

An Exploration of Shakespeare's Portrayal of "Reason" and of "the Mind" in Sonnets Based on Literary Modes Theory

Yi Wang*

Liberal Studies, CUNY Graduate Center, New York, the United States

*Corresponding author: ywang8@gradcenter.cuny.edu

Abstract:

This paper provides a window for understanding Shakespeare's relationships with reason and with the mind in his sonnets. It selects eight poems via the indexes of "reason" and of "the mind" from the 154 Shakespeare's sonnets for close reading. It shows that Shakespeare writes about "reason" and "the mind" in three literary modes: narrative, lyrical and dramatic. This literary-mode-based analysis of the eight poems leads to the discovery of the unique performance of "reason" and of "the mind" in Shakespeare's sonnets. In specific, Shakespeare suggests that reason is the opposite of lust or of desire and that the mind, on the one hand, becomes weaker when it meets the eyes; the mind, on the other hand, becomes stronger when it meets another mind. In addition, the mind contradicts with the body, yet the power of the mind grows as the power of the body grows. Last but not least, through the poems on the themes of reason and of the mind, Shakespeare argues that love is dateless, nonsexual and preservable.

Keywords: Literary modes; Shakespeare; sonnets; mind; reason.

1. Introduction

Shakespeare's Sonnets is a set of 154 lyrical poems, grouped into two subsets, 1-126 (dedicated to one addressee) and 127-154 (dedicated to the other addressee) [1]. All sonnets capture "a unique moment or event in a person's emotional life" and all sonnets touch upon the theme of love [2]. Many are the finest love poems in the English language [3]. In addition, it is hard to concretely identify the sonnets' addressees [1]. In the other words, it is hard to offer concrete identities to the addressees given that there is no trace for such a task whereas the poet is often considered as the addresser [1].

Brian Boyd once tries to prove that the sonnets in which the characters are the poet, the Fair Youth and the dark Mistress avoid narrative and drama; are pure lyrics [4]. However, when Reason, Love and Time - those abstract terms - are characters, protagonists and antagonists, the lyrical sonnets become both narrative and dramatic. Robert Berkelman has shown that the best of the sonnets are "marvelously condensed dramas" in which "Time is often the chief antagonist" whereas love, youth and beauty are protagonists [5]. Nevertheless, Berkelman has not shown that those lyrical sonnets are also narratives. In addition, he has not investigated the roles of Reason, and the Mind in Shakespeare's sonnets based on the literary modes theory. This paper hopes for interrogating "Reason" and "the

Mind" in sonnets based on dramatic, narrative, and lyrical modes (or moments) to compensate for the previous research's lacking, where *reason* can simply refer to "the power of *the mind* to think, understand, and form judgments by a process of logic" [6]. The purpose of this study is to understand the portal of Reason and Mind in the sonnets and gain a deep understanding of literary modes adopted in Shakespeare's Sonnets.

2. Theoretical Basis

The 154 poems would be regrouped into new orders for close analysis though the Shakespeare scholar Stephen Booth finds no ordering effect among poems [7]; and it is vain to try to find a new arrangement for the poems, but without a rearrangement it would also be impossible to read and comprehend the poems in the 1609 sequence. Thus, the scholar Booth argues that the 1609 sequence is obviously ordered; for example, one can read poems 33-37 as a group of ordered poems - though no order is satisfactory [7]. Inspired by such arguments, this study proposes that the poems can be grouped into themes while reading or rereading them. For instance, poems that contain the discourse of reason are a group whereas those that contain the discourse of the mind are another group. As a result, sonnet 129 would be read together with sonnet 147, whereas poems 113, 114, 116, 27, 59, and 77 would be read together. In this way, one can say that the discourse

of Reason emerges only in the Dark Lady sequence, whereas the weakness of the mind is presented only in poems that are dedicated to the Fair Youth.

