

## Stylistic Approach to Shakespeare's Sonnets 1-5

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### ABSTRACT

Shakespeare's sonnets are poetic and philosophical examination of some foibles in the persona who refuses to give birth to children probably because of the need to preserve her beauty. The persona is considered to be male but all indications show that he is actually a female. The thrust of the paper is to deconstruct the poems by examining the language of the poet in order to achieve the thematic preoccupations of the poet. This study therefore is an attempt at applying stylistics to the study of the poems in order to unveil the effects that the choice of words have on the subject matter.

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### Introduction

Poetry is a genre of literature that students find difficult to understand over the years. The difficulty may be traced to the cryptic nature of the language of poetry that makes it inaccessible to readers. The desire to make the sonnets of William Shakespeare clearer to secondary school students and undergraduates informs this study. The themes and subject matters of sonnets 1-5 are considered in the study through attention to the language of the poet.

William Shakespeare wrote his works in English Language. He lived between 1564 and 1616. He was a potent voice in the era known as the Renaissance. He wrote some sonnets that amply reflected the socio-political contradictions of that period in England. The study sought, therefore to unravel the subject matter of sonnets 1 — 5 through conscious attention to the language of the poet.

Language has been a means of communication over the years. From the dawn of time, language has remained a potent means of communication. It is the instrument through which landmarks are recorded. Poetry and other disciplines rely greatly on language. It is debatable whether there could be development without language.

However, the language of poetry has been a source of concern to students and critics over the years. This source of concern centres on the abstract nature of the language of poetry. William Shakespeare's poems are adjudged difficult as a result of the language and the need to transcend the level of ordinary communicative usage to the individualised world of the poet. Secondary school students and undergraduates alike, therefore, find these poems difficult to understand.

### Definition of Terms

*The Norton Anthology of Poetry* (1997) defines "a poem as a composition written for performance by the human voice" (1103). W. H. Auden is preoccupied with style above the intentions in any poem and declares in his reference to poetry: "All my life I have been more interested in technique than anything else (1103)". Eliot, T. S. (1997) considers music to be central to the composition and reading of poetry: "*The conscious problem with which one is concerned in the actual writing are more those of a quasi-musical nature, in the arrangement of metric and pattern: than of a conscious exposition of ideas*" (1103).

Eliot's exposition about the place of music above ideas exonerates poets from what Nashe(1589) considers being a mere amplification of tales in poetry. Therefore, some poems are to be enjoyed for their musicality and others for their tales. Above all, poetry is a representation of both ideas and music, laced with a high degree of imagination in the quest to address the subject matter. A poem can be studied and enjoyed for the facts it contains, or for its formal characteristics, or for the meaning of the words, or for their derivation, or

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for its moral (if it contains a perceptible moral, or for its allusions, (if there are any), or it could be treated as an historical document (if it has any value of that kind), or it could be correlated with some other subjects of instruction, or it could be used as a grammatical exercise, or it could be compared with a standard-given marks, so to speak-or it could be committed to memory and could be enjoyed for pleasure as opined by Wordsworth. A poem can also be an ideological construct that seeks a political course and could also be revolutionary as e. e. cummings represents.

Poetry is a metrical composition; the art of uniting pleasure with truth by calling imagination with the help of reason, the essence is invention—Samuel Johnson. Other definitions of poetry will also be considered in order to acquaint students with other peculiarities of poetry. According to Wordsworth, poetry is an emotion recollected in a moment of tranquillity.

A genre can be defined either by the formal properties of the work, or by its subject matter. Thus, a poem is held to be a sonnet if it is fourteen-line long, while, on the other hand, it is described as an elegy if it speaks of the death of a loved or admired person. In fact, neither form nor subject matter alone will usually be sufficient to define a genre. So, by convention, a sonnet is a poem about love; while the word “elegiac” originally denoted not a concern with death, but a specific Greek poetic metre. For all these difficulties of definition, however, genre is among the most enduring of literary concepts, introduced by the Greek philosopher Aristotle and now enjoying yet another revival in contemporary literary criticism. It reflects a deep urge, in writers and readers, to classify literary works, and it is the difficulty of performing such classification that has kept the term alive.

Fergusson (1997) classifies poetry into three different categories; epics, dramatic and lyrical poems. Among these categories may be found the following sub-genres: ballad, burlesque, elegy, ode, sonnet, farce, lyric and limerick. No doubt, therefore, that different poets find different means of expressing their ideas through any of the sub-genres. Poetry, according to Thomas Nashe (1589) in Wilson (1964) is a pack of lies that have been invented by the makeshifts in the quest for gains (191).

