Alessandro Serpieri

Shakespeare's Drama in Poetry

> **15**
>
> WHen I consider euery thing that growes
> Holds in perfection but a little moment.
> That this huge stage presenteth nought but showes
> Whereon the Stars in secret influence comment.
> When I perceiue that men as plants increase,
> Cheared and checkt euen by the selfe-same skie:
> Vaunt in their youthfull sap, at height decrease,
> And were their braue state out of memory.
> Then the conceit of this inconstant stay,
> Sets you most rich in youth before my sight,
> Where wastfull time debateth with decay
> To change your day of youth to sullied night,
> And all in war with Time for loue of you.
> As he takes from you, I ingraft you new.

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S K E N È   Theatre and Drama Studies

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Foreword

I am collecting in this volume various studies that I have written on Shakespeare's *Sonnets* over a period of several years. Most of them were published only in Italian editions, except for an essay on Sonnets 33 and 29 that appeared at first in Italian and later in English.

Altogether, my major study on the subject has been a translation with parallel text of the *Sonnets* that was opened by a long introduction and accompanied by a very detailed structuralist commentary of all the poems (Shakespeare 2014). This large work might still hope to find a new life in an English edition, even though the field has been richly furnished by the commentaries offered in the whole twentieth century, and particularly in the last decades.[1]

Anyway, many years before my edition of the *Sonnets*, I had devoted a book to the agon with Time that Shakespeare engaged in a large number of those poems (1998).[2] It is a very

[1] I will limit myself to mentioning the following editions of Shakespeare's sonnets: 1977 (Booth); 1986 (Kerrigan); 1997a (Duncan-Jones); 1997b (Vendler). While acknowledging my debts to Booth and Kerrigan, I cannot but lament my ignoring in 1991 the brilliant commentaries of Duncan-Jones and Vendler.

[2] Of course, in those early Seventies I could not avail myself of the rich commentaries quoted in the previous note; but the critical bibliography, to which I referred in plenty of notes, already represented

relevant theme in which the poet directly or indirectly ad-
dresses and challenges Time's overreaching power and thus
develops, in various stages, a kind of physical-metaphysical
drama. In the late Seventies a translation into English was
undertaken by William Nigel Dodd, a colleague and a great
friend to whom goes my deep gratitude; but the work re-
mained dormant because structuralist readings were not eas-
ily accepted by English language publishers during that period
of deconstruction, materialistic and new-historicist criticism.
In the last few years, though, a new interest in close formalist
readings[3] has encouraged my presentation of this study on
the immortality sonnets to the English-speaking public in the
hope of a response similar to that received by the Italian public.

The dialectical exchange with Time was, of course, but
one of the dramatic aspects in a sonnet sequence conceived
and developed by an author for whom the stage was the fa-
voured container of all that he imagined. Moreover, if Time
was the great Actor to be often addressed and contested, the
hectic development in the historical period going from the
mid-sixteenth to the beginning of the seventeenth century
provided further materials for a dialectical, and often openly
contradictory, view of both worldly and personal relationships.
In fact, the substantially symbolic view of the world, which
descended from the Middle Ages, was being rapidly eroded
by a relativistic approach to all aspects of life. In his plays, but

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an ample repertoire of information.

[3] As documented, in particular, by the just mentioned commen-
tary of Helen Vendler, and, at large, by Marjorie Levinson who regrets
"the transformation of literary studies into socio-historical study over
the past twenty years" (2007: 561), and offers a large review of recent
formalist works concerned both with theory and with critical read-
ings of a large number of authors, Shakespeare included.

also in the *Sonnets*, Shakespeare could therefore work also on the dialogue between two world-views that might represent in their turn, both imaginatively and rhetorically, a divergence or conflict in personal relationships.

To this end, a short time after completing my long study on the immortality sonnets, I dedicated another essay to two sonnets (33 and 29) that seemed to me quite representative of a conflict between two cultural models that mirrored, in different ways, a private *I – You* dramatic interaction. That essay was then added to the following editions of the volume *I sonetti dell'immortalità* (1976, 1981, and 1998), but was also translated into English by Anthony Johnson, another colleague and dear friend of mine, and published in the first number of a prestigious journal which was then being relaunched (Serpieri 1994a).

The last essay included in the present volume, and daringly entitled "Shakespeare Against Iago" (Serpieri 1994b), is a dramatically-inspired interpretation of the last group of sonnets addressed to the fair youth. All these writings of mine have put a particular stress on the lyrical-performative language of the *Sonnets* since most of them develop a question, a dialogue, a struggle, a contradiction. Shakespeare's poetry often presents mini-dramatic scenes in ways that, in the same period, only John Donne was able to invent, and occasionally in an even more 'theatrical' guise, due to the unfolding of the action while the dialogue itself takes place (cf. Donne 2009).

Anyway, besides a new interest in close formalist approaches, a particular stress has recently been put on the dramatic or perlocutionary aspect of the *Sonnets*.[4] This had

[4] Two recent collections of essays have well documented all the major theoretical and critical approaches to the Sonnets: Schiffer (ed.)

already been noted by quite a few critics many years ago, as I mentioned in the volume on the immortality sonnets; but in recent years it has often received an almost exclusive atten-

tion. Also Helen Vendler has been well aware of this peculiar aspect of the *Sonnets*, even though she has regarded it as one of "several compositional strategies on Shakespeare's part": the Temporal, the Emotional, the Semantic, the Conceptual, the Philosophical, the Perceptual, and finally the Dramatic, in relation to which she argues that "[t]he speaker indirectly quotes his antagonist" and replies "to the antagonist's implicitly quoted words", so that "we come closest, in the sonnets, to Shakespeare the dramatist" (1997b: 19, 21).

More closely connected with a real story that should or might be detected in the *Sonnets* are critical studies that look at their dramatic structure as determined by a strongly personal involvement of the poet and by the special identity of his addressee. Joseph Pequigney, for instance, considers the sonnets as "the grand masterpiece of homoerotic poetry" (1985: 1) and identifies the young friend not as an aristocrat, but as a humble actor after the view of Oscar Wilde and Samuel Butler (1985). David Schalkwyk (1998), on the contrary, remains faithful to the addressee as a young aristocrat, and concentrates all the dramatic meaning of the *Sonnets* on a poet ashamed of his profession as an actor and playwright, and therefore in search for a negotiation in an unequal political and social relationship (his thesis was then developed in Schalkwyk 2002).

A closer attention to the lyrical-performative language of the *Sonnets* can be found in a rich essay by Manfred Pfister (2005) in which speech act theories, deixis and per-

1999, Schoenfeldt (ed.) 2010.

formative acts are rightly pinpointed and discussed; but the poet-fair youth relationship still remains strictly biographical: "Performing the role of a sonneteer for a coterie of *cognoscenti* who would have had access to the manuscripts, he 'fashioned himself' (Greenblatt 1980) into something culturally more prestigious than a furnisher of scripts for the ephemeral and vulgar new stages south of the Thames and at the same time would have increased and enhanced his general visibility on the London literary and social scene" (223-4).

The danger of these works, however brilliant they may be, lies in their determining the *real* key that dominates themes, situations, feelings, inventions, and contradictions of the complex lyrical and dramatic structure of this great collection of poems. As a matter of fact, in "Shakespeare Against Iago", the last essay in this book, I must acknowledge that I have probably taken a similar risk, save that only on account of *strictly textual* hints I advanced a hypothesis for the breakdown of a personal relationship. But, all in all, the most reliable judgement on the dramatic structure of this post-post-Petrarchan collection of sonnets may be summed up by a brief statement of Robert Berkelman:

> We can hardly enjoy Shakespeare's plays without being struck by his tremendous dramatic power. Few of us, however, may fully appreciate the dramatic sense with which he animates even his Sonnets. Once read them in this light, we come upon new beauties and discover new strengths . . . Too easily, perhaps, we slip into the habit of classifying Shakespeare's sonnets as lyrics, when we might more fittingly appreciate the best of them for what they are – marvellously condensed drama. In these dramas

Time is often the chief antagonist. (1948: 138)

Apart from all the hypothetical conjectures on the identity of the Fair Friend (the Earl of Southampton or the Earl of Pembroke? or the Willie Hughes proposed by Oscar Wilde after the first surmise of Thomas Tyrwhitt in the eighteenth century?), of the Dark Lady (Mary Fitton or Emilia Lanier or Elisabeth Wriothesley or Lucy Morgan?), and of the Rival Poet (George Chapman or Samuel Daniel or Robert Drayton?), the *I – You* (or *He* or *She*) of the implicit-explicit dialogue that permeates the lyrical-dramatic structure of these *Sonnets* may, without any doubt, identify *only* Time as the addressee of many poems. And with Time this volume starts.

Chapter 1

Shakespeare's Immortality Sonnets.
An Agon Against Time*

1.1 The Actantial Structure and The Agon Against Time

Life and Rhetoric

Of Shakespeare's hundred and fifty-four sonnets a hundred and twenty-six are addressed to the so-called Fair Friend, a young nobleman who is unlikely to be identified with absolute certainty, although the main candidates seem to be either the Earl of Southampton to whom the artist dedicated the two poems published in 1593 and 1594, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, or the Earl of Pembroke, several years younger and, much later, principal dedicatee of the First Folio of 1623. The complex and rather elliptical 'story', of which the Friend is the main protagonist, occasionally together with

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* The whole work is here presented in the original 1976 English translation, by William Nigel Dodd, of the first Italian edition of *I sonetti dell'immortalità*, Milan: Bompiani (1975, 4th edition 1999). A few changes have been made only in the first chapter.

the so-called Rival Poet and with the Dark Lady (who is the addressee of the final series of sonnets 127-152), cannot be reduced to a kind of personal memoir which only an act of piracy hurried into print, thus exposing Shakespeare's privacy to the scandalized curiosity of the public.[1] It constitutes a macro-text, in which the single poems unfold according to an often close thematic relationship that follows various routes, both lyrical and dramatic, explicit and implicit, strictly thematic and largely universal.

Whilst contemporary evidence proves beyond doubt that some of these sonnets, according to the practice of the age, circulated, like Donne's poems, in manuscript, and whilst it is likely that the poet's friends could decipher hints and allusions to facts and persons they were acquainted with, more often than not the writing of the *Sonnets* transcribes its materials onto another plane from that of a private context. After centuries of prevalently thematic and biographical criticism, a renewed sensitivity to formal and classic rhetoric of Eliza-

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[1] As assumed by Frank Harris (" . . . the Sonnets give us a story, the whole terrible, sinful, magical story of Shakespeare's passion"), or F.H. Bradley ("No capable poet, much less a Shakespeare, intending to produce a merely 'dramatic'series of poems, would dream of inventing a story like that of the Sonnets, or, even if he did, of treating it as they treat it"), both quoted by Lionel Charles Knights (1945: 57), who disproved these, and other similar, censures. Other qualified critics, such as George Wilson Knight, took a similar moral position: "From this nettle-bed of vice, we pluck the flower, genius" (1955: 22), and even a poet, W.H. Auden, did not escape the usual biographical fallacy: " . . . what is astonishing about the sonnets . . . is the impression they make of naked autobiographical confession. . . . he wrote them, I am quite certain, as one writes a diary, for himself alone, with no thought of a public... Of one thing I am certain: Shakespeare must have been horrified when they were published" (1964: xxxvi).

bethan poetics has laid the groundwork for much more than a private reading of these poems.

I may mention here a few critics whose approach has followed this line. Over forty years ago William Empson noted in passing that rhetoric was predominant in Shakespeare's style, whose syntax, "if it appears ambiguous, it may be because the Elizabethan rules of punctuation trusted to the reader's intelligence and were more interested in rhetoric than in grammar" (1961: 133-4). Empson touched here on a point of particular importance: in the highly rhetorical art of the Elizabethans, the offspring of a late Renaissance which was already baroque, rhetoric predominates over grammar, the level of tropes and schemes over that of syntax and 'sentence'. Later came the specialized studies of Arthur Mizener and Thomas W. Baldwin (1944), who postulated that Shakespeare was an extremely accomplished practitioner with a solid grounding in rhetoric obtained from the handbooks that circulated widely in the schools at that time. Arthur Mizener (1939), Sister Miriam Joseph (1947), Rosemond Tuve (1961), Winifred Nowottny (1952), and Claes Schaar (1960) have all conducted further research in this direction.

At the end of her essay on the first six sonnets, Nowottny, fully aware of the new critical trend, had no hesitation in asserting that "Every age rediscovers the genius of Shakespeare. It is open to ours to discover and show the working of his genius in the realm of forms" (1952: 84). More recently Brian Vickers has concluded an essay with an equation between feeling and rhetoric which would have scandalized early twentieth-century critics: "But it seems at least likely that an awareness of the forms of rhetoric can enlarge our understanding of the poetry, for in Shakespeare's time and in Shakespeare's poetry rhetoric and feeling

were one" (1971: 97-8).

The poetics of the period fully justify a critical attitude of this kind. See, for instance, Henry Peacham for whom figures of speech "do attend upon affections, as ready handmaids at commandment to express most aptly whatsoever the heart doth affect or suffer" (Crane ed. 1954: 120). For John Hoskins ". . . in speech there is no repetition without importance", and the figure anaphora, for instance, "beats upon one thing to cause the quicker feeling in the audience" (1935: 12-13). For George Puttenham, probably the most influential of the rhetoricians of that age in England, rhetoric was the expression of an ideal, the means whereby a poet's language attains its full creative level, as he attested at the beginning of Book 1 of *The Arte of Englishe Poesie* (1589). For him, rhetoric coincides with the art of poetry: ". . . the chief praise and cunning of our poet is in the discreet using of his figures" (1970: 138). Rhetoric is a system of violations of the norm that set language in a world of superior harmony, on a different plane from everyday communication:

> As no doubt the good proportion of any thing doth greatly adorne and commend it and right so our later remembred proportions do to our vulgar Poesie: so is there yet requisite to the perfection of this arte, another maner of exornation, which resteth in the fashioning of our makers language and style, to such purpose as it may delight and allure as well the mynde as the eare of the hearers with a certaine noveltie and strange maner of conveyance, disguising it no little from the ordinary and accustomed: neverthelesse making it nothing the more unseemely or misbecoming, but rather decenter and more agreeable to many civill eare and understanding. (Ibid.: 137)

In a remarkable study on the use of imagery in the Eliza-
bethan period, Rosemond Tuve repeatedly emphasized the
view of "poetry as a craft", quoting George Gascoigne to show
how a work of art conceived without the framework of rhet-
oric was to them unthinkable: "[I]f you do . . . never studie
for some depth of devise in the Invention, and some figures
also in the handling thereof, it will appear to the skillful
Reader but a tale of a tubbe" (Tuve 1961: 27-8).[2] She then fo-
cused her attention on the absence of conflict between
the 'artificial' and the 'natural', along the lines of the famous
conclusion to Puttenham's treatise:

> The reasons for this carry us into Renaissance conceptions of
> reality to be imitated through the help of images . . . To put
> it too bluntly, the poet who imitates not the visible world
> but the intelligible as manifested in the visible will not con-
> sider that the use of artifice to emphasize form makes im-
> agery less 'true to Nature' . . . the Renaissance image could
> be extremely and carefully artificial without being thought of
> as unreal, as not natural, or as mere decoration. (1970: 35-
> 6, 38)

Of course, there did exist, at that time, and in Shakespeare
in particular, an opposition not to the 'artificial' as such (an
opposition for which only Romanticism was later responsible)
but to the falsely artificial; not to rhetoric, but to the degener-
ations of empty rhetoric. As Rosemond Tuve put it:

> Although the opposition did not lie between artificiality and
> artless naturalness, there was, of course, a vicious oppo-
> site to true art. Renaissance emphasis on the difficulty of

[2] George Gascoigne, "Certayne Notes of Instruction", was the first
treatise on prosody in English.

the art of poetry is a commonplace, and it is frequently accompanied by an emphasis which is equally a commonplace – disdain of false art. (1961: 38)

Disdain of false art is, in practice, an acclamation of true artifice, which is an instrument of knowledge and pleasure. It is no accident that Puttenham gave the following title to the last Chapter 15 of his treatise: "That the good Poet or maker ought to dissemble his arte, and in what cases the artificiall is more commended then the natural, and contrariwise". The true artist's task in this age of linguistic and conceptual paradoxes is to achieve natural artificiality or artificial naturalness. As Puttenham significantly observes, this means "cunningly to be able to dissemble", since the 'fiction' of art is truthful only if it succeeds in concealing itself:

> . . . we doe allow our Courtly Poet to be a dissembler only in the subtilities of his arte: that is, when he is most artificiall, so to disguise and cloake it as it may not appeare, nor seeme to proceede from him by any studie or trade or rules, but to be his natural. (1970: 302)

This can be said to be Shakespeare's ideal too, whence his outbursts against empty and dandyish mannerisms,[3] the rhetery of actors,[4] and the hackneyed formulae of the Petrarchan orical code of reactionary political power,[5] the bombastic deliv-

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[3] Cf., for example, Biron's attack on artificial language in *Love's Labour's Lost* 5.2.406-8: "Taffeta phrases, silken terms precise, / Three-pilled hyperboles, spruce affectation, / Figures pedantical . . . ". If not otherwise stated, all quotations of Shakespeare's plays are from Shakespeare 1994.

[4] Cf. Hamlet's attack on 'hamming' in 3.2.

[5] Cf., for example, Hamlet's debunking of the fossilized, conven-

tradition[6] etc. Shakespeare recoils from the *déja vu* and shuns any kind of artifice smacking of ornamental re-touching or expansion, and proceeds to transform the drama and the poetry of his age by adopting and renewing both the language structures and the tropes and figures of the rhetorical tradition. As a consequence, his poetry should be interpreted with an acute awareness of the dialectical tension between the acquisition and the violation of norms: a tension in which the thought-process can never be extrapolated from the figures that inform and express it.

The Structural Approach

The recognition of this dialectical process validates the structural approach which, in recent years, has been applied with considerable success to the *Sonnets*. For the most part it has taken the form of analyses of single poems. Within a few years, Samuel Levin (1962) produced a pioneering study of the couplings in Sonnet 30, Marcello Pagnini (1970) published an important experiment in multiple-level decoding of Sonnet 20, and Roman Jakobson, in collaboration with Lawrence G.

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tionally rhetorical language of Polonius and Claudius. Hamlet's language is based entirely on a fundamental procedure of linguistic and ideological 'estrangement', and consequently his tropes, figures, and above all his puns are dynamic and surprising, while the speech of Polonius and Claudius is ornate, syntactically hypertrophical and formally and ideologically static.

[6] Cf. another of Biron's harangues in *Love's Labour's Lost*, 4.3.71-3: "This is liver-vein, which makes flesh a deity, / A green goose a goddess; pure, pure idolatry. / God amend us, God amend: We are much out o'the way". See also Sonnet 130 "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun", a pure parody of the courtly tradition.

Jones, (1970) analysed with particular brilliance the micro-structures of Sonnet 129. No serious criticism could further ignore the great progress in analytical reading achieved by these authoritative essays.

Studies of the complete collection of sonnets as a macro-text in which the single poems, though each a relatively inde-pendent whole, are seen in a close relationship, have so far been less convincing. The first attempts to classify the *Sonnets* on the basis of formal more than thematic or 'narrative' criteria were made by the critics mentioned earlier – those, that is, who revalued the role of rhetoric in order to arrive at a more fully articulated appreciation of the poems as highly formalized products.

Thomas W. Baldwin, for example, tried, somewhat for-cing the issue, to demonstrate that the *Sonnets* are organ-ized according to the scheme of argument of classical rhet-oric, each opening with a "proposition" (corresponding to the first quatrain), leading via various "rationes" to the "complexion" of the couplet. A similar approach made by Schaar proved very fruitful from the analytical viewpoint, but resulted in a somewhat unwieldy taxonomic classifica-tion. Nowottny, on the other hand, taking the first six son-nets as her sample, confined herself to asserting the validi-ty of a macrotextual analysis, observing: "In each of these six sonnets, features of the individual sonnet are illumi-nated by a consideration of the design of the whole group" (1952: 78).

Years ago, in an attempt to reconcile the reading of the individual sonnets with an awareness of their macrotex-tual relations, Stephen Booth offered a valuable contribu-tion to the analysis of the various levels of which they are composed. He rightly maintained that ". . . the book, Shake-

speare's *Sonnets*, is not an anthology but a single work of art", and recognized that the sequence, hitherto considered to be more or less arbitrarily arranged, has an order of its own, whose structure had still to be assessed: "I want only to emphasize that the 1609 sequence seems to need interpretation or reorganization not because it is disordered, but because it is so obviously ordered" (1969: 84, 12).[7]

In the same 1969 an important contribution came to help scholars and readers that wanted to evaluate certain peculiar features of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* when compared with other English sonneteers of the same time: Herbert S. Donow's *Concordance of the Sonnet Sequences of Daniel, Drayton, Shakespeare, Sidney and Spenser.* The figures referred to were those of the frequencies of the most common words, of the pronominal forms and of the connotative terms in the five collections studied. With regard to the pronominal forms, Giorgio Melchiori pretty soon noted the extremely high frequency in Shakespeare's *Sonnets* of the first person singular (979 occurrences) and of the second person singular (933), and concluded:

> The most notable variation in respect of the other collections remains . . . Shakespeare's use of the second person, which is almost as frequent as that of the first . . . He opens a dialogue: rather than contemplating his interlocutors from on high or paying them respectful and detached homage, he involves them in debate. He behaves, that is, as *par inter pares*, or as man to man. On the other side, this balance between *I* and *thou*, this direct exchange, this dialogue, is also an obvious demonstration of the dramatic and theatrical

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[7] A few years later, in 1977, he published one of the most important commentaries to Shakespeare's *Sonnets*.

character of his poetic genius, even when using the lyrical form. (1976: 15)[8]

A statistic evidence had come to confirm the unusually high frequency of an often dramatic, explicit or implicit, address. What had to be further noted was that the pronominal high frequency *I – thou* (or *you*), apart from attesting a pervasive dialogue between the speaker and the addressee (the Fair Friend, or the Dark Lady in the second sequence), included other characters, such as the so-called Rival Poet. A dramatic structure runs therefore throughout the lyrical tissue of the *Sonnets* according to a major scheme that presents the poet as the agonist and the Fair Friend, and later the Dark Lady, as the object of love or desire. But there is more than this: apart from an implicit or explicit dialogue with the Fair Friend, the Rival Poet, the Dark Lady or other unidentified persons, there is an inner dialogue of the same *I* and *thou* when portrayed and implicated in their own self-contradictions.[9]

No less important, in Donow's *Concordance*, was the table of connotative terms with highest frequencies in the five sequences. It showed that the word *Time* (which in the

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[8] The study had already been published in the original Italian version with the title *L'uomo e il potere* (1973). In my opinion, the title of the English version (*Shakespeare's Dramatic Meditations*) did better represent the main thesis of this important volume devoted to an extremely rich analysis of the four sonnets – 94, 121, 129 and 146 – in which I and thou are absent, thus leaving room to the thought of the author himself.

[9] I may be both the judge and the culprit, as, for instance in Sonnet 35, while thou or you, the Friend or the Dark Lady, may appear as he/she should be and as he/she actually is or behaves, for instance in Sonnets 93 and 95 or 150 and 152.

other sonneteers is quite negligible) in Shakespeare's *Sonnets* occupies the fifth place with 79 occurrences, after *Love* (223, in tune with the love-convention genre used), *Eye(s)* (95), *Self* (90), *Beauty* (84): all names, these first four, that represent feelings, objects or qualities, but not agents – except *Love*, but rarely and conventionally. *Time*, on the other side, occupies the role of a prominent antagonist, of both *I* and *you*, and of *everybody*, and its presence is therefore extremely important in the 'drama' of the *Sonnets*. In other words, *Time* is a main character in the 'story'. In fact, the dialogue with Time and the fight against it develop so conspicuously in a large number of sonnets addressed to the Fair Friend that, as some critics have stated, it may be said to represent one of the most outstanding features of the whole text.[10]

Once recognized as a consistently dialectic structure more than as a simply thematic line,[11] the sonnets addressed to Time or dealing with it represent a 'dramatic' series that runs through all the tangled relationships and the fleeting events of a pervasively reticent text. It is according to the very relevant theme of the agon against Time in which the poet directly

[10] "The *Sonnets* are exactly this: a poetic war with time" was for example the decree of Wilson Knight (1955: 69), while the opinion of L.C. Knights was that " . . . 'the problem of Time' is not a metaphysical problem at all, – and the discussion of Platonic Forms and Ideal Beauty is irrelevant. Wherever we look, Shakespeare is concerned merely with the effects of time on animate and inanimate beings, on persons and personal relationships" (1945: 78).

[11] Cf. for instance, Julius W. Lever (1956), a very useful book which identifies various sonnet sequences according to their main themes, or James Blair Leishman (1961), a critical study almost entirely devoted to the immortality theme, with useful comparison with classical and Renaissance literature.

or indirectly challenges its overpowering power, and following the varied and peculiar rhetoric that guides the many stages of such fight, that I am here offering a structural analysis of the sonnets addressed to Time, the so-called immortality sonnets.

1.2 The Engrafting

The Marriage Sequence

The first seventeen sonnets form a unified sequence in which the Friend is urged to marry so as to perpetuate himself in his offspring.[12] They are built upon a basic semic opposition between *ageing*, *death* and *tomb* on the one hand, and *growth*, *procreation* and the *perpetuation* of man in his lineage on the other. As with other sonnets later in the sequence, this opposition is linked analogically with the growth and decline of the natural cycles of the day and the year with respective 'ages' – the hours and seasons – which move from the positive zero-point of dawn and spring to the negative zero-point of night and winter.[13] The inexorable cy-

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[12] This, of course, is the 'Increase theme', a cultural commonplace during the Renaissance period, for which we refer the reader in particular to Erasmus's declamation *De laude matrimonii* included as exemplum in *De Conscribendis* (1521: xxx verso - xliii recto), and translated into English as "An Epistle to Persuade a Young Gentleman to Marriage, Devised by Erasmus in Behalf of His Friend" in Thomas Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorike* (1994: 79-100). The epistle is an exhortation to matrimony on the basis of Genesis 1:28, "Be fruitful and multiply". It influenced Shakespeare also in *Venus and Adonis*, being one of the main arguments used by Venus to seduce the young Adonis. All quotations of sonnets are from my 2014 edition.

[13] A few examples must suffice. For the parabola of the sun's course, see the whole of Sonnets 7 and 33, and, in the opening sequence, the following images: Sonnet 12, l. 2, "And see the brave day

clic process robs even the ripest hour, season or age of its
stability. Even the moment of greatest splendour, of which
the Friend, as the "only herald to the gaudy spring" (Son-
net 1, l. 10), is the living emblem, contains the seeds of decay
and death. The body itself is already a *tomb* if it fails to per-
petuate itself in offspring,[14] which can give it a kind of im-
mortality in time:

> Sonnet 11, ll. 1-2
> As fast as thou shalt *wane* so fast thou *grow'st*,
> In one of thine, from that which thou departest

The seme of burial (tomb), whose opposite is growth and
Ovidian flux, is absolutely central in the whole of the *Sonnets*.
It appears frequently in the plays too, but here we shall limit
ourselves to quoting a few examples (in note) from the poetry.[15]

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sunk in hideous night"; Sonnet 15, l. 12, "To change your day of youth
to sullied night"; Sonnet 16, l. 5, "Now stand you on the top of hap-
py hours". For the parabola of the seasons, see the whole of Sonnets
18, 97, 104, and, in the opening sequence: Sonnet 5, ll. 5-6, "For never
resting time leads summer on, / To hideous winter"; Sonnet 6, ll. 11-12,
"Then let not winter's ragged hand deface, / In thee thy summer ere
thou be distilled"; Sonnet 12, l. 7, "And summer's green all girded up
in sheaves".

[14] This is the core of the marriage theme, expressed earlier by
Shakespeare in Venus's wooing of Adonis: l. 757, "What is thy body
but a swallowing grave".

[15] In addition to the line already quoted from *Venus and Adon-
is*, see *The Phoenix and the Turtle*: "Truth may seem, but cannot be; /
Beauty brag, but 'tis not she / Truth and beauty buried be", where the
Elizabethan keen sense of the vanity of life is made explicit. Some of
the more significant examples from the *Sonnets* are:

1, l. 11	"Within thine own bud buriest thy content"
3, ll. 7-8	"Or who is he so fond will be the tomb
	Of his self-love to stop posterity?"

In the opening sonnets, the GROWTH/TOMB opposition corresponds to that of PROFIT/EXPENSE, used paradoxically:[16] *to give*, i.e. to procreate, means to profit, and hence to preserve one's own image in time in one's progeny, whereas *not to give*, i.e. not to procreate, means to expend, to destroy, and thus to make the body its own tomb. The fair youth is explicitly reproached for his avarice and hence exhorted to procreate in the very first sonnet, ll. 11-12:

> Within thine own bud *buriest* thy content,
> And tender churl mak'st waste in niggarding.

4, l.13	"Thy unused beauty must be tombed with thee"
5, l. 10	"A liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass"
17, ll. 3-4	"Though yet heaven knows it is but as a tomb Which hides your life …
31, l. 9	"Thou art the grave where buried love doth live"
72, l. 11	"My name be buried where my body is"
77, ll. 5-6	"The wrinkles which thy glass will truly show, Of mouthed graves will give thee memory"
81, ll. 8-9	"When you entombed in men's eyes shall lie, Your monument shall be my gentle verse"
83, ll. 11-12	"For I impair not beauty being mute, When others would give life, and bring a tomb"
86, ll. 3-4	"That did my ripe thought in my brain inhearse Making their tomb the womb wherein they grew"

[16] Cf. the whole of Sonnet 4; here are a few examples from other sonnets:

1, l. 12	"And tender churl mak'st waste in niggarding"
6, ll. 4-5	"That use is not forbidden usury, Which happies those that pay the willing loan"
9, ll. 11-12	"But beauty's waste hath in the world an end, And kept unused the user so destroys it"
16, l. 13	"To give away yourself, keeps your self still"

In Sonnet 5, however, the pattern is rendered more complicated. Although the *Increase* theme still explicitly counters that of natural decay, its vehicle is an image whose connotation is no longer naturalistic but *cultural*: namely that of the distilled essence of flowers which prolongs the summer beyond its season:

> ll. 5-12
> 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'er-snowed 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.

The essence of flowers *should* have the same perpetuating function as progeny, but it is not, *in itself*, a natural product in that it is distilled and conserved by means of an artificial (and thus cultural) intervention.[17] It is immutable, lifted out of time precisely by those "walls of glass" which are the prison of its permanence. The essence can only survive provided it enters a kind of casket or tomb.[18] We have here a first glimpse of the paradox

[17] In ll. 11-14 of Sonnet 54, the poet makes the comparison between the distillation of flowers and the writing of poetry explicit: "Sweet roses do not so, / Of their sweet deaths, are sweetest odours made: / And so of you, beauteous and lovely youth, / When that shall vade, by verse distils your truth".

[18] Nowottny (1952: 82) glosses line 10 as follows: " . . . where Beauty's distillation is at once arrested ('prisoner', 'pent') yet free ('liquid') and visible ('glass')". But it needs to be noted that the semantic, phonic and rhythmical redundancy of "prisoner pent in" disowns the equivalence set up, and gives priority to the seme of constriction over

of immortality in art, which we shall explore more fully later.
The course of the first seventeen sonnets takes us from the ster-
ile body as a living tomb to art as celebration, which *nonetheless*
obscures the life of the referent (imprisoning it like the essence
of flowers in Sonnet 5, eclipsing it in the word in 17).

Sonnet 15

The immortality theme proper appears for the first time in
Sonnet 15, abruptly transforming the naturalistic paradigm
of Growth into the cultural paradigm of Engrafting:

> When I consider every thing that grows
> Holds in perfection but a little moment.
> That this huge stage presenteth nought but shows
> Whereon the stars in secret influence comment.
> When I perceive that men as plants increase,
> Cheered and checked even by the self-same sky:
> Vaunt in their youthful sap, at height decrease,
> And wear their brave state out of memory.
> Then the conceit of this incostant stay,
> Sets you most rich in youth before my sight,
> Where wasteful time debateth with decay
> To change your day of youth to sullied night,
>   And all in war with Time for love of you,
>   As he takes from you, I engraft you new.

