

THE REFINING CRUCIBLE

Shakespeare and lyric sequences in Victorian England

by

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To the memory of my grandmother,
Mary Evelyn Pridmore 1887-1960
and with gratitude to my parents

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PREFATORY NOTE

The style of presentation in this dissertation is in accordance with the Style Sheet of the Department of English, University of Tasmania.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other higher degree or graduate diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Ambrose Tansley

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ABSTRACT

Since the early years of the Victorian era, Shakespeare's pre-eminence as a dramatist has itself prompted much of the attention paid to his Sonnets, because their celebrated biographical 'hints' suggest knowledge of the 'real life' of this most universal of English creative geniuses. Indeed it was simply the fact that Shakespeare was the author of these poems that induced several influential Victorians to read them at all. Five of the major poets of Victorian England wrote lyric sequences which have suffered a like fate. Tennyson's In Memoriam, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Sonnets from the Portuguese, Christina Rossetti's Monna Innominata, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's The House of Life and George Meredith's Modern Love - all of these have been read as autobiography, as thinly disguised, or even transparent, confessions of actual experience. This dissertation takes the view that poetry must stand on its own, independent of the poets' biographies. It contends that what makes Shakespeare's sonnets and these Victorian sequences lastingly valuable is the central consciousness of each one, regarded as an artistic creation, not as an autobiographical sketch of the poet. This central consciousness, this poetic protagonist, I call the 'sequence persona'.

To demonstrate the presence of a persona proper to each of these five Victorian sequences, I have adopted a quite new critical approach. Chapter I demonstrates the existence in Shakespeare's Sonnets of what I call the Shakespearean persona. This involves close textual analysis of a number of the poems and includes some differentiation of Shakespeare's methods from

those of other Elizabethans such as Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser. Out of this comes a thesis to the effect that Shakespeare's sonnets are unconventional in their content and language because they cumulatively create an individual rather than a Petrarchan sensibility.

Chapter I offers, in itself, a contribution to the study of Shakespeare's Sonnets, but its main purpose in the dissertation is to locate a crucible in which the poetic emotions of the Victorians were refined to produce a new yield of artistic gold. Chapters II-V demonstrate the existence of an equally distinct persona, akin to that of Shakespeare's Sonnets, in each of the named Victorian sequences. I accompany this analysis with, and indeed often conduct it through, a comparison of individual Victorian poems and particular Shakespearean sonnets. The Conclusion codifies, clear of poetic analysis, the usefulness of reading these major nineteenth-century sequences with the Shakespearean model in mind, and suggests that the method adopted in this dissertation might well be used for fresh study of other less unified and less important examples of Victorian love poetry.

INTRODUCTION

Victorian poetry as a whole is often analysed for its intellectual content, or for its reflection of the anxieties of the age, but not often enough for its continuity in treatment of one of the central poetic subjects of all ages - love. Patricia M. Ball has attempted to correct this imbalance in a work she called The Heart's Events. In its suggestive introduction, Patricia Ball calls Victorian love poetry 'the poetry of relationships' and she sees the Victorians as being

fascinated by the challenge of recording the psychological repercussions when two lives are brought into intimate conjunction. The working out of such a history is compelling to these poets, as it weaves or unweaves the personalities involved and brings about a calamitous or ecstatic realisation of their own being and potential.¹

For the Victorian, Patricia Ball continues, love 'is seen both as a force and as a guiding compass in development, an agent promoting personal awareness' (p. 3). She links the Victorian poets with their Romantic predecessors in their treatment of the development of the individual to full self-consciousness. She finds (p. 7) that there are occasions in Romantic poetry

1. Patricia M. Ball, The Heart's Events: The Victorian Poetry of Relationships (London: The Athlone Press, 1976), p. 2.

where love is represented as an invasion of the personality by another, and that

there are poems where this experience has to be dealt with as a developing, or at any rate changing, situation, so that the single lyric unit comes under narrative pressure.

The result, for Patricia Ball, is 'an incipient poetry of relationships', and she concludes:

Despite the fact that the poetry of relationships is a mid-century phenomenon, a distinctively Victorian development, it is still possible and I think helpful to approach it from a Romantic direction.²

Patricia Ball's qualified introduction of her thesis ('Despite the fact ...'), its limited application ('there are occasions ...'), and her tentative phrasing ('an incipient poetry of relationships') all suggest that some further qualification of this specific link between the Romantics and the Victorians is needed. Patricia Ball recognises (p. 1) that the Victorians were 'repairing a Romantic neglect rather than following their predecessors' lead', and concedes that while 'Love is a concept potent enough in Romantic poetry ... it appears as a vision not as it may be known in the dramatic actuality of a relationship.' These admissions leave a gap between the Romantics and the Victorians that Patricia Ball never closes. Now, while the links between the Romantics and the Victorians both at the generalising level of literary history and at that of poet-to-poet influence are strong and close, there is really no need for Patricia Ball's elaborate association of the two 'generations' of poets over the question of love. The Victorians had predecessors in the poetry of relationships; they lived in the 1590s and their chief

2. The Heart's Events, p. 6.

was William Shakespeare. All of Patricia Ball's perceptive comments on the nature of the Victorian poetry of relationships apply to Shakespeare's collected sonnets. They are love poems that create and delineate an individual poetic psyche moulded by the emotions of love, and they make up a body of poetry with a sharp focus on the particularity and reality of the effect of the beloved on the poet. For Tennyson and the major Victorian love sonneteers Shakespeare's sonnets were a blueprint. They showed a poetry that would allow the poet to chart the course of a specific love relationship while still preserving a central focus on his or her individual psyche.

The general background to this claim is best established by means of a brief history of Shakespeare's Sonnets in the Victorian era. From the time when they were published (1609) until the late eighteenth century almost no-one had a good word for Shakespeare's sonnets. Even William Wordsworth, who did so much to rehabilitate the sonnet as a form, was only an ambivalent friend to Shakespeare the sonneteer. Wordsworth veered from denouncing the Dark Lady sonnets as 'abominably harsh, obscure and worthless' to declaring that 'in no part of the writings of this Poet is found, in an equal compass, a greater number of exquisite feelings felicitously expressed', and afterwards offered a late judgement that the Shakespearean sonnets were 'merely quatrains with a couplet tacked to the end; and if they depended much upon the versification they would unavoidably be heavy'.³ Wordsworth's most influential and

3. These comments by Wordsworth are all quoted by Kenneth Muir in Shakespeare's Sonnets (London: Allen & Unwin, 1979), pp. 140-41.

celebrated comment upon these sonnets was not written in prose but in his sonnet in defence of the sonnet - 'with this key / Shakespeare unlocked his heart'.⁴ This biographical weighting of the sonnets pressed heavily on Victorian criticism of them because, as H.E. Rollins was to explain,

A new era in study and criticism of these lyrics began with the publication in 1837 of James Boaden's On the Sonnets of Sh., announcing the 'discovery' of Mr. W.H. as Pembroke, and in 1838 of Sh.'s Autobiographical Poems, a book by ... C.A. Brown. Henceforth, it became almost impossible to read the sonnets for themselves, to dodge a consideration of the sonnet 'problems', and henceforth, too, 'discoveries' and interpretations abounded.⁵

This biographical criticism underlay the moral distaste for Shakespeare's sonnets that persisted through the Victorian period. In 1839 the historian Henry Hallam published an Introduction to the Literature of Europe in which he expressed the view that 'it is impossible not to wish that Shakespeare had never written [the Sonnets]', and passed the following judgement:

There is a weakness and folly in all excessive and misplaced affection, which is not redeemed by the touches of nobler sentiments that abound in this long series of sonnets.⁶

Rollins noted (p. 359) that 'Nobody could call Hallam an idiot or question his taste for poetry, so that his words were extremely influential.' Kenneth Muir takes up the story:

Carlyle declared (1840) that the Sonnets 'testify expressly in what deep waters' Shakespeare 'had waded, and swum struggling for his life'.

4. William Wordsworth, Selected Poetry, ed. Mark Van Doren (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 669.

5. Hyder Edward Rollins (ed.), A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare: The Sonnets (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1944), II, p. 358.

6. Rollins, II, p. 359.

The argument continued all through the nineteenth century. Delius (1851) argued that the Sonnets were essentially dramatic. R.G. White (1854) agreed, adding that Shakespeare wrote them as a professional for other people to use. Robert Bell (1855) admitted that all poetry is, in a sense, autobiographical [but added the rider, remarkably pertinent to the Victorian poetry of relationships, that] '... the particle of actual life out of which verse is wrought may be, and almost always is, wholly incommensurate to the emotion depicted, and remote from the forms into which it is ultimately shaped'. Masson (1856) erroneously thought that there was general agreement that the Sonnets are 'autobiographic ...'. Furnivall (1877) thought that only fools could think otherwise. Swinburne (1880) and Dowden (1881) concurred.⁷

The Victorian poets with whom we are to be concerned thought very positively about Shakespeare's sonnets. Tennyson disagreed with the father of his best friend, remarking in about 1883, 'Henry Hallam made a great mistake about them: they are noble.' Elizabeth Barrett Browning characterised Shakespeare's efforts as 'divine': 'We recognize and bless them as short sighs from thy large poetic heart, burdened with diviner inspiration!' Dante Gabriel Rossetti roundly declared that 'a Shakespearean sonnet is better than the most perfect in form because Shakespear wrote it.'⁸

Just as Shakespeare's sonnets were smothered, in the Victorian era, by a frenetic biographical industry, most of which has since been recognised by serious scholars as being without either foundation or critical utility, so the main Victorian love lyric sequences have, in their turn, been overcast by equally confusing biographical smokescreens. The biographical critics of Tennyson, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the Rossettis and George Meredith can, on the basis of historical evidence, point to

7. Muir, p. 119.

8. These comments were quoted by Rollins, II, pp. 364, 360 and 364 respectively.

specific experiences in the lives of each of these poets that almost exactly parallel those presented in their major verse sequences: In Memoriam, Sonnets from the Portuguese, Monna Innominata, The House of Life, and Modern Love. This correspondence of biographical fact and poetic fiction can sometimes be useful to those whose specific interest is the life of the poet concerned. It is much less useful, and, I submit, even irrelevant, to those whose interest is in the poetry. In this dissertation I will advance and support the thesis that each of these major Victorian sequences of love lyrics yields a distinct 'persona' independently of the biographical background. Indeed, it is of the poetic speaker, and his or her presentation of experience, that we must be aware if we are to do each sequence full justice. Shakespeare's Sonnets are the most fitting introduction to the Victorian 'poetry of relationships' not only because the Victorians so much admired him, but also because we get a sense of a Shakespearean persona from the Sonnets, be it the William Shakespeare of real life or not.

In a recent article Heather Dubrow has said of the Sonnets:

Their emphasis on the lyrical rather than the narrative or dramatic ... helps to explain ... how immediately and how intensely they evoke the speaker's feelings. The reader need channel little or none of his attention to an exposition of a situation or an exploration of the beloved's psyche: he focuses instead on the poet-lover himself.⁹

To this one might add that Shakespeare's Sonnets offer a valuable paradigm for an examination of the Victorian lyric sequences because they vivify a highly conventional and artificial genre

9. Heather Dubrow, 'Shakespeare's Undramatic Monologues: Toward a Reading of the Sonnets', Shakespeare Quarterly, 32 (1981), p. 65.

with an independent genius of expression. A hundred years ago J.A. Noble suggested that

If we could imagine the existence of a person of cultivated taste who was still ignorant of the recognised place of Shakspeare in literature, he could not pass from the sonnet work of Shakspeare's contemporaries to that of the master himself without an instant sense of an enlarged outlook, of a freer, clearer air, of a more impressive spiritual presence.¹⁰

From this rhetorically expressed but essentially correct identification of an air of individual distinction about Shakespeare's sonnets, Noble passed to an explanation of how this impression was created:

Coleridge has spoken of the 'condensation of thought' in these sonnets, Dyce of their 'profound thought,' Archbishop Trench of their being 'double-shotted with thought'; but ... the thing which gives to them their specific gravity is not what is usually understood by thought, but what may rather be described as intellectualized emotion - that is, the incarnation of pure emotion ... in a body of symbol or situation which is supplied by the intellect.¹¹

It was just this sense of a self, identified in the Sonnets by J.A. Noble and Heather Dubrow, this sense of a poetically realised persona created across a long sequence of love poems, that the Victorians took from Shakespeare. For Tennyson, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the Rossettis, and Meredith, the model of the Shakespearean sonnet sequence, with its fusion of meditative analysis and lyric reverie into 'intellectualized emotion', constituted an artistic crucible in which they could refine their amatory experiences and emotions into an aesthetic whole marked by their own thought-forms and idiom.

Critical commentary on the Victorian period often stresses the subjective trauma of those mid-Victorians who struggled to

10. In Rollins, II, p. 405.

11. Rollins, II, p. 406.

achieve a balance between their private consciences and the public debates of the day. Critics are quick to notice also the introspective flights from engagement with these public debates in a great deal of later, Pre-Raphaelite poetry. The result is often an adverse judgement of Victorian poetry based on its fragmentation. If, however, the love poetry of the period is viewed in the light of an older form, and under the gaze of that form's pre-eminent practitioner, then this poetry gains in stature and is seen to have bequeathed us a series of coherent creations deserving of at least the degree of respect accorded to earlier English love poetry. Before looking at the Victorian sequences themselves, we must first learn to see through Shakespearean eyes.

CHAPTER I

It is becoming standard practice to begin a critical commentary on Shakespeare's Sonnets by disclaiming any intention of solving, or even attempting to solve, the celebrated riddles to which the dedication by T.T. has given rise. Usually a catalogue of these conundrums then follows. The chief items are the identities of the youth and the mistress, the dating and order of the sonnets, and the precise degree of autobiographical weight the sonnets should bear.¹ Further, there are thorough accounts of the relationship of Shakespeare's sonnets to other Elizabethan sonnet sequences, and to the classical Latin, medieval Italian and French treatments of the general themes found in the sonnets.² I wish to disclaim any intention of retreading these paths of

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1. Three such approaches are J.W. Lever, The Elizabethan Love Sonnet (1956; repr. London: Methuen, 1974); Stephen Booth, An Essay on Shakespeare's Sonnets (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969); and Kenneth Muir, Shakespeare's Sonnets (London: Allen & Unwin, 1979). W.G. Ingram and Theodore Redpath, the editors of Shakespeare's Sonnets (London: University of London Press, 1964), also begin this way. My quotations from Shakespeare's sonnets will all be from their edition.
 2. Three works of this kind are Lu Emily Pearson, Elizabethan Love Conventions (1933; repr. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1966); Lisle Cecil John, The Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences: Studies in Conventional Conceits (1938; repr. New York: Russell & Russell, 1964); and J.B. Leishman, Themes and Variations in Shakespeare's Sonnets, 2nd ed. (1961; London: Hutchinson, 1963).

Shakespearean criticism. I shall limit my intrusion upon them to a consideration involving some of the sonnets of Shakespeare's English contemporaries, and concentrate on the particular mind and heart within the Shakespearean sonnets.

The enduring power and appeal of Shakespeare's sonnets derive from their disclosure of an individual sensibility. Through the twists and turns of their situations and themes the sonnets allow us to uncover a complex persona. The end result of reading the sonnets is not an objective and complete knowledge of the course of Shakespeare's love-life, although a skeletal narrative can be pieced together; it is rather an initiation into a sense of community with the poet. This is the significance of those words of Francis Meres about Shakespeare's 'sugred Sonnets among his private friends.'³ Some of these sonnets were passed around from hand to hand to make possible the sharing of this poet's way with the form so popular at the time. Shakespeare's particular 'style', if we include in that word both poetic technique and individual thought and emotion, is what his friends would have detected and remarked upon in the context of a whole tradition of love sonnet writing. To approach the sonnets in this way is not to claim any certain knowledge of Shakespeare's biography; it is only to claim that what we do know as a result of the survival of these sonnets is how Shakespeare, in particular, handled this form of composition.

In the Sonnets Shakespeare reveals on the one hand that he is a passionate mortal seeking to delineate with the utmost precision all the twists and turns of his experience, and on the

3. Quoted in Muir, p. 139.

other that he is an austere philosopher endeavouring always to grapple with mutability and to transcend it. In either guise the Shakespeare of the sonnets is ever concerned with the interaction of the concrete and the abstract, the particular and the universal. As a friend and lover, he reasons for a recognition of the relative nature of Truth and Love - things which, while comprehensible as absolutes, are reflected in human experience only through the twin mirrors of expediency and point of view. As a philosopher, Shakespeare sensuously evokes the operations of mutability upon Nature and from his imaged illustrations derives lessons of intimate personal significance.

This balance between the ideal and the real is by no means unique to Shakespeare, for indeed it has been the common coinage of philosophers and poets at least since Plato. What is unique to Shakespeare among English love sonneteers of the 1590s is the bias in his sonnets in favour of the real. This bias is not simply in favour of a 'realistic' view of the loved one, although the familiar vein of 'My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun' does include this; it is rather a bias in favour of the accurate and intimate reporting of the poet-lover as he seeks to define love through anatomising its intricate workings upon his inner self. Where the conventional sonneteer was able only to impose some individual mood or personal poetic language upon the received formulaic situations of the love sonnet tradition, Shakespeare refashioned the traditional motifs after his own image. Sidney had quickened the Petrarchanism of the Astrophel and Stella sonnets with his own lively wit and Spenser pressed upon the Petrarchanism of the Amoretti a bitter-sweet melodiousness of his own. Shakespeare, however, in his most

individual sonnets, wrote love poetry which only borrowed certain Petrarchan mannerisms to adorn his idiosyncratic intensity and vision.

When Sidney and Spenser spoke of love in their sonnets, it was as an abstraction, a universal power, over and above their particular experience of loving. It was an ideal upon which they could call for help and of which they could hope eventually to partake. The early printed texts would suggest that these poets repeatedly capitalised 'love', and they certainly used it as a focus for their laments and imprecations. It served them as a foil for their particular predicaments so that any sonnet was able to achieve a poetic tension by an appeal from the actual promptings of sexual desire and emotional longing to an abstraction that was the summation of these needs. This process involved the subterfuge of retreating from any examination of the human relationship between lover and beloved. In its place was substituted an address to Love, often through the intermediary retinue of classical deities whose characters and emblematic behaviour patterns could be manipulated to serve the poet's own ends. In this way all frank discussion of emotions properly held between two lovers could be transformed into a series of conceits. When Shakespeare, on the other hand, spoke of love in his sonnets, it was as a connecting bond between human beings of equal individuality, a bond requiring the investment on either side of a series of emotions that could be separately weighed and tested. In Sidney and Spenser the subjective presence in the sonnets is a formal thing involving the articulation in the first person, and with more or less wit and grace, of conventional attitudes of the frustrated lover figure. In

Shakespeare's sonnets the subjective presence is a reasoning individualised intelligence revealing itself through its meditations.

Shakespeare did not achieve this rarefied pre-eminence without serving an apprenticeship. There are indications within the sequence that he worked from the simplest level of love sonnet writing, through an intermediate stage, to his own inimitable height. Sonnets 153 and 154 are standard, indeed routine, sonnets in which Shakespeare reworks the matter of older poems. The story of Cupid giving his torch into the keeping of nymphs while he slept, and of their heating the water of a bathing pool with it in a vain attempt to quench the source of desire, came originally from a Greek epigram of the fifth century A.D. Before being taken up by the Elizabethans, it had been translated into Latin, Italian, and French and included in an anthology which was widely disseminated across Europe.⁴ The Elizabethan love sonneteer Giles Fletcher picked up the germ of this story and worked it into number 27 of his Licia sequence, transferring the power from Cupid to his mistress who, by bathing in a fountain, incited its waters to love her and imparted to them the power of her worth that it might thereafter 'all diseases quicklie ... remoove.'⁵ Fletcher's couplet concludes:

Then if by you, these streames thus blessed be:
(Sweet) graunt me love, and be not woorse to me.⁶

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4. The myth and its literary history are recounted in detail in The Sonnets of Shakespeare, ed. R.M. Alden (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1916), pp. 369-71, and more briefly in Ingram and Redpath, p. 354.
 5. An observation by Sidney Lee cited in Alden, p. 371.
 6. In Elizabethan Sonnets, ed. Maurice Evans (London: Dent, 1977), p. 168.

Shakespeare took the Cupid story from some version of the original epigram of Marianus, adopted the same orientation towards the mistress and the healing power of the waters as is present in Fletcher's sonnet, and wrote two variations upon the theme.

Of the two Sonnets (153 and 154), 154 is the more general. It takes eleven and a half lines to retell the classical story, including the rider concerning the waters' therapeutic power. Only in the last two and a half lines does the poet intrude:

But, I, my mistress' thrall,
Came there for cure; and this by that I prove:
Love's fire heats water, water cools not love.

Sonnet 154 is clumsy and plodding. Its conclusion has little organic connection with its narrative. The single isolated phrase, 'my mistress' thrall', gives the lady of the poet's devotion a weak and insufficient connection with the myth. The penultimate line is awkward and question-begging, and the ugly phrase, 'this by that I prove', obscures more than it clarifies. The final line is impotent, since its bald juxtaposition of a statement of fact from the narrative against the interpretative concluding allusion to the poet's ardour succeeds neither in its ostensible role of making a profound statement nor in providing an arresting conclusion for the poem as a whole.

Sonnet 153 is a more telling variation because here the classical myth is recounted in the first six and a half lines with the rest of the octave adding the therapeutic twist to the story. The poet then has the whole sestet to make his more personal point. This is more effective than the personal application of the myth to the poet's own situation in Sonnet 154, since the connections between the myth, the poet's mistress, and his own pangs of love are much more coherently and intricately

interwoven.

But at my mistress' eye Love's brand new fir'd.	9
The boy for trial needs would touch my breast.	
I, sick withal, the help of bath desir'd,	
And thither hied, a sad distemper'd guest	12

Line 9 gives the mistress an integral narrative function within the myth and line 10 does the same for the poet so that by line 11, in contrast to the stage reached by line 11 of Sonnet 154, the poet is able to reinforce the connection between past and present with an extension of his own predicament.. Indeed, lines 11 and 12 of 153 are the best two lines in either sonnet because they generate intensity and expectation by highlighting the subjective experience of the speaker. The double ring of 'distemper'd' enriches the poem by including both physical and emotional distress; the general healing properties of the 'cold valley fountain' of the myth, there a cure for the 'strange maladies' that afflict all men, are also exploited as an anodyne for the particular and conventional pain from unfulfilled sexual desire that racks the speaker here as it does the swains of the love sonnet tradition at large. The couplet of 153 is far more arresting than that of 154 because it can claim to be the culmination of both the narrative and its appropriation by the poet-lover - 'But found no cure: the bath for my help lies / Where Cupid got new fire - my mistress' eyes.' The final reference to the mistress' eyes picks up that in line 9 and so unites the narrative of the myth with a standard Petrarchan topos. This couplet brings all the narrative and thematic strands together and thereby becomes a vital force in this sonnet rather than remaining the spare limb that the couplet of 154 resembles.

Even with its added smoothness and finish, Sonnet 153 tells us nothing about the inward life of the speaker-poet and can never have been meant to do so. The shift at the turn from third-person narrative to first-person confession is but a switch from one level of objective interest to another. Shakespeare's injection of direct emotion at lines 11 and 12 does not throw light upon his own thoughts and feelings, but rather, suggests the conventional predicament of the poet-lover inflamed by his mistress' eyes and dependent upon them for release from the fires of desire. These two sonnets rely on the narrative of the myth to fix the reader's attention, and on the poet's deftness and ingenuity (in redirecting the myth towards the conventional predicament of the Petrarchan lover) to excite the reader's admiration. These ends are unexceptionable in the context of the broader love sonnet tradition but they are uninteresting when set alongside all that Shakespeare was to do with the love sonnet when writing at his best.

The predicament of the speaker of Sonnets 153 and 154 is at the heart of the love sonnet tradition. As Maurice Evans has remarked, the love sonnet is the most committed form of the poetry of frustration:

The Elizabethan sonneteer inherited ... not only the basic Petrarchan situation of the adoring lover and the unresponsive mistress but also a large number of traditional topoi inseparable from it, which offer elaborations upon the central theme and time-honoured modes for their expression.⁷

Sir Philip Sidney expressed the position of the typical love sonneteer seeking to win the Lady's favour in his first Astrophel

7. Elizabethan Sonnets, p. viii.

embellishment for his 'invention' of appealing to the Lady's eyes against her heart. The background to Shakespeare's first quatrain in Sonnet 132 is the haughty mistress whose disdain is the lover's torment and who loomed so large in Spenser's Amoretti. Shakespeare remains within this established view of the mistress while reworking it to novel effect.

Thine eyes I love, and they, as pitying me, -
 Knowing thy heart torment me with disdain -
 Have put on black, and loving mourners be,
 Looking with pretty ruth upon my pain.

Shakespeare's quatrain particularises and makes personal where Sidney spoke in general terms, and yet both poets are manipulating the same imagery to pay the Lady a formal compliment. Sidney's couplet speaks for all the swains of the love sonnet tradition; Shakespeare's quatrain provides an instance of how one such suitor might use the 'invention'.

Again, Shakespeare, in his sonnet, praises the Lady's eyes by contrasting them favourably with the sun and stars. Sidney had found the star image so suitable to the vision of the beloved he wished to create that he called his speaker 'Astrophel' (star-lover), and the Lady 'Stella' (star). Shakespeare's recourse in 132 is to Venus, the evening star:

And truly not the morning sun of heaven
 Better becomes the grey cheeks of the east,
 Nor that full star that ushers in the even
 Doth half that glory to the sober west
 As those two mourning eyes become thy face.

Shakespeare's neat play on the identity of sound between 'morning' and 'mourning' is still evident in the written sonnet as both meanings obtain - the one to the sun and the other to the Lady's eyes. This pun links the speaker's lyric celebration of the mistress's beauty to his self-regarding plea for her favour in a

smooth and subtle image. Thus the pun gives Sonnet 132 a much greater unity than is evident in Sidney's Sonnet 7. Sidney's excuse for the black colour of Stella's eyes is that, 'if no vaile these brave gleames did di[s]guise. / They sun-like should more dazle then delight'. This use of the sun image is more obviously ingenious but less persuasive and intimate than Shakespeare's.

Shakespeare's success with this conventional form of sonnet, of which invention rather than realism is the hallmark (Sidney's protest, 'looke in thy heart and write' notwithstanding), can be seen in the way he uses his syntax to rhetorical effect. Sonnet 132 ends with an invocation to the Lady followed by the speaker's first-person response:

Oh, let it then as well beseem thy heart
To mourn for me, since mourning doth thee grace,
And suit thy pity like in every part.
Then will I swear Beauty herself is black,
And all they foul that thy complexion lack.

Here Shakespeare returns to his opening hypothesis, which he has substantiated in the second quatrain, and beseeches the Lady to win for her heart the beauty that her eyes have achieved through taking pity on his pain and dressing in mourning. If this condition be fulfilled, the poet declares, he will proclaim the Lady to be the type of Beauty and, by so doing, vindicate her black eyes before all the world, making their colour a virtue rather than a fault. In Sidney, the final twist to the argument of the seventh sonnet is more distanced from both the Lady and the speaker himself. Also, Sidney approaches the Lady's beauty through Nature -

Or would she her miraculous power show,
That whereas blacke seemes Beautie's contrary,
She even in blacke doth make all beauties flow?

(pp. 4-5)

The result of this indirect approach is a more artificial appearance to the sonnet and a lesser degree of intensity than Shakespeare created in Sonnet 132.

Shakespeare's sonnet is not really any less artificial than Sidney's; it only appears so because the poet has framed his argument, his flow of invention, in much more intimate terms. Even within this reworking of a common Petrarchan motif, Shakespeare has drawn sparingly on the vocabulary of the ideal that is the staple diet of the conventional love sonneteer. The intimacy of Sonnet 132 does not derive from any personalisation of the Lady, who remains a Petrarchan 'object', but is created by the speaker's first-person involvement in the construction of the poem's argument. In Sonnet 132 Shakespeare improves upon the kind of treatment of the theme of the Lady's black eyes evident in Sidney's Sonnet 7 by making the relationship between himself and the Lady as important as the courteous Petrarchan compliment. To achieve this result he had to intervene more directly at each stage in the argument than was incumbent upon Sidney, who was able to hide behind the rhetorical consideration of an objective problem. Shakespeare's most emphatic and self-assertive intervention comes in the couplet, where he relies on the traditional aesthetic in favour of 'fair' over 'black' complexions in women for the impact of his offer personally to overturn it in the case of his Lady - 'Then will I swear Beauty herself is black, / And all they foul that thy complexion lack.'

Shakespeare was not always content, however, to let the traditional aesthetic remain unchallenged.⁹ In Sonnet 127 he

9. In his notes to Sonnets 21 and 130 Alden gives numerous examples of the kind of description of the beloved against which Shakespeare is reacting. Among them is Spenser's *Amoretti* 15 (see *Elizabethan Sonnets*, p. 120).

also uses the image of the Lady's eyes as 'mourners', but he does so within an attack on the cosmetic creation of a false blonde complexion by those not naturally so featured.

In the old age black was not counted fair,
 Or if it were it bore not beauty's name;
 But now is black beauty's successive heir,
 And beauty slander'd with a bastard shame:
 For since each hand hath put on Nature's power,
 Fairing the foul with Art's false borrow'd face,
 Sweet Beauty hath no name, no holy bower,
 But is profan'd, if not lives in disgrace.
 Therefore my mistress' eyes are raven black,
 Her brow so suited, and they mourners seem
 At such who not born fair no beauty lack,
 Slandering creation with a false esteem:
 Yet so they mourn becoming of their woe,
 That every tongue says beauty should look so.

The couplet of this sonnet turns upon just the kind of compliment to the Lady as did that of sonnet 132. The beauty of the Lady is such that her black eyes set a new standard of Beauty. The compliment of 132 was, however, Petrarchan in its inspiration. There the beloved's eyes were in mourning for the pain the Lady's cold heart was causing the poet; in sonnet 127 they are not in mourning for the poet at all, but rather for the other ladies of dark complexion who cannot rest until they have substituted a false blonde beauty for their own 'brunette' looks. In sonnet 132 the speaker was seen elaborating an argument designed to win the Lady to his own emotional interest. Here, in 127, the speaker pays no attention at all to the Lady as the object of his self-interested desire, but enlists her in his critique of the slavish valuation of 'fair' over 'black'. This sonnet is a polemical one, designed to argue a case for a particular aesthetic rationality. The speaker is employing all his invention in the service of a point that he holds dear. In the octave the poet is present not as the sugar-tongued suitor of Sonnet 132, but as a controversialist to whom the correcting of a

hypocritical fashion is a matter of immediate concern. In the sestet he speaks for the Lady, using her as a particular instance of his earlier, general case.

The intrusion of the poet as speaker of the sonnets proves to have a specific purpose. Mildly in 132, and more forcefully in 127, Shakespeare reveals a concern to make the particular experience of the lover predominate over abstract formulae. The real rather than the ideal is for Shakespeare the basis of love poetry. This characteristic of the speaker of the Sonnets makes him a persona, an identifiable individual. It can be illustrated more cogently through consideration of two other 'Dark Lady' sonnets, 131 and 137, which, to the distinction between the good 'fair' and the unfavoured 'black' complexions, add a moral distinction between outward beauty and inner virtue. Sonnets 131 and 137 show the speaker concerned to resolve the dilemma posed by the presence of physical beauty and moral ugliness in the one mistress. Yet there is a marked difference in power between 131 and 137, because in 131 Shakespeare is writing within the bounds of conventional expression while in 137 he has achieved a freer, more intensely individual style.

Sonnet 131 is, like 132, addressed directly to the Lady. Despite the tender cadences of its second couplet, which derive from the speaker's exertion of first-hand pressure on his statement of a conventional devotion, the first quatrain of 131 does little more than restate the standard opening gambit of innumerable earlier love sonnets:

Thou art as tyrannous, so as thou art,
As those whose beauties proudly make them cruel;
For well thou know'st to my dear dotting heart
Thou art the fairest and most precious jewel.

It is with the second quatrain that the real interest of the sonnet begins.