Nashe's castigation of poetry as an emphasis on sound at the expense of the content may not be a true reflection of poetry. The truth is that a poem may appeal to the readers through an exploration of diverse instruments inherent in the poem. Thus, a poem may be a meeting point of sound, history, myth, reality and socio-political contradictions in the society. Nashe's emphasis on sound remains a minute examination of the different levels of relevance of poetry.

This study adopts the definition of Samuel Johnson, which is a reflection of sound, imagination, truth, pleasure and a lucid reasoning. It is thus difficult to draw a line of demarcation between poetry and philosophy. This difficulty arises as a result of the abstract nature of both fields of human endeavour. Rather than an outright dismissal of poetry as an exhibition of both “sound and fury, signifying nothing” poetry remains the only recourse left for a man of letters whose preoccupation is the search for knowledge beyond the surface.

It is significant that the exploration of the metrical form of poetry was a convention that characterized a particular era. The time was when metre was celebrated. Revolutionary poets, today, no longer pay attention to such details. From the standpoint of Nashe, poems contain insignificant grains of truths, which are further tainted by tales. Thus poems are a mixture of truth and lies (191).

What Nashe castigates as falsehood in poetry is that ingredient of creativity that Samuel Johnson (1965) refers to as ‘pleasure’

*Poetry is a metrical composition; the art of uniting pleasure  
with truth, by calling imagination with the help of reason;  
the essence is invention. (Johnson, 1965: 15)*

Poetry, as a form through which a rhythmic expression is given to the imaginative and concrete manifestations of the thought process, has different phases. The original form of poetry followed Samuel Johnson's delimitation. In this regard, attention is paid to metre, sound, and sound effects. The other form is considered the revolutionary counterpart. In this wise, the tradition that Aristotle (1957) established in the poetics was discarded. Attention was paid to the message without any conscious effort to enforce any rule. A

potent voice in this regard was e. e. cummings (note the peculiar way of writing his name in outright disregard for the rules of grammar.)

The sonnet is derived from an Italian word 'sonnetto' meaning a little sound or song. It consists of fourteen lines, usually in iambic pentameters, with considerable variation in rhyme scheme. Three basic forms are found in the sonnet. They are the petrarchal form, the Spenserian form and the Shakespearian form. The petrarchal form comprises an octave, rhyming: abbaabba and a sestet that rhymes cdecde. The Spenserian form has three quatrains and a couplet that rhymes ababcdcd, efef, gg. Philip Sidney's sonnet entitled: *Astrophel and Stella* was the first known sonnet ever published. Daniel's *Delia* Lodge's *Phyllis*, Constable *Diana*, Drayton's *Idea's Mirror* and Spenser's *Amoretti* later followed.

Imputed to poetry is a regular pattern of rhyme, alliteration or a combination of these. An employment of figurative language that may break the convention of ordinary language and its usage may characterise poetry and thus make it a significant version of the usage of language. The desire to achieve communicative excellence and amuse the readers makes the employment of the language unique. Unlike the modern versions of poetry, metre was a significant trait that distinguished poetry from prose in the days of old.

Poets are unique in their employment of language. This may be seen in the arrangement of the words, lines and stanzas. Language, therefore, becomes a tool, an amenable one for that matter that poets may bend in the quest for an individualised world. This world may not be reached except salient images are decoded. Thus, a poetic licence is usually associated with poets as a result of the fact that they may break the rules of grammar with impunity.

Shakespeare brought the English Language to an enviable height. His use of language amazed other users of the language especially as he coined metaphors from diverse areas of human endeavours. This may amount to a manipulation of the language through the creative ingredients that were available to him.

Poetry relies greatly on language and other poetic devices to achieve the intention of the poet through a representation of the thematic preoccupation that may excite the readers. This study involves an examination of the language of Shakespeare in sonnets 1-5. The language of these poems is characterised by excellent arrangement of lexical items, elegance in the use of signs and images, as well as metaphoric deployment of words from diverse disciplines.

Stylistics is a critical model through which a work of art may be examined. It dwells on the examination of the language as it yields the intended meanings of the poem. In stylistics, the style that makes the poet unique is examined. This endeavour may also lead to an analysis of the creative ingredients that may be achieved through language or its domestication.

