


CHAPTER 1: FOUR PIVOTAL SONNETS: SONNETS 20, 62, 104, 129



In this chapter we have selected four sonnets for special consideration, as taken together they illuminate the Poet's most prevalent concerns, including his horror of aging and his bisexuality. We will be referring to these sonnets again and again throughout this book.


If we allow ourselves to assume that the "I" of the sonnets is a single character (whether that is Will Shakespeare himself or a character of his creation doesn't matter) we can connect seemingly disparate material into a revealing, coherent picture. By so doing we are well aware that we have ventured beyond the relatively safe harbor of the psychoanalytic hour where a living patient can confirm the analyst's insights and we recognize that what seems evidence to us may not be convincing to some readers. But the approach has one certain benefit: by following it we will gain access to the major themes of the sonnets and get to know this astonishing body of poems very well.

The Poet of the Sonnets, being a man of the Renaissance, made full use of classical mythology but was also capable of coining new myths of his own making and creating an imagery so beautiful that, once compre-

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hended, it remains with us even if we do not share the Poet's interior psychic conflicts.

SONNET 20



A woman's face with nature's own hand painted,
Hast thou the master mistress of my passion,
A woman's gentle heart but not acquainted
With shifting change as is false women's fashion,
An eye more bright than theirs, less false in rolling:
Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth,
A man in hue all hues in his controlling,
Which steals men's eyes and women's souls amazeth.
And for a woman wert thou first created,
Till nature as she wrought thee fell a-doting,
And by addition me of thee defeated,
By adding one thing to my purpose nothing.
 But since she pricked thee out for women's pleasure,
 Mine be thy love and thy love's use their treasure.

In the first five lines the feminine aspects of the Young Man are stressed, as is his superiority over women. The next three lines will emphasize his masculine aspects. In line 6, this androgynous man-woman is compared to the sun: "Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth." The act of gilding, as distinguished from gilded, appears only twice in Shakespeare's work, in this sonnet and in Sonnet 33:

Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy (Sonnet 33, lines 3-4)

In mythology the sun is usually a masculine symbol, whereas the "pale" moon is experienced as feminine; the use of the term gilding emphasized the masculine aspect of this bisexual youth.

A gender change is introduced in line 7, when the Young Man is addressed as "A man in hue, all hues in his controlling." The word "hue" had in Shakespeare's time many connotations, such as appearance, bearing, and grace. In these lines, the Poet seems eager to counteract the femi-

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nine impression he conveyed in the first six lines. “Masculine” means being in control of all his hues so that nothing that emanates from him is beyond his control. In Sonnet 94 a similar praise appears: “They are the lords and owners of their faces,” meaning that those whose face does not betray what they feel are masculine. Commentators have also noted that “controlling” in line 7 contains a pun on “cunt.” In that case the faint echo of “his cunt” in “his controlling” increases the sense of the Young Man as hermaphroditic.

Line 8 affirms the Young Man’s appeal to both men and women: “Which steals men’s eyes and women’s souls amazeth.” We note that the appeal is not equal on both genders. The Young Man evokes admiration from men, “stealing their eyes,” implying taking men’s eyes away from women. The Young Man has an even deeper effect on women, whose “souls he amazes.” Blackmore Evans believes that the asymmetry is intended to convey that men responding with their eyes are more intellectual, while women, responding with their souls are more richly endowed with emotions. However, we will see that the eye is often the principal sexual organ in Shakespeare’s sonnets—perhaps because it is the organ used to read them—so to “steal men’s eyes” has sexual undertones.

The third quatrain introduces a legend that Shakespeare created for this occasion. Nature was engaged in creating a woman when she “fell a-doting”—that is, in love with the woman she was creating. Being heterosexual, Nature decided to add a penis for her own sexual pleasure. The Poet suggests that he was ready to love the woman nature was creating, but nature defeated him by the addition of the penis, making a sexual relationship between the Poet and the Young Man impossible. Hence, “me of thee defeated.” Nature can have him but the Poet cannot. The verb “painted,” found in the first line, appears in Shakespeare’s work 58 times and is mostly used as a metaphor, often to connote the opposite of genuine as in “your painted counterfeit” in Sonnet 16. In this sonnet, when nature paints a woman, the woman comes to life, and when she adds a penis the woman becomes a bisexual person.

The term “a-doting” appears only in this sonnet. In the quarto edition, the line reads: “fell a dotting.” In Sonnet 131 the Poet speaks of “my dear dotting heart.” In Sonnet 141 the Poet tells us that his heart is “pleased to dote.” And in Sonnet 148 the Poet speaks of “my false eyes dote.” In these

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sonnets, as well as in other works of Shakespeare, doting means loving to excess, or loving foolishly. However, to be the recipient of such a love may not be undesirable. Thus, in *Much Ado About Nothing* we are told that Beatrice loves Benedick with an “enraged affection.” Don Pedro muses “I would she had bestowed this dotage on me” (Act II, Scene III). An extreme form of dotage takes place in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* when Titania tells Bottom, transformed into an ass, “Oh, how I love thee; how I dote on thee.” Oberon comments, “Her dotage now I begin to pity.” Dotage can be a painful emotion.

Who is this nature so charmingly anthropomorphized? If we turn to other sonnets to discover who nature is, we will find, in Sonnet 4, that “Nature’s bequest gives nothing, but doth lend,” meaning that the loveliness of the Young Man was not given to him as a permanent right, but only lent to him by “nature,” obliging him to pass on his beauty to the next generation. In Sonnet 18 we are told that “nature” is far from constant: “nature’s changing course untrimmed.” In Sonnet 60 “nature” can be in conflict with time, when time “Feeds on the rarities of nature’s truth.” In Sonnet 67 “nature” can be experienced as bankrupt, and when that happens there is no reason to live on. Depressing is also that “nature” uses the Young Man as a kind of souvenir of times now past. In Sonnet 126 “nature” is described as “sovereign mistress over wrack.” At times “nature” is equated with life itself, a ruler over destruction, as for example in Sonnet 122: “so long as brain and heart/Have faculty by nature to subsist.” Nature can be playful and goddesslike; she sometimes helps and at other times hinders our effort. Basically, in this sonnet, nature is portrayed by the Poet as narcissistic and irresponsible, pursuing her own ends indifferent to human wishes. In other sonnets discussed in Chapter 2 she is a sort of stand-in for the Poet himself, keeping the Young Man youthful as a souvenir of the beauty she had long ago. This idea seems strange but we will come to know it well, beginning with the discussion of Sonnet 62 later in the chapter.