Yet in good faith some say that thee behold 5
 Thy face hath not the power to make love groan:
 To say they err I dare not be so bold,
 Although I swear it to myself alone. 8

Lines 5 and 6 break the implicit assumption of the conventional love sonnet that the mistress's beauty is self-evident, a fact. Shakespeare here raises the simple common-sense wisdom that recognises individual tastes and their variety. In keeping with the departure these lines represent from the conspiracy among love sonneteers to idealise, Shakespeare expresses this perception as a worry, a disquieting realisation. The combination of line 5's 'Yet in good faith' and line 6, 'To say they err I dare not be so bold,' completes the recognition of objective variance in standards of beauty with a subjective contemplation of this by the poet himself. The timidity of these lines, conveyed through a process of qualification, serves only to accentuate our familiarity with the speaking voice of the poet. In this quatrain the speaking voice of the poet is so insistent in its manipulation of the problem of judging correctly the quality of the Lady's beauty that the Lady becomes of secondary importance. In the third quatrain this first-person intrusiveness on the speaker's part continues, although he does, in the middle lines of the quatrain, lapse into a Petrarchanism:

And to be sure that is not false I swear, 9
 A thousand groans but thinking on thy face
 One on another's neck do witness bear
 Thy black is fairest in my judgment's place. 12

The rhetorical presumption of intimacy by the speaker in the phrase 'And to be sure' is matched in line 12 by the confidence of his use of the phrase 'my judgment's place.' This readjustment

of the complexion controversy examined in a very much more traditional language in sonnet 132 is based not solely on the desire to compliment the Lady but also on the poet's conviction that the exercise of personal judgement is the best basis for a profession of love.

In the couplet to 131 the complexity of the sonnet is markedly increased. The douzaine introduced Shakespeare's concern with the real rather than the ideal through a consideration of the proverb that 'Beauty is in the eye of the beholder'. The couplet adds to this the distinction between beauty of face and beauty of character - 'In nothing art thou black save in thy deeds, / And thence this slander as I think proceeds.' Shakespeare has covered a lot of ground between the mention of the word 'black' in line 12 and its recurrence here in line 13. The former is limited to physical appearance but the latter is resonant with moral suggestion. The clause 'as I think' in line 14 continues the speaker's intrusion into the sonnet as a particular consciousness capable of particular judgement outside the formulaic style of utterance adopted unthinkingly by a traditional sonneteer. Its role in the couplet is important also because it makes the attack on the Lady of line 13 far more damaging than the critical Petrarchan rhetoric with which the sonnet began. The couplet shows the speaker deliberately offering the Lady a very barbed compliment. He excuses her from the general denigration of her beauty by others only by introducing a far more radical kind of fault, moral ugliness.

In sonnet 137 this moral blemish in the Lady's character becomes the principal subject of the speaker's meditations.

In this, Shakespeare is entirely outside the conventional Petrarchan conception of the Lady. His realignment of the ideal and the real has taken the most savage form possible because the mistress is now the antithesis of a goddess, be she ever so proud and disdainful of the lover's suit: she is reduced to the status of a whore and is openly branded as such. Shakespeare's treatment of the inconstant mistress is still within the reach of conventional topoi. It is his evaluation of her role in the poet's inner life that is all his own. A comparison with Spenser will illuminate this point. Spenser, in his 37th Amoretti sonnet, speaks of the 'net of gold' under which the Lady attires her 'golden tresses,' that she might 'men's frayle eyes ... entangle in that golden snare' and 'craftily enfold theyr weaker harts'.¹⁰ Shakespeare, when describing his own enslavement to the whore-mistress speaks of the love-god as having wrought 'hooks / Whereto the judgment of my heart is tied.'

If we turn to the wider picture of these variations on the trap topos, the differences between Spenser and Shakespeare become clearer. Both poets deal with the enslavement of the lover to the Lady's charms, and the difference in the moral status of the two beloveds is not immediately relevant. Spenser begins his 35th Amoretti sonnet thus:

My hungry eyes, through greedy covetize
still to behold the object of their paine,
with no contentment can themselves suffice,
but having pine and having not, complaine.

(p. 128)

10. Elizabethan Sonnets, p. 129. As with Sidney, all quotations from Spenser are from the Evans anthology.

And Shakespeare's 137 begins,

Thou blind fool, Love, what dost thou to mine eyes,
That they behold, and see not what they see?
They know what beauty is, see where it lies,
Yet what the best is take the worst to be.

Spenser is anxious to describe as fully as possible the predicament of the infatuated swain, and his treatment of the inner experience of enslavement is refracted through the external lenses of the lover's physical eyes. Shakespeare is directly concerned with the inner mechanism of the enslavement. Spenser's lines describe a lover looking upon his beloved and they depict the intoxication of desire in outward terms. Shakespeare probes more philosophically, weighing the experience with an analytical, psychological logic based on the language of perception. Both poets employ a variation of the eye-topos in which it is the lover's eyes rather than those of the beloved that are the subject of the sonnet. Spenser builds the tension of his quatrain on the dichotomy between the pleasure of gazing upon the beloved and the frustration created by that very sight. Shakespeare makes a better-pointed metaphor of the eyes by playing on the gap between physical sight and moral insight. For Shakespeare, the dichotomy is between the consciousness of what constitutes moral beauty - namely virtue - and the physical desire to regard as beautiful a mistress who is lacking in virtue.

Spenser worked with the traditional Platonic and medieval Christian philosophic vocabularies. Plato distinguished between the objects of empirical experience and the 'Forms' that are their ideally real prototypes; the medieval Christian teachers distinguished between the vanities or inessentials of this world and the alleged reality of God and the next world. In the

concluding couplet to Amoretti 35 ('All this world's glory seemeth vayne to me, / and all their showes but shadowes saving she'), Spenser exposes the shadowy vain glory of all but the mistress, who is the only substantial reality. Shakespeare's concluding couplet to Sonnet 137 ('In things right true my heart and eyes have err'd, / And to this false plague are they now transferr'd'), deals less with the descriptive matter of these distinctions than Spenser's, and shows the poet seeking to understand and order the relative truth or falsity of particular experiences by the application of a rigorous philosophic-cum-psychoanalytic self-examination. It is just this judgemental aspect of Shakespeare's style, with its stress on the importance of particular experience and the drive to place it in the setting of a personal morality and sexuality, that constitutes a major 'Shakespearean' element in Shakespeare's sonnets. This habit of thought and method of self-expression come to mark off the Shakespeare of the Sonnets from his Petrarchan contemporaries.

Sonnet 137 relates not only to the Petrarchan tradition but also to the anti-Petrarchan tradition in which the Lady is persistently insulted. Shakespeare transcends this negative tradition in much the same way as he went beyond the Petrarchan conventions. The anti-Petrarchist focused as much on the Lady as their opposites did, but from a negative standpoint. The Lady as a figure was debased; indeed, certain Italian sonneteers also accused their mistresses of promiscuity.¹¹ Shakespeare does not stop at identifying this fault in the mistress, nor at

11. For a detailed treatment of this negative tradition see Pearson, pp. 202-22.

reproaching her for it. He goes on to analyse his own responses and reproach himself.

Why should my heart think that a several plot	9
Which my heart knows the wide world's common place?	
Or mine eyes, seeing this, say this is not,	
To put fair truth upon so foul a face?	12
In things right true my heart and eyes have err'd,	
And to this false plague are they now transferr'd.	

The speaker's vituperative exaggerations of the woman's fault in this sonnet are prompted as much by the disgust he feels at his own gullibility and inability to resist her appeal to his sexuality as they are by moral horror at her promiscuity. This is borne out by the note Ingram and Redpath append to line 14's phrase 'this false plague' which they (rightly, I believe) interpret to mean 'plague of deception':

Wyndham confusingly takes the 'plague' to be the woman, which was, in any case, unnecessary, since there are plenty of parallels in the Sonnets for the construction 'this false plague', e.g. 51. 1: 'slow offence' (offence of being slow), and 127. 4: 'bastard shame' (shame of being a bastard).¹²

Sonnet 137 then, builds onto the characterisation of the mistress as a whore an examination of the poet's capacity for true or right seeing, in both the physical and metaphysical senses of the phrase. Its core is the motif of the universal, 'truth', being twisted in its translation into the solid realities of life. The poet is angry because he has failed to connect his understanding of truth, conceived in the abstract, to a true thing and has anchored it instead to a false woman.

Shakespeare's refusal to write in the idealist Petrarchan style, his coupling of an alternative 'realist' point of view

12. Ingram and Redpath, p. 316.

as a love sonneteer with an audible first-person voice as a lover, and his preference for a language of analytical precision over the formulaic vocabulary of the love sonnet tradition – all these are again evident in Sonnets 138 and 152. Sonnet 138 ('When my love swears that she is made of truth ... '), exhibits the subtlety of thought and refinement of expression of which Shakespeare's persona is capable in the Sonnets, but it is too well known and too often analysed to need detailed consideration here.¹³ Sonnet 152 will serve equally well to illustrate the high point of Shakespeare's refashioning of the Petrarchan model of the love sonnet that he inherited, and to which, as was seen in the case of Sonnet 132, he could do more than justice.

In Sonnet 152 the speaker is mulling over the fact of his relationship with his mistress with such an intensity of 'intellectualised emotion' that he, rather than the mistress, becomes the subject of the reader's thoughts.

In loving thee thou know'st I am forsworn;
 But thou art twice forsworn to me love swearing, –
 In act thy bed-vow broke, and new faith torn
 In vowing new hate after new love bearing. 4
 But why of two oaths' breach do I accuse thee,
 When I break twenty? I am perjur'd most:
 For all my vows are oaths but to misuse thee,
 And all my honest faith in thee is lost. 8
 For I have sworn deep oaths of thy deep kindness –
 Oaths of thy love, thy truth, thy constancy;
 And to enlighten thee gave eyes to blindness,
 Or made them swear against the thing they see: 12
 For I have sworn thee fair, – more perjur'd eye,
 To swear against the truth so foul a lie!

13. Patrick Cruttwell, in The Shakespearean Moment (1954; New York: Random House 1960), pp. 13–14, gave a very serious reading of Sonnet 138. Philip Martin argued for a much lighter reading in Shakespeare's Sonnets: Self, Love and Art (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 49–55.

The opening phrase of the sonnet, with its present participle 'loving' and the direct object 'thee', suggests a degree of intimacy and direct involvement greater than that present in the more static and distant pose of the traditional suitor. The rest of the first line, 'thou know'st I am forsworn', reminds the mistress of the poet's sacrifice for her and reveals his own recognition of the cost of his passion. It creates a sense of complicity between the two lovers which assumes a reality of experience behind the factual statement. The reader is thus informed, at the outset, of narrative facts and acquainted with a particular attitude to these facts on the part of the poet. Each of Shakespeare's highly individual sonnets exhibits this delicate counterpointing of factual statement and interpretative reaction. The result is that sentimentality is minimised by the overlaying of emotion with intelligence. This point is illustrated by the rest of the first quatrain, where Shakespeare speaks in cold and accusatory tones, delineating the mistress's compound betrayals of her husband and the poet through the finality of the verbs 'broke' and 'torn', and through the cumulative uses of 'new' to convey her fickleness. In this opening quatrain Shakespeare manages to blend the emotion of regret with the mathematical impersonality of his logic, largely through the effectiveness of the present participles: 'swearing', 'vowing' and 'bearing'. These 'dying falls' soften somewhat the hard tenor of the argument of the quatrain. This softening effect of the gerund is more noticeable in Sonnet 87, 'Farewell - thou art too dear for my possessing,' and its use there is echoed in Sonnet 152. In Sonnet 87 the gerund is used repeatedly to end a line and the feminine endings created thereby add poignancy

to the poet's tone. The reliance on the soft cadences of the gerunds in these two sonnets, and others besides, would seem to indicate that the Shakespeare of the Sonnets, when writing as a lover, felt the emotional pull of his involvement with the mistress or the friend, even as he endeavoured to analyse quite clinically the precise balance between truth and falsity in his relationships.

This emotional pressure is made evident in the second quatrain of Sonnet 152, which rhetorically holds up the opening analysis for renewed inspection and offers an emotional resolution. The movement from the theoretical question of lines 5 and 6 to the lament of line 8 is created by the shift away from an address to the mistress and towards a self-communing meditation. At line 6 Shakespeare stops the tallying of broken vows, which looks like mean point-scoring, and turns to a recognition of the fact that it is not how many times one is forsworn that matters, but that one is forsworn at all. This recognition is seen in Shakespeare's attempted reduction of the numbering of broken vows to an absurdity in line 6 and his simple statement, 'I am perjur'd most', is uttered more for the speaker's own sake than to give the mistress any satisfaction. It leads on to the admission on the speaker's part that 'all my vows are oaths but to misuse thee,' whereby the poet confesses to having systematically deceived the mistress. This personalisation of guilt excludes the mistress from consideration and in the following line the poet ruefully laments 'And all my honest faith in thee is lost.' Here the speaker regrets, not that he broke faith with the mistress, but that he broke faith with his knowledge of Truth in the matter of his relationship with the mistress.

The poet relives Adam's fall from grace in his own loss of innocence, of his 'honest faith', but he does so, not in meta-physical, but in concrete terms. With this interpenetration of abstract knowledge and actual experience, Shakespeare has made the speaker of his sonnets a living presence and transcended the usual method of sixteenth century love sonneteers. In the couplet the speaker's self-focus is again revealed - 'For I have sworn thee fair, - more perjur'd eye, / To swear against the truth so foul a lie!' This couplet gathers together all the strands of imagery and meaning in the Dark Lady sonnets examined so far. The use of 'fair' in line 13 and the allusion to her moral blackness in line 14 recall the complexion debate of Sonnet 131, its general extension in 127, and its moral dimension in 137. The pun on 'eye', meaning organ of sight and the speaker in the first person, also looks back to that sight-topos of the complexion sonnets and overlays it with the moral quality of the speaker's intrusions to judge both his mistress and himself, most trenchantly in 137 and 152 itself. The use of 'sworn', 'perjur'd', and 'against the truth' indicates again the speaker's insistence on evaluating the compromises forced upon his integrity by his experience; and it is this meditative analysis of both abstract themes and his own psychology that brings the speaker of the Sonnets into being as an individual.

Shakespeare's special gift, then, his uniqueness as a love sonneteer, lies in the degree to which he intensifies his poetry by concentration on the palpable emotions of a particular relationship. The result of this concentration is the emergence of the speaker of the separate sonnets as a distinct persona across the sequence as a whole. While this has been demonstrated

in the 'Dark Lady' sonnets already examined, something must yet be said about Shakespeare's revelation of his sonnet persona through his celebrated love poems to his young male friend. Here, as in the sonnets to the mistress, Shakespeare makes the reality of his involvement with the one he loves his point of departure, rather than relying on a received body of idealism.

Among the many sonnets to the young man there are some which are much closer to the Petrarchan methods and themes than others. The conventional theme of the lover's suffering caused by the absence of the beloved will serve to illustrate the point. In Sonnet 51 Shakespeare is writing in the Petrarchan style and is, like Sidney in Astrophel and Stella 84,¹⁴ relying on a conceit to hold emotion. In Sonnet 50, however, Shakespeare invests the conceit of the highway and the lover's journey, present in Sidney's sonnet, with a first-person intensity that shifts the focus of the sonnet from the virtuosity of the poetry to the personal experience of the speaker. This Shakespearean sonnet of absence is a confession by an individual. Sidney's speaker, on the other hand, never emerges from behind the Petrarchan facade of his conventional diction and turns of thought. Again, a comparison of Shakespeare's Sonnet 29, 'When, in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes' with Surrey's 'Set me whereas the sun doth parch the green,'¹⁵ shows how Shakespeare's use of an insistent and emotionally intense personal tone of voice vivifies conventional thought. Both Shakespeare and Surrey claim that

14. Elizabethan Sonnets, p. 38.

15. Poems of the Elizabethan Age, ed. Geoffrey G. Hiller (London: Methuen, 1977), p. 32.

only the thought of the loved one can compensate the speaker for life's trials. The great difference between the two is in the development of each of these sonnets.

Set me whereas the sun doth parch the green,
 Or where his beams may not dissolve the ice,
 In temp'rate heat, where he is felt and seen;
 With proud people, in presence sad and wise;
 Set me in base or yet in high degree,
 In the long night or in the shortest day,
 In clear weather or where mists thickest be,
 In lost youth or when my hairs be grey;
 Set me in earth, in heaven, or yet in hell,
 In hill, in dale, or in the foaming flood;
 Thrall or at large, alive whereso I dwell,
 Sick or in health, in ill fame or in good:
 Yours will I be, and with that only thought
 Comfort myself, when that my hap is nought.

When, in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes,
 I all alone beweepe 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 rememb'red such wealth brings
 That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

Surrey, in his douzaine, presents a catalogue of the many possible physical and social situations in which he might find himself during life; only in the couplet does he turn to the beloved who is his chief blessing. Shakespeare includes in his octave a stridently personal outcry against his fate and a confession of the envy of others that racks his discontented state of mind. The speaker's inner life is the raison d'être of this octave, and his woes are sufficiently realised to free the sestet (a third quatrain and a couplet) for presentation of the saving influence of the friend as a process, a further first-person experience. While Surrey's is by no means a negligible sonnet,

I have introduced it to show the specific increase in first-person presence that Shakespeare habitually adopts as a method. I would also suggest that his sonnet is the more powerful because of this filtering of the simple Petrarchan proposition through the inner life of the speaker.

A return to the most complex of Shakespeare's subjective sonnets addressed to the young man will fill out the delineation of the sequence persona begun in the analysis of 'Dark Lady' sonnets. Sonnets 40 and 42 turn upon another Petrarchan thought, the total subservience of the lover to the beloved. In these sonnets, however, Shakespeare has so transformed the theme that it is recognisable only in the slightly precious tone of the concluding couplets. The poet is not languishing in a state of frustration from unfulfilled sexual desire, the pain of which stimulates the imagery of torture and suffering common in the conventional sonneteer's rhetoric. He is rather attempting to hold within the bounds of the sonnet form a psychological account of the 'eternal triangle'. The situation behind these two sonnets is the youth's sexual indulgence with the poet's mistress. They reveal a love that will suffer any indignity rather than lose the friend's affection. The speaker is prepared to indulge in intricate sophistries if he can thereby lull into quiescence any hostility to himself born of his friend's guilt. Doing so, he can be seen to minimise or even discount his own sense of loss and betrayal. The speaker's impotence in the relationship, his superior conscience and greater need, and his subtle sense of personal shame - all these emerge from, and are expressed through, Shakespeare's analytical twists of thought and language. The complexity of the emotional self-

consciousness achieved by the speaker in Sonnets 40 and 42 can be seen in his extensive use of the ambiguity that surrounds the word 'love', with its double meaning of both his own emotion and the mistress herself.

This portrait of the Shakespearean sonnet persona leaps into life in the first quatrain of Sonnet 40. It revolves around the identification of the interests of the speaker and those of his friend - which is indeed the core of all the sonnets to the friend.

Take all my loves, my love, yea, take them all:	1
What hast thou then more than thou hadst before?	
No love, my love, that thou mayst true love call -	
All mine was thine, before thou hadst this more.	4

The very symmetrical structure of these lines emphasises the speaker's deliberate sophistries and the emotional sacrifices that the lines conceal or at least contain. In lines 1 and 3 the speaker plays on the ambiguity of 'love' to offer his friend his mistress in a demeaning bargain, trading sex for affection. The speaker trades his mistress's body (assuming that it is his to trade) for the friend's continued company. The speaker's rhetorical catching of his breath in the middle of line 1 produces a tone of desperate magnanimity through which he can rise above the sordid implications of the barter. Behind the vehement cadences of line 1, created by the repetition of the three key words, can be heard the genuine generosity of one whose love is greater than his pride. In line 3 the speaker turns the tables on his friend. He matches the harsh insult to his mistress - involved in the distinction between 'love' and 'true love' when the former refers to her - with the reproach of the friend that arises from contrasting her feigned emotion with the speaker's

own true emotion. Lines 2 and 4 balance the cynicism of the other lines with a tender sadness that is more relevant to the speaker than to the friend. Line 4 is a confessional renewal by the speaker of his established commitment to the friend - a renewal which the latter is, on the evidence of the quatrain as a whole, unable to appreciate or even understand.

This balance of direct address to the friend and self-communion by the speaker is continued in the rest of the douzaine:

Then if for my love thou my love receivest,	5
I cannot blame thee, for my love thou usest, -	
But yet be blam'd, if thou this self deceivest	
By wilful taste of what thy self refusest.	
I do forgive thy robbery, gentle thief,	
Although thou steal thee all my poverty	10

The sexual innuendo of lines 5 to 8 combines with the emotional resonances that cling to the word 'love' to produce a blend of meaning that is both unpleasantly demeaning to the speaker and a testament to his satiric intelligence. The very act of composing this sexually barbed language attracts attention, resulting in a deeper appreciation by the reader of the speaker's desperation. Indeed, the strong stress on the sexual connotations of these lines has the surprising effect of making the speaker more, rather than less, important. The speaker's real, inner, responses to his situation emerge from behind this facade of casuistry in the soft and poignant phrases of lines 9 and 10. The indulgent tone of these lines is swamped by the pathos of the speaker's position. There is emotional cost to the speaker in relinquishing rights over both mistress and, more particularly, friend, and this cost becomes far more significant than any dramatic role the mistress and friend fulfil.

The poet ends Sonnet 40 with an aphorism - 'and yet love knows it is a greater grief / To bear love's wrong than hate's known injury.' This theme of the difficulty of emotionally sustaining a wrong done one by somebody one loves is renewed in the opening lines of Sonnet 42:

That thou hast her, it is not all my grief;	1
And yet it may be said I lov'd her dearly:	
That she hath thee is of my wailing chief,	
A loss in love that touches me more nearly.	4

In line 1 the speaker admits to some chagrin at the loss of his mistress to his friend and for a moment, in line 2, reveals the personal value he placed on that relationship. This line has a self-communing air that brings us closer to the speaker in himself rather than in direct relation to the friend. In line 3 the speaker picks up the idea of love's 'greater grief' from Sonnet 40, now revealed as the loss of the friend's free and unclouded affection. In speaking of this the speaker discloses his priorities as he places the friend far above the mistress. The balance of emotional confession and intellectual analysis of human psychology that is the basis of this first quatrain is of great interest to the reader because it brings him closer to the speaker as a subjective presence. With writing like this we are a long way from the Petrarchan method: we are in touch with a new poetic style as well as with a more complex narrative background.

The second quatrain of Sonnet 42 shows the speaker reworking the logic by which he will excuse his friend and mistress, but doing it in order to convince himself rather than them:

Loving offenders, thus will I excuse ye: -	5
Thou dost love her because thou know'st I love her;	
And for my sake even so doth she abuse me,	
Suffering my friend for my sake to approve her.	8

These lines do more than express an argument about the couple's self-interest and specious exploitation of the speaker: they also bring out his groping for a rationale of what has befallen him. This meditative tendency in the sonnet is strengthened in the lines that follow, becoming most powerfully evident in the last two lines of the third quatrain.

If I lose thee my loss is my love's gain;	9
And losing her, my friend hath found that loss:	
Both find each other, and I lose both twain;	
And both for my sake lay on me this cross.	12

Here the speaker completes his second-quatrain analysis of the basic rationalisation behind both sonnets: that the liaison of the friend and the mistress is justified by the claim that each can make to be taking advantage of the speaker's often-expressed refusal to preserve his rights over their desires if his surrender will make them happy. Ostensibly, the friend and the mistress can claim to be indulging in their liaison for the speaker's sake, as loving each other because of their common connection with him. The speaker's act of self-denial behind these arguments is now expressed as a significant event in his personal experience. To the light-heartedness of the dramatic statement in lines 9 and 10 from Sonnet 40 ('I do forgive thy robbery ... '), lines 11 and 12 of Sonnet 42 add a new and more intense personal sadness. The speaker is acknowledging the great loneliness that has come to him as a result of his attempt to please both those whom he loves. The couplet that now follows - 'But here's the joy: my friend and I are one. / - Sweet flattery! then she loves but me alone!' - is a transparent fabrication by the speaker, and it does nothing to ease away the heaviness of lines 11 and 12.

The importance of these two sonnets from the 'Friend' series, as with those examined earlier from the 'Dark Lady' group, lies in their first-person style. In all these sonnets and the many others like them in the sequence, Shakespeare has used a reasoned examination of emotion to delineate the particular sensibility of his speaker. The narrative 'facts' are worked over in the speaker's mind and that process creates a distinct persona which the reader can recognise as an individual. In all these sonnets the matter has been love and sex, the speaker being revealed in his role as a lover. However, before beginning this analysis of individual sonnets, I identified two sides of the Shakespearean persona - the lover and the philosopher. These two labels suggest the breadth of Shakespeare's vision in the Sonnets, a vision which encompasses not only direct emotional and sexual relations but also philosophic thinking about life and love, and theoretical statements about the function of poetry. Analysis of the sonnets examined so far has brought forward those features of Shakespeare's love poetry that distinguish him from his more predictably Petrarchan contemporaries and bring out the leading features of his individuality. This individuality in the persona of the Sonnets needs now to be seen from a wider, 'ideological' perspective. For this we must return to the beginning of the sequence and the 'procreation' sonnets that first invited Shakespeare to re-consider, through this medium, the nature of time and the theme of mutability. Shakespeare quite probably had this topic set for him in the form of a commission or request to write some sonnets to a noble scion

urging him to beget an heir.¹⁶ The first seventeen poems in Shakespeare's Sonnets as published by Thorpe are pieces of advice to a young man to beget an heir and thereby leave the world a copy of his own beauty, but they show Shakespeare warming to his task and developing a more general argument against Time which allows him to oppose himself, as lover and as poet, to mortality. The philosopher in the Shakespearean sonnet persona can best be approached by tracing the emergence of his metaphysic in these procreation sonnets.

The opening two lines of the first sonnet are an overture to discourse on Time and mortality. They are directed towards the young man but already have a wider significance:

From fairest creatures we desire increase,
That thereby beauty's rose might never die

Shakespeare begins as he means to continue, by speaking of particulars that are themselves invested with an air of universal significance. The speaker does not open with any specific reference to his friend, on the contrary, he invokes the general category of 'fairest creatures' and in line 2 gives them the responsibility for preserving a universal, 'beauty's rose', from the fate of mortal roses. The force of this idea can be seen in the emphasis Shakespeare gives to the word 'thereby' which makes the perdurance of beauty in the abstract contingent upon the self-reproduction of a select group of particulars. The point being, of course, that 'beauty's rose' will depend for

16. This is only a hypothesis and it is true that Shakespeare would have been familiar with passages from Erasmus which could serve as an inspiration for this theme of procreation (Muir, p. 35; Lever, p. 190); but the remarkable treatment of the themes of Time's power and mutability in these first seventeen sonnets examined in my text does not depend on the hypothesis and is not diminished by the literary parallel.

its survival upon the youth's begetting an heir. The first two lines show the speaker achieving a personal reworking of a past Platonic tradition.¹⁷ Shakespeare is concerned with universality, with a conception of beauty over and above beautiful things, but he connects it, as is ever his wont, with something real and beautiful. As the sonnet continues we come to understand the power of Shakespeare's advance upon tradition and we begin to see where he is heading. Lines 3-4 ('But as the riper should by time decease / His tender heir might bear his memory') show Shakespeare recognising the need to continue the existence of the best forms of beauty and recognising, too, that this will only be achieved by procreation. The narrowing of Shakespeare's vision to a sharp focus on the earthly manifestation of a non-idealist universality, is especially evident in lines 7-10, where, after reproaching the youth for not producing an heir, the speaker complains:

Making a famine where abundance lies,	7
Thyself thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel:	
Thou that art now the world's fresh ornament	
And only herald to the gaudy spring ... '	10

The use here of words like 'famine' and 'abundance' and the natural imagery of lines 9-10 indicate that for Shakespeare in the Sonnets beauty as a universal quality is meaningful because it can be made visibly manifest or, alternatively, denied visible substantiation in the physical world. This shift in vision from the older Platonic idea is neatly encapsulated in the opening of line 13, 'Pity the world', which imbues the speaker's address

17. A straightforwardly Platonic reading of these lines is recorded by Alden, p. 17. My reading owes much to J.B. Leishman's chapter entitled 'Shakespeare's "un-Platonic hyperbole"' in Themes and Variations in Shakespeare's Sonnets, especially pp. 151 and 163.

to the youth with concern for the continuance of 'beauty's rose', thereby unifying his speculative turn of mind and his specific orientation to the particular call of the youth's charm.

In the course of the Sonnets Shakespeare turns again and again to nature to illustrate both the empirical and the metaphysical dimensions of his thought. It is from this use of nature imagery that we come to detect his personal traits of thought within the canvassing of less personal themes. The opening quatrain of the second sonnet is a case in point, because here Shakespeare begins his treatment of the theme of the ravages of time upon the beauty of earthly and human life:

When forty winters shall besiege thy brow,	1
And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field,	
Thy youth's proud livery, so gaz'd on now,	
Will be a totter'd weed of small worth held	4

While Shakespeare is certainly attempting to scare the young man, to bludgeon him into begetting an heir, by the recitation of the horrible ravages of time upon his beauty, this is not all that is happening in these lines. Repeatedly in these early procreation sonnets Shakespeare's language carries a degree of imaged emphasis on mortality and mutability that indicates meditative involvement beyond any commissioned purpose. The violence of the image in the first two lines of this quatrain, in both its pictorial and symbolic dimensions, suggests that the speaker himself feels the impact of mutability just as keenly as he seeks to make the young man feel it. This graphic image brings the speaker and the thought closer together. In the second line the word 'beauty', which was possessed of such a powerful resonance in the first sonnet, is here rendered almost insignificant in the context of the 'forty winters' digging deep trenches in its field. The next two lines continue the theme

with the contrast of 'proud livery' and 'totter'd weed' being directed at the youth whose garments as well as body would come within the sweep of the mutability image. These two lines are, however, differently weighted from the first two. Here the stress is on the interpretative vision rather than the pictorial. The phrases, 'so gaz'd on now' and 'of small worth held' capture the complete devaluation of appearance that time effects. Where the first two lines reflect Shakespeare's recognition of what happens to beauty, these next lines show us that he was equally aware of the accompanying shift in the world's judgement of beauty that has declined. In this first quatrain the imagery and the structure of the argument reveal that the speaker has profoundly internalised the very lessons he wishes to teach another.

After this meditative opening the poet dwells on the necessity for the young man to produce a child, and he concludes:

How much more praise deserv'd thy beauty's use	9
If thou couldst answer: 'This fair child of mine	
Shall sum my count, and make my old excuse', -	
Proving his beauty by succession thine!	12
This were to be new made when thou art old,	
And see thy blood warm when thou feel'st it cold.	

G. Wilson Knight takes exception to the couplet of this sonnet, claiming that poetically the thought never really carries conviction, and that it is not good enough for its context.¹⁸ If, however, the degree of subjectivity behind these early sonnets that I am arguing for be allowed, then the couplet of Sonnet 2 is not impotent. The couplet ('This were to be new made when thou art old, / And see thy blood warm when thou feel'st it cold'),

18. G. Wilson Knight, The Mutual Flame (London: Methuen, 1955), p. 79.

suggests that the poet has internalised the process so vitally described in the opening quatrain. Shakespeare pairs verbs and nouns by contrast; 'see' being followed by 'feel'st', and 'warm' by 'cold.' The difference in each case is strikingly effective. Line 13 effects a transition, from advocating the objective continuation of a particular personal beauty that dominates his advice to the young man, to the expression in line 14 of just how this act of procreation might provide subjective recompense for having aged. Line 14 carries great conviction because the sight of a vibrant child alive to the quickening influences of life is contrasted with the recognition of the ebbing of vitality in the ageing father. Shakespeare has so vivified the hypothesis that it resonates with a first-person intensity. It is through this kind of emotionally quickened thought that the speaker emerges in these procreation sonnets.

Sonnet 5 begins with Shakespeare gazing at the youth through the mirror of time:

Those hours that with gentle work did frame	1
The lovely gaze where every eye doth dwell	
Will play the tyrants to the very same,	
And that unfair which fairly doth excel	4

Despite the awkwardness of pressing 'unfair' into service as a verb, these lines are tender in tone, with the speaker as admirer, using his diction and rhythm to soften the severity of thought. The link between the beauty of the youth and the time it took nature to create it on the one hand, and the inevitable decline of that beauty with the passing of more time on the other, is forged with solicitous authority. With the second quatrain, however, the philosophical side of the speaker predominates as he passes beyond the youth, and his interest

in the fate of the youth's beauty, to present a sensuous but chilling meditation on the metaphysical thesis behind the first quatrain:

For never-resting time leads summer on	5
To hideous winter and confounds him there,	
Sap check'd with frost, and lusty leaves quite gone,	
Beauty o'ersnow'd and bareness everywhere	8

As in the opening quatrain of the second sonnet, Shakespeare here exerts rhetorical force upon his theme by infusing graphic description with philosophical and emotional conviction. The thematic self-sufficiency of these lines, their discrete completeness of imagery, and their independence from the advice to the youth that controlled the first quatrain - all suggest that the lines reflect an individual response on the part of the speaker to all manifestations of mutability. By selecting words that import a strong element of personification into the working of time upon nature, and by charging that personification with a surge of malevolence, Shakespeare has invested his generalisation with subjective intensity. This quatrain as a poetic unit is so strikingly different from the surrounding argument and style of the sonnet that, building on the hints of the first two sonnets and the fleeting metaphorical allusions to nature in the third, it reveals an awareness of mutability and a habit of articulating this consciousness through reference to the particulars of nature as specific traits of the Shakespearean sonnet persona.