'The aim of stylistics is to analyse language habits with the main purpose of identifying from the general mass of linguistic features...those features which are restricted to certain kinds of social context, to explain where possible why such features have been used as opposed to other alternatives, and to classify those features into categories based upon a view of their function in the social context.' (Crystal, *et al*, 1969:10)

Stylistics is an examination of the peculiar style in a work of art. It is, therefore, an attempt at revealing the unique nature of language. In this direction, the linguistic style of an author may consequently be unveiled. The language of Shakespeare becomes easily recognised as a peculiarity that is salient to his creative effort. The sonnets under consideration are not in their original forms. John Benson and others altered the language of the original version in the desire to unravel the identity of the personality that the poems seem to be addressed to (Auden, 1988: XVII). This inability to unravel the identity of the lady or man that the poems purport to be addressed to leads to some sharp claims by critics. This search is, however, beyond the scope of stylistics. Yet, this consideration becomes worthwhile in view of the structural changes that critics brought to some of the poems in order to make them really an address to a lady. Wordsworth (1988) is not satisfied with what he terms the harsh, obscure and worthless nature of the sonnets: 'The others are for the most part much better, have many fine lines and passages. They are also in many places warm with passion. Their chief faults — and heavy ones they are — are sameness, tediousness, quaintness, and elaborate obscurity (xxiv).' This criticism of the sonnets does not reflect the true picture of the contents of the poems in this study. At best, the negative comments may be a peculiar appreciation of what have now become assets to humanity.

Hazlitt (1988) is appalled at the thought of Shakespeare's sonnets because of what he terms a lack of "genuine sense of nature or passion" (xxiv). The sonnets under consideration fall under sonnets 1-126 where the poet seems to be involved in a relationship with a young man or woman. Sonnets 1-5 are thus part of the address to a young friend. Shakespeare tries to convince the young man (or woman) to marry and give birth to children. He states the reason for this desire for procreation within the preservation of beauty. If he, however, refuses to marry, the sonnets will preserve the youth's beauty, much like the youth's children would (Hazlitt, 1988:17).

THE SONNETS: The male and female connection.

Hazlitt (1988) declares that the sonnets of Shakespeare can be divided into different sections. The most apparent in this division involves sonnets 1-126. Here, the poet seems to be involved in a relationship with a young man. In sonnets 127-154, a relationship seems to be involved between the poet and a woman. This woman is at times referred to as the Dark Lady or Mistress (25).

In the sonnets under consideration (1-5) the poet is addressing a young man. There seems to be a relationship between the poet and the man. In sonnets 1-17, the poet tries to convince the young man to marry and give birth to children.

*... so that the youth's incredible beauty will not die when the youth dies.*  
(Hazlitt, 1988:25)

The youth's reaction seems to be a rejection of the argument in support of marriage and procreation. This, however, falls outside the focus of the study.

Crystal *et al* (1969) define linguistics as a science that studies language and its employment in a particular context. It is also a means of making generalisations about languages generally (27). This study was approached through stylistics. This preoccupation involved the analysis of the sonnets of Shakespeare through a critical examination of the language. It was determined whether the texts under study were accessible or not. It is pertinent to note that attention was devoted to the language of the poems under consideration without any reference to extra-linguistic or para-textual material or context.

Linguistic analysis involves an examination of the codes and signs, which were employed by the creative writer in the quest for an expression of his thought. In this wise, language is the variable that is subjected to analysis and the tools are directed towards unveiling the relevance of the choice of words, their meanings as well as other salient considerations in the areas of graphological, phonological, grammatical or syntactic analysis.

The first sonnet serves as an introduction. It takes off with the claim that something good must come from a fair creature: *From fairest creatures we desire increase.*

A possible explanation of the above verse is that it is necessary that beautiful creatures multiply in order to preserve their beauty's rose. The argument follows that as the parents die, the features of the children would reveal what forms their parents had when they were alive: *His Tender heir might bear his memory.* According to the poet, it is an act of selfishness for the young man not to think of procreation. The persona seems to be engrossed in the acknowledgement of his own beautiful physique: *But thou contracted to their own bright eyes/Feedest thy light's flame with self— substantial fuel making a famine were abundance lies,/Thy self thy foe to thy sweet self too cruel (Sonnet 1)*

