HELEN VENDLER

THE ART OF SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS

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CONVENTIONS OF REFERENCE

I HAVE reprinted both the 1609 Quarto *Sonnets* and a modernized version of my own. All editors repunctuate according to their own understanding of the connection among the lines and quatrains of a given sonnet. While considering, and often adopting, the choices made by such editors as Booth and Evans, I have finally followed my own best understanding of the articulation of a sonnet in modernizing its punctuation. The emendations in my modernized sonnets are chosen from emendations already proposed by others. In each dubious case, my comments explain my choice among available emendations. Because some of Shakespeare's linguistic play depends on Quarto spelling, I specify whenever an interpretive remark requires reference to the Quarto. Otherwise, it can be assumed that whatever I say in the Commentary is as true of the Quarto as of the modern text.

In the comment on each sonnet, I aim to disclose some of the sonnet's significant features—imaginative, structural, semantic, syntactic, phonemic, graphic—and to point out their cooperation in a mimetic aesthetic result. That is, I assume that the features of these poems are designed to cooperate with, reinforce, meaningfully contradict, and play with one another. I also assume that such interplay has a psychologically mimetic end (to enact, by linguistic means, moves engaged in by the human heart and mind). I assume, too, that all of this play and enacting would be of no use unless the result were aesthetic novelty with respect to lyric tradition—by which I mean that something striking, memorable, beautiful, disturbing, surprising, etc. has been created.

Though many of the *Sonnets* play (often in blasphemous or subversive ways) with ideas central to their culture, I assume that a poem is not an essay, and that its paraphrasable propositional content is merely the jumping-off place for its real work. As I say in my Introduction, I do not regard as literary criticism any set of remarks about a poem which would be equally true of its paraphrasable propositional content. The poetics from which Shakespeare's sonnets issue is not the only poetics from which poems can be constructed, but the Aristotelian conventions about the unity of the literary work seem to apply particularly well to a form so tightly structured as the Shakespearean sonnet. However, there are ways

in which most of the sonnets are self-contradicting, as I will say below; and the sequence itself, with its two main subsequences and its several subsubsequences, is a powerful dispersive structure. Nonetheless, it would be absurd to believe that Shakespeare, the most hyperconscious of writers, was inscribing lines and words in a given sonnet more or less at random. Since another set of words would have done equally well to transmit the propositional or paraphrasable content of the poem, content by itself (as it is usually defined) cannot possibly be the guide at work in determining the author's choice of words and syntactic features. If at first I seem excessive in finding orders and structurings, I hope readers will become convinced of the existence of such structurings as they read further in the Commentary.

My comments vary in length. Some amount to small essays on the sonnet in question (a temptation not to be resisted in the case of the most complex poems, such as 73, 116, and 129). Others are brief sketches of linguistic features that would need to be accounted for in any critical examination of the sonnet. In the past, I have often wished, as I was reading a poem, that I could know what another reader had noticed in it; and I leave a record here of what one person has remarked so that others can compare their own noticings with mine. In such a way, we may advance our understanding of Shakespeare's procedures as a working poet—that is, as a master of aesthetic strategy. In no case does my commentary exhaust any given sonnet. These are sketches, not completions. And yet, since the sonnets are still the least investigated, aesthetically speaking, of Shakespeare's works, there is room for a first sketch of the salient stylistic self-presentation of each of these poems.

I have not followed a single expository scheme for each sonnet. For variety's sake, I have taken up different aesthetic problems at different times; and I have deliberately changed topics for the first twenty sonnets, so that anyone reading straight on would find many of Shakespeare's concerns raised early. After that, I have let each sonnet dictate what seemed most essential to discuss. I cannot pretend to understand all the sonnets equally well; some still elude me (and my instinct in such cases is to think I have not found the spring that will open the box, rather than to judge that Shakespeare had nothing interesting in mind).

At the end of each sonnet-commentary, I have consistently pointed out what I call (for want of a better name) the Couplet Tie—the words appearing in the body of the sonnet (ll. 1–12) which are repeated in the couplet (ll. 13–14). By "words" I really mean "a word and its variants"; for example, in this context, *live*, *lives*, and *outlive* count as the same "word." Shakespeare expended real effort in creating verbal connections between

the body of a sonnet and its couplet, and the words he chose to reiterate in this way are almost always thematically highly significant ones. (It is this repetition which has caused some readers—who seem to read only for theme—to assert that the couplets are superflous; but see my comments on the problem of the Shakespearean couplet in the Introduction.) After giving the root version of each word of the Couplet Tie, I print, in brackets, the variants in which it appears: *live* [*outlive*] [*-s*]. If the root word itself does *not* appear in the poem, I print it in brackets: if, for instance, "being" and "been" were the Couplet Tie, I would print [*be*] [*-ing*] [*been*]. After each Couplet Tie "word," I print in parentheses the line numbers in which it appears.

Often, Shakespeare used a more complex form of repetition than the Couplet Tie. He frequently firmly connected the four units of his sonnet—three quatrains and a couplet (Q_1, Q_2, Q_3, and C, in my abbreviated form of reference)—by repeating in each of these units a single "word" (as defined above). That single "word" appears (at least) four times in the sonnet, (at least) once in each part. In sonnet 7, for instance, Q_1 contains the word *looks*, Q_2 the word *looks* again, Q_3 the word *look*, and C the word *unlooked-on*. I call the root word that is so used—in this case, the root word *look*—a KEY WORD, and register it at the end of my commentary, preceding the Couplet Tie (which of course contains it). It is easy for an author writing a sonnet to use a given word in Q_1, and still fairly easy in Q_2; but as the vortex of meaning and development tightens, Q_3 puts a greater demand on ingenuity to insert the word; and C—with only two lines to work within instead of four, and with closure necessary—is the hardest of all.

Sometimes Shakespeare plays games with his KEY WORD. In sonnet 55 *(Not marble nor the gilded monuments)*, we find *outlive* in Q_1, *living* in Q_2, and *live* in C. Though we began by thinking (as we read the octave and couplet) that we might be about to find the fourth use that would make *live* a KEY WORD, we are momentarily "disappointed" as we look back on Q_3 and find no mention of anything "living" or "outliving" anything else:

> 'Gainst death and all oblivious enmity
> Shall you pace forth; your praise shall still find room
> Even in the eyes of all posterity
> That wear this world out to the ending doom.

It is only on a second reading that we notice, with distinct amusement, the "tucked-away" KEY WORD *live* in *ob**live**vious*, making the pattern phoneti-

cally (if not graphically) complete in all four units of the poem. There are other such instances (e.g., 106, where instead of *praise* in a fourth appearance, for instance, we find *press*). The most complex such game occurs in 105, where the key word *one* appears (sometimes in phonemic, sometimes in graphic, form) *twice* in each of the four units. Without a sense of Shakespeare's wish to put the KEY WORD into each of the three quatrains and the couplet, one misses the ingenuity of *oblivious* in 55 and of *expressed* in 106, and one does not see the reason for their location in their respective poems.

Once a potential KEY WORD has been spotted in three of the members of a given sonnet, one feels it "ought" to appear in the fourth. When it doesn't, one suspects that the expected word has been designedly suppressed in the part where it is missing. I register here, in addition to any KEY WORD, the existence (when it occurs) of a DEFECTIVE KEY WORD, because I think we are meant to notice the *absence* of the expected word; it is, I find, almost always thematically relevant that the word is "suppressed" in the quatrain or couplet where we (alerted by its appearance in each of the other three units of the poem) have supposed it would appear. See Appendixes 1 and 2, on KEY WORDS and DEFECTIVE KEY WORDS.

Throughout, I have italicized phrases from the *Sonnets* in order to avoid a page littered with quotation marks. Any word here italicized comes directly from the sonnet in question. I have occasionally, for syntactic coherence, rearranged the words of a phrase: discussing the line *O how much more doth beauty beauteous seem* (sonnet 54), I might say, "The speaker says that *beauty seem[s] beauteous* when accompanied by truth." The convention of italicizing is meant to indicate that these words actually occur in the poem, even if not in this order, whereas in my sentence the word "accompanied" does not form part of the poem. Usually, however, I keep the cited words in the order in which they appear in the sonnet. On the occasions when I wish to summarize quickly the plot of a sonnet, or quote a string of connected phrases, I have omitted the usual ellipses signifying omission and the virgules signifying line-breaks. Of 147, for instance, I might write, "The speaker says, in rapid succession, *My love is as a fever, reason hath left me, past cure I am.*" This choice, too, is made to avoid excess punctuational distraction.

Sometimes, when I wish to make a point about a single word and that word alone, I enclose the relevant line of the sonnet in quotation marks and italicize only the word which is the object of attention. I might say, "In writing 'But thy *eternal* summer shall not fade,' Shakespeare attaches

And I'll be sworn upon't that he loves her;
For here's a paper written in his hand,
A halting sonnet of his own pure brain.

—William Shakespeare, *Much Ado about Nothing*, V, iv, 85–87

There lives within the very flame of love
A kind of wick or snuff that will abate it.

—William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, IV, vii, 114–115

Through torrid entrances, past icy poles
A hand moves on the page!
Sheets that mock lust and thorns that scribble hate
Are lifted from torn flesh with human rue.

—Hart Crane, "To Shakespeare"

I neer found so many beauties in the sonnets—they seem to be full of fine things said unintentionally—in the intensity of working out conceits.

—John Keats to J. H. Reynolds, 22 November 1817

Our talking about poetry is a part of, an extension of, our experience of it, and as a good deal of thinking has gone to the making of poetry, so a good deal may well go to the study of it.

—T. S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*

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

—John Berryman, *The Freedom of the Poet*

INTRODUCTION

> There are indeed a sort of underlying auxiliars to the difficulty of work, call'd Commentators and Critics, who wou'd frighten many people by their number and bulk, and perplex our progress under pretense of fortifying their author.
>
> —Alexander Pope to Joseph Addison, 1714

> In fact, every poem has the right to ask for a new poetics. This is created only once to express the contents, also given only once, of a poem.
>
> —Anna Swir, quoted by Czeslaw Milosz in his introduction to *Talking to My Body*, by Anna Swir

Writing on the Sonnets

Before I begin to describe my own intentions in commenting on Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, I must say a few prefatory words. I intend this work for those who already know the *Sonnets*, or who have beside them the sort of lexical annotation found in the current editions (for example, those of Booth, Kerrigan, or Evans). A brief account of the reception history of the *Sonnets* can be found in these editions, as well as a more comprehensive bibliography than I can offer here. The older reception history in Hyder Rollins' *Variorum Sonnets* is still the most complete—and the most sobering to anyone hazarding a new addition to that history. Perhaps total immersion in the *Sonnets*—that is to say, in Shakespeare's mind—is a mildly deranging experience to anyone, and I cannot hope, I suppose, to escape the obsessive features characterizing Shakespearean sonnet criticism.

How are the *Sonnets* being written about nowadays? And why should I add another book to those already available? I want to do so because I admire the *Sonnets*, and wish to defend the high value I put on them, since they are being written about these days with considerable jaundice.[1] The spheres from which most of the current criticisms are generated are social and psychological ones. Contemporary emphasis on the participation of literature in a social matrix balks at acknowledging how lyric, though it may *refer to* the social, remains the genre that directs its *mimesis* toward

the performance of the mind in *solitary* speech. Because lyric is intended to be voiceable by anyone reading it, in its normative form it deliberately strips away most social specification (age, regional location, sex, class, even race). A social reading is better directed at a novel or a play: the abstraction desired by the writer of, and the willing reader of, normative lyric frustrates the mind that wants social fictions or biographical revelations.

Even the best sociopsychological critic to write on the *Sonnets*, Eve Sedgwick, says "Shakespeare's Sonnets seem to offer a single, discursive, deeply felt *narrative* of the dangers and vicissitudes of one male homosocial adventure" [49]; "It is here that *one most wishes the Sonnets were a novel, that readers have most treated it as a novel*, and that we are, instead, going to bring the Sonnets' preoccupation to bear on *real novels*" [46] (italics mine). The persistent wish to turn the sequence into a novel (or a drama) speaks to the interests of the sociopsychological critic, whose aim is less to inquire into the successful carrying-out of a literary project than to investigate the representation of gender relations. It is perhaps a tribute to Shakespeare's "reality-effect" that "one most wishes the Sonnets were a novel," but it does no good to act as if these lyrics were either a novel or a documentary of a lived life.

Other critics (Barrell, Marotti, Kernan) have brought the *Sonnets* into the realm of the social by drawing analogies between the language of the poetry and the language of solicitations addressed to patrons and requesting patronage. This is a reasonable semantic (if not poetic) investigation, and reminds us that lyric language in any given epoch draws on all available sociolects of that epoch. The *Sonnets*, however (as Kernan makes clear), go far outside the originating discourse: no patron was ever addressed *qua* patron in language like that of sonnet 20 *(A woman's face with Nature's own hand painted)*. Aesthetically speaking, it is what a lyric *does with* its borrowed social languages—i.e., how it casts them into new permutational and combinatorial forms—that is important. Shakespeare is unusually rich in his borrowings of diction and formulas from patronage, from religion, from law, from courtship, from diplomacy, from astronomy, and so on; but he tends to be a blasphemer in all of these realms. He was a master subverter of the languages he borrowed, and the point of *literary* interest is not the fact of his borrowings but how he turned them inside out. (See, in the commentary, sonnets 20, 33, 105, 135, or 144.)[2] One of Shakespeare's most frequent means of subversion is the total redefinition, within a single sonnet, of a word initially borrowed from a defined social realm (such as *state* in sonnet 33); there is no social discourse which he does not interrogate and ironize.