In Sonnet 12, Shakespeare had recapitulated the marriage
sequence themes in terms of the natural cycles – first that of
the day, then that of the year – and set against the negative
pole (night-winter-death) the continuous, equally naturalistic,
forward movement in time of the *growth* seme, transmitted

that of liberty ('liquid') and transparence ('glass').

via the children and descendants of the fair youth:

> ll. 9-14
> Then of thy beauty do I question make
> That thou among the wastes of time must go,
> Since sweets and beauties do themselves forsake,
> And die as fast as they see others grow,
>> And nothing against Time's scythe can make defence
>> Save breed to brave him, when he takes thee hence.[19]

Sonnet 15 explores the GROWTH/DECAY dialectic in depth, but instead of a forward movement (the doctrine of *Increase*),[20] it proposes the achievement of permanence in the poetic word. The central actantial triangle I - You (Thou) - Time emerges in its full force.

The logical-syntactical structure is syllogistic, as is often the case in these sonnets,[21] although it would be better to use the term enthymeme rather than syllogism. For Aristotle the enthymeme was the oratorical equivalent of the logical syllogism; the Shakespearian sonnet can often be considered its poetic equivalent. It is a contraction of the syllogism, with either the main thought omitted or left implicit, or the *rationes*

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[19] These lines link up with lines 1-2 of the preceding sonnet (11), completing the circle: "As fast as thou shalt wane so fast thou grow'st, / In one of thine, from that which thou departest".

[20] The word "increase" is used here, in l. 5, in its full naturalistic meaning, as an equivalent to "grow" in l. 1, as the simile makes perfectly explicit: "[M]en as plants increase". Given the cultural importance of this word (it refers directly to a code) in this opening sequence (cf. l. 1 of Sonnet 1, "From fairest creatures we desire increase"), we cannot overlook the fact that the different semantic use here serves not only to introduce the natural dimension, but also to give it an oppositional value: men grow like plants – there is no Increase of the Biblical, humanist kind.

[21] Cf., for example, Sonnets 12, 29, 30, etc.

or premises or proofs reduced to one only. There is a fixed scheme into two alternatives: i) parallelism of the concepts: AB / AB (where A = the main idea, implicit or explicit, and B = the *ratio*), ii) chiasmus of the concepts: AB / BA (Lausberg 1998: 386-7; 1969: 198-201). In either case the symmetrical arrangement is very well suited to the sonnet form, but the latter pattern (chiasmus) is, as we shall see, the one most favoured by Shakespeare for many reasons, whether semantic (philosophical) or formal (syntactical and rhetorical).[22]

In Sonnet 15, the first two quatrains form the protaxis and are introduced by the same temporal-conditional clause containing a natural observation:

l. 1   When I consider every thing that grows
l. 5   When I perceive that men as plants increase

with a syntactic-semantic anaphora and a semantic epiphora (the figure: xxx … y / xxx … y). The third quatrain is the apodosis and opens with the corresponding deductive clause: "*Then* the conceit …".

The semic structure turns on a double opposition: first GROWTH/DECAY, ll. 1 and 12, then GROWTH/ENGRAFT, ll. 1 and 14, which occur in the rhyme or in a position of metrical importance ("engraft") thus confirming their special significance. Numerous codes are intertwined here: the Aristotelian (ll. 1-2), the Platonic (ll. 3-4), the Ovidian (ll. 5-9), the Horatian (ll. 13-14), and lastly the topological, both in the metaphors[23] (ll. 3-4) and in the traditional allegories of the mo-

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[22] Cf. pp. 34-44 below.

[23] See the cultural metaphor of the world as stage, which, although rooted in antiquity, is obsessively present in the Elizabethan age, and in the baroque period in general. For an authoritative survey of this

rality play type (ll. 11-12).

A closer analysis of some of these codes (the less obvious) will reveal how they are interlinked and greatly enrich a structure of extraordinary inventive symmetry. The first quatrain, in two parallel line-pairs, singularly reconciles Aristotelian and Platonic outlooks: ll. 1-2, the transientness of perfection in the *dialectic of potentiality and act*;[24] ll. 3-4, the vanity of all natural, existential aspects, seen in Platonic terms as shadows within the metaphorical *topos* of the world as theatre. The element common to both pairs is that of precariousness and the destitution of significance: in the world-as-stage the action of man is an empty performance whose purpose has been lost, along with its dramatist or director (if he ever existed).[25] The ambiguity of l. 4 is particularly disquieting: in the theatre of the world, the stars, which in the Middle Ages were the intermediaries of divine providence (Tillyard 1943), now look down on the performance like spectators commenting on the action, while at the same time secretly *influencing* it. They are simultaneously foreign to it (comment implies detachment) and participators (secret influence implies a hidden, and hence alarming, design), in an ambig-

topos see Curtius 1948.

[24] At the connotative level, there is probably an extra element of information in the use of the verb 'to hold' which seems to suggest the figure of the sun in its zenith (cf. its opposite in l. 7, where the solar course after the high point is explicitly mentioned: "[A]t height decrease").

[25] Of the innumerable Shakespearian loci which might be quoted, see the famous speech of *Macbeth* 5.5.23-7: "Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player, / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage, / And them is heard no more: it is a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing".

uous metaphysical presence-absence:[26] a typical Shakespearian situation, even in great tragedies such as *Hamlet* and *King Lear*.

In the logical terms of the enthymeme we may identify the implicit *propositio*: "[A]ll the world, non-human and human, is a fleeting spectacle of growth and decline, without direction". Lines 1-2 form the Aristotelian *ratio*, 3-4 the Platonic one. The two *rationes* are reiterated parallelistically in the second quatrain, which first presents the precariousness of man's existence in terms of plant-life (ll. 5-6), and then his decline in terms drawn from the theatre (ll. 7-8).[27] In the third quatrain, which constitutes a first conclusion, the two *rationes*, which persist only as metaphorical fields (A = the natural world, with its succession of ages, hours, seasons; B = the same world as stage – cf. the Platonic cave myth), now appear in inverted order: B in ll. 9-11, A in l. 12. The theatrical connotation of l. 9 lies in its foreshortened view of the entire human condition "*this* inconstant *stay*", which, significantly, is a precise formal parallelism of "*this* huge *stage*" (l. 3) – the phonic and grammatical parallelism is obvious. As for l. 10,

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[26] Sir Walter Raleigh's brief poem "On the Life of Man" is built entirely around the metaphorical rendering of the journey and functions of man's life in theatrical terms. There too the heavens are spectators of the drama acted out by men, but there is no ambiguity because, unlike Shakespeare's line, the drama in question has distinct Biblical connotations: "What is our life? A play of passion, / Our mirth the music of division, / Our mothers's wombs the tiring houses be, / Where we are dressed for this short comedy, / Heaven the judicious sharp spectator is, / That sits and marks who still doth act amiss" (ll. 1-6) (Lucie-Smith ed. 1965: 216).

[27] See Booth's (1969: 183-5) acute observations on the theatrical connotations in this sonnet. The remainder of the analysis seems to me impressionistic and debatable.

we may quote Booth's remark to the effect that "the beloved is set before the speaker's sight in a refrain of the theatrical metaphor" (1969: 185). The theatrical element of l. 11 is evident from the morality play-type context.

Lines 11 and 12 round off the body of the quatrains in a chiastic figure; the first answers ll. 3-4 ('agon' of the theatrical 'morality' ≈ neoplatonist spectacle of vanity), the second ll. 1-2 (revealing an identical, deterministic movement of time to wards its end – night, winter). The complicated pattern (which initially takes the form of a parallelism and successively of a chiasmus) of the enthymeme here outlined can be schematised as follows:

ll. 1-2 A) Aristotelic immanentism

ll. 3-4 B) Platonic transcendentalism with world-as-stage

ll. 5-6 A)

ll. 7-8 B)

ll. 9-11 B)

l. 12 A)

The syllogistic model in Shakespeare tends to opt for a chiastic arrangement: it does not proceed in terms of a logical impulse but round upon itself anaphorically.

It is the couplet which provides the real conclusion and initiates the series of sonnets on immortality.[28] Here too we find another theatrical event, for the first time in the sequence typically triangular, in which the poet agonist and Time the antagonist fight for the fair youth who

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[28] Hence Booth's opinion that "[t]he couplet describes a facile and fanciful triumph over time" (1969: 186) is unacceptable.

throughout the immortality sonnets is the passive subject of the great context. From active protagonist of his own immortality in time by procreation (to which he is exhorted in the previous sonnets), the Friend for the first time becomes the passive referent of the act of poetic *nomination* which will preserve him in a different, and more definitive manner. The real protagonist is now the poet, who, by the act of naming, transforms the naturalistic paradigm of *growth* (which inevitably carries the implication of decay and death) into the cultural paradigm of *engrafting*. It will be noted, moreover, that *engraft*, etymologically, includes the act of *writing*; it involves, so to speak, carving a signature on the natural world, the competition of art with nature in the act of creation.[29] The scheme is thus:

> grow   –   nature
> engraft   –   art (culture)[30]

[29] We may also note that at the phonological level, "engraft" alliterates with "grow" of line 1.

[30] It is very important to note how this scheme is considered by Puttenham in *The Art of English Poesie* (1589), where he gives a metaphorical resumé of the whole Elizabethan conception of aesthetics: "[H]e [the poet] doth as the cunning gardiner that using nature as a coadiutor, furders her conclusions & many times makes her effectes more absolute and straunge" (1970: 307). A few pages earlier he had provided a significant example of the gardener who improves nature by means of graftings: "And the Gardiner by his arte will not onely make an herbe, or flowr, or fruite, come forth in his season without impediment, but also will embellish the same in vertue, shape, odour and taste, that nature of her selfe woulde never have done: as to make the single gillifloure, or marigold, or daisie, double . . . These actions also are most singular, when they be most artificiall" (303-4). In Shakespeare, compare the figure of the gardener as king of his State, pruning and adjusting nature's disorderly realm, in *Richard II*, 3.4. Of

Time in its deterministic aspect is summoned to take part in the theatrical agon; the metaphorical fields of *rationes* A + B appear simultaneously. The inexorable action of time ("As he takes from you", l. 14) is challenged, and compensated for, by the poet: the equation "As he … I", which fixes the present state of perfection indefinitely, now contradicts l. 2, "Holds in perfection *but* a little moment". The ensuing battle is an emblematic theatrical performance.

In the first half of line 14 time is the active, predatory subject; in the second the poet is the triumphant agent of restoration who succeeds in accomplishing the end towards which the whole sonnet has tended, namely to make the fair youth *new*, to recreate him as something different from the naturalistic character that time is able to dominate, erode and annihilate. The emphasis that falls upon the last word "new" shows how the poetic language can intensify meaning by its use of metaphor, rhythm and timbre. As Lotman defines it, "rhyme is . . . phonetic repetition which

particular importance in this respect is the well-known exchange between Perdita and Polixenes in *The Winter's Tale*, 4.4, of which we quote here only Polixenes' reply to Perdita, who had refused to plant carnations in her garden since they were "nature's bastards", produced by crossing (tantamount to engrafting): "Say there be. / Yet nature is made better by no mean / But nature makes that mean; so over that art, / Which you say adds to nature, is an art / That nature makes. You see, sweet maid, we marry / A gentler scion to the wildest stock, / And make conceive a bark of baser kind / By bud of nobler race. This is an art / Which does mend nature - change it rather, but / The art itself is nature" (ll. 88-97). His reasoning clearly extends to include the Renaissance concept of art as artifice, and of language as figure, already discussed at pp. 16-9 above. Art corrects nature and yet art itself is, in the end, a part of nature, just as nature is, in the last analysis, an artifice in that it is the product or book of God.

plays a rhythmic role" (1977: 120), but here, in lines 13-14, the rhyme "you"/"new" is further enriched by redundant grammatical functions in that "new" also rhymes internally with "you" at the end of the first hemistich of line 14 and is in immediate syntactical contiguity to the "you" of the final phrase: "I engraft *you new*". Nor is this all: "you" is also contained phonetically in "new", the rhyme being totally incorporated in the very word which *changes*. The real-life person is concealed in the word which makes him new.

The couplet summarizes the semantic values of this tightly constructed sonnet, and can be schematized as follows:

"I engraft"	vs	"(wasteful) time"
creation in the word	vs	destruction in the world
culture	vs	nature
transcendence	vs	transience
grafting	vs	growth
new non-natural birth	vs	natural death

The dominant Neoplatonist code, the I-YOU-TIME actantial triangle, and the basic GROWTH/DEATH (tomb) opposition, which attracts the ART/NATURE opposition, have all now clearly emerged.

Sonnets 16 and 17

In the next two poems, in line with a contrapuntal procedure found in many of the sub-sequences of the *Sonnets*, the earlier theme of immortality-by-offspring (naturalistic 'sowing') reappears in opposition to the new theme of immortality-in-art

(artistic 'engrafting') which will triumph definitively in Sonnet 18. This can be seen in lines 6-7 of Sonnet 16, which we quote here in full:

> But wherefore do not you a mightier way
> Make war upon this bloody tyrant Time?
> And fortify yourself in your decay
> With means more blessed than my barren rhyme?
> Now stand you on the top of happy hours,
> And many maiden gardens you unset,
> With virtuous wish would bear you living flowers,
> Much liker than your painted counterfeit:
> So should the lines of life that life repair
> Which this (Time's pencil) or my pupil pen
> Neither in inward worth nor outward fair
> Can make you live your self in eyes of men.
> > To give away yourself, keeps your self still,
> > And you must live drawn by your own sweet skill.

Here the fair youth is once more exhorted to make war directly on Time the arch-antagonist by a poet who has now resumed the role of an onlooker who doubts the power of his "barren rhyme" (l. 4). The basic themes of the marriage sequence reappear: that of armed conflict ("war", l. 2; "fortify", l. 3); that of temporary perfection linked metaphorically to the solar zenith which neutralizes time *in praesentia* just as midnight neutralizes it *in absentia* ("Now stand you on the top of happy hours", l. 5); that of inevitable decline ("in your decay", l. 3); that of the copy which is art according to Plato ("Much liker than your painted counterfeit": a recurrent theme of the *Sonnets*); and finally, the theme of giving the self as the means of preserving it, as opposed to avarice which is waste ("To give away your self, keeps your self still").

In the triangular actantial structure, all the three act-
ants have here the status of the *artist*. Time is the art-
ist who destroys, the poet the artist who creates, yet both
obliterate the fair youth as empirical referent: see the third
quatrain where the need to survive as the real self – and
not as the self celebrated in the word, which obliterates its
referent – is made explicit, particularly in the linguistic re-
dundancy of l. 12 "Can make *you* live *your self*". Thus the
fair youth too steps forward as an artist, one who makes
living copies of himself in his offspring (l. 14), immortal-
izing an image which, by reproducing that of the zenith
("the top of happy hours") in his descendants, should par-
adoxically be safe from the "wastes of time": no longer the
Platonic shadow of the idea, but the immutable archetypal
paradigm itself.

Sonnet 17, too, avows the risks of art as opposed to life,
but it is the last moment of doubt:

> Who will believe my verse in time to come
> If it were filled with your most high deserts?
> Though yet heaven knows it is but as a tomb
> Which hides your life, and shows not half your parts:
> If I could write the beauty of your eyes,
> And in fresh numbers number all your graces,
> The age to come would say this poet lies,
> Such heavenly touches ne'er touched earthly faces.
> So should my papers (yellowed with their age)
> Be scorned, like old men of less truth than tongue,
> And your true rights be termed a poet's rage,
> And stretchéd metre of an antique song.
>> But were some child of yours alive that time,
>> You should live twice in it, and in my rhyme.

The logical pattern of the opening octave is once more that of the chiasmus:

l. 1	A)	disbelief of future reader
l. 2	B)	hypothesis of the poem as an act of celebration
ll. 3-4	B$_1$)	limits of hypothesis: annulment of the referent
ll. 5-6	B)	celebrative hypothesis
ll. 7-8	A)	disbelief of future reader

Celebrative poetry will not appear credible to the future reader, and consequently the referent will appear unreal. At the same time, it cannot but appear to the writer as a *tomb* that "hides" the life of the referent (ll. 3-4) by transferring him from a naturalistic to a symbolical order and hence compelling him to relinquish *his* reality too. Admittedly, Shakespeare overtly proffers the excuse of the inadequacy of his art ("my *barren* rhyme"); nevertheless, I believe it is possible even here to observe Shakespeare, in the very act of writing celebrative verse, already embarking on a metalinguistic exploration (in the terms of his own cultural codes) of the role of the poet and of the relationship between art and referent, above all from the standpoint of the reader. It needs to be noted that here, rather than Time, the antagonist of the actantial triangle is the reader himself "in time to come" – the decoder of the message who should balance the accounts of an existence already over with those of an art which outlives it, without betraying the original referent. An impossible task. It is easier to balance life's accounts *within* the order of nature by the perpetuation of self in one's lineage, which is a living, tangible sign of the origi-

nal source (or referent). The couplet contains Shakespeare's last effort to achieve a compromise by linking the marriage theme and the theme of immortality in art.

Sonnet 18

The next sonnet in the sequence gives free rein to the hyperboles of laudatory verse in a process of nomination which abandons, or rather, systematically contradicts, the order of nature:

> Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
> Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
> Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
> And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
> Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
> And often is his gold complexion dimmed,
> And every fair from fair sometime declines,
> By chance, or nature's changing course untrimmed:
> But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
> Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
> Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,
> When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st,
>   So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
>   So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

The act of engrafting, which transforms nature into art, life into a name, and man into an archetype, is here completed. The sonnet is divided into two well-defined syntactic and semantic sections: i) ll. 1-8, dealing with nature, its laws and vicissitudes; ii) ll. 9-14, dealing with art and its symbolic order. The common denominator is summer which ushers in each section (cf. ll. 1 and 9), first as a real event, then as a metaphor

which annuls its temporal dimension.

The poem opens with a comparison of the referent and addressee with summer as the season of perfection, in line with the preceding sonnets. But the comparison is unsatisfactory, and is straightaway exposed by the dubitative, rhetorical "Shall" which introduces it.

By line 2 it has been rejected outright, while lines 3 and 4, which are harnessed to line 2 by antonymic contiguity ("temperate", l. 2 / "Rough", l. 3), specify the reason for its rejection, namely a) the presence of violence in summer too (l. 3), and b) its transitoriness (l. 4).

The first and second line-pairs of the next quatrain echo in turn lines 3 and 4: lines 5 and 6 develop the theme of violence (whether perpetrated or endured by the sun); lines 7 and 8 develop the theme of the mutability of all things fair.

The third quatrain, with its initial "But", abruptly halts the natural process and introduces the counterpart of summer in the symbolic order ("thy eternal summer"); counterpart which is then consolidated by a series of negations of the drawbacks inherent in the natural order. Using his favourite chiastic structure once more, the poet first of all denies its transience (ll. 9-10 answer ll. 4 and 7-8), and its violence (l. 11 answers ll. 3 and 5-6). The scheme, initially parallelistic, but taken as a whole, chiastic, is as follows:

l. 3	A)	violence of the wind
l. 4	B)	ephemerality of the "lease"
ll. 5-6	A)	violence of the sun
ll. 7-8	B)	ephemerality of natural process
ll. 9-10	B₁)	denial of ephemerality
l. 11	A₁)	denial of the final violence of death

The series of extremely emphatic negations – especially "shall not" of l. 9 which answers the opening "Shall" of l. 1, and thereby counters the doubts about rhetoric's effectiveness as mediator of the real with a triumphant certainty of a non-referential aesthetic – prepares the way for the ultimate assertion of the third quatrain: "When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st", a veritable knot of paradoxes which transforms the emphatic negation "shall not fade" (l. 9) into an absolute positive, "thou grow'st". The place of *growth* is no longer in reality but in art, and immortality is no longer entrusted to lineage but to the *lines* of the poem, which have the power to check age's inroads (which themselves take the form of *lines*, wrinkles). The phrase "eternal lines" is thus clearly a macro-textual nexus: if "lines" can mean (a) units of verse (b) wrinkles and (c) progeny, lineage, it will be evident that "eternal lines" rejects the naturalistic hypothesis of Sonnet 16, where the task of guaranteeing the Friend's immortality was assigned to "the lines of life" (l. 9), i.e. his descendants, in preference to the weak lines of the poet; as well as it rejects those written on the ageing forehead by time in Sonnet 19, l. 10, "Nor draw no lines there with thine antique pen". In Sonnet 18, "eternal lines", coming at the end of the third quatrain, links up with

"thy eternal summer" (l. 9), and stands in opposition to the first two quatrains as a whole.

Lastly, "eternal lines" is contrasted, via syntagmatic contiguity, with "to time". Time is thus intimately defeated: no longer a sequence of temporal fragments as in ll. 1-8 ("summer's day", l. 1; "summer's lease", "date", l. 4; "Sometime", l. 5; "often", l. 6; "sometime", l. 7), it has been reduced to immobility and rendered impotent as an antagonist. There is, in fact, an exchange of functions between the actant fair youth and the actant Time. It is no longer the latter which flows, which *grows against*, the former rendering him ephemeral, but the fair youth who *grows against* Time rendering it ineffectual.[31] The process of growth is no longer natural (cf. the paradigm explored up to Sonnet 15) but cultural and hence, paradoxically, one which no longer takes place in the temporal dimensions of past, present and future, but in a continuous, archetypal presence – *towards* time, *against* time.

The couplet restates the paradox – which, however, is the status itself of art – in an eternal present no longer maintained at the naturalistic level through the indefinite perpetuation of the referent in his descendants (the marriage theme), but at the level of art, through an indefinite succession of readers ("So long as men can breathe or eyes can see", l. 13) who will continually recreate, as they read the poetic word which "contains" him, the youth who has now become an archetype: "So long *lives* this, and this *gives life* to thee" (l. 14).

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[31] This pattern will be rendered figuratively explicit in Sonnet 116, ll. 5-6. For my analysis, see pp. 116-20 below.

1.3 The Archetype: Monument or Tomb?

The themes of time's violence and constant erosion are once more interwoven in Sonnet 19, where for the first time the fair youth takes on the status of archetype, the Neoplatonist alternative to the metamorphic flux of Ovidian reality:[32]

> Devouring Time blunt thou the lion's paws,
> And make the earth devour her own sweet brood,
> Pluck the keen teeth from the fierce tiger's jaws,
> And burn the long-lived phoenix in her blood,
> Make glad and sorry seasons as thou fleet'st,
> And do whate'er thou wilt swift-footed Time,
> To the wide world and all her fading sweets:
> But I forbid thee one most heinous crime,
> O carve not with thy hours my love's fair brow,
> Nor draw no lines there with thine antique pen,
> Him in thy course untainted do allow,
> For beauty's pattern to succeeding men.
>> Yet do thy worst old Time: despite thy wrong,
>> My love shall in my verse ever live young.

The syntactical articulation of this sonnet is somewhat abnormal in that the *incipit* does not occupy the whole of the first two quatrains but stops at the end of line 7. Nevertheless it stands in a parallelistic relationship to the structure of the previous sonnet: as in the former, the first section, dominated by violence and mutability, is followed by a second introduced by an identical "But" clause which, via an analogous series of

[32] Shakespeare was influenced especially by Pythagoras's speech in the fifteenth book of the *Metamorphoses*, of which, for the moment, we need to quote only a single, crucial line: "Cuncta fluunt, omnisque vagans formatur imago" (l. 178). All quotations are from Ovid 1958.

prohibitions (here addressed directly to Time in the conative function), prepares the way for the final epiphany of the fair youth immortalized in art. As in the couplet of Sonnet 15, Time and the poet are directly involved in an agon in which they compete for the youth. Both appear as writers: one of death, the other of life.

In the first seven lines Time is the unchallenged protagonist of the action (though by rhetorical concession: cf. "blunt thou", l. 1); as tragic hero he is the agent of the apocalypse. In the next five lines Time becomes the writer of decay and death, who is now subjected to the prohibitions of the positive artist. In the last two, Time in his dotage is scoffingly left to play out his malicious farce, now that the poet has succeeded in snatching the immortalized referent from his claws, precisely by *describing the agon.* As this brief summary shows, the two main agonists undergo a converse development. The gradual *belittling* of the great tragic hero "Devouring Time", transformed, in the final mockery, into "old Time", is counterbalanced by the progressive *magnification* of the role of the poet – absent from the first section, except for the ego-oriented implications of the conative function, present as announcer of prohibitions in the second, triumphant in the double assertion of "my" against "thy" (ll. 13-14) in the last. The scheme – which can be termed theatrical – is as follows:

ll. 1-7

(+)   Time-as-tragic hero   (-)   concession of the writer

ll. 8-12

          Time-as-writer   agon   prohibitions of the writer

ll. 13-14

(-)   Time-as-fool   (+)   triumph of the writer

The agon in the middle section takes place within the common ground of *writing*, metaphorical in one case, literal in the other. At the beginning of the agon in l. 8, one notes the abrupt reversal of power in the grammatical relationship between subject and object: the dominant "thou" of lines 1 and 5 is reduced to the object "thee" of the new explicit subject "I" in: "But *I* forbid *thee*...". Thus the victor of the agon is immediately revealed at the level of linguistic structure. It is also worth noting that the final assertion which sanctions the victory is made in the same kind of grammatical clause as in the previous sonnet: "shall" (l. 14). The logical-grammatical scheme, unified by parallelisms (ABAAB), is as follows:

ll. 1-7   apostrophe with a series of concessive
          imperatives
ll. 8   adversative clause in the indicative
ll. 9-12 apostrophe with imperatives, two negative, one
          affirmative
l. 13   apostrophe with concessive imperative
l. 14   affirmative clause in the indicative

The final couplet thus reproduces the grammatical+modal double-articulations of the quatrains, setting the final seal on the victory. Time the antagonist is dominated even in the verbal mood (submitted to an imperative) by an agonist who, like his referent, acts in the assertiveness of the indicative mood.

After this analysis of the actantial and grammatical structures, let us now turn to the parallelistic pattern. The grammatical structure, like the rhyme scheme, is also a parallelism- or chiasmus-based pattern in the sonnets: the level of logical argument is organized within a formal frame-

work functioning as a self-contained system of supplementary formal significations.[33] Here the parallelistic pattern is formed mainly by a symmetrical combination of the semes of violence (ll. 1-4) and of mutability (ll. 5-7), produced by couplings at the rhythmical, phonic and metaphorical-mythical levels. For each of these levels we shall indicate only the most outstanding instances in order not to lose sight of the complex coherence of the text as a whole.

The rhythmical level. In the first quatrain, which is entirely dominated by the violence of Time, the opening word "Devouring" acquires a powerful tonic accent, being the only trisyllabic word in a string of monosyllables, within a basic iambic pattern checked midway by the strong trochaic inversion of "blunt thou". The opening emphasis is repeated at line 2 in "devour" (with a change of inflexion: polyptoton) within a symmetrical, still monosyllabic, iambic cadence. This is followed by a violent trochaic inversion at the beginning of l. 3 in the verbal function which parallels "blunt" ("Pluck . . . "), and a partial return to the fluency of iambics in l. 4, whose sacrificial theme has now superseded that of violence ("And burn . . . ").

The phonological level. The potent phono-symbolical effect of the assonances + alliterations in the first quatrain, especially in l. 3 where the violence seems to be communicated by the reiteration of the /i:/, is immediately perceptible. I shall not attempt a full phonetic transcription here, however, given the difficulty of reconstructing Elizabethan pronunciation with sufficient confidence, even though Helge Kökeritz's impor-

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[33] See Jakobson 1968: 597-60. Stefano Agosti (1972) has carried out an extremely subtle examination of the undermining of the role of syntax as a logical progression that takes place in poetry.

tant work (1953) has provided us with some valid (though not
definitive) instruments for its analysis. The articulation of the
vowels is the principal obstacle: it is hard to establish wheth-
er the /ʌ/ of "Pluck" is to be considered a front or back vow-
el, and whether the vowel in "tiger" has already been diph-
thongized into /ai/ or is still the long /i:/, or, as seems more
likely, is in an intermediate phase.

The consonants are less problematical, so that we can
hazard a reasonable phonetic reading of the second quat-
rain. Lines 5-7 show a linking of three predicates or qualifi-
cations, each pertaining to ephemerality and each occurring
in the final or penultimate position (and hence in rhythmi-
cal parallelism) by means of alliterations and assonances:

> l. 5 floot'st
>   f i:t st
> l. 6 swift-footed Time
>   swift f tid   tai
> l. 7 fading sweets
>   f di   swi:ts

This phonematic selection clearly reveals, *within* the se-
mantic + rhythmical parallelisms, a complex parallelistic
patterning of the alliterating consonants /f/, /t/, /s/, /d/ (all
labio-dentals or alveolars) around the front-vowels /i:/, /i/,
/i/, /i:/ which are arranged in a chiasmus.

The metaphorical-mythical level. Lines 1 and 3 show the
violence of Time directed against the most violent of the an-
imals, arithmetically squaring, as it were, the idea of vio-
lence, in a parallelistic, anaphoric pattern on the syntagmat-
ic axis: subject, "thou" (l. 1), implicit in l. 3; predicate, "blunt"
(l. 1), "pluck" (l. 3); (extensive) complement, "paws" (l. 1),
"teeth" (l. 3); qualifier, "lion's" (l. 1), "tiger's" (l. 3). Moreo-

ver, we note the parallel phonetic articulation of the two verbs /bl/ and /pl/, and the symmetrical positioning (epiphora) of "lion's paws" (l. 1) and "tiger's jaws" (l. 3) enhanced by rhyme. Lines 2 and 4, on the other hand, contain a different kind of violence, this time at the mythical level: that of the Earth which devours her brood (even if, of course, the naturalistic sense of the earth as grave is also present) and of the final sacrifice of the phoenix which will never more arise from its ashes. In addition, the openings of the two lines are in obvious (anaphoric) parallelism: "And make" (l. 2), "And burn" (l. 4). Thus (at all levels) the scheme of the first quatrain is ABAB (further echoed by the alternating rhyme, the phonological epiphora *par excellence*).

Lastly we may note how the semes of violence and ephemerality combine in a single metaphor in line 9 expressing, after an initial exclamation-entreaty, the strong prohibition: "O carve not with thy hours my love's fair brow", where "carve" contains the seme of violence and "hours" that of ephemerality. Time's greatest violence operates through transience: thus this line restates, in the simultaneity of metaphor, ll. 1-4 (violence) and ll. 5-7 (ephemerality).

Thanks to the poet's victory in the agon, the Friend, now immune from Time, is raised to the level of the archetype: "For beauty's pattern to succeeding men" (l. 12).

The Fair Youth as Archetype and the Obliteration of the Referent

The archetype receives its full paradigmatic articulation in the following Sonnet 20,[34] where it is presented as an original bi-sexual matrix (cf. the Platonic myth), reappearing in Sonnet 31 as the sum of all dead friends and as their living grave:

> ll. 1-4
> Thy bosom is endeared with all hearts,
> Which I by lacking have supposéd dead,
> And their reigns love and all love's loving parts
> And all those friends which I thought *buriéd*.

> ll. 9-10
> Thou art the *grave* where *buried* love doth live,
> Hung with the trophies of my lovers gone . . .

The burial seme (cf. the words in italics) does not even spare the archetype, let alone art itself which – as we shall see shortly – is situated on a plane of homological correspondences with the status of the archetype.

This status is subjected to a thoroughgoing interrogation in Sonnet 53:

> ll. 1-2
> What is your substance, whereof are you made,
> That millions of strange shadows on you tend?

As well as being the pattern of beauty for future generations, the archetype is also the epitome of all the mythical beauties of the past, which, in comparison, are mere approximations to it (or, as Shakespeare will call them later, in

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[34] See the previously mentioned analyses by Pagnini and Melchiori, as well as Sabbadini and Renzi (1972).

Sonnet 106, using the Biblical code of the advent of Christ, "prophecies" of it):

> ll. 5-8
> Describe Adonis and the counterfeit,
> Is poorly imitated after you,
> On Helen's cheek all art of beauty set,
> And you in Grecian tires are painted new.

The archetype is equated to the status of the poetic word in so far as it is a Signifier of numerous historical signifieds (signifieds as decipherings of, or rather approximations to, a Signifier which cannot be definitively decoded); whereas it is equated to the status of the Word in so far as it is a Signifier whose referent (Jesus, the fair youth)[35] *physically* intersects history, confirming both prophecies and prophets (in the Platonic code, approximations to the Idea).