The poet's attitude to this development is that of pity. He believes that the persona is his own enemy for making 'a famine where abundance lies.' The young man is now as fresh as May. As he is the "world's fresh ornament and only heralds to the gaudy spring" However, this beauty will fade as the persona grows. A couplet ends sonnet 1 with a charge from the poet that the persona should pity the world and give birth to children. The reason for this quest for procreation is to rejuvenate the world and prevent it from extinction. In sonnet 2, the plea made by the poet to the persona continues. The poet uses the imagery of military, winter, and commerce. Time becomes the dreaded encroachment into beauty's domain. It will invade the physique of the persona at forty: *When forty winters shall besiege thy brow/And dig deep-trenches in thy beauty's field,/ Thy youth's proud livery so gaze'd on now,/Will be a tattered weed of small worth held (Sonnet 2)*

The argument in the preceding extract is that time will soon make the youth's beauty irrelevant as old age creeps in and wrinkles are on his face and thus ravage these good looks of his. The truth, according to the poet is that beauty is a treasure that is susceptible to decay unless a judicious use is made of it. This may be through marriage, procreation and continuity. The persona is exposed to what his physique will look like at forty as he will be a "tattered weed" like a rag that is of little worth. The images of old age contained in the poem are: deep-sunken eyes, deep-trenches, and tattered weed. The persona's blood will be warm and his "lusty day" would have been wasted, as he did not give birth to children. He thus, becomes a victim of time in his childlessness.

Drawing on farming imagery, the poet focuses entirely on the young man's future, with both positive and negative outcomes in the third sonnet. However, the starting point for this possible future is "now," when the youth should "form another," that is, father a child. The sonnet begins with the image of a mirror — "Look in thy glass" — and is repeated in the phrase "Thou art thy mother's glass." Continuity between past, present, and future is established when the poet refers to the young man's mother, who sees her own image in her son and what she was like during her youth, "the lovely April of her prime," a phrase that recalls the images of spring in sonnet 1. Likewise, the young man can experience a satisfying old age, a 'golden time,' through his own children.

The fourth sonnet summarises all that the poet has been saying thus far. In a series of questions and statements, the poet lectures on the wise use of nature, which liberally lends its gifts to those who are equally generous in perpetuating nature by having children. But the youth's hoarding contrasts with nature's bountifulness. Lines 7 and 8 express this contrast in terms of "lives." The term used here means both "invest" and "use up". Similarly, "live" means both to gain immortality and to make a living.

Sonnet 5 compares nature's four seasons with the stages of the young man's life. Although the seasons are cyclical, his life is linear, and hours become tyrants that oppress him because he cannot escape time's grasp. Time might "*frame/ The lovely gaze where every eye doth dwell,*" meaning that everyone notices the youth's beauty, but time's "never progress ensures that the beauty will eventually fade. In an extended metaphor, the poet argues that because flowers provide perfume to console people during the winter, it is natural for the youth to have a child to console him during his old age. Without that perfume from summer's flowers, people would not remember previous summers during the long, hard winter; childless, the young man will grow old alone and have nothing to remind him of his younger days. Winter, an image of old age, is regarded with horror: "Sap checked with frost and lusty leaves quite gone, Beauty o' oversnowed and barrenness everywhere." The "lust leaves".

## **GRAPHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

Graphology involves a study of the orthography of a language. According to Atewologun (2003), graphology is the study of a language's writing system as seen in both hand-written and typographical forms (43). Salient to the preceding claim is the fact that graphological analysis is concerned with a consideration of language in the areas of punctuation, italicisation, capitalization, and spacing in order to explore the intentions of the poet.

The first visible device in the stylistic analysis of Shakespeare's sonnets 1-5 is the capitalization that runs through the fourteen lines of each sonnet. This is a reflection of the versification that was salient to poetry in its earliest form. The style in vogue then was to begin every new line with a capital letter: *From fairest creatures we desire increase/That thereby beauty's rose might never die/But as the riper showed by time decease...(Sonnet 1)*

This versification runs through the five sonnets under consideration. The first part of each sonnet has twelve lines and it follows a graphological design. The last two lines constitute the couplets and are meant to reinforce the preceding claims.