The sonnets have also been investigated by psychoanalytically minded critics, of whom the most formidable was the late Joel Fineman. Fineman, fundamentally disappointed by the Young Man sonnets, much preferred the Dark Lady sequence, where "difference" (read: the Lacanian Symbolic) replaces "sameness" (read: the Lacanian Imaginary).[3] Anyone who prizes drama above other genres delights in conflict, the structural principle of drama; and for Shakespeareans the Dark Lady sequence is, give or take a few details, a proto-sketch for a drama rather like *Othello*, with its jealousy, its sexuality, its ambiguous "darkness," its betrayals, and so on. It is much harder to imagine the Young Man sequence as a play. Yet, if one judges not by the criteria proper to drama but by those appropriate to lyric—"How well does the structure of this poem mimic the structure of thinking?" and "How well does the linguistic play of the poem embody that structural mimesis?"—Shakespeare's first subsequence is at least as good as (and in my view better than) the second. A psychological view of the *Sonnets* (whether psychoanalytically oriented or not) stresses motivation, will, and other characterological features, and above all needs a story on which to hang motivation. The "story" of the *Sonnets* continues to fascinate readers, but lyric is both more and less than story. And, in any case, the story of the *Sonnets* will always exhibit those "gaps" and that "indeterminacy" [Kuin, 251] intrinsic to the sonnet sequence as a genre. A coherent psychological account of the *Sonnets* is what the *Sonnets* exist to frustrate. They do not fully reward psychological criticism (or gender criticism, motivated by many of the same characterological aims) any more than they do political criticism. Too much of their activity escapes the large sieves of both psychology and politics, disciplines not much concerned to examine the basic means of lyric: subgenre, structure, syntax, and linguistic play.

The true "actors" in lyric are words, not "dramatic persons"; and the drama of any lyric is constituted by the successive entrances of new sets of words, or new stylistic arrangements (grammatic, syntactical, phonetic) which are visibly in conflict with previous arrangements used with reference to the "same" situation. (See, for example, my comments on sonnet 73 or sonnet 116.) Thus, the introduction of a new linguistic strategy is, in a sonnet, as interruptive and interesting as the entrance of a new character in a play. And any internal change in topic (from autumn to twilight to glowing fire in sonnet 73, for instance) or any change in syntactic structure (say, from parallel placement of items to chiastic placement) are among the strategies which—because they mimic changes of mind—constitute vivid drama within the lyric genre. Read in the light of these lyric criteria, the first subsequence is fully as dramatic (in the form proper to

by the actions taking place on the stage; they do not show the successive intellectual position-taking that is such a striking feature of the *Sonnets*.

Here, for instance, is Berowne's charming sonnet repudiating "figures pedantical" in favor of plainness in language. It is evident that it is a reiterative sonnet: each of its four units repeats the same antirhetorical stance. Berowne's outburst, because it is chiefly reiterative, lacks those dynamic reversals of thought and feeling indispensable to the true Shakespearean sonnet:

> O, never will I trust to speeches penned,
> Nor to the motion of a schoolboy's tongue,
> Nor never come in vizard to my friend,
> Nor woo in rhyme, like a blind harper's song!
> Taffeta phrases, silken terms precise,
> Three-piled hyperboles, spruce affectation,
> Figures pedantical—these summer flies
> Have blown me full of maggot ostentation.
> I do forswear them; and I here protest
> By this white glove (how white the hand, God knows!)
> Henceforth my wooing mind shall be expressed
> In russet yeas and honest kersey noes.
> And to begin, wench—so God help me, law!—
> My love to thee is sound, sans crack or flaw.
>
> (*Love's Labor's Lost*, V, ii, 405–419)

The essential function of such a sonnet is to advance the plot and represent Berowne's repentance.

There is, on the other hand, a real evolution in the inventive dialogue-sonnet of Romeo and Juliet, but it is an evolution of dramatic interaction rather than of inward psychic reevaluation:

> *Romeo*
> If I profane with my unworthiest hand
> This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this:
> My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
> To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.
>
> *Juliet*
> Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
> Which mannerly devotion shows in this;

For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,
And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.

Romeo
Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?

Juliet
Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.

Romeo
O, then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do!
They pray; grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.

Juliet
Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.

Romeo
Then move not while my prayer's effect I take.
(*Romeo and Juliet* I, v, 95–108)

Precisely because he was a dramatist by temperament and by training, Shakespeare could, in the 1609 Quarto, turn the external dramatic enactment we see here into the interior meditative drama of lyric. Because the drama of the 1609 poems has less to do with their themes than with the way those themes are stylistically dramatized through grammar, syntax, and word choice, any treatment of the *Sonnets* that focuses chiefly on their themes loses almost all of their aesthetic richness.

Consider, for instance, what is left of a genuine Shakespearean sonnet when its themes are preserved but its language is altered. Here is Shakespeare's sonnet 29, followed by George Santayana's "translation" of it into modern English:

When in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state

(Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven's gate,
For thy sweet love rememb'red such wealth brings,
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

When times are hard and old friends fall away
And all alone I lose my hope and pluck,
Doubting if God can hear me when I pray,
And brood upon myself and curse my luck,
Envying some stranger for his handsome face,
His wit, his wealth, his chances, or his friends,
Desiring this man's brains and that man's place,
And vexed with all I have that makes amends,
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,—
By chance I think of you; and then my mind,
Like music from deep sullen murmurs rising
To peals and raptures, leaves the earth behind;
For if you care for me, what need I care
To own the world or be a millionaire?

In spite of its resemblance to the original in theme, sentiments, and rhyme, this is not a Shakespearean sonnet. "The experiment," says Santayana in *The Genteel Tradition*, "is meant only to make evident how much old finery there is in our literary baggage" [70–71]. It is the "old finery" as well as the internal psychological dynamic (retained in Santayana's version) that makes a Shakespeare sonnet what it is. It is not theme as such (since, as is evident, much Shakespearean thematic material is present in my opening collage-pastiche or in Santayana's "translation"). Because a comprehension of the internal logic and the "old finery" of Elizabethan lyric has now almost vanished, I have written this Commentary to restore them to view as they appear in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*. I hope, of course, that the logic and the finery will be relished as soon as seen.

The modernist lyric aesthetic has been, on the whole, hostile to finery of Shakespeare's sort. One of the more bizarre moments in the reception history of the *Sonnets* occurred when the English poet Basil Bunting went to study with Ezra Pound at the "Ezuversity" in Rapallo.[6] The task Pound set the young Bunting was to go through Shakespeare's *Sonnets* correcting the inversions, and removing all the "superfluous words." There is a spirit of beginner's bravado in Bunting's compliance: sonnet 87, for instance, is briskly reduced to a mere two lines;

Farewell! Thou art too dear for my possessing;
And like enough thou know'st thy estimate.

That says it all, if one accepts the Poundian aesthetic. But perhaps more instructive with respect to modern distaste for Elizabethan rhetoric is a somewhat less mutilated sonnet. Here is Shakespeare's original sonnet 30:

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste:
Then can I drown an eye, unus'd to flow,
For precious friends hid in death's dateless night,
And weep afresh love's long since cancell'd woe,
And moan th'expense of many a vanish'd sight:
Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,
And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er
The sad account of fore-bemoanèd moan,
Which I new pay as if not paid before.
But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restor'd, and sorrows end.

(Quoted from Bunting's copy)

And here it is after Bunting's blue-penciling:

When I summon up remembrance of things past
To the sessions of silent thought,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
And wail time's waste:
I can drown an eye
For precious friends hid in dateless night,
And weep afresh love's long since cancell'd woe,
And many a vanish'd sight:
I can tell o'er
The sad account
As if not paid before.
But if I think on thee,
All losses are restor'd.

My transcription lacks of course what a facsimile reproduction would convey—how much the youthful Bunting enjoyed the literary vandalism of crossing out, with heavy pen-strokes, such a large number of "super-

fluous" words, how he reveled in "correcting," with his loops and arrows, Shakespeare's old-fashioned syntactic inversions. Nothing could better clarify twentieth-century impatience with *copia*, apparent reduplication, and elaboration. Naturally, the entire implicit aesthetic of the Renaissance poem, and its cunning enactment of its woe as the lines unwind, is lost in Bunting's version (see my description in the Commentary of the necessary and functional nature of all that Bunting deletes).

The logical termination of the modernist reduction in a comic-populist mode may be seen in George Starbuck's witty 1986 *Space-Saver Sonnets*, where sonnet 29, reduced to its (slightly tampered-with) rhyme scheme, becomes:

The Sessions

To
think.

Lou,
Dink,
and
Miss
Land-
is,
dead.

You
do
stead-
y
me.

It is in the hope of showing that Shakespeare's sonnets contain more than is to be found in their translations or reductions or paraphrases that I have compiled this Commentary.

"A Verbal Contraption"

Shakespeare is a poet who matches technique to content in a stunningly exemplary way, and his poems deserve to be asked the two questions formulated by Auden in *The Dyer's Hand:*

> The questions which interest me most when reading a poem are two. The first is technical: "Here is a verbal contraption. How

images), Winifred Nowottny (on formal arrangement), Stephen Booth (on overlapping structures), and Brian Vickers and Heather Dubrow (on rhetorical figuration) suggest that such efforts are particularly rewarding. Inevitably, rather few sonnets have been examined in detail, since critics tend to dwell on the most famous ten or fifteen out of the total 154; in fact, the *Sonnets* represent the largest tract of unexamined Shakespearean lines left open to scrutiny. As A. Nejgebauer remarked in his recapitulation (in the 1962 *Shakespeare Survey)* of work on the *Sonnets:* "Criticism of the sonnets will not stand comparison with that of the plays. . . . It has largely been amateurish and misplaced. . . . As regards the use of language, stanzaic structure, metre, tropes, and imagery, these demand the full tilth and husbandry of criticism." [18] Nejgebauer's complaint could not be made with quite the same vehemence today, largely because of Stephen Booth's massive intervention with his *Essay on Shakespeare's Sonnets* (1969) and his provocative edition of the *Sonnets* (1977). Yet Booth's critical stance—that the critic, helpless before the plurisignification of language and overlapping of multiple structures visible in a Shakespearean sonnet, must be satisfied with irresolution with respect to its fundamental gestalt—seems to me too ready a surrender to hermeneutic suspicion.

On the other hand, the wish of interpreters of poems to arrive at something they call "meaning" seems to me misguided. However important "meaning" may be to a theological hermeneutic practice eager to convey accurately the Word of God, it cannot have that importance in lyric. Lyric poetry, especially highly conventionalized lyric of the sort represented by the *Sonnets*, has almost no significant freight of "meaning" at all, in our ordinary sense of the word. "I have insomnia because I am far away from you" is the gist of one sonnet; "Even though Nature wishes to prolong your life, Time will eventually demand that she render you to death" is the "meaning" of another. These are not taxing or original ideas, any more than other lyric "meanings" ("My love is like a rose," "London in the quiet of dawn is as beautiful as any rural scene," etc.). Very few lyrics offer the sort of philosophical depth that stimulates meaning-seekers in long, complex, and self-contradicting texts like Shakespeare's plays or Dostoevsky's novels. In an effort to make lyrics more meaning-full, even linguistically minded critics try to load every rift with ore, inventing and multiplying ambiguities, plural meanings, and puns as if in a desperate attempt to add adult interest to what they would otherwise regard as banal sentiment. This is Booth's path, and it is also that of Joseph Pequigney, who would read the words of the *Sonnets* as an elaborate code referring to homosexual activity. Somehow, Shakespeare's words and images (most

of the latter, taken singly, fully conventional) do not seem interesting enough as "meaning" to scholarly critics; and so an argument for additional "ambiguous" import is presented, if only to prop up Shakespeare's reputation. The poet Frank O'Hara had a better sense for the essential semantic emptiness of love lyrics when he represented them (in his poem "Blocks") as "saying" "I need you, you need me, yum yum." The appeal of lyric lies elsewhere than in its paraphrasable statement. Where, then, does the charm of lyric lie? The answers given in this Commentary are as various as the sonnets examined, since Shakespeare almost never repeats a strategy. However, they can be summed up in the phrase "the arrangement of statement." Form is content-as-arranged; content is form-as-deployed.

The Dramatis Personae

The new broom sweeping clean in Margreta de Grazia's *Shakespeare Verbatim* has cleared away the early editorial contextualizing of the *Sonnets* by Benson, Malone, and others; the construction of a story "behind" the sequence has been rebuked by critics pointing out how few of the sonnets include gendered pronouns; and the new purity of anti-intentional criticism (stemming in part from the postmodern wish to dispense with "the author function") is salutary as a defense against the search for biographical origins of the *Sonnets*. Still, there is a factual minimum account of Shakespeare's compositional acts in any given poem on which all readers of a text must agree. In my comment on each sonnet, I give this minimal account (of Shakespeare's lexical, grammatical, syntactic, and sequential choices) on which any interpretation must found itself. Even such a minimal narrative is not a simple one. Any commentator must—given Shakespeare's frequent authorial irony—make a division between Shakespeare the author and his fictive self, whom we name the speaker of the sonnets. Yet often the two are designedly blurred, since the fictive self, too, is an author. It is difficult, as well, to settle on a word for the object of the speaker's affections. Each word prejudices the case. The "beloved"? The "object"? The "friend"? The "lover"? The "mistress"? The "young man"? The "dark lady"? I use whatever seems best suited to the sonnet at hand, and aim at some variety of reference to avoid boredom.

I have also decided, in the interests of common sense, to hold to the convention which assumes that the order of the sonnets as we have them is Shakespearean. In this convention, we take the first 126 sonnets as ones concerning a young man, and the rest as ones concerning a dark-

haired and dark-eyed woman; I therefore say "him" or "her" in my sentences about the love-object in ungendered sonnets according to the subsequence in which they occur. I say "Shakespeare" when I mean "the writer of these poems." I say "the speaker" when I mean the fictive person uttering the poem; and I sometimes say "the poet" when the fictional speaker identifies himself in the sonnet as a poet. Though the terms "dark lady" and "mistress" are now offensive to some modern ears, the blunt word "woman," used of the tormenting betrayer of the second cycle, often rings false to the historical language-conventions of the *Sonnets* themselves.

The *Sonnets* raise powerful sexual anxieties not only by representing a sexual triangle (as other sequences, European and English, did not) but by making the speaker's erotic relationships unusual ones. Though most reviewers found unconvincing Pequigney's insistence on a concealed linguistic code of homosexual acts, over time there has evolved—in the work of Blackmur, Sedgwick, Pequigney, Stallybrass, and others—an increasing willingness to admit, about the first subsequence, that its controlling motive is sexual infatuation. (The motive of sexual desire has never been doubted in the second subsequence.) The infatuation of the speaker with the young man is so entirely an infatuation of the eye—which makes a fetish of the beloved's countenance rather than of his entire body—that gazing is this infatuation's chief (and perhaps best and only) form of intercourse. Shakespeare's insistence on the eye as the chief sexual organ is everywhere present in the *Sonnets*, as in the plays:

> Tell me where is fancy bred,
> Or in the heart, or in the head?
> How begot, how nourishèd?
> Reply, reply.
> It is engend'red in the eyes
> With gazing fed, and fancy dies
> In the cradle where it lies.
> (*The Merchant of Venice*, III, ii, 63ff.)

