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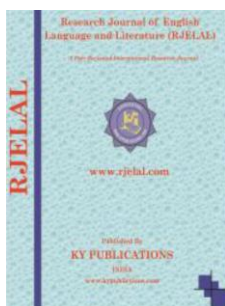
PERLUSTRATION OF SHAKESPEAREAN SONNETS

SANGAVI. K

PG student in Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women,
Coimbatore-43,

E-mail- sangavi14ene36@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

It is always regarded that Shakespeare is universally known as an exquisite dramatist. But he is also the finest poet in English Literature. He has written one hundred and fifty-four sonnets, thirty-eight plays and two epic narrative poems. The works of him are divided into comedies, histories and tragedies. These works of him stand as unique manuscripts in English Literature by its universal ideas and portrayal of characters. His works always stand in the test of time by its universality and treatment. If his plays are with a universal theme and seen as the evidence of his wit in language, then the sonnets are seen as his personal experiences and are more subjective. It is more subjective in themes and even more in its structure. Shakespeare still stands out as the greatest playwright after four hundred years. Most of his works were released posthumously in 1623 by his theatre companies.

Keywords: Sonnet, Couplet, Quatrain, Structure, and Themes

The Origin of Sonnet

A sonnet is a form of a lyrical poem that was initially originated in Italy. There are more definitions to justify the term sonnet. Some say that it is a 'fourteen-line poem'. Some say that it is a 'fourteen-line poem with iambic pentameter'. But there are various forms of sonnets. They may have different line variations, different metres and structure. The sonnet can be classified into different types, like Petrarchan sonnet, Shakespearean sonnet, Miltonic sonnet or Pushkinian sonnet. So a sonnet is defied of definition. Petrarch was the first man to successfully used the sonnet form in his "Rime to Laura", which portrayed the romantic form and stylistic model of the sonnet that is used today. Sir Thomas Wyatt, the poet, brought the sonnet to the English Court. But it was more successful only after the publication of Shakespeare's sonnets in 1609.

Shakespearean Sonnet

In early days, it seemed difficult to rhyme in the English language and regarded that sonnet could only be suitable for a Germanic language group. Because the Italic languages were with lofty vowel endings and suffixes to rhyme in a poem. Shakespeare wrote his sonnets during the outbreak of plague in London, which actually resulted in the closure of theatres and it prevented to stage the dramas of the playwrights. Then it was published in a book titled "SHAKE-SPEARES SONNETS". It was after the publishing of Shakespeare's sonnets, the sonnet form became the vogue in the English literature. The readers of Shakespeare had great taste for it, and the sonnet was shaping into a common literary form. Shakespearean sonnet is also called as English sonnet. Later, this form was followed by writers like Keats, John Donne, etc.

Structure

It was Shakespeare, who broke the rules of the sonnet and created a new one. But like the traditional sonnet form, he used the line variation. Each of his sonnets consists of fourteen lines. This form has three quatrains. Quatrain means having four lines in each stanza. All the quatrains have a similar rhyme scheme. It also has a couplet, which means a two lined stanza. This couplet alone has a different rhyme scheme than the quatrains. He used the three quatrains to establish a particular idea and used the couplet to denote a completely different approach to the established idea. For instance:

Sonnet 116:

Let me not to the marriage of true mind

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-fixed mark,

That looks on tempests, and is never shaken;

It is the star to every wandering bark,

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 (Sonnet 116.1-14)

The first quatrain has an explanation of what true love is not. He says that true love, which will not 'alter' or 'bend'. Then the second quatrain explains what true love is, which is an 'ever-fixed mark'. Further, the third quatrain explains what love is, and love isn't. The examples given in the three quatrains are agreeable. But in the couplet, he challenges the reader that if whatever has explained in the

quatrains were wrong then he wouldn't have written at all and nobody had ever truly loved. The couplet completely surprises the readers. There are some exceptions. The *sonnet 99* has fifteen lines with an additional line in the first quatrain and has the rhyme scheme *abab*. And the *sonnet 126* does not have quatrains. The entire sonnet is made up of six couplets.