The tempo of the poems is sustained through punctuation marks in their appropriate positions. Sonnet 1, for instance, is clearly composed and readable as a result of the insertion of commas, colon, semi-colons and full stops at the end of the poems. There is a full stop at the end of the eighth line. This is a reflection of the summation that Shakespeare intends to make: *Thyself thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel.* (Sonnet 1)

The next line sets in motion the argument of the poet about the need for marriage and procreation as he succinctly turns the persona to an admiration of his tender features: *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, makest waste in niggarding*(Sonnet 1)

It is significant that the poet ends the second part of the argument with a full stop. The intention may be an attempt at a conclusion or the statement of the poet's views about a stubborn resolution to remain single. On the whole, sonnet 1 has three full stops and they are meant to isolate the tempo of each argument. Sonnet 2 has three full stops. The first eight lines contain the observation of the poet about the havoc that time may cause on the beauty of the persona: *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 tattered weed of small worth held./Then being asked where all thy beauty lies,/Where all the treasure of thy lusty days,/To say within their own deep — sunken eyes,/Were an all eating shame and thriftless praise.* (Sonnet 2)

It is significant that the five poems under consideration have the same three divisions. This is synonymous with the division of the human body into feet, body and head. Each may not function properly without being complemented by others. The question of procreation runs through the five poems. Apart from the full stops that mark out every segment of the argument, the poet makes use of punctuation marks such as hyphen, colon, and semi — colon where necessary as may be shown above.

Sonnet 4 begins with a question and the poet is worried that the persona seems to be wasting his beauty: *Unthrifty loveliness, why dost thou spend/Upon thyself thy beauty's legacy?* This sonnet is a summary of the entire poet's argument about the place of beauty and procreation. The poet attempts to teach the reader about the importance of a judicious use of nature. According to the poet, nature is the generous mother whose generosity must be acknowledged through a judicious use of its bountifulness: *Nature's bequest gives nothing but doth lend,/And being frank, she lends to those that are free* (Sonnet 4) The poet presents the idea behind nature's bountifulness in the preceding extract and then shows his amazement at the decision of the persona to annex nature without a thought of compensating her. The ludicrousness of the decision not to give birth to children becomes obvious in the above extract as the poem seems to present the intention of nature. It is thus clear that nature bestows some physiological gifts to people in order to expend them on others. The conclusion from sonnet 4 is that the poet himself may soon drift into oblivion if he would not properly bestow nature's gift on others: *Thy unused beauty must be tombed with thee* (Sonnet 4).

The contrast to the above development, however, is a judicious use of nature and this will enhance his beauty too. He will be perpetuated through the offspring he leaves behind whenever he dies. On the other hand, the decision to withdraw the use of nature's bounty will make his unused beauty to be buried with him.

On the whole, four question marks are present in sonnet 4 alone. This ample use of question marks is to reveal the amazement of the poet, draw the attention of the persona to his stupidity and possibly force him to judiciously expend his beauty on worthwhile endeavours.

The poet sums up his attempt at convincing the persona in Sonnet 5. With a solemn voice, the poet identifies four seasons in the life of a man. The stages are characterised by a cyclical movement just as the life of the poet is tied to the hours: *For never resting time leads summer on/To hideous winter and confounds him there,/Sap checked with frost and lusty leaves quite gone,/Beauty oversnowed and barrenness everywhere.* (Sonnet 5).

Sonnet 5 has three full stops to, as usual, distinguish the argument in each segment. The argument in the preceding extract centres on the wastage that may characterise the bubbling youth in his summer all through an unsuspecting march to the winter. The winter is synonymous with old age. By extension, it may also mean the succour that a child might give during old age.

The poet makes a judicious use of punctuation marks. They range from comma to full stop. Sonnet 1, for example, begins with the poet's idea of how man should strive to populate the world: *From fairest creatures we desire increase,/That thereby beauty's rose might never die,/But as the ripper should by time decrease,/His tender heir might bear his memory* (Sonnet 1). Each of the lines in the above extract is

marked by the use of comma in the first three sentences and a semi-colon in the fourth line. The next four lines mark a departure in the argument: *But thou contracted to thine own bright eyes,/Feedest thy light's flame with self- substantial fuel,/Making a famine where abundance lies./Thyself thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel.* (Sonnet 1). Shakespeare's mastery of English language places him at an advantage in the use of punctuation marks as may be seen in the above extract. This usage of punctuation marks makes it easier for readers to follow the presentation of the idea, the argument as well as the conclusion.