My hypothesis is further strengthened by Sonnet 12 where the momentary, arresting insight of Sonnet 5 is expanded and held across the whole sonnet. Where Shakespeare spoke in the third person in the mutability episode of Sonnet 5, in Sonnet 12 he takes up the first-person voice and thus openly reveals his direct involvement with the theme. Sonnet 12 is, in a way, a

pivotal sonnet in the collection because it reveals three central, personal aspects of the sequence persona. The first is this theme of mutability which the speaker feels keenly in terms of his own mortality and that of the youth. The second is his affection for the youth as depicted in the major middle group of sonnets. The third is Shakespeare's search for some other certainty to set against that of mortality, the principal contenders being love and poetry.

The entire octave of Sonnet 12 is given over to the kind of illustration of Time's power over nature that was employed in lines 7 and 8 of Sonnet 5 - 'Sap check'd with frost, and lusty leaves quite gone, / Beauty o'ersnow'd and bareness everywhere'. Here, in Sonnet 12, Shakespeare not only accumulates visual images of decay and death but enlivens them with an insistent use of the first-person pronoun that both accentuates their immediacy and imbues them with significance for human life.

When I do count the clock that tells the time,	1
And see the brave day sunk in hideous night;	
When I behold the violet past prime,	
And sable curls o'er-silver'd all with white;	4
When lofty trees I see barren of leaves,	
Which erst from heat did canopy the herd,	
And summer's green all girded up in sheaves	
Borne on the bier with white and bristly beard	8

The first line sets up a direct link between the poet and time so that they are protagonist and antagonist from the start, with the one presented to us consciously observing and tallying the depredations of the other on all of nature. The ominous suggestions of this first line are made firm in the second where Shakespeare not only records the most obvious work of time - the shift from day to night - but fills it out with the malevolent associations that man has always placed on the shift. In line 2

there is a further reminder of the conscious control exercised by the speaker over his presentation of the mutability theme, as the adjective 'hideous' from Sonnet 5 (there applied to winter) is now applied to night, and the emotional resonance of 'lusty leaves' from Sonnet 5 is renewed in 'the brave day' of Sonnet 12.^o Time is thus evoked in its essence at the beginning of the sonnet and then systematically observed working upon the particulars of nature. These descriptive images are affecting, and they suggest the speaker's involvement with his theme, particularly in lines 7 and 8 where he brings man and nature together - 'And summer's green all girded up in sheaves / Borne on the bier with white and bristly beard'. The sonnet is, however, unified by the verbs, which hold the consciousness of the speaker before us. In the octave they are verbs of observation ('count', 'see', 'behold'), but at the turn of the sonnet the speaker moves to an inward meditative form of self-expression - 'Then of thy beauty do I question make / That thou among the wastes of time must go'. The construction 'do I question make' parallels that of the first line, 'I do count' and adds to physical sight a speculative element. The speaker is dominating this sonnet, and even though he here returns to the youth, he does so for his own emotional reasons rather than to further a commissioned task.

The next significant addition to this personal involvement of the poet in his subject matter comes in Sonnet 15 where Shakespeare substantially repeats both the matter and structure of Sonnet 12 but at a more theoretical, less simply pictorial level. In both quatrains of the octave of Sonnet 15 the speaker

moves from external observation to meditative interpretation. The increase in direct metaphysical reasoning in Sonnet 15 over Sonnet 12 can be seen in the second quatrain where the language of Sonnets 5 and 12 is exploited not only for its application directly to nature but also for its metaphorical application to human life:

When I perceive that men as plants increase, 5
Cheer'd and check'd even by the selfsame sky,
Vaunt in their youthful sap, at height decrease,
And wear their brave state out of memory 8

With line 8 this octave has reached the concept of oblivion, previously caught in Sonnet 12's phrase 'wastes of time', and here, through the man-centred drift of the imagery, this concept embraces the general fact of the disappearance of all individuals from the collective human memory. The level of the speaker's speculation in this octave is higher than that of Sonnets 5 and 12 because in addition to placing himself in a direct relation to time, the speaker is adopting a universal point of view, speaking for everyman.

In the sestet, after the turn of the sonnet, Shakespeare applies this general principle of mutability to the mortality of his young friend. In Sonnet 15, however, there is a difference from the presentation of this consideration in Sonnet 12. The speaker considers the friend's mortality as part of his process of philosophical speculation.

Then the conceit of this inconstant 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 ...

Here it is not only we who observe the speaker applying his recognition of mortality to the friend; the speaker observes himself in this act. This increase in self-consciousness becomes

quite explicit in the final couplet, where the speaker's recognition of his use of 'the conceit of this inconstant stay' is complemented by a further reference to his own poetic power - 'And all in war with Time for love of you, / As he takes from you I engraft you new.' With this couplet Shakespeare has gone beyond his original purpose, by offering what is tantamount to an alternative to the youth's begetting an heir: his own power as a poet, writing with love, as a means of immortalising the youth.

The first-person presence of the speaker of the sonnets is now fully realised, as he is self-consciously a love poet writing for himself as much as for others. This self-consciousness is plain in Sonnet 17 where it is interwoven with the motif of procreation by the use of a strong thread of emotion. As Sonnet 17 opens, Shakespeare has returned to the point at which he concluded 15, and the first quatrain now is a tender soliloquy;

Who will believe my verse in time to come?
If it were fill'd 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, -

here, and in each of the following two quatrains of the sonnet, the speaker considers the usefulness of his own poetry as a means of immortalising the youth. His poetic self-consciousness is emphasised by his rhetorical denigration of its power to do the youth full justice, and also by his quite detailed vision of the reception that his poems will meet in the future.

So should my papers, yellow'd with their age,
Be scorn'd, like old men of less truth than tongue,
And your true rights be term'd a poet's rage
And stretch'd metre of an antique song

In the couplet that follows - 'But were some child of yours alive that time, / You should live twice - in it and in my rhyme' - Shakespeare neatly returns to the theme of procreation while not dropping his role as the youth's defender.

Sonnets 15 and 17 bring the procreation group to a close. The simple theme of the youth begetting an heir has been overtaken in the poet's mind by the more complex one of the power of his poetry to do battle with time on the youth's behalf. Mutability and poetry are now both subject to love, and in the rest of the sonnets concerning the young man the speaker continually reworks this more personal handling of the question of the youth's survival beyond the span of earthly life. In Sonnet 18, for example, Shakespeare begins in his self-conscious vein asking, 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?', and, after considering the operations of Time on such an ephemeral instance of natural beauty, he concludes with a renewal of his conviction that only his own poetry has real power against time: 'So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, / So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.' In Sonnet 19 the speaker picks up the violent imagery of the earlier sonnets to present more forcefully both the danger threatening the youth and the defiance he offers 'Time' in his role as a poet.

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-liv'd phoenix in her blood;
 Make glad and sorry seasons as thou fleets,
 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: -
 Oh 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 themes and techniques of Sonnet 19 suited Shakespeare's metaphysical convictions, his conception of poetry, and his inner emotional life, and he reworked them repeatedly in the sequence.

Sonnet 55 recapitulates the confident tone of Sonnet 19, containing both its violent descriptions of time's power over earthly things and the linking of Shakespeare's desire to immortalise the youth with his conviction that his poetry alone can accomplish the task. The octave of Sonnet 55 begins with a clear assertion by the poet of the confidence he has in his work - 'Not marble, nor the gilded monuments / Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme'. Shakespeare steals a march on the builders and sculptors as he shows their works falling victims to the ravages of time, unlike his poetry, which will survive:

... you shall shine more bright in these contents
 Than unswept stone besmear'd 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.

Here the persona of the Sonnets is present as a polemicist - convinced of the strength and power of his love and his poetry. Shakespeare's creation of his persona is not a static one. The persona as a complete personality has varied responses to his experiences and presents them as the changing manifestations of an individual mind rather than as fixed in themselves. Sonnet 65 contains the rose of beauty from the very first sonnet, the vehemence of the second and of Sonnet 19, the general perspective on mutability from Sonnet 15, and the speaker's particular cherishing of, and fear of losing, the young man. Holding all these elements together is the first-person consciousness of the speaker, both in his self-communing philosophical mood and in his role as loving friend.

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea, 1
 But sad mortality o'ersways their power,
 How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,
 Whose action is no stronger than a flower? 4
 Oh how shall summer's honey breath hold out
 Against the wrackful siege of battering days,
 When rocks impregnable are not so stout
 Nor gates of steel so strong but time decays? 8
 Oh 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? 12
 Oh none, unless this miracle have might -
 That in black ink my love may still shine bright.

Even though this sonnet is still treating of the metaphysical sweep of the speaker's view of life and time, it does so with the soft and intimate cadences of the speaker's voice in the analytical-emotional sonnets examined earlier. It adds to the portrait of the sequence persona by strengthening the personal tone behind the concern with the fate of the young man.

There are other sonnets, however, that avoid completely any residual discussion of the implications of the procreation theme and concentrate firmly on the inner life of the speaker. The presence of the speaker is most palpable when he drops the special pleading for his poetry's power against time. Sonnet 64 is, in its first ten lines, very like the octaves of Sonnets 12 and 15, with a catalogue of particular instances of Time's ravages on material things and the forecast of Time's effect on the youth. Such an application of the speaker's thoughts to the friend does come but it moves much further into the heart of the speaker than do the returns to the youth in the two earlier sonnets:

When I have seen by Time's fell hand defac'd	1
The rich proud cost of outworn buried age;	
When sometime lofty towers I see down raz'd,	
And brass eternal slave to mortal rage;	4
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:	8
When I have seen such interchange of state,	
Or state itself confounded to decay,	
Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminare -	
That Time will come and take my love away.	12
This thought is as a death, which cannot choose	
But weep to have that which it fears to lose.	

In sonnets 12 and 15 the chilling thought that beset the speaker was that the friend would go the way of all the other mortal and mutable objects of the earth. The fear was objectively cast in the light of a personal application of a philosophic proposition. Here in Sonnet 64, however, the chilling thought is the simple one of line 12 - 'That Time will come and take my love away.' The couplet then reinforces this poignant emotional statement of foreboding - 'This thought is as a death, which cannot choose / But weep to have that which it fears to lose.' The analytical turn of phrase brings us back to the style of the speaker's examination of his emotional relationship with the young man and suggests strongly that the speaker of the Sonnets, as lover of the friend and of the 'Dark Lady', and as a philosopher of mutability, is a unified individual sensibility.

This importing of an emotional resonance in the couplet of an otherwise philosophical sonnet can be seen in several other sonnets. Two examples will suffice. In Sonnet 66 Shakespeare opens with a cry - 'Tir'd with all these for restful death I cry' - and goes on to list eleven instances of life's imperfection, all beginning with 'And'. The anaphora spreads the vehemence of the poet's disgust with life across the separate grievances.

At line 13 Shakespeare repeats his cry, 'Tir'd with all these, from these would I be gone', but turns back upon the contemptus mundi vein with the last line's powerful caveat - 'Save that, to die, I leave my love alone.'

A still more forceful example of the presence of the sequence persona in a mutability sonnet is in number 73.

That time of year thou mayst in me behold	1
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang	
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,	
Bare ruin'd choirs where late the sweet birds sang:	4
In me thou see'st 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:	8
In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire	
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie	
As the death-bed whereon it must expire,	
Consum'd with that which it was nourish'd by:	12
This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong	
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.	

The first quatrain of this sonnet is directly in the line of those sonnets in the procreation group in which mutability was described in terms of its operation on the particulars of nature. Here, however, there is no need to hypothesise a metaphoric application of this principle to human life on the basis of the intensity or sensuous concentration of the imagery; the speaker himself now claims direct identification with nature. The whole quatrain is a metaphor of external emptiness and ruin meant to re-create objectively the subjective condition of the speaker. This self-conscious internalisation of external imagery continues throughout the sonnet, helped by the marking phrase, 'In me thou see'st ... '. The language of the couplet, for all its emotional protestation, has the same intellectual poise that marked the first group of sonnets I examined, those spoken by the sequence persona as a lover. Here the reversed application

of the mutability theme, in which it is the speaker who is to die and the friend whose feelings are to be wrought upon by contemplation of that prospect, is an example of how intensely the speaker feels his own mortality and how skilful he is in handling the psychological presentation of abstract philosophical themes. Throughout Sonnet 73 the concentration upon the speaker himself, both as the subject of the experience of mortality and the object of interpretative comment, renders inescapable the conclusion that there is within the Sonnets a persona in a new 'Shakespearean' sense, far beyond the model of the Petrarchan lover.

The predominant characteristics of the persona of the Sonnets are a dedication to the recording of experience rather than of idealist formulae, and a recognition that this fidelity to life can be achieved only by a degree of honesty in the appraisal of love and the confession of personal emotions hitherto unknown to the English love sonnet sequence. Shakespeare has made his sequence persona credible by balancing his language of analytical intelligence against a language of lyric reverie. The former enabled him to avoid the flat Petrarchan beloved and suitor and substitute more rounded participants in the relationships of the Sonnets. The latter enabled him to validate his metaphysical presentiments continually by clothing them in a sensuous form recognisable to all. The main fact about the Shakespearean sonnet persona is not either of the languages in which he speaks, but that he speaks at all. Shakespeare may have been recording his own experience in a directly autobiographic sense, or he may have been embroidering it for the sake of creating fiction, or again, he may have been deliberately

obfuscating it for reasons of propriety and diplomacy. However, the crucial thing is that he created a single speaking voice behind the Sonnets that is a recognisable individual. In each of the chapters that follow I shall be delineating the sequence personae behind certain Victorian love lyric sequences in much the same way as I have done here with Shakespeare's Sonnets. My thesis is that such a process is possible; that is, that there can be detected in the Victorian sequences an individual speaking voice that could not have emerged in the genre had there not been the Shakespearean model.

CHAPTER II

At first glance it may seem strange that Tennyson's In Memoriam is the first Victorian sequence examined for its Shakespearean persona when it is not a sonnet sequence at all. In Memoriam is included because its speaker, the 'I' of the poem, constitutes the short answer to 'the most important critical question about In Memoriam ... in what sense do the 133 separate sections, ranging in length from 12 lines to 144 lines, ... [form] a whole, a poetic unity, a poem?'¹ Tennyson emphatically denied that the poem was an actual autobiography and claimed:

There is more about myself in Ulysses, which was written under the sense of loss and that all had gone by, but that still life must be fought out to the end. It was more written with the feeling of his [Arthur Hallam's] loss upon me than many poems in In Memoriam.²

Tennyson thought In Memoriam 'a very impersonal poem as well as personal', and considered it 'rather the cry of the whole human race than mine.'³ I see no need to quarrel with Tennyson's

1. Christopher Ricks, Tennyson (New York: Macmillan, 1972), p. 212.

2. Quoted in The Poems of Tennyson, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Longmans, 1969), p. 859. All references to, and quotations from, In Memoriam are to the Ricks edition.

3. Ibidem.

expressed wish to distance himself as an individual from the speaker of In Memoriam. The surest way of coming to an appreciation of the intrinsic character of In Memoriam is to accept Arthur Hallam's death as the inspiring occasion of the poem and leave aside the delicate interconnections between its details and the actual emotions of the man Tennyson, much as critics are now recognising they are forced to do in the case of Shakespeare's Sonnets. Discussion can then begin from the fact of the literary creation left to us. I now wish to suggest that In Memoriam, as a body of lyrics both amatory and philosophic, is itself best understood by means of an account of the emergence of its first-person speaker, its persona in a Shakespearean sense.

This approach to In Memoriam, taking it as a composite portrait of a single speaker drawn both from individual lyrics and from the body of lyrics regarded as a single unit, is not idiosyncratic; it can be seen to square with the general development of criticism of In Memoriam in the twentieth century. T.S. Eliot encapsulated this view of the work in his judgement that

In Memoriam is the whole poem. It is unique: it is a long poem made by putting together lyrics, which have only the unity and continuity of a diary, the concentrated diary of a man confessing himself. It is a diary of which we have to read every word.⁴

J.H. Buckley has expressed a similar view:

[In Memoriam] describes the loss of hope and the recovery of assent, the reassertion of the dedicated spirit; it grounds a new faith on the persistence of the remembered past; and it freely reorders literal facts to achieve its psychological pattern, to illustrate 'the growth of a poet's mind' or, as Tennyson called it, 'the way of the soul.'⁵

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4. T.S. Eliot, 'In Memoriam', in Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 243.
 5. Jerome Hamilton Buckley, Tennyson: The Growth of a Poet (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 108.

Buckley complemented these descriptive comments with the conclusion that

Since the way of the soul is neither direct nor entirely consistent but beset by waverings and alternatives, the unity of the poem as a whole derives less from its large loose argument than from the intensity and often the confusion of its single subject.⁶

Christopher Ricks's comment that Shakespeare's Sonnets are important both as a source and as an analogue for In Memoriam⁷ can be supported by an appreciation of how its form is able to suggest the conception of the work common to Eliot and Buckley. As Joanne Zuckermann explains:

the love poem which most pervasively influenced In Memoriam, which we know that Tennyson read with special attention during the period of its composition, and which may even have helped to suggest its form, are [sic] undoubtedly Shakespeare's Sonnets.

Both the Sonnets and In Memoriam are series of lyric poems in a continuously used metrical form, in which a story is discerned through the lyric utterances rather than related in narrative form. In creating such a series, Tennyson has, as it were, accidentally stumbled upon an ideal solution to the problem of devising an appropriate form for a long poem, in an age which, if anything, rather overvalued the spontaneity of the brief lyric outburst. ... Tennyson, however, has achieved perhaps the most perfect compromise between lyric spontaneity and major constructive art in In Memoriam, by taking a large group of highly personal poems, commenced without any view to publication, and arranging them in a series which must be read as a carefully structured whole. One of the few models which could really have helped to suggest such a solution is that of the sonnet sequence.⁸

This reading gains support from the history of the gestation of the poem and from Tennyson's comments on it. In his headnote to In Memoriam (pp. 856-57) Christopher Ricks outlines two stages in its production. Tennyson, it appears, began writing elegiac lyrics from the time of Arthur Hallam's death, and between 1833 and 1849 wrote more at some times than at others. This desultory

6. Buckley, p. 112.

7. The Poems of Tennyson, p. 860.

8. Joanne P. Zuckermann, 'Tennyson's In Memoriam as Love Poetry', The Dalhousie Review, 51 (1971), pp. 203-04.

composition of the sections gives credence to a 'process' view of the work which underlines its reflection of stages of emotional change and growth, 'The Way of the Soul'. Then, from 1849, when Tennyson agreed to consider printing the lyrics, until the publication of the completed whole in May 1850, he worked on the lyrics more as 'artefact', consciously forging a work which could be offered to the public. His own remarks on the poem confirm this history:

The sections were written at many different places, and as the phases of our intercourse came to my memory and suggested them. I did not write them with any view of weaving them into a whole, or for publication, until I found that I had written so many.⁹

There should not, then, be any conflict between critics who wish to regard In Memoriam as 'developmental' and those for whom it is 'architectural'.¹⁰ Indeed, as Alan Sinfield argues, the twin attitudes - 'process' and 'artefact' - behind the poem are both present in the poem itself. Sinfield quotes section XXI ('I do but sing because I must, / And pipe but as the linnets sing'), and section CXXVIII ('all, as in some piece of art, / Is toil coöperant to an end'), to illustrate the emotional spontaneity and careful artistic design that together account for In Memoriam.¹¹ In the analysis of In Memoriam that follows I will be using the model of the Shakespearean sequence persona, a speaker who is both a lover and a philosopher, to bridge the

9. Quoted in The Poems of Tennyson, p. 859.

10. This distinction by James R. Kincaid, along with the one between 'process' and 'artefact', is explained by Joseph Sendry in 'In Memoriam: Twentieth-Century Criticism', Victorian Poetry, 18 (1980), pp. 108-09.

11. Alan Sinfield, The Language of Tennyson's 'In Memoriam' (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), p. 17.

gap between the poet as 'linnet' and as artificer in Tennyson's poem. Just as Shakespeare's separate sonnets add up to more than the total of their specific themes by yielding a persona, so the separate sections of In Memoriam disclose a persona who is not Alfred Tennyson but an artistic creation.

The Tennysonian persona of In Memoriam is possessed of a great fund of simple ardours which, when directed outwards towards the friend, produce devotion, loyalty and a tendency to hagiology. Inwardly, the speaker's desire for emotional and spiritual security results in a constant effort to bring his irrepressible emotional temperament into line with his equally inescapable conscience. Further, like the Shakespearean persona, the speaker of In Memoriam is acutely conscious of the passing of time. He fears its impact upon the grief that is his last link with his dead friend. He is also a visionary, reliant upon the symbolic suggestiveness of nature and upon faith in the immortality of the soul for deliverance from the trauma of bereavement that has overwhelmed his everyday experience. Like the Shakespearean sonnet persona, the speaker of In Memoriam, in his role as a lover, is concerned to evoke the particular intimacy of his association with his friend; and as a philosopher he is even more anxious than his Shakespearean forerunner to place his particular experiences in the setting of a universal and absolute truth.

The In Memoriam persona in the aspect of lover has both a specific and general link with his Shakespearean counterpart. Joanne Zuckermann has identified and interestingly explored a direct link between sections LX-LXV of In Memoriam and the stance

adopted by the Shakespearean speaker as a lover. After giving in outline the various love situations to which the Tennysonian speaker likens his own, all of which are based on a spirit 'of the utmost humility and self-abnegation', Joanne Zuckermann explains:

None of this is literally appropriate to Tennyson's situation. Hallam has not 'deserted' him, ... he has been snatched away by death. Unlike the highborn lover and the public man, he had no opportunity to make the false but romantically generous choice and count the world well lost for love. But an exclamation at the end of lyric LXI makes us recognise, early in the group, the provenance and nature of these emotions, and recall the situation in which they were literally appropriate:

I love thee, Spirit, and love, nor can
The soul of Shakespeare love thee more.

It is almost as though Tennyson wishes at this point to render absolutely overt a resemblance which is present throughout the section in tone, emotional quality and increased archaism of diction, but is not elsewhere thrust upon our attention by close verbal parallels or direct allusions. Thus alerted, we remark the similarity of the deserted girl of LX, all humility, yet still 'Half jealous of she knows not what / And envying all who meet him there', to the Shakespeare of Sonnets 57 and 58, who dares not chide the beloved for his voluntary absences, but must 'Like a sad slave stay, and think of naught / Save where you are how happy you make those'.¹²

To this specific and conscious allusion to Shakespeare on Tennyson's part, I should like to add an analysis of several sections of In Memoriam which will illustrate the more general and yet more personal debt that Tennyson owed to the Shakespeare of the Sonnets. When discussing Shakespeare's Sonnets I identified two strands of language: a probing analytical one used to dissect emotion, and an image-filled ornate language used to illustrate pictorially the metaphysical themes that weighed upon the poet's mind. The persona of In Memoriam uses both these Shakespearean strands of language, whether speaking intimately as a lover or extending his reach to incorporate religious and philosophical

12. Zuckermann, p. 206.

speculation within his emotional outpourings. Throughout In Memoriam the concurrent uses of these two strands of language enables us to recognise the distinct style of the speaker, as was the case in Shakespeare's Sonnets, and it enables the speaker, himself, to unite his sorrow at his loss with his desire to believe in his friend's survival beyond the grave.

Tennyson's speaker is directly and most powerfully present as a lover in the famous lyric, 'Dark house, by which once more I stand' (IM: VII). The last stanza of this section achieves its intensity of feeling, its sense of settled melancholy, bereavement and alienation, by the impressive suggestiveness of its description:

He is not here; but far away
 The noise of life begins again,
 And ghastly through the drizzling rain
 On the bald street breaks the blank day.

Of these four lines, only the first makes any direct reference to the dead friend but it is his absence and the numbing effect this has on the speaker that inform the remaining three lines. The firm and graphic adjectives and nouns in these last three lines build up, through their stark simplicity, a literal and metaphorical aura of gloom. The description has superficially nothing to do with a confessional outpouring of private grief. The persona is present, not simply because of the first-person pronouns of the first two stanzas, but because his first-hand pressure can be felt in the choice of descriptive diction. The restraint of the poet is more eloquent than his passion. Shakespeare also worked in this way in the opening quatrain to Sonnet 73:

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
 When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
 Upon the boughs which shake against the cold,
 Bare ruin'd choirs where late the sweet birds sang

The last line of this quatrain is matched by the last line of Tennyson's lyric ('On the bald street breaks the blank day'). In both lines the slowed rhythm anchored to a series of sombre monosyllables produces a dirge-like echo that is more effective as a means of communicating the speaker's emotion than a more overt lament might have been.

The majority of sections of In Memoriam that disclose the sequence persona as a lover are not Harold Nicolson's 'lonely, wistful, frightened elegies';¹³ they are, rather, 'Shakespearean' blends of thought and feeling. Before examining several of Tennyson's love poems to his friend, I want to borrow a critical term which is of great usefulness in pinpointing that quality of lyric strength - deriving from a fusion of thought and feeling - that I have called 'Shakespearean'. John D. Boyd writes of a 'logic of feeling':

The term 'logic of feeling' implies ... a structural principle by which unity comes through the use of a single human sensibility whose experience is the whole of the poem. Each separate lyric, however self-sufficient, is fully comprehended only when seen as a moment in the psychic life of the poem's speaker and central consciousness. The reader is sharing not the versified thoughts of a poet-philosopher, but the intimacy of a subtly evolving mind.¹⁴

John Boyd then stresses the individuality of the logic of feeling - 'Not only does the poem portray the workings of a mind, but that

13. Harold Nicolson, Tennyson: Aspects of his Life[,] Character and Poetry (London: Constable, 1925), p. 297.

14. John D. Boyd, 'In Memoriam and the "Logic of Feeling"', Victorian Poetry, 10 (1972), pp. 96-97.

mind has a logic of its own, certain principles of operation sometimes congruent with the principles of logic, yet very different from them' (p. 97). The personal logic of feeling in Shakespeare's Sonnets was a mixture of dedication to telling the truth about emotions and obfuscation employed to avoid causing pain. It involved the recognition of mutability, and the courage to set love and the creative power of the poet against time. With In Memoriam Tennyson's logic of feeling is a mixture of cathartic indulgence in grief at being separated from the loved friend and a clinging to the counsels of faith as a way out of grief. It involves an appropriation of nature imagery for both its positive and negative metaphorical applications to emotion. And, finally, it also works through the speaker's self-conscious meditations on his role as a poet.

I want to begin my analysis of the logic of feeling that identifies the persona of In Memoriam by looking at three sections which all exhibit a balance between the speaker's emotions and his intelligence. In section XVI the speaker is in the grip of his sorrow but he is sufficiently conscious of this predicament to begin evaluating it.

What words are these have fallen from me?	1
Can calm despair and wild unrest	
Be tenants of a single breast,	
Or sorrow such a changeling be?	
Or doth she only seem to take	5
The touch of change in calm or storm;	
But knows no more of transient form	
In her deep self, than some dead lake	
That holds the shadow of a lark	
Hung in the shadow of a heaven?	10
Or has the shock, so harshly given,	
Confused me like the unhappy bark	
That strikes by night a craggy shelf,	
And staggers blindly ere she sink?	
And stunned me from my power to think	15
And all my knowledge of myself;	

And made me that delirious man
 Whose fancy fuses old and new,
 And flashes into false and true,
 And mingles all without a plan? 20

This poem is about a psychological condition. The speaker is conscious of a loss of equilibrium and he is bewildered by this realisation. The cause of his sorrow is, for the time being, less important to the speaker than its effect on his mind and heart. As early as line 5 the speaker can be heard assessing analytically the impact of his sorrow - 'Or doth she only seem to take / The touch of change in calm or storm'. The use of 'seem' here alerts us to the crucial element of distance in the poem - distance between the speaker and his grief. Lines 7-13 explore the deadening effect of shock on the speaker's emotions through the image of the static shadow and another of a foundering boat. Lines 15-16 draw out the lesson of these symbols - 'And stunned me from my power to think / And all my knowledge of myself'. Here the speaker is expressing the fact of his inner numbness in phrasing that conveys something of his sense of confusion. The last stanza continues both these elements. It extends the description of the speaker's present disorientation and it does so through an analytical rhetorical style that helps us to accept the very personal quality of the experience. This lyric is illustrative of this particular speaker's logic of feeling, of his own special way of revealing himself through meditation and reverie. In this sense it is Tennyson's equivalent of the Shakespearean style of the Sonnets. Just as each of Shakespeare's sonnets told us something about his sequence persona, so this lyric from In Memoriam acquaints us with the Tennysonian persona. From it we learn, on the one hand, that he is confused

by the self-protective mechanism of his mind that has blocked out the passionate sorrow the speaker believes he ought to feel, and on the other hand, we learn that he values highly the power of the human mind to order random experiences and place them in some broad metaphysical scheme of things. The deliberate evaluation of experience recorded in this lyric does not detract from the integrity of the speaker; on the contrary, it makes him live for the reader who can thereby gain a greater understanding of the speaker himself.

In section XXIV the speaker again blends emotional confession and philosophical speculation in such a way as to reveal something of himself. This lyric is an elegiac meditation in which the speaker's logic of feeling presents private nostalgia in universally relevant terms. In the opening stanza of this poem the speaker continues the deliberately distanced evaluation of his private emotions that gave strength to section XVI.

And was the day of my delight	1
As pure and perfect as I say?	
The very source and fount of Day	
Is dashed with wandering isles of night.	4

The speaker's initial framing of his thoughts in the form of a query and a response invites the reader to follow a line of reasoning rather than simply to overhear an essentially private confession. The first two lines place the particular friendship of the sequence firmly in second place behind the present self-consciousness of the speaker as chief claimant for our attention. This first quatrain is filled with arresting phrases and images that can mean as much to the reader as they do to the speaker. The phrase 'day of my delight' in line 1 is sufficiently aphoristic to strike a chord in the reader as well as suggest

to him the speaker's nostalgia. The obvious alliterative emphasis of line 2 in the phrase 'pure and perfect' continues this attractive epigrammatic style. The philosophical tenor of these first two lines is neatly complemented by the imagery of the next two. The description of the sun-spots gives a pictorial counterpart to the blighting of the speaker's emotional joy and allows the reader to endorse the speaker's more personal recognition of mutability implicit in the first two lines.

In the second stanza this yoking of personal reverie by the speaker to a wider sweep of thought is continued as the particular focus on imperfection in the first stanza is couched in more general terms:

If all was good and fair we met,	5
This earth had been the Paradise	
It never looked to human eyes	
Since our first Sun arose and set.	8

The phrase 'good and fair' in line 5 has the same symbolic resonance as those quoted from stanza one and it squares nicely with the biblical allusion of the following line. The reference to 'Paradise' in line 6 suggests specifically the garden of Eden with the phrase 'our first Sun' strengthening the Christian emphasis of the stanza by a pun on Adam being the first 'son' of God and the sun carried over from the first stanza. As the stanza reads at present there is an implicit parallel between Adam's fate and the speaker's own situation; while Adam was exiled from the garden of Eden the speaker has been exiled from the idyllic experience of his friendship. Indeed it is worth recalling that in an early draft of this lyric the eighth line read - 'Since Adam left his garden yet' (Ricks, p. 886).

These first two stanzas present the speaker's emotions indirectly, in the form of a quasi-metaphysical meditation on the imperfection of all of life. In the second half of the poem the speaker turns to the psychological manoeuvres that have led him, and that lead all men, to glorify the past.

And is it that the haze of grief	9
Makes former gladness loom so great?	
The lowness of the present state,	
That sets the past in this relief?	12
Or that the past will always win	
A glory from its being far;	
And orb into the perfect star	
We saw not, when we moved therein?	16

In the first of these two stanzas the speaker is both identifying a psychological process and re-creating its essential features. He has entirely relinquished the superficial indicators of personal meditation, there being no use of the first-person pronoun nor any specific reference to the dead friend. The speaker almost abstractly ponders a general human experience, but presents some emotion through his diction and the use of the present tense. In the first two lines of this stanza the diction is loaded with sufficient emotional weight and is possessed of sufficient descriptive power to recall the speaker's particular loss of his friend. The phrase 'haze of grief' in line 9 suggests that the poet is speaking from first-hand experience, and in line 10 the use of 'loom' to describe the speaker's apprehension of his 'former gladness' goes far in suggesting the personal experience that motivates the general reflection. In the last two lines the speaker invests only the word 'lowness' with any of this emotional colouring, relying instead, and successfully, on the immediate credibility of the

proposition to secure the reader's endorsement of his meditation. It is the degree of balance between thought and feeling, reflection and reverie, present in this third stanza of section XXIV that enables the best lyrics of In Memoriam to disclose the particular logic of feeling that belongs to the sequence persona.