There is a bawdy play on words in line 12: “adding one thing” is a reference to the penis; “to my purpose nothing” is the opposite of “one thing” and a reference to the vagina. It is likely that line 14 in Sonnet 8—“Thou single wilt prove none”—is also a reference to the female genital. There is a famous scene in *Hamlet* that can also be cited as confirmation of the Elizabethan equation between vagina and nothing:

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Hamlet: Lady, shall I lie in your lap?

Lying down at Ophelia's feet.

Ophelia: No, my lord.

Hamlet: I mean, my head upon your lap?

Ophelia: Ay, my lord.

Hamlet: Do you think I meant country matters?

Ophelia: I think nothing, my lord.

Hamlet: That's a fair thought to lie between maids' legs.

Ophelia: What is, my lord?

Hamlet: Nothing [Act III, Scene II, 119-28.].

In the third quatrain of Sonnet 136, (a sonnet we do not otherwise include in this book) we read:

Among a number one is reckoned none.

Then in the number let me pass untold,

Though in thy store's account I one must be.

For nothing hold me, so it please thee hold

That nothing, me, a something sweet to thee (lines 8-12).

The Poet asserts that one is no number, and that one is to be reckoned as none. That one is none is a proverb in many languages. For example, the German "Einmal (once) ist Keinmal (never)." A favorite strategy used by seducers is to persuade that one intercourse is no intercourse. "Store's account" contains an allusion to cunt. "Nothing" in line 11 can be read as "no thing" and therefore again as a reference to the vagina. The psychoanalyst Bertrand Lewin (1948), without reference to Shakespeare stated, "When a patient in analysis says he is thinking of nothing, he or she will soon be talking about the female genital."

The Poet has fallen in love with a very attractive and effeminate young man, but the Poet knows that homosexual relationships are forbidden under Elizabethan law. He may also share the abhorrence for homosexual activities, or may only be careful not to express them. In any case, he hopes homosexual love that does not lead to homosexual activity can be made acceptable to the reader. No wonder, then, that in subsequent years this poem evoked controversy, some using it to prove Shakespeare's homosexuality while others employed it as a proof that he was not. It is hardly sur-

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prising: an overt homosexual would never have written this sonnet, but neither would it have occurred to a heterosexual man.

The Young Man in this poem represents a solution to a particular problem that the Poet experiences. The Young Man is as beautiful as a woman but, being a man, is free from the character defects that the Poet attributes to women. The Poet of the Sonnets leads us to believe, at least in his case, that love and sexuality run along different tracks: the Poet's feelings of love are easily and unselfconsciously directed towards a man, but his feelings of sexual attraction remain directed towards women. Both feelings are presented as natural, so as to require no explanation to the reader.

In Sonnet 20, the beauty of women is regarded as self-evident, as the poem begins by attributing to the man "a woman's face." Written in an exuberant mood with a great deal of humor, many original ideas, and unexpected puns, this sonnet is a charming fable. One would have expected that it would rank among Shakespeare's more popular sonnets, but only one anthology included it. We suspect that it did not fare well because in spite of the Poet's denial so charmingly stated, the implicit homosexuality was too disturbing to many readers. To our knowledge, Sonnet 20 is unique in celebrating love based on the bisexual appeal of the person chosen.

In real life there are heterosexual women who love their female friends, and enjoy their company and have much more in common with them than they do with their heterosexual mates. The reverse is equally common: men who spend most of their time and pleasure in the company of other men and yet seek sexual gratification from a woman or from more than one woman. In psychoanalytic terms such solutions are called compromise formations between homo- and heterosexual wishes. Many masculine women and feminine men exert a special fascination on their partners, appearing bisexual; as both man and woman, they represent a possible solution to a conflict between homo- and heterosexual wishes. As a rule, however, the perceived bisexuality of the partner remains unconscious. However in Sonnet 20, this knowledge has not only become conscious but was transformed into a highly original poem. Sonnet 20 is an attempt at compromise formation based on love for a man who seems to the Poet to possess the attributes of both genders; the Poet admits openly that it is the bisexuality of the Young Man that is attractive, but denies that the Young Man is sexually attractive. Bisexuals attract for the same reason

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that narcissists are attractive: they are or at least appear self-sufficient. Psychoanalysts often discover that both envy and jealousy often interfere with the capacity to love, but love for a bisexual person who is believed to have within her or his orbit all that is the best in both genders must evoke also a great deal of envy. Falling in love with a hermaphrodite, as the Young Man is experienced in Sonnet 20, contains an obstacle. Anyone experienced in fantasy as hermaphroditic fantasy is bound to seem self-sufficient and therefore incapable as well as unwilling to love the other.

On the surface, this sonnet is in praise of a young man the Poet adores, or to use Shakespeare's term, "dotes upon." There are many sonnets in praise of this or another young man, but the nature of the praise bestowed in this sonnet is unique. The Young Man is exalted because he has androgynous qualities; because he combines masculine and feminine tendencies, being both master and mistress is proclaimed to be unique. This dual nature is captured in the second line: "the master mistress of my passion." In Shakespeare's time, the term "mistress" had not yet acquired the connotation it has for us—that of a "kept woman," or a woman who belongs to a man, usually married, who is financially supporting her. The term "master" here refers to a person endowed with the right to command. A note of submission to this hermaphroditic creature is introduced.

