way of writing sonnets in several important respects. Amatory in tone, the majority of his sonnets are addressed to a male friend. To substitute a male friend like the Earl of Southampton for a Stella or Elizabeth Boyle is certainly unconventional. Shakespeare's praise and admiration of his male friend finds expression in language which is generally employed for a woman. Shakespeare sometimes even uses erotic language for his male friends; and this a serious breach not only of convention but even of decency. In one of the sonnets, for instance, he even describes the features and the countenance of his male friend as if he were describing the features and the countenance of a woman. And, with the exception the first seventeenth sonnets and with the exception of about a dozen others, he keeps parsing the youth and beauty of his male friend as any ardent lover would praise the youth and beauty of his sweetheart.

What binds the sonnets together is inter-relationship among the three or four persons who figure prominently in them. These persons are the Earl of Southampton the young friend to whom the first one hundred and twenty-six sonnets are addressed, the dark lady to whom the next twenty-six sonnets are addressed (with the exception of two sonnets -129 & 146- which have no connection with the dark lady), and a contemporary poet, not named in the sonnets, who seem to have been a rival of Shakespeare and round whom ten or eleven of the sonnets (no. 76- 86) center. The rival poet has generally been thought to be one of the following three-

(i) Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593); (ii) George Chapman (1559-1634); and (iii) Robert Greene (1554-1592). It is curious that none of the persons figuring in these sonnets has been named, and that the true identity of none of them is known with any degree of certainty. This is quiet in keeping with the fact that the true circumstances of Shakespeare's own life are also not known to us with any degree of certainty, and that all biographies of the great genius are based largely upon guess-work.

Shakespeare wrote a ling sonnet-sequence consisting of 154 pieces. These sonnets were written over a number of years and though there are several strands to impart to them a unity of sorts, they do not have the kind of continuity which one might expect from a collection which has been called a sequence. These sonnets were written during the years 1592 and a597 or 1998; but they were not published until 1609, only seven years before Shakespeare's death. They were not published by Shakespeare himself. The publisher was a man called Thomas Thorpe, a literary-minded man who had previous published a number of famous plays, particularly those written by Ben Jonson and Chapman, and who had also published Marlow's translation of Lucan. Now this Thomas Thorpe has obtained the manuscripts of the sonnets from one Mr. W.H. but nobody really knows who this Mr. W.H. was. Perhaps he was not at all the man from whom the publisher obtained the manuscripts of sonnets. Most biographers and critics are of the opinion that Mr. W.H. was the young lord to whom the large majority of these sonnets are addressed. In other words, Mr. W.H. was the young man who inspired Shakespeare to write these sonnets and for whom Shakespeare had developed a great admiration and a profound love. As this is a widely accepted view regarding the identity of Mr. W.H., we have assumed, for the purposes of this critical study that Mr. W.H. refers to the young lord whom Shakespeare adored and to whom the sonnets are addressed.

**Love as a dominant force in Shakespeare's Sonnets:** The theme of love is certainly the predominant theme of the sonnets of Shakespeare. The theme is all-pervasive in the sonnets. The dominant impression of almost all the sonnets may be regarded as an extending awareness of the nature of love, even though this awareness does not show any progressive movement forward. Shakespeare's concept of love and its nature does not seem to have moved forward steadily because what he sees clearly on one occasion is only dimly or faintly perceived in a subsequent sonnets. In some cases a sense of certainty in respect of love gives way to doubt, and doubt subsequently gives way to certainty. However, we as readers tend to form a view which is cumulative in richness and in depth so far as Shakespeare's concept of love is concerned.

**Examples of Unconventional Comparisons:** In one sonnet (21), Shakespeare discards conventional comparisons to depict the beauty of the young man: **And then believe me; my love is as fair, As any mother's child, though not so bright, As those gold candles fixed in heaven's air.**



In another sonnet (130), Shakespeare admits that his mistress is lacking in the attractions which were conventionally recognized as essential to beauty; and yet he ends the sonnet by recognizing her beauty through his own eyes: **I grant I never saw a goddess go, My mistress when she walks treads on the ground. And yet by heaven I think my love as rare, As any she belied with false compare.**

**Shakespeare's Self-Effacement in His Love for His Friend:** The difference between Shakespeare's relationships with his friend and his relationship with mistress has also been emphasized through some unconventional comparisons and parallels. Perhaps the most conspicuous feature of Shakespeare's love for his friend is self-abasement or a complete obliteration of self by Shakespeare. This feature of Shakespeare's love for his friend has emphatically been stated in the sonnet (57) which opens with the following lines: **Being your slave what should I do but tend, Upon the hours, and times of your desire? (Lines 1-2)**

The use of the "desire" in the second line clearly indicates that Shakespeare is being kept waiting while his friend is making love to the dark lady, and this interpretation implies an ironic touch to a comparison in the sonnet (151) in which Shakespeare admits his physical enslavement to his mistress: **Flesh stays no farther reason, But rising at thy name doth point out thee, As his triumphant prizes, proud of this pride, He is connected thy poor drudge to be, To stand in thy affairs, fall by thy side. (Lines 8-12)**