The last stanza of XXIV is a symbolic codification of the common human response to change, involving a romanticisation of the past; yet it retains a palpable physical coherence since the run of words relating to the sun - 'glory', 'orb' and 'star' - can lean upon the vivid image of the first stanza. Its diction also directs us to the speaker's state of mind by pointing to his resilient faith in the potential for life to have meaning even though that meaning is not immediately comprehended. This stanza contributes to our familiarity with the In Memoriam persona by complementing his melancholy with a positive vision that becomes gradually stronger as the sequence progresses.

A much later section, CXVI, which is also concerned with the nature of the past and its relation to the present will serve to illustrate further Tennyson's 'Shakespearean' ability to use his logic of feeling to cope with powerfully-felt first-hand emotion.

Is it, then, regret for buried time
That keenlier in sweet April wakes,
And meets the year, and gives and takes
The colours of the crescent prime?

Not all: the songs, the stirring air,
The life re-orient out of dust,
Cry through the sense to hearten trust
In that which made the world so fair.

Not all regret: the face will shine
Upon me, while I muse alone;
And that dear voice, I once have known,
Still speak to me of me and mine:

Yet less of sorrow lives in me
 For days of happy commune dead;
 Less yearning for the friendship fled,
 Than some strong bond which is to be.

The first stanza is in much the voice of the early In Memoriam persona, for here the speaker, in a very Shakespearean mood, borrows from the 'crescent prime' (glossed by Tennyson as 'growing spring'),¹⁵ a sharply poignant longing for summer and joy. In this first stanza thought and the expression of thought depend strongly on the use of the word 'buried' to cross from the human emotion of the speaker in the first line to the natural context of the next three lines. The meaning of 'buried' in the first context is much the same as that of the phrase 'the day of my delight' from section XXIV – the time the speaker shared with the now dead and buried friend. The meaning of 'buried' in the second, natural, context is the internment of growing things during the long months of winter. By matching the two, by comparing the tremulous spring change from winter to summer with the quickening of the speaker's nostalgic longing for the joy of his past friendship, Tennyson has, like Shakespeare in his mutability sonnets, aligned the outward and inward worlds of his experience.

The second stanza continues this parallel and advances the heart's narrative of the persona's inner odyssey. The second stanza speaks at two levels: it interprets the course of nature as one from decay to regeneration and, by a subtle parallel with the experience of the poem's persona to date, it interprets the inner life of man from death to new life. The speaker presses

15. Ricks, The Poems of Tennyson, p. 967, records this gloss by Tennyson.

his religious wish to believe in the immortality of the soul and the teleological view of creation onto his response to nature and, by so doing, brings his intellectual faculties to bear on his emotional experience.

In the third and fourth stanzas of the lyric Tennyson moves from a metaphorical focus on nature to a more directly personal expression of his feelings. The third stanza strips the nature metaphor back to its basis in the speaker's experience; its poignancy derives from the confessional intimacy introduced into a more objective meditation:

Not all regret: the face will shine
 Upon me, while I muse alone;
 And that dear voice, I once have known,
 Still speak to me of me and mine

The opening phrase, 'Not all regret', recaptures the openings of both the first and second stanzas ('Is it, then, regret', and 'Not all'), and the friend is introduced as one who watches the speaker of the first two stanzas in his meditations. In the final stanza the speaker builds on and subtly recalls the themes of regeneration in nature and the resurrection of man from earlier in the lyric, and applies them to his own predicament introduced in the third stanza. Again the opening phrase links up with those of the preceding stanzas to complete the appearance of an argument progressing towards its proof:

Yet less of sorrow lives in me
 For days of happy commune dead;
 Less yearning for the friendship fled
 Than some strong bond which is to be.

The metaphysical optimism of the last line is connected to the examples of renewal in the first two stanzas as much by the structure of the lyric as by the continuity of theme. The positive

resonance of the final stanza is not, like that of section XXIV, a gesture of emotional salutation on the speaker's part to the ineradicable human illusion of a paradisaical past, but a reaching forward through faith to some ultimate deliverance from the present.

The structural progress of section CXVI can be likened to the movement in a sonnet - the pronouncement of a theme in the first quatrain, its endorsement in the second, the beginning of a resolution or proof in the first tercet and the consolidation of this proof in the second tercet. In Shakespearean practice the couplet serves this final function, drawing out the point of the previous douzaine or occasionally overturning it. One of Shakespeare's absence sonnets which employs natural imagery but reaches a much more melancholy conclusion than Tennyson's section will illustrate the similar use of syntactic structure to support the poet's logic of feeling:

From you have I been absent in the spring,
 When proud-pied April, dress'd in all his trim,
 Hath put a spirit of youth in every thing,
 That heavy Saturn laugh'd and leapt with him.
 Yet nor the lays of birds, nor the sweet smell
 Of different flowers in odour and in hue,
 Could make me any summer's story tell,
 Or from their proud lap pluck them where they grew:
 Nor did I wonder at the lily's white,
 Nor praise the deep vermilion on the rose;
 They were but sweet, but figures of delight
 Drawn after you, you pattern of all those.
 Yet seem'd it winter still; and, you away,
 As with your shadow I with these did play.

(Sonnet 98)

Shakespeare structures his poem around a series of syntactic markers which lend a logical appearance to his reveries, importing a reasoning tone and adding a distinct personal quality to the descriptions. It is just this semantic underscoring of lyrical exuberance with an intelligent consciousness that justifies

an alignment of Shakespeare and Tennyson. In both the Sonnets and In Memoriam the persona behind the sequence of discrete lyrics is gradually revealed as a personality, a guiding consciousness lending coherence to different moods and meditations, and doing it by the operation of the logic of feeling within individual lyrics as well as across the whole series.

In Shakespeare's procreation sonnets the advice to the young man to beget an heir was blended with a leavening measure of speculation in mutability, expressed in particular through the mortality of human beauty. The speaker was able to address love poetry to his friend which was based on a strong foundation of argument; and the imagery was continually strengthened by the controlling consciousness of the speaker who directed it towards a specific end. In Memoriam, with the speaker as mourning lover, also infuses a particular address to the friend with a strain of speculative thought. In sections LXXIII-LXXV and CX-CXII Tennyson's overt theme is the promise his friend manifested when alive, the great potential that all who knew him saw in him. This simple level of loving testament is supported by a deeper one of thought at which the speaker seeks to understand the meaning of the friend's death. In section LXXIII the speaker presents both these concerns in a style that exemplifies the logic of feeling of In Memoriam. In this section the speaker can be observed disclosing his inner self through his attempt to adjust his understanding of his experience in the light of a broad faith. It is just this process, conducted across the sequence as a whole, that leads the speaker from despair to hope.

So many worlds, so much to do,
 So little done, such things to be,
 How know I what had need of thee,
 For thou wert strong as thou wert true?

The fame is quenched that I foresaw,
 The head hath missed an earthly wreath:
 I curse not nature, no, nor death;
 For nothing is that errs from law.

We pass; the path that each man trod
 Is dim, or will be dim, with weeds:
 What fame is left for human deeds
 In endless age? It rests with God.

O hollow wraith of dying fame,
 Fade wholly, while the soul exults,
 And self-infolds the large results
 Of force that would have forged a name.

Here Tennyson's speaker, like Shakespeare's, sets the particular glory of the friend against the great clouding of all glory that time effects. He makes a conscious effort philosophically to account for the doubts raised by the themes of time and death. The speaker infuses all these reflections with the pressure of his love for his friend. In the first stanza, for example, the first two lines are general ones that introduce the theme of time engulfing the particular possibilities of human life. The third line rings with a personal tone of voice, while the last line brings in the friend. In the second stanza the order is reversed; the first line is concerned with the friend and the last two move from the speaker's own reaction to mutability to his recognition of it as a universal law.

In the last two stanzas of this section there is a strong elegiac tone of voice which is allowed to dominate and direct the rhythm but not, finally, the speaker's mood. He remains true at the last to his conviction that the soul preserves through its immortality all that is of real worth in anyone. In the

first line and a half of the last stanza, for example, the speaker rhetorically dismisses all earthly laurels - 'O hollow wraith of dying fame, / Fade wholly' He then drops his voice and expresses his thoughts in more analytical and sober language:

..., while the soul exults,
And self-infolds the large results
Of force that would have forged a name.

This combination of negative emotional rhetoric and positive thoughtful meditation is characteristic of the speaker of In Memoriam and constitutes his logic of feeling.

The Tennysonian persona of In Memoriam is like that of the Sonnets in its wrestling with the capacity of poetry to provide an adequate testament to the beloved friend. Shakespeare's persona is goaded by the presence of a rival poet, and Tennyson's is pressured by the world's high estimation of his friend's promise; both looked to their lyrics to find a way of truly representing the worth of their friends. Each felt, at times, unequal to the task and made of this feeling a further tribute to the ineffable glory of the friend. Shakespeare wrote in Sonnet 83,

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 yourself being extant well might show
How far a modern quill doth come too short,

and Tennyson lamented in section LXXV,

What practice howsoe'er expert
In fitting aptest words to things,
Or voice the richest-toned that sings,
Hath power to give thee as thou wert?

Both Tennyson and Shakespeare were jealous of the friend's worth and sought to protect him from debasement. In Sonnet 102 Shakespeare explains that he does not write often of his friend because that would be to cheapen his real worth:

My love is strengthen'd, though more weak in seeming;
 I love not less, though less the show appear:
 That love is merchandiz'd whose rich esteeming
 The owner's tongue doth publish everywhere.
 Our love was new, and then but in the spring,
 When I was wont to greet it with my lays;
 As Philomel in summer's front doth sing,
 And stops her pipe in growth of riper days:
 Not that the summer is less pleasant now
 Than when her mournful hymns did hush the night,
 But that wild music burthens every bough,
 And sweets grown common lose their dear delight.
 Therefore like her I sometime hold my tongue;
 Because I would not dull you with my song.

Tennyson continues section LXXV with dignified scepticism regarding the value of writing at all about his friend given the transience of the world's approbation:

I care not in these fading days
 To raise a cry that lasts not long,
 And round thee with the breeze of song
 To stir a little dust of praise.

Thy leaf was perished in the green,
 And, while we breathe beneath the sun,
 The world which credits what is done
 Is cold to all that might have been.

So here shall silence guard thy fame;
 But somewhere, out of human view,
 Whate'er thy hands are set to do
 Is wrought with tumult of acclaim.

By virtue of the hard necessity of circumstance, Tennyson's stanzas, in their imagery and elegiac tone, are more akin to Shakespeare's mutability sonnets than to Sonnet 102; its link with that sonnet is, however, in the intimacy between the love that prompts the lyric act and the conscious creativity of the poets involved. Each is reluctant to write copiously about his friend and by assuming the role of guardian of the friend's true merits, each is enabled to focus attention more closely on his own poetic writing. While both poems are inspired by the respective friends, it is the speaker in each case who becomes

the focus of our attention and this method is part of what Tennyson has in common with Shakespeare, not only in this lyric but through In Memoriam as a whole.

Before going on to consider closely the sections of In Memoriam in which the speaker discusses his act of composing elegiac lyrics to his friend, I want to consider briefly his treatment of mutability and the immortality of the friend's soul. It is usually taken that the evolutionary cantos of In Memoriam are part and parcel of the debate in Tennyson's day on this controversial topic, and Tennyson's reading of the pioneer works of scientific investigation by Lyell and Chambers is often brought into a discussion of the poetry. This approach needs to be modified in the light of Christopher Ricks's information from Hallam Tennyson's Memoir:

'The sections of In Memoriam about Evolution had been read by his friends some years before the publication of [Robert Chambers's] Vestiges of Creation in 1844' ... T. read Charles Lyell's Principles of Geology in 1837 ...¹⁶

In view of Hallam Tennyson's claim, the Shakespearean treatment of the mutability theme seems a more likely impetus for Tennyson's than his scientific reading. The wording of section CXVII gives some support to his hypothesis:

And unto meeting when we meet,
Delight a hundredfold accrue,

For every grain of sand that runs, 9
And every span of shade that steals,
And every kiss of toothèd wheels,
And all the courses of the suns. 12

Ricks (p. 968), notes two precise parallels with Shakespeare: line 10 recalls Shakespeare's phrase "thy dial's shady stealth"

16. The Poems of Tennyson, p. 968.

from Sonnet 77, and line 12 here echoes Shakespeare's 'five hundred courses of the sun' from Sonnet 59.

A closer correlation between the Shakespearean and the Tennysonian treatment of the themes of mutability and the immortality of the friend lies in the way each poet uses these subjects to illustrate the emotional cast that his persona gives to his philosophical reflections. In Sonnet 64 Shakespeare's meditations lead him to a melancholy conclusion, whereas Tennyson - for example in section CXXIII - cannot be so pessimistic. Without going so far as to deny Tennyson's awareness of the scientific thinking that he had become acquainted with both before and during his years at Cambridge, I think it worth noting the similarity between the second quatrain of Shakespeare's sonnet and the second stanza of section CXXIII:

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
(Sonnet 64: ll. 5-8)

The hills are shadows, and they flow
 From form to form, and nothing stands;
 They melt like mist, the solid lands,
 Like clouds they shape themselves and go.
(IM: CXXIII, ll. 5-8)

Shakespeare's sense of mutability, here, is as broad as Tennyson's, embracing the changes that take place in the phases of geological time as well as the more usual reference in his sonnets to the process of ageing. Tennyson would seem to have blended the sense of Time's power being manifest in all the ways of man and of the earth from Shakespeare with the organising theoretical inquiry of the science of his time.

The similar ends to which this awareness of mutability in all of nature is put in the work of both poets, and at the same

time the difference between the inner disposition of the two personae, can be seen by comparing the conclusions of these two poems. Shakespeare's Sonnet 64 ends quite sadly:

Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminare -
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.

Tennyson also brings his speculation on the changing of the earth by time to a human conclusion, but for his In Memoriam persona, the sadness of the loss of the friend is minimised by his desire still to believe in the immortality of the soul:

But in my spirit will I dwell,
And dream my dream, and hold it true;
For though my lips may breathe adieu,
I cannot think the thing farewell.

This section from In Memoriam can be supplemented by the last four sections (CXXVIII-CXXXI), which combine the strong personal emotion of the speaker directed in love towards the friend, whom he is sure is immortal, with an eloquent visionary-cum-Christian faith in positive resolution of all mutability. Section CXXX begins:

Thy voice is on the rolling air;
I hear thee where the waters run;
Thou standest in the rising sun,
And in the setting thou art fair.

Section CXXXI begins:

O living will that shalt endure
When all that seems shall suffer shock,
Rise in the spiritual rock,
Flow through our deeds and make them pure,

and in these positive if pious lines can be seen the end to which the persona of In Memoriam has travelled, through the long meditative course of the sequence.

I wish to conclude this account of the Shakespearean persona of In Memoriam with an examination of a few of the sections in which that persona discusses the task upon which he is engaged. Shakespeare, as we have seen, accompanied his professions of love for his friend and his meditations on the meaning of life and death with a continuous strand of thinking about his poetry and its role. Tennyson's speaker too is a self-conscious poet evaluating his own artistic creations. At the beginning of this discussion of In Memoriam I alluded to the critical distinction often made between the 'process' lyrics of In Memoriam, lyrics in which the speaker is within his experience, and In Memoriam as an artefact, a consciously-produced artistic whole. Tennyson's lyrics about his lyric task of composing a cathartic elegy to his friend justify both these views of the work. They also show the sequence persona coming to a consciousness of self and of wholeness as he explores his artistic exorcism of grief.

For In Memoriam just as for the Sonnets, the existence of a poetic persona is secured, and the persona made intimate, through this practice of writing poems about writing poems. E.D.H. Johnson and J.C.C. Mays¹⁷ are among the critics of In Memoriam who stress the importance of this self-dramatisation of the poet as an important means of exploring the emotional and spiritual experience that the work describes. Mays's position is this:

17. E.D.H. Johnson, 'The Way of the Poet', and J.C.C. Mays, 'An Aspect of Form', in Tennyson, 'In Memoriam': A Casebook, ed. John Dixon Hunt (London: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 188-99 and 259-87 respectively.

The way in which Tennyson solved the problem of form was the way closest to his own experience: he presents the drama of himself in the very process of discovering it, so that the continuity which underlies the whole poem's form is in the first place provided by himself in the role of hero.¹⁸

These comments could, with equal justice, be applied to Shakespeare in his Sonnets, since each poet eschews narrative structure for a lyrically confessional mode which brings us into an intimate relationship with both the substance of the sequence and the lyric method employed.

A further distinction flows from this identification of method and matter and it is one which has direct bearing on our judgement of the individual lyrics and of the works as wholes. The question of distance is crucial to this mode of poetry, for, if it is to work, the poet must not be seen to intrude upon the fiction of his persona. The persona must not be allowed to dispel the further fiction of privacy, of being 'overheard' rather than 'heard', by consciously posturing to the audience. Shakespeare is least successful in those sonnets which are merely conventional and in those (such as the 'Will' sonnets) which show his presence in an abrasive manner. Tennyson fails whenever he becomes pompous, or didactic simply for the sake of being so, and whenever he allows his imagery to become strident and obviously manufactured rather than intimate and suggestive. The reader of either sequence knows in advance that it has been written by a poet who is necessarily present but who must not seem to be so if we are to be lulled into Coleridge's 'willing suspension of disbelief' and won to the lyrically 'dramatic' point of view.

18. Mays, Casebook, p. 264.

I want, now, to work through the first section of In Memoriam in some detail because it is a pattern of what is to follow, illustrating both the arresting Shakespearean stance of the persona of the poem and his tendency to overdramatise and thereby lose power.

I held it truth, with him who sings
 To one clear harp in divers tones,
 That men may rise on stepping-stones
 Of their dead selves to higher things. 4

But who shall so forecast the years
 And find in loss a gain to match?
 Or reach a hand through time to catch
 The far-off interest of tears? 8

Let Love clasp Grief lest both be drowned,
 Let darkness keep her raven gloss:
 Ah, sweeter to be drunk with loss,
 To dance with death, to beat the ground, 12

Than that the victor Hours should scorn
 The long result of love, and boast,
 'Behold the man that loved and lost,
 But all he was is overworn.' 16

This lyric divides at line 8, with the first half exhibiting a style at once deeply felt and restrained, and the second becoming shriller and more importunate. The first stanza is the best statement we have of the view of the whole work as artefact. In it Tennyson affirms the centrality of the concern with Arthur Hallam in all the lyric sections of the poem, despite their different moods and conclusions when he characterises Goethe, and himself by implication, as singers 'To one clear harp in divers tones'. The speaker then offers a succinct encapsulation of the progress of the work as a whole - a progress from initial grief to a final affirmative vision - 'That men may rise on stepping-stones / Of their dead selves to higher things. The opening clause of the stanza ('I held it truth')

sounds a sceptical note with the past tense of the verb immediately introducing a qualification of the usual assurance of the noun. This blending of a personal mood of doubt with an objective truth is sustained in lines 3 and 4, where the auxiliary 'may' again withdraws from a too certain or confident endorsement of the proposition. Tennyson's use of the impersonal style of 'men may rise' and 'their dead selves' in the last two lines of this first stanza points to his wish that much of his personal journey from loss to hope be read as holding also a universal experience, and it does so without fanfare or obvious emotionalism.

The second stanza is process poetry with the speaker now even less sure of himself. The indicative mood of the first stanza and the forthright image of the 'one clear harp' have given way to the interrogative form and a diction of hesitancy. In this stanza Tennyson balances a language about time against a language about money, making feeling the nexus. The interrogative that begins the stanza is only just completed as a question, for its tone is of such doubt and resignation as to swamp the tentative hope of the proposal with its negation even in the moment of utterance. In these lines the only positive and established fact is the loss; any contrary is contained only in the indefinitely qualified 'a gain to match'. The effort at possibly making up for a present loss at some nebulous future date is posited in terms of the seeming impossibility of mustering the confidence to conceive of the reward. The use of 'so forecast' entails a degree of scepticism that burdens this effort with the presumption of failure. In this loading of the language Tennyson lifts the intellectual query and its rhetorical spirit of inquiry to the level of emotional experience, thus making

the first two lines a hopeless-sounding consideration of the removed possibility of hope itself.

In the next two lines Tennyson completes his fiscal undercurrent by making the elusive gain of the first two the interest paid for the investment of tears in life - 'Or reach a hand through time to catch / The far-off interest of tears?'. Here the scepticism is continued, as the sense of disbelief in the ultimate recompense is caught in the difficulty of actually reaching a hand through time. The metaphor pre-judges the effort it describes and, by so doing, reflects the present mood of despair that has subtly overtaken the speaker's thought processes as well as his emotions. The sound pattern of the stanza echoes this sadness of mood with the long soft rhymes of 'years' and 'tears' sapping the force of the middle rhymes 'match' and 'catch'. The alliterative resonances of 'forecast' and 'far-off', and such rhymes as 'years' and 'tears', lend the stanza a sombre tenderness. The expectation of iambic tetrameter requires that 'interest' in the last line be read as three distinct syllables, which further enhances the melancholy mood of the verse by slowing down the pace of the reader. Christopher Ricks notes a parallel with Shakespeare's Sonnet 31 in Tennyson's use of 'interest', and it is worth quoting the particular quatrain in order to feel the similarity of meditative weight in Shakespeare's lines and Tennyson's.

How many a holy and obsequious tear
Hath dear religious love stol'n from mine eye
As interest of the dead, which now appear
But things remov'd that hidden in thee lie!

These first two stanzas of section I counter an optimism of thought with an emotionally insistent pessimism and thus the

discursive structure is accompanied by a style that is emotional and suggestive. It is this fusion of rhetoric and reverie, this interweaving of an intellectually speculative subject matter with strands of deeply emotive language that recalls the Shakespearean sonnet practice and begins the creation of the persona of In Memoriam in the same way as Shakespeare created the persona of the Sonnets.

The third and fourth stanzas of section I are not like this. The repetition of 'Let', the rhetorical 'Behold' and the insistent capitalisation of abstract nouns intrude an element of theatricality that detracts from the poignant predicament of the speaker. Here the poet is excessive in quantifying his sorrow as an object of discussion, and the weakness of the versifying can be seen in the impotence of the hysteria at the end of the third verse: 'Ah, sweeter to be drunk with loss, / To dance with death, to beat the ground'. The artificiality of such exhibitionism can be seen, not only when set against the first two stanzas, but even in comparison with the best phrase in these last two stanzas - 'The long result of love' - which most nearly approaches the style and subtlety of the opening verses.

The general similarity of method and even a particular bond of imagery between Shakespeare and Tennyson in these lyrics about poetry can be further illustrated by a brief comparison of Sonnet 76 and section V of In Memoriam. In the second and third quatrains of his sonnet Shakespeare uses a clothing metaphor to describe his poetry:

Why write I still all one, ever the same,
 And keep invention in a noted weed,
 That every word doth almost tell my name,
 Shewing their birth and where they did proceed?
 Oh know, sweet love, I always write of you,
 And you and love are still my argument;
 So all my best is dressing old words new,
 Spending again what is already spent

The imagery of this sonnet may well have lingered in Tennyson's mind: when he wanted to describe and slightly deprecate his own poetic effort he used similar language.

In words, like weeds, I'll wrap me o'er,
 Like coarsest clothes against the cold:
 But that large grief which these enfold
 Is given in outline and no more.

There is in both these poems a merging of thought and feeling in a style that lends the strength of the one to the expression of the other. There is also a strong elegiac tone in the Shakespearean sonnet that sits well with Tennyson's mood and suggests a linking of the two. Each poem holds its first-person speaker clearly before the reader while allowing also a strong impression of the friend's importance to the poet. Despite the fact that Tennyson is worried that he will not be able to present his subjective experience fully, and that the obverse worry besets Shakespeare (namely that he is too immediately present), both lyrics bring us close to the speaker and the poetic stance particular to him.

Section XXXVIII of In Memoriam is a lyric of both meta-physical and emotional import; its purpose is to comfort the speaker in his need. Its method is that of a process lyric in which the present-tense act of writing becomes the means by which comfort can be created.

With weary steps I loiter on,
 Though always under altered skies
 The purple from the distance dies,
 My prospect and horizon gone.

No joy the blowing season gives,
 The herald melodies of spring,
 But in the songs I love to sing
 A doubtful gleam of solace lives.

If any care for what is here
 Survive in spirits rendered free,
 Then are these songs I sing of thee
 Not all ungrateful to thine ear.

That Tennyson had Shakespeare in mind when writing his lyric is evident from the way the earlier poet's line 'herald to the gaudy spring' (Sonnet 2: l. 10) turns up here in Tennyson's 'The herald melodies of spring'. More than this, however, the Shakespearean echo can be heard in the rich interplay of objective and subjective voices in the first stanza. Tennyson allows his images to retain objective force while appropriating them for subjective ends. This method can be seen in Shakespeare's Sonnet 50, to which Tennyson's first stanza is very close:

How heavy do I journey on the way,
 When what I seek (my weary travel's end)
 Doth teach that ease and that repose to say:
 'Thus far the miles are measur'd from thy friend.'

The lethargy of spirit that besets both Shakespeare and Tennyson is not described in isolation from the objective world about them but is pressed on to it. This crossing of the speaker's emotional confessions and their experience and description of the world is accomplished with a degree of restraint that makes their personal situations both comprehensible and even universally relevant.

After this melancholy opening to section XXXVIII, the second stanza sounds a more positive note. The speaker consciously

moves from his focus on the external world to one on his own inner life by the artful connection of the 'herald melodies of spring' with the lyrics of In Memoriam itself, regarded as the poet's 'songs'. By calling his elegies 'songs' the speaker is able to invoke the pastoral fancy of the friend listening, from his vantage point in heaven, to the poet singing his songs of mourning on earth. This fiction allows the possibility of validating the process of In Memoriam through the fond response of the dead but 'risen' friend. Shakespeare did much the same thing in Sonnet 32:

If thou survive my well-contented day,
 When that churl Death my bones with dust shall cover,
 And shalt by fortune once more re-survey
 These poor rude lines of thy deceased lover,
 . . .
 Oh then vouchsafe me but this loving thought:
 'Had my friend's Muse grown with this growing age,
 A dearer birth than this his love had brought
 To march in ranks of better equipage:
 But since he died, and poets better prove,
 Theirs for their style I'll read, his for his love'.

Shakespeare is hypothesising his own death, not the friend's as is the case in Tennyson's lyric, but the persona, the speaker of each lyric, is presenting himself and justifying his poetry on the grounds of the love that has existed between poet and friend. In both poems the wish is self-fulfilling, easing the poet's anxiety and contributing to our acquaintance with the private life of the persona.

Turning towards the end of In Memoriam, we find the phrase 'logic of feeling' in both its general and particular readings substantiated by the speaker's summation of his poetic achievement in section CXXV:

Whatever I have said or sung,
 Some bitter notes my harp would give,
 Yea, though there often seemed to live
 A contradiction on the tongue,

Yet Hope had never lost her youth;
 She did but look through dimmer eyes;
 Or Love but played with gracious lies,
 Because he felt so fixed in truth:

And if the song were full of care,
 He breathed the spirit of the song;
 And if the words were sweet and strong
 He set his royal signet there;

Abiding with me till I sail
 To seek thee on the mystic deeps,
 And this electric force, that keeps
 A thousand pulses dancing, fail.

In the first of these stanzas Tennyson regards In Memoriam as a collection of separate 'process' lyrics seen from the outside, seen from the standpoint of the 'artefact' poet. The use of the image of the harp takes us back to the first lyric, and the phrase 'A contradiction on the tongue' recalls the analytic style of the persona's anatomy of his grief. In the remainder of the poem the speaker is well clear of the process of coming to terms with his grief. By the positive affirmations of the third stanza, however, he reveals a new process - a present-tense recording of his hard-won faith and joy. The powerful resonance of the opening of the last stanza shows the speaker in possession of the 'gain' he hoped to earn by the investment of his tears in the first section of the work. The measure and controlled progress of this lyric mirrors the inner journey the speaker has accomplished; the visionary enthusiasm of the last two stanzas adds the promise of a further journey to an eventual reunion with the friend. The credibility of this lyric comes not from its objective truth, from its proof of the immortality of the

soul, but rather from its own positive process. The speaker of the sequence is as present in this changed mood of hope as in the earlier lyrics of loss. His style of reasoning about his feeling, meditating on it from within his experience and evaluating it from a more distant artistic standpoint, is the means by which he remains the basis of the unity of In Memoriam.

In conclusion, then, In Memoriam gains a special coherence from being set against Shakespeare's Sonnets. Far from being simply a group of 'plangent elegies' or a 'theological treatise',¹⁹ it can be seen as an intimate self-portrait by a poetically self-conscious persona whose confessional meditations give renewed vigour to the motto 'I love, therefore I am.' By the end of In Memoriam this motto might be more accurately expressed as 'I love, therefore I become'.

In Memoriam was published in 1850, a year that proved to be an annus mirabilis for Victorian love poetry since it saw also the publication of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Sonnets from the Portuguese. It is to these that I now wish to turn.

19. Nicolson, p. 297.

CHAPTER III

Tennyson's star, as Joseph Sendry's survey of twentieth-century criticism¹ amply testifies, is in the ascendant. The early reaction in this century against Tennyson and all things Victorian has been superseded by a new and more balanced appreciation of the value of the best products of the nineteenth century in poetry and indeed in all the arts. Tennyson's accession to the laureateship in 1850 was the beginning of his apotheosis as the 'pre-eminent Victorian'.² His name, however, was not the only one put forward, nor even the first, as Alethea Hayter records:

When Wordsworth died, just half way through the nineteenth century, and a successor for him as Poet Laureate had to be found, the claims of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to succeed him were seriously canvassed. It was suggested that a female Poet Laureate would be particularly suitable when a woman was on the throne of England; but the influential Athenaeum flatly stated that in any case no living poet of either sex had a higher claim than Mrs Browning's.³

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1. Joseph Sendry, 'In Memoriam: Twentieth-Century Criticism', Victorian Poetry, 18 (1980), pp. 108-09.
 2. The phrase is from Joanna Richardson's The Pre-Eminent Victorian (London: Jonathan Cape, 1962). She, of course, adapted it from Lytton Strachey's Eminent Victorians.
 3. Alethea Hayter, Elizabeth Barrett Browning (London: Longmans, 1965), p. 5.

Since that day of the Athenaeum's proposal, 1 June 1850 - the day, incidentally, on which In Memoriam was published - Elizabeth Barrett Browning's star has considerably declined and no-one now would speak of her in the same breath as Tennyson. A distinction must, however, be made between the critical and popular reputations of Elizabeth Barrett and her poetry.

During her lifetime, and even more in the years following her death, Elizabeth Barrett Browning enjoyed wide critical acclaim. In the present century her fame has been more dependent upon the romantic appeal to the general public of the story of the Brownings' courtship, elopement and marriage than upon critical opinion of her poetry. Virginia Woolf put the case with customary intelligence in her essay on Aurora Leigh.

By one of those ironies of fashion that might have amused the Brownings themselves, it seems likely that they are now far better known in the flesh than they ever have been in the spirit. Passionate lovers, in curls and side-whiskers, oppressed, defiant, eloping - in this guise thousands of people must know and love the Brownings who have never read a line of their poetry. ...

But Fate has not been kind to Mrs Browning as a writer. Nobody reads her, nobody discusses her, nobody troubles to put her in her place. One has only to compare her reputation with Christina Rossetti's to trace her decline. Christina Rossetti mounts irresistibly to the first place among English women poets. Elizabeth, so much more loudly applauded during her lifetime, falls farther and farther behind.⁴

While it is no longer true to say that 'nobody' reads or discusses her poetry, the imbalance noted by Virginia Woolf between biographical and critical interest in Elizabeth Barrett Browning is still there. And the gulf between the reputations of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti has, if anything, widened

4. Virginia Woolf, The Common Reader: Second Series (London: Hogarth Press, 1932), p. 202.

since Virginia Woolf's day. There has been a steady stream of biographies since Mrs Woolf wrote the essay on Aurora Leigh, but only recently, with the upsurge of feminist critical writing, has Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetry been re-examined. Even in this modest revival the Sonnets from the Portuguese have not fared well: Aurora Leigh, 'The Cry of the Children' and 'Casa Guidi Windows' have been the works preferred.