Shakespeare's commentators have interpreted that "but not acquainted" puns as not having a cunt. Whether this interpretation is accepted or not, it is clear that a strong anti-female attitude is present when the Young Man's eyes are seen as "less false in rolling," namely, more loyal than woman's eyes. This belief in the lover's constancy will not be sustained in the subsequent sonnets. Patrick Mahony (1979) noted that the syntactical structure of Sonnet 20 contains many inversions (changes in the words' order), ellipses (omission of words necessary to complete the sentence), paralaxis (change in direction), and hypotaxis (subordinate clauses). The sonnet is unique in having fourteen hypermetric lines (exceeding the established meter of the sonnets). The bisexuality is also reflected in the binarity of the lines, two different ideas being pressed into the same line. He noted that to be accepted with the reverse side, or back side, is a reference to anal eroticism, so prominent in homosexuality. What Mahony discovered is a connection between the style of the poem and what the Poet tried to

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repress. What is repressed in the content, the anal homosexual wish, resurfaces in the style.

In psychoanalytic practice, one occasionally encounters men and women who have fallen in love with someone of their own gender, but this love or even sexual attraction notwithstanding, they insist that they are not homosexuals. As the Poet declares in Sonnet 20, they only happen to have fallen in love with this particular person. With humor and irony some people wear a button that says, "I'm not gay, my lover is."

One of the important contributions of psychoanalysis to the understanding of homosexuality was the insight that in addition to overt homosexuality, two other types have to be added: latent homosexuality, where homosexual wishes, insufficiently held back by repression, require fear and hatred of homosexuals to contain the homosexual wishes in a state of repression. Latent homosexuals rely heavily on projection (attributing their feelings to others, not themselves) and reaction formation (feeling repelled by what unconsciously attracts them) to keep their homosexuality repressed. Another diagnostic group comprises desexualized homosexuality; such men and woman have passionate love relationships with members of their own gender, including jealousy when the loved one prefers someone else, but the relationship does not include direct sexual wishes. In Sonnet 20 desexualized homosexuality is the Poet's ideal. It is possible to read all the love sonnets to the Young Man as examples of desexualized homosexuality, but the heterosexual sonnets discussed later in this book (Chapter 7), including the painful triangle, cast doubt on the fact that the desexualization idealized in this sonnet was actually achieved.

In the Poet's unconscious there was a choice: he could desire the Young Man's penis as a woman would and find that he is a homosexual. Or he could ask for friendship based on admiration but devoid of sexual interest, thus sublimating homosexual wishes into a "mere" friendship. Unwilling to accept the implication of homosexuality, the Poet created Sonnet 20. Resigned to the fact that nature "pricked" the man he loves, that is, endowed him with a penis for woman's pleasure, he asks only for the Young Man's love and suggests the Young Man's sexuality, here called "love's use," should go to women. What the Poet advocated was a radical separation between love and sexuality; as we will see in other poems, sexless love also implies loveless sexuality.

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SONNET 20 AND THE CLASSICAL PAST

Shakespeare very likely wrote under the influence of the Roman poet Ovid, who in his famous book *Metamorphoses* told the story of the sculptor Pygmalion, who fell in love with and caressed the statues of a young woman he had created. Venus granted his prayer that the statue come to life and become his wife. In psychoanalytic terms both Shakespeare's Nature and Ovid's Pygmalion are not capable of loving a real person and fall in love with what they themselves have created.

Whether Shakespeare read Ovid in the original in his student years or whether he read it in the Golding translation that had just appeared in 1565 is not clear, but the bisexuality was described by Golding thus:

Her countenance and her grace
was such as in a boy might well be called a wench's face,
and in a wench be called a boy's (Golding 10:429-36)

Ovid's story of Salmachis and Hermaphroditus is also relevant to Sonnet 20. The water nymph Salmachis did not enjoy the hunt, preferring to look at herself in the water mirror and comb her lovely hair (we will meet her masculine equivalent as Narcissus). Hermaphroditus, the son of Hermes and Aphrodite, was a beautiful lad fifteen years old. He came to a pool translucent to the very bottom and it was the pool that Salmachis was using as mirror to her self-love. She sees Hermaphroditus, admires his beauty, desires him and pleads for kisses. Hermaphroditus is reluctant. Salmachis lures him into the water and once there, serpentlike, she coils herself around him. She prays to the gods, "May no day ever come to separate us." Her prayer was answered. Their bodies merged, becoming one person, both man and woman. "Two beings and no longer man and woman but neither and yet both" (Ovid *Metamorphoses*, 4:285-388, Humphries translation).

"Master mistress of my passion" goes even further back to the fable told in Plato's *Symposium*. The best-known part of the *Symposium*, the one that has influenced Western culture most profoundly, is the legend told by Aristophanes to explain the nature of love: originally mankind was com-

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posed of double creatures, having two heads, four arms, four legs, and two genitalia. Some were double-males, others double-females, and still others were composed male and female. These creatures threatened the gods because being self-sufficient they felt no need to sacrifice to the gods and the gods were in turn desperately dependent on human sacrifices. So the gods decided to cut each creature in half and since then the two halves are yearning to be reunited.

The legend told in the *Symposium* explained also why some people are heterosexual and others homosexual: sexual orientation depends on the gender of the person with whom we were originally united. We should note the wisdom of this legend. The hermaphrodite is self-sufficient and does not need the help of the gods, and therefore will feel no need to sacrifice to the gods. Being self-sufficient themselves, these gods nevertheless “need” the sacrifices offered by mortals for their own gratification; therefore they have a narcissistic relationship with mortals. These gods are interested in mortals only as sacrificers.

Our analysis of Sonnet 20 leads us to believe that this sonnet has been underestimated by the commentators and anthologizers. There is first the original use of the classical heritage and its transformation beyond what had been transmitted by the tradition. But there is more; whenever in the course of psychoanalysis sexual or love wishes for someone of one’s own gender emerge, anxiety of becoming homosexual or bisexual surfaces. Shakespeare was capable of taking this anxiety-laden subject and treating it lightly and with humor; a taboo subject was given permission to become articulated. A weight of guilt and shame was lifted, if only for the time it takes to read this sonnet.