Lyric, drama and narrative - these three literary modes are all involved in the above two sets of Shakespeare's sonnets. The application of the lyrical mode refers to texts that focus on the meaning of a single, static moment; the application of the narrative mode refers to texts that contain a story developed through time; and the application of the dramatic mode refers to texts that concern literary conflicts or the contradictory [8]. Each poem under examination in this paper contains the three literary modes and the theme of the power (or powerlessness) of the mind. Each argues for love's nonsexuality, datelessness and preservability.

Moreover, it is easier to imagine the Young Man sequence as a play but less easy to imagine the Dark Lady sequence as a play [9], which means it is possible to read Shakespeare's lyrics as dramas. And it is also possible to distinguish lyrics from dramas: in lyrics there are static words yet in dramas there are dramatic or dynamic personas [9]. In addition, this paper's author would like to further suggest that it is also possible to read the lyrics as narratives. Texts that are both narrative and lyrical are texts that have one abstract character who does not change over time and the other more concrete character who does change over time. In this way, one character represents a static, lyrical moment, while the other represents a series of narrative moments. That being said, it is easier for a lyric that is a narrative to be at the same time a drama, as long as the lyric involves conflicts or contradictions. In the end, this paper's author wants to argue that Shakespeare's sonnets on strong and weak reason are in lyrical, dramatic and narrative modes. Additionally, their richness helps suggest that love can be nonsexual, dateless and preservable as long as such love encounters reason and enact its identity in the poetic world together with reason's.

3. The Relationships among Reason, Love, and Lust

The Sonnet 129 is at about a single poetic moment where lust is captured via Shakespeare's words. But at the same time the poet also shows the development of lust and exhibits an inner conflict between Reason and Lust; lust pushes love to the side of darkness or hell whereas Reason pushes love to the opposite side of brightness or heaven. Reason is what regulates love; what Reason leaves for the audience are love's "a bliss in proof" and love's "a joy proposed." If one wants more of such bliss or such joy, then love becomes lust. Lust is as "a very woe" as well as "a dream." From something "full of blame" to "a very woe" and then to "a dream" [10], the author's description

of lust becomes more positive or comedic. Lust is understood and, therefore, mitigated through the understanding of it. One's understanding of lust inferring from the story of lust in Sonnet 129 is that it is woe that causes men to do things that are bloody and murderous, or that can be described using the other words - "perjured, full of blame, savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust" - that appeared in lines 3-4 [10]. The nature of this woe is the understanding that, extremely speaking, life is just like a dream. Lust's bloodiness, its woe, and its dream all counter love's reason, love's bliss and love's joy. The reader can not only see the development of lust's embodiment but also see the conflict between lust and love or lust and reason.

In the end, Shakespeare's Sonnet 129 tells one where love ends; it uses lust's story to imply love; by marking the boundaries of lust, Shakespeare also marks the boundaries of the opposite of lust which is love or reason. Shakespeare tries to understand the act of lust and then to present it for sharpening love's boundaries (the deeper the understanding of lust, the sharper the boundaries of love). Love ends where lust emerges. While the advice of lust is "to shun the heaven that leads men to this hell," this paper argues that this ultimately ought to mean that Love's (or Reason's) advice is merely "to shun [that] hell" to which heaven cannot lead.

In addition to Sonnet 129, Sonnet 147 that records the static moment when the poet encounters desire or death also narrates the story where love and reason are characters and further suggests the conflicts between reason and love. It is not merely a lyric but it also incorporates narrative and drama into its literary being. Reason in the field of love is opposite to death (or desire and lust). Besides, it is reason that is capable of carrying love to the safe and bright side while desire and lust are forces delight the black and the dark. Specifically, Sonnet 147 uses three metaphors to tell the story of a patient who does not want to be cared or healed becoming mad and unrested. The poet compares love with a fever; reason with the physician; and desire with death [10] for suggesting that without reason, one's love would lose its control; such love would encounter or see death on its way to madness or to unrest. In other words, the patient who loves conflicts with the physician who reasons; in the end the patient wins the fight and is carried away by desire. The poem demonstrates the contradiction between love with reason and love without reason. Reason can push love away from desire (which is as death) while one would not realize the art of love if one does not encounter death, blackness and darkness (namely, all states in which reason is absent). In a word, the art of love is about the independence of a fever or of a passion (or about the forces of death after reason is gone).