Gardner B. Taplin, one of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's recent and authoritative biographers, makes an interesting point on the critical silence over the Sonnets from the Portuguese:

Serious literary historians are now less impressed by the 'Sonnets' - which nevertheless have continued to fascinate a portion of the general reading public. ... Although many readers may have purchased the 'Sonnets' with a firm belief in their high literary qualities, the arrangements of publication of the various separate editions are evidence of an attitude which has some of the characteristics of a cult. ... In some editions each copy is numbered and signed by the illustrator and was originally offered for sale in an attractive-appearing publisher's box. Various editions were bound in white pigskin, calf, morocco, and gay-coloured cloth. Some were printed on English handmade paper; others on Japanese vellum. Many have rubricated initials, decorated borders, and different kinds of ornamental designs.⁵

This style of publication does indeed suggest that the Sonnets from the Portuguese have come to be regarded as precious literary ornaments, of sentimental rather than scholarly value. Their status becomes that of lovers' prayers whispered in private rather than that of legitimate poetry capable of withstanding public scrutiny of its literary worth.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's biographers have contributed to this iconisation of the Sonnets from the Portuguese by treating

5. Gardner B. Taplin, The Life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1957; repr. [n.p., U.S.A.] Archon Books, 1970), pp. 422-23.

them as confessional footnotes to the narrative of the Brownings' courtship. The admiration and wonder that the biographers feel for the couple, Elizabeth in particular, gets extended to these sonnets, which are then used to raise the personal drama to the level of romantic myth. The criterion used to discriminate between the sonnets, if any is used at all, is truth to personal passion rather than artistic or technical excellence. The Sonnets from the Portuguese are first and foremost treated as extensions of Elizabeth Barrett's personality rather than as poems which, while being inspired by first-hand experience, achieve an independent artistic existence. There is among biographers little recognition that these sonnets can be appreciated and analysed from within, so to speak, or that the persona created by the sequence should be regarded as an achievement in itself. In 1928 Osbert Burdett wrote:

Now the quality of this cycle of sonnets which makes it rare among the few of its kind, and unique as the record of a woman's heart by a woman, is its truth. The series tells a story of true experience, not merely the aspiration of a warm and imaginative heart. The beautiful clarity of the language, its chastened expression, the fineness of its response, were not only, not mainly, an imaginative thing. ... Therefore among the wealth of English love-poetry her Sonnets from the Portuguese have not only beauty of form but the authority of a fact. ... If they are rare, it is as much because the fullness of her experience is exceptional as because she brought exceptional art or skill to making it known.⁶

This is not the kind of argument that I think should be put forward if these sonnets are to be fairly judged by literary criticism. So far as it goes, it is not even completely accurate, since claims for biographical truth have been advanced in respect of all the love-lyric sequences under consideration in this

6. Osbert Burdett, The Brownings (London: Constable, 1928), pp. 222-23.

dissertation. We know more about the lives of the Victorians than we do about Shakespeare's but his sequence as well as those of Tennyson, the Rossettis and Meredith is often said to be autobiographical. I am suggesting that it is more fruitful to ignore relative degrees of autobiographical content in the sequences, and to concentrate on the method they all share, than it is to be obsessed with such content. If Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Sonnets from the Portuguese are to leave the realm of biography and enter that of genre, then an effort at discussing them as if in ignorance of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's life has to be made. Once these poems are freed from readers' fascination with the poet's personality and experience, as much remains to prize as can be found in the other Victorian sequences.

When the late Victorian critics spoke of Elizabeth Barrett Browning in the same breath as Shakespeare,⁷ they forged a literary link which can bear considerable critical strain. The Sonnets from the Portuguese, like In Memoriam testify to their author's fruitful reading of Shakespeare's sonnets. They do this in two ways: first by their disclosure of a poetic persona, a guiding consciousness behind the poems, which develops into a coherent personality; and secondly, by echoing particular details of language and style from the master sequence. Sonnets from the Portuguese may be said in a narrative sense to have a beginning, a middle and an end. Unlike Shakespeare's Sonnets,

7. Taplin, The Life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, cites several. One of the most extravagant was E.C. Stedman who thought it, 'no sacrilege to say that their [SftP] music is showered from a higher and purer atmosphere than that of the Swan of Avon' (p. 422).

and in a more organised and indisputable way than In Memoriam, the Sonnets from the Portuguese take their speaker from one clearly recognisable emotional state to another by means of an easily discerned narrative progression. At the beginning of the sequence the speaker is painfully insecure, addicted to a sense of personal worthlessness nourishing a death wish. By the end, this morbid personality has come to accept the fact of being loved and is able to surrender self-obsession and look outward towards the other with a reciprocating love. By the end of the sequence the speaker is able both to love unself-consciously and to endorse the emotion with an affirmative metaphysic. This development is achieved in the Shakespearean manner by the juxtaposition of a number of meditative lyrics (here sonnets) which are directly confessional, being written in the first person, and philosophical in tenor, setting personal feelings amidst wider impersonal issues.

The two most obvious and important facts about the poetic persona of Sonnets from the Portuguese are that she is female, and that her experience of love is a happy and fulfilling one. There was no precedent for such a combination among the Elizabethan sequences, and most commentaries on the Sonnets from the Portuguese account for this unique conjunction by direct appeal to the poet's biography. What might be called the standard approach involves a narration of the main facts of the Brownings' courtship with selective quotation from Elizabeth's sonnets offered as evidence for, or illustration of, these facts.⁸ The

8. An early example is John H. Ingram, Elizabeth Barrett Browning (London: W.H. Allen, 1888), and a more recent one is Frances Winwar, The Immortal Lovers (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1950).

only critical comments that accompany this method are usually rhetorical exclamations of wonder. In what follows I intend to reject this biographical line completely and approach the Sonnets from the Portuguese as I have the Shakespeare Sonnets and In Memoriam. I hope to show that the poetic value of this sequence derives from its Shakespearean style and that there is a persona proper to it, developed and explored through this style independently of the poet's life story.

Alethea Hayter recoiled from the biographical air of the sequence, finding it too close:

To me the much-praised Sonnets from the Portuguese are not her best work because in them she is dealing with an emotion too new and powerful for her to transmute it into universally valid terms. ...

Happy love between men and women is a much more universal human experience than ... the homosexual love of Shakespeare's sonnets. But these last are nevertheless so universal that they can fit any kind of love, and speak for all of us. Mrs Browning's sonnets express the love of one particular individual for another; they are personal, even idiosyncratic. ... They are not enough removed from personal relationship to universal communication. They are hardly sensual at all, but emotionally they are naked - wonderful for the lover to whom they were addressed, but in some way uncomfortable for the rest of us. When she talks of 'cheeks as pale as those you see', or says 'I never gave a lock of hair away / To a man, dearest, except this to thee' or 'Yes, call me by my pet-name!' when she turns over his letters in her lap or describes how he kissed her hair, one has Peeping Tom sensations.⁹

To this criticism it might be objected that a good deal of English love poetry is less universal than Shakespeare's sonnets, at their most universal, but is not worthless on that score alone. Further, one might insist that Shakespeare is himself at times

9. Alethea Hayter, Mrs Browning: A Poet's Work and its Setting (London: Faber, 1962), p. 105.

quite as personal as Elizabeth Barrett Browning. The significant point, however, is that the indications of a personal love between the Brownings are only able to worry Alethea Hayter because of the knowledge we have regarding their composition and their intimate encapsulation of an actual courtship. We know much more about the Brownings than we do about Shakespeare; where his love-life is a closed book, theirs lies open for all the world to read. If the Sonnets from the Portuguese were as much shorn of auxiliary biographical material as Shakespeare's Sonnets, we should have been prevented from feeling like Peeping Toms by an accident of history.

The question then remains - are these sonnets, in and of themselves, too personal to be of use to the general reader of poetry? I would answer this question in the negative on two counts, the one general and the other particular. Taking the sequence as a whole, I suggest, contra Hayter, that particularisation and idiosyncrasy add to the fullness of the disclosure of a poetic persona behind the sonnets. The more intimate the details the more completely do we come to know the speaker of the sequence and hence the work of art; the Sonnets from the Portuguese as artefact is more complete. Again, taking the sonnets individually, I suggest that the personal mode, with its intimate first-person confessions, is offset by a universalising meditative discourse. Just as the Shakespeare Sonnets and In Memoriam each yielded a poetic persona when analysed, so too these sonnets by Elizabeth Barrett Browning add up to a single work which not only makes particular points about particular stages in a heterosexual relationship, but also

bequeaths to us an artistic portrait of a complex sensibility. The lesson of the Shakespeare Sonnets is that, when reading love sonnet sequences, we should be on our guard 'dramatically', and should seek to learn as much about the speaker of the sequence as about the course of the relationship. The usefulness of aligning Shakespeare's Sonnets and such Victorian sequences as In Memoriam and the Sonnets from the Portuguese lies in the subsequent readiness of the reader to appreciate the self-disclosure of a poetic persona behind a series of individual lyrics connected by a single voice rather than by an objective framework or plot.

In Sonnets from the Portuguese the poet uses three strands of language to create the character of her speaker: a base language of reasoned psychological analysis, a literal descriptive language and a figurative or metaphorical language. The literal strand of language is that which describes everyday objects and recounts events - objects and events which are of emotional significance for the speaker. This strand of language includes all those allusions to a shared experience private to the Brownings which so discomfited Alethea Hayter, the 'lock of hair' sonnets and the 'letters' sonnet being obvious examples. The figurative strand of language includes all the metaphors of the sequence, both those drawn from the physical world and those from the Christian and Classical vocabularies.

Alethea Hayter has taken exception to two of the sonnets on the basis of their allegedly faulty organisation of figurative language. Her objection to Sonnet V is, by her own admission, idiosyncratic and even 'irrelevant'.¹⁰ Her hostile commentary

10. Mrs Browning, p. 108.

on Sonnet XXV, however, deserves scrutiny and refutation because of the authority of her work on Elizabeth Barrett Browning in general and also because she places considerable reliance on her reduction of Sonnet XXV to a nonsense in her case for a low valuation of the Sonnets from the Portuguese as a whole. The sonnet in question runs:

A heavy heart, Belovèd, have I borne
 From year to year until I saw thy face,
 And sorrow after sorrow took the place
 Of all those natural joys as lightly worn
 As the stringed pearls, each lifted in its turn
 By a beating heart at dance-time. Hopes apace
 Were changed to long despairs, till God's own grace
 Could scarcely lift above the world forlorn
 My heavy heart. Then thou didst bid me bring
 And let it drop adown thy calmly great
 Deep being! Fast it sinketh, as a thing
 Which its own nature doth precipitate,
 While thine doth close above it, mediating
 Betwixt the stars and the unaccomplished fate.¹¹

Alethea Hayter claims that in this sonnet Elizabeth Barrett Browning has confused her various images, moving chaotically from one association of a word (particularly with 'heart' and 'pearls') to another: the poet's 'affluent imagination like a cornucopia tumbles out rich confused fruits of emotion.'¹² Some of the confusion, however, is of the critic's making, since Hayter begins her commentary with the paraphrase 'she has worn a heavy heart for years,' when what the poem actually says is that the speaker has borne a heavy heart for years. Indeed, the

11. The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, ed. Frederic C. Kenyon (London: Smith, Elder, 1900), p. 317. All quotations from the Sonnets from the Portuguese are from Kenyon's edition, pp. 312-21.

12. All references to, and quotations from, Alethea Hayter's critique of Sonnet XXV are to Mrs Browning, p. 106.

first two lines have a distinctly metaphorical force, with the phrase 'A heavy heart' being much more figurative than literal. This conventional metaphor is followed by two lines of what I shall, for the moment, call emotional confession before the simile of the string of pearls is introduced. There is no evidence that the simile of pearls lifting on the bosom of a dancer has anything at all to do with the 'heavy heart ... borne' by the speaker in the first line; Alethea Hayter's claim that 'we now seem to have a heart worn over a heart,' makes no sense at all. The pearls are a straightforward simile for the 'natural joys' of a dancer against whose happiness the speaker pits her own sorrows; the two hearts are quite distinct, the one bearing sorrow, the other wearing 'natural joys'. So Hayter's comments obfuscate what is a simple and effective passage. Elizabeth Barrett Browning manages to keep the physical associations of the adjective 'heavy' from line 1 through the next five lines until she returns to it in lines 7 to 9. Alethea Hayter blandly paraphrases these lines by saying, 'she comes back again to her own heavy heart, which is now lifted over the world by God ...'. What Elizabeth Barrett Browning actually says is that in contrast to the light heart of a dancer which lifts the pearls strung above her breast, the speaker's heart is so heavy that

... God's own grace
 Could scarcely lift above the world forlorn
 My heavy heart.

The strain involved in the divine effort here to save the speaker from despair is entirely missing from Hayter's reading and it is this tension, so much in contrast to the easy effort of the dancer in the simile, that gives the first nine lines their

continuity and force. These lines work because the speaker keeps under her direct control the progression from the first to the second mention of her heavy heart whilst allowing for the detour of the comparison with the dancer.

Alethea Hayter's handling of the remainder of this sonnet is even more odd than her reading of its first part. She postulates allusions to 'Cleopatra's pearl dissolved in wine', and suggests references to alchemy. Her expression of her ideas about this last part of the poem is very hesitant, yet even though Elizabeth Barrett Browning does change her central image in the second part of the sonnet there seems no real reason for confusion. The second implied image is surely the sea, for the lover's 'calmly great / Deep being' and the clause 'Fast it sinketh' together make quite good sense if the speaker's heart being swallowed up by the suitor's is considered in terms of an object dropped into deep water. The 'Metaphysical' style of the elaboration of this image in the simile '... as a thing / Which its own nature doth precipitate' supports such a reading. The last two lines of the sonnet then make perfect sense as the waters of the lover's soul 'close' over the speaker's heart and 'mediate' between the stars, literally imagined, and the yet-to-be-accomplished regeneration of the speaker through love. This last line has a moving astrological weight about it that is quite within reach of conventional poetic diction and certainly gives no immediate warrant for the more complex reading offered by Hayter. I have spent time on this re-reading of Sonnet XXV because it is difficult enough to dispel the aura of sentimentality that clings to the Sonnets from the Portuguese without facing a critical misreading as well.

Sonnet XXV is also a convenient starting point for the identification of the base language of the sequence which is Shakespearean in the same sense that Tennyson's 'logic of feeling' was in In Memoriam. When speaking of lines 3 and 4 of this sonnet - 'And sorrow after sorrow took the place / Of all those natural joys ...' - I used the term 'emotional confession', and in this lies the affinity with Shakespeare. The base language of the Sonnets from the Portuguese is a direct, discursive language which weighs feeling and thought on their own terms without creating parallels for them in either the natural or supernatural world. This base language is the voice of the poet speaking in the first person as the persona of the sequence. It can be aphoristic and epigrammatic, often encapsulating conclusions about life and love arrived at through a process of extended evocation of image or conceit. Lines 3 and 4 of Sonnet XXV are a direct statement of emotional experience revealing that over time the speaker lost all the joys of happy life as they were replaced by sorrows. The pacing of the lines is interesting as the structure 'sorrow after sorrow' follows from that of 'year to year' in line 2 so that both the weary passing of time and the attendant melancholy of the speaker are focused more sharply, or rather, dwelt upon more lingeringly than the compressed statement 'all those natural joys'. Later in the sonnet, at lines 6 to 7, the whole process of emotional disappointment and alienation that has been the speaker's lot is caught in the statement, 'Hopes apace / Were changed to long despairs,' using the same relation of quicker rhythm to hopes and slower to sorrow as earlier in the poem.

Sonnet XXV is successful because the three images (the heavy heart, the stringed pearls, and the sea-soul of the lover) are all held in place by the first-person urgency of the speaker's voice and emotion. In this manner or style Elizabeth Barrett Browning is Shakespearean because here and throughout the sequence it is this base language that gives us a sense of the persona, just as Shakespeare's analytical confessions revealed his persona's defining traits. The legitimate claims of the Sonnets from the Portuguese to our attention, as well as their limitations, can be fairly estimated only if this base language is recognised and if its success in lending continuity to the literal and figurative strands of language is evaluated. While I have taken exception to Alethea Hayter's treatment of Sonnet XXV there are times across the sequence when her general criticisms of too strident an emotional voice and too awkward a manipulation of images hold good. These weaker moments, it must be stressed, should not be allowed to compromise a fair reading of the best sonnets. The aura of sentimentality that has clung to the reputation of these sonnets can be dispelled or at least placed in perspective if the Shakespearean method of the work is recognised and explored.

In the first sonnet of the sequence Elizabeth Barrett Browning introduces her speaker as one habitually given to melancholy and one for whom this sombreness of mood gives rise to analytical introspection. Thinking of Theocritus's blessed years the speaker turns inward:

And, as I mused it in his antique tongue,
I saw, in gradual vision through my tears,
Those of my own life, who by turns had flung
A shadow across me.

Here the mood of the speaker is like that of Shakespeare in Sonnet 30, 'When to the sessions of sweet silent thought'. Her mood is presented in a language of just sufficient intellection to allow us to share it, making it a little less than personal while not detracting from its intimacy. In the second sonnet this exercise of mind on the predicament of the heart is again in evidence. The speaker feels that God has laid a curse

So darkly on my eyelids, as to amerce
My sight from seeing thee, - that if I had died,
The deathweights, placed there, would have signified
Less absolute exclusion.

This language is the result of the speaker's desire that not only her emotion but also her attempt to place that emotion in some metaphysical context should be recognisable. The hypothesis of God's curse and the conclusion of these lines both supply evidence for the liveliness of the speaker's consciousness; and this base language, this 'Shakespearean' precision, will be the chief means by which the speaker's character will become known to us in the course of the Sonnets from the Portuguese.

The pattern of the sequence as a whole can be seen in Sonnet XI, which illustrates both the strengths and the weaknesses of Sonnets from the Portuguese. The octave contains that particular tone of intimacy that limits the reach of the poem to the speaker and her suitor, while at the same time its Romantic imagery does little to reveal the speaker's personality.

And therefore if to love can be desert,
I am not all unworthy. Cheeks as pale
As these you see, and trembling knees that fail
To bear the burden of a heavy heart, -
This weary minstrel-life that once was girt
To climb Aornus, and can scarce avail
To pipe now 'gainst the valley nightingale
A melancholy music

This octave does at least begin with the base language of the sequence. In the first line and a half the speaker infuses her emotion with a certain logical quality involving self-conscious evaluation of emotion. The indirection of the language of this opening is very Shakespearean: it shows the speaker standing back from her feelings, encasing them in a deductive style which, moving from a hypothetical premise to a markedly tentative and qualified conclusion, directs our attention towards, rather than away from, the speaker as one in love. In the next six lines the speaker abandons this distanced evaluative stance and plunges into her emotion, forcing rather than inviting the reader to consider her emotional predicament. It is not the phrase 'Cheeks as pale / As these you see' that worries me, as it did Alethea Hayter, since it is at least an honest statement of immediate significance for the speaker and her lover. What does worry me is the hollow ring of lines 5 and 6, because their stilted diction carries no significant emotion and encapsulates no new thought. Here one might recall the line 'As I mused it in his antique tongue' from Sonnet I which takes us closer to Theocritus (and to the Shakespeare of Sonnet 17), and therefore to the speaker's firsthand experience of a specific philosophic reflection. Lines 7 to 8 of Sonnet XI also detract from the credibility of the speaker as a confessional persona in the Shakespearean sense by their echoes of Blake and Keats and their emasculation of emotion by poetics.

In line 9 the sonnet changes and, after the turn, it develops a markedly Shakespearean strength:

... O Belovèd, it is plain
 I am not of thy worth nor for thy place!
 And yet, because I love thee, I obtain
 From that same love this vindicating grace,
 To live on still in love, and yet in vain, -
 To bless thee, yet renounce thee to thy face.

The language of these lines is original to the speaker in that it is only her yoking of the ordinary meanings of words, one to another, that is important. She does not here rely on any special poetic effects but speaks directly of her situation. The speaker's essentially conventional position of humility and gratitude towards her lover is vivified by her intelligent presentation of her case. She moves from personal reference to her particular situation, through a more universally applicable definition of how love between any couple might work, to arrive at an arresting conclusion which carries the courage of her convictions. Bearing in mind the public dimension of Shakespeare's concern in Sonnet 36, 'Let me confess that we two must be twain', we can compare the style of that poem to this eleventh Portuguese sonnet. Shakespeare's sonnet runs:

Let me confess that we two must be twain
 Although our undivided loves are one:
 So shall those blots that do with me remain
 Without thy help by me be borne alone.
 In our two loves there is but one respect,
 Though in our lives a separable spite,
 Which, though it alter not love's sole effect,
 Yet doth it steal sweet hours from love's delight.
 I may not evermore acknowledge thee,
 Lest my bewailèd guilt should do thee shame;
 Nor thou with public kindness honour me,
 Unless thou take that honour from thy name:
 But do not so; I love thee in such sort
 As, thou being mine, mine is thy good report.

In Shakespeare's lines and in those of Elizabeth Barrett Browning there is a deliberate development of thought which generates emotional tension by means of the speaker's direct control over

the language. There is a similar investment of self by the speaker in the address to the lover, which, because of its reasoned expression, brings us as close to the poetic persona of each sequence as to the theme of each poem. In both poems there is an obvious attempt by the speaker to define feelings in words rather than simply suggest them by images.

The difference between, on the one hand, a language of pictures, of suggestive images that 'dramatise' emotions in an imaginary context, and, on the other, a language of analysis, of perceptive psychological commentary on emotion, can be seen in the run of sonnets on the inferiority theme early in the Sonnets from the Portuguese. In Sonnets III, IV, VIII, and XVI Elizabeth Barrett Browning presents the theme of the speaker's great inferiority to her lover in a consistent run of images.

She plays upon the fact that they are both poets, making her lover a 'Most gracious singer of high poems' (Sonnet IV), and herself 'A poor, tired, wandering singer' (Sonnet III). Elizabeth Barrett Browning then extends this contrast in two ways: first, by highlighting the difference in the setting to which each belongs (Sonnets III and IV), and secondly by stressing the difference in their status (Sonnets VIII and XVI). These images of inferiority and superiority, like the images of mutability in Shakespeare's Sonnets, serve to hold, and allow the exploration of, a particular theme of great emotional significance for the speaker.

Sonnet III will serve to illustrate how effective this use of imagery to convey an emotion can be when it is accompanied by a strong element of personal intensity:

Unlike are we, unlike, O princely Heart!
 Unlike our uses and our destinies.
 Our ministering two angels look surprise
 On one another, as they strike athwart
 Their wings in passing. Thou, bethink thee, art 5
 A guest for queens to social pageantries,
 With gages from a hundred brighter eyes
 Than tears even can make mine, to play thy part
 Of chief musician. What hast thou to do 9
 With looking from the lattice-lights at me,
 A poor, tired, wandering singer, singing through
 The dark, and leaning up a cypress tree?
 The chrism is on thine head, - on mine, the dew, -
 And Death must dig the level where these agree.

Here the gaiety and buoyancy invested in the description of the lover's situation, contrasting with the lethargy and melancholy behind the speaker's description of her own position, give the poem a certain affecting qualify. Even here, however, the strength of the sonnet comes from the rhetorical reasoning of the speaker's interventions in lines 2, 9, and 14. By themselves the images of this sonnet, its pictorial vignettes, are too contrived to be really successful. It is the speaker's manipulation of them to serve her rhetorical ends that gives them force.

Sonnet IX shows Elizabeth Barrett Browning moving beyond these images of inferiority, even though they are recalled late in the poem, and employing instead the more successful base language of the sequence to treat this theme.

Can it be right to give what I can give?
 To let thee sit beneath the fall of tears
 As salt as mine, and hear the sighing years 4
 Re-sighing on my lips renunciative
 Through those infrequent smiles which fail to live
 For all thy adjurations? O my fears,
 That this can scarce be right! We are not peers, 7
 So to be lovers; and I own, and grieve,
 That givers of such gifts as mine are, must
 Be counted with the ungenerous. Out, alas! 10
 I will not soil thy purple with my dust,
 Nor breathe my poison on thy Venice-glass,
 Nor give thee any love - which were unjust.
 Beloved, I only love thee! let it pass.

Just as in Shakespeare's Sonnets 40 and 42, where the speaker was seen to weigh up his relation to his friend in a language of analytical precision, so here in Sonnet IX Elizabeth Barrett Browning adopts an argumentative stance that allows her to assess the very emotions she is experiencing. The alternating question and exclamation marks in the sonnet are the external signs of an inner evaluative process. The speaker, by posing questions and offering answers, creates a distance between her inner life and her expression of it in words, and this lends a measure of complexity to a simple, fearful emotion. In the first two lines the opening query allows both the speaker and the reader to evaluate as well as appreciate the rhetoric of 'the fall of tears / As salt as mine'. The objective point of view set up by the first, fifth and sixth lines eases the pressure on the melodious whispering of lines 3 and 4 as the speaker questions her own melancholy. Lines 7 to 10 and lines 13 and 14 again bring to the fore the speaker's self-conscious appraisal of her relationship to the lover. In this sonnet the dominant tone is one of reasoning over emotion and the figurative embellishments are under the control of the speaker's conscience.

Before leaving these inequality sonnets it is necessary to refer in detail to Sonnet V. This is one of the best poems of the sequence, illustrating Elizabeth Barrett Browning's control over images and analysis in intricate combination.

I lift my heavy heart up solemnly,
 As once Electra her sepulchral urn,
 And, looking in thine eyes, I overturn
 The ashes at thy feet. Behold and see
 What a great heap of grief lay hid in me,
 And how the red wild sparkles dimly burn
 Through the ashen greyness. If thy foot in scorn
 Could tread them out to darkness utterly,

It might be well perhaps. But if instead
 Thou wait beside me for the wind to blow
 The grey dust up, ... those laurels on thine head,
 O my Belovèd, will not shield thee so,
 That none of all the fires shall scorch and shred
 The hair beneath. Stand farther off then! go.

Here the speaker manages consistently to fuse her treatment of her own emotion and her presentation of a conceit. The early association of the speaker's 'heavy heart' and Electra's urn, accomplished by the equation of the two as objects and by the interconnectedness of 'solemnly' and 'sepulchral', is kept up throughout the sonnet. Lines 5-7 play on this association to achieve an impressive force at the twin levels of literal and metaphorical meaning. Across this sonnet the speaker's rhetorical manipulation of her image of the urn is inseparable from her ardent emotional reasoning. It is this controlled union of theme and image that might put one in mind of Shakespeare's use of the image of the sun in Sonnets 7 and 33. It certainly brings us irresistibly into the presence of the speaker.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning continues to work in this double vein of images and meditative self-analysis throughout the sequence. In Sonnet XXVI, for example, she reveals the speaker's inner growth through a style similar to that employed to record her hopelessness in IX.

I lived with visions for my company
 Instead of men and women, years ago,
 And found them gentle mates, nor thought to know
 A sweeter music than they played to me.
 But soon their trailing purple was not free
 Of this world's dust, their lutes did silent grow,
 And I myself grew faint and blind below
 Their vanishing eyes. Then THOU didst come - to be,
 Belovèd, what they seemed. Their shining fronts,
 Their songs, their splendours (better, yet the same,
 As river-water hallowed into fonts),
 Met in thee, and from out thee overcame
 My soul with satisfaction of all wants:
 Because God's gifts put man's best dreams to shame.

This sonnet is full of images but they are all under the direction of a controlling intelligence. The emotion that clings to each image is placed even as it is expressed, and this element of distance in the speaker's tone is very like that quality of reasoned introspection that marks the Shakespearean sonnet style. It is not that Elizabeth Barrett Browning is less passionate than usual, in this sonnet, less dogmatic because of her inner turmoil; it is rather that she is here anxious to pinpoint specific kinds of experience from the outside as well as from the inside. This poem retains the symbolism of the purple-coloured robe dragged in the dust from Sonnet IX and reworks the metaphor of music from Sonnets III and IV; yet there is, in addition, a mental toughness not apparent in the earlier sonnets. Sonnet XXVI has a stylistic as well as a thematic movement from the particular to the abstract, from the specific to the universal, that orders the speaker's emotions and lends them a wider, deeper significance than the merely idiosyncratic matter of the speaker's experience.

Sonnet XXIX shows how subtle at times is the Shakespearean influence on Elizabeth Barrett Browning's thoughts, images, and rhythms.

I think of thee! - my thoughts do twine and bud
 About thee, as wild vines, about a tree,
 Put out broad leaves, and soon there's nought to see
 Except the straggling green which hides the wood.
 Yet, O my palm-tree, be it understood
 I will not have my thoughts instead of thee
 Who are dearer, better! Rather, instantly
 Renew thy presence; as a strong tree should,
 Rustle thy boughs and set thy trunk all bare,
 And let these bands of greenery which insphere thee
 Drop heavily down, - burst, shattered, everywhere!
 Because, in this deep joy to see and hear thee
 And breathe within thy shadow a new air,
 I do not think of thee - I am too near thee.

Shakespeare's famous opening query in Sonnet 18, 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?', is answered unconsciously here as Elizabeth Barrett Browning plunges into such a comparison with gusto. In Sonnet 18 Shakespeare has the 'Rough winds' shaking 'the darling buds of May' and here Elizabeth Barrett Browning catches this natural energy in images infused with the speaker's enthusiasm. In Sonnet 56 Shakespeare implored, 'Sweet love renew thy force ...' and here Elizabeth Barrett Browning echoes this with her own, 'Rather, instantly / Renew thy presence ...'. Lines 7-11 of this sonnet, in their strong but steady slowness of rhythm culminating in a 'dying fall', echo passages from Shakespeare's fifth and seventy-third sonnets. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's hope and happiness in this sonnet has involved such a reversal of the mood of pessimism in the Shakespearean sonnets that the echoes are muffled, and yet the drawing of such parallels as these has a point. It shows how, in her attempt to give life to the persona of Sonnets from the Portuguese, she drew, however unconsciously, upon that English sonnet sequence which most powerfully yielded a distinct persona of its own. The strong emotional sweep of her twenty-ninth sonnet, with its undercurrent of sexual awakening ('Rustle thy boughs and set thy trunk all bare'), is important as a stage in the speaker's development from a fear of love to an acceptance of it. It also shows Elizabeth Barrett Browning's capacity to reach beyond the first-person voice of her persona and touch universal desires in the way that Shakespeare was so often able to do by a combination of subjective emotional confession and objective descriptive imagery.

By Sonnet XXXIX the speaker of the sequence has arrived at a point where she can recall her past failings, measure her inner growth, and then redirect this new maturity towards the lover in an arresting expression of love triumphant.

Because thou hast the power and own'st the grace
 To look through and behind this mask of me
 (Against which years have beat thus blanchingly
 With their rains), and behold my soul's true face,
 The dim and weary witness of life's race, -
 Because thou hast the faith and love to see,
 Through that same soul's distracting lethargy,
 The patient angel waiting for a place
 In the new Heavens, - because nor sin nor woe,
 Nor God's infliction, nor death's neighbourhood,
 Nor all which others viewing, turn to go,
 Nor all which makes me tired of all, self-viewed, -
 Nothing repels thee, ... Dearest, teach me so
 To pour out gratitude, as thou dost, good!

This sonnet skilfully combines argument and imagery in a union which creates something new. Its force derives from its blending of a personal voice with the universal experiences from which the speaker finds herself drawing individual life. The first quatrain unites personal ageing with universal mutability, and in the sestet the speaker sets her suitor's act of loving generosity against a framework of reference that includes the widest operations of Providence and the fundamental human experiences. This sonnet has a majesty of tone and a completeness of vision that can well stand comparison with Shakespeare. In his Sonnet 66 Shakespeare rings a series of sonorous peals against all the horrors of life only to turn round in the couplet and counter all these negations - 'Tir'd with all these, from these would I be gone - / Save that, to die I leave my love alone.' Elizabeth Barrett Browning manages to achieve much the same effect in the sestet of Sonnet XXXIX; but there it is the lover who

saves the speaker from the world, in contrast to the speaker of Shakespeare's sonnet who is loath to leave the beloved alone in the world. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's expression of her inner weariness in lines 11 and 12 - 'Nor all which others viewing, turn to go, / Nor all which makes me tired of all, self-viewed,' recalls the Shakespearean speaker's disaffection with his existence and his onomatopoeic formulation of it in the opening and closing lines of the sonnet. Elizabeth Barrett Browning manages to interweave the objective critique of the world and the personal domain of reciprocated emotion so that the impact of the lines is twofold all the way through. The intimacy of the octave with its presentation of the dramatic interaction of lover and beloved, only alluded to in the couplet of Shakespeare's Sonnet 66, prepares for and lends emotional tension to the catalogue of the sestet. Much earlier in the Sonnets from the Portuguese Elizabeth Barrett Browning had already added a distinct note of personal intensity to a defence of love reminiscent of Shakespeare's in Sonnet 116. Shakespeare's speaker declares:

Oh no! ... [love] is an ever fixèd 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.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's speaker has, in Sonnet II achieved something of Shakespeare's objective grandeur of vision, but has added to it just that measure of personal voice which makes it emotionally gripping:

O my friend!
Men could not part us with their worldly jars,
Nor the seas change us, nor the tempests bend;
Our hands would touch for all the mountain-bars:
And, heaven being rolled between us at the end,
We should but vow the faster for the stars.