In Sonnet 20 we encounter the Poet who can bring to life the classical past, but is capable of creating a personal myth modeled on the classical past. Shakespeare’s humor goes beyond Ovid; his nature is not a goddess-like Aphrodite who grants the sculptor’s wish. She herself falls a-doting and for her own sexual satisfaction adds the penis the Poet claims not to need. We can look upon this sonnet as a compromise between homo- and heterosexual wishes. If the Poet had succeeded to live up to this division we would not have had the conflicts that animate the other sonnets. Because the sonnet is an erudite and funny compromise it remains inherently unstable. An unstable compromise is a wonderfully promising dramatic

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premise and since the rest of the sonnets show that the compromise of Sonnet 20 did not lead to a permanent resolution, we selected this poem as the gateway to one of the Poet's major inner struggles.

SONNET 62

Credit for the discovery of self-love as a third form of love after heterosexual and homosexual love goes to Ovid. This love still carries the name of his legendary character Narcissus and is called narcissism. Ovid, being a poet and not a systematic thinker, created a legendary character, not a psychological concept.

According to Ovid, Narcissus was a youth of wondrous beauty. Perceptively, Ovid made him not the child of a loving couple but of the nymph Leiriope, who was ravished by the river god Cephisus, who encircled her with his winding streams. Leiriope consulted the prophet Tiresias as to whether Narcissus would reach old age; the prophet replied, "Only if he never knows himself." It has been pointed out that the seer's answer was Ovid's ironical reversal of the Greek ideal "know thyself," inscribed on Apollo's temple in Delphi. Beautiful youths, men, women and nymphs fell in love with Narcissus but he rejected them all. In response to a rejected lover, Nemesis, the goddess of vengeance, inflicted upon Narcissus the pain he caused others, to love without being loved. Exhausted from the hunt, Narcissus reaches a fountain whose waters are unruffled. In the silvery waters he is smitten by love for the image that stares at him from the water. Narcissus cannot tear himself away and dies gazing at his image.

Among those who fell in love with Narcissus was the nymph Echo, who was punished by Juno to be unable to have independent speech and was capable only of repeating what she was told.

Out of the woods she came with arms all ready to fling around his neck, but he retreated. "Keep your hands off," he cried, "and don't touch me. I would die before I would give you a chance at me." "I'd give you a chance at me," was all that poor Echo could reply (Ovid *Metamorphoses* 3, Humphries' translation).

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This story, in our opinion, shows how profound a psychologist Ovid was. Milder narcissists may not be able to love an independent person but at least they can find a partner who mirrors them, who, echo-like, reflects back what they are. That Narcissus could not even love Echo doomed him to utter loneliness.

With these preliminaries behind us, we turn to Sonnet 62.

Sin of self-love possesseth all mine eye,
And all my soul, and all my every part;
And for this sin there is no remedy,
It is so grounded inward in my heart.
Methinks no face so gracious is as mine,
No shape so true, no truth of such account,
And for my self mine own worth do define,
As I all other in all worths surmount.
But when my glass shows me my self indeed
Beated and chopped with tanned antiquity,
Mine own self-love quite contrary I read:
Self, so self-loving were iniquity.
’Tis thee (my self) that for my self I praise,
Painting my age with beauty of thy days.

The very first words of the sonnet are a surprise. Why is self-love a sin? There is hardly a passage in the Bible where self-love is denounced with such vehemence. What has usually been condemned is the sexual expression of self-love, masturbation. True, during the Middle Ages vanity had the status of a sin. But there is little evidence that the author of the sonnets was a believing Christian.

“Self-love possesseth all mine eye” tells us that the eye is the crucial organ in self-love. This self-love permeates the Poet’s soul and every part of him. The expression “possesseth” implies that self-love, like other forms of love, can overwhelm the person in love, who has the feeling of being taken captive by the love. To feel possessed implies that love is experienced passively as something that overwhelms us, not actively as something we choose to do. This self-love first conquered the eye, then the soul and then “every part.” This self-love is so grounded in the Poet’s heart that there is no remedy for it. The first quatrain is stated as an overwhelming fact; the second quatrain opens with “Methinks.” It is not as absolute as the first

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quatrain, for “Methinks”—the equivalent of “it seems to me”—mitigates the absoluteness of the first quatrain. It was this all-conquering self-love that made the Poet think that “no face so gracious is as mine/ No shape so true, no truth of such account.” The last statement is of special interest because even if something is believed to be truth it can be held weakly or uncertainly, or, as it happened to the Poet, so strongly that no other truth compares to it and is of similar account. The second quatrain ends with the declaration that the Poet feels he surmounts, or surpasses, everybody else.

In the first two quatrains the Poet, like Narcissus, is in love with himself. Regarding self-love as a sin, he knows no cure for it. In the third quatrain, however, the remedy for self-love is discovered. The same mirror that trapped Narcissus has a sobering effect on the Poet.

Shakespeare transformed Ovid’s tale. The very glass that trapped Narcissus awakens the Poet out of his narcissistic slumber. His age, in this sonnet called “tanned antiquity,” causes him to fall in love with someone who reminds him of his own now-lost self-love while he was young. This is expressed metaphorically in the last line, “Painting my age with beauty of thy days.”

It is only when he happens to look in the mirror (“but when my glass shows me myself indeed” sounds like something that happens, not like something that happened once) he is suddenly reminded that he is praising the Young Man. The Poet moves beyond his self-love when he can no longer maintain it because of aging. This moment allows him to write uniquely because he gained some distance from his self-love.

Thus for all its debt to Ovid, Sonnet 62 tells the story of a “Narcissus” who became a lover of someone else. The young man who looks at his reflection and falls in love has become an old man who loves himself until he sees his reflection and then finds a young man to love instead (this idea is the inspiration for the drawing on the cover of this book). Where a more ordinary mind would have had the Poet roused from his narcissism by the beauty of another (one, perhaps, who reminded him of himself), Shakespeare gives us a story of self-love that is thwarted by the Poet’s horror of old age. This is of great importance, for the relationship because the man the Poet loves will himself age, which, in other poems, will raise the question of whether the Poet will be able to love him as he gets older.