### **PHONOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

Phonological analysis involves a study of the speech sounds of a particular language. This entails the study of sound patterns that may be found in rhyme, alliterations and assonance. Alliteration is the first visible sound pattern in sonnet 1. This is found in line 8 where the poet mentions the implications of being single: *Thyself thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel* (Sonnet 1). The inherent meaning of the above extract is that the persona does not wrong any other person other than himself. He is his own foe, and what he terms beauty that he enjoys without a thought of giving birth to a child amounts to a cruelty he inflicts on himself. The repetition of sounds may be found in the following consonants: t, t, t, t, s, s, t. The rendition becomes musical as the reader reads through the poem. The repetition of consonants is found in the five poems under consideration: *Thy youth's proud livery, so gazed on now,/Will be a tattered weed of small worth held* (Sonnet 2). These repetitions of consonants at the initial positions are instrumental in the meaning of the poems.

The rhyme pattern in the five poems under consideration reflects the Shakespearian style. This may be found in the three quatrains and a couplet in every poem. They rhyme abab, cdcd, efef, gg. They consist of fourteen lines with iambic pentameters: *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 tattered weed of small worth held./Then being asked where all thy beauty lies,/Where all the treasure of thy lusty days,/ To say within their own deep — sunken eyes,/Were an all — eating shame and thriftless praise.*(Sonnet 2)

The first four lines present what looks like an exposition. They reveal the subject matter as well as the themes inherent in the poem. Each of the lines presents the main issues that the poet intends to present. Sonnet 1, for instance, is an example of this systematic presentation. Line 1 examines the idea of procreation in order to rejuvenate the world: "we desire increase".

Line 2 presents the consequence of procreation, which may be found in immortality: "that thereby, beauty's rose might never die". The third line reveals the slow but devastating progress of time. It is synonymous with both summer and winter. In other words, time; becomes a leveller that brings beauty to its prime and decay: *but as the ripper should by time decrease.*

The next four lines examine the persona and the decision to remain single. This style runs through the five sonnets of Shakespeare under consideration. The rhyme pattern in the couplet is gg. The couplet reiterates the injustice as well as the selfishness inherent in the persona's decision to remain single. In sonnet 1, the decision to remain single is synonymous with the creation of famine where there should be abundance as "he eats the world's due."

### **GRAMMATICAL/SYNTACTIC FEATURES**

The language of poetry is a peculiar one. It is a departure from the traditional usage that may be found in subject, verb, object/complement. The arrangement of the sentences depends on the motive of the poet. This choice may reflect what he intends to achieve in the composition. The structure of the sentences is examined under the following groups: nominal groups, verbal groups, adjectival groups and adverbial groups. A group may be defined as consisting of one or more words that occupy a grammatical structure (Halliday, 1961:253).

## VERBAL GROUP

The verbal group (VG) may consist of one or more verbs in the construction. This may range from simple verbal groups to the complex verbal groups. Again, the poet makes reference to both the present and future physique of the persona: *Thou that art now the world's fresh ornament,/And only herald to the gaudy spring* (Sonnet 1). These lines represent the present state of the persona's beauty. He is the fresh ornament of the world, but unknown to him, the blossoming beauty in "its spring may soon be naturally moving towards its winter": *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 tattered weed of small worth held* (Sonnet 2,)

The above extract is an example of both the future state of the beauty when it might suffer from nature and lose its present attractiveness. The idea presented by the poet is that there is a climax associated with nature. The verbal group are: *shall besiege thy brow dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field/will be tattered weed of small worth held*. As a result we have sentences that are marked off with series of commas: *From fairest creatures we desire increase,/That thereby beauty's rose might never die,/But as the ripper should by time decrease,/His tender heir might bear his memory* (Sonnet 1). These multiple sentences are, however, meaningful through the use of coordinating conjunctions such as: but, and, as well as pronouns, auxiliaries etc.

Shakespeare's poems achieve this lexical cohesion as may be seen in the illuminating usage of the appropriate words to delimit his views: The glass will readily 'tell' the 'face'. It will (the child) be a reflection in form of another, 'fresh', 'repair', 'renew'. When man refuses to marry and crop a lady, it amounts to a deception (beguile), which leaves the mother 'unblessed' as her unearned womb, disdains tillage. The crude metaphor here relates childbirth to the activities of a farmer (husbandry). The use of nature's capacity to procreate yields plenty when the planting is done and at harvest, (the husband) the farmer becomes satisfied at the abundance from his tillage: *Unthrifty, loveliness, spend, beauty's legacy,/*

*Nature's bequest, gives, nothing, lends, free.*The abundance of beauty in the persona is considered to be unthrifty loveliness by the poet. This loveliness he now spends as he relishes in the legacy that beauty bestows. Unknown to him, nature's bequest does not 'give' without expecting the giver to compensate her (nature). Thus, the 'gift' that 'nature' gives is just for a while. It is taken back at old age, and particularly bestowing her gifts on those that can use them freely.