I don't mean to slight the aura of privilege surrounding the young man as an enhancement of his beauty; but everything in the sonnets suggests that it was the youth's beauty of countenance (remarked upon, and attractive to others) which caused the helpless attachment recorded in the poems. Shakespeare was, after all, a man subdued to the aesthetic.

The perplexing case of the second subsequence seems to contradict

what I have just said. If the speaker is so susceptible to conventional beauty, how is it he becomes entangled with a woman *colour'd ill?* Freud describes, in an essay called "A Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men" (1910), the case of men who can be sexually aroused (when the object is a woman) only by a woman known to be promiscuous. Though the *Sonnets* can't offer conclusive proof of such a leaning in the speaker, it is suggestive that the speaker repeatedly and obsessively dwells on the promiscuity of his mistress, and that he remains baffled, almost until the end of this subsequence, by her power to arouse him. A psychoanalytic argument can be made that in having intercourse with a woman who has betrayed him with the young man, the speaker is in effect having vicariously that homosexual intercourse which he desires (but is frustrated of) in sonnet 20; and the meeting of the author's and the young man's "wills" in the woman's "will" supports such an argument. Yet one feels that evidence from literature is not the same as evidence from life; and it is certain that the speaker never introduces a self-analysis of the latter motive (vicarious homosexual intercourse), while he does understand, eventually, that it is precisely the promiscuity of his mistress that is the prerequisite for his own troubling sexual arousal in her presence. It is this latter understanding which causes the anguished self-division (the *perjur'd I* of which Fineman makes so much) in the second subsequence.

Because two different causes of sexual passion—homosexual infatuation consummated in the eye's intercourse with an image, and heterosexual infatuation consummated in the penis' intercourse within *the bay where all men ride*—are so idiosyncratically present together in Shakespeare's speaker, it seems at first extraordinary that they should have been euphemized by so many commentators into conventional friendship and conventional (if adulterous) heterosexual practice. But the reason these passions were susceptible to such euphemizing is that the *feelings* attached to fetishistic or anomalous sexual attraction are identical to the feelings attached to more conventional sexual practice, and it is essential feelings, not love-objects, which are traced in lyric.

Allegations of misogyny have arisen with respect to Shakespeare's speaker's discourse about his mistress and about *false women* (sonnet 20) in general. There is a philosophical impropriety in anachronistic reproaches to speakers of earlier centuries whose theological, ethical, and socially regulative concepts are alien to ours. But such accusations make us ask ourselves how we conceive an author's duty as a writer of lyric. As I see it, the poet's duty is to create aesthetically convincing representations of feelings felt and thoughts thought. Readers have certainly found the feelings and thoughts of Shakespeare's speaker with respect to his mistress

convincingly represented. Whether or not we believe that such *should* have been the speaker's feelings and thoughts is entirely irrelevant to the aesthetic success of the poem, as irrelevant as whether the fictive speaker *should* have found himself sexually aroused by the knowledge that his mistress was promiscuous. Whether he should have experienced self-loathing once he discovered the motive for his arousal is equally irrelevant. What *is* important, for the advance of the representational powers of lyric as it historically evolved, is that Shakespeare discovered a newly complex system of expression, unprecedented in the Renaissance lyric, through which he could, accurately and convincingly, represent and enact that arousal and that self-loathing—just as he had found strategic ways in the first subsequence to represent and enact his speaker's abject infatuation with a beautiful face. The ethics of lyric writing lies in the accuracy of its representation of inner life, and in that alone. Shakespeare's duty as a poet of the inner life was not to be fair to women but to be accurate in the representation of the feelings of his speaker. If the fictive speaker is a man tormented by his self-enslavement to a flagrantly unfaithful mistress, we can scarcely expect from him, at this moment, a judiciousness about women. The "poetic justice" of the sequence comes in the objectivity of Shakespeare's representation of his speaker in all his irrationality and wildness of language.

The Art of the Sonnets, and the Speaker They Create

With respect to the *Sonnets*—a text now almost four hundred years old—what can a commentary offer that is new? It can, I think, approach the sonnets, as I have chosen to do, from the vantage point of the poet who wrote them, asking the questions that a poet would ask about any poem. What was the aesthetic challenge for Shakespeare in writing these poems, of confining himself (with a few exceptions) to a single architectural form? (I set aside, as not of essential importance, the money or privileges he may have earned from his writing.) A writer of Shakespeare's seriousness writes from internal necessity—to do the best he can under his commission (if he was commissioned) and to perfect his art. What is the inner agenda of the *Sonnets?* What are their compositional motivations? What does a writer gain from working, over and over, in one subgenre? My brief answer is that Shakespeare learned to find strategies to enact feeling in form, feelings in forms, multiplying both to a superlative degree through 154 poems. No poet has ever found more linguistic forms by which to replicate human responses than Shakespeare in the *Sonnets*.

Shakespeare comes late in the sonnet tradition, and he is challenged

etc.). These compartments are semipervious to each other, and the osmosis between them is directed by an invisible discourse-master, who stands for the intellectual imagination.

4. *Conceptual.* The speaker resorts to many incompatible models of existence (described in detail in the commentary) even within the same poem; for example, sonnet 60 first describes life as a homogeneous steady-state succession of identical waves/minutes (a stoic model); then as a sharply delineated rise-and-eclipse of a sun (a tragic model); and next as a series of incessant violent extinctions (a brutal model). These models, unreconciled, convey a disturbing cognitive dissonance, one which is, in a philosophical sense, intolerable. The alert and observant mind that constructs these models asserts the "truth" of each for a particular occasion or aspect of life, but finds no "supramodel" under which they can be intelligibly grouped, and by which they can be intelligibly contained. In this way, the mind of the speaker is represented as one in the grip of philosophical conflict.

5. *Philosophical.* The speaker is a rebel against received ideas. He is well aware of the received topoi of his culture, but he subjects them to interrogation, as he counters neo-Platonic courtly love with Pauline marital love (116), or the Christian Trinity with the Platonic Triad (105), or analogizes sacred hermeneutics to literary tradition (106). No topics are more sharply scrutinized than those we now subsume under the phrase "gender relations": the speaker interrogates androgyny of appearance by evoking a comic myth of Nature's own dissatisfaction with her creation (20); he criticizes hyperbolic praise of female beauty in 130; he condones adultery throughout the "will" sonnets and elsewhere (and sees adultery as less criminal than adulterated discourse, e.g., in 152). This is not even to mention the interrogations of "love" and "lust" in 116 and 129 (sonnets of which the moral substance has not been properly understood because they have not been described in formal terms). No received idea of sexuality goes uninvestigated; and the thoroughly unconventional sexual attachments represented in both parts of the sequence stand as profound (if sometimes unwilling) critiques of the ideals of heterosexual desire, chastity, continence, marital fidelity, and respect for the character of one's sexual partner. What "ought to be" in the way of gender relations (by Christian and civic standards) is represented as an ideal in the "marriage sonnets" with which the sequence opens, but never takes on existential or "realist" lived validation. Shakespeare's awareness of norms is as complete as his depiction, in his speaker, of experiential violation of those norms.

6. *Perceptual.* The speaker is also given depth by the things he notices,

from damask roses to the odor of marjoram to a canopy of state. Though the sonnets are always openly drifting toward emblematic or allegorical language, they are plucked back (except in extreme cases like 66) into the perceptual, as their symbolic rose is distilled into "real" perfume (54) or as an emblematic April is *burned* by *hot* June (104). The speaker stands poised between a medieval emblematic tendency and a more modern empirical posture; within his moral and philosophical systems, he savors the tang of the "sensual feast."

7. *Dramatic.* The speaker indirectly quotes his antagonist. Though no one but the speaker "speaks" in a lyric, Shakespeare exploits the usefulness of having the speaker, in private, quote in indirect discourse something one or the other of the *dramatis personae* previously said. Many of the sonnets (e.g., 76 and 116) have been misunderstood because they have been thought to be free-standing statements on the speaker's part rather than replies to the antagonist's implicitly quoted words. Again, I support this statement below in detail; but one can see what a difference it makes to interpretation whether in sonnet 76 the poet-speaker means to criticize his own verse—"Why is my verse so barren of new pride?"—or whether he is repeating, by quoting, an anterior criticism by the young man: "Why [you ask] is my verse so [in your words] 'barren of new pride'?" In the (often bitter) give-and-take of prior-criticism-answered-by-the-speaker (in such rebuttal-sonnets as 105,117,151, and the previously mentioned 76 and 116), we come closest, in the sonnets, to Shakespeare the dramatist.

More could be said of the strategies that create a credible speaker with a complex and imaginative mind (a mind which we take on as our own when stepping into the voice); but I want to pass on to the greatest strength of the sonnets as "contraptions," their multiple armatures. Booth sees these "overlapping structures" as a principle of irresoluble indeterminacy; I, by contrast, see them as mutually reinforcing, and therefore as principles of authorial instruction.

Organizing Structures

When lyric poems are boring, it is frequently because they possess only one organizing structure, which reveals itself unchanged each time the poem is read. *If* the poet has decided to employ a single structure (in, say, a small two-part song such as "When daisies pied and violets blue"), then the poem needs some other principle of interest to sustain rereading (in that song, a copious set of aspects—vegetative, human, and avian—of the spring). Shakespeare abounds in such discourse-variety, and that in

part sustains rereadings of the sonnets; but I have found that rereading is even better sustained by his wonderful fertility in structural complexity. The Shakespearean sonnet form, though not invented by Shakespeare, is manipulated by him in ways unknown to his predecessors. Because it has four parts—three isomorphic ones (the quatrains) and one anomalous one (the couplet), it is far more flexible than the two-part Italian sonnet. The four units of the Shakespearean sonnet can be set in any number of logical relations to one another:

successive and equal;
hierarchical;
contrastive;
analogous;
logically contradictory;
successively "louder" or "softer."

This list is merely suggestive, and by no means exhaustive. The four "pieces" of any given sonnet may also be distinguished from one another by changes of agency ("I do this; you do that"), of rhetorical address ("O Muse"; "O beloved"), of grammatical form (a set of nouns in one quatrain, a set of adjectives in another), or of discursive texture (as the descriptive changes to the philosophical), or of speech act (as denunciation changes to exhortation). Each of these has its own poetic import and effect. The four "pieces" of the sonnet may be distinguished, again, by different phonemic clusters or metrical effects. Booth rightly remarks on the presence of such patternings, but he refuses to establish hierarchy among them, or to subordinate minor ones to major ones, as I think one can often do.

I take it that a Shakespearean sonnet is fundamentally structured by an evolving inner emotional dynamic, as the fictive speaker is shown to "see more," "change his mind," "pass from description to analysis," "move from negative refutation to positive refutation," and so on. There can be a surprisingly large number of such "moves" in any one sonnet. The impression of an evolving dynamic within the speaker's mind and heart is of course created by a large "law of form" obeyed by the words in each sonnet. Other observable structural patterns play a subordinate role to this largest one. In its Shakespearean incarnation, the sonnet is a system in motion, never immobile for long, and with several subsystems going their way within the whole.

The chief defect in critical readings of the *Sonnets* has been the critics' propensity to take the first line of a sonnet as a "topic sentence" which

the rest of the poem merely illustrates and reiterates (a model visible in Berowne's sonnet quoted above). Only in the plays does Shakespeare write nondramatic sonnets in this expository mode. In his lyrics, he sees structure itself as motion, as a composer of music would imagine it. Once the dynamic curve of a given sonnet is perceived, the lesser structuring principles "fall into place" beneath it. See, e.g., my commentary on 129 for a textbook example of a trajectory of changing feelings in the speaker about a single topic (lust); it is the patterns and underpatterns of the sonnet that enable us to see the way those feelings change. If the feeling were unchanging, the patterns would also remain invariable. The crucial rule of thumb in understanding any lyric is that every significant change of linguistic pattern represents a motivated change in feeling in the speaker. Or, to put it differently, if we sense a change of feeling in the speaker, we must look to see whether, and how, it is stylistically "guaranteed." Unless it is deflected by some new intensity, the poem continues by inertia in its original groove.

I deliberately do not dwell in this Commentary on Shakespeare's imagery as such, since it is a topic on which good criticism has long existed. Although large allegorical images *(beauty's rose)* are relatively stable in the *Sonnets*, imagery is meaningful only in context; it cannot be assigned secure symbolic import except with respect to the poem in which it occurs. The point, e.g., of the fire in sonnet 73 *(That time of year)* is that it is a stratified image: the glowing of the fire *lies upon* the ashes of youth. The previous images in the sonnet have been linear ones (*time of year* and *twilight*) referring to an extension in time (a year, a day), rather than superposition in space. By itself, the image "fire" does not call up the notion of stratification, nor does it in the other sonnets in which it appears; but in this poem, because of the poet's desire for variance from a previously established linear structure, the fire is called upon to play this spatial role, by which youth appears as exhausted subpositioned ashes rather than as an idyllic era *(the sweet birds; sunset)* lost at an earlier point in a timeline. Previous thematic commentators have often missed such contextual determination of imagistic meaning.

In trying to see the chief aesthetic "game" being played in each sonnet, I depart from the isolated registering of figures—a paradox here, an antimetabole there—to which the practice of word-by-word or phrase-by-phrase commentary inevitably leads. I wish to point out instead the larger imaginative or structural patterns in which such rhetorical figures take on functional (by contrast to purely decorative) significance. I do not intend, by this procedure, to minimize the sonnets' ornamental "excess"

(so reprehensible to Pound); no art is more pointedly ornamental (see Puttenham) than the Renaissance lyric. Yet Shakespeare is happiest when an ornamental flourish can be seen to have a necessary poetic function. His changes in discursive texture, and his frequent consciousness of etymological roots as he plays on Anglo-Saxon and Latin versions of the "same" meaning ("with my *extern* the *outward* honoring"), all become more striking when incorporated into a general and dynamic theory of the poem. (Rather than invoke the terms of Renaissance rhetoric, which do not convey much to the modern reader, I use ordinary language to describe Shakespeare's rhetorical figuration.)