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The term “self love” appears in Sonnet 62 three times: in lines 1 and 11, and in line 12 as “self loving.” In all of Shakespeare’s writing, “self love” appears eight times and “self loving” three times. In Sonnet 3 “Who is so fond will be the tomb/Of his self love to stop posterity.” Sonnet 62 alone would have assured for Shakespeare a prominent role in the Western understanding of the nature of narcissistic love. Love is a dominant theme in all poetry, but self-love has rarely been seen as a worthy topic for poetry. Poetry communicates one’s love to the other; as a communication to the self it seems cumbersome.

The couplet

’Tis thee (my self) that for my self I praise,
Painting my age with beauty of thy days.

Can be read in two different ways depending on how we interpret “thee.” Most commentators think that “thee” refers to the Young Man. In this interpretation the Poet used the Young Man as a kind of deceptive mirror to persuade himself that he was young. But the parentheses around the word myself suggests another and deeper possibility: that it refers to the self-love of the Poet as a Young Man. The cunning poet may have wished to convey the two interpretations simultaneously, obliterating the difference in the state of love between himself and the Young Man.

Vendler believes that the Poet created this delusory self-image in order to be able to believe in the Young Man’s affections for him. We, by contrast, believe that the Poet fell in love with the Young Man in order to prolong or recapture the illusion of his own youth and beauty. The love of the Young Man was in the service of the Poet’s restoration of his own narcissism.

It was in 1914 that Freud recognized that self-love, or as he preferred to call it “narcissism,” can give rise to a special kind of love, which he called “narcissistic love.” In that love, we love someone else who reminds us of ourselves either as we are or as we had once been or as we wished to have been. It is a love that is based on converted envy. When we read Sonnet 62, we can see that Shakespeare had this insight three hundred years before Freud. But, because the Poet condemned his own self-love, he also condemned his narcissistic love for the Young Man. Only Auden included this sonnet in his anthology. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the trans-

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formation of narcissism into a narcissistic love as depicted by the Poet is a milestone in the understanding of self-love.

SONNET 104

Sonnets 62 and 104 have in common the fear of aging. In Sonnet 62 aging forced the Poet to change his self-love for the love of the Young Man. In Sonnet 104 the Poet is amazed that his love for the Young Man lasted for three years without his lover showing signs of aging.

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 seasons 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 poem has a unique structure. The first two lines are addressed to the Young Man, assuring him that he can never be old. The next six lines are a description of three years and their respective seasons, implying the Poet's amazement that the youth did not appear to have aged in the last three years. In the third quatrain this peculiar certainty has gone; the Poet has become suspicious: time is compared to a "dial hand" that moves so slowly that beauty can be stolen from the Young Man's figure without the pace being "perceived," that is, without us noticing that the shadow on the sun dial has moved at all. In line 11 what was a certainty in the first lines has been reduced to a mere "methinks;" the Poet suggests that the Young Man has aged in these three years but the Poet's eyes have been deceived.

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The couplet is addressed to future generations, here called “age unbred,” and the Poet tells them that even before they were born “beauty’s summer,” a reference to the Young Man, beauty had died. The couplet thus takes back what the poem tried to affirm.

The traditional division of the sonnet into three quatrains in contrast as well as in communication with each other has not been observed. Instead, the theme of the second quatrain extends over six lines, giving the changes of the season extra power.

The second line brings in the role the eye plays in the Poet’s falling in love. Love took place literally at the first sight, when “your eye I eyed.” Once more we can confirm that the main sexual organ for the Poet is the eye and this displacement from the penis to eye helped the Poet separate love from sexuality. When the eye takes over the function of the genital, psychoanalysis uses the term “displacement.” Already in Sonnet 20 the lover was praised as having “an eye more bright than theirs/Less false in rolling;” and in Sonnet 62, “sin of self love possessed my eye.” There are a number of other sonnets in which the eye plays a prominent role in the love feelings of the Poet. For example in Sonnet 1: “But thou contracted to thine own bright eyes;” Sonnet 14: “But from thine eyes my knowledge I derive;” Sonnet 47: “Mine eye is famished for a look;” Sonnet 49: “Scarcely greet me with that sun, thine eye;” Sonnet 61: “It is my love that keeps mine eye awake;” Sonnet 93: “There can live no hatred in thine eye;” Sonnet 139: “Wound me not with thine eye, but with thy tongue.”

Nature, we note, is experienced as both active and hostile as well as passive and enduring. Active forces playing havoc alternate with passing events that could not be prevented, “three winters cold” is experienced as the aggressor, who “shook three summers’ pride.” In the fifth line, “beauteous spring to yellow autumn turned” without anyone actively bringing this change about. The next metaphor is a powerful one, “three April perfumes in three hot Junes burned,” implying that April perfumes linger until they are burned up by the hot June. The Poet repeats that these changes have taken place three times since the two have met. In the third quatrain, the Young Man himself is introduced into the cycles of nature. Three years ago, he was green, but unlike nature human life is not cyclical and subject to the power of time.

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In line 9, a major shift takes place. What impresses the Poet now is not nature, but the clock.

The word dial appears in Shakespeare's work nine times, the word dial's four times, and dials twice. The full term sundial was not used by Shakespeare. Two references to dial appear in Sonnet 77:

Thy glass will show thee how thy beauties wear,
Thy dial how thy precious minutes waste.

And again,

Thou by thy dial's shady stealth mayst know
Time's thievish progress to eternity;

The phrase "dial's shady stealth" refers to the fact that in the shade the dial cannot register the changing hours, and this is how time can steal. In psychoanalytic terms, the dial is a symbolic representation of the superego; it admonishes the Poet to note how precious moments are wasted, but it is also an instrument used by time as in "thievish progress to eternity," where time allegedly steals from us our hours. The reference to eternity is one of the few places where the Poet speaks in religious language.