4. The Relationships between Body and Mind

Sonnet 113 is about the weakness of the mind reflected through the relationship between sight and mind: the mind affects the eyes that affect the mind. Its weakness lets the eyes deceive the mind - though the mind seeks truthfulness, the sight searches for the untrue. The rhyme of the poem adds meaning to the text. According to the rhyme scheme, the poem also conveys that (A) the mind is blind; (B) is about being out; (C) the heart is parted; (D) latching the door of it and catching the figure; (E) the sight is as night; (F) creature's feature; (G) is as you - the addressee - which is untrue (but powerful). That is to say, the eyes' power to imagine is greater than the mind's power to think or to create discourses; hence, this poem is full of fragmented images but less of ideas. The eyes betray the mind transforming all scenes into the addressee's features. In the other words, the eyes do not share the shapes of the flowers and of the birds with the mind; they only share the shape of the addressee with the mind. This conflict between the powerful eyes and the weak mind create the dramatic effect of the poem. The story of the fight among the lover of the addressee, the pretend blindness of his eyes and the passive existence of his mind shapes the narrative voice of the poem; and, the emotional moment where all the poet sees and thinks are the beloved reproduces the static, lyrical moment. In the end, according to Sonnet 113, love is to let the beloved to be on one's mind day and night.

Sonnet 114 talks about the eyes that become the medium between the external world and the mind; it is a poem that is not only lyrical but also narrative and dramatic. The poem deals with the conflict between the ugly external world and the mind that bears the beauties. In addition, Sonnet 114 also tells the story of the power of the eyes to transform external objects. Briefly, the addressee's love teaches the addresser's eyes alchemy; the power of the addresser's eyes thus becomes able to transform anything into the beauties as long as they are seen. The eyes, then, are flattering the mind while the mind is deceived by the characteristics and functions of the eyes. In the end one knows that both the mind and the eyes love the beauties or the addressee. Both the mind and the eyes would rather be poisoned by a monarch's mindset than being awakened by the inferior, physical realities. "If it [the mind] be poisoned, tis the lesser sin / That mine eye loves it and doth first begin" [10]. Namely, love starts from the eyes; the eyes mediate the external world for the mind and taste the sin first; that is how and why the sin of the mind can be forgiven. All in all, one can see that the mind contradicts the eyes; the former does not have the power to transform

the external realities but the latter organ does. The eyes in this poem not only performs all actions but can also be seen as a static medium. A medium does not change itself but the physical realities. Love is the teacher of "alchemy" (or of transformation) whereas reason is weak due to the effect of the strength of the eyes on it - namely, due to that reason is flattered by the illusion created by the eyes which are the window to the mind.

Sonnet 116 talks about the power of two minds being glued together by true love. True love and Time clash while the poem unfolds the story of true love using two metaphors. True love is like the lighthouse and as the star [10]. True love is not Time's fool; it remains when Time passes. The two metaphors speak for the datelessness of love and love's nonsexuality. In addition, in order to preserve love one ought to preserve the effects of the lighthouse and of the star. Both the lighthouse and the star have the guidance function. They guide the traveler in the night to his/her destination. In Sonnet 116, the bodies lose their power to change the marriage of the minds due to what they encounter is true love. True love helps the addresser find the addressee.