**The Dual Nature of Love: Physical and Spiritual:** Shakespeare's claim that his love for his young friend is spiritual and everlasting, eternal and immortal. His friend's beauty and youth would never decline or diminish or come to an end, he says. His friend's beauty and youth would never fade but would live forever. His friend's beauty would be preserved in his sonnets which he has written in praise of his friend. For example in the sonnet- 33, named "Full Many A Glorious Morning Have I Seen" Shakespeare says that he has witnessed many glorious morning, with the sun rising and brightening the meadows and gilding the streams with its heavenly alchemy. By the evening, however, the sun loses its brightness, and is ready to set in the western sky. In the morning the sun, with its golden face, was proud like a monarch, but in the evening it loses all its pride and its triumphant splendor is replaced by a sense of disgrace and darkness: **Full many a glorious morning have I seen, Flatter the mountain tops with sovereign eye, Kissing with golden face the meadows green, Stealing unseen to west with this disgrace, Yet him for this, my love no whit disdaineth**

In another sonnet (No.54) beginning with "O how much more doth beauty beautiful seem," Shakespeare says that roses are valued by human beings for their beautiful look and shape and for their sweet odor, but that the worms eat up the petals of roses and consume all their fragrance. Here is change in the sphere of Nature. The beauty of the objects of Nature is prone to destruction with the passing of time. Only in a couple of days, the roses lose their beauty and fragrance. However, the perfume of the roses can be preserved if we extract their

essence. Shakespeare's friend would also lose his lovely youth and beauty with the passing of time; but this lovely youth and beauty can also be preserved. The friend's beauty and other qualities can be preserved through Shakespeare's poetry (the sonnets) in which these excellences of the friend would be found in a distilled form. In his famous sonnet "*Shall I Compare Thee to Summer's Day*" Shakespeare expresses an intense emotion through his profound praise and admiration for his friend's beauty and charm. He asserts that his friend's beauty and youth would never fade but live forever.

**The relation between Appearance and Reality:** The relation between appearance and reality is another outstanding theme with Shakespeare in many of these sonnets. At first sight, the beauty of Shakespeare's young friend seems to me matched by his truth (in Sonnets 14). Here Shakespeare says that his friend's eye clearly show that "Truth and beauty shall together thrive". In another sonnet (54) he repeats the same idea, saying that his friend's beauty seems more beautiful by the addition of the sweet ornament of truth. Thus in both these sonnets we find that appearance and reality tally with each other so far as Shakespeare's friend is concerned. In fact here Shakespeare sees his friend as representing the qualities of a golden age which existed before the fall of Adam and Eve from Paradise and from divine grace. This is implied (in Sonnet 14) in the idea that Shakespeare's friend is the sole example of the perfect union of truth and beauty. Elsewhere too the same idea occurs. The friend is regarded (in Sonnet 67) as an illustration of true beauty in an age of "false painting" (that is, the use of cosmetics). In the next sonnet (68), the religious note is sounded through the use of the word holy: "In him (Shakespeare's friend) those holy antique hours are seen/ Without all ornament, itself and true". However, as the relationship between Shakespeare and his friend develops, Shakespeare's understanding of his friend deepens, with the result that the closeness of beauty and truth seems to crumble because the friend proves to be lustful, lascivious and even treacherous. Shakespeare tries desperately to maintain a sort of balance in the relationship, arguing on the one hand that, in loving Shakespeare's mistress, the friend is in effect loving Shakespeare himself (Sonnets 40 and 42); and arguing on the other hand that the friend is too beautiful not to excite love and too kind to refuse love (Sonnets 41).

**The Psychology of a Promiscuous Woman:** The dark lady, who has been identified as Mary Fitton, has really been made to live before us in these sonnets. In several of the sonnets addressed to her (127-152), she depicted as callous, cruel, proud, inconstant, fickle and excessively fond of sexual varieties and sexual pleasure. In one sonnet, for instance, Shakespeare says that she is as tyrannous as those women whose beauties proudly make them cruel (13). In another sonnet, the poet complains that, while her eyes pity him, her heart torments him with disdain (132). In yet another sonnet, Shakespeare advises her to be as wise as she is cruel, and he speaks of his "pity-wanting pain" (140). A famous sonnet speaks of the poet's two loves, one of whom is the cause of his despair, meaning that his mistress is so cruel towards him that he is bereft of all hope with regard to her (144). Her infinite lust is revealed to us in the two sonnets where we find a lot of punning upon the word "will" (134 and 135). The

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poet also speaks of her having corrupted his angelic- friend by her amorous advances towards him. He deplores the fact that she has undertaken to take away his friend from him (133). In short, the working of the mind of this lustful woman is depicted in a candid manner, and we are let in no doubt that she was a thorough nymphomaniac.

**The Psychology of the Passion of Love:** The concluding two sonnets of the sequence give us Shakespeare's view of the passion of love. These two sonnets pertain to a myth relating to Cupid. The essential idea behind these two poems is that the flame of Cupid's torch can never be extinguished. In other words, the passion of love can never be eradicated from the hearts of human beings. Instead of torch of Cupid getting extinguished by the waters of a spring, it lent a perpetual heat to the water itself, and the water thus became a medicinal bath for diseased men, though this water could not cool the poet's passion of love. The whole thing has amusingly been started, but we cannot deny the fundamental truth underlying the conceits. In this context we might as well refer to a famous sonnet in which the poet defines true love. This sonnets, beginning "Let me not to the marriage of true minds," tells us that true love is something fixed and unalterable. Love is not the sport of time and does not change with the change in circumstances (116). This too is a realistic description in so far as cases of true love do exist in his world though such cases are the exception while inconstancy in love is the rule.