To give an illustration: I myself find no real functional significance in Shakespeare's alliteration when the speaker says that in *the **sw**art com**p**lexioned night, / **W**hen **sp**arkling **st**ars **tw**ire not, thou [the young man] gild**st** the even*. Such phonetic effects seem to have a purely decorative intent. But an alliterative "meaning-string"—such as sonnet 25's *favour*, *fortune*, *triumph*, *favourites*, *fair*, *frown*, *painful*, *famousèd*, *fight (an emendation)*, *foiled*, and *forgot*—encapsulates the argument of the poem in little, and helps to create and sustain that argument as it unfolds. Grammar and syntax, too, can be functionally significant to argument; see, for instance, the way in which 66 uses phrases of agency, or the way in which 129 uses its many verbals. In his edition of the *Sonnets*, Booth leaves it up to the reader to construct the poem; I have hoped to help the reader actively to that construction by laying out evidence that no interpretation can afford to ignore. Any number of interpretations, guided by any number of interests, can be built on the same foundation of evidence; but an interpretation ignoring that evidence can never be a defensible one.

I believe that anyone seriously contemplating the interior structures and interrelations of these sonnets is bound to conclude that many were composed in the order in which they are arranged. However, given the poems' variation in aesthetic success, it seems probable that some sonnets—perhaps written in youth (as Andrew Gurr suggested of the tetrameter sonnet 145, with its pun on "Hathaway") or composed before the occurrence of the triangular plot—were inserted *ad libitum* for publication. (I am inclined to believe Katherine Duncan-Jones's argument that the *Sonnets* may have been an authorized printing.) The more trifling sonnets—those that place ornament above imaginative gesture, or fancifulness above depth (such as 4, 6, 7, 9, 145, 153, and 154)—do seem to be less experienced trial-pieces. The greater sonnets achieve an effortless combination of imaginative reach with high technical invention (18, 73, 124, 138), or a quintessence of grace (104, 106, 132), or a power of dramatic conden-

The "meaning" carried by such a turn to the *consensus gentium* is that the speaker has run out, absolutely, of things to say from his own heart. He has to turn to old saws to console himself in his rejection, and to warn the young man that no good can come of his infidelities.

It might be thought that the couplet is the likeliest place for proverbial expression. Yet, knowing that the proverbial implies that the speaker "gives up" on the conundrum as insoluble, we are glad to see the displacement upward of proverbial closure into the body of the poem. I insert the mental quotation marks and emphasis implied by the following displaced-upward "closures":

> [Everyone knows that] "It is a greater grief
> To bear love's wrong than hate's known injury."
> (sonnet 40)

> No marvel then that *I* mistake *my* view,
> "The sun itself sees not till heaven clears."
> (sonnet 148)

When proverbial matter—implying a desire for unquestionable closure—is displaced upward into Q_3, it makes room for a new departure in the couplet, such as the fresh sensual address in sonnet 40 (*Lascivious grace*, etc.). Or, as in 148, the upward displacement of the proverbial idiom into lines 11–12 can enable a change of reference from third-person *love* (meaning successively "Cupid" or "the experience of love" or "emblematic Love") to a more mordantly "aware" second-person use of *love* in the couplet to mean the dark lady (a meaning certified by the obscenely punning adjective "cunning"):

> O me! what eyes hath *love* put in my head
> . . . . .
> *love* doth well denote
> *Love's eye* is not so true as all men's: no,
> . . . . .
> No marvel then though I mistake my view;
> The sun itself sees not till heaven clears.
> O *cunning love*, with tears thou keep'st me blind,
> Lest eyes well seeing thy foul faults should find.

A reader alert to the way that boilerplate idiom, when it is found in the couplet (*as black as hell, as dark as night*, sonnet 147), carries the speaker's despair of a solution, and who sees how in other sonnets the speaker finds a "way out" by displacing despair from the couplet to a few lines above (thereby providing room in the couplet for a fresh view), will not find couplets of either sort uninteresting.

Readers intent only on the propositional statement made by the couplet have often found it redundant. When one looks at what a given couplet permits by way of functional agency, one sees more. A telling comment on the couplet was made by Jan Kott in his introduction to Jerzy Sito's edition of the *Sonnets:* "The closing couplet of each sonnet is addressed directly to the protagonist [by himself]. It is almost spoken. It is an actor's line." While this is not true of the couplets in all the sonnets, Kott's remark shows us a critic perceiving a crucial *tonal* difference between the body of the sonnet and the couplet, even if what they "say" is "the same." A theory of interpretation that is interested only in the paraphrasable "meaning" of a poem tends to find Shakespeare's couplets uninteresting; but such a theory merely betrays its own inadequacy. It is more productive to look for what Shakespeare might have had in mind to make his couplets "work" than to assume that, because they "restate" semantically the body of the sonnet, they are superfluous. Poetically speaking, Shakespeare was not given to idle superfluity. In the Commentary following, I have pointed out, for each sonnet, the significant words from the body of the poem that are repeated in the couplet, calling the aggregate of such words the Couplet Tie. These words are usually thematically central, and to see Shakespeare's careful reiteration of them is to be directed in one's interpretation by them. There are very few sonnets that do not exhibit such a Couplet Tie. Shakespeare clearly depended on this device not only to point up the thematic intensities of a sonnet, but also to show how the same words take on different emotional import as the poem progresses.

Reading the Sonnets

Shakespeare encourages alertness in his reader. Because he is especially occupied with literary consolidation (resuming the topics, the images, the consecrated adjectives, and the repertoire of tones of previous sonneteers), one can miss his subversive moves: the "shocking" elements of the sonnets in both subsequences; the parodies, by indirect quotation, of Petrarchan praise in sonnets 21 and 130 (though the latter has been sometimes read as denigration of the mistress, it is no such thing); the satire on

learned language (78, 85); on sycophantic poets (79) and newfangled poets (76); the revisionism with respect to Christian views of lust (129) and continence (94) and with respect to Petrarchan views of love (116); the querying of eternizing boasts (122), of the Platonic conventions (95), of dramatic plot (144), of enumerative praise (84), of "idolatry" (105), of the Lord's Prayer (108) and of love-pursuit (143). That is, readers of the sonnets find themselves encountering—and voicing—both the most conventional images *(rose, time, fair, stars, love)* and the most unsettling statements. Many quatrains, taken singly, could well be called conventional, and paraphrases of them by critics make them sound stultifying. What is *not* conventional is the sonnet's (invisibly predicated) set of relations—of the quatrains to one another and to the couplet; of the words and images to one another; of the individual grammatical and syntactic units to one another. Even though the appearance of logic is often smoothly maintained by a string of logical connectives *(When . . . When . . . Then)*, some disruptive or contradictory force will enter the poem to pull one quatrain in two directions at once—toward its antecedent quatrain by one set of words, toward its consequent by another; toward the couplet by its temporality; toward a preceding quatrain by its spatiality. Since quatrains often participate in several patterns simultaneously, their true "meaning" is chartable only by charting their pattern-sets.

Though antithesis is Shakespeare's major figure for constructing the world in the sonnets, it is safe to say that the ever antithetically minded Shakespeare permitted his antitheses to breed and bring to birth a third thing (see sonnet 66). His second preferred figure, chiasmus, contends in the sonnets against the "natural" formulation of a sentence (linear, temporal, ongoing). Chiasmus refuses to let a phrase or a sentence dilate "naturally": instead, it makes the syntax round on itself. Not "Least contented with what I most enjoy" (the linear or parallel formation), but rather *With what I most enjoy contented least* (the chiastic formulation). The chiastic formulation always implies an analytic moment in the speaker. "Spontaneous" moments say things "naturally"; but when the speaker has had time to think things out and judge them, he speaks chiastically. *Consumed with that which it was nourished by*—where *consumed* and *nourished* bracket *that* and *which*—is a formulation that simply could not occur in Q_1 or Q_2 of 73. The first two quatrains of that sonnet are the epitome of linearity, as phrase follows phrase in a "natural" imitation of life's gradual leakage:

> In me thou seest the twilight of such day
> As after sunset fadeth in the west,

> Which by and by black night doth take away,
> Death's second self that seals up all in rest.

On this narrative of pathos, there supervenes the superb analytic moment of Q_3: the stratified fire does not fade, it glows; and the analytic law of consumption and nourishment refuses a linear statement of itself: "As the fire was nourished by heat, so it is consumed by heat". Between the glowing fire and the physical law, however, there is one line of linear "leakage": *As the death-bed whereon it must expire*. If that were the last line of the poem, the speaker's stoic resolve could be said to have left him, and he would have submitted to a "natural" dying fall. But he pulls himself up from that moment of expiring linearity into his great chiastic law, that we die from the very same vital heat which has nourished us in life. It is (as this example shows) always worth noting whether a Shakespearean statement is being made "linearly," in a first-order experiential and "spontaneous" way, or whether it is being made chiastically, in a second-order analytic way. These represent very different stances within the speaker.

Strategies of Unfolding

One of the strategies making many sonnets odd is that the utterances of the speaker are being generated by invisible strings "behind" the poem—the concurrent deducible actions or remarks of an implied other. Such poems are like the rebuttal sonnets mentioned earlier, except that the invisible prompt is not an earlier speech-act by another but rather a series of actions or speech-acts which are, imaginatively speaking, *in process while* the sonnet is being uttered. (See my comments on 34, which explain why the changes of metaphor in the poem—storm, rain, slave, physic, cross, pearl, ransom—are not inexplicable or unintelligible.) And then there are the "shadow-poems" (as I think of them), where one can deduce, from the speaker's actual statements, what he would really like to say to the young man (in the case of the "slavery" sonnet, 57) or to the mistress (in, say, 138) if he could speak clearly.

Yet another recurrent strategy for Shakespeare is to "mix up" the order of narration so that it departs from the normal way in which such an event would be unfolded. It would be "normal" to say, "He abandoned me; and what did that feel like? It felt like seeing the sun go behind a cloud." In "normal" narration, the literal event is recounted first, and then a metaphor is sought to explain what the narrator felt like. But in sonnet 33 *(Full many a glorious morning have I seen)*, the metaphor—not

perceived as such because not introduced by "Just as"—precedes the literal event. After seeing the sunny landscape clouded, and thinking we have been admitted to the literal level of the poem, we hear *Even so my sun one early morn did shine*. In order to understand such a poem, we must ask why the poet has rearranged the normal order of narration. In 97, for example, it would be "normal" to state literal perception first, and let an emotional contradiction follow—to say, "It was summertime, *and yet* it seemed like winter to me with you away." Instead, the poet puts the speaker's emotional perception ahead of his sense-perception: "How like a winter hath my absence been / From thee. . . ! / *And yet* this time removed was summer's time." Similarly, the very peculiar order of narration in 62 *(Sin of self-love)* has to be both noticed and interpreted.

I want to say a word here about Shakespeare's fancifulness. It ought not surprise us that the author of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* might also be fanciful in his poems. Modern readers have shown little admiration for the sonnets that play with the convention of the contest between eye and heart (such as 46 or 47) or the sonnet about flowers stealing their odor and hue from the young man (99, *The forward violet*), or the sonnets of elaborate wordplay (43, *When most I wink*), or the more whimsical complimentary sonnets, such as 78 *(So oft have I invoked thee)*. Such sonnets may be fanciful, but they are not frivolous, as I hope to have shown in the Commentary. Read from the right angle, so to speak, they can be very beautiful, or at least delightful; and in them, as elsewhere, Shakespeare is inventing some game or other and playing it out to its conclusion in deft and surprising ways.

Shakespeare the Writer

The purpose of my Commentary is to point out strategies of the sort I have been enumerating—strategies that make the speaker credible, that generate an evolutionary dynamic, that suggest interaction among the linguistic ingredients of the lines, that "use" the couplet, that beguile by fancifulness, and so on. There are hundreds of such strategies in the sonnets, since Shakespeare rarely amuses himself the same way twice. He is a poet acutely conscious of grammatical and syntactic possibility as one of the ingredients in "invention," and he routinely, but not idly, varies tense, mood, subject-position, and clause-patterns in order to make conceptual or rhetorical points. These *differentia* contribute to our sense that his mind was discriminating as well as copious. His inventories are sometimes exhaustive (as he reels off the forms of prognostication in sonnet 14,

from the interpretation of his emblem the lingering sensual overtones which Shakespeare retains in the word *unwooed* and the repetition *sweet . . . sweet . . . sweetest.* What is always unsettling in Shakespeare is the way that he places only a very permeable osmotic membrane between the compartments holding his separate languages—pictorial description, philosophical analysis, emblematic application, erotic pleading—and lets words "leak " from one compartment to the other in each direction. Rather than creating "full-fledged" metaphor, this practice creates a constant fluidity of reference, which produces not so much the standard disruptive effect of catachresis ("mixed metaphor") as an almost unnoticed rejuvenation of diction at each moment. The most famous example of this unexampled fluidity arrives in sonnet 60:

> Nativity, once in the main of light,
> Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crowned,
> Crookèd eclipses 'gainst his glory fight.

This passage, in which Shakespeare allows free passage of language from compartment to compartment, behaves as though the discourses of astrology, seamanship, astronomy, child development, political theory, deformity, religion, and warfare were (or could be) one. Such freedom of lexical range suggests forcefully an *ur*-language (occurring in time after the Kristevan *chora* but before even the imaginary in the Lacanian order of things) in which these discourses *were* all one, before what Blake would call their fall into division. As Shakespeare performs their resurrection into unity, we recognize most fully that this heady mix of discourses *is* (as with the peculiar interfusion of spaniels and candy once noticed by Caroline Spurgeon) Shakespeare's "native language" when his powers of expression are most on their mettle.