But if the Word is the absolute Signifier which predicates its mystic existence (non-verifiable on the empirical level), the poetic word, that celebrates the Friend as a Neoplatonist archetype, is an absolute Signifier which – precisely becauseit is such! – can only predicate the *absence* of its historical referent. In Sonnet 81, as we shall demonstrate more adequately later, the poet will give expression to this paradox: "Your name from hence immortal life shall have" – which is exactly what, ironically and inevitably thanks to the historical youth's transformation into an archetype, his poetry has been at great pains to *conceal*. The *name* is no longer a biographical index, but a *word*. Notwithstanding the conjectures of bi-

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[35] The association of Christ and the fair youth is not intended here in Northrop Frye's sense of a symbolic identification of the fair youth as "an erotic Messiah" (2010: 106).

ographical critics, in the autonomy of the internal meanings and in the functional code of Shakespeare's sonnets, immortality is bestowed upon a name *without* a face, upon an archetype *without* a referent – nor could it be otherwise.

In Sonnet 55, one of the greatest of the immortality series, the archetype is definitively consecrated in poetry. The celebration of the referent is tantamount to the creation of a perennial Signifier which is none other than a tombstone eternally concealing his absence. This poem is already a kind of epigraph to the sonnet sequence both in its declamatory tone and in its echoing the Horatian epigraph and the conclusion of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (by which it has obviously been influenced). The triumph of immortality in art is also, for Shakespeare, a tacit admission that life has been defeated, given, in fact, that the epigraph is all that survives. The celebrative word – an epideictic speech[36] which, by its specific rhetorical nature, is

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[36] Poetry in its origins is 'celebrative' and it is no accident that it belongs to the epideictic genre – and is hence 're-utilizable' – of the three Aristotelian rhetorical genres, the other two of which are the judicial and the deliberative. Lausberg notes: "Traditional rhetoric for the advanced has paid particular attention to the epideictic genre, which is close to poetry, in so far as the ceremony as situation of celebrative speech can be understood as a situation which is repeatable, and the solemn confirmation of the situation in epideictic speech has its analogy in the generalizing and solemn function of poetry" (translated from 1969: 21). Puttenham too was aware of the epideictic origins of poetry: "Wherfore the Poets being in deede the trumpetters of all praise and also of slaunder (not slaunder, but well deserved reproch) were in conscience & credit bound next after the divine praises of the immortal gods, to yeeld a like ratable honour to all such amongst men, as most resembled the gods by excellencie of function, and had a certaine affinitie with them, by more then humane and ordinaire vertues shewedd in their actions here upon earth" (1970: 35). It is also evident here how natural it seemed, in epideictic speech, to erect an archetype.

compelled to generalize the features of the referent in order to render it an object of universal praise, and is thus able to attain to the level of archetype where Man, or even the two-faced Janus, the Master-Mistress of Sonnet 20, replaces the individual – becomes in practice a *verbal grave*, the final expression of the *burial* seme.

In the conscious fictiveness of the word and in the paradox of archetypal celebration, there takes place what we might term a figuralizing of the ontological literalness both of Platonic archetype and Christian Word (the two codes are constantly interwoven: see, for example, the entire religious level of Sonnets 105-108): the poetic archetype ends by coinciding exclusively with its figuration and breaks loose from its real or historical referent. But at this point the poet *must* endow his archetype once more with the attributes of life, precisely because it conceals a historical person. In the words he must somehow – at the connotative level – retransform him into *nature*. This dialectical process (flight from life, which is change and death / return to life from the permanence of art, which also is death) is linked to the basic paradox that the fair youth exists as a real individual, addressee and referent of the Sonnets, while at the same time he is transfigured into a paradigm, a pure Signifier of all the significations and manifestations which historical, or even mythical, man has produced or will produce.

In art, life is superseded, but also *concealed*. The first image of a long series developed throughout the sonnet sequence comes to mind – that of the essence of summer's flowers: "A liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass" (Sonnet 5, l. 10). This is why the poet is always concerned to endow his archetype with *life*, even at the (rhetorical) risk of qualifying as artifice or counterfeit any historical approximation

or mythical copy of his paradoxical archetypal naturalness: cf. ll. 5-6 of Sonnet 53 already quoted. The referent *fair youth* belongs simultaneously to two antinaturalistic systems: that of the Neoplatonist idea, and that of the poetic word. Each tends to transmute the *name* into *tomb* or *monument*. To counteract this inevitable consequence of his practice, the poet has no option but to compensate by granting his archetype the verbs and colours of life (nature) *within* art. This can be seen for example in:

18, l. 12	. . . *in eternal lines* to time *thou grow'st*
19, l. 14	My love shall *in my verse* ever *live* young
55, l. 14	Shall you *pace forth* . . . /*in my verse* (implic-
it)/ 63, l. 14	You *live* in this . . . and he *in them* still *green*
81, l. 13	You still shall *live* (such virtue hath *my pen*)

The tension between referent and signifier seems to me to reveal, in a way that is new compared with the classical tradition in which archetypal celebration had already been employed, an exploration of immortality in art, with its dialectic of assertion and negation, life and death, monument and tomb, that is already modern in approach.[37] The paradox of celebrative art lies precisely in the fact that the signifier abuses the referent mainly by outliving it as the presence of an absence, thus exhibiting in full the semiotic deception in-

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[37] This dialectic profoundly affects the life/art dichotomy, which is of first importance in a mature work like *The Tempest*. As regards the modernity of this issue, to mention only one or two examples from English and American literature, compare the continual reflections on the relationship between art and life in the poetry of Wallace Stevens, or the more significant reworking of the same problem in W.H. Auden's *The Sea and the Mirror*, which is a 'version' of *The Tempest* precisely in this key.

herent in any use of signs, which always stands for what is absent.

Shakespeare, though a Renaissance man with his roots in the classical tradition, is a modern artist in his acute perception of the flaws and constraints hidden in the transmission of sense as well as in the very act of transmitting it. In his plays, for example, he exposes the paradigmatic vortex which robs Aristotelian action and the revenge tragedy sub-genre (cf. *Hamlet*) of their syntagmatic credibility and practicability. In his poetry, he penetrates the paradoxical presence-absence of the object celebrated, whereby the word, forfeiting its referent and detaching itself from the sender, finally celebrates itself as the tombstone of a mislaid signified. Immortality in art thus becomes the perpetual sliding of the signifier along the historical signifieds of the acts of reading to which the work will lend itself indefinitely throughout the years. Right from the beginning, the fair youth is forever lost.

Sonnet 55

Sonnet 55 can be usefully read in this light with interesting results at the macrotextual level:

> Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
> Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme,
> But you shall shine more bright in these contents
> Than unswept stone, besmeared with sluttish time.
> When wasteful war shall statues overturn,
> And broils root out the work of masonry,
> Nor Mars his sword, nor war's quick fire shall burn
> The living record of your memory.

'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.
　　So till the judgement that your self arise,
　　You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes.

We have here an absolutely monolithic composition which is best not to subject to analysis in terms of quatrains or sections of a different logical, thematic or metaphorical nature, even if the logical scheme – as usual symmetrically arranged – can be set out as follows:

　ll. 1-2　A)　negation of the everlastingness of marble

　ll. 3-4　B)　affirmation of the everlastingness of poetry

　ll. 5-6　A)

　ll. 7-8　B)

　ll. 9-14　B)　with final expansion

Its sustained metaphorical structure is generated by the inner dialectic of the arch-seme which opens the poem, "Not *marble*", and sets up the volumetric dimension of the poem and all its systems of reference, all its metonymic chains. The tension is present from the outset: "marble" can stand metonymically for *statue* (also by syntagmatic contiguity with "monuments"), but it can stand too, by synecdoche, for *gravestone*; the one in its image perpetuates a presence, the other in its inscription testifies to an absence.

The two meanings seem to reappear in combination in the immediately following "gilded monuments / Of princes", where, though the sense of "statue" is undeniably on the foreground, it nevertheless appears to be subsumed in the category

of funeral monuments.[38] If in ll. 4 and 6, the reading *gravestone* predominates, respectively in "unswept stone" and in "the work of masonry",[39] in line 5 the reading is explicitly manifested.

In opposition to the physical solidity of *marble* (and its double metonymic chain) which is nonetheless defaced by time and war, poetry achieves its triumph precisely because its lack of physicality enables it to remain immune throughout the ages. And yet, in its very competition with the *marble* paradigm, poetry metaphorically takes on marble's volumetric aspect and all the connotations implicit in it. Using A for the seme *marble* and B for the paradigm *poetry*, we get two parallel lexematic series:

	A		B
l. 1	marble	l. 2	*powerful* rhyme
	gilded monuments	l. 3	these *contents*
l. 4	unswept stone	l. 8	living *record*
l. 5	statues	l. 10	*Shall you pace forth*
l. 6	the work of masonry	l. 10	shall still find *room*
		l. 14	you live *in this*
		l. 14	*dwell in* lovers' eyes

[38] As was also the case in the Horatian source, where the funeral sense was no less explicit (the pyramids are enormous sepulchres): "Exegi monumentum aere perennius / regalique situ piramidum altius . . . " (*Odes* 3.30.1).

[39] This kind of construction does not seem appropriate to statuary art, while it is certainly appropriate to monuments to the dead. Note also the verb used in the image in question: "[B]roils root out the work of masonry"; this clearly implies a walled construction with foundations in the earth, and hence tombs, not statues.

The paradigm of physical volume (A) is carried over onto the paradigm of linguistic volume (B). Poetry as a general referent, but especially *this* sonnet, with its grandiose sculpture and the compactness of its total formal homogeneity, becomes a veritable verbal icon, a monument of words. The static, and literal, qualifications of A are transformed into the dynamic, and metaphorical, predicates of B, while preserving the connotations of volume. Poetry is immediately defined as "powerful" as if it had a physical dimension. It is then, more explicitly, defined as "contents" in a comparison opposing it to the marble paradigm, downgraded connotatively into "unswept stone" in the next line, which rounds the first quatrain in a chiastic structure: l. 1 "marble" (A), l. 2 "powerful rhyme" (B), l. 3 "these contents" (B), l. 4 "unswept stone" (A).

In the second quatrain, the dissolution or defacement of marble is counterbalanced by the inviolability of poetry as a "living record" (l. 8). Finally, in the third quatrain and the couplet, paradigm B achieves its complete, volumetric, epiphany.

Given the competition between plastic art and linguistic art on the axis of *durability*, the comparative procedure necessarily involves the choice of a common ground; thus the poet opts for that of volume, raising *his* monument, just as Horace had done: "Exegi monumentum aere perennius" (*Odes* 3.30.1). In so doing, however, he is obliged to carry over into the linguistic field the ambiguity of the paradigm set up by *marble* (sort of dialectic arch-seme): statue = replica of life *vs* tombstone = sign of death. The verbal commemoration, too, is the record of an absence. The poet carves a habitation for the referent-addressee out of his

poetry:[40] "your praise shall still find *room*" (l. 10), "You live *in* this, and *dwell* in lovers' eyes" (l. 14). But at the point of maximal figurative assertion, significantly introduced once more (as in Sonnets 18 and 19) by "Shall" (l. 10, "Shall you pace forth"), life is petrified, statue-like; it becomes (like the essence of the flowers) an image imprisoned in a niche of words. The martial effect, typical of the whole sonnet, is reminiscent of Renaissance monuments, especially those equestrian statues where the dynamism – symbol of life – of prancing horse and rider is poised in a perpetual promise (of an impossible action): which is also the perpetual commemoration of an absence.

This interpretation may perhaps seem too self-assured in its conclusions. Certainly the assertions of poetry's power are far stronger than the reservations, which are implied rather than expressed. Nevertheless, at the macrotextual level, as we have already seen and shall have occasion to verify in detail later, such an interpretation cannot be disregarded if we are to grasp the sense of Shakespeare's prolonged metalinguistic exploration of the problems of celebrative poetry in the immortality sonnets.

[40] There are other examples in Shakespeare where the word or name is a room, a dwelling-place. Cf. Teseus' description of the visionary role of the poet in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 5.1.12-17: "The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling, / Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven; / And, as imagination bodies forth / The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen / Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing / A local habitation and a name" (emphasis added).

1.4 Metamorphosis and The Triumph of Chiasmus

The Eternal Recurrence of the Same

Time is ever the great antagonist of man's and nature's significance: the agent of endless cycles of growth and decay (days, years, geological eras), and the historical perpetrator of as many endless cycles of glory and death that go with the vicissitudes of power – wars, conspiracies, triumphs and downfalls. The two levels (of nature and of man) advance hand in hand and exchange functions and images throughout the whole of Shakespeare's work, though never, perhaps, so consummately as in the last act of *King Lear*, where Lear invites Cordelia to abandon the world once and for all:

> No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison.
> We two alone will sing like birds i'the cage;
> When thou dost ask me blessing I'll kneel down
> And ask of thee forgiveness; so we'll live,
> And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
> At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
> Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,
> Who loses and who wins, who's in, who's out;
> And take upon's the mystery of things
> As if we were God's spies; and we'll wear out,
> In a *walled prison*, packs and sets of great ones
> That *ebb and* flow *by the moon*.
> (5.3.8-19; emphasis added; Shakespeare 1972: 187)

What immediately strikes the eye is that imprisonment (as with the essence of flowers of Sonnet 8 – note the resemblance between "*prisoner* pent in *walls* of glass" and "walled prison" here) is the necessary condition, real and metaphori-

cal, for withdrawal from life and for admission to a different level of being: a being, here, freed from the vain commitment to human power, the pointlessness of which, in what Shakespeare came to see as history's ever-repeated farce, is finally expressed in the image of the vain, cyclic movement of the tides "that ebb and flow by the moon". It is essentially a metamorphic, and pessimistic, vision, due partly to the influence of Ovid; and partly to Shakespeare's profound meditation on history throughout the chronicle plays and subsequently the great tragedies. The pattern of reality – whether natural or historical – shows neither progression, nor finality, nor the discovery of the new, but only repetition, instability, and the re-proposal of the old. When the actant Time does not rage like a destructive fury, he subjects his offsprings to the withering process of unending repetition:

> Sonnet 59, ll. 1-4
> If there be nothing new, but that which is,
> Hath been before, how are our brains beguiled,
> Which labouring for invention bear amiss
> The second burthen of a former child!

> Sonnet 123, ll. 1-4
> No! Time, thou shalt not boast that I do change,
> Thy pyramids built up with newer might
> To me are nothing novel, nothing strange,
> They are but dressings of a former sight:

Aware of this, the Poet too sometimes depicts himself in the same, typically Renaissance light, not as an inventor of the new, but as a remaker of the old, using the same metaphor of "dressing" that appears, in relation to Time, in 123:

Sonnet 76, ll. 11-12
So all my best is dressing old words new,
Spending again what is already spent.

Sonnet 76 is generally considered the first of the so-called
Rival Poet series; it systematically repudiates the poeti-
cal fashion of newfangledness cultivated by the rival. If
everything repeats itself everlastingly, the only bulwark
lies in the paradigmatic permanence of the monument of
words (cf. 55), not in a syntagmatic, headlong rush: to ape
the fashion of literary eccentricity is merely to leap-frog
the problem of semanticizing a recurrent, and hence ul-
timately futile, pattern. The way out of this paratactic fu-
tility is offered by the paradigmatic stability of the arche-
type. This, however, can be established only by the poet-
ic word, which will be paradigmatic in its turn, given that
it is a vortex of equivalences celebrating the ontological
Same:

Sonnet 76, ll. 1-10
Why is my verse so barren of new pride?
So far from variation or quick change?
Why with the time do I not glance aside
To new-found methods, and to compounds strange?
Why write I still all one, ever the same,
And keep invention in a noted weed,
That every word doth almost tell my name,
Showing their birth, and where did they proceed?
O know sweet love I always write of you,
And you and love are still my argument ...

Permanence is thus attainable by the word that *stands* (cf. 60,
l. 13) when nothing else can (cf. 60, l. 12 "And nothing *stands*
but for his scythe to mow"), and hence by the raising of the

fair youth to archetypal status by a Poet poised in a spiritual attitude of immutable loyalty, or, again, by the Platonic love of the two actants, exempt from time even though within time (cf. 116, l. 9, "Love's not Time's fool . . . ").

Sonnet 60

Sonnets 60, 64 and 65 are those, in fact, in which the poet proclaims art as the most consummate form of permanence in defiance of the repetitive cycles of geological, biological and historical time.

> Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
> So do our minutes hasten to their end,
> Each changing place with that which goes before,
> In sequent toil all forwards do contend.
> Nativity once in the main of light,
> Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crowned,
> Crookéd eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,
> And Time that gave, doth now his gift confound.
> Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth,
> And delves the parallels in beauty's brow,
> Feeds on the rarities of nature's truth,
> And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow.
>> And yet to times in hope, my verse shall stand
>> Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand.

The influence of Pythagoras' famous final speech in the fifteenth book of the *Metamorphoses*, from which Shakespeare, as we have already noted, repeatedly drew, is obvious in the first two quatrains.[41] In lines 1-4, the compari-

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[41] For the first quatrain, cf. ll. 181-5:

son of time with the sea unfolds in a sequence of syntactic parallelisms

a)	the waves	≈	a)	our minutes
b)	make towards		b)	hasten
c)	the pebbled shore		c)	their end

This is reinforced by an extremely significant series of redundancies: "make towards" (l. 1); "hasten" (l. 2), "changing place", "goes" (l. 3), "sequent", "contend" (l. 4).[42] The series of verbs suggests restless yet meaningless haste, arrested only by the negative limit of coast-as-death. The coast is "pebbled" and thus figuratively commutes, in an emblem of death, the vain *multiplicity* of the waves-minutes in the final ebbing, while at the same time preserving the seme of the *hardness* of impact. Perhaps, moreover, as Booth proposes, "minutes" is "logically apposite to *waves* but physically ad-

. . . ut unda impellitur unda
urgueturque eadem veniens urguetque priorem, tempora
sic fugiunt pariter pariterque sequuntur
et nova sunt semper; nam quod fuit ante relictum est, fitque quod
haud fuerat momentaque cuncta novantur.

For the second quatrain, cf. ll. 221-7:

Editus in lucem iacuit sine viribus infans:
mox quadrupes rituque tulit sua membra ferarum,
paulatimque tremens et nondum poplite firmo consistit
adiutis aliquo conamine nervis.
Inde valens veloxque fuit spatiumque iuventae transit et,
emeritis medii quoque temporis annis, labitur occiduae
per iter declive senectae.

[42] As regards the verbs attributed to the sea, Lever rightly notes that "Shakespeare viewed the whole universe in terms of human motivation" (1956: 253).

jacent to *pebbled* . . . minutes, unlike waves, are minute and insignificant, like pebbles" (1969: 133); although the context seems to me to suggest small rather than big waves in a "long-shot" of the sea.

The motion of the waves and the minutes is entirely horizontal, and hence a-semantic, since only the *vertical* dimension has significance in the Elizabethan cosmos which endows with meaning the vertices (and thus, by mere extension, the pyramidal bodies) of its classematic structures: the sun among the planets, the king in the body politic, the summer in the year, the lion among animals, gold among metals and so forth.

Once the eschatological vision of a future anchorage in another world has been lost, or become uncertain, time, like the sea, appears as nothing more than an arithmetical accumulation of identical segments: "Each changing place with that which goes before" (l. 3), recalling among other things the futile process of history, the epiphany and subsequent eclipse of every king in the "histories", each one mangled by the Grand Mechanism described by Jan Kott (1972).[43]

Time is here mainly figured by the life of man, whose vain existence is likened (in the second quatrain) to the vicissitudes of the sun. Man's journey, though presented in terms of the rising, zenith and setting of the sun, remains horizontal in its connotations, particularly thanks to the

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[43] See in particular the first chapter entitled "The Kings". For Shakespeare, history itself is a chain-like pattern, an indefinite series of anadiploses (the figure is: ... x / x ...). It might be described, in rhetorical terms, as a gradatio or climax (the figure: ... x / x ... y / y ... z / z ... etc.), in which each king or ruler corresponds to a letter which is supplanted by one which follows, in a play of illusory variables within a fixed scheme.

use of the verb "*Crawls* to maturity" (l. 6). The attainment of the zenith is expressed via a further metaphorical shift which allows us to glimpse the image of the king behind that of the sun ("wherewith being *crowned*"), while the two metaphorical planes merge in the following line: "Crookéd eclipses 'gainst his glory fight", in which "eclipses" pertains to astronomy whereas the rest of the terms connote a court-conspiracy against the king. "Crookéd" undoubtedly carries the implication of moral deformity in the Shakespearian code (a villainous plot against the glory of the king), but it also literally means "bent" in physical terms, thus at the iconic level suggesting the crescent of the eclipse and hence metonymically foreshadowing another crescent: time's scythe, which will emerge in l. 12.

In fact, time the mower is the protagonist of the third quatrain, delving "the parallels in beauty's brow", wrinkles iconically analogous to the waves of the sea and like them advancing towards death. Before his scythe "nothing stands" (l. 12): the horizontality is now that of death itself. Only celebrative art, in the couplet, *stands* (up) to time, as in line 12 of Sonnet 18; except that there the protagonist was the fair youth, whereas here it is poetry, of which the fair youth is only the object. Immortality, then, is a property of art, and not of the life which art appropriates and conceals.

The central opposition of the sonnet thus turns on the *horizontality* of sea, time and life, which is vanquished only by the *verticality* of poetry. We can illustrate this by listing some of the main finite verbal functions (bearing in mind their contextual role): *horizontality*, "make towards" (l. 1), "hasten" (l. 2), "contend" (l. 4), "crawls" (l. 6), "delves the parallels" (l. 10), "nothing stands" (l. 12); *verticality*, "my verse shall stand" (l. 13). Without the final inversion the son-

net would not be unified. Hence we feel obliged to reject Booth's opinion that: "Its last three lines are a prosaic and simpleminded reversion to a commonplace of the sequence" (1969: 132). This opinion however appears in the context of an acute observation on the role of the couplet in the Shakespearian sonnet:

> I hope to suggest that the couplets, even those as apparently debilitating as the grandly hollow couplet of 116, serve a purpose similar to the speeches of political reestablishment at the ends of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* . . . in the miniature scale of the sonnet the couplet ties off one set of loose ends, brings the reader's mind back to conceiving of experience in a single system. (Ibid.: 131)

Often, in fact, the couplet does channel the poetic complexity of the quatrains (inevitably impoverishing it) into a gnomic statement from the standpoint of recognized values. Yet in this, as in other cases (such as in Sonnet 116 where it is anything but hollow, as Booth assumes), the couplet is often capable of remaining in semiological harmony with the expressive system of the whole, even if only at a single semantic level.

Sonnet 63

This sonnet can be read as the epitome (orderly and free from semantic complications) of a considerable number of the semes and tropes and cultural codes employed in the immortality series, though the general tone begins to be noticeably less assertive. The poet abandons the categorical prohibitions of Sonnets 18 and 19 and accepts the naturalis-

tic ageing of the fair youth who henceforth will live on only
in memory as the paradigm of perfect beauty:

> Against my love shall be as I am now
> With Time's injurious hand crushed and o'erworn,
> When hours have drained his blood and filled his brow
> With lines and wrinkles, when his youthful morn
> Hath travelled on to age's steepy night,
> And all those beauties whereof now he's king
> Are vanishing, or vanished out of sight,
> Stealing away the treasure of his spring:
> For such a time do I now fortify
> Against confounding age's cruel knife,
> That he shall never cut from memory
> My sweet love's beauty, though my lover's life.
> > His beauty shall in these black lines be seen,
> > And they shall live, and he in them still green.

If we make a rapid inventory, we shall once more find the
following *motifs*: time as writer of old age (ll. 3-4); life's
journey metaphorically transposed into the brief passage
of the day (ll. 4-5);[44] the fair youth as king to be dethroned
(ll. 6-7); the fair youth as Spring, whose glories time is al-
ready stealing away (l. 8); the bulwark against decay (l. 9,
which can be compared, for example, to line 3 of Sonnet
16); time the mower (ll. 10-11); the poet as writer of eternal

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[44] The image "when his youthful morn / Hath travelled on to age's
steepy night" develops further the one already used in Sonnet 12, l. 2,
"And see the brave day sunk to hideous night", and attributes to the
night itself the qualification "precipice" derived from the sunset, thus
extending its implications indefinitely. Cf. once again the source in
Ovid: "Vidi ego quod fuerat quondam solidissima tellus / esse fretum,
vidi factas ex aequore terras" (*Metamorphoses* 15.262-3).

life who combats the destructive writing of time (ll. 13-14); and finally, "artificial" vegetable growth (cf. the engrafting theme) of the fair youth within the black letters of poetic lines ("and he in them still *green*", l. 14). The unusual directness and linearity of the motifs (all appear at the denotative level) enables Shakespeare to give an exhaustive repertory. For once the images are neither intricate nor superimposed, but clearly ordered and distributed, free from turbulent connotations in a compact syntactical scheme which resists division of lines 1 to 12 into quatrains.

Sonnets 64 and 65

These two sonnets together form a clear diptych and unlike 63 display Shakespeare's habitual complexity in their elaborately articulated levels. They take up once more the idea of the continual erosion of human monuments and signs, as well as of the worlds of history and nature (themes which appeared in 55 and 60), with perpetual metamorphosis occupying the foreground:

> When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced
> The rich-proud cost of outworn buried age,
> When sometime lofty towers I see down-rased,
> And brass eternal slave to mortal rage.
> When I have seen the hungry ocean gain
> Advantage on the kingdom of the shore,
> And the firm soil win of the watery main,
> Increasing store with loss, and loss with store.
> When I have seen such interchange of state,
> Or state it self confounded, to decay,
> Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminate

That Time will come and take my love away.
> This thought is as a death which cannot choose
> But weep to have, that which it fears to lose.

The logical-syntactical structure is akin to that of Sonnet 15, though even more rigorously parallelistic. The three quatrains, each opening with the same clause "When I have seen", form an extended protasis, even if in lines 11-12 the apodosis is already under way. The apodosis becomes explicit, however, only in the couplet, now neither triumphal nor even consolatory (as in 15, 29, 30, etc., which all have a syllogistic clause structure: "when", "when", "then"), but dominated by a painful sense of resignation. The comfort of celebrative poetry and the rescue of its referent from the grim scene of devastation surrounding him will not reappear until the couplet of the following sonnet, which is inseparably bound up with this one.

The first quatrain shows the antagonist Time (as in 55) in the act of defacing the treasures of the past (l. 2), its towers (l. 3) and its brass (l. 4). The second depicts, in epic and military terms (ll. 5-7) and in economic terms (l. 8), the vaster conflict of the natural world: that between land and ocean, in an endless alternation of victories and defeats.[45] The continual inversion of roles which goes with the perennial oscillation of the universal pendulum necessitates the formal organization of the concept in a chiastic structure (the baroque chiasmus being also a neutralization of the vain movement of history within a pattern of eternal recurrence):

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[45] Cf. once again the source in Ovid: "Vidi ego quod fuerat quondam solidissima tellus / esse fretum, vidi factas ex aequore terras" (*Metamorphoses* 15.262-3).

l. 5   A)   hungry ocean

l. 6   B)   kingdom of the shore

l. 7   B)   firm soil

l. 8   A)   watery main

It seems inevitable that the last line of the quatrain (l. 8) should round off the image of continual interchange in a perfect chiasmus:

Increasing store with loss, and loss with store
            a   b   a   b

The chiasmus will remain, in this sonnet and even more so in the one that follows it, the basic figure opposing metamorphic flux, containing it in a rhetorical mirroring which is baroque in character.

The first two lines of the third quatrain pick up and summarize the central images of the first and second, reproducing the chiasmus, this time vertically. Before setting this out schematically, it is necessary to clarify the different values assigned to the word "state" which occurs twice with different meanings (forming a rhetorical figure known as antanaclasis, often used by Shakespeare) in lines 9 and 10: "interchange of state" (l. 9) is equivalent to an exchange, or permutation, of a natural state or condition, with the additional metaphorical overtones of the political state, a reflection of the figurative representation of the strife between ocean and land as a war between states in the second quatrain (cf. the lexematic series appearing there: "gain", "kingdom", "win", "store", "loss"); whereas in "Or state itself confounded, to decay" (l. 10) it undoubtedly carries the meaning of status, pomp, grandeur laid waste by time. The construction of the vertical chiasmus thus appears:

ll. 1-4   A)   razing of man's loftiest monuments

ll. 5-8   B)   internecine war of nature, with exchange of roles

l. 9   B)   interchange in the natural world

l. 10   A)   decay of human grandeur

This, then, seems to be the organization of the protasis. It is no accident that the next line (11), which serves as a pivot leading into the apodosis, unfurls in its turn in a figure akin to the chiasmus, an epanalepsis (pattern: x … x), at the phonological, rhetorical and semantic levels:

> Ruin hath thus taught me to ruminate
> ru:in   ru:in

The circularity of the phonological and rhythmical levels does not require explication, but it may be useful to clarify in what way the semantic level too is circular. If the word "Ruin" has, on account of the connotations present throughout the whole of the sonnet, to be read as a gradual, unbroken, metamorphic erosion, "ruminate" which includes it phonetically, echoes it semantically in that it contains an identical seme of slow *transformation*. The former thus expresses the destruction brought about by the actant Time, the latter the *thought* of destruction of the actant poet, which echoes the former. This thought, moreover, "is as a death" (l. 13) which, like a chiasmus (and the effect here is distinctly iconic), rounds off and encloses the fleeting happiness time has allowed to man during the *parenthesis* of life, which in its turn appears as a chiasmus within a parallelism:

chiasmus:			a	b	b			a
	But weep to	have,	that	which it	fears to	lose
parallelism:	a		b				a	b

The chiasmus preponderates once more in the organization of Sonnet 65, which picks up again themes and metaphors already developed in Sonnets 55, 60, and 64:

> Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
> But sad mortality o'ersways their power,
> How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,
> Whose action is no stronger than a flower?
> O how shall summer's honey breath hold out,
> Against the wrackful siege of batt'ring days,
> When rocks impregnable are not so stout,
> Nor gates of steel so strong but time decays?
> O fearful meditation, where alack,
> Shall Time's best jewel from Time's chest lie hid?
> Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back,
> Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?
>> O none, unless this miracle have might,
>> That in black ink my love may still shine bright.

The first two quatrains rework the first ten lines of the previous sonnet (*semes*: metamorphosis, impermanence, war; *images*: monuments, land, sea, rocks), while the third reworks those of lines 11 and 12, and in its opening "O fearful *meditation*" (l. 9) reflects the opening of the couplet: "This *thought*" (l. 13). The couplet of this second sonnet however has no counterpart in the previous one, in that it rounds off both of them in the now habitual *topos* of the fair youth's immortality in art.

The initial octave thus forms a single, independent

block[46] and is organized geometrically in an extended chiastic figure. On the syntactical plane the two quatrains are balanced as follows:

ll. 1-2	A)	protasis
ll. 3-4	B)	apodosis
ll. 5-6	B)	apodosis
ll. 7-8	A)	protasis

We may also note the leading clauses:

l. 1	A)	Since
l. 3	B)	How
l. 5	B)	O how
l. 7	A)	When

Even the metaphorical structure fits into the same chiastic pattern and is distributed symmetrically over the lines:

ll. 1-3	A)	time's disintegrating violence
l. 4	B)	fragility of the flower
l. 5	B)	fragility of summer's fragrance
ll. 6-8	A)	time's warlike violence

Nor is this all. The syntagmatic order of the lexemes at opening and close further reinforces the overall chiastic pattern

[46] This is the case with many other sonnets. Cf. Booth: "In nearly two-thirds of Shakespeare's sonnets there are vestigial remains of the octave of the continental sonnet" (1969: 36).

l. 1	Since brass, nor stone	A)	man-made monuments
l. 1	nor earth, nor boundless sea	B)	natural elements
l. 7	When rocks impregnable	B)	natural elements
l. 8	Nor gates of steel47	A)	man-made monuments

It is worth stressing that "rocks impregnable", though at first sight semantically ambivalent, may here conveniently be read as 'cliffs' in a combination of images of land and sea (cf. l. 1) – both for reasons of a macrotextual kind, in that they link up with the image of sea-versus-shore in Sonnets 60 and 64, and for internal reasons, since a complex sea-war metaphor has just appeared in the previous line: "Against the wrackful siege of batt'ring days" (l. 6). This line in turn stands in a relationship of macrotextual parallelism to lines 1-4 of Sonnet 60, in that "days" echoes "minutes" and "batt'ring" evokes the beating of the "waves" against the "pebbled shore", and to lines 5-8 of Sonnet 64, in that "wrackful siege" recapitulates the entire image of the battle between land and ocean there depicted. Thus the single occurrence of "rocks" (l. 7) is to "earth" and "sea" in l. 1 as the single occurrence of "gates of steel" (l. 8) is to "brass" and "stone" of l. 1.