Sonnet 5 contains lexical cohesion too. Examples are:Hours, gentle, work, frame, lovely, gaze, eye, dwell, play, tyrants, same, unfair fairly, excel, time, leads, summer, to hideous winter, confounds etc.The creation of man by God is considered from the artistic point of view. According to Shakespeare, man is the product of 'hours' with gentle work. The persona is both a 'frame' and a product of a 'frame.' At the ripe age, he becomes a 'lovely gaze' that attracts every eye and within which these eyes dwell.' Lack of use of nature's gifts makes the persona a 'tyrant', unfair, to himself and nature as time, great arbiter gradually 'leads' him from 'summer' to hideous winter when attention shifts from him to other blossoming men in the environment.The choices of lexical items in the five poems under consideration are instrumental in the semantic imports of the poems.

## LEXICAL COLLOCATION

Lexical collocation refers to the arrangement of the words in a poem and how each word contributes or delimits one another. An examination of sonnet 1 shows a judicious use of these lexical items in their right collocations: Fairest creature, desire, increase, beauty's rose, never, die, ripper, time, disease, tender heir, bear memory etc.

Sonnet 2 has the following collocative arrangements:*Forty winters, besiege, brow, dig, deep, trenches, beauty's field,/youth's proud livery, gazed, tattered, weed, small worth, held etc*

Sonnet 3 has *Mother's glass, calls, back, lovely April, prime, windows, age,see, wrinkles, golden time etc.*

Sonnet 4 has traffic, sweet, deceive, Nature, audit, leave, unused beauty, tombed etc.

The collocative arrangements in the five sonnets above show that Shakespeare's choices of words make the meanings of the poems clear. This reveals a religious attention to the treatment of the subject matter. In



sonnet 1, the imageries of the farmer and the fruits clearly collocate with the idea of 'a ripper' in sonnet 1 which is a reference to childbirth and continuity.

In sonnet 2, the effect of old age is juxtaposed with the idea of a 'trench.' This may be a reference to wrinkles that clearly indicate old age. The same collocative success characterises sonnet 3. The child (offspring) is the metaphor of the mother's 'glass' though which the mother may call 'back' or recall her lovely April.' This is a reference to the prime of her youth and will reflect her golden time.

Sonnet 4 depicts the effects of the decision to remain single. This development may sound 'sweet' to the persona, but 'Nature' is bound to take a stock of every life as may be represented by 'unused beauty' that will go to the grave with the bearer.

Sonnet 5 sums up the argument through the use of words like 'barrenness' through summer's distillation, as the persona seems to hoard the means of procreation in him. Like a prisoner, he hoards his sperm (liquid) and keeps it 'prisoner' and pent up as if in a bottle. This leaves him bereft of an image (a child).

### **AGRICULTURAL LEXICAL ITEMS**

The sonnets under consideration contain words that are drawn from the register of agriculture. In sonnet 1, such agricultural terms include: *increase, rose, ripper, famine, abundance, flesh, spring, bud etc.*

Sonnet 2 has the following items that are associated with both agriculture and nature:

*Winters, dig, trenches, beauty's field, weed, lusty days, all-eating shame, etc.*

### **SONNET 3**

Fresh, renew, unearned, words, tillage, husbandry, lovely April, prime.

Sonnet 5 contains the following agricultural words/terms: gentle works, frame, summer, frost, lustily, leaves over snowed, barrenness, summer's distillation, flowers, distilled, winter meet sweet.

The use of lexical items from the field of agriculture becomes relevant. Items such as child and birth, like planting and harvesting are synonymous with an increase, continuity and rejuvenation.

### **SEMANTIC ANALYSIS**

This segment of the study is devoted to an analysis of the figures of speech, especially as the poet's use of words engenders both connotative and affective response from the readers. The first visible figure of speech is metaphor. The bloom of a man is considered to be synonymous with "beauty's rose", a time when everyone blossoms. The inference one may draw from the above usage is that beauty like a rose is ephemeral. It comes at a point in the life of both the man and the plant. At its prime, the rose, like beauty is attractive but it soon falls into decadence. Another example of metaphor in sonnet 1 is: *thyself thy foe*. The persona is an enemy unto himself. He is equally described as: *Thou art now the world's fresh ornament/and only heralds to the gaudy spring/within thine own bud buriest thy content*.