And yet there is no "ambiguity" in this passage. A lesser poet would have clung to one or two chief discourses: "Man, once born onto the earth, crawls to maturity, but at that very moment falls, finding his strength failing him"; or "Our sun, once in its dawn of light, ascends to its zenith, whereupon crooked eclipses obscure it." The inertial tendency of language to remain within the discourse-category into which it has first launched itself seems grandly abrogated by Shakespeare. Yet we know he was aware of that inertial tendency because he exploited it magisterially; every time a discourse shifts, it is (he lets us know) because the mind has shifted its angle of vision. Unpacked, the three lines above from sonnet 60 show us that the speaker first thinks of a child's horoscope, cast at birth; then he thinks of dawn as an image for the beginning of human life, be-

cause the life-span seems but a day; then he reverts to the biological reality of the crawling infant; then he likens the human being to a king (a dauphin perhaps in adolescence, but crowned when he reaches maturity); then (knowing the necessity of human fate) he leaves the image of a king behind (since the uncrowning of a king is contingent—on, say, a revolution—but death is a necessary event) and returns to the natural world. We assume the speaker will predict, as his emblem of necessity (as he does in 73), the darkness of night overtaking the sun that rose at dawn; but instead, feeling the "wrongness" of death's striking down a human being just at maturity, the poet shows nature in its "wicked" guise, as the eclipse "wrongfully" obscuring the sun in the "glory" of his noon. Yet, remembering how death is not without struggle, the speaker shows the man being "fought against," not simply blotted out, by the dark. If we do not see each of these shifts in discourse as evidence of a change of mental direction by the speaker, and seek the motivation for each change of direction, we will not participate in the activity of the poem as its surface instructs us to do.

In conceptual matters, Shakespeare displays an exceptionally firm sense of categories (logical, philosophical, religious), together with a willingness to let them succeed each other in total aspectual contradiction. Within the process of invention itself, as I have said above, his mind operates always by antithesis. As soon as he thinks one thing, he thinks of something that is different from it (though perhaps assimilable to it under a larger rubric). If one believes, as I do, that in many of the sonnets successive quatrains "correct" each other, and that in the "philosophical" sonnets Q_3 generally offers an ampler, subtler, or truer view of the problem than those voiced in Q_1 or Q_2, then it is true to say that these aspectual contradictions—like those offered by 60 as it presents models of life that are successively stoic, tragic, and brutal—are ranked hierarchically and climactically with respect to their "truth-value." The stratified erotic fire in Q_3 of sonnet 73 *(That time of year)* is therefore a "truer" picture of human life *(Consumed with that which it was nourished by)* than the earlier "pathetic" autumnal tree or the subsequent "rest-awaiting" twilight. And yet Q_1 and Q_2 are not repudiated as *un*true: in 73, the whole question of how we picture our life has been thrice answered (once physically, once emblematically, and once philosophically). If the third formulation is better than the others, because intellectually more comprehensive (no villain robs us of life, we die of having lived, and our *calor vitae*, even in old age, makes us "glowing" rather than "ruined" or "fading"), it does not invalidate the psychological "truth" of the two earlier models. The proffering

and hierarchizing of several conceptual models at once is, as I see it, Shakespeare's main intellectual and poetic achievement in the *Sonnets*.

Yet conceptual models, though necessary for the architectonics of poems, do not guarantee poetic interest. Although the conceptual models ("conceits") govern the working-out of compositional order, they do not repress other poetic energies, but rather act to stimulate them. As Keats put it (in a letter to J. H. Reynolds of November 22, 1817): "I neer found so many beauties in the sonnets—they seem to be full of fine things said unintentionally—in the intensity of working out conceits." The passage that drew this comment from Keats (Q_2 of sonnet 12) struck him so powerfully, we may suppose, because its theme—one that never failed to move him—was the consuming of beautiful and benevolent nature by death ("Is this to be borne?" Keats wrote in the margin; "Hark ye!"):

> When lofty trees I see barren of leaves,
> Which erst from heat did canopy the herd,
> And summer's green all girded up in sheaves
> Borne on the bier with white and bristly beard . . .

Even transfixed as he was by Shakespeare's theme of autumnal mortality, what Keats comments on is the "fine things" said (as if unintentionally) as the conception is worked out. Here, Shakespeare's metaphorical "leakages" occur in the words *barren*, *canopy*, *green*, *girded up*, *bier*, and *beard*, which "replace," with anthropomorphic emphasis, plausible words either more literal or more abstractly all-embracing, such as *shed*, *shade*, *corn*, *gathered into*, *wagon*, and *awn*. Here (with apologies) is a "literal" version of the quatrain:

> When lofty trees I see have shed the leaves
> Which erst from sultry heat did shade the fawn,
> And summer's corn all gathered into sheaves,
> Borne on the wain with white and bristly awn . . .

One can see the lessening of pathos in such a formulation.

But it was not merely the anthropomorphic reference in the metaphorical leakages that so affected Keats. I believe he was also moved by the apparently gratuitous insertion of *herd* (perhaps conceived "in the intensity of working out" the rhyme for *beard*, a word necessary to the bier-

deathbed scene underlying the close of the quatrain). The trees at the opening of the quatrain are not only beautiful in their foliage, they are also virtuous (if unconsciously so) in the benefit they confer on the herd by their *canopy* (the Shakespeare Concordance shows that Shakespeare uses *herd* to mean *flock* rather than *shepherd*). That Shakespeare had the virtue as well as the beauty of the trees in mind is proved by the summary in line 11, "*sweets* and beauties do themselves forsake," in which the only conceptual antecedent in the sonnet for *sweets* is the charitable trees. In the sonnets, while *beauty* is used of appearance, *sweet* is used of substance and virtue. To Keats, the fact that Shakespeare wanted his trees kind as well as beautiful answered to his deepest wish that his "Presider" (as he called Shakespeare) be as exemplary in breadth of vision as in talent of execution.

The complex effect of this single quatrain, as it evoked Keats's comment on Shakespeare's procedures in writing, suggests that many, if not all, of the sonnets deserve close and writerly scrutiny, more than I can give in my much-reduced comments below. I regret not being able to write at more length about the successive emotional tonalities of the *Sonnets*, from abjectness to solitary triumph, from perplexity to self-loathing, from comedy to pathos—but tribute to their tonal variety has been a staple of criticism, and is not likely to go unobserved by any reader.

Of course this Commentary is not intended to be read straight through. I think of it as a work that those interested in the *Sonnets*, or students of the lyric, or poets hungry for resource, may want to browse in. The elation of seeing what Shakespeare is up to is, I hope, a contagious feeling. I have included a recording of some of the *Sonnets* read aloud because the three readings available on tape are done by actors who, so far as I can judge, did not invest much time in studying the texts, and who therefore speak the lines with constant mis-emphases, destroying the meaning of many of the sonnets by not observing inner antitheses and parallels. Though I am acutely conscious that for both textual and acoustic reasons the ideal reading of the sonnets would be done by a male voice, in another sense a helpful reading-aloud can be done by one who sees the *allure de la phrase* in each poem, and has thought about how the poem develops intellectually and tonally. With the aim of being useful to a reader who wants (reasonably enough) to hear the sonnets as well as to read them and think about them, I have recorded a selection of the *Sonnets* as best I could. I did not want to deprive Shakespeare of his full voice, one still alive throughout the world after almost four centuries.

Notes

1. The most recent book considering them in some detail—Christopher Martin's *Policy in Love: Lyric and Public in Ovid, Petrarch and Shakespeare* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1994)—may serve to prove my assertion. Here are some quotations:

On the initial seventeen sonnets: "[The poet's] rigid alignment with a legitimizing community exhausts the technical resources of his discourse as it exposes the emotional sterility of the conventions in which he invests" [134–135].

"While the procreation subsequence's tight focus insures coherence, it simultaneously threatens a monotony that has also taken its toll on the poetry's modern audience. Even Wordsworth . . . was put off by a general 'sameness,' a feature most damagingly concentrated in this introductory series" [145].

"Lars Engle is right to suggest that the initial quatrain:

> [From fairest creatures we desire increase,
> That thereby beauty's rose might never die,
> But as the riper should by time decease
> His tender heir might bear his memory . . .]

'might be the voice-over of a Sierra Club film in which California condors soar over their eggless nest'" [148].

"The poet betrays himself [in the early sonnets] as one uneager to focus on human beings in any precise manner, much less upon the potentially messy emotions which join them to one another. . . . Questions of detail make him nervous, and he would just as soon stick to the homey blur of abstracted tradition" [148].

"On sonnets 124 ("If my dear love were but the child of state") and 125 ("Were't aught to me I bore the canopy"): "Posing as sonnets about discovery and liberation, these poems are overtaken by a spirit of persecution and resentment. . . . He resorts to a fantasy isolation . . . He lapses, moreover, by the final couplet's arch renunciation ["Hence, thou suborned informer! A true soul / When most impeached stands least in thy control"], from anxious vigilance to paranoia" [175].

2. Because of Shakespeare's subversion of any discourse he adapts, it seems to me inadequate to suggest, as John Barrell does, that sonnet 29 ("When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes") "may be actively concealing . . . a meaning that runs like this: 'when I'm pushed for money, with all the degradation that poverty involves, I sometimes remember you, and you're always good for a couple of quid'" [30]. Barrell prefers to conceive of Shakespeare as attempting the language of transcendent love, but unable to achieve it, "because the historical moment he seeks to transcend is represented by a discourse [of patronage] whose nature and function is to contaminate the very language by which that assertion of transcendence must try to find expression. For me, the pathos of the poem—I can repeat here my earlier point—is that the narrator can find no words to assert the transcendent power of true love, which cannot be interpreted as making a request for a couple of quid" [42].

simo Bacigalupo's *Pound in Rapallo.* Bunting's reductions are quoted from a xerox of his copy of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, kindly sent to me by Professor Bacigalupo of the University of Genoa.

7. The best account of Shakespeare's metrical practice is to be found in George T. Wright, *Shakespeare's Metrical Art*, 75–90; but see my critique of his scansion of 116 in my comments on that sonnet.

8. I do not include eclogues, debate-poems, etc. in the definition of normative single-speaker lyric. Such poems are constructed against the norm, and derive their originality from bringing into the public (dramatic) arena of shared speech thoughts that in normative lyric remain intrapsychic.

The Sonnets

1

FRom faireſt creatures we deſire increaſe,
That thereby beauties *Roſe* might neuer die,
But as the riper ſhould by time deceaſe,
His tender heire might beare his memory:
But thou contracted to thine owne bright eyes,
Feed'ſt thy lights flame with ſelfe ſubſtantiall fewell,
Making a famine where aboundance lies,
Thy ſelfe thy foe,to thy ſweet ſelfe too cruell:
Thou that art now the worlds freſh ornament,
And only herauld to the gaudy ſpring,
Within thine owne bud burieſt thy content,
And tender chorle makſt waſt in niggarding:
Pitty the world,or elſe this glutton be,
To eate the worlds due,by the graue and thee.

From fairest creatures we desire increase,
That thereby beauty's rose might never die,
But as the riper should by time decease,
His tender heir might bear his memory:
But thou, contracted to thine own bright eyes,
Feed'st thy light's flame with self-substantial fuel,
Making a famine where abundance lies,
Thyself thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel.
Thou that art now the world's fresh ornament,
And only herald to the gaudy spring,
Within thine own bud buriest thy content,
And, tender churl, mak'st waste in niggarding:
Pity the world, or else this glutton be,
To eat the world's due, by the grave and thee.

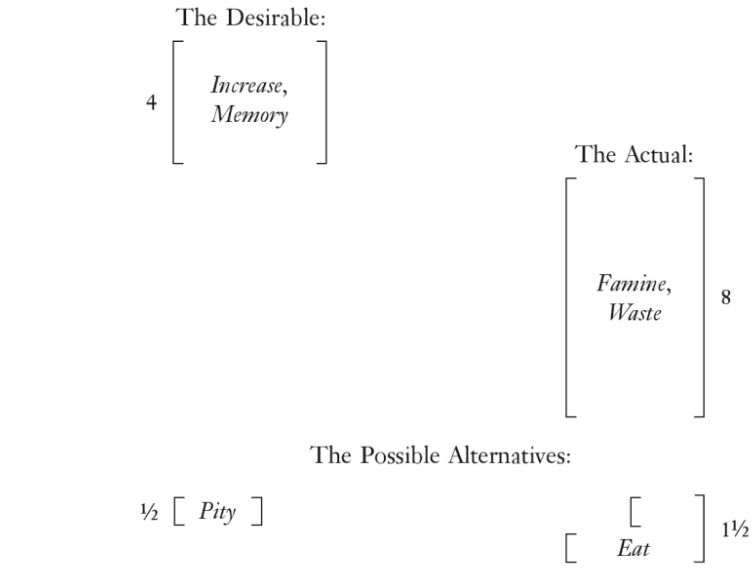
ganic, are given of the young man's refusal to breed: he is a candle contracted to the flame of his bright eyes; or he is a rose refusing to unfold his bud. The first symbolizes the refusal of the spirit; the second, the refusal of the flesh. The first creates famine; the second, waste. The juxtaposing of two incompatible categories—here, the inorganic and the organic—is one of Shakespeare's most reliable techniques for provoking thought in the reader. When two incompatible categories are combined in the *same* metaphor—"a candle which refuses to bud forth"—we say we have mixed metaphor, or catachresis, a figure which vigorously calls attention to itself. Shakespeare's use of metaphors from incompatible categories applied to the same object (here, the young man) does not immediately call attention to itself; it can pass almost unnoticed. Yet the candle-value (light and heat should be diffused as a social good, not consumed only by the candle) derives perhaps from a New Testament source (hiding one's light under a bushel), and is in any case parabolic and moral in import. But the organic metaphor *(Thou . . . Within thine own bud buriest thy content)*, though offered as a moral reproach, suggests a weakness of a biological sort, such as we infer in a bud that does not blossom, perhaps because it cannot. Since neither of these metaphors, organic or inorganic, is drawn from the human realm, they both exist in dissonance with human metaphors like *foe* or *glutton*, the first suggesting self-war (by contrast to the self-nurturing implied in *self-substantial fuel*), the second self-cannibalism. As the poem glides from metaphor to metaphor, it "makes sense" on the argumentative level, while revealing, on the metaphorical level, the author's struggle through thickets of metaphor seeking relevant (if contradictory) categorizations of the young man's culpable inertia—which is alternately seen as a sin of omission *(buriest)* and a sin of commission *(foe)*. The cognitive dissonance of the metaphors presses the reader into reflection; and this technique, recurrent throughout the sonnets, is the chief source of their intellectual provocativeness.