The various chiastic figures are distributed throughout the octave on the syntactic, logical, metaphorical, and syntagmatic-lexematic levels. They interlink to form a single, dominant figure, a figure which is tantamount to a Weltanschauung, and a typically baroque one at that.

Yet again, only the "miracle" of poetry (ll. 13-14) can outdo time's ravages. It alone will enable "Time's best jewel" to glitter for ever within the black ink of the lines of poetry. The final contrast between "black ink" and "shine bright" is it-

self a kind of semantic chiasmus, where "bright" is opposed to "black" through para-alliteration, and "shine" is linked to "ink" by the presence of the common seme *brilliance*.

In these sonnets, which are dominated by an obsessive awareness of a metamorphosis continually renewed and yet ever the same both in the realms of nature and history, the function of the prevailing chiastic structure is to supply a rhetorical vessel of *containment*. The absolute protagonist, eternally victorious in the realm of nature, is Time. The art of language, in its description of the agon, is his only valid opponent, defeating transience not so much by declaration or assertion as by reorganizing it definitively within the formidable bastions of the chiasmus which encircle its flux and thus exorcise its ephemerality and repetitiveness, creating a symbolic cosmos which is nevertheless structurally analogous to nature. In fact, Shakespeare's baroque chiasmus imitates, on the linguistic plane, the circular pattern of the real in its eternal recurrence: what was sea is land, what was land has become sea. The figure is called forth by the idea, the form is a necessity of the world-view.[47]

[47] Puttenham does not devote much space to the chiasmus, known to him as "*Antimetavole* or the Counterchange": "Ye have a figure which takes a couple of words to play with in a verse, and by making them to chaunge and shift one into others place they do very pretily exchange and shift the sence" (1970: 208). Nevertheless, his definition happily combines the exchange of meaning, the inner dialectic of this figure, with the grace and aesthetic satisfaction which it represents in its pattern. In addition, it is interesting to note how "Counterchange" seems a perfect synonym of "interchange" in Sonnet 64, where it appeared, significantly, within a chiastic figure: ll. 9-10, "such interchange (a) of state (b) / Or state (b) itself confounded (a)". The dominant figure of these two sonnets (and of the Sonnets as a whole) is here specifically named.

1.5 The Name Celebrated

Sonnets 71-74

Although the order within this sub-sequence is uncertain, the poems clearly form a single group in which the poet reflects anew on the meaning and function of his art, in particular with regard to his own role as writer-sender and to that of the fair youth as referent and addressee. Here the actant *Time* is set on one side, since in any case he will be victorious in physically destroying the poet actant, thus creating problems of recall or repression of memory in the mind of the surviving actant, the fair youth. The poet's defiance of Time is always martial, often triumphal, when he fights to protect the Friend from time's incursions and to defend him as the object of his own poetic celebration. But when the poet depicts himself as threatened by old age and death, the tone becomes humbler. And when the two human actors, journeying together in time, pause to observe each other and measure how each is declining (cf. 73 and 104, examined later), the tone grows elegiac and disconsolate.

For there to be immortality in art, the final addressee (explicitly as in 81, ll. 12-14, or implicitly evoked) *has to be* the future reader. The triangular actantial structure, which is *theatrical*, encompasses him in a kind of trigonometric projection so that there shall be a witness from *outside*: a future audience which can contemplate the *absence* of the original writer-sender and the referent-addressee, in other words, the victory of naturalistic time, while testifying to their triumphant *presence* in the word, the far greater victory of art. As long as the addressee remains the fair youth, and in the second instance, the contemporary reader, there can nev-

er be unlimited remembrance, but only grief-stricken mem-
ory, that of the fair youth for his departed poet, and the re-
duction of that memory into farce at the hands of his con-
temporaries. Thus in Sonnet 71, the writer asks to be totally
erased from the Friend's memory:

> No longer mourn for me when I am dead,
> Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell
> Give warning to the world that I am fled
> From this vile world with vilest worms to dwell:
> Nay if you read this line, remember not,
> The hand that writ it, for I love you so,
> That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,
> If thinking on me then should make you woe.
> O if (I say) you look upon this verse,
> When I (perhaps) compounded am with clay,
> Do not so much as my poor name rehearse;
> But let your love even with my life decay.
>> Lest the wise world should look into your moan,
>> And mock you with me after I am gone.

Renouncing any personal claim to remembrance, the writ-
er-sender seeks to efface himself in his poetry. We thus have
the paradox whereby he who names must have his own
name obliterated (l. 11) to prevent his personal, historical ex-
istence from damaging the memory of his addressee, and
from exposing him to the scorn of his contemporaries.

Here the series of prohibitions is no longer addressed,
as is usually the case, to Time defying him to wipe out the
memory of the two human actants and in particular that of
the Friend, but to the Friend himself who must not remem-
ber the poet when he is dead. The symmetrical arrangement
of the clauses, all of which are generated by the opening

movement: "No longer mourn for me" (prohibition) "when I am dead" (future condition), is worthy of note here. The first line of the second quatrain reverses the order: "Nay if you read this line" (a second future condition dependent upon the first, the death of the poet) "remember not" (prohibition), the second condition being redoubled at the end of the octave: "If thinking on me then should make you woe". The third quatrain opens with the second condition (l. 9) followed by the first (l. 10), and expresses the most radical of the prohibitions: "Do not so much as my poor name rehearse". The theatrical connotation of "rehearse"[48] is not accidental, especially if we consider that the near-synonym "recite" appears in a similar thematic context in the first line of Sonnet 72. The couplet motivates the series of prohibitions by means of a more inclusive prohibition levelled at the mockery of the contemporary reading-public, ironically defined as *wise* in its cruelty: "Lest the wise world..." (l. 13).

The actantial triangle thus comprises the poet, the Friend and contemporary readers; readers whose role here is that of the antagonist (normally played by Time), and who transform grief into scorn. We may also note the semantic circu-

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[48] A further reading of "rehearse" is possible here. The word, in fact, evokes once more the funeral connotations of the ubiquitous burial paradigm, composed, as it is, of re + hearse ("hearse" as a verb, i.e. to place a corpse in the coffin, is used elsewhere by Shakespeare in this way, for example in *Hamlet* 1.4.28). See also the use of "rehearse" in a semantic field explicitly related to burial in Sonnet 81 (cf. the analysis at pp. 85-9 below), and of the related "inhearse" in Sonnet 86, l. 3. We thus have an additional reading which goes: when my body is buried (l. 10), do not place my name too in the (verbal) coffin of your lament, because the others might maliciously transform the ceremony into a farce (ll. 13-14).

larity of the beginning and end of the sonnet; which moves
from "No longer mourn" (l. 1) to "And mock you" (l. 14),
where "mock" reverses the meaning of the first verb while
alliterating both with it and with the adjacent "moan". The
circular parallelism of opening and close is also displayed, at
the semantic and syntagmatic levels, in the perfect structur-
al reiteration of the line endings:

l. 1	when	I	am	dead
	a	b	c	d
l. 14	after	I	am	gone
	a	b	c	d

The invitation to the fair youth to forget the poet is re-
newed in Sonnet 72:

> O lest the world should ask you to recite
> What merit lived in me that you should love
> After my death (dear love) forget me quite,
> For you in me can nothing worthy prove.
> Unless you would devise some virtuous lie,
> To do more for me than mine own desert,
> And hang more praise upon deceasèd I,
> Than niggard truth would willingly impart:
> O lest your true love may seem false in this,
> That you for love speak well of me untrue,
> My name be buried where my body is,
> And live no more to shame nor me, nor you.
> > For I am shamed by that which I bring forth,
> > And so should you to love things nothing worth.

The opening clause ("O lest"), repeated anaphorical-
ly at the beginning of the third quatrain, clearly links up

with the couplet of the previous sonnet. After the poet's self-deprecation in the first quatrain, there is a curious exchange of roles in the second: the poet would have the right to be remembered only if were to be celebrated above his deserts, by the fair youth become a writer in his turn. But the poet rejects the possibility of being thus commemorated – playing on the semantic opposition: paucity-(truth)/praise-(lie), in lines 5-10 – and effaces himself completely, body and name together, by resorting to the constantly negative seme of *burial*: "My name be *buried* where my body is".

The eclipse of the writer-sender is carried a stage further in the famous Sonnet 73, where he depicts himself as prematurely ravaged by old age:

> That time of year thou mayst in me behold,
> When yellow leaves, or none, or few do hang
> Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
> Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
> 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.
> In me thou seest the glowing of such fire,
> That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
> As the death-bed, whereon it must expire,
> Consumed with that which it was nourished by.
>> This thou perceiv'st which makes thy love more strong,
>> To love that well, which thou must leave ere long.

As he moves towards the total extinction in body and name just forecast, the poet actant[49] projects himself hyperbolically in the figure of winter (first quatrain), of twilight (second quatrain) and of the fading fire (third quatrain), in order to give maximum significance – in the final couplet – to the meagre portion of life and identity left to him; once this has gone, he will no longer be guaranteed immortality in art, at least in the eyes of his predilected addressee.

The central paradigm underpinning the three *exempla* in the quatrains is that of light *which is obscured*, both on the natural and symbolical planes.[50] The first quatrain presents the longest, seasonal, time-span, with autumn fading into winter; the second presents the briefer span of the day with dusk giving place to night; the third shows the even briefer course of fire smothering, after his final glimmer, in its own ashes, as if on its death-bed. The three corresponding nadirs, succeed each other in a connotative crescendo: winter → night → ashes (death). Moreover, the three quatrains each reveal an identical process of connotative parallelisms: in the first we see the decline from "yellow" (l. 2) to "bare" (l. 4); in the second from "twilight" (l. 5) to "black night" (l. 7); in the third, from "glowing" (l. 9) to "Consumed" (l. 12). Further parallelisms are found on the syntactical plane too, in literal or semantic anaphoras:

[49] The usefulness of the notion of actant for the poet too is particularly evident here: while he seems to be speaking realistically and biographically in the first person, it is clear that he is pretending to an advanced old age, since we know that Shakespeare must have been between thirty and forty when he wrote this sonnet.

[50] Cf. Booth: "Color grows increasingly intense: yellow leaves, twilight after sunset, fire. Light grows dimmer: daylight (presumably) in quatrain one, twilight, night" (1969: 125-6).

l. 1   A)   . . . thou mayst in me behold

l. 2   B)   When . . .

l. 5   A)   In me thou seest

l. 6   B)   As . . .

l. 9   A)   In me thou seest

l. 10   B)   That . . .

l. 13   A)   This thou perceiv'st

l. 14   B)   final outcome of impermanence

Owing to the gradual narrowing of the time-span of the *exempla*, the parallel sequences thus create a comprehensive, vertical, funnel-shaped, figure: an icon of fleeing time.

As in previous cases, I shall not dwell upon the images already exhaustively examined by other critics (such as the one in line 4, the object of a close and brilliant analysis by William Empson 1961: 2-3). Here I wish only to draw attention to the highly significant syntactical and metaphorical development of the second line. The first line was colloquial and hesitant in its use of the auxiliary "mayst", which indicates a possibility while maintaining a sense of restraint, as if to cast doubt upon the image of total senescence that the poet is about to assume. Line 2 carries over the hesitation and restraint into the image itself which, once assumed, is now irrevocable, and thus presents, in three different phrases, the entire span of autumn which remains poised (see, at the semantic level, the seme of *suspension* in *hang* at the end of the line, and its metrical and syntactical equivalent in the *enjambement*) before its final plunge into the winter of the next two lines.

The autumnal cycle however does not appear here in its normal progression, if we consider that "yellows leaves"

evokes the season at its height, while the following "none" implies the end of autumn (i.e. winter already) and "few" refers to an intermediate phase. It would seem that the poet-actant first sees his old age in a glowing image, hardly appropriate to the pathos of this elegy, and hence counters it with another which is totally negative. He then hesitates and turns back, because the process of symbolical defoliation has been excessive, and inserts a consoling "few", which is immediately undermined, however, by the following verbal function "do hang", which abandons the few remaining leaves precariously – and most iconically – suspended above the final abyss. Furthermore, the entire sequence of this image can be read as iconic, in that the alteration of assertion, negation and compromise seems to reflect the irregular falling of the leaves.[51]

As in the close of Sonnet 64, the last line of this one seals what little is conceded in a syntactical and alliterative chiasm within a chiasm:

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[51] Hence I find Booth's reading of this line unsatisfactory: "The reader is the beholder as he goes through the poem, and this line is calculated to be looked at quickly and passed over . . . The reader's progress into line 3 is not slowed by anything in line 2 . . . At a given moment in autumn an actual beholder of trees shifts his eyes, turns his head, looks around, and sees some trees with full yellowed foliage, some bare, and some with a few leaves; the same variation is likely among the various branches of a single tree. Reading this line is like looking at nature unmethodized" (Shakespeare 1977: 121-2).

syntactical and semantic levels

	A	B		B		A		
To	*love*	that	*well,*	which	*thou*	must *leave*	ere	*long*
	/l/	/ð/	/w/	/w/	/ð/	/l/		/l/
	a	b	c	c	b	a		a

phonematic level

Sonnet 74 concludes the sub-sequence by disavowing what has been affirmed in Sonnets 71 and 72, in accordance with a constant contrapuntal principle. Once dead, the poet will not definitively disappear since his poetry will be a memento for his friend:

> ll. 1-4
> But be contented when that fell arrest,
> Without all bail shall carry me away,
> My life hath in this line some interest,
> Which for memorial still with thee shall stay.

Nevertheless in a later poem, Sonnet 81, the poet once more effaces himself in favour of the Friend, sole beneficiary of the immortality of his poetry.

> Sonnet 81
> Or I shall live your epitaph to make,
> Or you survive when I in earth am rotten,
> From hence your memory death cannot take,
> Although in me each part will be forgotten.
> Your name from hence immortal life shall have,
> Though I (once gone) to all the world must die,
> The earth can yield me but a common grave,
> When you entombèd in men's eyes shall lie,
> Your monument shall be my gentle verse,

Which eyes not yet created shall o'er-read,
And tongues to be, your being shall rehearse,
When all the breathers of this world are dead,
>   You still shall live (such virtue bath my pen)
>   Where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men.

The specific syntactical pattern of this sonnet[52] takes the form of a self-contained opening quatrain, followed by ten extremely fluid lines which expand the *incipit* without varying it. Nevertheless, as with the standard rhyme-scheme, the three quatrains and the couplet re-emerge as self-regulated units within the flux of the syntax, owing to their actantial and grammatical organisation, which is a figure of the semantic level. Already, in the first two lines, the pronouns form a chiastic scheme which has a definitive semantic function:

Or *I* shall live *your* epitaph to make,
Or *you* survive when *I* in earth am rotten

"I" is meaningfull only in relation to "you". Whichever of the alternatives introduced by the anaphorical "Or" proves true, the apparent result will not change: i.e. *your* survival in poetry will be accompanied by *my* complete annulment (ll. 3-4). The first two quatrains are built on the same type of actantial-grammatical organisation:

[52] Cf. Empson's (somewhat hasty) reading: "This fluidity of grammar is partly given by rhetorical balance, because since the lines are opposed to one another in regular pairs you still get some sort of opposition by opposing the wrong pair. Sonnet 81 runs this principle to death . . . Any two consecutive lines in this, except 2-3 and 10-11 for accidental reasons, make a complete sentence when separated from their context" (1961: 53).

l. 1	A) + B)	I + your
l. 2	B) + A)	you + I
l. 3	B)	your
l. 4	A)	in me
l. 5	B)	your
l. 6	A)	I
l. 7	A)	me
l. 8	B)	your

The horizontal chiasmus of the first two lines – ABBA – also appears vertically in the first quatrain, is then inverted in the second – BAAB –, and then re-established in its initial order in the first line of the next two metrical units, the third quatrain and the couplet:

l. 9   B) + A)   *Your* monument shall be *my* gentle verse
l. 13 B) + A)   *You* still shall live (such virtue hath *my* pen)

Thus the major figure is ABBA, where "I" celebrates "You" and, at the syntagmatic level includes it whilst appearing to withdraw into the background. The withdrawal of the writer- sender is only apparent, since here remains a subterranean (grammatical) relationship of equivalence between the two terms semantically opposed at the thematic level.

The total oblivion awaiting the sender seems to be counterbalanced by the perennial fame of his friend. But, as we have seen, the poet by now has made a complete philosophical exploration of the paradox involved in the transposition of life into art, and of the totalitarian nature of celebrative metalanguage. Hence, in two adjacent lines, he links self

and friend in a parallelism which, though situated on the different planes of the naturalistic and the symbolical orders, unites them under the same obsessive seme of *burial*:

> ll. 7-8
> The earth can yield me but a *common grave*
> When you *entombèd* in men's eyes shall lie

As we have remarked earlier, poetry is a monument: "Your monument shall be my gentle verse"; but it is also a grave: "When you entombèd" (l. 8). The referent will live eternally only as a *word* continually repeated: cf. ll. 11-14 where the semantic field consists entirely of "tongues" (l. 11), "breathers" (l. 12) "breath", "breathers" "mouths" (l. 14), which for generation after generation (including the present one, whose end is already grimly presaged: "When all the breathers of *this* world are dead" (l.12) will continue to "rehearse" that name without a face and with no other existence than itself. The word is a *schema*: it does not represent, but signifies.

Line 5 ("Your name from hence immortal life shall have") must thus not be read merely as an ironic allusion to the particular condition in which the *Sonnets* were written and which prevented the revelation of the historical referent's name for private reasons. The proper name is withheld deliberately because it is alien to that particular celebrative act.[53] The name which is immortalized is thus a common name, "fair youth", and assumes an actantial function and archetypal identity within an agon that transcends naturalistic and historical real- ity, and hence both "I" and "You". The object of desire becomes a name without an identity be-

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[53] Cf. pp. 52-9 above.

hind it. The status of the *name celebrated*, as in Saussure's linguistic sign, yokes the "I" (celebrator) and the "You" (celebrated) in an indissoluble equation, whence the impossibility of annulling the "I", which is only *apparently* relegated to a lower order. The chiastic figure which governs the pronoun forms seals the actants in a state of total interdependence (wherein each mirrors the other), and exhibits in the last two occurrences of the pronouns the previously rejected equation between "I" and "You": l. 9 "*Your* monument" = "*my* gentle verse"; l. 13 "*You* still shall lives" = ("such virtue hath *my* pen").

1.6 Speech and Silence, Seeming and Being

Sonnet 83

This sonnet, one of the so-called Rival-Poet series, like the nearby 85 and 86, apparently rejects celebrative poetry, in favour of an admiring *silence* more fitted to do justice to the referent whose virtues far exceed the possibilities of celebration: cf., in particular, lines 1-4. But let us first look at the sonnet as a whole:

> I never saw that you did painting need,
> And therefore to your fair no painting set,
> I found (or thought I found) you did exceed,
> The barren tender of a poet's debt:
> And therefore have I slept in your report,
> That you your self being extant well might show,
> How far a modern quill doth come too short,
> Speaking of worth, what worth in you doth grow.
> This silence for my sin you did impute,

> Which shall be most my glory being dumb,
> For I impair not beauty being mute,
> When others would give life, and bring a tomb.
>> There lives more life in one of your fair eyes,
>> Than both your poets can in praise devise.

Unlike the situation in the other sonnets in the series, the *silence vs poetry* opposition here involves far more than a single type of poetry, namely the exaggeratedly rhetorical,[54] bombastic,[55] eccentric[56] poetry of the Rival. The silence which the poet here temporarily prefers to celebration,[57] has a more profound *raison d'être* – as our argument should by now have suggested – than that of being a passing fling against the false art of those who crudely and misleadingly[58] embellish a portrait. Here the central problem of the relationship of art to life is clearly posed. Even the rarest skill of a "modern" poet (in "How far a *modern* quill . . . ", l. 7, the immunity of classicism is conventionally preserved) will inevitably fall short of the quality of life itself. This is evident in the emphasis which the redundancies of line 6 throw on the claims of life: "That *you yourself* being *extant* well might show". The referent is present, "extant", available to demonstrate the inadequacy of art. Art is inadequate not so much at the level of artistic value as of *life* which is of necessity concealed or expunged since the real referent is reduced to a symbolic name:

[54] Cf. 82, l.10, "What strained touches rhetoric can lend".

[55] Cf. 86, l. 1, "Was it the proud full sail of his great verse".

[56] Cf. 86, ll. 5-6, "Was it his spirit, by spirits taught to write, / Above a mortal pitch".

[57] Which will reappear, dense with implications, in 85 and 86.

[58] Cf. 82, ll. 13-14, "And their gross painting might be better used / Where cheeks need blood, in thee it is abused" (emphasis added).

ll. 13-14
There *lives* more *life* in one of your fair eyes,
Than both your poets can in praise devise.

When the referent is dead, his verbal monument will achieve immortality by 'walling in' an absence, so to speak: it will become, in other words, a *tomb*. While he lives, any verbal monument (and not just the rhetoric of false art) which attempts to portray and contain him is destined, he "being extant" (l. 6), to be a constriction and a reduction (→ *tomb*).

The third quatrain exhibits precisely this positive interpretation of the poet's silence, reasserting it in a further series of redundancies ("silence", l. 9; "dumb", l. 10; "mute", l. 11, the latter two in the "strong" rhyme-position), and contrasting it with the final "tomb" of line 12, which is the betrayal of life on the artistic plane (especially by false art, i.e. that of the Rival Poet).

The dialectical movement of line 12 – "When others would give *life*, and bring a *tomb*" – restates the identical doubt that had already surfaced, as we have seen, in lines 3-4 of Sonnet 17:

Though yet heaven knows it is but as a *tomb*
Which hides your *life*, and shows not half your parts

Empson has carried out a detailed, though confused, analysis of Sonnet 83, and, in a note added to a late edition of his book, has glossed the key word as follows: "The *tomb* is formal praise such as would be written on a tombstone, whereas the real merits of the man are closely connected with his faults, which can't be mentioned in a formal style of praise" (1961: 138). What he overlooks here is the deci-

sive role of this word in Shakespeare's metalinguistic exploration of the status of celebrative poetry. When Empson encounters the word during his analysis, he quotes in support of his argument lines 1-4 of Sonnet 17, as if this were the only previous occurrence, and observes: "This first use of the word has no doubt that it is eulogy: the sonnet is glowing and dancing with his certitude. But when the metaphor is repeated, this time without being explained, it has grown dark with an incipient double meaning" (ibid.). But this double meaning is already present in Sonnet 17, and even earlier, implicitly, in Sonnet 5. Empson's reading reduces this sonnet to a series of psychological waverings and satirical innuendoes, extracted by means of equivocating paraphrases (often frankly far-fetched) of single lines, or pairs of lines, thus missing the central opposition (which is also an intertextual macrostructure) between art and life. In this way he fails to notice the frequent emergence of the *burial* seme within the apparent triumph of the word in the immortality sonnets.

In the end, the very status of art, which reveals and hides at one and the same time, leads the poet to identify himself with his rival ("*both* your poets", l. 14) as a practitioner of artifice. For what is art but artifice?

Hence the opposition underlying the Rival-Poet sonnet series: *his* poetry = falsity *vs my* poetry = truth, seems to give place to the formula: poetry = falsity *vs* silence = truth, thus snapping the chain of oppositional equivalences which the poetry of immortality versus time has hitherto forged, and which can be shown diagrammatically as follows:

engrafting	culture	archetype	truth	poetry		
≈	≈	≈	≈		=	AGON
growth	nature	flux	falsity	time		
decay						

The Final Part of the Sequence

The way out of this *impasse* will be found in the Neoplatonist code and in the Renaissance aesthetic itself. It is legitimate to suppose that this takes place somewhat later on, since the *Sonnets* reveal a marked inner transformation of modes and tones from number 100 on. In fact, this sonnet explicitly mentions an interval of *real* silence prior to its composition (see ll. 1-2) and significantly proceeds straight away to raise the immortality theme once more:

> ll. 13-14
> Give my love fame faster than Time wastes life,
> So thou prevent'st his scythe, and crookèd knife.

As Dover Wilson and others have suggested, Sonnets 100-126 form a unified and ordered sequence. The immortality theme emerges repeatedly here.

Sonnet 101

In this sonnet the poet explicitly refutes the suspicion mooted in 83, 85, and 86 that admiring silence may be preferable to verbal celebration which inevitably defeats the ends of life.

> O truant Muse what shall be thy amends,
> For thy neglect of truth in beauty dyed?

Both truth and beauty on my love depend:
So dost thou too, and therein dignified:
Make answer Muse, wilt thou not haply say,
'Truth needs no colour with his colour fixed,
Beauty no pencil, beauty's truth to lay:
But best is best, if never intermixed'?
Because he needs no praise, wilt thou be dumb?
Excuse not silence so, for't lies in thee,
To make him much outlive a gilded tomb:
And to be praised of ages yet to be.
        Then do thy office Muse, I teach thee how,
        To make him seem long hence, as he shows now.

This is certainly not one of the finest sonnets of the sequence, with its rhetorical question and answer, addressed to a rhetorical Muse, in a series of unjustified stylistic redundancies. Nevertheless, it has its importance as a delayed rebuttal of a doubt that has grown more and more insistent. In the first quatrain the poet belabours the Muse for a silence which has interrupted the strict relationship of interdependence (see ll. 3-4) between the beauty and virtue of his love and the dignity of his art as if art must always, in the last analysis, be celebrative, given the dialectical, but totalitarian, relationship which it stipulates (as a metalanguage) with any referential reality named. In the second quatrain, the Muse replies using exactly the same arguments previously used by the poet against the false art of the rival poet (see ll. 6-7). In the third, the poet rejects the arguments for silence, reiterating the triumphal image (with all its graveyard implications!) of Sonnet 55: "To make him much outlive a gilded tomb". The silence has been broken, the Muse will continue in her task; but under what condition will be seen in the final couplet:

> Then do thy office Muse, I teach thee how,
> To make him *seem* long hence, *as* he *shows* now.

The grammatical level, with its comparison of equality (*as*), seems to imply that the poet has regained his faith in the perfect correspondence between the real, historical referent and the poetic signifier. But the connotations of the verbs (*seem* = *shows*) suggest a very different kind of equivalence which derives from the Elizabethan Neoplatonist code and from the Renaissance aesthetic. The identity of the fair youth is not that of *being* but of *seeming-appearing*. In so far as he is a real person, he is a copy, a *shadow*[59] of the Idea of Plato's phenomenology of reality,[60] who can attain to paradigmatic stability only by drawing on the status of the archetype (in the fiction of poetry) – in other words by becoming the Master-Mistress of Sonnet 20 which contains Adonis and Helen (cf. 53) and recapitulates all the shadows of imperfect copies (cf. 53 and 106). The danger of art as opposed to life is thus not greater than that to which the identity of the objects of empirical reality are exposed in the Neoplatonist view. If permanence, and hence the complete semanticizing, of the historically transient can only be achieved by transmuting *shadows* into archetype, then why

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[59] "Shadow" is a word which appears frequently in the Sonnets: for a single example, see Sonnet 53, where it is developed in all its meanings. In the plays, the number of occurrences – even in the strictly Neoplatonist sense – is extremely high. The famous "Life's but a walking shadow" of Macbeth's previously quoted soliloquy is a typical example.

[60] Here, too, one could quote innumerable examples from the plays. The words of Prospero "We are such stuff / As dreams are made on; and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep" (4.1.156-8) will have to suffice here.

not accept the artistic transmutation of nature into art and of life into fiction? Furthermore, in Renaissance aesthetics, this kind of transformation contains its own opposite; the artifice is truer than truth, and nature is in its turn God's artifice. Poetry, which falsifies life in the artifice of its symbolic order, becomes poetry which raises life to truth, and it does this precisely by reorganizing life, via artifice, in an otherwise unattainable order of perfection.[61] Celebration has once more become legitimate.

Sonnet 104

In Sonnet 103, in keeping with the poet's habitual contra-

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[61] In art, deception, deceit, is all, as Puttenham discovered, associating himself with Socrates', and Plato's, ancient attack on rhetoric: "As figures be the instruments of ornament in every language, so be they also in a sorte abuses or rather trespasses in Speach, because they passe the ordinary limits of common utterance, and be occupied of purpose to deceive the eare and also the minde, drawing it from plainnesse and simplicitie to a certaine doubleness, whereby our talke is the more guilefull & abusing, for what els is your Metaphor but an inversion of sence by transport; your allegorie by a duplicitie of meaning or dissimulation under covert and darke intendments . . . " (1970: 154). In what follows, however, he claims that it is a honest deception, a felix culpa: "This no doubt is true and was by them gravely considered: but in this case because our maker or Poet is appointed not for a judge, but rather for a pleader, and that of pleasant & lovely causes and nothing perillous, such as be those for the triall of life, limme, or livelyhood; and before judges neither sower nor severe, but in the eare of princely dames, yong ladies, gentlewomen and courtiers . . . they are not on truth to be accompted vices but for vertues in the poetical science very comendable" (154-5). As we have seen, Shakespeare goes much further in his meditations on art as a metalanguage.

puntal procedure, the doubt once more emerges that his im-
perfect art may "mar" a perfect image and that silence is
thus to be preferred, it being left to the mirror faithfully to
reflect the image of the referent:

> Alack what poverty my muse brings forth,
> That having such a scope to show her pride,
> The argument all bare is of more worth
> Than when it hath my added praise beside.
> O blame me not if I no more can write!
> Look in your glass and there appears a face,
> That over-goes my blunt invention quite,
> Dulling my lines, and doing me disgrace.
> Were is not sinful then striving to mend,
> To mar the subject that before was well?
> For to no other pass my verses tend,
> Than of your graces and your gifts to tell.
> 　　　And more, much more than in my verse can sit,
> 　　　Your own glass shows you, when you look in it.

But *seeming* does not mean *being*, as the great sonnet
that follows demonstrates:

> To me fair friend you never can be old,
> For as you were when first your eye I eyed,
> Such seems your beauty still: three winters cold,
> Have from the forests shook three summers' pride,
> Three beauteous springs to yellow autumn turned,
> In process of the season have I seen,
> Three April perfumes in three hot Junes burned,
> Since first I saw you fresh which yet are green.
> Ah yet doth beauty like a dial hand,
> Steal from his figure, and no pace perceived,
> So your sweet hue, which methinks still doth stand

Hath motion, and mine eye may be deceived.
>   For fear of which, hear this thou age unbred,
>   Ere you were born was beauty's summer dead.

The mirror of Sonnet 103,[62] like the eye of the poet here, captures an *un*faithful image of the referent, who *seems* motionless and perfect but is in fact immersed in the flux of time and imperceptibly worn away by it. The image will thus not be rescued by reproducing it as it *seems* to be, but by purifying and stabilizing it in the word that *names*, the vessel of an absence preserved for a future reader: "Ere you were born was beauty's summer dead".

Links with other sonnets of the whole sequence are found throughout the complex structure of this sonnet. Almost all of them, however, are in negative relation to the *loci* "cited", and weave a rich threnody on old age and death. To list them rapidly: line 1, at the discursive level, is in positive opposition to Sonnet 73 (there the ageing of the poet-actant is not only accepted, but is even rendered by hyperbole, whereas here that of the fair youth is rejected at the level of appearances; nevertheless, the last line announces his death to future times as a thing of the distant past), yet it is in negative opposition, at the connotative level, to line 14 of Sonnet 19: "My love shall in my verse ever live young" (cf. "never" *vs* "ever", "To me" *vs* the implicit "to everyone", "never can be old" *vs* "shall . . . ever live young"); in line 3, *seems* is linked to line 14 of Sonnet 101, via the *seeming/being* opposition; line 7 recalls the image of the phoenix's fire-sacrifice in line 4 of the Sonnet 19; line 8 connects up with the assertive "he in them still green" of line 14 of Son-

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[62] Cf. also 77, ll. 1-6, where we find the opposite idea: the mirror does not reflect an immobile image, but rather the decay of the image.

net 63, though here the scales are tipped towards impermanence (see the semantic contrast between "yet" in this sonnet and "still" in the earlier); lines 9-10 pick up again an image of time and of sun-dial identical to that in lines 7-8 of Sonnet 77:

> Thou by thy dial's shady stealth mayst know,
> Time's thievish progress to eternity.