Rhyme Scheme:

The Shakespearean sonnet has a different rhyme scheme from the traditional one. It employs the rhyme scheme *abab cdcd efef gg*. The sound of the ending word of the first line matches the sound of the ending word of the third line. Similarly, it matches with the second and the fourth line. For instance:

Sonnet 18:

Shall I compare thee to a summer's **day?** (a)

Thou art more lovely and more **temperate:** (b)

Rough winds do shake the darling buds of **May,** (a)

And summer's lease hath all too short a **date:** (b)

Sometime too hot the eye of heaven **shines,** (c)

And often is his gold complexion **dimmed;** (d)

And every fair from fair sometime **declines,** (c)

By chance, or nature's changing course, **untrimm'd;** (d)

But thy eternal summer shall not **fade** (e)

Nor lose possession of that fair thou **ow'st;** (f)

Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his **shade,** (e)

When in eternal lines to time thou **grow'st;** (f)

So long as men can breathe or eyes can **see,** (g)

So long lives this, and this gives life to **thee.** (g)
(Sonnet 18.1-14)

In the first line, the sound of the last word "day" rhymes with the sound of the last word "May" in the third line. The *sonnet 29* has an exception.

Sonnet 29:

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes, **(a)**

I all alone beweep my outcaste state, **(b)**

And rouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries, **(a)**

And look upon myself, and curse my fate, **(b)**

Wishing me like to one more rich in hope, **(c)**

Featur'd like him, like him with friends possess'd, **(d)**

Desiring this man's art and that man's scope, **(c)**

With that I most enjoy contented least; **(d)**

Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising, **(e)**

Haply I think on thee, and then my state, **(b)**

Like to the lark at break of day arising **(e)**

From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate; **(b)**

For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings **(f)**

That then I scorn to change my state with kings. **(f)** (Sonnet 29.1-14)

The rhyme (b) in the first quatrain is repeated in the third quatrain.

Meter:

The sonnets are mostly written in iambic pentameter, and this was his favourite one.

In this form, each line has five pairs of syllables. The unstressed syllable is followed by a stressed syllable. For instance, in Sonnet 29: "When **in/** disgrace / with **for /** tune **and /** men's **eyes/** I **all /** alone / be **weep /** my **out /** cast **state"** (Sonnet 29.1-2)

As usual, the sonnet 145 is written in iambic tetrameter.

Themes:

The themes in Shakespearean sonnets are age, time, politics, gender roles, lust, love, obligations, etc. Shakespeare had included romantic love as one of the themes in his sonnets. The reader can interpret as a love triangle between the speaker, the fair youth and the dark lady. Shakespeare had portrayed different levels of love from platonic to sexual in his sonnets. Over the centuries, the critics are in debate on the character of his love sentiments- the 'fair young man' and the 'dark lady'.

On Love:

The term 'Love' does not have a fixed definition in Shakespeare's sonnets. It is described as an overwhelming force, which travels over time, the physical world, and reason. Love is personified and explained as an immortal force which overcomes the age, death and time. His love is actually directed to two persons, the dark lady and the fair young man. Some of the sonnets on love are sonnet 1, 18, 29, 73, 116.

On Time:

The sonnets from 1 to 126, Shakespeare used the word 'time' seventy eight times. Shakespeare hauntingly preoccupied with time and felt its entailing. Shakespeare always personified time and considered as the fourth character in his sonnets. In sonnet 16 as "devouring"; in sonnet 19 as "swift-footed"; in sonnet 12 as "hideous night", the time is personified. In sonnet 18 and 19, the destructive face of time is described.

Speculations:

The characters on his sonnets are still in debate on real identity, whether it is addressed to the dark lady or the fair young man. There is also speculation that Shakespeare might be gay. The sonnets from 1 to 126 are addressed to the young man. The other character dark lady is referred to as 'black'. The sonnets from 127 to 152 express the sexual distaste of him. In sonnet 127, 128, and 130, he gives contempt compliments to the dark lady. Some critics say that the young man is his friend William Henry that he had shortly denoted as W. H. Some say that it was his initial and he has wrongly

placed it. The dark lady might be the queen of his time.

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Conclusion:

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