A willed profusion of the sort remarked in the diction and metaphors of the sonnet is also evident in the many speech-acts of the poem (the number here is greater than the norm in the sequence). An appeal to the *consensus gentium* ("we") is followed by an exemplum: *as the riper should decease, his heir might bear his memory*. With the rise of temperature always implicit in the turn to direct address, the rapidity of speech-acts increases with the vocative second quatrain: the little narrative *(thou feed'st thy light's flame with self-substantial fuel)* is succeeded by dependent paradoxes of famine in abundance and cruelty in sweetness. Praise has turned to reproach, and the two are combined in the oxymoron and paradox of the *tender churl* who makes *waste in niggarding*. An exhortation—*Pity the*

world—is followed by a prophetic threat *(or else)*. These speech-acts will be among those most frequent in the speaker's repertory throughout the sequence; in fact, we tend to define the speaker as one given to paradox, to exempla, to appeals to the *consensus gentium*, to volatile changes from praise to reproach, and to exhortation and prophecy. By showing us the speaker in many of his characteristic speech-acts, Shakespeare continues the display of profusion, initiates in us a further sense (beyond his fund of metaphors) of the speaker's typical behavior, and prepares us for the rest of the sequence.

If we take profusion as the aesthetic intent of the sonnet, we can justly ask whether the intent fails in any respect. An honest answer might be that the human alternatives offered by the logic of the sonnet ("breed or sin") seem incomplete when measured against the reaches of Shakespeare's imagination elsewhere. The narrowing of profusion to these bare alternatives makes the close of the sonnet purely conceptual and rhetorical, rather than truly imaginative. And these dynastic alternatives are not relevant to Shakespeare himself (who had already married and begotten children). The issue of a good poem must be urgent to the poet. When Shakespeare, after sonnet 17, abandons the dynastic question in favor of issues of mortality and corruption, his imagination can come fully into play.

Primary Structure of Sonnet 1



Most of the sonnets lend themselves to more than one schematic representation. This one is no exception, but we may say that its primary structure seems to be as shown in the diagram. The unexpectedness of such a structure, in which the reproachful narrative of actuality (lines 5–12) straddles the octave and sestet, shows Shakespeare's inventiveness with respect to the continental sonnet structure. Many of Shakespeare's sonnets preserve (except for rhyme) the two-part structure of the Italian sonnet, in which the first eight lines are logically or metaphorically set against the last six. An octave-generalization will be followed by a particular sestet-application, an octave-question will be followed by a sestet-answer (or at least by a quatrain-answer before a summarizing couplet). In such poems, we can see to what an extent Shakespeare had internalized the two-part structure of so many of his predecessors, Italian, French, and English. On the other hand, he finds a strenuous pleasure in inventing as many ways as possible to construct a fourteen-line poem; and I think it is no accident that the first sonnet in his sequence avoids the two structures a reader might expect—the binary structure of the Italian sonnet, and the quatrains-in-parallel of the English sonnet. (The quatrains here are not parallel, since direct address does not appear until after the first-quatrain, which, unlike the other two quatrains, is phrased in the first person plural.)

Because the ghost of the Italian sonnet can be said to underlie all the sonnets in the sequence, a "shadow sonnet" often can be intuited behind the sonnet we are reading. To give only one example of how such a ghost is felt here, let us imagine a sonnet more equally balanced, in which the initial reproaches to the young man are followed by a sestet of positive exhortations: [*So thou, fair youth, must bear an heir to be / An ornament, as thou wert, to the spring*]. The place of such expectable lines of positive injunction is usurped, as it were, by the reiteration in Q_3 of the narrative of reproach already heard in Q_2; and the "fact" of such usurpation is made evident by the tormented brevity of the single positive exhortation, *Pity the world*. The profusion so "normal" in this sonnet (as we have seen) is thus sharply prevented from exhibiting itself in positive terms at the close by the distorting "overabundance" of the narrative of reproach.

A confidence in the social norm of reproduction (from which the young man's deviancy is measured) exists, here as later, in tension with a confidence in the young man, so that even in the two small reproach-narratives, the terms of reproach *(famine, waste)* are preceded, as if involuntarily, by a rhetoric of praise. It is as though, before coming to the point, the speaker had to delay in wonder and admiration: "Thou—*that*

art now the world's fresh ornament and only herald to the gaudy spring—buriest thy content." It is easy to imagine a more mitigated praise; but here the praise is unqualified, as though social morality might reproach, but not dim, beauty. If Shakespeare (and the social *world* linking the third quatrain and the couplet) are here the owners and deployers of judgmental language, the young man is the sovereign over descriptive usage: he compels it to be beautiful, even when it is describing a sinner.

Couplet Tie: *world* [*-'s*] (9, 13, 14)

2

VVHen fortie Winters ſhall beſeige thy brow,
And digge deep trenches in thy beauties field,
Thy youthes proud liuery ſo gaz'd on now,
Wil be a totter'd weed of ſmal worth held:
Then being askt,where all thy beautie lies,
Where all the treaſure of thy luſty daies;
To ſay within thine owne deepe ſunken eyes,
Were an all-eating ſhame,and thriftleſſe praiſe.
How much more praiſe deſeru'd thy beauties vſe,
If thou couldſt anſwere this faire child of mine
Shall ſum my count,and make my old excuſe
Prooving his beautie by ſucceſſion thine.
This were to be new made when thou art ould,
And ſee thy blood warme when thou feel'ſt it could,

When forty winters shall besiege thy brow,
And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field,
Thy youth's proud livery so gazed on now
Will be a tottered weed of small worth held:
Then being asked, where all thy beauty lies,
Where all the treasure of thy lusty days,
To say within thine own deep-sunken eyes
Were an all-eating shame, and thriftless praise.
How much more praise deserved thy beauty's use,
If thou couldst answer, "This fair child of mine
Shall sum my count, and make my old excuse,"
Proving his beauty by succession thine.
This were to be new made when thou art old,
And see thy blood warm when thou feel'st it cold.

In this respect, another mapping of the sonnet becomes possible, as shown here; uppercase is used for suppositional or hypothetical events, and one should read down on the left, then on the right. Both the opening eight-line "octave" and the closing six-line "sestet" would then each exhibit a hypothetical middle answer (here in uppercase), framed by unhypothetical parts (statements of natural fact or transcendental judgment). To unfold a purely hypothetical future situation is a frequent enterprise in the sonnets, assuring the literally infinite possibility of their continuance. Whether anyone would ever actually ask the unmarried young man, in his fortieth year, where all his beauty and youth lie, scarcely matters. The extrapolation of mutually exclusive future alternatives is, after all, a guide for the present.

The words put in the young man's mouth, both indirectly *(To say . . .)* and directly *(This fair child of mine . . .)* are the first of a great many to be ascribed to him in the course of the sequence. Ascribing words to him or, later, to the "dark lady," is one way of building up a credible existential character for these *dramatis personae* over time.

The sonnet offers two motives for action. The first arises from a social morality dependent on others' response, in which one acts so as to avoid *shame*, or receive *praise*, or *make excuse*. The social morality of the body of the poem, however, is displaced in the closing couplet by an appeal to individual pleasure: the reward for reproducing and the source of self-worth is now narcissistic (warm blood, new self) rather than social, and, if not purely intrinsic, at least entirely self-referential.

This sonnet derives its aesthetic claim on us by the variousness of its suppositional moves. The variables (social / personal; right answer / wrong answer; favorable judgment / unfavorable judgment) make for those rapid conceptual shifts of which poetry is enamored. Are we to be in the social world of shame and praise or the world of narcissistic happiness? Of childlessness or reproduction? Of waste or of treasure? Of growing old or being new-made? As the alternative scenarios are expounded by the speaker, they are made, by their parallel constructions, palimpsests of each other rather than side-by-side pictures. What we see is a double exposure: the forty-year-old sunken-eyed bachelor feeling his blood cold in his veins superimposed on the forty-year-old proud father seeing his blood warm in his son. The poem exerts aesthetic power in compelling us to see both at once.

Finally, this sonnet introduces into the sequence those metaphors of seasonal destruction *(winters besiege thy brow)*, Time's delving *(dig deep*

trenches), and usury *(thy beauty's use)* that will be elaborated in other sonnets.

Couplet Tie: *were* (8, 13)
old (11, 13)
make [*made*] (11, 13)

3

LOoke in thy glaſſe and tell the face thou veweſt,
Now is the time that face ſhould forme an other,
Whoſe freſh repaire if now thou not reneweſt,
Thou doo'ſt beguile the world, vnbleſſe ſome mother.
For where is ſhe ſo faire whoſe vn-eard wombe
Diſdaines the tillage of thy husbandry?
Or who is he ſo fond will be the tombe,
Of his ſelfe loue to ſtop poſterity?
Thou art thy mothers glaſſe and ſhe in thee
Calls backe the louely Aprill of her prime,
So thou through windowes of thine age ſhalt ſee,
Diſpight of wrinkles this thy goulden time.
But if thou liue remembred not to be,
Die ſingle and thine Image dies with thee.

Look in thy glass and tell the face thou viewest,
Now is the time that face should form another,
Whose fresh repair if now thou not renewest,
Thou dost beguile the world, unbless some mother.
For where is she so fair whose uneared womb
Disdains the tillage of thy husbandry?
Or who is he so fond will be the tomb
Of his self-love to stop posterity?
Thou art thy mother's glass, and she in thee
Calls back the lovely April of her prime;
So thou through windows of thine age shalt see,
Despite of wrinkles, this thy golden time.
But if thou live rememb'red not to be,
Die single, and thine image dies with thee.

NO SINGLE repeated significant word links the couplet of sonnet 3 to the body of the poem; this absence is very unusual. Shakespeare is thus at pains to emphasize here the logical disjunction between the body of the sonnet and its couplet; and even a hasty reading shows that the sonnet falls logically into an exhortation to breed (in the quatrains) followed by the couplet-result—phrased almost as a death-curse—if the advice is not followed:

> *But if thou live rememb'red not to be,*
> *Die single, and thine image dies with thee.*

On the *But* of the couplet the whole poem appears to turn; the body of the poem would seem to be devoted to life, the couplet to death.

However, a second reading shows smaller "deaths" scattered throughout the poem; and the sonnet, instead of being mapped,

(1–12) [Reproduce]

[If not, die] (13–14)

can also be seen as a continuing offering of alternatives, both life-giving and death-dealing, as italicized in the diagram opposite. However, to divide the complicated second quatrain into the simple alternatives of husbandry/tomb does not do it justice. A better mapping of the second quatrain would show how each of its two rhetorical questions embodies both death (to *disdain husbandry*, to *stop posterity*) and life (since no woman, it is presumed, will be so mistaken as to scorn the young man, nor will any man be so fond as to make himself his own tomb). The second quatrain, then, is the "knot" thematizing in little the larger contrast between life and death, between the body of the sonnet and its couplet. In acting as a mini-thematizer of the whole, the second quatrain draws attention to the *dédoublement*, or aesthetic self-reflection, so frequent in the sonnets.

In this sonnet, the young man's face is compared to that of his mother; one might more properly expect a comparison with that of his father:

Alternatives Offered in Sonnet 3

	Life		*Death*	
2	*Tell face in glass* *time to make another*	If not	*beguile,* *unbless*	2
2	*fair womb . . . husbandry*	Or	*tomb . . . stop posterity*	2
4	*Mother sees self in you;* *you see self in son*	But if not	*die single,* *image dies*	2

[*Thou art thy father's glass, and he in thee*
Calls back the lovely April of his prime.]

It has been suggested (mistakenly, I think) that the young man's father must be dead (*you had a father*, sonnet 13), and that this fact explains the invoking of his mother as his model. It seems more likely that Shakespeare transforms the putative future bride-*mother* of line 4 into the actual *mother* of line 9 in order ostensibly to connect octave and sestet; the analogy with the mother's face is also relevant to the young man's possession of *a woman's face* (sonnet 20). The octave and sestet are connected not only by the word *mother*, but also by the word *glass (Look in thy glass . . . thy mother's glass)* and by the idea of regarding one's face in a mirror. To the idea of replication-by-breeding this sonnet adds the idea of replication-in-a-mirror, combining the two in a single image of dynastic representation *(Thou art thy mother's glass)*. The image is further complicated by the idea of an adult *see[ing] through windows* of his aged eyes his own child, the incarnate image of his youth. It is as though two forms of glass—the unsilvered one of the cornea permitting a mental representation, the silvered one of the mirror permitting a visual replication—were to confront each other. Already Shakespeare is classifying forms of representation, an interest reaching its apogee in the eye/heart sonnets.

Sonnet 3 reads like a series of sketches for future sonnets. *The lovely April of her prime* is a sketch for the seasonal poems, *the tomb* a foretaste of the *memento mori* sonnets; the chain of alliterative or prefix-iterated signifiers *(face, form, fresh, fair, fond; be-guile, be, be; un-bless, un-eared; re-pair, re-newest, re-memb'red)* and the graphic or phonetic puns *(till-**age**/**age**/im-**age**; **husband**-ry; g-**old**-en time)* betoken better efforts

CAPITULATING to paradox, Shakespeare produces a series of showy compound epithets characterizing the young man: *unthrifty loveliness*, *beauteous niggard*, *profitless usurer*. The three nouns, charged (like all nouns) with bearing essence, establish the beloved's beauty, his miserliness, and his (figurative) financial profligacy; the three adjectives, charged (like all adjectives) with bearing qualities, establish his (figurative) financial profligacy, his beauty, and his profitlessness. We are hard put to know whether he is a beauteous niggard or a niggardly beauty, and the very uncertainty as to essence and accident contributes to the confusion attending on any definition of the young man's ethical status.

The model of ethical value set up in the sonnet is drawn from the behavior of Nature, who benevolently circulates her currency: she *lends* . . . *bounteous largess*, or she *gives* it to the young man for him to *give* in turn; *being frank*, nature *lends* to those who are *free*, and her legacy is to be freely bequeathed to others. The young man's unacceptable behavior is both usurious and profitless; he unjustly hoards his beauty *unused* and *spends* it on himself. Like an unprofitable steward, he cannot leave an *acceptable audit*, and he has no *executors*. The speaker's "innocent" introduction of legal and banking language, especially when he speaks about Nature's loans, suggests that he can appeal to the young man only in the contaminated language the young man understands—the language of social, not natural, exchange.