While in line 10, "Steal" (in the double sense of "slip away" and "rob") also calls up the image of time the thief in line 14 of Sonnet 15; "hue" in line 11 is linked to line 7 of Sonnet 20 ("A man in hue all hues in his controlling"); lastly, "beauty's summer dead" in line 14, is the exact negative opposite of Sonnet 18, line 9: "But thy eternal summer shall not fade".

We can now proceed to analyse the text internally. The logical syntactical structures of the first two quatrains is quite unusual in that. The argument does not coincide with the metrical scheme, but interrupts it violently half way through the third line, and immediately opens the second proposition. The independent block of the third quatrain, and the self-contained couplet are, on the other hand, regular.

At the thematic level, the first sentence declares the permanence of the Friend's perfection, though not without innuendoes of uncertainty; the second sentence measures the interval of time that separates the present moment from the first meeting with the Friend (see the analogical courses of the seasons: "summer" (l. 4) → "winter" (l. 3), "spring" → "autumn" (l. 5) "April" → "June" (l. 7); in the third sentence, the apparent immobility of the present image of the referent reveals a hidden motion towards its end; in the fourth, the

present is blotted out, having become the symbol (sign) of an absence in the abyss of the future.

At the level of the deep structures of meaning, the sonnet is enclosed parallelistically by an initial, positive denial, "To *me* fair friend *you* never can be old" , where the two historical actants, writer-sender and referent, are co-present in time; and by a final, negative affirmation, from the standpoint in time of the future decoder: for the "age unbred", "beauty's summer" is already long dead. A closer look reveals however, that these are two analogous modes of *excluding* time under its aspect of mutability, decay, old age (a further confirmation of the circularity of this highly unified poem, a circularity which is an iconic reflection of the seasonal cycle and the face of the sun-dial): the first "exclusion", in line 1, is implied in the fair youth's illusory permanence within time's flow (= the Platonist code); the second, in lines 13-14, takes the form of an epigraph on a period already expired (= the poetic code).

Nevertheless it is time which gradually asserts its rights in lines 3-12, filling out the entire central section of the poem. The transformation from the apparent permanence of line 1 into a real process of change is effected first by the series of seasonal cycles described, and then in the third quatrain, by the image of the sun-dial: immobility in motion. On the connotative plane, the lexeme "still" is subjected to a similar transformation, so that what seemed immobile or persistent (the twin meanings of "still") is shown to be stealthily moving; "Such seems your beauty still" (l. 3), "which methinks still doth stand / Hath motion" (ll. 11-12).

In its elaborate anaphoric patterning, the sonnet seems to re-echo the typical triangular actantial structure at the lexematic, numerological, metaphorical and even phonolo-

gical levels. "Beauty" occurs thrice in an extremely signifi-
cant semantic progression:

l. 3	such seems your beauty still	*permanence*
l. 9	Ah yet doth beauty like a dial hand	*motion*
l. 14	Ere you were born was beauty's sum- mer dead	*absence*

There are three winters, summers, springs and autumns,
as there are three Aprils and three Junes, in lines 3-7; these
two (Aprils and Junes, l. 7) are accompanied by an analo-
gous semantic progression in the verbal functions (i.e. from
an initial movement to a final absence): 1) summer's pride
is *shaken* by winter, 2) spring is *turned* into autumn, 3) the
perfume of April is *burned* (destroyed) by the heat of June.
Three times in lines 9-12 we witness the treachery of the
sun-dial: "no pace perceived" (l. 10), "methinks doth stand"
(l. 12), and "mine eye may be deceived"[63] (l. 12). Moreover,
we find a triple case of homophony in line 2:

> For as you were when first your eye I eyed

> ai ai ai

where the first meeting, as required by the *dolce stil novo*
and the Petrarchan traditions, takes place on the spiritual
and noble plane of the sight, and the subject "I" seizes the

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[63] This last phrase is, moreover, parallelistically opposed to "your
eye I eyed": in line 2 we find the epiphany of "your eye", while here
(line 12) we have the deceit of mine which discovers the transitoriness
of that epiphany.

phonically identical object "eye" by means of a verbal link
which repeats and contains both, "eyed". Yet that first meet-
ing is now a memory (whereby we are made aware of the
interval that has elapsed and the consequent decline of both
due to the agency of the antagonistic Time) and hence the
triple homophony foreshadows the signs of time's erosions
(already implicit in the temporal adverb "first") which will
shatter the spell of that absolute spiritual communication
in a dirge on the passing of time (cf. the partially homoph-
onous exclamation of grief that introduces the sun-dial im-
age which, for all its seeming immobility, depicts precisely
the same transformation: "*Ah*, yet doth beauty . . . " (l. 9).[64]
Finally, we find a triple, modulated homophony based on
"still"/stil/ and "steal" /sti:l/: "your beauty still" (l. 3), "Steal
from his figure" (l. 10), "still doth stand" (l. 11).

To sum up: the triple homophony of line 2 is followed by
the triple temporal specification of the time elapsed, repre-
sented metaphorically in a triple *exemplum* expressed in
a triple numerical qualification ("three winters etc."); fur-
thermore we have the triple occurrence of "still", "steal",
"still", which posits and negates permanence, thus giving
rise to the triple reference to the treachery of the sun-di-
al (foreshadowed in the *seeming/being* opposition in line
3: "Such *seems* your beauty still") and finally plunging the
thrice-mentioned "beauty" into a definitive absence: "was
beauty summer dead" (l. 14).

In the third quatrain, the repetition of the redundant

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[64] Leishman's comment, "one of the most beautiful of the sonnets,
despite the careless (I cannot think deliberate) 'eye I eyed' in the sec-
ond line" (1961: 161), with its decidedly negative view of this phrase,
thus seems unacceptable.

"doth" (ll. 9 and 11) is worthy of note. Its function here is not one of grammatical reinforcement, unlike the affirmative and triumphal repetition in the first immortality sonnets (Sonnet 104, in fact, can be read as the elegiac counterpart, reworking, of Sonnet 18). On the contrary, it plays a complex role in the first appearance (l. 9) in that it allows the poet to insert the comparison with the sun-dial's gnomon into the same verbal corpus as "Steal from", thus enabling the verb simultaneously to govern both levels of the comparison in a single image (by means of a zeugma); the shadow of the gnomon creeps furtively past the number of the hour just as beauty imperceptibly slips away from the figure of the fair youth.[65] "Steal from" is both contrasted with what appears "still" (ll. 3 and 11) and yet identified with it thanks to the near-perfect homophony. Thus the central *seeming/being* dichotomy surfaces even in the verbal form "still"/"steal". But "steal" also means to thieve, and this sense is present in the extremely dense image of time as thief who even cheats the iconic sign that represents him, namely the number on the face of the sun-dial, while at the same time defrauding the Friend of his life and fullness.[66] The use of "doth", by permitting the insertion of the simile "like a dial hand" also produces the syntagmatic contiguity *hand/steal*, creating further, developments of meaning, with the result that the simile not only functions in parallel with the literal level but interferes directly in it: "hand", with the lexical ambiguity (gnomon, but also human hand, the more common sense) created by its contiguity with "steal",

[65] The whole of the image in ll. 9-12 may well refer to the clock as such, and not to the sun-dial. This however does not affect the critical interpretation offered here. We need only replace "gnomon" with "hand".

[66] For a similar image, see 77, ll. 7-8.

only thinly disguised by the line-break, foregrounds more explicitly the meaning of "thieve" in an additional metaphorical thread. The final couplet transforms the defeat – time, in spite of everything, passes even for the fair youth, ageing him and defiling his image – into a sort of victory, the only kind allowed to poetry. The actant-poet looks ahead and apostrophizes future time directly ("hear this thou age unbred", l. 13) in order to halt the present, inexorable, decline of his referent. With the result that, from that distant viewpoint – as we have already seen, the only valid one is that of the future reader witness of the immortality of art (see p. 69 above) – he no longer sees age, but death; death which is triumphant in his own way as the tombstone that celebrates an absence. The leap into the future annuls the ravages of inevitable old age in the present: the archetype remains unchanged, in a threnody which, in its own way, is an epinicion.

1.7 The Encoder, Referent, Decoder Triangle

Sonnet 105

Within the relatively compact sequence of Sonnets 100-108, Sonnet 105 stands out as a forceful re-affirmation of the archetypal image. As in 59 and 76 (see p. 60-3 above), Shakespeare reflects upon the monothematic character of his poetry, which cannot admit of variety (it "leaves out *difference*", l. 8), where "difference" is also eccentricity: cf. the polemic against the Rival-Poet) since it has chosen to celebrate the one, which is to say, the archetype.

> Let not my love be called idolatry,
> Nor my belovèd as an idol show,

Since all alike my songs and praises be
To one, of one, still such and ever so.
Kind is my love to-day, to-morrow kind,
Still constant in a wondrous excellence,
Therefore my verse to constancy confined,
One thing expressing, leaves out difference.
Fair, kind, and true, is all my argument,
Fair, kind, and true, varying to other words,
And in this change is my invention spent,
Three themes in one, which wondrous scope affords.
>   Fair, kind, and true, have often lived alone.
>   Which three till now, never kept seat in one.

Here the antagonist Time is expelled by the sublime confidence of Platonic love and of the poetry that celebrates it. Thus the binary I-YOU relationship, as we have already indicated in the introductory chapter, is projected to embrace the audience, thus recreating the typical triangular actantial situation. The audience is immediately involved by the injunction not to mistake the sacred for the profane: "Let *not* my love be called idolatry" (l. 1). The prohibition, the leading formal mode of the agon, is thus addressed to the reader. In this later section of the Sonnets it is possible to observe an increasingly evident shift from the agon with time to a dramatic meditation on the encoder/referent/decoder triangle, a process which got under way, as we have seen, in Sonnets 71-74 and 81, and re-emerged in 104.

The first quatrain denies that the poet is idolatrous towards his referent and asserts that his praise is a sacral, logical theorem or, more precisely, a numerological theorem (hence Aristotelian and Scholastic) whose postulate is that the containing poetry must necessarily adhere to the contained archetype. By celebrating the one ("to one, of one", l.

4: referent) poetry too becomes single ("all alike", l. 3). The second quatrain reaffirms the inevitability of this single constancy, opening and closing on two chiastic figures which, in turn, neutralize the rampages of natural time and of literary divagations:

> l. 5 Kind is my love to-day, to-morrow kind
>
>   a   b   b   a
>
> l. 8 One thing expressing, leaves out difference
>
>   a   b   b   a

Both quatrains reveal elaborate variations on the *one*, in two series relating to the archetype and to poetry:

	archetype		*poetry*
l. 4	To one, of one	l. 3	all alike
l. 6	Still constant	l. 7	my verse to constancy confined
l. 8	One thing expressing	l. 8	leaves out difference

while "still such, and ever so" in line 4 is linked to both paradigms.

In the third quatrain and the couplet, however, the presence of the *three* makes itself insistently felt. Poetry, which is *one*, assumes the dress of a liturgical variation of words[67] so as to render the *trinity* of the attributes. Thus the idolatry rejected in ll. 1-2 as vain and pagan reveals itself as adoration of a figure (not an idol), situated, as usual, at the crossroads of the Neoplatonist and Christian codes.[68] The redundancy of the *three* in a succession of conceits (quite unlike

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[67] Cf. 76, l. 11, "So all my best is dressing old words new".
[68] As Sonnet 108 will confirm unequivocally.

the extraordinary superimposition of levels of the previous sonnet) leads, as one might expect, to a distinct allusion to the biblical three-in-one in the last line.

Sonnet 106

The encoder/referent/decoder triangle returns here in a more complex diachronic perspective. The poet, /encoder/ of *this* message, is also the /decoder/ of the artistic messages of the past, while the referent of both these is one and the same: the archetypal fair youth, differently situated in relation to the poet-encoder.

Similarly to 31, 53, and 59, this sonnet does not project the living archetype forward, into the future (as in the bulk of the immortality sonnets), but backward, into the annals of the past. The archetype is the perfect paradigm, paradoxically situated not at the source, but *within* the flux of time (and *now* present before the poet): it is at this point that the Platonist code of the Ideas is modified by the Christian code of the advent of the "son of man" *within* history – whose historical precedents are to be understood as approximations or copies, according to the Platonist code, or as prefigurations or prophecies, according to the Christian code:

> When in the chronicle of wasted time,
> I see description of the fairest wights,
> And beauty making beautiful old rhyme,
> In praise of ladies dead, and lovely knights,
> Then in the blazon of sweet beauty's best,
> Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow,
> I see their antique pen would have expressed,

Even such a beauty as you master now.
So all their praises are but prophecies
Of this our time, all you prefiguring,
And for they looked but with divining eyes,
They had not skill enough your worth to sing:
　　For we which now behold these present days,
　　Have eyes to wonder, but lack tongues to praise.

Here too, though in a far richer and more subtle struc- ture, *variety* is resolved into *unity*, the copy into the idea, the prophets into the messiah. The ancient descriptions of beauty (both masculine and feminine – see line 4 – a further confirmation of the mythical bi-sexuality of the archetype, which had already emerged in Sonnet 20) converge from the past like the spokes of a motionless wheel on the hub of the now present archetype. Time is neutralized once again via passive self-destruction ("wasted time").[69]

As in Sonnet104, we also find the triple occurrence of beauty in the first two quatrains: in line 3 (with its polyptoton "beauty making beautiful") the beauty of innumerable literary referents, in lines 5-6 the beauty of the various physical features of the referents celebrated in verse, and lastly, in line 8, beauty entirely resumed in the archetypal *one*, thanks to the reduction of the multiplicity of copies into the unity of the original, just as in Sonnet 31, 53 and 59.

The third quatrain, with paradoxical, though formally syllogistic, logic, offers a hermeneutic reading of the ancient descriptions of beauty (l. 2) as copies of the archetype (ll. 7-8) in the manner of the Christian allegorizing initiat-

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[69] This brings to mind many other sonnets, among which we may mention the "wasteful time" of 15, and the even closer tenth line of 12: "That thou among the wastes of time must go".

ed by the Church Fathers, whereby characters and episodes of pagan classical literature are *read* as foreshadowings and prophecies of Christ – the Christian interpretation of the *Aeneid* is a typical example. Thus the problematical "would have expressed" in line 7 (the Platonist code) is transformed, by means of a typical "So" clause, into peremptory "all their praises are" in line 9 (the Christian allegorical code).

The lexematic and metaphorical pattern is ternary in the third quatrain too: "prophecies" (l. 9), "prefiguring" (l. 10), "divining" (l. 11) belong to the same semantic field, and are linked two-by-two in a supplementary alliterative and rhythmical parallelism ("*pro*ph*ecies*" – "*pre*figuring", each in final position) and a morphological-grammatical one ("prefigur*ing*" – "divin*ing*"). Moreover the first two are linked by alliteration to a third, adjacent element, "*pr*aises" (l. 9). The insistence at all levels on the number three in this series of sonnets is clearly no accident, but forms part of a new, ritual and sacral attitude.

The couplet conceals the epiphany of the dazzling archetype behind an admiring silence (another recurrent *topos* in the *Sonnets*) in a carefully balanced syntactical parallelism:

> Have eyes to wonder, but lack tongues to praise
>
> a   a   c   a   a   c

In the elaborate orchestration of all its levels, verbal artifice is truer than truth, and hence fully justified since, in comparison, reality or history is mere accident, or at most a succession of approximations.

The paradoxical process of reasoning thus reaches its conclusion: the ancients could celebrate the archetype because they had only its copies before them (whence their

song fell short of the absent referent's deserts); we cannot celebrate it precisely because it is here before us (yet by declaring that it is ineffable, we are able in fact to celebrate it, though always by understatement). Celebration is, in its essence, *litotes*: it denies in order to affirm, binding silence and speech, absence and presence, truth and fiction in an indissoluble contradiction. It is another, more complex answer to the problem of *art vs life* and of the snapping of the chain of equivalences discussed at page 82. Art is artifice; it reveals but conceals, it celebrates the referent but annuls it: its justification lies exactly in this unsurmountable contradiction, which is the toll exacted by the otherwise unarrestable stream of approximations of historical reality and of the language of communication.

Sonnet 107

In this sonnet, the poet once more turns his gaze towards the future. The past, at least, in its concreteness ("the *chronicle* of wasted time") had provided touchstones by which to demonstrate the greater glory of the archetype's present epiphany; the future serves only to renew the poet's trepidation: his fear of the final defeat, his own and the fair youth's decline into age and death.[70]

> Not mine own fears, nor the prophetic soul,
> Of the wide world, dreaming on things to come,
> Can yet the lease of my true love control,
> Supposed as forfeit to a confined doom.
> The mortal moon hath her eclipse endured,

[70] See 64, l. 14; 73, l. 14; 104, l. 13 for this constant fear.

> And the sad augurs mock their own presage,
> Incertainties now crown themselves assured,
> And peace proclaims olives of endless age.
> Now with the drops of this most balmy time,
> My love looks fresh, and death to me subscribes,
> Since spite of him I'll live in this poor rhyme,
> While he insults o'er dull and speechless tribes.
> > And thou in this shalt find thy monument,
> > When tyrants' crests and tombs of brass are spent.

As is frequently the case, here again the theme is developed through three syntactically independent quatrains, moving from a personal reflection in the first quatrain to a more embracing parallel situation in the second quatrain, and returning to the narrower circle of the poet's own experience in the third. The difference is that while the 'parallel situation' usually portrays the spectacle of nature (the succession of hours, seasons, geological eras), here it contains cryptic historical allusions. This has provided matter for innumerable, and largely pointless, conjectures, especially as to the meaning of the metaphor in line 5.

All things considered, the most likely hypothesis is that it alludes to the death of Queen Elizabeth and to the temporary disorientation of the country before the accession of James I, who announced a reign of peace. If we now return to the first quatrain, we shall see that it expresses the individual's fear of the future and of death in a double set of connotations. The principal set has its roots in the Bible and presents the individual future in epochal, not to say eschatological proportions: the fears of the actant poet are linked to the "prophetic soul" (the seme of *prophecy* is carried over from the third quatrain of the previous sonnet) of the "wide world"; the *anima mundi*, in oth-

er words, "dreaming on things to some"; the final "forfeit" exacted by these individual fears and the universal prophecy will thus apparently be death and apocalypse, implied in the expression "confined doom" (l. 4), with its Old Testament overtones.[71] The second set of connotations appears in "the *lease* of my true love control" (l. 3) and "Supposed as forfeit" (l. 4), terms of legal and economic origin which however underwrite the Old and New Testament code: we have seen how "forfeit" is linked syntagmatically to the "doom" of the Bible; similarly, "lease" in addition to its commercial sense, is also a divine gift (life is a *loan*) in the Christian context.[72] The two connotative levels thus reinforce each other, transforming existential trepidation into a state of eschatological suspension, whose only bulwark is Platonic love ("my true love", l. 3), the authority for the initial negation.

In the second quatrain too, the connotative level *displaces* the limited historical circumstance (whatever it may be), and lifts it into a vaster cosmological and epochal dimension. In other words, the famous eclipse metaphor of line 5 has defini tively obliterated its historical reference; which suggests that what is more worthy of note is how the historical situation more typically finds expression in terms of natural events in the *Sonnets*. "Eclipse" (l. 5) and "endless age" (l. 8) are more appropriate to geological eras than to the fleeting events of history, yet here as elsewhere, this has escaped the notice of the scholars labouring to unearth historical and biographical references

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[71] Cf. the extended image in 55, l. 12, and 116, l. 12.

[72] Cf. 13, ll. 5-6: "So should that beauty which you hold in lease / Find no determination".

under the misapprehension that these may somehow shed new light in the *Sonnets*. Surely it should be clear, above all from this work, that a biographical approach is quite unprofitable: the paradox of a Platonic love for the archetypal fair youth will not be forced into the straightjacket of realistic biography or cryptic history.[73] Specific allusions – to conspiracies, misdeeds of friend and poet, intrigues, reproaches, jealousies and rivalries – are undoubtedly woven into the texture of the sonnets, but they have been rewritten by the poet into an *artificial* plot, and it is this, and only this, which forms the internal referential system (a far cry from the external system, expunged once and for all) on which the semiological structure of the poetic process is built. For this structure is absolutely 'intransitive', except for the macro textual cross-references (where other poems by the author are called upon to supply 'external' referential support) and, of course, for the references to the basic codes behind the writing (literary, philosophical, socio-economic, ideological, cosmological, etc.). The only useful results to be gained from the biographical approach might be in the exact dating of the period in which Shakespeare wrote the *Sonnets*; nevertheless, I personally believe that the more reliable yardstick remains that of comparing the diction, style, and even the themes of these poems with those of such plays as have been dated with certainty.[74]

[73] Among the great variety of plots and accidents inferred by critics from the "eclipse" of l. 5, we may mention the Lopez conspiracy of 1594, Elizabeth's climacteric in 1595-96, her sickness in 1599, the Essex rebellion in 1601.

[74] Many critics have pointed out definite textual resemblances between groups of sonnets and the plays. I should like to add, if it has not been already noted, that there are numerous textual analogies be-

Before leaving this sonnet, it remains to point out how the third quatrain, after the comfort of the 'parallel situation' in the second, banishes the fears expressed in the first. Platonic love is renewed in triumph ("fresh", l. 10), and death, now openly named in line 10, submits to the actant-Poet, who has won the agon and is directly immortalized in his own "poor rhyme".[75] Death can finally vanquish and subjugate only those who have no words to fight him with: "While he insults o'er dull and *speechless tribes*".[76] This, it will be noticed, is the first time the poet forthrightly declares himself certain to achieve immortality through art: "Since spite of him I'll live" (l. 11). And, curiously, the Friend attains his immortality only in the couplet, and in a co-ordinating (and hence reductive) clause at that: "*And* thou in this shalt find thy monument".

This is indicative of a change of tone in the last part of the sequence dedicated to the fair youth. The archetype lives on, as does Platonic love, but now the Youth is no longer the focal point of the action, or the sole object of desire in the agon with Time. The actant-poet now moves into the foreground, becoming the leading protagonist. He now is the

tween the marriage sequence sonnets and *Richard II* (especially Act 1), which in all probability dates from 1595.

[75] This typical rhetorical device of self-denigration is an alternative to the frequently-used opposed mode of hyperbole: cf. 55, l. 2, "this powerful rhyme" etc.

[76] Language, in Shakespeare, offers the only means of combatting naturalistic flux, animality and death. See, for example, Prospero's (or Miranda's, according to the edition) tirade against Caliban, guilty of not having profited from language's civilizing virtues because of his irreducible, and vicious, bestiality (*The Tempest*, 1.2.353-64); compare also *Richard II*, 1.3.153ff.

"only begetter", he the champion of Platonic love (Sonnet 116). It is he who generalizes on the human condition starting from himself, he who disdainfully stands aloof from the others (cf. Sonnet 121 with its proud, almost blasphemous, central affirmation: "I am that I am", l. 9),[77] he who has committed the misdeeds upon which he now meditates in a precise parallel with the former wrongs of the Friend (compare, for example, Sonnet 120 with 34 and 35), he who asks pardon for a culpable period of silence and absence (cf. 117 and 119), he who ponders over the expense of his powers in acting and playwriting (cf. 110 and 111), and lastly, as we shall see, it is he who pitches himself into the final battle with Time, where the prize at stake is no longer the fair youth, but the poet himself (cf. 123).

Sonnet 108

We must now briefly examine Sonnet 108 which closes the sub-sequence on the celebrated archetype's immortality in art, begun in Sonnet 100:

> What's in the brain that ink may character,
> Which hath not figured to thee my true spirit,
> What's new to speak, what now to register,
> That may express my love, or thy dear merit?
> Nothing, sweet boy, but yet like prayers divine,
> I must each day say o'er the very same,
> Counting no old thing old, thou mine, I thine,
> Even as when first I hallowed thy fair name.
> So that eternal love in love's fresh case,

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[77] See Melchiori's brilliant analysis of this sonnet (1976).

Weighs not the dust and injury of age,
Nor gives to necessary wrinkles place,
But makes antiquity for aye his page,
    Finding the first conceit of love there bred,
    Where time and outward form would show it dead.

The poem is a conclusion in a minor key, testifying to the temporary wearying of the creative imagination. It takes the form of a query as to whether it is possible to invent anything new to say in praise of the loved one[78] (first quatrain); of a negative answer, which nevertheless contains an element of positivity that transforms the inevitable repetition into a liturgy (second quatrain, where the theme is that of 105, though the sacral level is now more explicit: see "prayers divine", l. 5, and "I hallowed", l. 8); and of a confirmation of the validity of dressing out eternal love in new words to combat the wrinkles of age (third quatrain); finally, of a couplet recognizing the treachery of natural time (along the lines of 104) which wears away the outer form of the loved one and claims thus to have shown that love is dead.

Sonnet 116

Love, however, reappears, and with far greater assurance in Sonnet 116. Like poetry and the archetype, Platonic love withstands the attack of time, violating its deterministic laws (as in John Donne). Paradoxically, it is immobile, yet at the same time it *grows*. The *growth* seme, so important in the

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[78] This question was raised earlier in a more complex manner in the first quatrains of 59 and 76.

first section of the *Sonnets*, has re-emerged, significantly, in the preceding Sonnet (115):

> Love is a babe, then might I not say so
> To give full *growth* to that which still doth *grow*.

The conceits of Sonnet 116 recall Donne's 'metaphysical' manner, especially the reiterative counterpointing (in the shape of polyptotons) in lines 3 and 4. But let us examine the sonnet as a whole:

> Let me not to the marriage of true minds
> Admit impediments, love is not love
> Which alters when it alteration finds,
> Or bends with the remover to remove.
> O no, it is an ever-fixèd mark
> That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
> Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
> Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
> Within his bending sickle's compass come,
> Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
> But bears it out even to the edge of doom:
>> If this be error and upon me proved,
>> I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

As in the similar 124, the argument consists of a series of negations: the essence of Platonic love cannot be expounded in the affirmative, it necessitates a dialectical approach via the refutation of profane, ephemeral passions. The negations make use of various registers: "Let me not" (l. 1) (the rhetorical); "Love is not love" (l. 2) (the inversive: a non-value is denied); "O no" (l. 5) (the categorical); "is never shaken" (l. 6) (assertive: the value is affirmed); "Whose worth's unknown" (l. 8) (assertive); "Love's not Time's fool" (l. 9) (assertive);

"Love alters not" (l. 11) (assertive); "I never writ, nor no man ever loved" (l. 14) (the rhetorical). As can be seen, the sonnet has a circular organization in which two rhetorical negations enclose an assertive central section whose meaning, thanks to its paradoxical, or meta-naturalistic logic, is transmitted by means of negatives which engraft the symbolical artifice in the semantic field of natural fugacity: the system is that of *litotes*. The negative rhetorical opening also enables the poet to 'quote' the Anglican marriage ceremony formula,[79] and give an aura of sanctity to Platonic love, which is then qualified by the first fundamental negation of lines 2-3, "love is not love / which . . . ". Any kind of mutability, whether temporal – "Which alters when it alteration finds" (l. 3) – or spatial – "Or bends with the remover to remove" (l. 4) – is excluded. The first quatrain thus declares that love *must not* change.

The second quatrain opens with a pure negation ("O no", l. 5) and postulates the fixed, immutable status of love in a double sea-image (in two line-pairs: 5-6 and 7-8). The first is that of the "mark" in the tempest; it is interesting to note that the adjective "ever-fixèd" combines the temporal and spatial dimensions mentioned above while denying each: "ever" negates time, and "fixèd" motion. The second is that of the pole-star by which all routes are set, but which in itself is remote, immutable and essentially mysterious, even if marine instruments can measure its "height" (a word which carries a connotation of sublimity). Like the star in the heavens, the lighthouse too is a vertical figure,

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[79] The Anglican rite has "If any of you know cause of just impediment why these persons should not be joined together in holy Matrimony, ye are to declare it".

which is precisely why it is aloof from the time implicit in the horizontal movement of the storm and waves (*nature*) in line 6 or of ships (*man*) in line 7. Verticality is the only bulwark against flux, and here it is represented in the form of Platonic love, whereas in 60 it was ascribed to poetry, and elsewhere to the archetype. As we might have expected, the second quatrain encloses the world of time in a chiasmus of permanence:

l. 5   A)   verticality, permanence

l. 6   B)   horizontality, flux

l. 7   B)   horizontality, flux

l. 8   A)   verticality, permanence

The third quatrain can also be divided into two line-pairs, the first of which links up with the second quatrain and maintains peremptorily (though still by negation) that "Love's *not* Time's fool", while the second catches up the conceits of the first quatrain, arguing (again, by negation) that "Love alters *not*" (l. 11). Yet again we have a chiastic structure, as can be seen from this scheme:

ll. 1-4   A)   concept

ll. 5-8   B)   exemplum (double)

ll. 9-10   B)   exemplum

ll. 11-12 A)   concept

This circular pattern is further displayed, as has already been suggested, in the correspondence between the last line and the first of this sonnet: the formula "Let me not" ≈ the double paradox "I never writ, nor no man ever loved". The negative, which expresses a categorical rejection of the nat-

ural world, establishes itself as the generative centre of the fictional process in order to affirm the essence of Platonic love, inexpressible in declarative or direct speech. Celebration is thus inevitably, as we have already maintained, a kind of litotes.

Sonnet 123

This theme will be taken up again, following the same procedure of negation, in 124. However, we must first deal with Sonnet 123 so as not to falsify the order in which the sonnets appear in this sequence, in accordance with the practice hitherto scrupulously observed, whose advantages have, we hope, by now begun to emerge. We find here a vigorous challenge to time, with the poet struggling to ensure his own survival and not that of the fair youth, who is now completely absent:

> No! Time, thou shalt not boast that I do change,
> Thy pyramids built up with newer might
> To me are nothing novel, nothing strange,
> They are but dressings of a former sight:
> Our dates are brief, and therefore we admire,
> What thou dost foist upon us that is old,
> And rather make them born to our desire,
> Than think that we before have heard them told:
> Thy registers and thee I both defy,
> Not wond'ring at the present, nor the past,
> For thy records, and what we see doth lie,
> Made more or less by thy continual haste:
>> This I do vow and this shall ever be,
>> I will be true despite thy scythe and thee.

Even here negation has pride of place, though not so much on account of its frequency (see ll. 1, 3, 10) as of the appearance of "No!" (reinforced by an exclamation mark) as the first word of the poem. Time is immediately apostrophized as if it were a *theatrical* antagonist, whose *linguistic* arms (cf. "boast") are blunted by the agonist with redundant emphasis: "No! Time, thou shalt *not* boast that I *do* change". Time is the writer of the *dèjà dit* and hence at first sight comparable, as an actant, to the writer-agonist (cf. 19, 59, and 76). Yet there is a basic difference in that Time tends to assume the role of the *false* poet (none other, in fact, than that of the rival poet in the sub-sequence already discussed): Time is a bluffing, eccentric double-dealer who dupes man with false novelties which only the agonist recognizes for what they are; the agonist is able to do so because he rejects eccentricity in his *own* poetry and denounces the false poets who defraud their readers. To make this point quite clear, it is worthwhile comparing the first quatrain of 59 and 76 with the first of sonnet in hand:

> Sonnet 59, ll. 1-4
> If there be nothing new, but that which is,
> Hath been before, how are our brains beguiled,
> Which labouring for invention bear amiss
> The second burthen of a former child!
>
> Sonnet 76, ll. 1-4
> Why is my verse so barren of new pride?
> So far from variation or quick change?
> Why with the time do I not glance aside
> To new-found methods, and to compounds strange?