**The Psychology of Lust:** In one of his famous sonnets, Shakespeare describes lustful love in very convincing terms. Lust involves a wasteful expenditure of one's time and energy. A lustful man is cruel, bloody, savage and untrustworthy. Lust loses all its pleasure as soon as it has been enjoyed. In the beginning one anticipates the pleasure of lust with great eagerness; but when the lustful experience has already been enjoyed, it seems to have been a mere dream. The whole world knows the ugly and sordid nature of lust, and yet no one knows how to avoid it (129). Thus Shakespeare here tells us that a lustful man can never control his lust despite his awareness that lustful pleasure is not really satisfying. According to one critic, this sonnet is the greatest poems in the group relating to the dark lady dally. The contrast between this particular sonnet and the one beginning "Let me not to the marriage of true minds" is very striking. One depicts the psychology of true love, and the other probes the reality of mere lust. Another sonnet which deserves mention in the same context is the one beginning "Poor soul, the Centre of my sinful earth" (146). Here Shakespeare reveals the conflict in his own mind between the demands of the flesh and the claims of the spirit. The conflict between the spirit and the flesh is a familiar theme in literature, and here Shakespeare himself experiences that conflict. Of course, in his case the demands of the flesh relate to the dark lady.

**The Psychological Basis for Marriage:** In the first seventeenth sonnets Shakespeare urges his friend to married and to beget children. Here again psychological motives are offered as requiring Shakespeare's friend to enter in the state of matrimony with a view to having children. The motive is a man's natural desire to perpetuate his name. if the friend does not marry, he will die single and his image will die with him. This is what the poet says in the

sonnet beginning “Look in thy glass” (13). In the sonnet beginning “When I do count the clock”, Shakespeare tells his friend that nothing against time’s scythe can make defense except breed or children (12). The second motive, at least in the case of the poet’s friend, should be a desire to preserve the beauty with which he has been endowed. In one of the sonnets, the urges the friend to produce a child who will be like himself and in whom his beauty may live on. In another sonnet, Shakespeare says that Nature gave his friend beauty so that: “Thou should print more, not let that copy die” (11). In yet another sonnet the poet say that the friend should give his sweet semblance to some other (namely, a son) so that “Beauty which you hold in lease/ Find no determination” (13). Then there is the desirability of repaying Nature for her bounty: “Nature’s bequest gives nothing but doth lend” (4). All these motives behind marriage are valid in the case not only of the Earl of Southampton but in the case of any gifted individual. Thus these motives have a much wider application than the context signifies.

**The Psychology of the Earl of Southampton:** Assuming as we have already done, that the young nobleman addressed in the first group sonnets is the Earl of Southampton, we learn something about how that nobleman’s mind worked in relation to poets, and especially to Shakespeare. The sonnets reveal that the Earl of Southampton was incapable of fully reciprocating the love and affection of his admirer, Shakespeare. In many of the sonnets, Shakespeare complains about the indifference of the Earl of Southampton towards him. In some of the sonnets Shakespeare grumbles about the Earl’s patronage of a rival poet who was most probably either Chapman or Marlowe. Such is the sonnet beginning “So often have I invoked thee for my Muse” (78). The same complaint is made by Shakespeare in the sonnet that follows: “Whilst I alone did call upon thy aid” (79) where Shakespeare speaks of “a worthier pen”. Then we find that the Earl of Southampton suffered from a number of faults, sensuality being the most glaring among them. In one of the sonnets, Shakespeare accuses his friend of being too common; in another sonnet he accuses the friend of being too fond of flattery; in another sonnet the poet points out that the friend’s moral character does not match his outward appearance; and in two of the sonnets (95-96) Shakespeare frankly accuses his friend of sensuality, saying in one of them: “Some say thy fault is youth, some wantonness.” (The word “wantonness” implies sensual indulgence)

**The Psychology of the Poet Himself:** If we accept the sonnets as being largely autographical, we have a right to treat them as record of Shakespeare’s personal thoughts and feelings. Thus we can regard the sonnets as being revelatory of the poet’s own nature, disposition, and temperament. In other words, these sonnets have great psychological value in giving us an insight into the mind of Shakespeare. According to one view, Shakespeare “unlock his heart” in these sonnets. One striking quality of Shakespeare’s mind that comes to our notice in these sonnets is Shakespeare’s capacity for making friendship. The manner in which Shakespeare pays glowing tributes to his friends and vows his eternal devotion to that friend is really something unique. The basis of Shakespeare’s devotion to Earl of Southampton might have been expediency, economic necessity, the need of a patron, and other worldly

considerations; but the fact reminds that Shakespeare felt a real and profound emotional attachment towards the young Earl. Without a genuine feeling of love and affection for the Earl, Shakespeare could not have idealized his friend and could not have waxed so eloquent while writing praises of him. In one the sonnets, for instance, Shakespeare counts himself lucky because he loves and is loved where he can neither himself change nor be rejected by his friends: "Where I may not remove nor be removed." In other sonnets the poet refers to the Earl as "Lord of my love" and calls himself the Earl's "vassal". In another sonnet, the poet, having the Earl's friendship, would not like to change his position with kings. In a famous sonnets, "When to the sessions of sweet silent thought, "Shakespeare says that, when he thinks of his dear friend, "all losses are restored and sorrows end". Another sonnet begins with the words: "Being your slave," and the poet then goes on to address his friend as "My sovereign". In another well-known sonnet Shakespeare asserts that his love for his friend is not a matter of policy and that his love stands on its own, its monumental state being affected neither by fair weather nor by foul weather (124). All such sonnets clearly show the intensity of Shakespeare's feeling of friendship for the Earl though there was no corresponding intensity in the Earl's heart. In fact, some of show that, after Shakespeare had tried the friendship of a few other people, he realized that the Earl was the best friend he could have after all.