This sonnet is a homily, and behind its vocatives, its hectoring questions, and its final proposing of strict alternatives for choice, lies the religious genre of the reproach of the cleric to the sinner. But of course true homiletic vocatives ("O miserable sinner") would not melt into the relenting dazzled oxymorons of *unthrifty loveliness* and *beauteous niggard*. Only the third vocative, *profitless usurer*, is a true homiletic vocative-to-the-sinner, in which both essence *and* accident are reproved. In this poem, homily has been secularized. Not God, with the divine command "Increase and multiply" as in sonnet 1, but rather organic Nature here provides the motive for reproduction; and the speaker's own ethical double standard in judging the "sinner" is visible in the first two vocatives of perplexed adoration and in the reference to "thy sweet self"—a double stan-

dard unthinkable in a priest. The recommended normative behavior of this secularized homily is not even ethically derived: it is drawn partly from the biologically normative circulation of life (visible in Nature's actions) and partly from the self-serving prudential counsel of worldliness (which advises an *acceptable audit*).

This sonnet, like others appearing early in the sequence, forecasts problems to come. The increasingly uncomfortable attempts of the speaker to sort out his own principles (and attendant questions both ethical and aesthetic) will motivate, psychologically speaking, many future sonnets. The sequence will contain other "homilies," and more interesting ones (such as sonnet 129). The boy's autoerotic *traffic with [himself] alone* is an early parody of the many true reciprocities envisaged in the sequence (those between mother and child, father and son, lover and beloved, poet and subject of celebration, friend and friend). The formal mark of reciprocity here is the reflexive verb-sequence *having traffic with thy self alone thou dost deceive thy sweet self of thyself*, an "enacting" process bettered in later sonnets. The rhyme *use-abuse* will turn up later, as will the subject of usury; and the *audit* will recur in the last of the sonnets to the young man (126), where it must be *answered* with Nature's surrendering of the young man to Time.

The aesthetic value proposed here is a rigid isomorphism (each of the four hectoring questions occupies two lines, and three of the questions use the same phrase, *why dost thou*). In the *Sonnets*, Shakespeare varies between being pleased with the idea of isomorphism (see, e.g., the repeated one-line indictments in 66, *Tired with all these*) and being driven by it to cunning variations within it; here, after an almost perfect isomorphism in the first three questions, to wit:

Adjective + noun, *why dost thou* verb — *abuse*, *spend*, *use*

he turns impatiently in the fourth question (lines 11–12) to a different form, omitting the vocative and asking *how* and *what* instead of *why*, but retaining still the two-line frame. The scattering of isomorphic questions through the three quatrains of the sonnet (1–2; 5–6; 7–8; 11–12) means that in its rhetorical structure this sonnet is distributively "Shakespearean" rather than contrastively "Italian"; but the "Italian" residue remains present in the fact that the first three "perfectly" isomorphic questions, which occur in the octave, have to do with spending, whereas the last ques-

tion, which occurs in the sestet, has to do with nature's calling in her accounts—an audit instead of an expenditure. The "Shakespearean" distributed syntactic structure of the four questions, then, offers itself against the "Italian" two-part thematic structure of expense and audit; and one of the perpetual sources of aesthetic play in the sonnets is precisely this offer, to the attentive reader, of two sonnets in one. The anomalies in phrasing and content of the fourth question disturb the very syntactic isomorphism which seems at first to be the structuring plot of the poem—which we at last see to be a double plot in which repetitive querying reproach for spending meets profligacy finally called to account. The double plot is mimed in the macaronic pun on ***use***/*exec**utor*** in line 14 (representing a satisfactory audit) versus the other appearances of evil *use*, *abuse*, *unused*, and *usurer*.

Couplet Tie: *beauty* [*-'s*], [*beauteous*] (2, 5, 13)
use (7, 14), *abuse* (5), *usurer* (7), *unused* (13), *usèd*, *exec**utor*** (14)
live [*-s*] (8, 14)

5

THoſe howers that with gentle worke did frame,
The louely gaze where euery eye doth dwell
Will play the tirants to the very ſame,
And that vnfaire which fairely doth excell:
For ..euer reſting time leads Summer on,
To hidious winter and confounds him there,
Sap checkt with froſt and luſtie leau's quite gon.
Beauty ore-ſnow'd and barenes euery where,
Then were not ſummers diſtillation left
A liquid priſoner pent in walls of glaſſe,
Beauties effect with beauty were bereft,
Nor it nor noe remembrance what it was.
But flowers diſtil d though they with winter meete,
Leeſe but their ſhow,their ſubſtance ſtill liues ſweet.

Those hours that with gentle work did frame
The lovely gaze where every eye doth dwell
Will play the tyrants to the very same,
And that unfair which fairly doth excel;
For never-resting time leads summer on
To hideous winter and confounds him there,
Sap checked with frost and lusty leaves quite gone,
Beauty o'ersnowed and bareness every where:
Then were not summer's distillation left
A liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass,
Beauty's effect with beauty were bereft,
Nor it nor no remembrance what it was.
But flowers distilled, though they with winter meet,
Leese but their show; their substance still lives sweet.

THIS beautiful sonnet is the first to exploit the powerful seasonal metaphor which will animate other sonnets like 73 *(That time of year)* and 97 *(How like a winter)*, setting the inexorable destructions of time against an apparently available defense here named "distillation." Sonnet 5 is also the first impersonal sonnet, deliberately eschewing any personal pronouns *(I, you, we);* in this respect it may be compared with 129 *(Th'expense of spirit)*. Wholly impersonal sonnets are very rare in the sequence, and are all the more telling when they appear, since the *Sonnets* is a volume dominated by personal shifters, especially by *thou*, *you*, and *I*. ("Shifters" are pronouns whose reference depends on the person uttering them.)

Sonnet 5 experiments with falling silent before it has reached its logical end in an expected hortatory direct address (which is postponed to the beginning of the linked sonnet 6). One may choose to regard sonnets 5 and 6 as a single, logically complete, poem; but since it is true that 5 is certainly a complete poem in itself, I prefer to see it as a poem requiring from its reader a silent extrapolation of its syllogistic warning logic into completion-by-exhortation, thereby generating sonnet 6. Let me sketch it, and the hortatory extrapolation (in brackets) that it calls for:

1. The same hours that framed a lovely gaze will unfair it,
2. (For time leads summer on to winter and its destructions):
3. Then were not summer's distillation left, beauty would cease to exist;
4. But flowers distilled keep their substance (if not their show) after winter has come.

[5.] [So you, too, must be distilled before your winter comes.]

The fifth of my units above, missing in the poem, makes explicit, in vocative address, the parallel that lies implicit in the threatening exemplum of the flower. This missing fifth unit becomes the opening of sonnet 6:

> *Then let not winter's ragged hand deface*
> *In thee thy summer ere thou be distilled:*
> *Make sweet some vial.*

The aesthetic advantage to sonnet 5 of *not* ending with the explicit direct address is that of closing with metaphor rather than with literal biological

as a figure for human life (which is not reborn), the poem exhibits no upward slope in seasonal change. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that nothing can be said to happen in a poem which is not there suggested. If *summer is confounded in hideous winter*, one is not permitted to add, irrelevantly, "But can spring be far behind?" If the poet had wanted to provoke such an extrapolation, he would by some means have suggested it. Here, by the insistence on instrumental distillation as the *only* possible preserving of beauty, he explicitly forbids any recourse to the idea of a recurring organic spring. Though *nature* is in fact cyclical, not all metaphorical *uses* of nature in poetry invoke its cyclicity, not by any means. Context controls the extent of reference, both here and, e.g., in sonnet 73.

The splendidly achieved aesthetic shape of sonnet 5 is conferred by the speaker's stereoptical comprehension (with "divining eyes") of past, present, and future time in one gaze. Schematically, the shape of the poem looks like that shown in the diagram below.

As the apparently inexorable prophecy of future destruction in lines 1–8 yields to a hypothesis of an alternate future, the speaker's stereoptical gaze turns out to be also an optative one, with an optimistic shadow-future glimmering beyond his pessimistic prediction in Q_2.

Shakespeare's description in Q_3 of the predicted future without distillation is radically stripped of metaphor, stripped of anything but that *bareness everywhere* which it enacts. If distillation were not to occur,

> *Beauty's effect with beauty were bereft,*
> *Nor it nor no remembrance what it was.*

The almost total semantic bleakness of that empty language is yet ornamented by the alliteration and word-repetition characteristic of almost all the *Sonnets*.

The emptiness is at last countered and redeemed by the mimetic play of *di**still**ed* / ***still** lives* in the couplet, and by the sonnet's lingering liquid close on the assertion that beauty's *substance still lives sweet*. But this assurance is won only by the principled sacrifice of the sentimental—with respect to human beings—hope for the natural rebirth of a loved form. Distillation destroys form, says the speaker, asserting the nonmimetic nature of even "mimetic" art. *Show* cannot be preserved, but *substance* can—a hope that successive sonnets will continue to explore.

Aesthetic Shape of Sonnet 5

Time (lines 1–8)

Past	*Present*	*Future*
hours did frame gaze	lovely gaze where every eye doth dwell	hours will play tyrants
	gaze fairly excels	hours will unfair gaze
[spring]	summer	hideous winter summer confounded
sap	sap	frost checks sap
lusty leaves	leaves	leaves gone
beauty	beauty	o'ersnowed
vegetation	vegetation	bareness every where

Beauty's Future (lines 9–14)

	Future without distillation	*Future with distillation*
	beauty bereft	summer's distillation
	beauty's effect bereft as well	beauty's effect remains
	no remembrance	remembrance of beauty
	lost show	living substance
		sweet [odor]

Couplet Tie: *winter* (6, 13)
distillation/distilled/still (9, 13, 14)

6

THen let not winters wragged hand deface,
In thee thy ſummer ere thou be diſtil'd:
Make ſweet ſome viall;treaſure thou ſome place,
With beautits treaſure ere it be ſelfe kil'd:
That vſe is not forbidden vſery,
Which happies thoſe that pay the willing lone;
That's for thy ſelfe to breed an other thee,
Or ten times happier be it ten for one,
Ten times thy ſelfe were happier then thou art,
If ten of thine ten times refigur'd thee,
Then what could death doe if thou ſhould'ſt depart,
Leauing thee liuing in poſterity?
Be not ſelfe-wild for thou art much too faire,
To be deaths conqueſt and make wormes thine heire.

Then let not winter's ragged hand deface
In thee thy summer ere thou be distilled:
Make sweet some vial; treasure thou some place
With beauty's treasure ere it be self-killed:
That use is not forbidden usury
Which happies those that pay the willing loan;
That's for thyself to breed another thee,
Or ten times happier be it ten for one;
Ten times thyself were happier than thou art,
If ten of thine ten times refigured thee:
Then what could death do if thou shouldst depart,
Leaving thee living in posterity?
Be not self-willed, for thou art much too fair
To be death's conquest and make worms thine heir.

SONNET 6 takes its origin directly from 5, and begins by completing the analogy between natural summer and a human summer, evoking the prospect of the de-facing of the lovely gaze by the hand of winter. (The odd *ragged hand* of winter may be partially explained by the fact that in the Quarto spelling, *ragged* and *winter* visually alliterate: ***w**inters **w**ragged hand*.) However, 6 then departs entirely from the organic ground of distillation from nature to take up the inorganic metaphor of treasure. This strange move (repeated in sonnet 65) is perhaps explicable here by the difficulty of manipulating perfume into any interesting activity, whereas treasure—as a metaphor for the semen that can invisibly act (*treasure*, verb) to create a child (*treasure*, noun)—*can* be put to use, and (literally) is, in the enacting of money's breeding money in lines 5–10. *Happies, happier, happier*, goes the breeding; forbid*den*, *ten*, *ten*, *ten*, *ten*, *ten; times, times; leaving, living.*

In this rather labored conceit of interest-bearing funds, a play—deliberately situated in the tenth line—on a posterity of *ten* producing a posterity of *ten* times that number reveals the degree to which Shakespeare could be entranced by fancifulness. The poem's opposed alternatives—make sweet some vial or make worms thine heir; make a willing loan or be self-willed; be distilled or be self-killed—are not very interesting, and the climax *Then what could death do* (had you ensured your posterity) is less than convincing.

These are the projections of interest-production:

another thee
ten for one
ten times thyself
ten of thine ten times refigured thee.

They "breed" the young man in an astonishing growth of an economic base; Shakespeare here reverses the one-in-ten rate of highest permitted interest, as Kerrigan suggests. This growth is permitted because the young mother is happy, as is posterity, to pay the young man back in biological interest—children. These operations of the fancy will not detain

Shakespeare long. The formal scheme, frequently found in homily, frames positive exhortations (lines 3–12) with opening and closing negative brackets *Let not* (1–2) and *Be not* (13–14)—a firm if uninventive structure.

Couplet Tie: *make* (3, 14)
will [*-ing*] [*-ed*] (6, 13)
death [*-'s*] (11, 14)

finally look away. After every two lines about the sun (the word *sun* is never, for reasons we shall come to, used in the poem) there are two lines about LOOKS. Finally, the witty couplet, with its quick bolthole pun *(son)*, offers a last-minute escape from the doom of solar analogy (by which a childless man would set, like the sun, and be found by onlookers to be of no social consequence). The poem can be mapped as shown in the diagram.

There are some odd words in the poem—among them *fore duteous* and *tract*—which beg for explanation. It becomes evident, as one reads the sonnets, that as Shakespeare begins to follow out a given verbal scheme, the constraints on language grow as the sonnet in question progresses to its end. Nothing in the requirements of meaning or sound alone would have prevented Shakespeare from writing:

> The eyes [***once***] duteous now converted are
> From his low [***path***] and look another way.

Neither *fore* nor *tract* can be explained by semantic, alliterative, or phonetic needs. At the risk of seeming overingenious, I can only suggest that the golden sun generates, throughout the sonnet, French puns on *or:* ***or****ient*, *ad****or****e*, *m****or****tal*, and—our point of origin—***for****e;* and that the central image of the sun's ***car*** generates anagrammatically scrambled cars elsewhere: in *gra****c****ious*, *sa****cr****ed*, and—our point of origin—***tract***. The aging of the sun in the poem seems to generate *hom****age***, ***age***, *g****old****en pilgrim****age***, and (once again) ***age;*** and the long and (to the reader, intolerable) suppression of the word ***sun*** of course makes the word ***son***, when it finally leaps off the page as the closing word, entirely inevitable.