The analogy between line 4 of Sonnet 59 and line 4 of Sonnet 123 requires no comment. What does need mentioning is that the same concept is also expressed in lines 11-12 of 76:

So all my best is dressing old words new,
Spending again what is already spent:

However, the most interesting comparison is that between the first quatrains of 74 and 123, for the contrast between the present poet and the false, braggart rhetorical poet, given to "new-found methods, and to compounds strange", in the former is identical to the contrast between the poet and Time in the latter. In the one we find the adjectives "new-found" and "strange", in the other "novel" and "strange". There is no real semantic development (novelty) in Time's metamorphoses, which are mere "dressings" (l. 4) of the *same* thing, just as there is nothing original in the obscurities of lying poetasters. In each case the antagonist represents *change*. The agonist recognizes not only that change is illusory, but also that it is *false* (according to the Neoplatonist code); he thus sets himself up as an image of stability and truth – in his verse, in his referent and here, in his spiritual attitude in the great agon. In the first quatrain, the rhyme-words *change/strange*, *might/sight* point the logic of the argument, which goes: I do *not change* because I do not believe that the seeming change you bring about involves anything *strange* (new) in as much as your *newer might* is merely another version of a *former sight*. The phonological parallelism of the second rhyme is enriched by the semantic opposition of the epithets "*newer* might"/"*former* sight" which, however, are identical at the morphological, grammatical and rhythmical levels.

The double negation of line 3 – "*nothing* novel, *nothing* strange" – in its linguistic redundance serves to render unbridgeable the gap between the plane of appearances upon which time operates and that of the immutable Ideas to which the agonist appeals in his struggle *not to change*. The

way to escape the ravages of time thus does not lie in denying their reality (cf. 104 in this), but in revealing their ineffectuality, for the semantic core of the world is immune to change and can be penetrated with the aid of the Neoplatonist-Christian code, however much this may be threatened by a late Renaissance sense of desperation as the great tragedies from *Hamlet* to *King Lear* show even more clearly than the *Sonnets*.

In the second quatrain the obsession with fugacity is shown as producing an insatiable pursuit of novelty, which amounts to playing into the hands of the antagonist Time. Here again, the burden of the logical argument is carried in the rhyme words: we *admire* the new because we *desire* it, but everything is *old* and has already been *told*.[80]

The third quatrain sees a renewal of the challenge in formal, ceremonial terms. It is aimed significantly at Time as well as Time's writings: "Thy registers and thee I *both* defy". The agonist is victorious because he refuses *to marvel* at the metamorphoses of past and present: "Not wond'ring" (l. 10) is clearly contrasted with "we admire" (l. 5). The annals of time – "thy registers" (l. 9), "thy records" (l. 11) – are akin to those of the false poets but totally different from those of celebrative poetry which perpetuates the memory of the historical referent by raising him to the status of an archetype (cf. 55, line 8, "The living *record* of your memory"). Whereas celebrative poetry *names* the truly immutable, the

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[80] "Old", it will also be noted, is entirely contained in "told", as in 76, ll. 13-14, "For as the sun is daily new and old, / So is my love still telling what is told". Only the memory of what has been said survives: cf. "Thy registers", "thy records"; and, to give just one example, line 1 of 106, "When in the *Chronicle* of wasted time" (emphasis added).

annals of time and the false poets are guilty of lying (see l. 11) since they beget a feverish succession of forms and images,[81] thus failing to achieve any sort of semantic stability or lasting identity: "Made *more* or *less* by thy continual haste". Time the writer, like a fashionable rhetorician, *cannot* write a single durable, and hence true, word. As Lever has acutely observed: "Time's own most impressive records in the Book of Nature, the mountains and seas Time had written there, were alterations and deletions . . . All Time's claims were impostures" (1961: 256). Time's writings are false because they cannot *be* what they *seem* and are destined by their continual metamorphosis simultaneously 'to be' and 'not to be': what was sea is now land, what was land is now sea (cf. 64).

Formerly it was the archetype or Platonic love or poetry, now it is the actant Poet himself who halts the flow of time with his own permanence, completing the circle of the poem in a couplet which balances the *incipit* "*I will be true*" (l. 14) *vs* "*I do change*" (l. 1), "this *shall* ever be" (l. 13) *vs* "thou *shalt not* boast" (l. 1).

Sonnet 124

The world of history and society (which is alienation: cf. 29), like the world of nature (which is flux, meaninglessness), cannot be exorcised by any system of values erected upon the sands of human or natural time.

Platonic love alone can meet requirements of immutability and nullify Time's accidents and deceits, here shown pri-

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[81] The paradoxical rejection of imaginative variety in 76 and 105 must be read in the same light.

marily in a metaphor of *politics* (and not, as is more usual, of nature or society) depending on the ambiguities of the word "state" in line 1:

> If my dear love were but the child of state,
> It might for Fortune's bastard be unfathered,
> As subject to time's love or to time's hate,
> Weeds among weeds, or flowers with flowers gathered.
> No it was builded far from accident,
> It suffers not in smiling pomp, nor falls
> Under the blow of thrallèd discontent,
> Whereto th'inviting time our fashion calls:
> It fears not policy that heretic,
> Which works on leases of short-numbered hours,
> But all alone stands hugely politic,
> That it nor grows with heat, nor drowns with showers.
> > To this I witness call the fools of time,
> > Which die for goodness, who have lived for crime.

The logical scheme is as follows: the first quatrain contains a hypothesis admitting Time's rights over the poet's love, which would thus become the slave of circumstance; the second quatrain rejects this hypothesis: Platonic love is not subject to the laws and mutations of time, accident or degree; the third quatrain is split into two units, the first of which (ll. 9-10) expands the second quatrain and, in a negation, depicts politics as an unstable display of appearances and adulation, subject to conspiracies and upheavals (lines 9-10 link up with lines 7-8 forming a kind of inner quatrain with its own specific semantic field), and the second of which (ll. 11-12) peremptorily declares the autonomy of Platonic love (an immutable state within the unstable state of history), carrying over the metaphorical field set up in lines 5-10 and rejecting, once more via negations, the vi-

cissitudes of nature (l. 12); the couplet completes the reasoning by summoning the "fools of time" themselves, who have lived in accordance with the dictates of the opposite paradigm of worldly "state", the realm of violence and of the illusions of power.

The entire meaning of the sonnet flows from the word "state" of line 1, a veritable arch-seme which generates the various modes of natural and historical-political time (fate, accident, "place", political condition, state). Sonnets 29 and 64 have already exploited its semantic complexity. In 29, it appears three times with three distinct meanings: l. 2 "outcast state" (social alienation); ll. 10-11 "then my state / Like to the lark ..." (positive existential condition); l. 14 "I scorn to change my state with kings" (a supreme level of being, above the supreme rank of the sovereign).

The last of these senses is the one claimed by Platonic love here. For the two occurrences of "state" with different meanings in Sonnet 64, we refer the reader to the analysis carried out above. Here, in Sonnet 124, state as an accidental condition generates the sequence "fortune's bastard" (l. 2), "subject to" (l. 3), "accident" (l. 5); as rank or "place", it generates "smiling pomp" and "nor falls" (l. 6); as a political condition (and hence also intrigue), it gives "blow of thrallèd discontent" (l. 7), "policy" (l. 9).

In line 11, in the usual "But" clause which affects all that has been previously said, we encounter the second affirmation of the sonnet (the first is in line 5) where the verb "stands" (already prominent in 60, l. 13 and elsewhere) refers to Platonic love, qualified in two highly significant modes: "all alone", indicating its difference from the rest of things and its essential unity (cf. 105), and "hugely politic", contrasting with all the earlier lexematic sequences deriving from

the paradigm *state*. It is *state* against *state* (and thus parallel to John Donne's similar handling of the Platonic love theme: to give only one example, compare: "She is all States, and all Princes, I, / Nothing else is" in *The Sunne Rising*).

Before concluding, it is worthwhile examining the secondary metaphorical centres of this poem in which the *state* paradigm is dominant. In the first two lines the meaning is expanded not merely from the Genitive Link Metaphor "of state" (l. 1), but also from the noun metaphor on which the former is built: "the child" (l. 1). Line two activates both metaphorical fields in the same grammatical modes: the Genitive Link Metaphor, "fortune's" (which mirrors *one* of the senses of the previous "of state"); the noun metaphor "bastard"; and a verbal function which annuls its identity, "be unfathered". As in Sonnet 123, the poet rejects all that is accidental because it has no lasting identity, and metaphorically attributes to it the bastard's social non-existence. Lines 3-4 show how the accidental depends on the whims of time - and the second of the two lines mirrors the first in chiastic inversion (A "time's love", B "time's hate", B "weeds", A "flowers") and introduces the metaphorical field of plant-life into the sonnet.

> As subject to time's love (A) or to time's hate (B),
> Weeds among weeds, (B) or flowers with flowers (A) gathered

In line 5, the verbal function "it was builded", referring to Platonic love, merits special attention. Love of this kind is not created like a child ("child of state", l. 1), it does not belong to the world of nature, but is created like a monument (cf. 55). It therefore has a vertical, paradigmatic status (cf. 60 and 116) and towers above the intrigues and inconstancies of horizontal history (see lines 6-10). Line 11 contains the second claim that is made for Platonic love, thus forming a functional par-

allel with line 5; the later line in fact foregrounds, at the connotative level, the idea of verticality implicit in "builded" in the earlier line: "But all alone stands hugely politic". The seme of verticality is evident in "stands" and "hugely", which also connotes the above-mentioned monumentality. In line 12, the monument seems to undergo a metaphorical transformation into a plant or tree, thus reflecting at the end of the third quatrain the vicissitudes of the vegetable world apparent in line 4, the end of the first quatrain. Those who are summoned to gaze on the monument, the only surviving sign of Time's defeat, are the "fools of time", slaves of change, "place", politics and its crimes, in other words, the sons of the initial "state".[82]

Sonnet 126

It now only remains for us to examine the last poem of the sequence dedicated to the fair youth. We have called it a "poem" rather than a sonnet because it has only twelve lines and is composed entirely of rhyming couplets. Its anomalous form seems intended to underline its formation as an epigraph, or Envoy:[83]

> O thou my lovely boy who in thy power,
> Dost hold Time's fickle glass, his fickle hour:
> Who hast by waning grown, and therein show'st,
> Thy lovers withering, as thy sweet self grow'st.

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[82] Cf. *King Lear*: the bastard Edmund is the son of state as chance, whereas Goneril and Regan, who are his equals as regards dramatic function, are the daughters of state as degree. In both cases, state belongs to the paradigm of discrimination and abuse.

[83] As many critics have maintained.

> If Nature (sovereign mistress over wrack)
> As thou goest onwards still will pluck thee back,
> She keeps thee to this purpose, that her skill
> May time disgrace, and wretched minutes kill.
> Yet fear her O thou minion of her pleasure,
> She may detain, but not still keep her treasure!
> > Her audit (though delayed) answered must be,
> > And her quietus is to render thee.

A heartfelt adieu, it acknowledges time's eventual erosion of the archetypal ephebe as inevitable. The Friend still seems to maintain his command over the conventional emblems of time – the mirror (which, as we have seen, is false) and the hour-glass – and to grow instead of declining. The *growth* seme, in fact, is repeated in lines 3 and 4: "by waning grown", "thy sweet self grow'st". The ally is now no longer poetry, but nature as a goddess who, like the female protagonist of *Venus and Adonis*, is enamoured of the youth ("thou minion of her pleasure", l. 9) and endevours to snatch him from the claws of time. But destruction is inevitable because Nature's powers, unlike Art's, are limited. Sooner or later, mythical *growth* ("She may detain, but not still keep her treasure", l. 10) will be caught up again in the naturalistic process which rushes headlong towards death, here expressed in the commercial-legal code: "Her audit" (l. 11), "her quietus" (l. 12). Thus the referent is shipwrecked in history as a commodity not just of Time (the great antagonist) but, at the connotative level, of a mercantile age that the poet had disdainfully banished in the immortality sonnets' magnificent illusion of eternity.

1.8 Prohibition and Litotes

Circularity, the Agon, Litotes

It will perhaps be useful to conclude by summarizing some of the key points which emerge from our analysis. The risks involved in recapitulation are always considerable, especially when, as in the present case, an attempt has been made to carry out close textual reading: the procedure will inevitably be simplified and hence falsified. Nevertheless, it has the undeniable advantage of enabling us to make a number of theoretical observations.

The first element I wish to stress is that of *circularity*, given that this is an active principle both on the philosophical and metaphorical and formal levels. In Renaissance culture, still deeply imbued with the medieval heritage, each category of reality – mineral, vegetable, animal, human, political, cosmic – retains its own compact, hierarchic circular autonomy (in strictly correlated series) in which value, and hence identity, is transmitted from the apex of the cone, degree by degree, to the base. But this circular order is now beginning to totter.[84] Circularity is also a characteristic of the natural cycles of day and night, summer and winter. The nature-based analogies haunt Shakespeare's imagination because the continual return of the same, in the beginning-end-beginning dialectic, prevents him from constructing permanent natural and, secondarily, historical, meanings. To the revolutions of nature corresponds, in fact, a similar movement in history, in the succes-

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[84] Of the various loci that might be mentioned, Ulysses' famous speech in *Troilus and Cressida*, Act 1, will suffice here.

sion of reigns each of which follows an identical parabola ending in violence and death (cf. the history plays, but also the great tragedies). Time and time again, history fetches up at "night" and "winter", while the closing scenes of the tragedies, with their precarious restoration of a shattered order by the survivors, are the starting point for yet another vain cycle.

These natural and historical revolutions, perpetually driving toward the final hour, have their counterpart in the circular form of the sonnet which gives structural prominence to the reverse movement of return, reaffirmation and permanence. The sonnet differs from *oratio soluta* and *oratio perpetua* because it is a closed circuit, a *period* (*periodus*). Heinrich Lausberg's definition runs as follows:

> *Periodus* (circuitus): cyclic (circular) construction of sentences, consists in the joining together of various thoughts in a sentence so that an element (*protasis*) creating tension is followed by another (*apodosis*) attenuating and solving tension. The basic semantic relationship is *antithesis*.[85]

The analyses carried out in the preceding chapters suggest that it would be hard to find a more exact definition of the Shakespearian sonnet: circularity achieved by means of antithesis in a balanced logical patterning which is often syllogistic or enthymematic. The couplets nearly always have a contrastive function, checking and counterbalancing the opening impetus. What is more, one often notes an hour-glass figure in the rhythmical and semantic organization, where an inverted cone is followed by an upright one.[86]

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[85] Translated from Lausberg 1969: 247-8.

[86] Melchiori reaches a similar conclusion when he discovers two

Of the many sonnets which could be cited as evidence, we shall mention only 29 where the figure is perfect.[87] In this kind of structure, the *chiasmus* achieves particular prominence, being the figure in which an antithesis is resolved into a circular pattern.

The antithesis, of course, is the chief domain of the *agon*, of *drama*. In the general sense, it is necessary to emphasize the contrapuntal, fundamentally *theatrical* (as well as musical) technique of the whole sonnet sequence: here the poet is not the pleader of a cause, like the usual lyric poet, but the judge presiding over a court where all conflicts and actants are allowed their rightful place. In the specific sense, I believe it has been sufficiently demonstrated that there exists in the sonnets examined a triangular actantial structure: namely the agon between the actant-Poet and the actant-Time for the object they both desire (though their desire is antithetical: *creation vs destruction*), i.e. the fair youth. At first, the agon has a linear three-phase progression: 1) the victory of time 2) the prohibition 3) the victory of the poet (see the exemplary scheme of Sonnet 19). But the situation gradually becomes more complicated, forcing the writer to face the problems of the metalanguage of celebrative poetry.

Has the object of desire been saved or not? Is the permanence achieved that of life or death? Is the referent revealed or definitively hidden? The agon throws doubt on the very status of language, since the *prohibition* through which it is fought and won is a knot of contradiction. The prohibition negates the naturalistic order so as to affirm the symbolical

opposed, overlapping cones in his penetrating analysis of 146 (1976: 204-7).

[87] See analysis in the following essay on Sonnets 33 and 29.

order; it finds a presence where there is an absence, but it also finds the opposite, namely the absence of art in the fullness of life. Celebrative art is not triumphal, because it inevitably revolves around the dilemma 'is art a monument or a tomb?'. Its figure, in the widest sense of the term, is, in short, the *litotes*, which denies in order to affirm, but is also doomed to be the signpost of an absence. The litotes is not the direct *prohibition* expressed during the agon of the earlier sonnets and which at times breaks into hyperbole (its rhetorical opposite), but it is its counterpart in the later section, where, behind the overt antagonist Time hovers a more elusive semiological antagonist present within the very body of the Word, which is a two-faced combination of permanent signifiers and fugitive signifieds and hence the emblem of celebrative art's failure to confer immortality to the *real* person. Thus it is that even silence may seem preferable, and when silence becomes the specific theme of the message (see Sonnets 82-86 where the poet's silence is contrasted with the false rhetoric of the rival poet) it appears as the extreme, profoundly ironic, form of the litotes figure: because the poet there speaks of the negation of the word, which is silence.

Classifying litotes among the tropes involving a shifting of limits (along with periphrasis, synecdoche, antonomasia, emphasis and hyperbole), Lausberg gives the following definition: "[I]rony of dissimulation of a periphrastic kind which consists in obtaining a superlative degree by the negation of the opposite".[88]

Which is exactly what we find in Shakespeare's celebrative poetry. The contrary – time, death, profane love, fleeting identity, false rhetoric – has to be denied so that cele-

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[88] Translated from Lausberg 1969: 121.

brative art may achieve the superlative degree of permanence, of the archetype, and paradoxically of 'silence'. If we overlook this basic tropical construction, we run the risk of falling into the kind of error of interpretation incurred even by such a penetrating critic as L.C. Knights when, in his comment on Sonnet 123, he expresses his disapproval of a central feature of the entire immortality sonnets series:

> . . . the poem *asserts* rather than expresses a resolved state of mind: 'thou shalt not boast', 'I defy', 'This I do vow', 'I will be true'. In the manner of its assertion the Sonnet is in line with the more famous Sonnet 116 ('Love's not time's fool') – a poem of which the difficulties have never, I think, been squarely faced – and with those sonnets promising some form of immortality. And, we may remark in conclusion, in all the sonnets of this last type, it is the contemplation of change, that produces the finest poetry . . . (1947: 80)

But it is precisely the *assertion* – which appears with increasing frequency in the *Sonnets* as the *negation* of the opposite – that is the cornerstone of celebrative poetry, understood as a metalanguage opposed to language, as culture opposed to nature, as permanence opposed to time.

The litotes, taken in its widest sense – in the way that metaphor and metonymy are taken as basic figural axes by Jakobson (1960) –, can thus be considered the key figure of Shakespeare's celebrative art. It enables him to expose and homologize all the semic oppositions underpinning the immortality sonnets without dissolving them.

The Semic Model and the Permanence of Shadows

The universe of those sonnets is a closed one, built upon an irreducible inner conflict[89] and actualized by means of systems of transformation (e.g. those of the semic oppositions DAY/NIGHT, SUMMER/WINTER, GROWTH/DECAY, ARCHE-TYPE/SHADOW, MONUMENT/TOMB, etc.) which, though incap- able of breaking out of their absolute boundaries, are *able* to expand them indefinitely by forming ever new, surprising constellations. The semic model of a poetic universe is closed, whereas its transformational systems (rather than its static isotopies) are, paradigmatically and syntagmatically, open series of modulations. The poet writes one sonnet after the other *varying* but not fundamentally *changing* the antinomic structures which govern his idiolect, which, of course, is also his project of reality (Serpieri 1973, especially "Introduction"). The artist is the prisoner of his isotopic universe of semic oppositions in the same way as an age is the prisoner of its hierarchical system of codes (which, in its turn, is subject to transformations that in the long run change the hierarchy and change the age): this is because the linguistic "real" (like the empirical real, always culturally oriented) is not, a-historically, the realm of the possible, but, historically, the realm of what is organizable by means of cultural isotopic "grids", hierarchies of codes and systems of transformation.

However, the poet's organization of his message does not fix the meaning, as Lacan taught us to expect when he

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[89] Cf. Lotman: "[A]s a rule the principle of binary semantic opposition lies at the foundation of the internal organization of textual elements" (1977: 237).

postulated an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier (1966: 502). A work of art is a self-contained system of signs and significations which remains necessarily open to an indefinite number of readings. The meaning of a work of art is always open, but this is not a sufficient reason for the critical act to be satisfied merely with elucidating the interplay of the signifiers, since a hermeneutic model, to function effectively, must take into account the *semantic* hierarchies of the text, however much they are inclined to 'slide' below the chain of signifiers. And even if the specific referent – the person celebrated or the reality described – is definitively erased, this does not authorize the critic to do away with the *reference*. For the reference will on the one hand be connected with the period codes organized by a given cultural typology and by the preferential system of the text in question, while on the other, it will exist in a functional relationship with the author's other works, which provide semantic backing and direction, in keeping with the semic model governing his poetic universe as a whole.[90]

It is to be hoped that the utility of a macrotextual analysis will be clear from this study of the immortality sonnets. They were not, of course, conceived as a strictly connected narrative sequence; moreover, they were written over a period of years, together with many other sonnets, in the intervals between work on plays, or at the same time as the plays. Yet they undeniably form a unity; they are not a haphazard anthology, but a *macrotext*. At each stage of the in-

[90] Moreover, the relationship of reference holds between a given work and the literary system of the period or the 'borrowings' from the literary past: it is the reference of intertextuality.

terpretation a part, a sonnet, of the macrotext is brought into focus, and appears as a specific and unrepeatable actualization, through the transformational systems, of the semic model which organized the more embracing macrotext of the author's entire work and which supplies continual semantic guidance for the interpretation of the signs in the text under examination. In this way, the act of criticism is able not only to approach the interplay of signifiers as a sign system that has become definitively intransitive by obliterating the particular reality celebrated, but to *penetrate* this system (without ceasing to be a semiological operation) and uncover the ideology which gives it its specific orientation and the project of reality which generates its various manifestations.

Shakespeare's art, though governed by an all-pervasive rhetorical system, is much more than a mere structuring of forms: it is a mediated, transformed projection of a world-view and of an individual mind (cultural and historical) in concordance with the collective structures and the techniques and styles of his period. Consequently it would be misleading to claim that his poetry consists of signifiers (figures, tropes, rhythmical and phonematic patterns) just as it is misleading to claim, as many critics have done, that it consists of signifieds (biographical, historical or ideological). Rather, it consists of continual transformational tensions between sign and sense, which are both conscious (= the intentionality of the sign) and unconscious (= the subliminal alignment of the sign in the system, as in anagrammatism etc.), individual (the style, the figurative system ruled by an underlying binary semantic system) and collective (deriving from cultural codes or "series", literary genres, styles).

Seen from this interpretation standpoint, the semantic and semiologic fulcrum of Shakespeare's immortality sonnets seems to me irreducibly dialectical. The agon is won and lost. Art does not offer a final answer but re-proposes *ad infinitum* an indissoluble contradiction. Baroque specularity, of which Shakespeare is an extraordinary interpreter, appears as emblematic of an age which, with Montaigne, as others have observed, made the painful discovery that *contradiction is truth.*

Contradiction finds expression above all in negation. Using the negative – first in the prohibition addressed to time, then in the litotes, which negates in order to affirm – for an act of ideological and aesthetic assertion within the hierarchy of the period cultural codes (in particular the dominant Platonist and Ovidian traditions), Shakespeare celebrates the *paradoxical permanence of a metamorphic universe of shadows.* And for us, equally temporary, readers it is *literally* a universe of shadows:

> Sonnet 81, ll. 12-14
> When all the breathers of this world are dead,
> You still shall live (such virtue hath my pen)
> Where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men.

The poet-encoder and the referent vanish, leaving on us signs to be deciphered by an indefinite succession of readers-decoders who will supply them with ever-diffent meanings. In Shakespeare's culture, dominated by Baroque Neoplatonism, and perhaps equally in our own, dominated by phenomenological relativism, existence is, in the last analysis, an act of language and of interpretation of language.

Sonnets 33 and 29.
Conflict Between Two Cultural Models*

A detailed analysis of Shakespeare's Sonnets 33 and 29 is particularly revealing in showing how Shakespeare modelled reality according to a cultural typology found in most of his work. It also offers a glimpse at the first 'cracks' in an allembracing world system which had been generally viable in England up till the beginning of the sixteenth century. These cracks soon developed into the radical crisis of individual identity and social cohesion in the tragedies – especially from *Hamlet* to *King Lear.*

Thematically, Sonnet 33 looks very simple. No narrative or philosophic complexity obtrudes:

> Full many a glorious morning have I seen
> Flatter the mountain-tops with sovereign eye,
> Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
> Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchymy:
> Anon permit the basest clouds to ride
> With ugly rack on his celestial face,
> And from the forlorn world his visage hide,
> Stealing unseen to west with this disgrace:
> Even so my sun one early morn did shine,
> With all-triumphant splendour on my brow,
> But, out alack he was but one hour mine,

*Translated by Anthony Johnson.

The region cloud hath mask'd him from me now.
        Yet him for this, my love no whit disdaineth,
        Suns of the world may stain, when heaven's sun staineth.

The sonnet consists of an *exemplum* (ll. 1-8), followed by a biographical event, which has prompted it, but is left vague (9-12), and it ends with a couplet which provides a summing-up (13-14). The task of putting this sonnet into prose looks all too easy – interpretation seems a foregone conclusion. But if this were so, the sonnet's value as poetry would be nil. The sonnet appears at first to be poor in thought and almost wholly lacking in narrative depth – a shortcoming which has made a great impression on 'biographical critics', who have lucklessly tried to make up for its 'excessive simplicity' and 'poverty of meaning' by searching for the specific fault done by the friend *outside* the context of the poem. On closer inspection, however, it turns out that a great poet like Shakespeare is able to arrange for vast expansions of sense beneath the denotative level.

By constantly drawing on metaphorical *connotation*, he creates a new pattern of meanings, so attaining to an expressive power which radically overshadows the meagre contribution made by denotation. This sonnet, therefore, stands as a striking proof that the plane of thought (which is bound to be strictly conceptual in character) is not the only, or the most relevant, determinant of a poem's importance (exclusive concentration on thought-content was part of the idealistic fallacy first effectively exploded by the Russian Formalists). Sonnet 33 is one of the simplest and most conventional on the thematic and conceptual levels, but one of the richest in linguistic patterning – especially in its use of the connotation and its utilization of cultural codes. A line-by-line reading reveals that below the

'obvious' surface of the theme there lurks Shakespeare's cunning use of language as a reflection on itself, and his activation of codes (patterns of thought recognized outside the text) present in the cultural typology of the Elizabethan age.

Lines 1-4: here the sun, the real subject of the entire exemplum found in lines 1-8, is substituted by "morning". This allows Shakespeare to personify the cosmos; the morning becomes a 'person' whose eye is the sun. And this person is a king – "sovereign eye". A metaphorical series is set up in which the sun's attributes and functions are replaced by those of a king. Once Shakespeare had decided to personify the sun his choice of a king was inevitable, because Elizabethan culture was still strongly attached – and not only at the metaphorical level – to the 'Great Chain of Being' and to the harmony of the world-order essential to the medieval tradition (whose origins lie in Pythagorean and Platonic doctrine). The anthropomorphization of the morning (sun), therefore, necessarily took the form of its homologue – the king – within the 'body politic'. One result of this transformation of the cosmos into social terms is to make the apparently naturalistic sunrise of line 1 metaphorical (the presence of the sun is conveyed indirectly, through metaphor – "sovereign eye", and the sun's movement is much more than a natural phenomenon – it is the sonnet's fundamental epiphany). Another advantage gained is that of allowing the sonnet to absorb another code still active in the social thinking of the age, whose roots went back many centuries. This second code, Alchemy, was itself connected with the idea of cosmic harmony and its total spiritual self-revelation. Within this code the Philosopher's Stone, which was supposed to be able to turn base matter into gold, has a function homologous with that of the sun within the cosmos or that of

a king within society. This function, as in the other two cases, is imagined as an epiphany. The Sun-King of the first two lines becomes an Alchemist as well in lines 3-4.

Thus lines 1-4 contain a closely woven mesh of levels and codes all converging on the idea of cosmic harmony, and all pointing to a final epiphany – that of alchemy's *mysterium magnum*.[1] The metaphorical registers which intersect with the *exemplum* of the sun, charging it with their own metaphorical values, are (a) *personification as king* – "glorious" (l. 1), "flatter" (l. 2), "sovereign eye" (l. 2), "kissing" (l. 3), "face" (l. 3) – and (b) *hierophanic encoding as alchemy*: "golden face" (l. 3), "Gilding" (l. 4), "heavenly alchymy" (l. 4). All the images, and the patterning of words, summon up codes which are linked by homologies, but the effect is not achieved automatically, as in allegory, because the registers cross elliptically, their points of intersection being polysemic signifiers. "Glorious", for instance, is a common attribute for "morning", but it is also appropriate for a king, and "golden face" develops in the noun the anthropomorphic se-

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[1] The new experimental science developed rapidly in the Elizabethan age, but alchemy was still widely practiced and discussed, and it is repeatedly referred to in literature (Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* is just one example). It is true that we are in a borderline area here between alchemy as a cultural value, and its transformation into metaphor, or even, perhaps, its demystification as a code which can no longer be taken seriously. But the same is true of the order of the cosmos, the 'Great Chain of being', and the whole medieval heritage. It is probably appropriate to say that Shakespeare has no ontological certainties, but constantly weaves metaphors which allude to the certainties of others. In any case, the difference between the medieval system of allegorical equivalences and the new Renaissance one of metaphorical images was still not wide enough to give Shakespeare's metaphors a 'modern', status, that of pure 'invention'.

ries, while the adjective 'golden' returns to the image of the sun, but also inaugurates the alchemic register.

So much for the various registers of attributes and functions in the first quatrain. These registers, though, can be seen to be still more complex if viewed within the perspective of the syntagmatic and rhythmic/metric planes. Poetry, after all, is not simply an isotopic field made up of various semantic levels. It remains a *linear event,* possessing its own internal *time*, and only this poetic time can fully activate the 'map' of sense. In a short poem, such as a sonnet, this flow of poetic time is usually laid down right from the start. The first quatrain begins with a phrase which is particularly interesting in this connection with "Full many a glorious morning", which functions as an emphatic plural. Shakespeare could have conveyed the plural in other ways – for instance, "I have seen many glorious mornings" –, but he made *this* choice, which is crucial in at least three ways.

Firstly, the formula "many a glorious morning" gives gram- matical expression to the idea of a plural, but its morphology allows Shakespeare to compress all the mornings which have shown him the natural phenomenon of "glorious" sunrise in to a *single* morning – "*a* glorious morning", which immediately gives this phenomenon symbolic status. It also allows him to personify the morning (a transformation which would have been impossible with "mornings"), making the sun its eye and its metaphorical counterpart a king. Shakespeare was forced to use a grammatical plural to convey a common phenomenon, but he had to shrug off its plural *form.* A singular substitute was essential to him in setting up the metaphorical equivalences: morning (Sun) = King = Alchemist (Gold, Philosopher's Stone).

Secondly, this formula allows him to use "Full" as his first word. Its semantic force goes on to pervade Shakespeare's elaboration of his set of equivalences. It is the first linguistic foundation stone for that great epiphany of reality which takes up the first quatrain. Shakespeare's synchronic arrangement of the three metaphorical planes enables him to give a rich 'harmonic' display. He develops the relationship between sun and earth within the natural cosmos alongside that between king and kingdom within the 'body politic', and that between gold and the base matter it has been transmuted from, within the hierophany of alchemy.

Thirdly, by using this type of emphatic syntax based on anastrophe, Shakespeare is led by the rules of rhythm and euphony to an inversion of his subject and its auxiliary verb – "*have I* seen". This has far-reaching effects, because it places "I" next to "seen" at the end of the first line, so creating a double parallel, semantic and homophonic, with the end of the second line: "with sovereign eye". On a purely metric plane the inversion weakens "I" by assigning it to an unstressed position:

> Full màny a glòrious mòrning hàve I sèen

But it is certainly reinforced semantically by being displaced towards the end of the line and by being placed next to "seen". The anastrophe is the necessary premise for the "I" – "eye" mirroring on the phonic and – by virtue of *I*'s involvement with *seen* – semantic plane as well. In fact, the last words of the first two lines answer each other semantically, as both embody the seme 'sight'. An 'eye-communication' begins, a meeting of looks: the "I" looks at the sun (never mentioned explicitly); the sun is the eye of the cosmos (and thus also a theophany); but it is also the king's

eye, which looks back at the original "I". Thus the subject of the sentence is not presented as the spectator of an external event, but is immediately caught up in the great metaphorical polyphony of the harmony of the world. At this point the three planes of reality have been made to intersect, and the whole medieval ontology-homology and microcosm-macrocosm has been set up. The grammar of "Full many a" therefore has a great many syntagmatic and paradigmatic repercussions, the most important of which is that of allowing the link-up between lines 1 and 2 through the homophonic punning of "I" and "eye".