**The Psychological Sonnets:** As has already been indicated, there is not much philosophy in these sonnets in any explicit sense. However, a philosophical attitude of resignation toward one's circumstances in life does emerge from our reading of them. Some of the sonnets have, too, a philosophical character in the sense of being profound meditations upon certain aspect of human life. In the sonnet beginning "When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes" (129), the meditates upon his own wretched lot. In the sonnet, "No longer mourn for me when I am dead" (71), the poet philosophically urges his friend to forget him after death: **When I perhaps compounded is with clay, Do not so much as my poor names rehearse?**

The poet speaks in a similar vein in the sonnet, "But be counted" (74). When he dies, the friend should not lament that death because the better part of the poet, namely the poet's spirit, will still remain behind with the friend. Then there are the sonnets which deal with the ravages of trial. These too have a philosophical quality. The sonnet beginning "When the poet dies the friend should not lament that death because the better part of the poet, namely the poet's spirit, will still remain behind with the friend. Then there are the sonnets which deal with the ravages of trial. These too have a philosophical quality. The sonnet beginning "When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced" (64) contains a vivid account of the destructive effective of time which will not spare even the poet's friend. Another meditation on the ravages of time occurs in the sonnet which opens thus: **Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea But sad mortality overlays their power (65: 1-2)**

The poet's desire to die, expressed in the sonnet beginning "Tired with all these, for restful death I cry" (66), and has also a philosophical tinge. The moralizing in the sonnet "Sin of self-love possessed all mine eyes" (62) may also be regarded as philosophical poem. The sonnet beginning "They that have power to hurt" (94) has both a psychological and philosophical value. Its psychological aspect is to be found in its brief analysis of persons who have the power to hurt others but who refrain from using that power. Its philosophical quality is seen in the couplet where the poet says that the summer's flower, which is sweet to the summer, stinks worse than a weed if it is attacked by a disease and becomes infected. In other words the corruption of the best persons has the possible consequences.

**Shakespeare's Treatment of the Theme of Time:** The concept of Time occupies much of Shakespeare's attention in these sonnets. The power and might of Time in bringing about decline and decay in buildings and monuments and in the youth and beauty of human beings has fully and repeatedly been recognized by Shakespeare in these sonnets. At the same time, Shakespeare regards the passing of time as a process leading to maturity and the development not only of human personality but also of human love. Time may be a tyrant, but Time can also lead Shakespeare to say at one stage to his friend: "Now I love you" (in Sonnet 115) and then go on to say in the same sonnet that love is a "babe" and continues to grow. Even "ruined love" grows fairer than before when it is built anew (in Sonnet 119). But Shakespeare also insists that time is not the mightiest of powers in this world provide that a marriage of true minds takes place, and that nothing, not even the process of Time, can change it: **O no, it is an ever-fixed mark That looks on tempests and is never shaken (116)**

"Love is not Times' fool"; and love alters not with Time's brief hours and weeks, Shakespeare goes on to say in this sonnet. Of course, Shakespeare is aware of the baneful effects of Time on himself. He fully shows his awareness of the fact that he is subject to ageing (in Sonnets 22, 32 etc.) He also shows his awareness of his faults and his liability to change (in Sonnets 36, 88, etc). But Time can be defeated; and it is Shakespeare's convention that his poetry can defeat it. And that his sonnets would thwart Time's power to put an end to the youth and beauty of his friend, and to his love for friend. In several of the sonnets, Shakespeare asserts with the fullest possible confidence that his friend's youth and beauty would live forever in his sonnets. Evidently Shakespeare believes that art is mightier than Time, whether we agree with him or not in view of our knowledge that even art, in the long run, is destroyed by Time.

**Time the Destroyer and the Greatest Enemy of Man and of Nature:** Time is depicted by Shakespeare in his sonnets as a great destroyer. Time is the greatest enemy of man; but Time is also the greatest enemy of Nature (meaning the objects of Nature, the phenomena of Nature, and the process of Nature). Nature brings old age, decline in energy and strength, and death to human beings; and Time wrecks the beauty of flowers, of meadows, and of all the vegetation. Nothing- neither the youth and beauty of human beings nor the hardness of the rocks and the gates of steel- can withstand the assaults of Time. This view of Time as a great

wrecker and destroyer is expressed by Shakespeare in a large number of sonnets. But Shakespeare also finds a way of defeating Time in some of the sonnets by claiming that his poetry would be perused and studied by all the coming generation and would therefore last forever, thus frustrating the endeavors' and effort of the "bloody tyrant Time" to put an end to everything.