The high point of the speaker's development in the Sonnets from the Portuguese, with respect to the transition from radical insecurity to emotional wholeness, is the penultimate Sonnet, XLIII.

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
 I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
 My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
 For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
 I love thee to the level of everyday's
 Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
 I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
 I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
 I love thee with the passion put to use
 In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
 I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
 With my lost saints, - I love thee with the breath
 Smiles, tears, of all my life! - and, if God choose,
 I shall but love thee better after death.

In this sonnet the linking of the first-person pronoun with a vast sphere of reference to the universal aspects of life and love has reached its highest point in the sequence. It moves easily, with significant pauses and a slow but climactic rhythmical development; its declamatory catalogue is sufficiently augmented by smoother lines of reasoning to prevent its being simplistic or abrasive, and its passion and philosophy complement each other with artful artlessness. Yet this famous sonnet does not do that which most of Shakespeare's sonnets and many of the other sonnets of this sequence do - it does not present the persona of the sequence in the context of the 'real drama' of her experience. This phrase, 'real drama' is one used by Joan Rees in her recent comparison of Sonnets from the Portuguese and Christina Rossetti's sonnet sequence Monna Innominata. Professor Rees finds 'plenty of dramatic appearance in Sonnets from the Portuguese but little of the reality.'¹³ For Professor Rees the 'characteristic drama

13. Joan Rees, The Poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Modes of Self-Expression (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 150.

of the sonnet ... depends on progression of thought and feeling' (p. 156). Now, while this penultimate sonnet, 'How do I love thee?', is both emotionally and rhetorically impressive, it does not meet Professor Rees's dramatic demands of the sonnet. Its portrait of the speaker is more static than some of the less perfectly crafted sonnets already examined, and less 'dramatic' than that offered in Sonnet XL.

I have been arguing that the development of a persona across the Sonnets from the Portuguese is achieved by the conscious presentation of a progression in 'thought and feeling' by the speaker, and I suggest contra Professor Rees that this sequence is dramatic, according to her definition of the term with regard to the sonnet, because of the success of the speaker in her self-creating confessions. Professor Rees also holds that the language of Sonnets from the Portuguese 'does nothing, in spite of energy and emphasis, to compensate for flaccidity of form since it does not provide for irony or ambiguity or internal strain' (p. 151). I would like to offer Sonnet XL as an example of a 'dramatic' sonnet that does exhibit some irony and internal strain:

Oh, yes! they love through all this world of ours!
 I will not gainsay love, called love forsooth.
 I have heard love talked in my early youth,
 And since, not so long back but that the flowers
 Then gathered, smell still. Mussulmans and Giaours
 Throw kerchiefs at a smile, and have no ruth
 For any weeping. Polypheme's white tooth
 Slips on the nut if, after frequent showers,
 The shell is over-smooth, - and not so much
 Will turn the thing called love, aside to hate
 Or else to oblivion. But thou art not such
 A lover, my Belovèd! thou canst wait
 Through sorrow and sickness, to bring souls to touch,
 And think it soon when others cry 'Too late.'

Elizabeth Barrett Browning here holds back her simple, ardent joy at being loved after being such a difficult beloved, until

it can break through the cynical, satiric wit of the octave with trenchant honesty. The mordant opening lines and the skilful reduction to absurdity of the overblown Byronic vogue of Romantic love, reveal just how penetrating an intelligence the poet-speaker possesses. This new role of satirist sits easily upon the speaker in this sonnet because the sequence has been governed, up to this point, as much by her intelligence as by her emotions. This sonnet illustrates in miniature the success of the general Shakespearean method adopted by Elizabeth Barrett Browning in the Sonnets from the Portuguese - that of the conscious self-creation of the speaker across the work by a combination of direct emotional unburdening and rational psycho-analysis. As a stage in the speaker's growth the poem presents 'dramatically' and with some irony, the positive increase in self-confidence that the lover has given the speaker. The 'internal strain' of the sonnet is evident in the way its irony is directed outwards and its emotion presented with conviction. As a general defence of simple and honest dedication of one heart to another it works well, being compounded of more than just dedication itself.

Not only do sonnets such as this produce our awareness of a persona behind the sequence, but, with this level of achievement clearly before us, it can be admitted that Elizabeth Barrett Browning's verse is weak in a number of ways. Critics have pointed out that Sonnets XVIII and XIX, the lock-of-hair poems, are compromised by too sentimental a view of love and by an awkwardness with imagery. The ponderously weighty lines

As purply black, as erst to Pindar's eyes
The dim purpureal tresses gloomed athwart
The nine white Muse-brows

lack the vivacity and cogency of the best parts of the sequence. Sonnet XXVIII, the letter sonnet, is coy and self-indulgent; Sonnet XXXIII, the pet-name poem, is simplistic and strident. More distressing than these lapses into an inferior mode are the occasional instances of failure to control the whole of a sonnet where part of it is in the poet's best style. Sonnet XXXVII will illustrate the point.

Pardon, oh, pardon, that my soul should make,
 Of all that strong divineness which I know
 For thine and thee, an image only so
 Formed of the sand, and fit to shift and break.
 It is that distant years which did not take
 Thy sovranty, recoiling with a blow,
 Have forced my swimming brain to undergo
 Their doubt and dread, and blindly to forsake
 Thy purity of likeness and distort
 Thy worthiest love to a worthless counterfeit:
 As if a shipwrecked Pagan, safe in port,
 His guardian sea-god to commemorate,
 Should set a sculptured porpoise, gills a-snort
 And vibrant tail, within the temple-gate.

The first ten lines of this sonnet are a convincing blend of the emotionally determined imagery and analytical meditative discourse that together make up the style proper to the sequence persona. The speaker is revealed, seeking to explain to herself, as well as to her suitor, the path she has taken to reach the point where she can consider accepting and returning his love. There is a strength of mind behind both the imagery of the opening quatrain and the commentary of the second that is used to present the speaker's frailty of heart. But this 'inner strain' between the manner and the matter of the major section of this sonnet is then betrayed by the last four lines which are unconvincing. The image they contain makes sense, and its relevance to the speaker's situation is mechanically obvious, but it lacks dignity and is too fantastic. It is a piece of rococco self-indulgence,

culpable in the way in which Samuel Johnson found the Metaphysicals culpable. It lowers the emotional and poetic tones of the sonnet and dissipates the fine concentration built up in the octave.¹⁴

Sonnet XV also begins with the speaker combining special pleading and reasoning. Her selection of images is apposite and, by conveying the speaker's emotions without appearing intrusive, the images of the octave achieve considerable rhetorical force.

Accuse me not, beseech thee, that I wear
 Too calm and sad a face in front of thine;
 For we two look two ways, and cannot shine
 With the same sunlight on our brow and hair.
 On me thou lookest with no doubting care,
 As on a bee shut in a crystalline;
 Since sorrow hath shut me safe in love's divine,
 And to spread wing and fly in the outer air
 Were most impossible failure, if I strove
 To fail so. But I look on thee - on thee -
 Beholding, besides love, the end of love,
 Hearing oblivion beyond memory;
 As one who sits and gazes from above,
 Over the rivers to the bitter sea.

Unlike Sonnet XXXVII, this does not fall away at the end but gathers new impetus as the predominance of the first-person speaking voice over the imagery is replaced by the impersonal pronoun 'one' and a more universal sweep of thought. At line 10

14. Dorothy Mermin finds this image appealing and suggests that 'no apology is really necessary, ... for this flattering comparison of the lover to a sexy sea-god or for the disarmingly erotic porpoise.' See Dorothy Mermin, 'The Female Poet and the Embarrassed Reader: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Sonnets from the Portuguese', *ELH*, 48 (1981), p. 354. The point is, however, that this image is meant to be a metaphorical illustration of the travesty of the truth represented by the speaker's doubting of the worth of her suitor, and for this reason the vitality of the image, so pleasing to Dorothy Mermin, renders it useless as a means of communicating the speaker's sense of guilt - its intended purpose.

the speaker is at her most intensely personal as she narrows the gap between herself and her lover that was opened up in the octave. She does this by creating a hiatus in the sonnet which is really a delayed 'turn'. The physical immediacy of this line, ' ... But I look on thee - on thee -', underlines the speaker's feelings of tenderness for her lover even as it prepares for the image of the isolated spectator of the last lines. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's capacity to make her speaker's dilemma resonate with a universal relevance is evident in the conclusion of this sonnet. Taken as a whole, Sonnet XV illustrates the poet's gift for compressing her thoughts and feelings into a single unit of vision and creating a complexity that justifies the comparison drawn so far between her and Shakespeare.

In the Cornhill Magazine of December 1930, Kathleen Greene wrote:

It was the fashion of their time to bracket together the work of Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Barrett Browning and to make far-fetched comparisons between them, for no particular reason except that they were for some years contemporary women writers. From our greater distance of time we can see how utterly unlike they were and how fruitless is any sort of combined judgement upon them. Mrs Browning, though Christina refers to her, in the foreword to Monna Innominata, as 'the Great Poetess of our own day and nation,' was all the things that Christina herself would have loathed to be.¹⁵

These comments are wise if one is taking the whole oeuvres of the two poets into consideration, for in general they are quite unlike, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's being much the more intellectual, and Christina Rossetti's the more lyrical. In spite of this I propose to continue the association of the two

15. Kathleen Greene, 'Christina Georgina Rossetti', Cornhill Magazine, n.s. (1930), pp. 664-65.

poets objected to by Kathleen Greene, but on the specific basis of their having both written love sonnet sequences of a 'Shakespearean' character. Kathleen Greene's remarking upon Christina Rossetti's attitude towards Elizabeth Barrett Browning is especially pertinent here because in that foreword to Monna Innominata Christina Rossetti revealed a significant degree of dissatisfaction with the Sonnets from the Portuguese. This discontent stems from a difference in vision based, most probably, on a difference in experience. Just as the Brownings dreamt up the title Sonnets from the Portuguese to protect their privacy,¹⁶ so too, it has been alleged, Christina Rossetti pre-faced her autobiographical sonnet sequence Monna Innominata with the following headnote:

Beatrice ... [and] Laura ... have alike paid the exceptional penalty of exceptional honour, and have come down to us resplendent with charms, but (at least, to my apprehension) scant of attractiveness.

These heroines of world-wide fame were preceded by a bevy of unnamed ladies, 'donne innominate,' sung by a school of less conspicuous poets; and in that land and that period which gave simultaneous birth to Catholics, to Albigenses, and to Troubadours, one can imagine many a lady as sharing her lover's poetic aptitude, while the barrier between them might be one held sacred by both, yet not such as to render mutual love incompatible with mutual honour.

Had such a lady spoken for herself, the portrait left us might have appeared more tender, if less dignified, than any drawn even by a devoted friend. Or had the Great Poetess of our own day and nation only been unhappy instead of happy, her circumstances would have invited her to bequeath to us, in lieu of the 'Portuguese Sonnets,' an inimitable 'donna innominata' drawn not from fancy but from feeling, and worthy to occupy a niche beside Beatrice and Laura.¹⁷

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16. The endowment of these sonnets with their title has been romanticised by most of the biographical critics of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, a typical case being that of Louise Shutz Boas, in Elizabeth Barrett Browning (London: Longmans, 1930), p. 135.
 17. The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti, ed. William Michael Rossetti (London: Macmillan, 1904), p. 58. All my quotations from Monna Innominata are from this edition by the poet's second brother.

The poet's brother, William Michael Rossetti, commented:

The introductory prose-note, about 'many a lady sharing her lover's poetic aptitude,' etc., is a blind - not an untruthful blind, for it alleges nothing that is not reasonable, and on the surface correct, but still a blind interposed to draw off attention from the writer in her proper person.¹⁸

Lona Mosk Packer, Christina Rossetti's controversial modern biographer, has insisted:

Although in a sonnet sequence external facts do not always correspond to emotional attitudes, we may assume that the Monna Innominata sequence is in the main a subjective expression of emotion rather than an exercise of the literary imagination in the form of a recognized poetic convention. In this assumption we would be supported by William, who repeatedly stated that his sister's love sonnets¹⁹ were inspired by a real and not an imaginary person.

Whether William Rossetti was right in thinking the object of Christina's love in the sequence to be Charles Cayley, or Lona Mosk Packer right in thinking it to be William Bell Scott, one incontrovertible fact remains - the sequence itself exists. The relevance of biographical speculation may simply be that Christina Rossetti's failure to contract a marriage with either suitor meant that she was more disposed to identify personally with poetic heroines of an 'unhappy' rather than a 'happy' history. Such a bias would account for her deafness to the appeals of the speaker in Sonnets from the Portuguese. Indeed, one great irony in all this is that Christina Rossetti, unlike almost every other contemporary reader of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's sequence, felt that it had been written from 'fancy' rather than 'feeling'. Christina Rossetti, in the headnote I have quoted,

18. Op. cit., p. 462.

19. Lona Mosk Packer, Christina Rossetti (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963), p. 224.

expresses her negative opinion of the Barrett Browning sonnets in the context of an ardent desire to know what the Petrarchan heroines thought and felt about their situations; and her own sequence is an attempt, so the 'blind' runs, to supply the want of such a revelation. From the headnote, however, it is clear that whatever the precise relation between the concern with the ladies of the courtly love tradition, the intricacies of Christina Rossetti's own experiences of love, and the poems of the Monna Innominata sequence, Christina Rossetti was aware of the 'Shakespearean' potential of the love sonnet sequence as a genre - the potential for the revelation of a distinct first-person consciousness.

Christina Rossetti's Monna Innominata sonnet sequence is quite short in comparison to those already examined; indeed, at just fourteen poems it is, as its sub-title points out, 'A Sonnet of Sonnets'. By subtitling the sequence thus, Christina Rossetti has deliberately drawn attention to its structural unity just as her headnote drew attention to the unifying central consciousness of the sequence. The Monna Innominata sequence, like Shakespeare's Sonnets, relies on the speaker's self-communing, rhetorical address to the lover for the unfolding of the narrative. However, unlike the sequences of Tennyson and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, this Christina Rossetti sequence does not imply a series of distinct events which give a penumbral reality to the speaker's situation. The movement of the Monna Innominata sonnet of sonnets is divisible into four parts. The first runs through the first 'quatrain' of sonnets, numbers 1-4, in which the speaker, though at present separated from her lover, is still speaking from

within their relationship. The theme, or thesis, of this first quatrain of sonnets is the value and strength of their love. The second part, the second quatrain of sonnets, runs from Sonnet 5 to Sonnet 8: in these, the speaker places their love in a universal context, considering its relationship to her own faith in, and love for, God, and setting love as a particular experience against Love as an abstract universal quantity. The sonnet of sonnets that is Monna Innominata then turns at 'line' (that is, Sonnet) 9. In Sonnets 9-13 the speaker reveals that the love-relationship has become a thing of the past, living in the speaker's memory. Across these sonnets the speaker renounces her lover for his sake, and a Shakespearean quality clings to the speaker's awareness of change in all things. The fourth part of the sequence, the final sonnet, appears to be entirely cut off from the relationship and is a despairing confession by the speaker of the failure of her life.

The speaker of these Monna Innominata sonnets is very close to the Shakespearean sonnet persona in her concentration upon time as the dominant arbiter between lovers. The whole experience of the speaker as one who loves is filtered through her acute awareness of the passing of time and of its inscrutability. The opening quatrain of the first sonnet is addressed to the lover and is meant to carry the extremity of the speaker's desire for him, but, as much as this, it conveys the speaker's consciousness of time's power over her.

Come back to me, who wait and watch for you: -
 Or come not yet, for it is over then,
 And long it is before you come again,
 So far between my pleasures are and few.

All the urgency of these lines is subjective. The speaker is balancing her desire against the possibility of its fulfilment, in order to decide which she most wants. The means of deciding, or rather, of not deciding, is her notion of time. The languor and melancholy of these lines is created, not by their treatment of the theme of love, but by their treatment of the theme of time. Again in the sestet of this sonnet, time is the dominant motif:

Howbeit, to meet you grows almost a pang
 Because the pang of parting comes so soon;
 My hope hangs waning, waxing, like a moon
 Between the heavenly days on which we meet:
 Ah me, but where are now the songs I sang
 When life was sweet because you called them sweet?

These lines are meant to express the great dependence the speaker has upon the lover, as was the case in the opening quatrain, but the vehicle for conveying this need is not the individuality of the lover but time. Anticipation and regret, emotional states linked to time, are again being made to carry, or stand in for, the more obviously love-based passions of desire and frustration. The emotions here, of nostalgia and longing, are ordered by the speaker's self-consciousness rather than by the challenge of the lover's personality. The speaker is in love with the hours of love. When love is a present-tense experience, it is to be celebrated; when it is not, it is that fact that is to be lamented.

The second sonnet illustrates this point at greater length.

I wish I could remember that first day,
 First hour, first moment of your meeting me,
 If bright or dim the season, it might be
 Summer or Winter for aught I can say;
 So unrecorded did it slip away,
 So blind was I to see and to fore-see,
 So dull to mark the budding of my tree
 That would not blossom yet for many a May.

If only I could recollect it, such
 A day of days! I let it come and go
 As traceless as a thaw of bygone snow;
 It seemed to mean so little, meant so much;
 If only now I could recall that touch,
 First touch of hand in hand - Did one but know!

Time pervades this sonnet through its matter and its method. The time or occasion of the lovers' first meeting is the ostensible subject of the sonnet; its real concern is with the act of remembering and with the speaker's sharp regret that she cannot now savour a past experience through memory. The use of nature imagery to help to convey the passing of time is a method that Shakespeare exploited to great effect both when considering the mortality of his friend and when meditating on his own poetic act of recording his love. In this sonnet, as in Shakespeare's practice, an elegiac tone of voice unites thoughts on love, time, and selfhood. The images drawn from nature are themselves demonstrations of the process the speaker is attempting to symbolise through their use. The literal meaning of lines 7 and 8 - 'So dull to mark the budding of my tree / That would not blossom yet for many a May' - is of direct relevance to the speaker's situation, capturing in its factual process the same kind of change through time as the speaker's experience of love has undergone.

Christina Rossetti's affinity with Shakespeare in the matter of time's being the driving force behind the sequence persona's mode of self-expression can be shown by a comparison of these two poets with a more conventional sonneteer such as Sir Philip Sidney. Each of these poets has written on the conventional sleep/dream topos, but Shakespeare and Christina Rossetti make a much more subjective affair of it than Sidney. Take the thirty-eighth sonnet in 'Astrophel and Stella':

This night, while sleepe begins with heavy wings
 To hatch mine eyes, and that unbitted thought
 Doth fall to stray, and my chiefe powres are brought
 To leave the scepter of all subject things,
 The first that straight my fancie's error brings
 Unto my mind is Stella's image, wrought
 By Love's owne selfe, but with so curious drought,
 That she, me thinks, not onely shines but sings
 I start, looke, hearke, but what in closde-up sence
 Was held, in opend sence it flies away,
 Leaving me nought but wailing eloquence:
 I, seeing better sights in sight's decay,
 Cald it anew, and wooed sleepe againe:
 But him, her host, that unkind guest had slaine. (p. 17)

Here Sidney's attention is all upon the little drama that is being played out. The speaker is the one who experiences the image of Stella shining and singing, and then loses both her and sleep, but it is this process or event that preoccupies the poet rather than the self-conscious analysis of its status as a subjective experience. Our attention is directed to the process of falling asleep, to the nature of the image dreamt by the speaker, and to the fact of its vanishing, and there is only the single line 'Leaving me nought but wailing eloquence' which has any self-regarding quality about it. The precision of the language - for the poem moves with a considerable grace - and the climactic development of the sonnet both serve to enhance the status of the conceit. The mechanics of the revelation of the experience are paramount.

In Shakespeare's forty-third sonnet there is a similar conceitedness, a similar enjoyment of the topos from an external point of view.

When most I wink, then do mine eyes best see,
 For all the day they view things unrespected;
 But when I sleep, in dreams they look on thee,
 And darkly bright are bright in dark directed:
 Then thou whose shadow shadows doth make bright,
 How would thy shadow's form form happy show
 To the clear day with thy much clearer light,

When to unseeing eyes thy shade shines so!
 How would, I say, mine eyes be blessed made
 By looking on thee in the living day,
 When in dead night thy fair imperfect shade
 Through heavy sleep on sightless eyes doth stay!
 All days are nights to see till I see thee,
 And nights bright days when dreams do show thee me.

Shakespeare is working over the same ideas as Sir Philip Sidney, and in a similar, conventional style. His reasoning is clever but superficial; its main achievement is a neat and conceited presentation of its theme. Shakespeare, like Sidney, has a double theme: the blessing of a dream-vision of the beloved conferred on the poet by sleep, and the vanishing of this dream upon waking with an attendant sense of bereavement. Shakespeare structures his sonnet, again like Sidney, around three quite conventional pairs of images: day/night, bright/dark, and being sighted as against being blind. These opposites are developed across both the Sidney and the Shakespeare sonnets so that a double complement might be paid the beloved. First, that her beauty is such that it shines in the dark, and secondly, that the absence even of her dream image can cause the poet pain. Neither Sidney nor Shakespeare manages to make very much more of the theme than this although Shakespeare's couplet is a little more ardent and personal than Sidney's line about 'wailing eloquence'. Shakespeare's couplet is directed ostensibly towards the image of the loved one but its pressure is personal, touching the speaker. It is self-regarding in the way in which Shakespeare's more individual, less conventional sonnets become, so that, even though it has a formulaic ring to it, the couplet suggests something of the effect that Shakespeare achieves more fully in Sonnets 27 and 28. In these two sonnets Shakespeare is still treading upon the ground of the traditional sleep and dream-of-the-beloved

theme but with a distinctive step of his own. In both 27 and 28 the speaker and his emotional condition are the real subjects of the poems. The language is now weighted with a first-person pressure that allows the speaker to confess and to analyse the standard theme from the inside. In Sonnet 27 Shakespeare is still basing his thoughts on the standard theme -

Looking on darkness which the blind do see:
Save that my soul's imaginary sight
Presents their shadow to my sightless view

- but he leads up to and moves away from it in a very private manner. The opening quatrain anatomises the experience of going to sleep with a far more profoundly subjective intensity than Sidney or Shakespeare himself in Sonnet 43.

Weary with toil I haste me to my bed,
The dear repose for limbs with travel tir'd;
But then begins a journey in my head
To work my mind when body's work's expir'd... .

The final couplet also exerts this same personal pressure upon the theme and the balance between 'thee' and 'myself' in the last line shows how Shakespeare has adjusted the objective view of the dream image to fit a subjective emotion - 'Lo, thus by day my limbs, by night my mind, / For thee, and for myself, no quiet find.' In Sonnet 28 Shakespeare again resists mechanical obeisance to the sleep and dream motif:

How can I then return in happy plight
That am debarr'd the benefit of rest,
When day's oppression is not eas'd by night,
But day by night and night by day oppress'd, 4
And each, though enemies to other's reign,
Do in consent shake hands to torture me,
The one by toil, the other to complain 8
How far I toil, still farther off from thee?
I tell the day to please him thou are bright
And do'st him grace when clouds do blot the heaven;
So flatter I the swart-complexion'd night
When sparkling stars twire not thou gild'st the even: 12
But day doth daily draw my sorrows longer,
And night doth nightly make grief's length seem stronger.

This sonnet incorporates the mood of another standard love sonnet theme, that of absence from the beloved, but its method of considering both the day/night dichotomy and this absence motif is to chart, in detail, the inner life of the speaker. In the octave the discussion of the day/night split in time is not organised by the image of the beloved, as it is in more conventional love sonnets of this type, but is held together by the consciousness of the speaker whose restlessness, both physical and mental, is treated as the object of inquiry. In line 8 the friend is finally brought into the sonnet; he is not, however, a dream image presented by sleep, but rather a means by which the speaker can sharpen his focus on his own weariness by making longing for the loved one a further illustration of the power of time to tax the mind. In the sestet Shakespeare at first (lines 9-12 inclusive) patterns his verse in a more conceited and conventional way, but in the couplet he again allows the speaker's consciousness to become dominant as the distinction between day and night is neutralised - each is regarded simply as a rack upon which the speaker is stretched.

Now, in Sonnet 3 of Monna Innominata, Christina Rossetti also blends sleep and dreams, day and night, and for her, as for Shakespeare, the conventional ideas attached to these images serve the emotional needs of the sequence persona.

I dream of you, to wake: would that I might	
Dream of you and not wake but slumber on;	
Nor find with dreams the dear companion gone,	
As, Summer ended, Summer birds take flight.	4
In happy dreams I hold you full in sight,	
I blush again who waking look so wan;	
Brighter than sunniest day that ever shone,	
In happy dreams your smile makes day of night.	8

Thus only in a dream we are at one,
 Thus only in a dream we give and take
 The faith that maketh rich who take or give;
 If thus to sleep is sweeter than to wake, 12
 To die were surely sweeter than to live,
 Though there be nothing new beneath the sun.

This third sonnet is structured like Shakespeare's Sonnet 28 with a conventional section bracketed by two more distinctly individual passages. In the second quatrain, considerable stress is laid upon the image of the lover and its benign influence. The subjective element in lines 5 and 6 is subordinate to the focus on the dream image which physically affects the speaker. This mechanical interaction is more in line with the conventional treatment of the theme than with the Shakespearean refinement of it. Lines 7 and 8 continue this superficial level of discussion, with line 8 being particularly predictable and lifeless. Before this, however, the first quatrain revealed a greater sense of self on the part of the speaker. The continuity of the first four lines is sustained by the self-preoccupation of the speaker, whose wishes form an interconnected sequence. The lover comes in at line 3 as part of this chain of reasoning. The lover is that which the speaker has lost by passing from sleep to wakefulness, but it is that first-hand experience of loss that is taken up in the fourth line and echoed in the natural image. This reference to the flight of summer birds at the onset of winter is typical of those Shakespearean sonnets where natural images serve as objective correlatives for the emotions of the speaker. Christina Rossetti is, like Shakespeare, indulging in personal reverie rather than, like Sidney, displaying competence with a conventional conceit.

In the third section of the sonnet, lines 9-11, Christina Rossetti adopts the other Shakespearean method of disclosing the sequence persona - the meditative evaluation of particular experience at an abstract, universal level;

Thus only in a dream we are at one,
 Thus only in a dream we give and take
 The faith that maketh rich who take or give

- the speaker uses the dream union of her lover and herself as a pretext for a consideration of the inner content rather than the external form of that union. The subsequent definition of love as a mutual faith involving both giving and receiving is teased out of the conventional topos to stand as a personal testament that has universal relevance. This process is an exhibition of self-consciousness which, in Shakespearean style, tells us more about the beliefs of the speaker than the stylised manner of Sidney and the Petrarchans. After this high point the sonnet falls away badly with the last three lines, and in particular the last, which is one of the most banal of the sequence. Indeed line 14 is worse than useless: its glaring irrelevance detracts from the achievement of the best lines of the sonnet.

These two Shakespearean ingredients of the love sonnet - concentration upon the personal repercussions of an awareness of mutability, and the capacity for reasoned examination of emotion - together allow Christina Rossetti to present her sequence persona with a marked degree of subjective intensity. In Sonnet 4 there is an impressive mixture of a language which measures emotion, looking at it from the analytical point of view of a logician or a student of the mind, and a language of special

pleading which carries the personal emotions of the speaker. This characterisation of Sonnet 4 from Monna Innominata could be applied to many of the Shakespearean sonnets and it is this similarity that impinges upon a reader of the Victorian sequence who is also familiar with the master sequence. Besides illustrating this point of method, Sonnet 4 also shows the speaker at the high point of her joyous self-consciousness:

I loved you first: but afterwards your love,
 Outsoaring mine, sang such a loftier song
 As drowned the friendly cooings of my dove.
 Which owes the other most? My love was long, 4
 And yours one moment seemed to wax more strong;
 I loved and guessed at you, you construed me
 And loved me for what might or might not be -
 Nay, weights and measures do us both a wrong. 8
 For verily love knows not 'mine' or 'thine';
 With separate 'I' and 'thou' free love has done,
 For one is both and both are one in love:
 Rich love knows nought of 'thine that is not mine';
 Both have the strength and both the length thereof,
 Both of us, of the love which makes us one.

This sonnet is successful largely because the series of verbal signals used to alert us to the various emotional attitudes being discussed is dominated by the enthusiasm of the speaker. The strongest lines are 4-7, where the speaker uses a more subtle intelligence than she displays towards the end of the sonnet. By exercising control over her diction, she has achieved, in these earlier lines, an incisive and perceptive style.

In Sonnet 9 the speaker adds to this analytical subjectivity an emotional tone of voice which results in poetry of a great resonance.

Thinking of you, and all that was, and all
 That might have been and now can never be,
 I feel your honoured excellence, and see
 Myself unworthy of the happier call:
 For woe is me who walk so apt to fall,

So apt to shrink afraid, so apt to flee,
 Apt to lie down and die (ah woe is me!)
 Faithless and hopeless turning to the wall.
 And yet not hopeless quite nor faithless quite,
 Because not loveless; love may toil all night,
 But take at morning; wrestle till the break
 Of day, but then wield power with God and man: -
 So take I heart of grace as best I can,
 Ready to spend and be spent for your sake.

Except for the lapse into self-pity in line 8 - a parenthetical exclamation which was not necessary since its meaning is contained in the lines preceding and following it - this sonnet is in the same mood and style as Shakespeare's Sonnets 40 and 42 examined earlier. Here Christina Rossetti reasons with herself and with her lover over her inner reaction to their situation. The language is full of that 'logic of feeling' of which Shakespeare was master. Each line adds to the communication of the speaker's understanding of her role and also of her desire to free her lover from any responsibility for the fate of their love. The speaker here offers a measure of faith in the possibility of love between herself and her lover, building this confidence first on her own weakness and then on her capacity to overcome it. There is no reproach of the lover for his failings, and the sonnet is entirely dependent for its coherence and power on the speaker's introspection. Just as Shakespeare took upon himself the task of reasoning his friend into a sense of freedom, so here Christina Rossetti takes upon herself the task of reassuring her lover that all is, or might yet be, well. Both in Shakespeare's analytical sonnets and in this one by Christina Rossetti the power of the speaker to dissect emotion and evaluate its significance in his or her own life is part of what impresses the reader.

In Sonnet 12 Christina Rossetti goes so far as to rewrite a Shakespearean sonnet. Shakespeare's Sonnet 57 is the model.

Being your slave, what should I do but tend
 Upon the hours and times of your desire?
 I have no precious time at all to spend,
 Nor services to do, till you require:
 Nor dare I chide the world-without-end hour
 Whilst I, my sovereign, watch the clock for you,
 Nor think the bitterness of absence sour
 When you have bid your servant once adieu:
 Nor dare I question with my jealous thought
 Where you may be, or your affairs suppose,
 But like a sad slave stay and think of nought
 Save where you are how happy you make those.
 So true a fool is love that in your will,
 Though you do anything, he thinks no ill.

Christina Rossetti reworks the matter of this poem in a markedly similar manner in her Sonnet 12:

If there be any one can take my place
 And make you happy whom I grieve to grieve,
 Think not that I can grudge it, but believe
 I do commend you to that nobler grace,
 That readier wit than mine, that sweeter face;
 Yea, since your riches make me rich, conceive
 I too am crowned, while bridal crowns I weave,
 And thread the bridal dance with jocund pace.
 For if I did not love you, it might be
 That I should grudge you some one dear delight;
 But since the heart is yours that was mine own,
 Your pleasure is my pleasure, right my right,
 Your honourable freedom makes me free,
 And you companioned I am not alone.

In both these sonnets the language is measured and deliberate, the rhythms and poised syntax capturing precisely the air of composure that each speaker wishes to convey. The sophistication of these sonnets derives from the assumption, implicit in each, that the speaker's case is irrefutable, even self-evident, and the magniloquence of tone conceals ardent emotion. Shakespeare's sonnet is ambiguous to the extent that much of its self-depreciation and surrender can be read as double-edged, carrying a measure of ironic reproach. It need not be so read, but the

possibility is there. The speaker's consciousness of the sacrifice he is making is a little too knowing to be entirely innocent. Christina Rossetti's speaker, on the other hand, allows for no equivocation. Adopting the Shakespearean theme of renunciation, this speaker fills her surrender with an emotional ardour and generosity that underpin, rather than undercut, the magnanimous reasoning of the surface argument. Despite this difference in the nuances of emotion behind the two sonnets, they both testify to the capacity of the 'logic of feeling' to delineate the character of a lyric speaker, a sequence persona overheard in meditation.