Once line 2 has established the metaphorical network and the ontological model supporting it, these are developed by lines 3-4 through syntactic, semantic and metric parallels which involve even the relational words. The phonic and semantic reflections between lines 1 and 2 widen out here into an all-embracing mirroring between levels, which swells Shakespeare's crescendo of cosmic epiphany built on the medieval model. The syntactic parallels between these lines, based on a structure of verb + (direct) object + (adverbial) phrase of manner, are easily identified:

l. 2

Flatter	verb	A
the mountain-tops	direct object	B
with sovereign eye	adverbial phrase	C

l. 3

Kissing	verb	A
with golden face	adverbial phrase	C
the meadows green	object	B

l. 4

Gilding	verb	A
pale streams	object	B
with heavenly alchemy	adverbial phrase	C

The parallel is varied once, in line 3, thus avoiding monotony: The metrical position of the verbs remains anaphorically constant: "Flatter" (l. 2), "kissing" (l. 3), "Gilding" (l. 4). But the metrical and grammatical parallels bring out phonic and morphological differences attached to the linking technique found first in lines 1-2 and then in lines 2-4. "Flatter" is in fact an infinitive and is connected by alliteration with "Full" (l. 1), while "kissing" (l. 3) and "Gilding" (l. 4) not only share the gerundival form but are also linked by near-alliteration, beginning with the voiceless (k) and voiced (g) gutturals respectively. Besides this, the infinitive "Flatter" is governed by a verb of perception, "have I seen", and thus refers to a period of time *shorter* than that of the subsequent gerundives.

This is naturalistically appropriate. The horizontal rays touching the mountain tops last much less long than the first oblique, then vertical, rays which fall on the plains and rivers. This takes us back to the semantic and connotative levels of the first four lines. We have already seen that these are dominated by the metaphor of the sun as king and then as divine alchemist. The series of syntactic, phonic and metric parallels mentioned so far is not *static*,[2] but shows a fascinating *dynamic* capability. The first two lines give a pic-

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[2] A static display is never found in true poetry since it would lead to monotony and tautology.

ture of very early morning, when the sun, rising above the horizon, has not yet reached the whole world but is seen 'touching' the mountain tops. This is the first phase of the naturalistic epiphany which, as a result of the connotative force of the immediately activated metaphorical plane (sun-morning as king), corresponds to the first stage of the feudal order within which the king 'shows' himself. The sun-as-king magnanimously deigns to flatter the mountain tops or 'high places' of his kingdom (the verb "flatter" could not apply to the "plain" – the people). Ptolemaic macrocosm and medieval society fully echo each other both in structure and in functions, within the hierarchical richness of their unifying models. Line 3 also contains an inversion of the order 'adjective + noun' – an inversion demanded by criteria of patterning as well as of emphasis. Shakespeare has already introduced semantic inversion above (ABC – ACB), and, within B, he now inverts the form of his direct object ("meadows green"), obtaining through this syntagmatic variant a rhetorical figure of 'mirroring' of great formal effectiveness – the chiasmus:

> with golden face the meadows green
>   a   b   b   a

This feature is anything but casual. In these first four lines each microstructure, whatever its level, aims to reflect a cosmic harmony, and the effects created, if successful, *must* contribute to a total epiphany.

In "kissing with golden face the meadows green", time has already passed and the sun is higher in the sky; and, in "Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchymy", the sun, whose position is again revealed by connotation rather than by direct description, has risen still higher. The adjective

"pale" applied to "streams" shows that, up till then, they had not been "golden" because they had not been touched by the sun, only by the diffuse light of morning. The streams follow the lowest levels in a plain or valley, so that, from a naturalistic viewpoint, it is clear that the sun reaches them *after* the "mountain-tops" and "meadows". Thus the climactic "Gilding" of streams is found in line 4, as a result of the Sun-King-Alchemist's divine intervention. This is when matter is transformed, leading to the full epiphany of the mysteries hidden in the natural world.[3] The connotatively engineered semantic development of the first four lines offers a formidable illustration of the Neo-Platonic and Alchemic transformation of nature, homologous with the sense-giving and vitalizing function of the divine king within the body politic in the Middle Ages. The idea of universal harmony within a closed cosmos is fully unfolded here. Even so, the various *metaphorical* levels (macrocosmic, political, alchemical) are governed by respect for the sequence of *natural* phenomena. And the referential aspect of time has to be gleaned *within* the metaphorical time conveyed by the language of the poem. This is shown by the verbal functions. Morphologically, the short time-interval indicated by "Flatter" (infinitive) is followed by the longer intervals conveyed by "kissing" and "Gilding" (gerundives). Semantically – exploiting properties peculiar to metaphor – these func-

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[3] As mentioned in note 1, the images here should not be considered in an exclusively metaphorical sense, as they belong to codes which were still operative – even if in danger of collapse – within the cultural typology of the Elizabethan age. Thus one of the senses attributable to "Gilding" should certainly be the specific one it possessed in the code of alchemy: "To impregnate (a liquid) with gold" (cf. *OED* 2.).

tions transfer the naturalistic sequence of reference on to the connotative planes of symbolism employed. The first verb, "Flatter", points to tenuous contact, the second, "Kissing", to full contact (= perfect harmony within the cosmos and between the king and the pyramidal base of society), and the third, "Gilding", to a complete inner transformation of matter; and contact becomes interpenetration here – a transubstantiation, with the appearance of a theomorphic stage ("heavenly") creating a complete circuit. Its initiators are Sun, King and divine Alchemist; its objects are nature, society and matter; and its recipient is man, represented by "I", the witness to, and actor in, the universal epiphany.

Lines 5-8 show history erupting into ontological epiphany, and hence disorder breaking into order. The metaphorical fields of lines 1-4 persist, but there everything was oriented towards a *plus*, a fullness, whereas here everything points to a *minus*, leading to a deepening eclipse of the cosmic harmony. At a rapid first reading, lines 5-8 may seem to give nothing more than a description of natural phenomena. A radiant morning is followed by bad weather and then by evening; throughout Shakespeare's sonnets, morning and evening are, in fact, symbols for a fullness and an ending respectively. But the connotative level discloses a complex network of functions and attributes which build on the cosmological and political metaphors of the first four lines.

The first verbal function, "permit" (l. 5), anthropomorphically develops the paradigm of the king introduced in lines 1-4. It is the king who 'permits' the insubordination of his subjects by making a historical mistake typical of the feudal kings, a mistake seen in Shakespeare's history plays (especially *Richard II*): that of letting his sacred power be obscured by courtiers or barons (here under the image of "bas-

est clouds"). The clouds, in fact, are given a connotation that is *not* naturalistic (black, heavy, stormy, etc.), but moral and social – "basest", which fits perfectly into the human, political code established by the first four lines. "Basest" may thus connote the betrayal of the divine-right king and the breakdown of an order guaranteed by the power delegated to the king by God.[4] But "basest" achieves more than this, because it recalls, in negative form, all the metaphorical levels of the first four lines. Cosmologically there is a semantic opposition – along the axis *high* (empyrean) / *low* (material) – between "heavenly" (l. 4) and "basest" (l. 5). On the sociopolitical plane it points to an inferiority in social status. And lastly, on the alchemistic plane, given its contiguity with "heavenly alchymy" (l. 4), it recalls the *base metals* which were those to be transformed into *gold*, whereas here they are degraded to the lowest level of all: "basest".

The connotative series proceeds uninterruptedly and consistently within the descriptive level. The verbal function attributed to "basest clouds" is "to ride", that summons up an image of courtier cavalry. The stormy weather, in other words, is viewed by analogy with an uprising against

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[4] Cf. the themes and the whole metaphorical texture of *Richard II*, which is constantly based on the cluster King-Sun-Gold. An even more stringent comparison is provided by *Henry IV, Part 1*, 1.2.194-200: "Yet herein will I imitate the sun, / Who doth permit the base contagious clouds / To smother up his beauty from the world, / That when he please again to be himself, / Being wanted he may be more wondered at / By breaking through the foul and ugly mists / Of vapours that did seem to strangle him". There is no doubt that these two passages are perfectly analogous. Despite the transformation of the situation in *Henry IV* into metaphorical terms, it directly concerns the king. We can thus conclude that the interpretation given here of lines 5-8, in terms of the predicament of a feudal king, is justified.

the king.⁵ The links with the first four lines go deeper than the development of themes. Another correspondence, this time a grammatical one, may be noted. The three adverbial phrases found in lines 2, 3, and 4 are answered and reversed by a fourth in line 6, "with ugly rack". Here too the semantic level is highly complex. "Ugly", like "basest", does not give a naturalistic description, but works on a human, moral level. "Rack" can mean 'drifting cloud', and this satisfies the naturalistic need for a rendering of the clouding-over of the sun, but, within the context supplied by "to ride", it also points to a pace in riding intermediate between trotting and cantering. And lastly, and most importantly from a connotative viewpoint, it suggests the medieval torture of the rack, so introducing the idea of a palace revolution, with the king deposed and tortured – an act of sacrilege against his superhuman role as God's chosen instrument – "with ugly rack on his *celestial* face" (and here too a comparison can be made with *Richard II).*

Lines 7-8 end the parallel group of four lines with the "disgrace" of the sun-king, who hides his face from the world, which has been made "forlorn" by its loss (within the medieval pyramidal vision of society, the loss of the king

⁵ The second quatrain in Sonnet 60 displays the same interweaving of the metaphorical field of the sun with that of the king, with the additional complication that the basic element on which these two registers build is that of the 'journey' of human life: "Nativity once in the main of light / Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crowned, / Crooked eclipses 'gainst his glory fight, / And time that gave, doth now his gift confound". The metaphorical field of the sun is conveyed connotatively by "light" and "eclipses", and that of the king, with an implication of wicked sedition, by "crowned", "crooked", "glory", and "fight".

meant the loss of a whole nation's identity); and he flees furtively westwards, following the course of the setting sun, symbolizing a death. Thus the great sun-king of the first four lines, who endowed everything with life to the point of transforming base matter into noble metals, as if enabling the whole cosmos to express its spiritual potentialities hidden within matter, now moves towards decadence and darkness: "Stealing away" as one overcome by disaster. On the morphological plane, it may be noted that this second group of four lines, like the first, closes with a gerundive – "Gilding" (l. 4), "Stealing" (l. 8). This sets up another semantic opposition; the context requires us to interpret "Stealing" as "Fleeing", but the primary function of this verb is to denote an act of robbery. Thus the act of transformation into gold is reversed into that of mean thieving (cf. the negative connotations of "unseen", l.8) and "disgrace" (l. 8).[6]

So far we have examined the sonnet's nucleus, the eight-line *exemplum.* The third group of lines displays a biographical plane, but again with a high degree of abstraction. The wrong done by the friend, "he", who is given only a vague form as an absence, is homologous with the clouding-over of the sun and the sedition against the king found in the

[6] As regards "disgrace", we may note its opposition, in the widest paradigmatic sense, to the first quatrain – an opposition strengthened by its appearance at the very end of l.8, as if summing up ll. 5-8. In l. 4 every formulation of sense was based on the concession of gifts to what had a lower position (than the sun, the king, or the divine alchemist), according to the Christian code of 'grace' - a code found elsewhere in Shakespeare (throughout *Measure for Measure*, for example). Whereas here the Sun-King-Alchemist is hidden and has been deposed, and loses his magic powers. Thus he first offers grace (1-4) and then suffers disgrace (5-8).

second quatrain. This wrong is what has penetrated into, and disintegrated that harmony's ontology. More specifically, within the relationship between the poet and the fair youth, this wrong is the flaw which threatens their eternal and immutable Platonic love: it corresponds to another emotional involvement by the friend, as shown by the following Sonnets 34 and 35. The third quatrain is linked to the first two by a perfectly parallel scheme. As we have seen, the first group expresses a *plus* and the second a *minus;* here we find the quatrain split into two subsets of two lines each; lines 9-10 express a *plus* and 11-12 a *minus*, so that the whole structure of the quatrains is I A, II B, III AB.

Lines 9-10 refer to a "thou" who is addressed metaphorically as "my sun" within a syntactic structure that mirrors in two lines that conveyed by lines 2, 3 and 4 of the first quatrain:

did shine	*verb*	A
with all triumphant splendour	*adverbial phrase of manner*	C
on my brow	*adverbial phrase of place functionally similar to a direct object*	B

Lines 11-12 build on the second group of four lines, using similar images; "The region cloud" recalls "the basest clouds" and "mask'd" returns to "his visage hide". But by now the multiplicity of metaphorical planes created by connotation in the first eight lines has been lost. The poetic discourse is still metaphorical with respect to the biographical plane, but it has become dangerously weaker. This is continued by the final couplet, with the last line's flat, rather obvious equivalence.

It is a low-geared, pessimistic, acceptance of the imperfection of reality at all levels. And this imperfection actually damages the language which conveys it. Metrically and phonically, the couplet is rather clumsy. Line 13 has four and a half feet, and the clumsiness – despite the pun "Suns" / "Sons" – increases in line 14: its very high number of consonants, with sibilants predominating, make it difficult to pronounce and irregular, as regards both length and stress; "sun", for instance, in the penultimate foot, should be given a stress, but the dissonant rhythm forbids it. The great cosmic harmony is by now a utopia for the poet, and it can only be renewed through artistic *illusion*, in the supreme order of language (as in the first four lines).

The sonnet is therefore imperfect, but, even so, it is a very interesting one. It appears to be discursively banal and speculatively simple, but only its conclusion turns out to be so – and that conclusion signals a crisis of confidence in a model of reality which had been almost wiped out. The illusion of its existence lasts only four lines, and it is reversed in the next four. The great orchestration of connotations found in the first eight lines displays the two models which were fighting for supremacy within the typology of Elizabethan culture. The first model, which derived from the Middle Ages, proposed an order which was divinely ordained, macrocosmic, social and microcosmic, and it was mapped out in closely knit parallel hierarchies; while the second, the Elizabethan model of disorder, derived from the emergence of a syntagmatic conception which rapidly eroded symbolic values.[7]

[7] See Lotman 1973. His survey ranges from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century and offers an important contribution on the var-

If Sonnet 33 shows the flaw in world harmony, and in its ethical and spiritual counterpart (Platonic love), caused by a 'wrong' done by the friend and his temporary absence, Sonnet 29 deals more directly with the absence of the self, in a more desperate reversal of that model of order and cosmic harmony which should have given every link in the great chain of being – especially man – a definite signic identity and semantic stability. Sonnet 29, therefore, must be located on that line of progressive loss of identity of the subject which runs from *Richard II* to *Hamlet*, and on to the total signic annihilation of Lear within what had by then become the irreversible collapse of the medieval hierarchies. However, the end of this sonnet allows order to be retrieved in the form of Platonic love, and in the movement of the formal modelling, where the 'fall' of the first nine lines is answered by a 'rise' in the last five, thus holding alienation at bay:

ious historical forms of a cultural typology. For our purposes much can be learnt from Lotman's distinction between the symbolic type (Middle Ages) and the syntagmatic type (which emerges in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). In the first, "The sign's importance lay in its function as a substitute. This immediately threw its double nature into relief; what was substituted was con- sidered 'content' and what substituted it was 'expression'. This was why the sign-as-substitute never acquired an independent value; its value depended on the hierarchical rank of its content within the general model of the world". In the second, "The meaning of a man or a phenomenon was determined not by its relationship with the essences belonging to another plane, but by its insertion within a given plane" (translated from 1973: 44, 52). We may say that in Shakespeare the collapse of the symbolic model was not followed by a sure confidence in the syntagmatic one, but by the perception of an absence – a void of values.

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,
Featur'd like him, like him with friends possess'd,
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 remember'd such wealth brings,
  That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

This is an unusual type of sonnet for Shakespeare, who normally respects a semantic and syntactic division into quatrains and a final couplet, in line with the rhyme-scheme. Here, on the other hand, we find a single syntactic development, only broken up by the short pauses provided by commas, in a kind of *oratio perpetua.* But this syntactic continuity does not prevent a clear semantic switch from occurring through an apodosis at the beginning of line 10 – "Haply I think on thee", which reverses the desperation of the protasis "When in disgrace …". The modelling of meaning restores the distribution of poetic discourse into quatrains, and a final couplet, with the single exception of line 9: lines 1-4 give a feeling of non-participation and alienation in the subject; ll. 5-8, the subject's desire to change himself into other more gifted or fortunate people; l. 9, a stage of hesitation, with self-contempt, almost as if to sum up the thoughts of lines 5-8 and deny them; ll. 10-12, recollection of the loved one, bringing back a happiness unjustified by the realities

of the situation; ll. 13-14, the cause of this 'fullness' that answers the 'emptiness' of ll. 1-4, while the earlier desire to change identity with other people (ll. 5-8) is hyperbolically rejected. Thus, with the syntagmatic flow, the organization of meaning, as always in Shakespeare, imposes semantic sequences built up out of skilful parallels.

An independent check on this modelling is offered by the lexical level where we find that the word *state*, in various forms, is the semantic nucleus of each of the four main sequences: "my outcast state" (l. 2) is the primary determinant of the meaning of the first four lines; the desired state of others, even if lexically latent, presides over the formulation of the second group of four lines; in the third sequence "then my state" (l. 10) points to the radical spiritual reversal of the first psychological shade of meaning; and the concluding "I scorn to change my state with kings" (l. 14) marks the Neo-Platonic beatitude of the subject who is now unable to desire any change in himself, even if that might elevate him to kingship, the emblematic peak of human society.

Functionally, then, *state* is the crucial noun; and *to change* – implied throughout the second quatrain and explicit in the couplet – is its verbal counterpart; change is first desired and then rejected. We may thus conclude that the sonnet expresses the usual Shakespearean dialectic (particularly conspicuous in the immortality sonnets) between *change* and immutability, between the syntagmatic model and the symbolic one. In other words, the polarization already seen in Sonnet 33 reappears here. The difference is that Sonnet 33 begins with the harmony of the cosmos, and ends with the acceptance of imperfection in the human relationships, accompanied by melancholy forgiveness, whereas this sonnet begins with the ego and its inner division and

ends with the perfection of Platonic love.

It is, in fact, the dialectic between the two models which leads to the division between the two segments already noted, lines 1-9 and 10-14. The first segment, even in its intonation, follows a falling movement that ends in a long gerundival form: "Yet in these thoughts myself almost *despising*" (l. 9). The second segment, involving the iconically upward flight of the lark, shows a rising movement which reaches the empyrean: "Heaven's gate" (l. 12). The two movements correspond to two models of reality: the syntagmatic against the symbolic, or the horizontal against the vertical. These are clearly juxtaposed in line 12, "From *sullen earth* sings hymns at *Heaven's gate*".

The dialectic between these models produces antithesis and reversals on the lexical and metaphorical planes. We have seen how the meaning of *state* fluctuates throughout the sonnet, and how the idea of change proposed by the first segment is refused by the second. We may also note the transformations occurring from l. 3 to l. 12: from "trouble … with my bootless cries" to "sings hymns", and from "deaf heaven" to "Heaven's gate".

More subtly, the same dialectic between the two models affects the semantic articulation of the first four lines, setting up a binary development. If we label with A the metaphysical plane (negatively oriented here), and with B the human and social plane, we find:

> When in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes,
>
> A   B
>
> I all alone beweep my outcast state,
>
> B
>
> And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
>
> A
>
> And look upon myself and curse my fate
>
> B   A

This semantic bifurcation leads to another binary distri- bution, this time between the verbs: "beweep" is answered by "And trouble" with a further doubling-up in "And look … and curse". This two-pronged patterning of verbs continues in lines 5-8: "*Wishing*" (l. 5) = "*Desiring*" (l. 7) (with anaphora) and "*Featur'd* like him, like him with friends *possess'd*" (l. 6) (with chiasmus). This patterning is reinforced by that of the noun-phrase syntagmas: "Like him, like him" (l. 6) and "this man's art, and that man's scope" (l. 7). This binary formulation culminates explosively in an antithesis: "With what I most *enjoy contented least*" (l. 8) (again with chiasmus). The second segment displays the triumph of the symbolic model, and, as a result, all these binary forms disappear. They are in fact the articulatory equivalents – in terms of grammar and rhetoric – of the horizontal model, which is ultimately futile, as it is made up of provisional choices rather than of immutable paradigms.

Within the first segment, lines 5-9 not only bear the impress of the doubling-up process, but tend to give it a circular arrangement, with exchanges of roles as part of the model's *futility*. This may be seen in the chiasmuses just not-

ed, and in the epanalepsis which begins with "Wishing", ends with "despising" and finds room for another gerundive "Desiring" in between. All the verbal forms here, except "I most enjoy" (l. 8), are gerundives or participles. The desired change cannot be given a finite *form*, because this would once again pose the problem of "finiteness"; thus it is given "infinite" forms, which mime the irresolvable tensions. And these tensions are necessarily reiterated.

In the second segment, change is refused and recollection of the 'Other' as an archetype attaches the subject to the vertical axis of immutability. The Platonic love which links the two of them is not a matter of 'fact' and is therefore not subject to the laws of time; it belongs to the mind as an untouchable paradigm – "thy sweet love *remember'd*" (l. 13). The alienation of l. 8 is not overcome 'narratively' (such a strategy would find itself caged within the syntagmatic model) – through, say, a meeting with the loved one; it is forgotten in the foregrounding of a paradigm 'inscribed' in memory. It is thus the plane of the signifier which triumphs. It is true that in this sonnet, unlike many of the other immortality sonnets, release from time does not take place explicitly in terms of a transformation into art, but the semantic change of track, with the rejection of the laws of time relies on the plane of the signifier in any case. The memory possessed by the subject of poetic discourse is atemporal; it corresponds to the eternal memorability which, in the immortality sonnets, is entrusted to the countless recipients of the artistic object – a quality which will free both the fair youth and the poet who has celebrated him from time and death. Lastly, the two key words in the couplet – "remember'd" (l. 13), the sign which represents the symbolic model, and "to change" (l. 14), the func-

tion most typical of the rejected syntagmatic model – are perfectly aligned and contiguous, in a symmetrically central position.

Unlike Sonnet 33, which started off with a cosmic epiphany, then revealed the flaws which were threatening it, and ended weakly on both the semantic and formal planes, Sonnet 29 begins with a movement *in diminuendo* and ends with a highly functional *crescendo*. These are two different ways of arranging the dialectic between the two basic models. These two sonnets, therefore, using different viewpoints (absence of the self in Sonnet 29, absence of the Other in Sonnet 33), display the bipolarity of reality in the Elizabethan age, whose greatest interpreter was Shakespeare. Like most of the others, these two sonnets belong to a phase in Shakespeare's development in which tensions could still be resolved in terms of harmonious balance. Later, in the period which produced the great tragedies, the tensions produced wounds which ran deep, leading to anguish, to the utilization of the grotesque, and to a confrontation with the void. The breakdown of order and of the symbolic model leads inevitably to the destructive 'estranging' language of Hamlet – which simultaneously twists accepted codes of knowledge and ways of politics – and to the corresponding metatheatrical operations with their upheaval of classical drama. In *King Lear* this process goes still further: there are persistent frays into the language of madness, which, in Shakespeare's view, tends to become the only 'reasonable' answer to the collapse of world harmony.

Chapter 3

Shakespeare Against Iago*

The lyrical and dramatic persona speaking in Shakespeare's sonnets constantly makes references to his time, his life and his contemporaries: his multifarious viewpoints, original attitudes, and existential, emotional and cognitive implications do not seem to suggest the presence of an entirely fictitious character, typical of the coeval *canzonieri*.[1] It is obviously impossible to determine how much this 'lyrical I' may coincide with Shakespeare's private and biographical self, even if the more or less oblique and indirect allusions to his environment and his work as a playwright and possible actor[2] abound. Certainly, this 'I', while occasionally employing some classic *topoi* of the courtly love tradition (from Petrarch to the Pléiade poets), never gets trapped in stereo-

[1] With the exception of *Astrophel and Stella* by Sidney, and *Amoretti* by Spenser in which, as in Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, the pressure and the passionate involvement of the poetic ego clearly surface.

[2] In particular I refer to the Sonnets 110 and 111, in which the real Shakespeare seems to emerge as a man of theatre and an actor; that is to say, the representative of a trade not yet fully recognized in its artistic value, due to the debauchery, vagrancy, and makeshift quality commonly associated with it.

* Translated by Carlo Vareschi.

types, artificial portraits (see Sonnets 21, 82, and 83),[3] rhetorical excesses (see Sonnet 82),[4] or false comparisons (see Sonnet 130),[5] thus always presenting himself as a sincere subject sincerely writing. This is declared explicitly as early as in Sonnet 21, l. 9, "O, let me, true in love, but truly write", and then asserted repeatedly. But what matters most is that this 'I' is unceasingly evolving and primarily seeking his own identity and truth. As I have stated elsewhere (Serpieri 2014), the *canzoniere* does not unfold so much through a succession of facts as through states of consciousness, in a 'story' which is sometimes interior, but more often engages the poetical speaker in a constant dramatic exchange with the 'other' or the 'others'. The chain of emotions and attitudes uncoils in the flow of time. And while the poetically celebrated object often changes (the fair youth, the beloved and honoured young man, and the dark lady, the mistress of both), the speaking character is far from fixed, due to his continuous questioning: what, how and why he de-

[3] Sonnet 21 is wholly based upon the untruthfulness and artificiality of sonnets convention: it suffices to mention the incipit: "So is it not with me as with that Muse / Stirred by a painted beauty to his verse". Sonnet 82 is an attack on those poets who use every rhetorical trick in order to depict falsely the object of their writing: these are the final lines: "And their gross painting may be better used / Where cheeks need blood: in thee it is abused." The same point is made from the start in Sonnet 83: "I never saw that you did painting need / And therefore to your fair no painting set".

[4] Lines 9-12 express his disdain for false poets, and particularly for the so-called rival poet: " . . . yet when they have devised / What strainèd touches rhetoric can lend, / Thou, truly fair, wert truly sympathized / In true plain words by thy true-telling friend".

[5] Its ending runs like this: "And yet, by heaven, I think my love so rare / As any she belied with false compare".

sires, who he himself truly is, the boundaries of the self, and the nature of the other.

This essay focuses on what I believe to be the final development of this 'I'; that is, the sequence 121-125 (Sonnet 122 excluded), constituting in my opinion a dramatically circumscribed and tightly interconnected group. These sonnets can be considered among the last in chronological order, because the so-called "dark lady" sequence (from Sonnet 127 to the last one, 154) is unlikely to be later than the one addressed to the "fair youth". The two sequences presumably run in parallel, either entirely or in part, with the likely exception of this micro-sequence[6] that seems to mark the end of the poet's relation with the young aristocrat.[7]

This is a surprising ending, nearly scenic in its final lines, which shows the rebellion of the 'I' against every form of subjugation and limitation of his own moral and existential rights, and even more against all the lies, calumnies and evils projected onto him by the others. The poet confronts the shadows cast upon him by the sick or malign minds of slanderous spies in an apparently successful attempt to influence the fair youth, a young and powerful patron.

[6] Evidence for this is that the micro-sequence of Sonnets 40-42, dealing with the love triangle involving the youth and a contested woman, probably the "dark lady", is mirrored in the micro-sequence 133-134: in the former the addressee of the poet's lament is the fair youth, in the latter the dark lady, both of them unfaithful to him.

[7] The last sonnet of the sequence addressed to the fair youth, 126, is a valediction: it is anomalous in its structure, consisting of only twelve lines, and quite conventional in its inspiration. It was probably written in a different moment, many years before the rest of the sequence, since its stylistic features seem to point to the first part of the canzoniere.

The finale seems to consist in an almost theatrical clash, in which the poet faces a spy bearing striking similarities to *Othello*'s Iago, the most ambiguous, malevolent, and projective character that Shakespeare had created or would create. I will show how some of his traits and expressive modes can be traced in this group of sonnets.

In this last micro-sequence the poet is completely different from the formal, deferential and often evasive 'I' of the so-called marriage sequence (Sonnets 1-17, in which the youth is invited to marry in order to perpetuate in his children his own beauty and perfection), as well as from the charmed, yet restless and doubtful, 'I' of the following sonnets, whose aim is to immortalise the young friend (probably famous for being of noble descent), and to fight the destroying Time. Furthermore, this 'I' has experienced bewilderment and even alienation in Sonnet 29, which has already been dealt with in this volume. He is a tormented 'I' who suffers for the loss of dear friends as if they were 'parts' of his own self (see Sonnets 30 and 31), experiences a sense of unease in his privileged relationship with the young patron, and starts to notice defects and faults in this young man (see Sonnets 33-35). He is forced to bear the patron's betrayal (a double betrayal, of his friend and of the woman he loved, as related in Sonnets 40-42) but is willing anyway to take upon himself the defence of his offender. He seeks solace in perfect desire, ideal love, and the peace of mind deriving from the absolute contemplation of Beauty; while he keeps studying and feeling the 'other's' shortcomings, subterfuges and ambiguities, he constantly underplays these faults and returns to the ideal that triggers his imagination.

In the "fair youth" sequence, it is possible to notice an increasing hardening of the poet and a reversal of roles that

seems to start with Sonnet 87 (in which a sort of ironic de-
tachment from the friend can be detected), and to become
more and more steady and explicit from Sonnet 109 on-
wards. The addressed 'you' is the target of subtle ironies re-
garding his faults, haughtiness, presumption and especially
his ambiguity: for instance, in the passionate Sonnet 94, the
poet, even without directly mentioning his friend, denounc-
es the elusive ambiguity of the proud and mighty, self-as-
sured and seemingly perfect masters of their own emotions,
and yet secretly vulnerable to corruption. On the contra-
ry, the poet increasingly avows his own autonomy, consist-
ency, sincerity, and truthfulness. He no longer needs to tri-
angulate others: he neither claims to be different, nor asks
for other people's views, nor does he blame himself in order
to shield his friend, but personally confronts the abuses of
Time, the great deceiver.

Now let us have a closer look at what happens in this
part of the collection, which can be considered the final one,
as I have already stated. In Sonnets 89-96 – before the sepa-
ration, hinted at in Sonnets 97-98 and explicitly revealed in
Sonnets 100 and 101 – the blame for the hypothetical or ac-
tual break up between the pair lay with the friend, seduced
by the allure of changes (89) but able to conceal his guilt be-
hind his beauty, coolness and aristocratic superiority (92-
96).[8] From Sonnet 109 onwards it is the poet who distances
himself from the youth, driven by restlessness and the pur-

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[8] This group of sonnets, from 92 to 96, deal with the contrast be-
tween appearing and being, or, rather, with hidden guilt and dis-
guised evil: a typical way of some mighty men, and namely of the
young aristocrat who turns away his eyes, with a carelessness de-
riving from his high status. It is an anticipation of the final micro-se-
quence which is examined more closely in the following pages.

suit of new experiences. As a consequence, he goes here and there, probably following his profession as actor or as a man of theatre (Sonnet 110).[9] If his name has been branded by his activity, this branding soils his very nature, just as the dyer's hand is permanently soiled by his craft (Sonnet 111).[10] But this is not the only blemish: as related in Sonnet 109, ll. 5-8, the poet is especially guilty of unfaithfulness, and now, back to his "best of love" even more assured – after mutual infidelities – of the strength of their ideal bond, he begs forgiveness (Sonnet 110, l. 8).

But the danger for their relationship is not over yet, because the poet's faults have been multiplied, or magnified, by malicious allusions and calumnies. The stigma he carries ("brand" in Sonnet 111, l. 5; "impression" in Sonnet 112, l. 1) is largely undeserved: thus, in sonnet 112, there emerges a new assertive tone that will characterise the last group of sonnets addressed to the young friend. For the first time the poet has taken the initiative and has gone away, both physically and emotionally: now he is ready to admit responsibility for his behaviour rather than acting ambiguously like his friend in similar circumstances. However, he is even more resolute in contemptuously rejecting other people's opinions and libellous gossip. The only judgement he accepts and treasures is that of his beloved, with whom he tries to restore a totalis-

[9] See the oblique yet quite cogent reference to his occupation, at the time far from being held in high regard, in Sonnet 110, ll. 1-3 "Alas, 'tis true, I have gone here and there, / And made myself a motley to the view, / Gored mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear".