The rigid left-right optical symmetry of the poem, as the sun visible in the "left" half of each quatrain is mirrored by the LOOKS on the "right" (explaining why the KEY WORD appears always in the second half of each member), perhaps suggested some of the mirror-resembling acts with words. I do not believe anagrams to be common in the *Sonnets*, but neither do I believe they were beneath Shakespeare's interest (see 20 for *hue/hew*, another example). The degree of verbal fancifulness in the sonnets to the young man lessens as the subsequence advances and imagination supervenes on mechanical fancy. (This is perhaps one reason for believing that most of the sonnets in this initial subsequence were composed in the order in which they appear, even if later revised.)

Sonnet 7 has little to recommend it, imaginatively; both the conceit of the sun's predictable day-long *jour*-ney (another French pun) and the con-

ceit of the fall of favorites from public respect are well-worn topics. It was perhaps because his topics here were so entirely conventional that Shakespeare looked to word-games to put him on his mettle in composing the poem. He certainly enjoyed the obstacle of shaping his four parts around a single KEY WORD enough to propose it to himself later many times.

KEY WORD: LOOK [-S] [unLOOKed]

Couplet Tie: *look* [*-s*] [*un**look**ed*] (4, 7, 12, 14)

8

MVſick to heare,why hear'ſt thou muſick ſadly,
Sweets with ſweets warre not , ioy delights in ioy:
Why lou'ſt thou that which thou receauſt not gladly,
Or elſe receau'ſt with pleaſure thine annoy?
If the true concord of well tuned ſounds,
By vnions married do offend thine eare,
They do but ſweetly chide thee, who confounds
In ſingleneſſe the parts that thou ſhould'ſt beare:
Marke how one ſtring ſweet husband to an other,
Strikes each in each by mutuall ordering;
Reſembling ſier,and child, and happy mother,
Who all in one,one pleaſing note do ſing:
Whoſe ſpeechleſſe ſong being many,ſeeming one,
Sings this to thee thou ſingle wilt proue none.

Music to hear, why hear'st thou music sadly?
Sweets with sweets war not, joy delights in joy:
Why lov'st thou that which thou receiv'st not gladly,
Or else receiv'st with pleasure thine annoy?
If the true concord of well-tunèd sounds
By unions married do offend thine ear,
They do but sweetly chide thee, who confounds
In singleness the parts that thou shouldst bear;
Mark how one string, sweet husband to another,
Strikes each in each by mutual ordering;
Resembling sire, and child, and happy mother,
Who all in one, one pleasing note do sing;
Whose speechless song being many, seeming one,
Sings this to thee, "Thou single wilt prove none."

IT IS NOT Shakespeare's use of the commonplace conceit *single life : married life : : single string : consort* (see Evans on its use in *Arcadia*, etc.) that here requires comment, but rather the increasingly fantastic prolongation of this commonplace through the last ten lines of the sonnet. The conceit is made the more fantastic by being elaborated not in solitary meditation or sustained public oratorical argument (where a conceit can easily take on a growth disproportionate to its origins), but rather in the intimate address of one person to another.

The pretext for the conceit is the young man's uneasiness as he listens to sweet music. This untoward response gives Shakespeare the opportunity (more stringently practiced in sonnet 40) to give his speaker balanced half-lines enacting the figure of opposition. I show in parentheses the number of syllables per half-line:

Music to hear (4)	*why hear'st thou music sadly?* (7)
Sweets with sweets war not (5)	*joy delights in joy* (5)
Why lov'st thou that (4)	*which thou receiv'st not gladly* (7)
Or else receiv'st with pleasure (7)	*thine annoy?* (3)

It is clear that Shakespeare is here intent on deliberate caesural variation (which would be evident even if my placing of the caesura were slightly modified). The rocky disequilibrium of this quatrain could be charted metrically in the initial trochees of the first two (or three) lines and in the spondees of *sweets war not;* or it could be shown phonetically in the cacophony of *lov**st th**ou th**at wh**ich th**ou rece**iv'st***, etc. The metrical and phonetic disequilibrium is meant to enact the dis-ease of bachelorhood. By contrast, the family harmony which would exist were the young man to marry and beget a child generates the flurry of puns on harmonic unison, the graphic anagram of "unions": *t**un**èd*, ***union**s*, ***one** string, all in **one, one** pleasing note, seeming **one***. Bachelorhood contrasted with marriage generates the contrastive monodic pun on ***singl**e* and ***sing** (**sing**leness, do **sing**, **song**, **sing**s, **sing**le)*. A fundamental appeal wants to turn the young man's *not* (line 2) to a *note* (line 12).

The "invention" at work in the elaborate conceit of harmony (lines 5–14) is the decision to divide music into its three parts: its *sounds* or aural effect (lines 5–8); its *strings* or medium (lines 9–12); and its *song* or content

(lines 13–14). This sort of logical division of a single entity into multiple (and therefore elaboratable) aspects is one of Shakespeare's most common inventive moves, widely shared with his contemporaries and borrowed of course from commonplace logical training. (For Shakespeare's most searching critique of the belief that everything can be classified by aspectual definition into parts, see sonnet 129.) Here, although the division of music into sounds, strings, and song is an intrinsically and materially rational one, the insistently developed conceit of married (and childbearing) strings is not. Shakespeare's procedure thus foregrounds the extent to which interpretation of a phenomenon (here, music) is determined by the context in which it is investigated. Were it not for the speaker's wish (whether commissioned or not) to incite the young man to marry, he would scarcely continue to insist, when hearing music, on the conceit of "married" sounds. As it is, his preexisting concern shapes his analysis of the aspects of music into his conceit. As sounds, the ingredients of music are simply *married*. As strings, one first becomes *sweet husband to another* and, as another instrument is added, they resemble *sire, and child, and happy mother* (where the happiness of the "mother" and the presence of the "child" are equally preposterous). Finally, as song, they are "lent" by the speaker a putative message for their literally *speechless* song, a message which taunts the young man for his nullity ("one," being *single*, cannot be a *number*, the concept "number" being regarded as solely plural). The projection of human motive onto the sounds *(They do but sweetly chide thee)* is a step up in invention from the young man's being (apparently irrationally but really understandably) annoyed by their "married" presence; and the projection into the sounds of chiding words (line 14)—words which, we are given to understand, they have been singing to the young man from the very beginning, causing his sadness and "annoy"—is a further escalation of invention.

The original dramatic situation of paradox (lines 1–4), in which sweets meet sweets sadly, seems more successfully worked than the rather tortured subsequent explanatory conceit. However, the resolution of many parts in one unison / *(being many, seeming one)* is of obvious relevance as an aesthetic principle for the Shakespearean sonnet, which, because of its four discrete parts, runs an inherently greater risk of disunity than does the Italian sonnet.

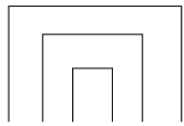
The assumed preestablished harmony between music and a harmoniously ordered human soul exists in the young man; he loves music, and normally receives pleasure from hearing it. Shakespeare (characteristically) gives several verbal formulations of reciprocity to the philosophical dissonance which provokes the sonnet:

9

IS it for feare to wet a widdowes eye,
That thou conſum'ſt thy ſelfe in ſingle life?
Ah;if thou iſſuleſſe ſhalt hap to die,
The world will waile thee like a makeleſſe wife,
The world wilbe thy widdow and ſtill weepe,
That thou no forme of thee haſt left behind,
When euery priuat widdow well may keepe,
By childrens eyes,her husbands ſhape in minde:
Looke what an vnthrift in the world doth ſpend
Shifts but his place,for ſtill the world inioyes it
But beauties waſte, hath in the world an end,
And kept vnvſde the vſer ſo deſtroyes it:
No loue toward others in that boſome ſits
That on himſelfe ſuch murdrous ſhame commits.

Is it for fear to wet a widow's eye
That thou consum'st thyself in single life?
Ah! if thou issueless shalt hap to die,
The world will wail thee like a makeless wife,
The world will be thy widow and still weep,
That thou no form of thee hast left behind,
When every private widow well may keep,
By children's eyes, her husband's shape in mind:
Look what an unthrift in the world doth spend
Shifts but his place, for still the world enjoys it,
But beauty's waste hath in the world an end,
And kept unused, the user so destroys it:
    No love toward others in that bosom sits
    That on himself such murd'rous shame commits.

THIS "Fantasy on the Letter W" (as it could be entitled) arises, I believe, from Shakespeare's fascinated observation of the shape of the word *widdow* (the Quarto spelling):



The initial and final *w*'s of *widdow* are mirror images of each other, and its middle letter is repeated—*dd*—in self-identity. The only letters in the alphabet which are mirror images of themselves are (roughly speaking, and disregarding serifs) *i*, *m*, *o*, *u*, *v*, *w*, and *x*. A word having *i*, *o*, *u*, *v*, or *x* both fore and aft is almost impossible to find, unless it is a proper name, an invented word, or slang (e.g., *Ubu*, *Xerox*, or *obbo* [for "observation," as in the idiom "keeping obbo"]). A word with a mirror-letter fore and aft and a middle repeated letter is even harder to find. The word *willow* (which Shakespeare uses in *Othello*) is another one of the rare natural instances of almost perfect symmetry. Shakespeare, delighted with the properties of the word *widdow*, and with the fact that *w* is a double *u* (and that *v* is internally printed *u*, and v is used for initial *u* in Elizabethan printing), sets off in a flurry of *w*'s, *u*'s, and *v*'s. Words containing more or less symmetrical parts like *issulesse* and *makelesse* and *unused* and *bosome* arise in the train of *widdow*. The poem needs to be read in the Quarto spelling, since in modern spelling some of the symmetries disappear (compare *widow* and *widdow*, *issueless and issulesse*). I have put the *w*'s, letters that would be *v*'s in modern spelling, and *u*'s in boldface; it will be seen that every line has at least one of these, and most lines have several:

Is it for feare to **w***et a* **w***iddo***w***es eye,*
*That tho***u** *cons***u***m'st thy selfe in single life?*
*Ah; if tho***u** *iss***u***lesse shalt hap to die,*
The **w***orld* **w***ill* **w***aile thee like a makelesse* **w***ife,*
The **w***orld* **w***ilbe thy* **w***iddo***w** *and still* **w***eepe,*

That thou no forme of thee hast left behind,
When euery priuat widdow well may keepe,
By childrens eyes, her husbands shape in minde:
Looke what an vnthrift in the world doth spend
Shifts but his place, for still the world inioyes it
But beauties waste hath in the world an end,
And kept vnvsde the vser so destroyes it:
No loue toward others in that bosome sits
That on himselfe such murdrous shame commits.

Whatever the charms of mirror-image letters and symmetrical words, the poem has to mean something too, and has to have a general shape. Categories familiar in the age of Shakespeare have now often fallen into desuetude; it has not, I think, been recognized that the shape of this sonnet depends on the contrast between a *sin of omission* (octave) and a *sin of commission* (sestet). This theological contrast (see the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1967, *s.v.* "Omission") is foregrounded by the octave-words of negativity or absence (issue*less*, make*less*, *no form*) contrasted with sestet-words implying action *(spend*, *waste*, *user*, *destroys*, *murd'rous*, *commits)*. The change in metaphor from the octave (a husband who leaves his widow childless) to the sestet (a hoarder who destroys beauty and murders himself) reinforces the distinction between omission and commission, as does the change from the octave's second-person address *(thou consum'st thyself)* to the sestet's third-person examples *(an unthrift . . . the user . . . on himself)*. In sonnet 9, with its many differences demarcating octave from sestet, Shakespeare comes as close as he ever does to approximating the internal form of the Italian sonnet.

The sonnet at first presumes a *love toward others* (mentioned in line 13) as a natural quality in the young man, preposterously suggesting that he may have chosen to refrain from marriage so as not to make his future widow unhappy if he dies. One can read this as a reply sonnet:

Young Man: I'm not going to marry: how could I forgive myself if I were to die and leave my wife a widow? I love others too much to do that to her.

Speaker: Is it really for fear of grieving your widow that you don't marry? *Is* it really love of others? Whether or not you leave a widow, the whole world will mourn your death, so you'll be grieving people by your death whether you're married or not. *No love toward others* sits in your bosom, because self-love (according to the commandment to

love others as yourself) has to precede love of others, and you commit murder[-ous shame] on yourself.

The "sin of omission" in the octave *(thou consum'st thyself)* advances toward the "sin of commission" in the couplet (the man refusing marriage *commits murd'rous shame on himself*) via the odd modulatory metaphor of circulating capital in Q_3. Money, because it is a medium of exchange, is always afloat in society as a value. But beauty—another form of social capital—cannot be transferred, and can be spent only by its owner. Shakespeare's interesting perception of the comparability of different forms of social capital, tangible (money) and intangible (beauty), brings them together only to divide them: [*use*]/[*money*]/*enjoy* ≠ *unuse/beauty/destroy*, a difference foregrounded by the rhyme *enjoys it / destroys it.*

Couplet Tie: *no* (6, 13). Normally, such a small and insignificant word would not "count" as a Couplet Tie. However, since one of the themes of the sonnet is omission, the adjective *no* is a strongly thematic word. Also, in its two occurrences it appears in the same sort of phrase (No X + preposition + personal pronoun)—*no form of thee* (6) and *no love toward others* (13), so that the word *no* becomes mnemonically foregrounded by patterning.

10

FOr ſhame deny that thou bear'ſt loue to any
Who for thy ſelfe art ſo vnprouident
Graunt if thou wilt, thou art belou'd of many,
But that thou none lou'ſt is moſt euident:
For thou art ſo poſſeſt with murdrous hate,
That gainſt thy ſelfe thou ſtickſt not to conſpire,
Seeking that beautious roofe to ruinate
Which to repaire ſhould be thy chiefe deſire:
O change thy thought, that I may change my minde,
Shall hate be fairer log'd then gentle loue?
Be as thy preſence is gracious and kind,
Or to thy ſelfe at leaſt kind harted proue,
Make thee an other ſelfe for loue of me,
That beauty ſtill may liue in thine or thee.

For shame deny that thou bear'st love to any,
Who for thy self art so unprovident.
Grant, if thou wilt, thou art beloved of many,
But that thou none lov'st is most evident;
For thou art so possessed with murd'rous hate,
That 'gainst thy self thou stick'st not to conspire,
Seeking that beauteous roof to ruinate
Which to repair should be thy chief desire:
O change thy thought, that I may change my mind!
Shall hate be fairer lodged than gentle love?
Be as thy presence is, gracious and kind,
Or to thy self at least kind-hearted prove:
Make thee another self for love of me,
That beauty still may live in thine or thee.