The persona is both 'the world's fresh ornaments' in his march towards the spring of his life. Other examples of metaphorical usage abound. In sonnet 3, the persona is considered to be: 'thou art thy mother's glass.' Personification is another visible figure of speech in sonnet 2. Winter is dreaded like a plague because it can perform the action of digging trenches: *When forty winters shall besiege thy brow,/And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field. (Sonnet 2)*

The idea of old age as a march towards dissolution is achieved through the use of actions that are salient to plants and animals when they shed their skins once in a year. Winter is believed to be capable of carrying out the same action on the beauty of the persona. This is tantamount to old age and passivity.

Nature and time are also considered to be capable of human activity. Nature in sonnet 4, is the summoner of all to the eternal realm. In sonnet 5, Time is the never-resting judge that leads summer on to 'hideous winter.' The imagery of an army of occupation is achieved through the use of both Nature and Time. They both give and take. Time heralds the beauty of the persona to an eternal rest by ravaging his look. Images that readily make the poems meaningful abound. They include: tattered weed, lusty days, deep-sunken eyes; look in thy glass, thou art thy mother's glass, the lovely April of her prime, golden time etc.

On the whole, Shakespeare achieves his intentions in the five sonnets under consideration as he succinctly brings out the themes of beauty, time and posterity through relevant images. Beauty, according to the poet, is an attraction that is cherished, loved and coveted. During the Elizabethan era, beauty, love and romance were apparently prized, and they reflected in the creative endeavours of writers.

Through a judicious reconciliation of both beauty and time, Shakespeare presents the fact that beauty remains a pawn in the hand of almighty time. He, therefore, enjoins the persona to make use of his beauty as well as all natural endowments in his possession to ensure procreation, continuity and rejuvenation.

### **Conclusion**

The five sonnets considered in this study point to the need for man to appreciate the motive behind nature's largesse: existence. The readers/students will understand the need to appropriate time and utilise it to their advantage. This is because whatever Nature gives is ephemeral; it does not last forever. Therefore, the need arises for human beings to recognise this and enjoy every moment of existence.

Childbirth, like creative contributions, may make existence worthwhile. The child will remain a mirror through which the deceased mother could be seen. Creative contributions such as scientific or technological breakthroughs will make the existence of human beings memorable. They will perpetuate the memories of their creators.

The researcher may want to associate the persona's selfishness to an indulgence in masturbation. This is a form of sexual arousal without the benefit of a female partner. Sonnet 1 (lines 5-8) suggests the possibility of this claim: *But thou contracted to thine own bright eyes,/ Feedest thy light's flame with self-substantial fuel/Making a famine where abundance lies (41)*. An interpretation of the poems from the perspective of Freudian analysis (psychoanalysis) may be academically rewarding. This may amply equip students with the knowledge of the adverse effects of sexual perversions. Line 11 of sonnet 1 buttresses the possibility of this Freudian consideration: *Within their own bud buriest thy content,/And, tender churl, makest waste 'in niggarding*.

Whether or not the five sonnets under consideration in this study are analysed from Freudian dimension, it is clear that students will benefit immensely from a conscious attention to the allusions in them. They may shape the beliefs, thoughts and consciousness of students towards a positive outlook.

The inevitable conclusion is that if the youth does not properly use his beauty, he will die childless and doom himself to oblivion, but if he fathers a child, he will be remembered. Line 13 uses familiar death imagery to express the negative result of dying childless: "Thy unused beauty must be tombed with thee." However, line 14 suggests that should the young man use his beauty to have a child, as "executor to be," his beauty will be enhanced because he will have used it as nature intended.

The negative scenario, in which the young man does not procreate, is symbolised in the poet's many references to death. In lines 7 and 8, the poet questions how the young man can be so selfish that he would jeopardise his own immortality. The reference to death in line 14 stylistically mirrors the death imagery in the final couplets of the preceding sonnets, including the phrases "the grave and thee" in Sonnet 1 and "thou feel's it cold"

"In Sonnet 2, the themes of narcissism and usury (meant here as a form of use) are most developed in this sonnet, with its references to wills and testaments. The terms "unthrifty," "legacy," "bequest," and "free" (which in line 4 means to be generous), imply that those who benefit from nature should match nature's generosity. The poet, who calls the youth a "beauteous niggard," or a miser of his good looks, claims that his young friend abuses the many gifts of beauty that nature has given him and thus is a "profitless usurer."

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