So it can be seen that Christina Rossetti's 'donna innominata' has much in common with the Shakespearean sonnet persona: both are aware of the power of time over their love and over individual existence, both feel that it is better that they, rather than their lovers, suffer when difficulties arise in their relationships, and both make nature a symbolic and sensuous mirror of their emotions. Christina Rossetti's sonnet persona is, however, much more religious than Shakespeare's; while the turning to God and the effort to include Him as a third partner in the relationship are absent from the Sonnets, Christina Rossetti's method of treating this subject matter is still Shakespearean. Sonnet 6 exhibits that style of reasoned dialogue with the lover, conducted by the speaker almost as a monologue, so typical of the Shakespeare sonnets. The sestet in particular is full of the special pleading disguised as rational argument that Shakespeare so often used to great effect:

Yet while I love my God the most, I deem
 That I can never love you over-much;
 I love Him more, so let me love you too;
 Yea, as I apprehend it, love is such
 I cannot love you if I love not Him,
 I cannot love Him if I love not you.

Here Christina Rossetti conveys the impression that no conclusion could have been reached other than that at which she has arrived through her reasoning. This self-assured illusion of logical proof is built, not upon strict logic, but upon the semantic cleverness of the syllogistic style in which an emotional wish is expressed. Shakespeare's sonnets repeatedly reveal this style of writing, which is sometimes plain but often ornamented with images. In Sonnet 31 the sestet is an example of Shakespeare's combining the plain and ornate methods:

Thou art the grave where buried love doth live,
 Hung with the trophies of my lovers gone,
 Who all their parts of me to thee did give, -
 That due of many now is thine alone.
 Their images I lov'd I view in thee;
 And thou, all they, hast all the all of me.

Sonnet 39 begins in a similar vein:

Oh how thy worth with manners may I sing
 When thou art all the better part of me?
 What can mine own praise to mine own self bring?
 And what is't but mine own when I praise thee?

Sonnet 88 concludes:

For bending all my loving thoughts on thee
 The injuries that to my self I do,
 Doing thee vantage, double vantage me.
 Such is my love, to thee I so belong,
 That for thy right myself will bear all wrong.

In each of these Shakespearean passages, as in Christina Rossetti's sixth sonnet, the speaker is simultaneously a participant in the emotional interaction that is the subject of analysis and the poetic philosopher conducting an inquiry into the relationship. This adoption of a double point of view gives

Shakespeare the character of an unwilling ironist; his sonnet persona constantly reveals an awareness of the shortcomings of his friend, shortcomings which he is then unwilling to expose, so he turns his awareness back upon himself. Christina Rossetti's sequence persona is also complex; she exhibits a tender and frail self-conception and yet can speak with wisdom and experience far beyond such weakness. The sestet of Sonnet 13 is an example of this:

Searching my heart for all that touches you,
 I find there only love and love's goodwill
 Helpless to help and impotent to do,
 Of understanding dull, of sight most dim;
 And therefore I commend you back to Him
 Whose love your love's capacity can fill.

The weak and desperate speaker of these lines presents, through her exploration of her weakness, a strength that transforms that emotional limitation into an asset. Her reasoning style gives the lie to her profession of impotence, as we observe through it that she is more than capable of great love. To the Christina Rossetti of this and the other Monna Innominata sonnets, as to Tennyson and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the Shakespeare sonnets provided an example of how a first-person sensibility and a third-person intelligence might be productively fused.

Shakespeare's free enrichment of the Petrarchan tradition with an independent speaking voice enabled the two women poets of this discussion to surmount the limitation placed on the expression of personal emotion by the superficiality of the conventional Petrarchan topoi. In a very forthright article Dorothy Mermin has explored the difficulties that Elizabeth Barrett Browning faced in adapting the traditional male point

of view of the love sonnet to her own needs. Dr Mermin explains that Elizabeth Barrett Browning's sequence persona 'fills roles that earlier love poetry had kept separate and opposite: speaker and listener, subject and object of desire, male and female.'²⁰ The article then accounts for the twentieth-century reader's embarrassment with the Sonnets from the Portuguese by elaborating upon this dislocation in the point of view of the sequence. If these sonnets are read from a Shakespearean angle, the problem as Dorothy Mermin sees it becomes less important. Ellen Moers has offered a key to understanding why this is, in her comments on love poetry by nineteenth-century women writers such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti.

Women's love poetry seems to me to be I-You poetry, not I-He poetry on the whole; the effect is verse letters directed by a woman to the specific man she loves, and not about him; women poets do not celebrate his eyes, his hair, his smile; they mostly write about Me. Oddly enough, a certain realism results: the lover seems to be a real man, because he is You; we usually put this adversely, saying that women are too sentimental in their love poetry, too responsive to their own emotions (which we deduce from the poems alone). On the other hand, we criticize male love poetry as being too abstract, too conventional, for the beaming eyes, golden tresses, snowy bosom, and blushing cheeks of the lady seem interchangeable from a Beatrice to a Laura; and the experience of love behind men's poetry tends to seem unreal.²¹

Shakespeare's Sonnets are distinct from those of the English Petrarchans because they are precisely 'I-You poetry' telling us a great deal about the 'Me' of the sequence. This quality of realism in a psychological sense, involving truth to emotion,

20. Dorothy Mermin, ELH, 48 (1981), p. 352.

21. Ellen Moers, Literary Women (London: W.H. Allen, 1977), pp. 167-68.

is something that Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti took from Shakespeare. His sequence was striking as a model for their poetry because its persona achieved the degree of individuality they both wanted to express in their sequences. Indeed, in both the Sonnets from the Portuguese and Monna Innominata there is a 'Shakespearean' quality of personal authority in the speaker's tone of voice and poetic style which in itself constitutes sufficient cause for re-examining them as first-rank contributions to the corpus of English love poetry.

CHAPTER IV

The story of the gestation and publication of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's sonnet sequence The House of Life is at least as complex as those regarding Shakespeare's Sonnets and Tennyson's In Memoriam.¹ William E. Fredeman has written influentially on The House of Life calling it 'Rossetti's In Memoriam'.² He charts the parallel distortions that critical literature has made of the two poets' intentions, stressing how Rossetti, like Tennyson, did not himself regard his poem as autobiography but claimed universality for it.³ William Fredeman is strongly opposed to biographical readings of The House of Life, and with good reason, since fascination with Rossetti's love life has meant that until recently the poetry has rarely been treated for its own sake,

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1. Rossetti composed the sonnets of The House of Life over a period extending from 1849 until 1880. Some were published in 1869 and more in 1870. The final version, from which I shall be quoting, appeared in 1881. For an account of these periods of composition see Carl Peterson 'The Poetry and Painting of Dante Gabriel Rossetti', Diss. Wisconsin, 1961 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1963), pp. 341-44.
 2. William E. Fredeman, 'Rossetti's "In Memoriam": An Elegiac Reading of The House of Life', Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, 47 (1964-65), pp. 298-341.
 3. Fredeman, pp. 319-20.

and its artistic merit has been lost sight of.⁴ Linking The House of Life to In Memoriam on the basis of its elegiac qualities, Fredeman comes close at several points in his essay to connecting the two sequences because of their common creation of a fictional persona, although he does not use the word.⁵ His reading of The House of Life is based on the development of consciousness that occurs as the poet reviews the crises of his life, seeking to understand the relationship between life and death. Professor Fredeman's method is to work through the sequence, identifying the various thematic stages in the maturation of the poet. In the reading of The House of Life that follows in this chapter, I do not intend to repeat Fredeman's journey through the stages of meaning present in the poem, but, starting from a similar conviction that The House of Life portrays a personality,⁶ I hope to show how this has been achieved, and I shall link Rossetti's achievement not directly with Tennyson's but with the chief analogue for both In Memoriam and The House of Life - Shakespeare's Sonnets. Fredeman takes great pains to explicate

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4. Fredeman, in his comparison of Rossetti with Tennyson, has recourse to Shakespeare to illustrate this point even though he does not bring Shakespeare's Sonnets into his more general appreciation of The House of Life. Fredeman (p. 319), notes that 'The dangers inherent in biographical "in-reading" can be surveyed readily in the scholarship on Shakespeare's sonnets, from Oscar Wilde to A.L. Rowse ...'.
 5. Fredeman, pp. 320 and 323. Houston A. Baker Jr., in 'The Poet's Progress: Rossetti's The House of Life', Victorian Poetry, 8 (1970), concentrates on the maturing vision of life of the speaker and is aware of the fact that the 'poet' of the sequence is a distinct consciousness - Baker, p. 11.
 6. Fredeman dissociates himself from the biographical readings of The House of Life early in his article, p. 301, and uses the neutral term 'poet' in his discussion of the developing themes of the work. This is a synonym for the term 'speaker' that will be preferred here.

the formal unity of The House of Life which he sees as having the structure of an Italian sonnet writ large.⁷ Clyde de L. Ryals uses this 'ingenious argument' of Fredeman's as grounds for placing him in the third of Ryals's three groups of House of Life critics:

The first disallows any unity to the sonnet sequence, the work being merely a collection of sonnets exhibiting no over-all design. The second, relying heavily on biography, finds a 'consistent personality' portrayed in the sonnets but little or no formal unity. The third type, while admitting that the poet had in mind a structure for his work, nevertheless does not allow that the poem is a fully connected and indivisible whole.⁸

Ryals then explains that his own aim

is to show that The House of Life is indeed a carefully planned and highly unified poem and that the order and meaning of the work which Rossetti subtitled 'A Sonnet-Sequence' are discernible without recourse to the poet's biography.

(p. 242)

For Ryals, this unity is a narrative one, but of a special kind.

He postulates the problem that faced Rossetti as a question:

granted that his sonnets were all 'moments' in the life of a pilgrim soul, how could he pull all these 'occasions' together to form a unified poem?

(p. 243)

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7. Towards the end of his argument on this point Fredeman concludes, 'The House of Life, then, is a sonnet of sonnets ...' (p. 321). Now, this is just the phrase Dante Gabriel Rossetti's sister, Christina, used to describe her sequence Monna Innominata which, as I explained in Chapter III, was organised around the internal structure of a single sonnet.
 8. Clyde de L. Ryals, 'The Narrative Unity of The House of Life', JEGP, 69 (1970), pp. 241-42. All of the quotations from Ryals that follow are from this article and further page references are given in the text.

He answers,

Only by presenting his 'moments' or his 'dramatis personae of the soul' in logical discontinuity; in short, by employing the symbolist technique of juxtaposing without links. ... The poet would arrange these sonnets which were united in experience but not in logical thought so that the linkage between them would be analogical - which is to say, there being no logical copula, the connection between the parts would require effort on the part of the reader and, indeed, would demand that the reader join in the creation of the poem.

(pp. 244-45)

Ryals's formulations of this view of Rossetti's plan for the work results from and points to a conviction that the unity of The House of Life must derive from the development of the meaning of the separate sonnets. Professor Ryals unnecessarily complicates the form of the poem by demanding a certain kind of content and, if he can deduce this from an elaborate line of argument such as the one reproduced above, then he is satisfied.⁹ I think this stress on the matter of The House of Life unnecessary, because, while the meaning of one sonnet can indeed be connected by a reader with that of another in the way that Ryals suggests, I will be arguing - from within Ryals's second camp of critics - that the unity of the work as a whole derives from the ubiquitous presence of a single speaker.

Clyde de L. Ryals's stress on meaning leads him to reject William Fredeman's association of The House of Life with In

9. Ryals's conclusion, p. 245, 'By this method the poet could produce a unified poem which would truly be what its subtitle claims it is - a sonnet sequence', does address the problem of linking the matter and the form of The House of Life, but it misses the subjective vitality of Rossetti's first-person presence.

Memoriam on the grounds of their very different concluding moods.¹⁰ I would defend Fredeman's comparison because the final optimism or pessimism of either sequence is a secondary matter in relation to the similarity in method, the method which I have called 'Shakespearean', deriving from the common use of an identifiable speaker in all three poets' work.

One reason for Ryals's neglect of this speaker-centred view of The House of Life is his placing of the poem in a medieval Italian rather than an Elizabethan English context:

The House of Life is unique among sonnet sequences in English literature. Deliberately based on medieval and Renaissance sonnet sequences and using the imagery and ideas of Dante and his contemporaries, Rossetti's poem frustrates the reader's expectations of what a sonnet sequence should be. The poet employs the characteristics of the traditional sequence for his very own special purposes: to show, among other things, that the 'transfigured life' of the Vita Nuova is no longer possible in the modern House of Life.¹¹

The Italian orientation here is understandable given Rossetti's parentage, upbringing and work of translating his namesake, and it is common enough among critical readers of The House of Life,¹² yet it is not the only comparison that can be drawn, or even the most productive. Ryals's statements about The House of Life's being 'unique' and 'frustrating the reader's expectations of what a sonnet sequence should be' need to be set

10. Ryals, p. 257, contrasts the 'too hopeful' verdict that Tennyson himself passed on In Memoriam with the 'dissolution of every value [Rossetti] ascribes to various aspects of life.' He then suggests 'The Holy Grail' as a more suitable Tennysonian counterpart for The House of Life.

11. Ryals, p. 257.

12. Extended treatments of this link can be found in Florence Saunders Boos, The Poetry of Dante G. Rossetti: A Critical Reading and Source Study (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), pp. 260-66, and Joan Rees, The Poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Modes of Self-Expression (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 127-41.

alongside Shakespeare's achievement in his Sonnets where he showed how successfully a persona might be created by gathering together 'moments' in the development of a soul. Indeed this term 'development' might, with greater accuracy, be replaced by 'disclosure', because it is the gradual process of self-revelation by the speaker that furnishes both meaning and unity and is common to Shakespeare's sequence and The House of Life. While not wishing to discount the valuable insights into the meaning of many of the sonnets of The House of Life that emerge from the detailed analyses of Fredeman and Ryals, I do suggest that a conscious critical acceptance of the speaker's first-person direction of the sonnets will be rewarded by a firm sense of how the poem's unity derives from the speaker's conscious attempt to balance the promptings of his heart against the counsels of his mind. I suggest that a reader coming to The House of Life from Shakespeare's Sonnets would not feel confused or frustrated but would readily perceive that he has simply passed from the acquaintance of one persona to that of another.

When analysing Shakespeare's sonnets I distinguished the speaker as lover from the speaker as philosopher in order to demonstrate how each contributed to the creation of a persona across the sequence, and how each added a particular dimension to the work's central consciousness. Then I distinguished a language of reasoning from a language of imaged embellishment of thought in order to point out how each of these styles contributed not only to our understanding of, but also to familiarity with, the persona behind them. These two distinctions were then employed in examinations of Tennyson's In Memoriam,

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Sonnets from the Portuguese, and Christina Rossetti's Monna Innominata to draw attention to the persona behind each of these sequences. The pattern that has emerged is as follows: the poet writes a series of love lyrics which explore both a particular relationship and, as a corollary of that relationship, a body of ideas about Love as an abstract universal force. Now, because the poet is particularising his or her ideas on the basis of a first-hand experience recorded or reported within the sequence itself, a consciousness or 'persona' develops and becomes in its turn the subject of the poetry as well as its guiding hand. Consequently, an examination of the relationship between the particulars of love, the framework of experience from which the poet starts, and the conception of Love as an absolute at which the poet arrives, has been central to a full understanding of each of the sequences treated so far. The main structural principle of each, and the primary source of its unity as a work of art, has been the first-person consciousness observed in the process of aligning and adjusting love as a quantity of real experience against love as an ideal quality.

In my treatment of Shakespeare's Sonnets I argued that the poet was constantly modifying the Petrarchan ideal vision of love and the formulae in which it was expressed in England so that they should correspond more closely to the poet's own experience, whether real or imagined. In the course of this readjustment Shakespeare arrived at ideals of his own and developed a language proper to his vision of love, yet the bias of that vision was towards the real. Actual experience - or

a convincing imitation of it - informed all his conclusions. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, on the other hand, continually sets his actual experience of love against an ideal background. Rossetti regards any moment of love between man and woman as but a manifestation of the power of universal 'Love' to inform and transform particular lives. Rossetti treats his own experience as a means of approaching, however falteringly, the realm of absolute truth. This claim raises one of the common motifs of criticism of The House of Life, the existence and exact nature of Rossetti's mysticism. This issue can be usefully approached by way of an article by Wendell V. Harris.¹³ Harris resists the almost universal critical view of Rossetti as a spiritual visionary.

There is truth in the view that, in C.M. Bowra's words, Rossetti 'assumed the existence of an ideal world and sought to find it through beautiful things.' However, this prevailing interpretation has, I believe, done Rossetti a disservice in drawing attention away from one of the major sources of his poetic strength and from some of his most interesting poems.

(p. 300)

This acknowledgement by Wendell Harris of the substance of Bowra's statement is followed in the next paragraph by Harris's quotation of the first House of Life sonnet 'Love Enthroned' as evidence for Rossetti's idealism. For Harris, however, this is not the only Rossettian style.

In Rossetti's lyrics, I contend, one finds two quite different modes existing side by side, one tending toward the objectification and generalisation of emotion, the other toward presenting it more immediately, more subjectively, and in greater detail. At times the two modes are in conflict within the same poem.

(p. 300)

13. Wendell V. Harris, 'A Reading of Rossetti's Lyrics', Victorian Poetry, 7 (1969), pp. 299-308. All the quotations from Harris that follow are from this article: page references are given in the text.

The essay cites Sonnets XXII ('Heart's Haven'), XXIV ('Pride of Youth'), Sonnets LXIII, XCI and XCVIII, and finally VI-a ('Nuptial Sleep') as examples of

[a] move away from abstraction, mechanical personification, and conventional compliments on the power of love, toward more detailed, more individual, more psychologically analytical portrayals of states of mind.

(p. 302)

Harris sets Rossetti apart from the Romantics who preceded him and from such a contemporary as Meredith (p. 303), but he can find no proper confrères for him. It is at this point, I suggest, that the Shakespearean model of the Sonnets becomes useful. I agree with Wendell Harris and hope to show that Rossetti's combination of visionary images and more personal, psychological, statements matches Shakespeare's use of both conventional Petrarchan and original ornate images on the one hand, and his development of a language of the 'logic of feeling' on the other.

The hesitancy of Rossetti critics to pronounce on the speaker's act of self-disclosure in The House of Life rather than on its content - with which they are able to come to terms - can be overcome by adopting a Shakespearean perspective for the sequence. It is useful to approach the persona of Rossetti's sonnets in the same way as I did that of the Shakespeare Sonnets because, not only can a development from a conventional treatment of love in a Petrarchan sense to a self-defining individual style and pattern of thought be discerned in Rossetti's as in Shakespeare's sequence, but also Rossetti's final division of The House of Life into two parts results from just such a development. The first part of the sequence is called 'Youth and Change' and the second 'Change and Fate'. In Part One the speaker is predominantly concerned with love and moves from an early celebration

of its joys and of the beauty of the beloved to a later expression of love's limitations and the pain that comes in the wake of its subservience to time and death. In Part Two, the speaker takes a step backwards from his active relationship with the beloved(s)¹⁴ of Part One and explores in a more metaphysical manner, his own relationship to time and death. In 'Shakespearean' terms then, Rossetti the lover is predominant in Part One, and Rossetti the philosopher in Part Two. Now while Rossetti does philosophise at times in Part One, and while he does treat of love in Part Two, this rough division does begin to measure the development of the speaker across the sequence.

Wendell Harris's distinction between Rossetti's ornate visionary style and his more psychologically penetrating language needs to be set in the 'Shakespearean' context of the speaker's development from a Petrarchan love poet to a more fully realised individual consciousness attempting to understand both life in general and his own life in particular. As the speaker of The House of Life develops, the complexity and profundity of his second analytical style (Shakespeare's 'logic of feeling') becomes more arresting. Among the sonnets of 'Youth and Change' there are several which read very like Petrarchan effusions of the 1590s, yielding very little sense of a distinct first-person presence behind them. To complement these, however, is a group of sonnets which, while continuing the style of Rossetti's Petrarchan sonnets, begins to add depth to the revelation of

14. In the analysis of The House of Life that follows I do not distinguish between the different women referred to by the speaker. Both Fredeman, p. 325 and Ryals, p. 248 explain the differences between the old and new loves of Part One.

the personality of the speaker. Then in Part Two, 'Change and Fate', the speaker is clearly individualised and his meditations on life and its meaning draw much of their meaning from our sense of the presence of the speaker.

In his Petrarchan sonnets Rossetti praises the Lady repeatedly, introducing a variety of images and hypotheses, all of which are then pushed, in conventional fashion, to the point where they can be neatly turned to the Lady's advantage. Sonnet XXIX, 'The Moonstar', is a good introduction to this type of sonnet since it shows Rossetti exhibiting the kind of ingenuity common in Elizabethan sonnets.

Lady, I thank thee for thy loveliness,
 Because my lady is more lovely still.
 Glorying I gaze, and yield with glad goodwill
 To thee thy tribute; by whose sweet-spun dress
 Of delicate life Love labours to assess
 My lady's absolute queendom; saying, 'Lo!
 How high this beauty is, which yet doth show
 But as that beauty's sovereign votaress.'

Lady, I saw thee with her, side by side;
 And as, when night's fair fires their queen surround,
 An emulous star too near the moon will ride, -
 Even so thy rays within her luminous bound
 Were traced no more; and by the light so drown'd,
 Lady, not thou but she was glorified.¹⁵

This is neat but unoriginal. Both the mannered skill behind the twisting of the description of the moon to the Lady's advantage, and the adoption of a triumphant tone of voice in which to gloat over the moon on the Lady's behalf, place this sonnet firmly in the conventional category. It is written in the first person but the result of the Petrarchan method's having been adopted

15. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, The House of Life: A Sonnet-Sequence, ed. Paull Franklin Baum (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1928), p. 106. All my quotations from The House of Life are from this edition.

is not any understanding on our part of the character of this 'I' but rather an invitation to us to endorse the superficial triumph of the speaker over the moon. All our attention is directed outwards from the speaker toward the unfolding of the intricacies of the imagery as it consolidates the speaker's argument. This argument is, in itself, a means of avoiding the expression of any personal traits of character since it is directed at the mechanical or rhetorical comparison of the moon and the Lady. Its success depends not so much on any degree of thought evident behind it as on the smoothness of the organisation of the imagery. Despite this superficiality of matter and structure, there are certain tell-tale choices of word and phrase by means of which this sonnet can be identified as being by Rossetti - through the adjectival enthusiasm of such phrases as 'My lady's absolute queendom' and 'beauty's sovereign votaress' from the octave, and through 'night's fair fires' and 'An emulous star' from the sestet. Even with this idiosyncratic diction there is still no sense in which this style of expression by itself lends individuality to the speaker.

Sonnet VIII, 'Love's Lovers', is another of Rossetti's Petrarchan sonnets. Unlike 'The Moonstar' it is written in the third person, and while this may seem to indicate less personality for the speaker, the sestet shows some increase in the speaker's particular stylistic pressure upon routine themes.¹⁶

16. I do not wish to imply here, or in the pages that follow, that Rossetti organised the 1881 version of The House of Life around my distinction between Petrarchan and more personally distinctive writing. My thesis is simply that the gradual superseding of the former by the latter fits in with Rossetti's division of the poem into the two parts, 'Youth and Change', 'Change and Fate'.

Some ladies love the jewels in Love's zone,
 And gold-tipped darts he hath for painless play
 In idle scornful hours he flings away;
 And some that listen to his lute's soft tone
 Do love to vaunt the silver praise their own;
 Some prize his blindfold sight; and there be they
 Who kissed his wings which brought him yesterday
 And thank his wings to-day that he is flown.

My lady only loves the heart of Love:
 Therefore Love's heart, my lady, hath for thee
 His bower of unimagined flower and tree:
 There kneels he now, and all-anhungered of
 Thine eyes gray-lit in shadowing hair above,
 Seals with thy mouth his immortality.

The octave here is, like that of 'The Moonstar', Petrarchan in its ornamentation and style of argument. The surface cleverness of the poet's discrimination of the various motives women have for loving does not presage any deeper scrutiny of their self-interest or triviality but rather it is followed by a defence of the speaker's own beloved's difference from these ladies. This turn of thought and theme is entirely predictable given the love sonnet conventions of English as well as Italian practice, and yet there is more to this sestet than simply a finely turned compliment. The second tercet depicts the beloved's reward for her true dedication to Love in language that is full of the speaker's own special way of approaching love.

There kneels he now, and all-anhungered of
 Thine eyes gray-lit in shadowing hair above,
 Seals with thy mouth his immortality.

These three lines with their sensuousness and rhetorical sweep are characteristic of the speaker's idealism. The personification of Love as a lover and the elevation of an act of sensuous union to the status of an apotheosis are special tricks of this speaker, who always seeks to unify his experience and his vision of love.

This personal pressure on a Petrarchan moment can be most fully illustrated by a reading of Sonnet XI, 'The Love-Letter'.

Warmed by her hand and shadowed by her hair,
 As close she leaned and poured her heart through thee,
 Whereof the articulate throbs accompany
 The smooth black stream that makes thy whiteness fair, -
 Sweet fluttering sheet, even of her breath aware, -
 Oh let thy silent song disclose to me
 That soul wherewith her lips and eyes agree
 Like married music in Love's answering air.

Fain had I watched her when, at some fond thought,
 Her bosom to the writing closelier press'd,
 And her breast's secrets peered into her breast;
 When, through eyes raised an instant, her soul sought
 My soul and from the sudden confluence caught
 The words that made her love the loveliest.

Here Rossetti goes about his task in much the same way as would an Elizabethan Petrarchan. He chooses a particular object, in this case a love-letter, and makes it the pretext for an impassioned expression of that one-dimensional Petrarchan emotion, desire. Like a conventional sonneteer Rossetti begins at the basic level of physical fact and works through a series of elaborations on that fact to reach a pointedly emotional and self-regarding conclusion. Rossetti plays upon the physical proximity of the lady to the letter she is writing in something of the manner of a conceit.¹⁷ The sensuous and vaguely sexual language used in the evocation of the intensity of the Lady's composition of her letter serves the speaker as a metaphoric language for the expression of his own intense desire to be spiritually at one with his Lady. While the matter of the sonnet is unoriginal and even predictable given the title, the manner of its expression begins to distinguish it as a Rossetti sonnet.

17. In his notes to this sonnet (The House of Life, p. 82), Paull Franklin Baum includes the following comments: 'Personal, ... but conceitistic and inferior; "one of the most gracious of the series," says Knight ..., "but marred by a conceit worthy of the days of Donne if not Lyly or Marino."'

In this personal treatment of a standard theme he is again in the same camp as the Elizabethan Petrarchans whose skill or capacity for 'invention' marked them off one from another. The speaker here is more present than the faceless narrator of 'Love's Lovers' or the conventional arbiter between the moon and the Lady of 'Moonstar', because here he sets himself up as the focus of attention by the stratagem of directing all the observation of the Lady back upon himself. The speaker is stronger in this 'Love-Letter' sonnet because the development of the poem depends upon the sway of his self-regarding idealism.

In the octave, the speaker's idealism stems from the ornamentation of the indicative mood by recourse to the imperative mood bolstered by an exclamatory 'Oh'; in the sestet this idealism is generated by the way in which the pace of the rhythm, the crescendo of successive heavily weighted clauses and the speaker's assured tone all work together to create an air of inspired utterance and visionary conviction. In both octave and sestet it is this movement from observation to imagination, from an empirical to a visionary field of reference that marks Rossetti's distinctive individual style.

At this point, however, there cannot be said to be any real revelation of the speaker's character under way, nor can this identification of an idealist perspective be sufficient warrant for claiming real individuality for the speaker. This extra dimension can be seen in a Sonnet like IV, 'Lovesight', in which the speaker is still engaged on a Petrarchan task initially, but passes beyond this to speak in his own voice in the sestet. Even in the octave of this sonnet, however, there

is a greater degree of individuality in evidence than was the case in the 'Love-Letter'.

When do I see thee most, beloved one?
 When in the light the spirits of mine eyes
 Before thy face, their altar, solemnize
 The worship of that Love through thee made known?
 Or when in the dusk hours, (we two alone,)
 Close-kissed and eloquent of still replies
 Thy twilight-hidden glimmering visage lies,
 And my soul only sees thy soul its own?

In this octave from 'Lovesight' Rossetti takes up the eye-topos of the Petrarchan tradition but it is not the Lady's eyes that the speaker celebrates but his own power of looking-with-love - lovesight. In this he is like Shakespeare and, again like Shakespeare, he uses this sight motif to ask questions about his own relation to love. The first and last lines of this octave have the simplicity and directness of Shakespeare's plain style, and the highly ornate lines in between explain that particular quality of this speaker's vision. Here the speaker is concerned with testifying to the power of the beloved's beauty over him in a conventional manner, but the yoking of the religious imagery of the first quatrain and the sensuous language of the second suggests the intense investment the speaker himself makes in this moment of shared emotional and physical closeness.

The visionary imagery of the sestet of 'Lovesight' produces a greater degree of direct involvement on the part of the speaker than was usual among the Elizabethan Petrarchans.

O love, my love! if I no more should see
 Thyself, nor on the earth the shadow of thee,
 Nor image of thine eyes in any spring, -
 How then should sound upon Life's darkening slope
 The ground-whirl of the perished leaves of Hope,
 The wind of death's imperishable wing?

After the personal intimacy of the direct address in line 9,

which consolidates the emotional ardour of the octave, the speaker turns away from celebrating the Lady's presence to imagining the consequences for himself of her possible absence through death. This gives rise to a moment of visionary speculation that is intense enough to qualify as a disclosure of something of the speaker's self; and at this point style becomes significant. At one level, it is true that all the speaker is doing in this sestet is echoing the laments of many Petrarchan suitors, yet; if the terms of this lament are analysed, the lines work at quite another level. The poet remains anchored to the Lady's physical absence in the first tercet but in the second he moves to a more abstract level of thought. These three lines presuppose only the fact of loss and not its particular circumstances. They are chilling enough as a coda to a contemplation of the death of a beloved but they are more revelatory of the speaker's metaphysics than of his amorous elegiac emotions. It is not so much their content as their form that is important. In the first tercet the speaker builds his lament around three obvious and distinct elements - himself, his beloved, and nature, the connecting link between them being the speaker's capacity for physical sight. The speaker states his horror at the prospect of no longer seeing his beloved or any visible parallels to her beauty in nature, and he postpones examination of the consequences of such an eventuality. This examination is conducted in the second tercet and direct personal pressure is necessary for the communication of the speaker's negative vision. He does not proceed by speaking in the first person but builds up his mood by objective means. He starts with three abstract nouns 'Life', 'Hope', and 'Death', and associates them with three concrete

nouns, 'slope', 'leaves', and 'wing'. The speaker forges a link between the two groups of nouns by a series of value-laden adjectives: 'darkening', 'perished', 'imperishable'. This selection and association of empirical and metaphysical terms is carried out by the speaker who emerges as a guiding, feeling force behind this enigmatic utterance. The speaker's investment of self in this tercet is made the more evident by his use of the interrogative form which adds an echo of the voice of a questioning subject to the objective resonance of the hypothesis.

The speculative self-directedness of the last tercet of 'Lovesight' gave the underlying conventional theme an impress of personality, and this element is much stronger in Sonnet XXV, 'Winged Hours'.

Each hour until we meet is as a bird
 That wings from far his gradual way along
 The rustling covert of my soul, - his song
 Still loudlier trilled through leaves more deeply stirr'd:
 But at the hour of meeting, a clear word
 Is every note he sings, in Love's own tongue;
 Yet, Love, thou know'st the sweet strain suffers wrong,
 Full oft through our contending joys unheard.

What of that hour at last, when for her sake
 No wing may fly to me nor song may flow;
 When, wandering round my life unleaved, I know
 The bloodied feathers scattered in the brake,
 And think how she, far from me, with like eyes
 Sees through the untuneful bough the wingless skies?

In the octave the speaker laments the weight of time between the occasions of his meeting his beloved, and in this regard it can be compared with the opening sonnet of Christina Rossetti's Monna Innominata sequence, 'Come back to me who wait and watch for you'. The difference between these two sonnets is greater than that between two Elizabethan sonnets on a common theme precisely because each of these two sonnets is stamped, in the

'Shakespearean' sense, with the impress of the character of the sonnet persona. In this octave Rossetti picks up the wind-and-leaves imagery from 'Lovesight' and fashions a new series of images around the suggestion of the last line of the earlier sonnet - 'The wind of Death's imperishable wing?'. Sonnet XXV opens with this wing image being given full prominence - 'Each hour until we meet is as a bird'. In such transferences of conception and image from one sonnet to another Rossetti is still in line with Shakespeare and the Elizabethans. The more specifically 'Shakespearean' connection is strengthened by the way these links from one sonnet to another deepen our knowledge of the speaker's characteristic thought patterns. The important Shakespearean point about the first quatrain of this sonnet is that its visionary imagery of place¹⁸ is not Petrarchan pyrotechnics but an attempt to express the quality of the speaker's inner experience. When Rossetti writes a phrase like, 'The rustling covert of my soul,' the fusion of a palpable physical element and an emotional, even confessional, intent shows his first-person appropriation of, and involvement in, a time-worn theme. In the second quatrain, in the last two lines of the octave, the speaker is recognizing something other than idyllic harmony in his experience of love -

Yet, Love, thou know'st the sweet strain suffers wrong,
Full oft through our contending joys unheard.