**Shakespeare's Poetry Even More Powerful than Time:** It now remains for us to offer concrete examples of what we have stated above. In an early sonnet (15) Shakespeare says that Time would change his friends' day of youth to night which dark. And then in the closing couplet he says that poetry is at war with Time because of his love for his friend, and that what Time would take from his friend (Shakespeare's) poetry would restore to his friend. Thus Shakespeare in this sonnet regards Time as a powerful force, but expresses his belief that his poetry is even more powerful than Time. It is in the sonnet which follows that Shakespeare refers to Time as "this bloody tyrant Time," but here he refers to his poetry as his "barren rhyme". Thus in this sonnet Shakespeare suddenly changes his stance, expressing a view opposite to the one which he has expressed in the preceding sonnet. Then there is a sonnet (15) which begins by using the word "devouring" to describe the power of Time. Devouring Time blunts the lion's paws and the fierce tiger's teeth. But here once again (15) claims that his poetry is more powerful. In the closing couplet of the sonnet he challenges Time to do its worst because, in spite of whatever injury Time can do to human beings including his friend, his (Shakespeare's) love for his friend would be even remain young in his poems. Then in another sonnet (60) Shakespeare again asserts that hi poetry is more powerful than Time. Time certainly has the power to bring wrinkles to the forehead of his friend and the power to mar the beauty of his friend's face. Nothing can stands against Time's scythe which can mow down everything. And, in the closing couplet here, Shakespeare claims that his poem would forever continue to be perused and would thus perpetuate his friend's worth in spite of the cruel hand of Time.

**The Sonnets Are Largely Autobiographical and Psychological:** The Sonnets of Shakespeare have considerable psychological and philosophical value. The psychological value of these poems consists in throwing much light on the working of the human mind. Assuming, with some of the most eminent critics and commentators, that these sonnets are largely autobiographical and not merely literary and imaginative exercises, we learn a good deal about the states of minds of Mary Fitton (the dark lady), the Earl of Southampton ( the poet's patron and friend), and the poet himself. The sonnets reveal the inconstancy, fickleness, and cruelty of an attractive woman; they give us a peep into the inner mind of a young and handsome nobleman who was very close to the Court circles of the time; and they acquaint us also with the nature and disposition of the great genius, Shakespeare. However, it must be made clear at the outset that we do not have in these sonnets the kind of deep psychological analysis which we find in the case of persons whom we meet in Shakespeare's dramas, especially in the

tragedies. Also, the philosophical value of these sonnets is very great; indeed, there is very little philosophy in them in the proper sense of the world.

**Images Drawn from the World of Music:** Shakespeare was also very sensitive to sound. In Sonnet 102 he refers to the “wild music” that “burdens every bough”. The songs of the birds, like the skylark and the nightingale, appeal to him. In Sonnets 29 and 102 he writes of “the lark at break of day arising” and the nightingale who **“In summer’s form doth sing , And stops her pipe in growth of riper days”**

At the advent of the winter he gives a picture of desolation: “the bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang” (Sonnet 73), or the dull cheer of the birds’ song Sonnet 97. Sensitive to the charms of music, Shakespeare’s love of music in the Sonnets:**Mark how one string, sweet husband in another, Strikes each by mutual ordering; Resembling sire and child and happy mother, who all, in one, pleasing note do sing**

Like a gardener, Shakespeare knows in Sonnet 14 how a storm or frost can spoil the flowers: **“Rough winds do shake the darkling bud of May”**

A number of metaphors and images are concerned with. “It is” says Caroline Spurgeon, ‘a fire, a furnace, a blast and lightening it; it is as an arrow, a siege and a war; it is a food, a drink and a banquet’; it is a plant, a fruit, a sickness, a wound, a fever; it is a building on firm or frail foundations, fair and strong or in ruins, it is constant as the sun, false as water, musical as Apollo’s lute.

**Some Unconventional Images:** These are all conventional images. But there are some unconventional images also. Love, Shakespeare maintains, is “a babe”, and can, therefore, grow. Love can, at times, transmute, like alchemy, base things into pure gold. In Sonnets 114, Shakespeare says he will use this alchemy. **“To make of monsters and things in digest Such cherubim’s as your sweet self-resemble”**

Love is not which alters when it alteration finds. It is a fixed beacon. In Sonnet 116, he says Love, **“Is an ever fixed mark, that looks on tempests and is never shaken, It is a star to every wandering bark.”**

**Images Concerned with Time:** It has become a commonplace”, says L.C. Knight “that one of the most consistently developed themes of Shakespeare’s Sonnets is time. Not of course that Time’s ‘rage’ is always an ostensible or formal subject. It is simply that whenever there is occasion to mention Time and ‘nature’s changing course’ the time takes possession; there is a sharpness of sense and argument, the imagery involves us in a word where, **Everything that grows, Holds in perfection but a little moment ,Where “Men as plants increase.**



Where, in short, nothing stands but for (Time's) scythe to mow". The word 'Time' appears for as many as seventy -eight times in Sonnets 1- 126, although, strangely enough, there is no reference to 'Time 'in the Sonnets which follow. Time is the old fleet-footed gipsy man, who is always moving fast; and Time is the grim and destructive force, who is a devour, spoiler, and a thief, at whose touch cities, buildings, and empires crumble down like a pack of cards. Time "feeds on the rarities of nature's truth'. Time devours youth, bloom, and beauty, "and nothing stands but for his scythe to mow'

**A couple of Sonnets, Containing Some Historical References:** Two or three of these sonnets, but no more than three, contain references to certain contemporary events and have, therefore, some historical importance. For instance, Sonnets 107 refers to the Spanish invasion of England or to the grave illness which Queen Elizabeth, the British sovereign of the time, suffered. These historical references, however, have hardly any significance so far as the subject-matter or the style of the sonnets in general is concerned.