The metaphor used by the Poet in line 10: "Steal from his figure, and no pace perceived;" is of special interest because it illustrates how a creative poet can use the paranoid idea of stealing and transform it into poetry. Beauty is compared to a "dial hand" (sundial) that moves so slowly that no movement is noticed, expressed as "no pace perceived." Beauty itself, in line 10, is accused of stealing from the figure of the Young Man. Beauty also fades imperceptibly like the dial hand. What the Poet means is that because aging takes place, the beauty of the Young Man is stolen from him, a striking example of how a paranoid idea can become transformed into an original metaphor. Because the idea is paranoid, lines 9 and 10 are difficult to decipher logically. To make sense of them, we have to divide the thoughts that have become condensed. Beauty is accused of stealing (sneaking away) from the Young Man's figure and treated like a possession that can be stolen. Another metaphor is then added: beauty behaves like a dial hand that moves so slowly that we did not ever perceive the motion. The Poet frequently used the metaphor of stealing to connote lack of le-

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gitimacy; for example, in Sonnet 63 time is described as “Stealing away the treasure of his spring.”

As we reach line 11, the certainty of the first line has vanished. The bold statement “you never can be old” has become the hesitant “methinks still doth stand.” The metaphor of the dial hand in line 9 is still animating line 12. The dial can deceive the eye by moving in such a way that the motion itself is not noticed. The Young Man can age without the Poet noticing it. The fear of not noticing the effect of time grips the Poet. The Young Man was never supposed to age, and by loving him the Poet would also stay young. This was beyond the power of Eros to achieve. The Young Man may still be “green,” but the Poet knows that he will not stay young forever. The Poet cannot accept that beauty is transient. “Sweet hue” in line 11 refers to the Young Man’s complexion. “Hue,” as we saw in Sonnet 20, is a word the Poet usually uses to describe masculinity. The Poet is no longer sure that a Young Man’s “sweet hue...still doth stand.” He begins to feel that his eyes, which have not noticed aging, may have deceived him. What the Poet feared becomes a certainty in the couplet. With “thou age unbred” the Poet addresses future generations and tells them (us) that with the aging of his lover, “beauty’s summer” died. Thus the personal tragedy of the Poet, seeing the Young Man he loves aging, becomes a universal tragedy because his beauty will never be replicated. The coming generation will no longer know the beauty that died with the summer. Future generations should know that when the Poet’s Young Man aged, summer’s beauty died.

What is striking, particularly to older readers, is that three years seems such a long time to the Poet. In Sonnet 116, Shakespeare expressed the opposite feeling that love is “not time’s fool, though rosy lips and cheeks within his bending sickle’s compass come.” In Sonnet 104, the mere anticipation of aging frightens the Poet. He does not explain this sonnet and we cannot be sure that we grasped it fully, but a hypothesis does come to mind. There are three years that make a very big difference: these three years may have been so crucial if they embrace the years during which the Young Man will have reached puberty. This hypothesis cannot be entirely dismissed because we encounter in real life people who can love either boys or girls as long as they are pre-pubescent (Charles Dodgson’s desexualized love for Alice Liddell gave us *Alice in Wonderland*). If this was to any de-

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gree true of the Poet of the Sonnets, we gain a new understanding of the procreation sonnets which begin the sonnets in the traditional published sequence and which we describe in Chapter 5. They are addressed to the Young Man the Poet loved who is now reaching sexual maturity. If this was the case we can also understand better the enmity between the Poet and time. It is normal to have difficulty in accepting aging, but if love is confined to the few years before pubescence sets in, there will be a deeper reason to be at war with the destructive power of time. Sonnet 104 leads to the hypothesis that the Young Man the Poet loved was not only young, but not yet a man.

We have included Sonnet 104 in this chapter because in this sonnet the Poet allowed insight into his sexual and love life that he has not granted elsewhere. We are aware of the fact that no other interpreter of the sonnets has interpreted it the way we have, and we may be mistaken in our surmise. But if we are right, then one more puzzle about the Poet's love life will have yielded its secret. What has alerted us to the uniqueness of the sonnet is that the Poet himself seems amazed that his love had lasted for three years. If the Poet had used thirty years we would not have been surprised. But does anyone consider a relationship that lasts for three years particularly remarkable?

Since we assigned a pivotal role to Sonnet 104, we were naturally curious how the other commentators dealt with this problem. Vendler ignored it. Blackmore Evans, on the authority of Rollins, suggested that "'three' may be not a specific historical allusion but a poetically conventional number for commemorating such meetings (p. 212)." He draws attention to the fact that Sonnet 104 as well as Sonnet 107 is so often discussed in terms of the controversy of who the youth was, Southampton or Pembroke. Burrow noted that Sonnet 104 "does not break decisively from the poems that precede it" and that it contains "a significantly higher proportion of late rare words and lower proportion of early rare words than those which preceded them (p. 109)." We seem to be alone in the significance that we assigned to this sonnet. The sonnet contains some beautiful nature metaphors but if we were right in our surmise of its perverse implication it is hardly surprising that it was included in only one anthology.

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SONNET 129




The three sonnets we have looked at so far cover a wide range of variations on falling in love, and what we think of as normal or at least typical falling in love (“boy meets girl” in American popular culture) is noticeably absent. Absent, too, is the theme of sexual desire or the fulfillment of love through the sexual act.

Sonnet 129, by contrast, concerns itself directly with desire and lust and ranks among Shakespeare’s best-known sonnets and was chosen by five anthologies. The sonnet has its own unique structure but it is also one of the most savage ones. The word “lust” did not at first have the sinister connotation it has in this sonnet; though a deadly sin in the Christianity of the Middle Ages it was synonymous with pleasure and delight. However, by the time the sonnet was written the word lust acquired the meaning of strong, excessive or inordinate desire followed, once gratified, by loathing.

When a minister in one of his sermons fulminates against lust, we are not surprised. It is, so to speak, his *métier*. But Shakespeare? There is nothing in the other sonnets to prepare us for the vehemence with which lust is denounced in this sonnet, except the similar denunciation of self-love in Sonnet 62.

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SONNET 129



Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame
Is lust in action, and till action, lust
Is perjured, murd'rous, bloody full of blame,
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust;
Enjoyed no sooner but despised straight,
Past reason hunted, and no sooner had,
Past reason hated as a swallowed bait,
On purpose laid to make the taker mad:
Mad in pursuit and in possession so,
Had, having, and in quest, to have, extreme;
A bliss in proof and proved, a very woe,
Before a joy proposed behind a dream.