[10] "Thence comes it that my name receives a brand, / And almost thence my nature is subdued / To what it works in, like the dyer's hand", where the dyer's hand seems clearly to allude to the work of the actor, that changes his 'colour' depending on his role.

ing relationship – "You are all my world", l. 5 – against and be-
yond the rest of the world. He rebuffs the "vulgar scandal" (l.
2), does not care "who calls me well or ill" (l. 3), because his
conscience is already hardened ("my steeled sense", l. 8) and
fit to challenge any adverse voice or opinion: "In so profound
abysm I throw all care / Of others' voices, that my adder's
sense / To critic and to flatterer stoppèd are" (ll. 9-11). Each
past uncertainty seems to have disappeared, together with the
need to triangulate others in order to affirm his own identity.
In the last sonnets addressed to the fair youth, the poet rebels
even more strongly against all the lies and slanders heaped
on him, and finally asserts himself while recognising his own
faults and weaknesses. In my opinion, Sonnets 121 and 124-
125 constitute a solid thematic and situational microsequence,
notwithstanding the inclusion of two seemingly unrelated
poems, Sonnet 122 which appears somehow out of place be-
cause of its connection with Sonnet 77, and Sonnet 123, which
shares the assertive and defiant tone of the contiguous son-
nets, despite the different thematic and 'narrative' frame.

We will first examine Sonnet 123:

> No, Time, thou shalt not boast that I do change!
> Thy pyramids built up with newer might
> To me are nothing novel, nothing strange;
> They are but dressings of a former sight.
> Our dates are brief, and therefore we admire
> What thou dost foist upon us that is old,
> And rather make them born to our desire
> Than think that we before have heard them told.
> Thy registers and thee I both defy,
> Not wondering at the present nor the past;
> For thy records and what we see doth lie,
> Made more or less by thy continual haste.

> This I do vow, and this shall ever be:
> I will be true despite thy scythe and thee.

These lines provide a powerful challenge to Time, in which the "I" affirms his own immutability. First of all he denies that all stunning monuments Time should create would still cause amazement and astonishment in him. Time is a conjurer who always tries to deceive the eye with new edifices, new illusory theatrical sceneries. However, this is a well-known show and it would be naive to expect any surprise from it. Deceptive promises and novelties are nurtured by desire (ll. 5-8). Up to this point, the fair youth has been the albeit passive protagonist of a struggle against Time. In the immortality sonnets, the poet has made his perfect Image into an archetype, pitting it against old age and death. Here, instead, the "I" takes the field all by himself, defiantly affirming his own identity and truth against Time's intention of pouring scorn upon the ever-changing human nature ("No, Time, thou shalt not boast that I do change"), and falsifying everything by mixing past and present in an unceasing reshuffling of records (ll. 11-12). The poet will remain firm, "true", steady, in spite of Time and its companion, death ("Thy scythe").

Therefore this "I" *stands* beyond all deception, even beyond the institutional one of life's flow in time. He refuses to be *conditioned* and *framed* by, and within, time-bound perspectives, as they may prove fallacious and contradictory. He also, and more radically, refuses to be reduced to other people's maleficent views aimed at misrepresenting him. Only the exclusive, ideal and absolute bond with the young friend should remain valid, virtually similar to the pure and aristocratic relationship between Platonic lovers described by John Donne roughly in the same years (Donne 2009: 114-19, 138-43, 156-63, 204-9, 336-47).

However, this ideal relationship seems doomed to end abruptly in the course of the micro-sequence. My discussion here starts with Sonnet 121, which proves largely impersonal although it expounds a decidedly resentful meditation on private morality and its maleficent misrepresentation in public life. Yet it is inextricably intertwined with Sonnets 124 and 125, which deal with the poet's tie to his young friend, in both theme and tone:

> Sonnet 121
> 'Tis better to be vile than vile esteemed
> When not to be receives reproach of being,
> And the just pleasure lost, which is so deemed,
> Not by our feeling but by others' seeing.
> For why should others' false adulterate eyes
> Give salutation to my sportive blood?
> Or on my frailties why are frailer spies,
> Which in their wills count bad what I think good?
> No, I am that I am, and they that level
> At my abuses reckon up their own.
> I may be straight though they themselves be bevel;
> By their rank thoughts my deeds must not be shown,
>   Unless this general evil they maintain:
>   All men are bad and in their badness reign.

For a detailed analysis of this sonnet, as well as of the preceding one and the following two, I refer the reader to my edition (Serpieri 2014: 708-12). Here I wish to emphasize the struggle of the "I" against those who try to defame and discredit him. They are despicable spies motivated only by malice, or perhaps incited by the young patron to keep the poet under control, as suggested by Sonnet 125, l. 14, where the spy is said to be "suborned", that is, obeying someone's

orders. They may also be caught in a perverse process of projection, which is typical of Shakespeare's villains, especially Iago (see Serpieri 2003). This sonnet and the tragedy display many linguistic and situational parallels.[11]

They differ, though, in showing reversed axiological perspectives. In *Othello* Iago is the cunning schemer of the

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[11] It is well known that many critics have been trying to date the composition of the *Sonnets* by means of verbal and stylistic parallels with works whose dating is more or less certain. Since the first part of the collection contains echoes of works written between 1593 and 1597 (*Venus and Adonis*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merchant of Venice, Henry IV*) some critics have come to the seemingly logical conclusion that all the sonnets must have been written in this time span. This hypothesis is apparently supported by Francis Meres who, in his *Palladis Tamia* (1598), relates of the circulation of Shakespeare's "sugared sonnets" in manuscript form among close friends, thus seemingly setting a *terminus ad quem*; in the same way the publication of Sonnets 138 and 144 in *The Passionate Pilgrim* (1599) could lead one to surmise that, since they are among the latest in numerical order, by the end of the sixteenth century the whole collection was assumedly concluded. Unfortunately, the same criterion of verbal and stylistic comparisons with playwriting production shows extremely interesting relations with much later works such as *Othello* (1604), as regards Sonnets 121 and 125, or *Antony and Cleopatra* (1607) regarding Sonnet 107. It is also worth mentioning that in this group of sonnets one can read allusions – albeit quite obscure and therefore far from unquestionable – to historical events such as the coronation of James I in 1603 (Sonnet 107) or the Gunpowder Plot (1605). Finally, in this section (which could actually be the last one if, as we argued, the dark lady sequence runs parallel to the fair youth one and therefore the numerical order has to be considered misleading) it is possible to find interesting stylistic analogies with John Donne, whose poems Shakespeare might have read in the early seventeenth century. All these facts can lead to the conclusion that the writing of the *Sonnets* extended over a long period of time, and Sonnets 121 and 124-125 were written in about the same years in which he wrote *Othello*. For a full discussion of these problems, see my introduction (Serpieri 2014: 32-8).

whole plot, the dynamic propeller of action: his revenge exceeds by far the wrongs he supposedly suffered. The invented affair between Desdemona and Cassio, Othello's lieutenant, drives the plot to its tragic ending. Conversely, in this sonnet the dynamic subject is the poet. He rebels against calumnies, arbitrary judgements, hypocritical scrutiny, and most of all against those nameless spies who project onto him *their own* faults and dissolute fancies.

Caught in the hideous web of projective judgements and faced with the false court geniality that hides unspeakable malice, the poet proclaims his immutable and unquestionable nature, even drawing on Elohim's answer to Moses from the burning bush: "I am that I am" (l. 9). The nearly blasphemous power of this assertion at the beginning of the third quatrain evidences the bold rebellion of the subject and his inalienable self-assurance when facing the big deception plotted by others in order to entrap him. While Othello falls into Iago's web, here the poet reacts and escapes, peremptorily declaring at line 12 that his acts are not to be interpreted through the filthy thoughts of those who spy, judge, and slander him.

As Iago's *projective* mode is always active, so that black Othello ends up being the damned champion of sex, with which Iago constantly fills his mouth and troubles his mind, so in this sonnet the same process of *projection* is underlined and exposed no less than three times: at line 8, through their own fancies as measuring stick, the spies judge as evil what the "I" deems as good by his own desire; at line 10, the same spies, by focusing on the poet's faults and abuses, actually voice *their own*; at line 12, they interpret the poet's actions by *their* "rank thoughts".

Furthermore, in the tragedy Iago censures the just pleasure of Othello and Desdemona, and of everybody else, espe-

cially of women, who in his eyes are nothing but harlots,[12] and Desdemona calls him a slanderer for having jokingly expressed such a view ("O, fie upon thee, slanderer", l. 216), while here, in analogous but inverse manner, the poet rebels against his "just pleasure" being considered abject (l. 3), and against the malevolent winks at his sensual nature, not in the least bad or censurable for him (l. 6). Iago is false, corrupted, morbid (which he betrays thematically in his monologues, and, formally, in the convolute syntax, insinuating manners, innuendoes and reticence in ensnaring Othello). Here, likewise, falsehood is everywhere, and is explicitly attributed to others' eyes (l. 5) while the spies are defined perverted, "bevel" (l. 11)

The play and this sonnet deploy a whole range of parallels, most evidently at lines 9-10. I have already noted that here the poet asserts his own inalienable authenticity: "I am that I am". In *Othello* 1.1.41-65, Iago, after disclosing to Roderigo the deceit hidden in his seemingly faithfulness to Othello, ends his cue with the sinister, nearly devilish: "I am *not* what I am". This is the most explicit and unequivocal role reversal between the poet of this sonnet and Iago, and this obvious parallelism has been widely noticed.[13]

Yet there is another less apparent but, I think, noteworthy, analogy. At line 10 we find the word "abuses" which is a recurrent one in Iago's speeches. In Shakespeare it has a

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[12] "Come on, come on; you are pictures out of doors, / Bells in your parlors, wild-cats in your kitchens, / Saints in your injuries, devils being offended, / Players in your housewifery, and housewives' in your beds" (2.1.112-15).

[13] See, for example, John Kerrigan: "Asserting his integrity, the poet puts himself as far from Iago (that arch-misconstruer of others' affairs) as possible" (Shakespeare 1986: 342).

variety of meanings. As a noun, it means wrong, outrage, misdeed, fraud, deception, swindle, illusion. As a verb, it signifies to deceive, mistreat, insult, dishonour, offend. Iago uses it as a noun in 3.3.151ff. when Othello asks him to speak out his thoughts, and he replies that he would rather not reveal them since they could be mere conjectures dictated by his own suspicious nature: " . . . I confess it is my nature's plague / *To spy* into *abuses*, and oft my jealousy / Shapes faults that are not" (my emphasis). What Iago tries to suggest is that, for an excess of morality or moralism, he "spies" "abuses" and "faults" everywhere, and therefore *may* have seen *more* than what has really happened between Cassio and Desdemona. It is interesting to note that vicious spying as well as wrongs and deceptions ("spy", "spies", and "abuses") recur both here and in lines 7 and 10 of the sonnet.

Behind his mask, Iago is the one spying, falsifying and projecting *his* own vices onto the other, and accordingly he uses twice the verb "to abuse" with the meaning of insinuating or deceiving or calumniating: in the final monologue of 1.3.386-8 he decides his main tactic: "Let's see. / After some time, *to abuse* Othello's ear, / That he [Cassio] is too familiar with his wife"; and in the monologue closing 2.1 he plans, among other things, to falsely accuse Cassio of lascivious behaviour: "*Abuse* him to the Moor, in the rank garb" (l. 305). In both the play and the sonnet the spy is guilty and corrupted. But while in the former the main character and victim has to be deceived for the catastrophe to happen, in the sonnet the poet resists and defies all deception by affirming his own invulnerability.

I will now turn from Sonnet 121 to Sonnet 124. It may appear to have little in common with Sonnet 121, and yet I believe that it plays an important part in this micro-sequence

dedicated to the fair youth which will be concluded by Sonnet 125.

> Sonnet 124
> If my dear love were but the child of state,
> It might for Fortune's bastard be unfathered,
> As subject to Time's love, or to Time's hate,
> Weeds among weeds, or flowers with flowers gathered.
> No, it was builded far from accident;
> It suffers not in smiling pomp, nor falls
> Under the blow of thrallèd discontent,
> Whereto th'inviting time our fashion calls.
> It fears not policy, that heretic
> Which works on leases of short-numbered hours,
> But all alone stands hugely politic,
> That it nor grows with heat, nor drowns with showers.
>   To this I witness call the fools of Time,
>   Which die for goodness, who have lived for crime.

This sonnet, like the following one, has been much discussed as it has been considered one of the most difficult and complex of Shakespeare's. According to Booth it could even be defined as "the most extreme example of Shakespeare's constructive vagueness" (Shakespeare 1977: 419). I ascribe this identification of "vagueness" largely to an interpretative view that does not lay enough stress on the relationship, quite apparent to me, between this sonnet and the neighbouring ones, while trying in vain to positively pinpoint the historical event referred to in the couplet.[14]

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[14] Many have identified the "fools of time" as the conspirators of the 1605 Gunpowder Plot against James I, who would be executed in the following year.

In this sonnet, too, the poet rebels against a judgement or a rumour, insinuating that his attachment or love would depend on his young patron's social standing, thus branding his affection as opportunistic. But who did spread such slander against the poet? If this sonnet were not tied to a sequence, it could be presumed that the young friend himself had started to doubt the poet and had reproached him, thus provoking his reply. But, if we keep in mind the "spies" mentioned in Sonnet 121 as well as the "informer" we will encounter in Sonnet 125, a different reconstruction of the story appear to us more plausible. Misjudgement was probably caused by insinuations reported to the young patron by one or more spies or mercenary informers (see 125, l. 13) coming from the deeply ambiguous and deceitful court world which in Sonnet 121 is characterized by false and hypocritical glances and the formal "salutation to [the poet's] sportive blood", dissimulating gossips, and backbiting.[15] This context is evoked here at ll. 5-10,[16] and then again in the second quatrain of the following sonnet. These three sonnets (121, 124, 125) deal with this same environment pervaded by hypocritical glances, pretences, exterior pomp and the discontent of those who try to progress in their career with no merit to rely upon. This milieu and its poisonous calumnies and rumours become the target of the poet's rebellion.

[15] Stephen Booth notes about 121, l. 6: "Give salutation to defies a precise gloss, but it carries suggestions of the ceremony, hypocrisy, backbiting, and gossip of courtiers" (Shakespeare 1977: 409).

[16] For an analysis of the courtiers' milieu portrayed in lines 5-10 in expressions such as "smiling pomp" "thralled discontent" "inviting time" "our fashion" "policy", see the extended commentary and explanatory notes to this sonnet which I give in my edition of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* (Serpieri 2014: 719-25).

Finally, it is noteworthy that his rebellion, refutation, and self-assertion in all of these three sonnets[17] assume the oppositional form of absolute negation:

"*No*, Time . . . " (123, l. 1); "*No*, I am that I am" (121, l. 9); "*No*, it was builded far from accident" (124, l. 5); "*No*, let me be obsequious in thy heart" (125, l. 9).[18]

Thus, we finally reach the last sonnet both of this microsequence and of the whole long sequence dedicated to the fair youth (excluding Sonnet 126 for its conventional style and theme, and anomalous lack of the final couplet).

> Sonnet 125
> Were't aught to me I bore the canopy,
> With my extern the outward honouring,
> Or laid great bases for eternity,
> Which proves more short than waste or ruining?
> Have I not seen dwellers on form and favour
> Lose all and more by paying too much rent,
> For compound sweet forgoing simple savour,
> Pitiful thrivers in their gazing spent?
> No, let me be obsequious in thy heart,
> And take thou my oblation, poor but free,
> Which is not mixed with seconds, knows no art
> But mutual render, only me for thee.
>   Hence, thou suborned informer! A true soul
>   When most impeached stands least in thy control.

[17] This is also true for Sonnet 123, which therefore is to be considered functionally connected with this micro-sequence since in it the subject reflects upon his inalterable being.

[18] As further evidence of the high degree of cohesion of this group of sonnets and of extraordinary final assertiveness of the 'I', it has to be noted that in these sonnets are present four of the total six occurrences of the absolute negation in the whole of the collection.

Various critics[19] have noted the connection of this sonnet to the first line of the previous one, as well as to the whole Sonnet 121. The first two lines take up the same theme as 124, l.1: the poet's love, or affection, is neither opportunistic nor related to a world of ceremonies, deceitfulness and adulation, and therefore is by no means servile. Were it so, he could meet the same fate which befell some courtiers, that is, losing everything, as the "Pitiful thrivers in their gazing spent" (l. 8). This observation is analogous to the one contained in Sonnet 124, l. 2: if his love were only pretended, sooner or later the mighty one would unveil the trick and withdraw his favour.

However, the most peculiar feature of these first two lines is the parallelism they show with Iago's long cue ending with "I am not what I am" which we have already encountered when examining Sonnet 121. In that speech Iago defines himself as a cunning servant and lays the basis for a type of role-playing doomed to become very troubling in the course of the play (ll. 56-57: "It is as sure as you are Roderigo, / Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago"). He then affirms to be always seeking his own advantage (ll. 59-60) and concludes with these lines:

> For when my *outward* action does demonstrate
> The native act, and figure of my heart,

[19] For instance, Hilton Landry remarks how "Sonnet 125 is a continuation of Sonnet 124 in the sense that once again the speaker's true unstinting love is contrasted with affection that depends on state" (1963: 120); and, even more explicitly, Kerrigan points out that "[t]he poet responds to the criticism of an onlooker (perhaps one of those described in Sonnet 121) who has apparently suggested that his love is just the child of state (124, l. 1), by insisting that he recognizes the vanity of pomp and circumstance and has been impressed in the past by the folly of those seduced by appearances" (Shakespeare 1986: 348).

> In complement *extern*, 'tis not long after,
> But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve,
> For doves to peck at: I am not what I am.
> (ll. 61-5; emphasis added)

It may be noticed that, in his boasting about his constant simulating and dissimulating practices, which allow him to hide his real intentions (and the dark "figure" of his heart) behind his visible actions, Iago uses the adjectives "outward" and "extern" in two subsequent lines. They recur as nouns in line 2 of this sonnet. This coincidence is all the more intriguing because these two occurrences of "extern" are the only ones in Shakespeare's canon. There seems to be a very close affinity between these two passages, and a possible relation between this last group of sonnets and *Othello* is more than a conjecture.

Let us return to the beginning of the sonnet. Someone, who will assume a specific identity at line 13 (in all likelihood an informer or a spy, given the courtiers' milieu in question), has denounced the poet to the young lord as an opportunistic and servile deceiver.[20] In doing so he has interpreted the poet's behaviour by his *own* false and corrupt standards, that is, he has projected onto him his own mean and illusory ambitions. The profile of this denouncer is

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[20] This would be a wide different and much weightier fault than the one the poet acknowledges, accepting the blame and repenting of it, in the preceding sonnets, from 109 to 120, namely unfaithfulness, that is having turned to someone else. It is easily understood that this transgression could have been linked to the main charge by some slanderer, possibly instructed to enquire into the matter by the young patron: if the poet had been unfaithful, that was probably due to his affection being utilitarian, opportunistic, far from the ideal sentiment he had often avowed.

clearly identifiable, although it still lacks individuality and is confounded with the plural category of the "Pitiful thrivers in their gazing spent". He has Iago's fiendish traits. In contrast to him, the poet re-affirms his honesty and suggests to the young friend the only exchange he can conceive, not of favours but of affection.

Then, in the final couplet, with an impressive theatrical effect he changes his target and directly addresses the object of his indignation: the mercenary informer, the spy we have seen prying and projecting wickedness and falsehood on the speaker of this group of sonnets. The poet violently sends him away and strongly maintains he is honest and true ("true" as in Sonnet 123, l. 14), rejecting all the accusations and claiming to have escaped his control. He is no Othello ensnared by a Iago. The 'I' of the sonnets finds here his radical and final standing and autonomy, and it is at least curious that this sonnet, concluding the long fair youth sequence, should end in an openly theatrical way.[21] The direct allocution to the informer represents a surprising deictic and communicative change compared to the preceding address to the friend (ll. 9-12), and the first person speech (ll. 1-8). This communicative shift results in a *dramatic* finale, seemingly reproducing a circumstantial 'scene' in which the poet defends himself, facing both his friend and the informer, and finally commanding the latter to exit the stage ("hence"). Of course this does not imply an exactly reported *actual situation*, but records the emotional dramatization (of

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[21] Here I mean to stress that this couplet is exceptionally powerful in somewhat a similar fashion to the final couplet of Sonnet 152, the last one addressed to the dark lady (for a commentary on this, see Serpieri 2014: 804-9).

which Shakespeare was the undisputed master) of a potentially real event; yet the effect is extremely close to that of a theatrical finale.[22]

Has the author entered the stage? There is a clear methodological risk in this approach, suggested by the same partly playful and partly provocative title of this essay. Is it possible to identify the "I" of the sonnets with the author William Shakespeare *tout court*? Would we not fall into naive psychologism and biographism that structuralism, literary semiotics, deconstruction, reader-oriented criticism, etc., unanimously for once have definitely condemned? Did I not, in my study on the immortality sonnets, reprinted in the present volume, take every precaution, and warn that the "I" of the sonnets was to be intended as the poetic 'I', an actantial function, never to be confused with the poet Shakespeare?

Surely every fictional 'I', be it lyric, dramatic or narrative, is essentially a literary construct, a function of the text. And yet, as I affirmed in the *Introduction* to my edition of the *Sonnets*,[23] this collection holds also an *extra-textual* se-

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[22] Kerrigan acutely observes, in his comment on Sonnet 124, that, in this last group, the power of emotion tends to overcome the same structure of the sonnets: "In this last group of poems to the youth – beginning perhaps with the sestet of 119 – writing yields in strength to emotion, verbs of making are given over . . . , and sonneteering becomes less sufficient . . . " (Shakespeare 1986: 346).

[23] "Along the centuries the critics have been split into two camps: those unwilling to yield to the cryptic allusiveness of the Sonnets, looking for the most dubious biographical coincidences in order to reconstruct their secret life-related 'story', and those resolute in reading everything – characters, situations, hinted at events – almost exclusively as literary fiction. A less radical position seems preferable, for many reasons here discussed. The adventure of this collection is

cret, hard as it may be to admit it. It reverberates in its dating and sequential order, as well as in the meaning of many poems, if not all of them. Some sonnets do not signify in isolation, but within micro-sequences whose 'narrative' sounds like the account of a true story.

Shakespeare as historical author seems to enter the stage personally in various sonnets or micro-sequences, and most of all in the final part of the sequence addressed to the fair youth: his theatrical profession, his belonging, albeit in a partially separate position, to the noble circles close to the court, the varied and dramatic expression of themes, modes and relationships that can be found in the extraordinary catalogue of his theatrical characters, appear here concentrated in the dialectics between the 'I' and the 'you', and between the 'I' and the others. But even if the whole story sketchily unfolding in the collection were nothing but fiction – which I do not believe –, the critic's task should not be limited to studying the individual poems, but, when useful for his hermeneutics of the text, and if supported by unequivocal data, should extend to identifying possible links between the single sonnets. It should also attempt to clarify semantic issues and textual ellipses by means of thematic and situational echoes from other works of the same author. These echoes and patterns reflect the author's perspective and point to the core of all his fictions.

too original and unconventional in its dealing, daringly and deeply, with the articulation of human feelings and relationships, to exclude any possible trace of personal and therefore biographic involvement – always keeping in mind that it would be anyway plainly wrong to make of it an actual 'story'. Hard as it may be to admit it, there is in this work an extra-textual secret, starting with its unauthorised, and probably unwelcome to Shakespeare, publication" (Serpieri 2014: 15).

Finally, the critical hypothesis and the title itself of this essay are meant also as challenges to the dominant interpretative trend of these latter decades, aimed at forgetting and inexorably erasing the figure of the actual historical and empirical author, as if any possible trace were a stain on the literary work and not its original imprint, as if any possible figuring out or emerging of the author in the text with his or her historical and biographical presence (or better, with the impact, dynamics and semantic coherence of that reality, which, in itself, inevitably remains uncertain, uncontrollable, unverifiable) could be conceived of only if seen and interpreted as a disguise, artifice, and deceit.

The notion of an implicit author is a popular one, and it surely has a theoretical justification. But why might or might not the real author coincide, or be close, to the implicit one? There is no denying that most of the times they can be verifiably distant. Yet, how much of their existence and history do they have in common? Who can sharply distinguish between fact and fiction, between real life in its historical context, and fiction?

It is certainly true that we can come to know only the author's persona (his/her mask, that is, the implicit author), while his or her biographical person can only be more or less accurately reconstructed or, as is the case with Shakespeare, only conjectured about. But sometimes we can sense the author's presence, personality, and urgency. We feel the person in the process of fictionalizing him or herself at various levels in the act of writing: and we cannot just ignore this personality, claiming that it is not our concern. Reading a text within a macro-text, with its generative dynamics, its constants and variants, and investigating its meaning, which always comes from the specific, albeit complicated

and contradictory, perspective of a single *author* operating inside a specific *culture*, we cannot but feel the persistence of the author's personality in the different fictional 'personae', and therefore record the imprint of the real author on all the implicit authors under whose guises he or she refashions him or herself.

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Glossary

Actant a function of plot-development sometimes or usually played by a character.

Allegory a literary image in which the relationship between vehicle and tenor applies not globally, as in simile, or metaphor, but element by element with according personification.

Alliteration repetition of the same sound beginning several words in sequence.

Amphybology ambiguity deriving from grammar, morphology, or syntax.

Anacoluthon lack of grammatical sequence; a change in the grammatical construction within the same sentence.

Anadiplosis ('doubling back') the rhetorical repetition of one or several words; specifically, the repetition of a word that ends one clause at the beginning of the next.

Analogy a similarity or comparison between two different things or the relationship between them.

Anaphora the repetition of the same first word in successive phrases, clauses or sentences.

Anastrophe reversal of the usual order of terms in the same group.

Antimetabole a figure in which the same words or ideas are repeated in inverse order, like chiasmus.

Antiphrasis a word used in a manner contrary to the natural one.

Antithesis figure of balance in which two contrasting ideas are intentionally juxtaposed through parallel structure; a contrasting of opposing ideas in adjacent phrases, clauses, or sentences.

Antonimic a term which is the opposite of another; a counter-term.

Apodosis the concluding clause of a sentence.

Assonance repetition of the same sound in words close to each other.

Asyndeton a kind of ellipsis which omits the merely cumulative conjunctions supposed to unite the different parts of a sentence.

Cadence harmony resulting from the arrangement of words in a sentence or line of poetry.

Chiasmus two corresponding pairs arranged not in parallels (a-b-a-b) but in inverted order (a-b-b-a).

Clause a grammatical unit that contains both a subject and a verb.

Climax arrangement of words, phrases, or clauses in an order of ascending power. Often the last emphatic word in one phrase or clause is repeated as the first emphatic word of the next.

Connotation the nonliteral, associative meaning of a word; the implied, suggested meaning. Connotations may involve ideas, emotions, or attitudes.

Denotation the strict, literal, dictionary definition of a word, devoid of any emotion, attitude, or colour.

Enthymeme an informally-stated syllogism which omits either one of the premises or the conclusion. The omitted part must be clearly understood by the reader. The usual form of this logical shorthand omits the major premise.

Epanalepsis repetition of the beginning word of a clause or sentence at the end.

Epideictic adapted for display; chiefly of set orations.

Epinicion an ode in honour of a victor in the games; also generally.

Epiphora the repetition of a phrase or word at the end of several sentences or clauses.

Gradatio see *Climax*.

Hendiadys use of two words connected by a conjunction, instead of subordinating one to the other, to express a single com-

plex idea.

Hypallage ('exchanging') transferred epithet; grammatical agreement of a word with another word which it does not logically qualify.

Hyperbaton separation of words which belong together, often to emphasize the first of the separated words or to create a certain image.

Hyperbole a figure of speech using deliberate exaggeration or overstatement.

Inference/infer To draw a reasonable conclusion from the information presented.

Isocolon A string of phrases of corresponding structure and equal length.

Litotes a figure of thought in which a point is affirmed by negating its opposite. It is a special form of understatement, for intensification, by denying the contrary of the thing being affirmed.

Metaphor a figure of speech using implied comparison of seemingly unlike things or the substitution of one for the other, suggesting some similarity.

Metonymy substitution of one word for another contiguous to it. Metonymy is a figure of speech in which the name of one object is substituted for that of another closely associated with it; the word is used not in its literal sense, but in one analogous to it.

Oxymoron semantic contradiction achieved by the juxtaposition of words with contrary meanings.

Paradigm in linguistics a set of linguistic terms that form mutually exclusive choices in particular syntactic roles. *Paradox* an assertion seemingly opposed to common sense, or logically contradictory.

Parallelism also referred to as parallel construction or parallel structure, this term comes from Greek roots meaning 'beside one another'. It refers to the grammatical or rhetorical framing of words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs to

give structural similarity.

Paranomasia use of similar sounding words; often etymological
wordplay.

Phoneme in phonetics any of the perceptually distinct units of
sound in a specified language that distinguish one word
from another.

Polyptoton The repetition of a word or root in different cases or in-
flections within the same sentence.

Polysyndeton the repetition of conjunctions in a series of coordi-
nate words, phrases, or clauses.

Praeteritio (= paraleipsis) pretended omission for rhetorical effect.

Prolepsis the anticipation, in adjectives or nouns, of the result of the
action of a verb; also, the positioning of a relative clause be-
fore its antecedent.

Protasis the first or introductory clause in a sentence.

Ratio/rationes premises (major and minor) inherent in syllgism or
enthymeme.

Scheme any rhetorical figure.

Seme minimal unity of meaning.

Semantics that branch of linguistics and philology which deals
with the meaning of words.

Semiotics the study of signs and symbols and their use or
interpretation.

Syntagm or syntagma nominal or verbal unit consisting of a set of
linguistic forms (phonemes, words or phrases) that are in
a sequential relationship to one another. Often contrasted
with paradigm.

Syntagmatic related to the combination of syntagms.

Simile an explicit comparison between two things using 'like' or
'as'.

Syllepsis use of a word with two others, with each of which it is
understood differently.

Syllogism a syllogism (or syllogistic-reasoning or syllogistic logic)
is a deductive system of formal logic that presents two prem-
ises (the first one called 'major' and the second, 'minor') that

inevitably lead to a sound conclusion.

Signifier a sign's physical form (such as a sound, printed word, or image) as distinct from its meaning. Compare with *Signified.*

Signified the meaning or idea expressed by a sign, as distinct from the physical form in which it is expressed.

Synecdoche the use of a part for the whole, or the whole for the part.

Tautology repetition of an idea in a different word, phrase, or sentence.

Taxonomy classification.

Zeugma two different words linked to a verb or an adjective which is strictly appropriate to only one of them.

Index

This volume presents for the first time in English a selection of seminal studies, originally published in Italian, on the dramatic potential of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, providing a crucial contribution to a recently revived debate on their inherent dramatic dimension. These studies long antedate the recent attention internationally dedicated to the formal and semiotic functions of the communicative structure of the sonnets, providing the basis for a new perception of their peculiar capacity to perform speech acts within dramatically defined situations. The first, longest, section, is dedicated to a discussion of the so-called 'Sonnets of Immortality' where the poet struggles with Time over the future of the fair youth, providing the argumentative premise upon which issues of mortality and loss, running through the whole collection, are defined in the agonistic terms of human defiance of Time's destructive power. There follow two essays devoted to Sonnets 33 and 29, and to the last sonnets for the young friend, respectively. Here the poet abandons the battlefield of human mortality and engages with the tensions and conflicts of affection and moral duty against the backdrop of an intrinsically conflicting world model, showing a medieval symbolic universe traversed by incipient, yet radical, sceptical stances. These poems interlace fictionality and biography, constructing a lyrical drama where the I/poet features as an extraordinarily artificial, yet all too real, voice.

Alessandro Serpieri was Professor Emeritus of English Literature at the University of Florence. His main fields of interest include Shakespeare's poetry and plays, Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre, John Donne, Romantic and twentieth-century poetry, Joseph Conrad, T.S. Eliot, Samuel Beckett, theory of drama, translation studies as well as semiotic and performance studies. Former President of the Italian Association for Semiotic Studies and of the Italian Association for English Studies, he is a renowned translator into Italian of many Shakespearean works, including the *Sonnets*.

Cover:
The first two stanzas of Sonnet 19 in the 1609 Quarto.