**The Central Theme of Sonnets and the Subsidiary Themes:** The central theme of the sonnets, taken collectively, is Shakespeare's deep love for, and his profound admiration for the Earl of Southampton. The first one hundred and twenty six sonnets contain many tributes to the Earl of Southampton and they also express Shakespeare's profound attachment to him, though a few of them contain his grievance against that eminent personage. Another theme which emerges, more particularly in the sonnets of the second group (125-152), in Shakespeare's adulterous love-affair with the dark lady (adulterous because Shakespeare was a married man and had a wife living back at home in the town of Stratford-on-Avon). The situation presented to us in the sonnets, taken collectively, is quite interesting, and even intriguing. It seems that Earl of Southampton began to feel attached by Shakespeare's mistress (the dark lady) and that, in course of time, was able to win her heart and wean her away from Shakespeare. The Earl of Southampton thus became guilty of betraying Shakespeare's trust in him.

The Earl of Southampton's behavior naturally offended Shakespeare who thought that the young lord had let him down badly and that his mistress too had played him false. Shakespeare therefore began to nurse a grievance against both the guilty persons though he was unable to give up either of them. The sonnets of the second group clearly show that, while Shakespeare severely condemns the dark lady for her treachery towards him, he will still loves her passionately, though his love for her is merely sensual. And the sonnets of the first group show equally clearly that Shakespeare still continues to love and admire his friend. In this connection it may also be pointed out that, considering the language of worship and adoration which Shakespeare has employed in addressing the Earl of Southampton, his friendship with that young lord might have been of a homosexual nature. In addition to all this, there is one other important theme which seems to have become as great an obsession with Shakespeare as his friendship with the Earl of Southampton and his love for the dark lady had become. This theme is the power of Time. In fact, Time may also be regarded as a character in the entire

drama which is enacted before our eyes in the sonnets. Shakespeare repeatedly refers to the destructive power of Time; and he points out to his friend again and again the havoc which Time play in this world. Time is depicted as the great destroyer. Nothing can withstand the assault of Time. All things in this world, including youth and beauty, are subject to the destructive power of Time. But there is another theme which is also quite important and which too receives a lot of emphasis from Shakespeare.

The other theme is the greatness of Shakespeare's own poetic genius. Shakespeare expresses a very high opinion about the sonnets which he has written, telling his friend several times, and with great force, that these sonnets would preserve his friend's youth and beauty forever, and these sonnets are therefore more powerful than Time. Time conquers everything, but these sonnets would conquer even Time and would perpetuate the youth and beauty of his friend. These sonnets would continue to be perused by all the coming generations and would thus keep his friend's name, eminence and merits alive forever and ever. In view of this variety and multiplicity of themes, these sonnets are for us a rich storehouse, and a rich treasure of ideas and feelings. The light, which these sonnets throw on Shakespeare's own nature and temperament, greatly enlarges our knowledge of the great bard.

**A Mingling of the Lyrical and the Dramatic Qualities in Shakespeare's Sonnets:** If the sonnet is itself a kind of lyric, then what do we mean by the lyrical elements in a sonnet? The answer to this question is that a sonnet may sometimes partake of other kinds of literary writing. For instance, many sonnets possess dramatic qualities; and the sonnets of Shakespeare have these qualities in great abundance. Thus Shakespeare's sonnets are a blending or an amalgam of lyrical and the dramatic. But what do we mean by "dramatic", and how do we distinguish the "dramatic" from the "lyrical"? While the lyric is essentially and basically personal in inspiration and is feeling, a drama or a play is essentially and basically impersonal. A lyric comes directly from the writer's own heart, while a drama is based upon the writer's observation of the world and his experience of mankind and human nature. In a drama, the author portrays other characters, while in a lyric the author projects himself and his own feelings. But drama also means something else. It means conflict; it means tension; it means forces at work against each other. This conflict or tussle is twofold: external and internal, outward and inward; visible to the eyes and experienced by the mind. The sonnets of Shakespeare possess a striking dramatic quality; and Shakespeare employs a lot of dramatic technique in the writing of his sonnets. The conflict in his sonnets is mostly inward or internal. Most of his sonnets are debates which take place in his mind and thus possess a great psychological value. Almost each one of the one hundred and fifty four sonnets written by Shakespeare has its lyrical qualities. For instance, the opening two lines of commonly studied sonnet 18 may be mentioned: **Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Thou art lovelier and more temperate**

In this sonnet the imagery, the emotion, the music, the melancholy, and the personal elements, all combine to make of it one of Shakespeare's most exquisite lyrics; and it ends,

once again, with an assurance to his friend that these sonnets would keep his friend's beauty and youth alive for all time: **So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, So long lives this and this gives life to thee (No.18:13-14)**

Another feature of the sonnets heightening their dramatic quality is ambiguity which is at once a poetic and an erotic principle. If compared with Shakespeare's sonnets, Petrarch's sonnets seems to be pure and transparent like crystal; but Petrarch's sonnets also seem to be cold, artificial and contrived. Beauty and goodness in the Petrarchan sonnets are permanent values, never to be doubted or questioned. The conflict in the Petrarchan sonnets is between the body and the mind. But in Shakespearean sonnets, this division into the physical and the spiritual aspects of love and friendship is blurred. In Shakespearean Sonnets good intermingles with evil, beauty with ugliness, desire with repulsion, and passion with shame.