Sonnet 27 is a lyric about the unreprieve of the body by day and of the mind by night [9]. It depicts the conflict between the tried body and the active mind and tells the story of how the figure of the addressee is presented to the addresser in the night. The work of the mind is as "a journey," "a zealous pilgrimage," or as the act of keeping the eyelids open wide, and the act of presenting the shadow of the addressee in the darkness in front of the addresser [10]. The work of the body is not depicted clear but can be conjectured as journey on horseback [9]. The active mind that contradicts the active body affects the eye sight. In the darkness which the blind man can see, the soul of the addresser imagines a figure of the addressee. This dark figure in the night sky is like a jewel shining its light [10]; it makes the night beautiful and its own figure novel by the colors it wear. That is the journey of the mind. Its delightfulness contradicts the weariness of the body. Yet, through the parallelisms in line 13-14 (i.e., day and night; limbs and mind; thee and myself [9]), the reader could see that it is the labor of the mind in the dark night by which the labor of the body in the daylight is accompanied - though the clip-clop of the horse towards the addressee only appears together with a quiet mind of the addresser whereas the silence of the limbs of the addresser and the silence of the horse of the addresser only emerge together with an anxious yet delightful mind towards the self of the addresser. For Shakespeare, the work of the mind allows the self and the figure or idea of one's lover to coexist; love is nonsexual but depends on the labor of the body and the labor of the mind; love is dateless and preservable

also because of its labor via the body and its labor via the mind.

In Sonnet 59 that is about painting the addressee (or the beloved) with words or characters, there is a dramatic conflict between something new (about the addressee) and nothing new (about the addressee). At the beginning of the poem, new invention by the brain that becomes amiss is just like “the second burthen of a former child” [10]; namely new intention by the brain is impossible. Nevertheless, in the end of the poem, the reader could see a dramatic shift of the poem’s central argument; the poet ultimately overthrows the assumption “if there be nothing new...” arguing that the now’s portrait is better than the old portrait, and the now is the new because the now’s subject becomes novel, different from and more superior than the old subject. In addition, in Sonnet 59, the author also tries to find the image (of the beloved) created by words in history. He says that he wants to know what history has to say about the image of the beloved (or of love). Such history is recorded via words. In the end he knows that the power of languages that reflects the power of the ancient mind is weaker than the power of languages used by the nowadays to depict the new beloved. In the other words, the mind in Sonnet 59 grows stronger because the now’s beloved becomes more superior than the old beloved. The mind is the one who uses words to depict the beloved. Its power is stronger when its subject becomes more powerful (or harder to be captured). Love is such an increase of the power of the mind.

In Sonnet 77 that records the usages of glass, sundial and blank notebook, the discourses of the mind and of the brain contradict the discourses of beauties and of time. The former discourses contain substances that save lives via reproducing words on the blank notebook while the latter ones contain objects (such as bodies’ strength, bodies’ beauties, and time by itself) that will pass or decline, and that can be reflected via the mirror or the dial. Sonnet 77 is also narrative because it tells the story of the mind’s cooperation with the notebook, the person will get older and the time will be wasted by the flâneur, but one of the central characters, the mind, will be enriched by words or poems that are written on the other (personified) central character, the vacant notebook. In the other words, one can use the notebook to change one’s self; dead words will form memories while lived words will be written on the vacant pages. The notebook is the medium used to hold back or save time as well as the medium through which new knowledge will be learned as time passes or beauties pass. That is to say, the poem’s addressee owes the empty pages words. What cannot be remembered, according to the author, should be jotted down. The vacant pages should be where the mind of the addressee coordinates

with the brain of the addressee to generate new knowledge. Such powers of the mind and of the brain preserve love and keep and save time. Such powers of the mind and of the brain also turn back the powers of darkness, of death and of growing old.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the paper argues that Shakespeare uses all three literary modes - the narrative, lyrical and dramatic modes - to create his sonnets about reason and the mind. Ultimately, this study offers insights about how Shakespeare uses the terms “reason” and “the mind” to create meanings and how he uses the three literary modes to construct the forms or structures of the sonnets. Whereas, the explicit discourses of reason and of the mind are easy to be found, while the hidden ones would be difficult to be found because poems under examination are selected by using the indexes, “reason” and “the mind”, and those poems that do not explicitly contain those two terms would not be selected. Future studies could seek to focus on the poems that talk about “reason” and “the mind” implicitly to gain deeper academic insights.

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