All this the world well knows yet none knows well,
To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

“Th’ expense of spirit,” the opening words in this sonnet, are as striking as they are puzzling. The word *expense* was used by Shakespeare 19 times and only this once in the sonnets. It is the only place in his work where the word is used metaphorically rather than concretely. Commentators interpreted “Th’ expense of spirit” as waste of vital energy, which results in a “waste of shame.” By putting the two words “waste” and “shame” under the same yoke the Poet created a term that never existed before.

Something more can be learned from Shakespeare’s use of the word *waste*, which appears in his works 51 times. Words can be wasted, breath can be wasted, and also memory, and above all the treasure of time can be wasted by idle hours. Man can waste time but time can also waste the man. One can also make “waste in brief mortality (*Henry V*, I.ii.28).” Because the Poet was, as we shall demonstrate in the next chapter, at war with time, he was highly sensitive to any waste. In the sonnets the word *waste* appears seven times, as for example in Sonnet 30, “And with old woes new wail my dear time’s waste,” or Sonnet 77, “Thy dial how thy precious minutes waste.”

“Waste of shame” evokes the image of desolate territory—a desert inhabited by shame, possibly a non-flattering reference to the vagina. Lust is

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an action; it lasts only as long as the action lasts. The third and the fourth lines are lines of invectives; altogether nine invectives are hurled against lust. These invectives tell us what happens after lust has passed. The second quatrain repeats explicitly what was implicit in the second line. It emphasizes the brevity of the enjoyment and the guilt feelings that follow after consummation, expressed as “despised straight.” In lines 6 through 8, the use of “past reason hunted” and “past reason hated” portray the double nature of lust. One feels first hunted by it and then overcome by hatred of it. Reason cannot explain either the haunting quality of lust nor why it is so powerfully hated after consummation. “Past reason” is repeated in lines 6 and 7; it is the Poet’s term for what we call the “irrational.” The Poet then goes on to compare the person seized by a lust to a fish that swallowed bait—a highly compressed metaphor, the word fish being eliminated. A person overtaken by lust is struggling like a fish that just swallowed bait, struggling in vain to free itself from the bait.

In line 8 a paranoid idea emerges. Lust has the character of conspiracy imposed upon us by some mysterious evil designer “to make the taker mad.” The couplet emphasizes human helplessness in avoiding lust, even though we know full well its destructive power.

The Poetic impact of the sonnet is due in part to its structure: four nouns in line 1; the repetitive reversal of the words “lust” and “action” in line 2; three adjectives in line 3, followed by four adjectives in line 4. Together, they give the first quatrain a strong declarative and impersonal quality.

The second quatrain is constructed differently. It contains one sentence per line, but each sentence contains two ideas. The third quatrain is structurally similar to the second; all lines until the couplet consisting of six to nine words, while the couplet is longer, consisting of ten words. However, it is the content, the savage denunciation of lust that is most striking.

We are fortunate to have the analysis of Sonnet 129 by the distinguished linguist Roman Jakobson (in collaboration with Lawrence Jones, quoted by Rosen). In his analysis of that sonnet, Jakobson relied on the principle of binary opposition, which played so fundamental a role in his systematization of the study of sound structure in language. This binary opposition highlights the collision of pairs that provides a linguistic representation of the collision of two bodies in the act of fulfilling lust. And

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since, to Shakespeare, lust was the opposite of love, the structure of the sonnet captures and repeats the enmity between these two emotions.

Inserting vertical lines into the sonnet emphasizes the binary opposition.

- I Th' expense of Spirit / in a waste of shame
Is lust in action, / and till action, lust
Is perjured, murd'rous, / blouddy full of blame,
Savage, extreame, rude, / cruel, not to trust,
- II Injoyd no sooner / but dispised straight,
Past reason hunted, / and no sooner had
Past reason hated / as a swallowed bayt,
- 8 On purpose layd / to make / the taker mad.
- III Mad[e] in pursuit / and in possession so,
Had, having, and in quest, / to have extreame,
A blisse in prooffe / and provd, / a[nd] very wo,
Before a joy proposd / behind a dreame.
- IV All this the world / well knows / yet none knowes well,
To shun the heaven / that leads / men to this hell.
(Rosen, p. 199)

As the vertical lines show, the binary opposition is maintained until line 8. In the first seven lines the grammatical parallelism has been maintained, while line 8 is built on five dissimilar grammatical forms. Equally striking for Jakobson is the fact that this sonnet alone among the 154 contains no personal or possessive pronouns, giving the sonnet an abstract structure, making it possible for Jakobson to speak of the “poetry of grammar.” The impersonal structure of Sonnet 129 is in sharp contrast to the most personal theme of fornication and its bitter aftermath. Even the fornicator is never referred to directly, except in dependent clauses. Charles Rosen, who quoted Jakobson’s work in a chapter entitled “Concealed Structures,” noted that “the ability of the grammatical structure of language to assume a poetic life of its own is fundamental to music, which imitates this aspect of language.”

After quoting Jakobson, Rosen also suggested an alternate analysis. He noted that the four consonants of s.p.r.t. dominate the first 12 lines.

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- 1 Expencc, Spirit, waste (sp sp st)
- 2 lust, lust (st st)
- 3 Is perjurd (s p r r)
- 4 Savage, extreame, trust (s str tr st)
- 5 despised straight (sp s str t)
- 6 Past reason hunted (p st r s t)
- 7 Past reason hated (p st r s t)

Rosen differentiates between what he calls the canonical interpretation, which deals with the interrelationship between the three quatrains and the couplet, and the “microscopic analysis,” to which Sonnet 129 was subjected by Jakobson. If Shakespeare had attempted to achieve both kinds of symmetries, it would require an enormous amount of work and concentration. It is therefore likely that Shakespeare was so sensitive to language that such hidden structures occurred to him effortlessly and even unintentionally. Words occur to the Poet the way melodies occur to the composer.