**Shakespeare's Use of Similes in his Sonnets:** In simile, as in paradox, Shakespeare's bias is towards expressiveness. A majority of Shakespeare's similes are drawn from the familiar experience of simple humanity; and therefore they impart to the particular sonnets a sense of immediate emotional contact. The possibility, that the interpretation was intended by Shakespeare, seems clear from line 10 (Not wondering at the present, nor the past" as well as from the Elizabethan use of the word "pyramids"; and even if we do not take into account the pun of "borne" by regarding it as "born" in the first sense as well as in the second, we are left with "that is old" fitting awkwardly into the first interpretation. Moreover the sonnets asserts rather than expresses a resolved state of mind: "Thou shalt not boast"; "and thee I both defy;" "this I do vow"; and I will be true" (Sonnet 123). This assertion is in keeping with the more famous sonnet "Love's snot Times fool" (Line 9 of Sonnet 116) so far as the manner of the assertion is connected. The difficulties of sonnet form have never been dealt with; and the manner of the assertion above is also in keeping with those sonnets which promise some form of immortality.

We may also here add that in all the sonnets of this type (namely those promising immortality), it is the contemplation of change, not the boastfulness and the defiance, which produces the finest poetry. These sonnets derive their value entirely from plays by Shakespeare in which the theme of Time occurs there is no defiance; the conflict is resolved by the more or less explicit acceptance of maturity. There is, for instance, the sonnet (143) in which Shakespeare compares himself to a baby crying for his mother when the mother is running to catch one of her chickens which has broken loose from her grip. In this sonnet the emotional relationship between a mother and a child defined and made immediate by the simile. Then there is another sonnet (52) in which Shakespeare compares himself to a rich miser whose "blessed key" enables him to open his sweet treasure box. Here it is the human emotion implicit in the comparison which produces the chief effect. In the sonnet, which have any merit of similes as their main feature shows as an extended fashion of Shakespeare's individual use

of his figure of speech? For instance: **How like a winter hath my absence been? From thee, (Lines 1-14 of Sonnet 97)**

**Shakespeare's Use of Imagery in his Sonnets:** Shakespeare's imagery is a fascinating- subject of study and it throws valuable light on the various aspect of his art and of his personality. The imagery of his plays has been studied in depth by such noted modern scholar as Caroline Spurgeon. Wilson Knight, L. C. Knight, Molly Mahmoud, and several others. They have shown that many of Shakespeare's images are conventional and literary, drawn from a host of contemporary and ancient writers. In the earlier sonnets also, Shakespeare has used, by and large, conventional imagery. As Sidney Lee says, "The typical collection of Elizabethan sonnets was a mosaic of plagiarism, a medley of imitative or assimilative studies. Echoes of the French or the Italian sonneteers are distinctly heard". His early images were the stock-in trade of poets like Sidney, Spenser, Daniel Drayton, and many others. But as his art matured, his imagery is increasingly drawn from his own close observation of the world around, from the everyday scenes and sights of nature and the facts of everyday life. It becomes more vivid, more pictorial and throws more valuable light on the mind and art of the dramatist. There are a number of images which are used both in the plays and the sonnets, and so they serve to link up the sonnets with particular plays, and thus help us in determining the possible period of the composition of some particular sonnet or play.

**Flower Images:** A number of images cluster round flowers. The use of flower-imagery was a fashion of the times, but Shakespeare's flower images are startling, and even though conventional, show the hand of the master. In Sonnet 94 we get, **the summer's flower is to the summer's sweet, though to itself it only live and die.**

Shakespeare was extremely sensitive to fragrant smell. He loved "the sweet smell of different flowers". Rose and Lily occur frequently. In Sonnet 54 he pays homage to the 'rose', the symbol of youth and beauty, and says that, unlike other flowers, roses, even when faded never give an offensive smell: "**Of the sweets death are sweetest odors made**"

The poet hates flowers, which are so beautiful and fragrant while alive give a foul smell like that of weeds when dead. In Sonnet 69 he says: "**To thy fair flower add the rank smell of weeds**"

Again in Sonnet 94, Shakespeare compares the Dark Lady to festering Lily: "For sweetest things sourest by their deeds, Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds"

**The conceits used in Shakespeare's sonnets:** Shakespeare's sonnets are beautiful pieces of lyric poetry. In their variety of imagery, unrivalled expression, felicity of phrases, wealth of similes and metaphors, these sonnets stand unique in English poetry. The conceits form an essential part of these sonnets. In fact the charm of Shakespeare's lyricism in sonnets lies in the

use of conceit in them. In Sonnet 22 there is a conceit in the following lines in which Shakespeare says that even the mirror cannot convince him that he is old as long as his friend is young. He also says that his friend's external beauty is merely the garment of the poet's heart. His heart lives in the friend's breast just as the friend's heart stays in his breast: **"My glass shall not persuade me I am old, So long as youth and thou are of on date (22: 1- 2)**

There is another conceit in which Shakespeare speaks of the heavier elements like earth and water; the lighter elements in his body prevent him flying to his friend during the period of their separation, while the lighter elements keep company with the friend no matter where the friend is. The conceit is expressed thus: **But that, so much of earth and water wrought, I must attend time's leisure with my moan (Sonnet 44: 11-12)**

**The other two, slight air and purging fire, Are both with thee, wherever I abide. (Sonnet 45: 1-2)**

An interesting conceit in Sonnet 98, Shakespeare presents the very fanciful idea that the whiteness of the lily and the redness of the rose have been modeled on his friend's charm. He says: **Nor did I wonder at the lily's while Nor praise the deep vermilion in the rose: They were but sweet, but figures of delight, Drawn after you, you pattern of all those." (98: 10- 4)**

**The Platonic and Neo-Platonic Influence on Shakespeare's Sonnets:** We cannot ignore Plato in this context. Under the influence of the metaphysical speculations of the Renaissance, Plato's spiritual conception of beauty has become a dominant element of love-poetry in Italy and France in the sixteenth century; and Petrarch was the first poet of that period to make use of that conception of beauty. In Shakespeare's England, Edmund Spenser was the chief follower or disciple of Plato, as *The Fairie Queene* amply shows. But Shakespeare also provides enough evidence in his sonnets of having fallen under this Platonic influence; and Shakespeare has made use of this Platonic conception with great subtlety.

The Platonic regards earthly beauty as a reflection or shadow of heavenly beauty, with the difference that, while earthly beauty is visible, heavenly beauty is not perceptible by our eyes. Plato had made use of the famous simile of a cave to explain his theory, and had asserted that, while heavenly or spiritual beauty was the only true and perfect beauty, earthly beauty was only an imitation of it or a reflection of it. In one sonnet, Shakespeare's metaphysical questions have their obvious source in Platonic or neo-Platonic ideas. In these lines Shakespeare asks what substance his friend is made of, and says that his friend's reflection is to be found in millions of shapes and figures in this world. Every individual and every object, Shakespeare here says, has one shadow or one shape, while his friend is an epitome of all the shapes and figures which exist in this world. The poet says: **What is your substance, whereof are you made? That millions of strange shadows on you tend (53: 1- 2)**

**Three Principal Weakness and Shortcomings in Shakespeare's Sonnets:** The sonnets of Shakespeare undoubtedly show genius; and yet some critics (Your winters, for instance), find them somewhat disappointing also. In the first place, a large number of the sonnets show an attitude of servile weakness on Shakespeare's part towards the friend who is addressed in them. It would be no defense of this servility to argue that it is a convention of the country style and should not be taken too seriously. It is indeed a convention of the courtly style, then it is a flaw in that style. In the second place, Shakespeare does not always take the sonnet-form with real seriousness. The sonnets are elaborated almost always through simple repetition or antitheses, with the result that they never achieve the closely organized treatment of the subject which we find in the best sonnets of Jonson and Donne. Often Shakespeare employs evasion or an irrelevant cliché to solve a problem. In the third place, Shakespeare often feels uncertain while dealing with a theme in a sonnet; and this uncertainty undoubtedly constitute a defect. A few of the sonnets can here be considered to illustrate these weakness and shortcomings.

**The Reader's Expectation not fulfilled in some of the Sonnets:** There is a Sonnet (66) beginning with the line "Tired with all these for restful death I cry". This is a poem dealing with the theme of disillusionment with the world. A number of poems dealing with this subject were written in Shakespeare's time. But whereas the writers of the other poems on this subject, offered the best solution which they could, Shakespeare turns away from the issue which he has raised to a kind of despairing sentimentality; and the total effect of this sonnet is one of weakness, personal as well as poetic weakness. Shakespeare has here given us a long, though perfectly realistic, catalogue of the afflictions of human life, but he has not grappled with them. The same thing occurs in several other sonnets: for example in the sonnet 29 beginning with the line: "When in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes", and in the sonnet 30 beginning with the line: "When to the sessions of sweet silent thought". Of course, nobody can deny that these two sonnets and many others contain many felicities as regards both the content and the form; but the sonnets do not fulfill our expectations which are raised in us by the opening lines. The sonnet 66 beginning with the line "Tired with all these for restful death I cry" is a fine example of the plain style except for the closing couplet which represents a sentimental degeneration of courtly rhetoric.

**The Alleged Faults/Weakness and Shortcomings in Shakespeare's Sonnets:** The sonnets of Shakespeare undoubtedly show genius; and yet some critics (Your winters, for instance), find them somewhat disappointing also. In the first place, a large number of sonnets show an attitude of servile weakness on Shakespeare's part towards the friend who is addressed in them. It would be no defiance of this servility to agree that it is a convention of the courtly style and should not be taken too seriously. If it is indeed a convention of the courtly style, then it is a flaw in that style. In the second place, Shakespeare does not always take the sonnet-form with real seriousness. The sonnets are elaborated almost always through simple repetition or antithesis, with the result that they never achieve the closely organized treatment of the subject

which we find in the best sonnets of Jonson and Donne. Often Shakespeare employs evasion or an irrelevant cliché to solve a problem. In the third place, Shakespeare often feels uncertain while dealing with a theme in a sonnet; and this uncertainty undoubtedly constitutes a defect. A few of the sonnets can here be considered to illustrate these weakness and shortcomings.

**Conclusion:** In fine we can say that Shakespeare's sonnets are the remarkable compositions of English literature. Their intensity of emotion, their meditative quality, their psychological insight, their vivid and realistic imagery, their striking openings and decisive concluding couplets, their use of an astonishing number of figurative expression, their musical and melodious appeal, their felicities of language, their compactness, their disclosures of the poet's private thoughts and feelings, all combine to make them exquisitely beautiful and to lend them an appeal which is enduring and which can never decline or diminish. Justly does a literary historian says that these sonnets possess that quality of sublimity which the ancient Greek critic Longinus mentioned, and that they have the power to move, to stir, and above all, "to transport" the reader. So it is said that Shakespeare invented a new form of sonnet writing that surpasses the conventional practice of sonnets in the world literature. Last but not the least; William Shakespeare was not only a world famous dramatist but also a reputed sonneteer in the history of world literature. His sonnets are very much unconventional and sources of multifarious themes and structures.

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