A biblical passage is probably the oldest text to describe the pernicious effect of lust. Amnon, one of King David’s sons, was so vexed by his desire for his half sister, Tamar, that he fell sick: “For she was a virgin; and Amnon thought it hard for him, to do anything to her.” Following the advice of a lecherous friend, he pretended to be sick, and when King David visited him, he asked as a special favor that Tamar come and cook for him so that he can recover. King David complied, and Tamar came and cooked for him. Amnon then sent away all servants and when the two of them were left alone, the following happened.

- (11) And when she had brought them unto him to eat, he took hold of her, and said unto her, Come lie with me, my sister.
- (12) And she answered him, “Nay, my brother, do not force me; for no such thing ought to be done in Israel: do not thou this folly.

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- (13) And whither shall I cause my shame to go? And as for thee, thou shalt be as one of the fools in Israel. Now therefore, I pray thee speak unto the King: for he will not withhold me from thee.
- (14) Howbeit he would not hearken unto her voice: but, being stronger than she, forced her and lay with her.
- (15) Then, Amnon hated her exceedingly; so that the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her. And Amnon said unto her, Arise, be gone.
- (16) And she said unto him, there is no cause: this evil in sending me away is greater than the other that thou didst unto me, but he would not hearken unto her.
- (17) Then he called his servant that ministered unto him, and said, Put now this woman out from me, and bolt the door after her (Samuel II, Chapter 13).

In the biblical passage, the essence of lust is an overwhelming desire before consummation, followed by an even more powerful disgust after the sexual act has been completed. The Bible offers no explanation for the radical shift in mood.

One of the influences of Freud's ideas on our way of feeling is that we no longer feel as inimical to lust as earlier generations were. We know today that the main enemies of love are more likely to be hatred or jealousy rather than lust. The term lust connotes a powerful sexual attraction driven by hostility that takes hold of a person after the sexual act has been completed. Lust can take place between two consenting partners but is more commonly experienced in isolation. It is usually a powerful sexual attraction to a person considered a forbidden partner, as when incest is involved, or as in happened in *The Winter's Tale*, where the coveted woman was the wife of the childhood friend. (However, there is no evidence that Polixenes actually lusted after Hermione, wife of his childhood friend Leontes. Rather, the sexual attraction between the two appears to be a product of Leontes' paranoid imagination.) Within the Freudian sphere of influence, lust takes

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place within the sexual sphere of narcissism, where the partner's needs are ignored; if the welfare of the partner is taken into account, lust will not be the word chosen. Lust is the sexuality of those who cannot love.

Wilson (1966) noted that unlike most sonnets, this sonnet was not written in quatrains, conveying to us the impression of being written in one breath, the form imitating the content. Wilson also put forth the idea that Sonnet 129 comprises all the different stages of lust: the after-lust period (had), the actual experience of lust (having) and the anticipation of lust (in quest) and that the extremes of lust are felt—all these stages (to have extreme). He credits Laura Riding and Robert Graves for this observation. In the biblical account that we presented, this chronological order was followed, but it ended in disgust, avoiding repentance. In psychoanalytic terms, if the capacity for repentance is present, the person who succumbed to lust is functioning on a higher psychological level of development than the one who stops at the level of disgust.

The psychoanalyst André Green (1975) differentiated between the object of need and the object of desire. In a relationship in which need predominates the gratification of the need leads to a loss of interest in the object. In a relationship of this kind once the sexual need has been gratified the other is of no further interest. If, however, the partner is the object of desire, gratification does not lead to satiety, and no one knew this difference better than Shakespeare.

Cleopatra is clearly the object of desire and not an object of need in *Antony and Cleopatra*. As Enobarbus puts it:

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety; other women dloy
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
Where most she satisfies; for vilest things
Become themselves in her, that the holy priests
Bless her when she is riggish (II.iii.240-246).

To our knowledge no one equaled Shakespeare in describing the object of desire. What is astonishing is that the same man who wrote Sonnet 129 knew also of the bliss of which Enobarbus speaks.

The place of Sonnet 129 among Shakespeare's sonnets is a puzzle. Why should a cycle of love poems be interrupted to make room for a vehement

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denunciation of lust? If religious scruples, ideas of hell and punishment after death, were in the Poet's mind, surely this was the sonnet in which to express them. But there is no hint of religious feelings in this sonnet.

It therefore seems to us that Sonnet 129 was the result of the Poet's inability to maintain the split between love and "love's use" that the Poet tried to maintain in Sonnet 20. In our view the Poet would not have written Sonnet 129 had he been able to keep his sexual wishes out of the relationship with the Young Man. The sonnet suggests that the Poet could neither abstain nor accept his homosexual wishes.

Sonnet 129 has been placed within the series of the heterosexual sonnets devoted to the Dark Lady. The general tendency of the Poet to direct his feelings of love to the Young Man and his sexual feelings to the Dark Lady support a heterosexual reading of the poem as does phrase "waste of shame" in the first line suggesting an unflattering reference to the vagina. But if Sonnet 129 documents a moment when the Poet's deep love of the Young Man finally overcame his inhibition against desiring his beloved, then the failure of the avowal of sexual disinterest in Sonnet 20 could well account for the bitterness, rage and linguistic violence that permeate the poem. The sonnet itself gives us scant evidence as to whether lust was experienced in a homo- or heterosexual relationship, but makes it clear that sex and desire were not, for the Poet of the Sonnets, happy components of life.

We have selected these four sonnets for special consideration because they seem to us, individually and taken together, to yield an introduction to the major themes of the sonnets. We will see the Poet's war with time played out with astonishing richness. No man, one would think, can win the battle against time, but time was a worthy adversary for a pen as great as Shakespeare's and it will be left to the reader to judge who is winning. The Young Man's self-love will haunt many other poems, as will the Poet's attempt to love people other than himself. Nature, too, will return again and again, not as the goddess of Sonnet 20 but as the object of the Poet's immense affection as he describes trees, flowers and sunlight with great tenderness. In fact, we will see that it is the Poet's indisputable love of nature that makes us believe him when he says he loves the Young Man and the Dark Lady.