18. Imagery of place is very important to Rossetti in the sequence as a whole, holding for him the possibility of a utopia or paradise as well as giving point to much of his nature imagery. A succinct treatment of this place imagery can be found in Joan Rees, The Poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, pp. 80-81.

This is to a large extent Petrarchan. It is an elaborate compliment in which the song of Love is allowed to be wronged only by the competing joys of the lovers, and yet the innocence of a Petrarchan narrator was cancelled in the first quatrain and replaced by the direct voice of the speaker. This results in the structure of these last lines including a suggestion that competing claims for self-fulfilment militate against idyllic Love. Without wishing to push this too far, I suggest that the fact of the speaker's vivid presence in this octave rescues it from the naivety of a Petrarchan effusion.

This happy, if qualified, apostrophe to Love is left behind in the sestet where the speaker returns to both the intensely personal mood of the first quatrain and its imagery of place. The speaker, oppressed by the same sense of loneliness and loss as weighed upon him in 'Lovesight', takes up this imagery and charges it with a vehemence, even a violence, that highlights the way the imagery is serving to express some passionate personal experience rather than to restate conventional formulae. The speaker of the sonnet can be felt as a presence by the reader in the alternation between rhetoric and reverie caught in the difference between the 'bloodied feathers' of line 11 and the 'untuneful boughs' of line 14. This sestet represents an advance on that of 'Lovesight' because the speaker is concerned with the act of self-analysis, taking his own soul as the real arena in which the drama of love is played out.

The themes of time passing and the pain of separation, either at a physical or a metaphysical level, present in 'Winged Hours' are reworked in Sonnet XL, 'Severed Selves'. In the octave

of this sonnet the speaker combines the languages of rhetorical reasoning and imaged reverie, as Shakespeare did before him, in order to demonstrate that, as an individual poetic presence, he is able to interpret his experience even while he is dominated by it.

Two separate divided silences,
 Which, brought together, would find loving voice;
 Two glances which together would rejoice
 In love, now lost like stars beyond dark trees;
 Two hands apart whose touch alone gives ease;
 Two bosoms which, heart-shrined with mutual flame,
 Would, meeting in one clasp, be made the same;
 Two souls, the shores wave-mocked of sundering seas

The simple diction of these lines, dominated as it is by a structural order and clear consistency of thought, suggests at once that the speaker is recording his conclusions about life based on the kind of emotional experiences and discoveries presented in 'Lovesight' and 'Winged Hours'. This octave represents an advance on 'Winged Hours' because it depends less upon the evocative power of strident imagery and more upon the appearance of deductive reasoning with which Rossetti invests his expression of emotion. In this it constitutes the kind of psychological moment admired in Rossetti by Wendell Harris and presaged by Shakespeare's pioneering work in his sonnets. The repeated movement from statement through hypothesis to a negation of that hypothesis directs the reader's attention to the speaker's conscious exercise of control over his personal yet universal statement on the fact of human isolation. Each section of the octave begins with a statement of fact ('Two separate divided silences', 'Two glances', 'Two hands apart', 'Two bosoms'), moves through the expression of wish for union ('would find loving voice', 'together would rejoice', 'would, meeting in one clasp,

be made the same'), and ends with a pessimistic reversal of this wish ('now lost like stars beyond dark trees', 'Two souls, the shores wave-mocked of sundering seas'). The reversals vitiate the mood of the octave, making the preceding lines sound like laments. The striking feature of this octave is not the profundity of its thought, which is little more than a conventional cri de coeur, but the weight of personal presence that is pressed upon this simple observation of mutability. The gradual increase in emotional power, generated by the turning of simple indicatives into laments through the repetition of the conditional 'would', brings us close to the speaker and invests the lines with pathos.

This element of first-person immediacy is more concentrated in the sestet:

Such are we now. Ah! may our hope forecast	9
Indeed one hour again, when on this stream	
Of darkened love once more the light shall gleam? -	
An hour how slow to come, how quickly past, -	12
Which blooms and fades, and only leaves at last,	
Faint as shed flowers, the attenuated dream.	

In the first tercet the use of the first-person plural pronouns performs the obvious task of uniting the speaker and his beloved. The speaker then returns, not to the pessimism of the conclusion of the octave, but to the optimism of its hypothesised union of lovers. Together, these two elements merge the speaker's role as a partner in a love relationship with his role as the poetic consciousness of the sequence interpreting that relationship. This unification can be seen in the move from the directness of 'may our hope forecast' and 'when on this stream' to the more impersonal resonance of line 11. The second tercet is more subtle because, while the superficial marks of first-person reference are absent, there is in fact an increase in

the speaker's pressure on the language. In lines 12 and 13 the speaker is deliberately codifying his metaphysical vision and in line 14 he is reverting to his language of reverie, which reveals his characteristic style of a visionary heightening of concrete images. The difference between the two modes of self-expression is sufficiently marked to create the impression of a distinct persona at work.

If we continue to bear in mind that the main criterion being used to evaluate these poems from The House of Life is Shakespeare's achievement in the Sonnets of developing an individualised persona across a series of meditative love poems, then XLVI, 'Parted Love', can be seen to represent a major advance on 'Lovesight' and 'Winged Hours' and even a progression beyond the level of consciousness apparent in 'Severed Selves'. In 'Lovesight' and 'Winged Hours' the speaker was envisaging separation as a trauma that stood as a threat to present love, although in the latter there was an increased recognition of the mortality of love itself over and above the prospect of being apart for a time. In 'Severed Selves' separation was actual but the longing for union was still present as a hope. In 'Parted Love', however, the speaker is now utterly alone and the beloved is consigned to the realm of 'Memory's art'. This means that the speaker is now dealing wholly with his own psyche and his own emotional reaction to his loss. The result is a very high degree of self-directed meditation. The distinction between an element of reasoning and one of reverie, mooted in the discussion of 'Severed Selves', is again appropriate to the octave of 'Parted Love'.

What shall be said of this embattled day
 And armed occupation of this night
 By all thy foes beleaguered, - now when sight
 Nor sound denotes the loved one far away? 4
 Of these thy vanquished hours what shalt thou say, -
 As every sense to which she dealt delight
 Now labours lonely o'er the stark noon-height
 To reach the sunset's desolate disarray? 8

This octave has an orientation towards the use of reason to understand and cope with a traumatic experience and in this sense the speaker is present as self-consciousness. The thought is as simple as that of the octave of 'Severed Selves', if not more so. Here the speaker is simply asking himself, rhetorically, how he can address this loss of his beloved. The skeletal inquiry is fleshed out with a body of imagery that serves to increase our appreciation of the emotional cost of this loss to the speaker. Here, as elsewhere in the sequence, the speaker's use of the interrogative form is a means of opening up the discussion of a private predicament to public scrutiny. In the first quatrain the speaker rhetorically associates himself with us, making his experience the subject of our combined analysis. Here then, the speaker is again assuming a double role and increasing his 'presence'. In the second quatrain he moves from the beloved-oriented conclusion of the first ('Nor sound denotes the loved one far away?'), to a broader, more metaphysical and self-oriented vision. The final phrase of line 8, 'the sunset's desolate disarray' picks up the tone of the last line of 'Severed Selves' - 'Faint as shed flowers, the attenuated dream' - and prepares for the grand style of utterance to follow in the sestet.

Stand still, fond fettered wretch! while Memory's art 9
 Parades the Past before thy face, and lures
 Thy spirit to her passionate portraitures:
 Till the tempestuous tide-gates flung apart 12
 Flood with wild will the hollows of thy heart,
 And thy heart rends thee, and thy body endures.

The speaker is here, as in the octave, speaking objectively in the third person from outside the experience, but in his adoption of an imperative tone in line 9 he is in fact castigating himself. This double stance gives the first tercet an atmosphere of pathos edged with bitter hopelessness as the speaker can both describe the trapped predicament of a lover driven by memory to recall the face of his lost beloved and convey a sense of first-hand emotional involvement in it, at one and the same time. In the octave the extended metaphor of military conflict is fused with the themes of separation and time passing to give a constant rigour to the lines. It holds the speaker's passion in check, allowing his sorrow to achieve an objective, almost universal quality. In the second tercet of this sestet, on the other hand, the speaker's personal passion is unleashed to the full, yet it derives an equivalent dignity by virtue of the third-person point of view -

Till the tempestuous tide-gates flung apart
 Flood with wild will the hollows of thy heart,
 And thy heart rends thee, and thy body endures.

These strongly rhetorical lines express the highest pitch of the speaker's sorrow through the accessible, even familiar, image of flood-gates and rushing waters and through the comprehensible dichotomy of an inner trauma akin to spiritual death occurring within a living body. The impact of the tercet, however, is more dependent upon its impassioned rhythms than upon its content. The consistent alliteration in the lines and the succession of heavily stressed words generate emotional and poetic power while the balanced and yet counterpointed structure of the last line slows down what has hitherto been a gathering rhythmic crescendo, thereby concluding the sonnet with a deliberate vehemence that underscores its claims to be a personal testament.

The speaker emerges from this 'Parted Love' sonnet as a highly articulate consciousness revealing itself through a moment of suffering. His awareness of himself as a field of study, a subject within whose experience objective or metaphysical propositions find concrete expression, makes the line of development of sophistication from 'Lovesight' to 'Parted Love' indicative of the process by which the speaker emerges as an identifiable individual - a sequence persona, in short.

In all the sonnets analysed so far, the element of reverie, the encasing of simple thoughts or propositions in an abundance of imagery, has been the speaker's principal method of self-revelation, but among the sonnets of Part One 'Youth and Change' there are some in which the speaker gives some scope to Shakespeare's other method, the use of a language of reason to probe the content of emotions. In 'Heart's Hope' (Sonnet V) for example, the speaker begins,

By what word's power, the key of paths untrod,
Shall I the difficult deeps of Love explore,

and while the speaker is, in general, moved by the power of the visionary word he does here explain in more reasoning terms the ground of his idealist enterprise in The House of Life:

For lo! in some poor rhythmic period,
Lady, I fain would tell how evermore
Thy soul I know not from thy body, nor
Thee from myself, neither our love from God.

In this quatrain Rossetti comes close to the analytical style of Shakespeare's persona. By attempting to define his position in fairly precise language, and by recognising the difficulty of this task, Rossetti's speaker demonstrates the ability to stand back from his emotions and evaluate them. Both this style

and Rossetti's more usual, visionary, language are present in the Sestet of 'Heart's Hope' where the speaker moves from a description of his desire in reasoned, evaluative language that places his personal experience in a universal context, to an imaged evocation of the essential qualities of this passionate emotion:

Yea, in God's name, and Love's, and thine, would I
 Draw from one loving heart such evidence
 As to all hearts all things shall signify;
 Tender as dawn's first hill-fire, and intense
 As instantaneous penetrating sense,
 In Spring's birth-hour, of other Springs gone by.

The first tercet is quantitative, weighting up and measuring love, and the second is visionary and sensuous, but the two work together to show the speaker again, at first at a little distance from his own emotion, and then in the thick of it.

In Sonnet XXVIII, 'Soul-Light', the speaker continues to use this style of language as he begins with an attempt, albeit a rhetorical one, to quantify his love for the Lady:

What other woman could be loved like you,
 Or how of you should love possess his fill?

This query finds an echoing answer at the beginning of Sonnet XXXII 'Equal Troth' - 'Not by one measure mayst thou mete our love; / For how should I be loved as I love thee?' The speaker moves from this point in a Shakespearean manner by devaluing his own worth vis-à-vis the beloved. The tone of Rossetti's self-negation is reminiscent of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's tone early in the Sonnets from the Portuguese and this illustrates the way the general slant of Shakespeare's work became the common property of the Victorians. In this 'Equal Troth' sonnet Rossetti writes,

For how should I be loved as I love thee? -
 I, graceless, joyless, lacking absolutely
 All gifts that with thy queenship best behove; -

and he begins Sonnet XXXIV, 'The Dark Glass', with

Not I myself know all my love for thee:
 How should I reach so far, who cannot weigh
 To-morrow's dower by gage of yesterday?

Both these expressions of self-doubt recall Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and both these Victorians echo such passages in Shakespeare as the opening of Sonnet 39,

Oh how thy worth with manners may I sing
 When thou art all the better part of me?
 What can mine own praise to mine own self bring?
 And what is't but mine own when I praise thee?

These three poets' statements of self-doubt are distinguished from the routine Petrarchan style by the self-consciousness of the speaker who, by being unduly analytical, brings himself or herself into the foreground as a meditative presence. The 'Shakespearean' character of Rossetti's fragments can be further illustrated by reference to Sonnet XXXV 'The Lamp's Shrine', in which the poet picks up one of Shakespeare's variations on this theme of the relative worth of the two lovers. In 'The Lamp's Shrine', the speaker begins 'Sometimes I fain would find in thee some fault, / That I might love thee still in spite of it', and while this recalls Shakespeare's sonnets on the faults of his friend, Rossetti does not follow up its simplicity and honesty with any more psychological interest independent of the conventional panegyric on the beloved that takes up the rest of this sonnet.

Rossetti's next and most significant reworking of Shakespeare's analytical style is to be found in Part Two, 'Change and Fate', where he analyses his own character and identity in a rigorous fashion. It is in the speaker's introspection here that the next development in the creation of the persona of The House of Life occurs. This development is, however, presaged by Sonnet XLIV, 'Cloud and Wind', from Part One.

Love, should I fear death most for you or me?
 Yet if you die, can I not follow you,
 Forcing the straits of change? Alas! but who
 Shall wrest a bond from night's inveteracy, 4
 Ere yet my hazardous soul put forth, to be
 Her warrant against all her haste might rue? -
 Ah! in your eyes so reached what dumb adieu,
 What unsunned gyres of waste eternity? 8

And if I die the first, shall death be then
 A lampless watchtower whence I see you weep? -
 Or (woe is me!) a bed wherein my sleep
 Ne'er notes (as death's dear cup at last you drain) 12
 The hour when you too learn that all is vain
 And that Hope sows what Love shall never reap?

The first line of this sonnet introduces a speculative query capable of further investigation through reason, and Rossetti then considers the two possible replies, her death in the octave and his own in the sestet. In the octave the speaker considers suicide as a means of joining the beloved but counters this with what I take to be a quasi-Christian fear of the consequences of such a 'sin' - eternal exile from the beloved.¹⁹ The first

19. I have qualified the adjective 'Christian' here because there is no specific indication of such a religious concept immediately present in the poem. Joan Rees, p. 122, states the idea in secular terms and while this is less contentious than my own formulation it does not fully capture the degree of Rossetti's fear. To do this I have introduced this Christian notion of the 'sin' of suicide and the sinner's exile consequent on it.

quatrain is a good example of how Rossetti is able to combine a simple direct formulation of an idea with an imaged quickening and enlivening of its significance. Lines 1 and 2 are, with the exception of 'follow' a monosyllabic hypothesis which lines 3 and 4 charge with the speaker's emotion. In the second quatrain speculation is followed by lamentation. Across the sequence as a whole, the pattern of development evident in this octave of XLIV, comes to attest to the speaker's individuality. In the sestet the argument is organised around a further hypothesis and another emotive conclusion. The speaker expresses his fear in lines 10-12 that his earlier death might simply entail the extinction of consciousness and prevent his observation of the death-hour of the beloved from beyond the grave. Lines 13 and 14 underscore this fear with a pessimistic reflection that this absence of an afterlife will make a mockery of their plans made in expectation of earthly life's being followed by reunion in immortality.

This sonnet is a useful introduction to Part Two because it shows the speaker in the process of working out his own thoughts and feelings in a language consistent with his sensibility; it is this coincidence of inner stimulation or inspiration and poetic expression that consolidates the claim that this speaking voice of The House of Life can best be regarded as a persona in my 'Shakespearean' sense. Indeed, Rossetti, articulating in the first two sonnets of Part Two his conception of his role in the rest of the sequence, reveals a consciousness of being both the 'makar' and the matter of his poems. In Sonnet LX, 'Transfigured Life', he speaks of 'passion's fullgrown birth'

being subtly spanned by 'Art's transfiguring essence', and in Sonnet LXI, 'The Song-Throe', he addresses himself rhetorically, exclaiming,

O Singer! Magic mirror thou hast none
Except thy manifest heart; and save thine own
Anguish or ardour, else no amulet.

These two Sonnets (LX and LXI) are over-ornate but credibly self-conscious statements of intent on Rossetti's part. They are ambitious in their scope, attempting to cover the process of individual maturation in the speaker and to provide some justifying context of universal relevance. They are more personal and self-directed than the Petrarchan mould of Shakespeare's Sonnet 100, 'Where art thou, Muse, that thou forget'st so long', and yet less resonant with candour and pathos than Shakespeare's 110, 'Alas, 'tis true, I have gone here and there'. However, it is the direct consideration of self as subject that links Shakespeare and Rossetti in their conception of their task, as against Sir Philip Sidney's "'Foole," said my Muse to me, "looke in thy heart and write"', which is an injunction to sincerity, only in the matter of creating love poems and not for the purpose of self-revelation.

The third sonnet of Part Two of The House of Life, no. LXII, 'The Soul's Sphere', is, as its title suggests, an expansion of the field of reference of the sequence to the highest level of generality.

Some prisoned moon in steep cloud-fastnesses, -
Throned queen and thrall'd; some dying sun whose pyre
Blazed with momentous memorable fire; -
Who hath not yearned and fed his heart with these?
Who, sleepless, hath not anguished to appease
Tragical shadow's realm of sound and sight
Conjectured in the lamentable night? ...
Lo! the soul's sphere of infinite images!

What sense shall count them? Whether it forecast
 The rose-winged hours that flutter in the van
 Of Love's unquestioning unrevealed span, -
 Visions of golden futures: or that last
 Wild pageant of the accumulated past
 That clangs and flashes for a drowning man.

In this poem all the elements of the speaker's style revealed in Part One are combined, but the beloved as the focus of the speaker's self-expression is absent. Here the speaker seeks to bridge the gap between the inner, private workings of his soul and the metaphysical reach of all men, in which he shares. He does this by combining sweeping images with rhetorical questions. The imagery of the sonnet represents the speaker's attempt to compress his visionary imagination into words and the interjections are designed to win the reader's endorsement of this effort. In the octave the speaker transfers the intensity of his emotions to the grand sweep of his imagery and yet, he maintains sufficient distance from this imagery to be able to express an awareness of the effort required to understand, as well as conceive of, this visionary realm if he is to understand his own life. In the sestet the speaker again yokes an objective point of view, employed specifically to hold the metaphysics of Love, to his subjective desire to place himself within such a general context. The positive and negative sections of both octave and sestet are the positive and negative sides of the speaker's experience recorded in Part One, raised to a level of generality that sets the speaker free to try to comprehend its mysteries.

'The Soul's Sphere' is important to this study of The House of Life more for what it shows at a glance than for its minutiae, because it is a good example of how the epithet 'Shakespearean'

that I have been applying to the sequence needs to be understood as being of general, as well as of particular, significance. The general significance of Shakespeare's sonnets can be seen in the way they liberated the love poet from the Petrarchan conventions by providing a model of how traditional formulae might be made more personal. Shakespeare's blend of speculation and confession stands behind 'The Soul's Sphere' because it is typical of the way in which Rossetti conducts his poetic inquiry into his first-person emotions and his metaphysical beliefs. Indeed, this kind of inquiry was itself brought into the English love sonnet sequence by Shakespeare.

The more immediate significance of Shakespeare's sonnets for The House of Life in particular emerges from such a sonnet as LXIX, 'Autumn Idleness':

This sunlight shames November where he grieves
 In dead red leaves, and will not let him shun
 The day, though bough with bough be over-run.
 But with a blessing every glade receives
 High salutation; while from hillock-eaves
 The deer gaze calling, dappled white and dun,
 As if, being foresters of old, the sun
 Had marked them with the shade of forest-leaves.

Here dawn to-day unveiled her magic glass;
 Here noon now gives the thirst and takes the dew;
 Till eve bring rest when other good things pass.
 And here the lost hours the lost hours renew
 While I still lead my shadow o'er the grass,
 Nor know, for longing, that which I should do.

This sonnet is, in its method, very close to Shakespeare's linking of sensuous description of nature with what can best be called his philosophical sensibility. In the best of the procreation sonnets and in some of the major statements on Love and Time from later in the Sonnets any statement Shakespeare makes about nature is accompanied with a metaphysical frisson. Shakespeare is able to suggest a particular metaphysical slant on life in

general and the fate of individuals in particular, principally himself and his friend, by interested selection and presentation of natural details. Rossetti's speaker is doing just this in 'Autumn Idleness'. In Sonnet 12, for example, Shakespeare presses on to his description of winter his pessimistic attitude towards mortal life so that when he says, 'Then of thy beauty do I question make / That thou among the wastes of time must go' (ll. 9-10), the reader is ineluctably led to read that statement of a personal foreboding with the atmosphere of the preceding description in the forefront of his mind. In the octave of 'Autumn Idleness' Rossetti suggests the same awful face of winter ('November where he grieves / In dead red leaves ...') as did Shakespeare, but then he holds it at bay with an autumn idyll only to reverse the process in the sestet. There the autumn day declines and the poem's mood declines with it, so that when the reader reaches line 12, 'And here the lost hours the lost hours renew', the movement from dawn in line 9 through noon in line 10 to eve in line 11 has prepared him for the otherwise unexplained melancholy that has entered the poem and that is then made directly personal in the last two lines - 'While I still lead my shadow o'er the grass, / Nor know, for longing, that which I should do.' This last line of the sonnet has a nakedness, a personal resonance, that presents the speaker to us directly, just as Shakespeare's confessional mode brought us closer to his sequence persona.

There is, then, a link between Shakespeare and Rossetti, between their separate but similar uses of natural images to convey psychological and emotional stands by the speaker of the

sonnets. This link, established by my analysis of 'Autumn Idleness' can be clarified by reference to Shakespeare's Sonnets 7 and 33 and Rossetti's Sonnet LXX, 'The Hill Summit'. The idea shared by these three sonnets is the movement of the sun from east to west across a single day. In each sonnet this movement is characterised as a journey and the sun itself personified as a traveller. In each sonnet this first metaphor is followed by another - the drawing of a parallel between the journey of the sun across the sky and the journey of man from youth to age. While the bare statement of the metaphor in such prosaic terms suggests little particularity, in each of these sonnets the speaker is finely etched in the course of his expression of this metaphor.

In many of Shakespeare's procreation sonnets the impact of the finest images is weakened by the presence of such uninspired couplets as this one from Sonnet 7 - 'So thou thyself out-going in thy noon, / Unlook'd on diest unless thou get a son.' Detached from this uninspiring conclusion, the douzaine presents, albeit indirectly through the third-person point of view, the speaker's own emotional and metaphysical involvement in the theme, and presents it as a private epiphany worked out in universal terms.

Lo, in the orient when the gracious light	1
Lifts up his burning head, each under eye	
Doth homage to his new-appearing sight,	
Serving with looks his sacred majesty;	
And having climb'd the steep-up heavenly hill,	
Resembling strong youth in his middle age,	
Yet mortal looks adore his beauty still,	
Attending on his golden pilgrimage:	8
But when from highmost pitch, with weary car,	
Like feeble age he reeleth from the day,	
The eyes ('fore duteous) now converted are	
From his low tract, and look another way	12

The attribution of a degree of personal intensity of vision to these lines is supported by Shakespeare's further investment of this theme and this metaphor with a personal tone of voice in Sonnet 33. Again only the douzaine is relevant:

Full many a glorious morning have I seen	1
Flatter the mountain tops with sovereign eye,	
Kissing with golden face the meadows green,	
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy, -	
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:	8
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 -	
The region cloud hath mask'd him from me now.	12

In the first of the douzaines Shakespeare's speaker is present as a governing hand controlling the course of the sun metaphor and weaving around it a shifting value judgement. Initially the journey is presented positively and the judgement is of a piece with it (ll. 5-7), but then the description changes tone and the commentary follows suit (ll. 8-11). The speaker is an observer across these lines in which the third-person omniscience conceals his first-person involvement in the issue. In the second of these douzaines, Shakespeare's speaker sets himself in direct first-person counterpoint to the third-person control he still exercises. The result is that the speaker, rather than the sun, emerges as most to be 'pitied'. In Sonnet 7 the speaker was participating in the sun's tragedy but in Sonnet 33 the sun illuminates the speaker's own dilemma.

It is partly through such shifts in vision that individual sonnets when gathered together create the impression of an individualised persona behind them all, and this is part of what that Shakespeare bequeathed to such Victorians as are being

studied in this dissertation. Rossetti, in Sonnet LXX, has taken over this journey-of-the-sun metaphor and used it to substantiate further the presence of his sequence persona. Rossetti's first use of the image occurred in Sonnet XXVIII, 'Soul-Light', in the lines, 'And as the traveller triumphs with the sun, / Glorifying in heat's mid-height, yet startide brings ...', but in LXX it is central rather than incidental:

This feast-day of the sun, his altar there
 In the broad west has blazed for vesper-song;
 And I have loitered in the vale too long
 And gaze now a belated worshipper.
 Yet may I not forget that I was 'ware,
 So journeying, of his face at intervals
 Transfigured where the fringed horizon falls, -
 A fiery bush with coruscating hair.

And now that I have climbed and won this height,
 I must tread downward through the sloping shade
 And travel the bewildered tracks till night.
 Yet for this hour I still may here be stayed
 And see the gold air and the silver fade
 And the last bird fly into the last light.

Rossetti here incorporates the central ideas of Shakespeare's two sonnets into his own: the passing of time and the change this brings to the 'face' of the sun, the speaker's description of this process, and his application of it to himself. Rossetti's speaker, familiar to us from LXII, 'The Soul's Sphere', has canvassed the basic ideas of this seventieth sonnet in several others. In LXIV, 'Ardour and Memory', the poet held fast to moments of peace and beauty within nature's constant process of change. In Sonnet LXVII, 'The Landmark', the speaker expressed his bewilderment at life's incertitude and his desire to find a right path through life. In 'Autumn Idleness' all these themes appeared and here, in 'The Hill Summit' the speaker can be observed working over concerns of direct personal significance through his adaptation of a Shakespearean metaphor. In the octave Rossetti combines the first- and third-person points of

view in both quatrains, regarding himself as object in the first and speaking as subject in the second. He also matches Shakespeare's gradual intensification of his personal involvement, for, by the end of the octave, Rossetti's speaker is again using his visionary imagery. The move from octave to sestet reveals a shift from principally nature- and sun-oriented meditation to a more directly introspective standpoint. This can be seen in the way in which the nature description of the last lines of the poem is weighed upon by the speaker himself. His mood informs them with his chastened sense of failure to realise his visions personally or to find them realised in nature.

In all the sonnets of Part Two mentioned so far the speaker has striven to maintain balance between the sense of uplift his visionary faculty affords him and the debilitating fears that his experience raises within him. This sense of being in transit between polar states of spiritual liberation and death is something that the speaker brings to bear on sonnet after sonnet in the rest of Part Two. In order to show both the 'Shakespearean' quality of the speaker's meditations on this predicament and their contribution to that unity of The House of Life which results from the ubiquitous presence of the speaker, I want to focus now on just three Sonnets, LXXIX, XCVII, and the final sonnet CI. These three could be supplemented by many others, among them LXXXIII, 'Barren Spring', LXXXVI, 'Lost Days', XCI 'Lost on Both Sides', and XCVI 'Life the Beloved', all of which combine the styles of analysis and reverie originally found in Shakespeare but recreated in a personal way by the speaker across The House of Life.

The pattern that emerges from all these sonnets begins with a reasoned statement of a proposition that leads into the theme of the sonnet. This is then continued but with the embellishment of imagery, although (as in most sonnets) the task of explicating the theme is dominant in the octave. Then in the sestet the speaker moves, gradually at first, away from such analytical meditation toward a more visionary and imaged encapsulation of the emotional significance of the theme. This pattern allows the speaker to consolidate both his mature claims to a metaphysical investigative approach to life and his personal involvement in these objectively-introduced themes. The speaker works through his awareness of the dilemmas that face him, to resolve them through ardent emotional reveries that serve a cathartic function. This pattern is a codification through form of the speaker's odyssey in the sequence and it holds him personally before us by organising his thoughts and feelings in an affective harmony.

In Sonnet LXXIX, 'The Monochord', the speaker begins with a question that expresses in direct personal terms the dilemma implicit in the earlier poems of Part Two.

Is it this sky's vast vault or ocean's sound
That is Life's self and draws my life from me,
And by instinct ineffable decree
Holds my breath quailing on the bitter bound?

He then moves on to restate this query but with an increased reliance on the opening image of the ocean:

Nay, is it Life or Death, thus thunder-crowned,
That 'mid the tide of all emergency
Now notes my separate wave, and to what sea
Its difficult eddies labour in the ground?

This octave then states the speaker's metaphysical plea for some understanding of the reason behind the difficult struggle that his life has become.²⁰ The imagery stands in the place where the answer should be, allowing the speaker to inform his philosophical questioning of the meaning of life and death with a distinctly personal resonance. The speaker's skilful development of a single statement across eight lines by means of this imaged language is indicative of how the persona of the sequence has emerged. In the sestet the style intensifies as the speaker moves away from simply stating his problem to attempting to convey what it feels like to be beset by such doubt and confusion:

Oh! what is this that knows the road I came,
The flame turned cloud, the cloud returned to flame,
The lifted shifted steeps and all the way? -

and yet to know the resilience of hope, to receive a measure
of recompense for suffering,

That draws round me at last this wind-warm space,
And in regenerate rapture turns my face
Upon the devious coverts of dismay?

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20. This 'Monochord' sonnet has caused much speculation, and Oswald Doughty in A Victorian Romantic: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 2nd ed. (1949; London: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 691-92 records the various opinions held by William Michael Rossetti and by Christina Rossetti regarding its meaning. Christina's mention of 'the musical monochord' was taken up by William Michael and is justified by a comment of Rossetti himself to the effect that the poem records 'that sublimated mood of the soul in which a separate essence of itself seems as it were to oversoar and survey it' (Doughty, p. 692). The crucial element lacking in these earlier readings, Rossetti's own included, is that of the struggle the speaker makes to understand the inscrutability of this 'Monochord'. Professor Rees, p. 76, comes close to acknowledging this element of distress in the octave, but goes further than I can in finding the sestet sufficiently compensatory to make this sonnet 'a rare moment of relative security in the sequence'.

The power of these lines, like that of many of the other sestets across the sequence, derives from the speaker's infusion of visionary ardour into his pessimistic view of mortal existence. Here, as elsewhere, the speaker leans more heavily upon the evocative power of language than on its analytic precision for his effect. The rhythm of line 11, 'The lifted shifted steepes and all the way' is as important as its diction in suggesting his life-long struggle, and the assistance the alliteration of lines 13 and 14 gives the speaker in conveying the two sides of his self is an essential part of his style of self-presentation. The second tercet is emblematic of the speaker's personality as well as forming an arresting expression of a particular moment of consciousness.

The answer to the questions of 'The Monochord' can be found in XCVII, 'A Superscription', where it is death itself that addresses the speaker with a vehement and chilling imperative:

Look in my face; my name is Might-have-been;
 I am also called No-more, Too-late, Farewell;
 Unto thine ear I hold the dead-sea shell
 Cast up thy Life's foam-fretted feet between;
 Unto thine eyes the glass where that is seen
 Which had Life's form and Love's, but by my spell
 Is now a shaken shadow intolerable,
 Of ultimate things unuttered the frail screen.

Mark me, how still I am! But should there dart
 One moment through thy soul the soft surprise
 Of that winged Peace which lulls the breath of sighs, -
 Then shalt thou see me smile, and turn apart
 Thy visage to mine ambush at thy heart
 Sleepless with cold commemorative eyes.

This shift from the interrogative to the imperative mood is one that the speaker has already employed in Part One in the sonnets on separation. Here, as there, the movement from hypothesis or inquiry to a definite statement or declamation intensifies

the speaker's presence. The interesting feature of this sonnet is that the speaker's mood, his inner condition, is revealed indirectly. The adoption by the speaker of death's point of view is dramatic only in a limited sense because the poem is still an expression of the speaker's vision.²¹ The speaker here is engaged in a soliloquy, a personal monologue. The language is his, the movement from an analytic to an imaged rhetoric is his, and the impression of being hollowed out by the failure of a dream is his. The speaker's adoption of death's point of view for the expression of total hopelessness is a subterfuge that is not meant to deceive. In the octave the speaker's experience, charted in the first person across the sequence, is caught accurately, if enigmatically, in the description of his visionary faith in Life and Love as a 'shaken shadow', a 'frail screen'. In the sestet, his resilient clinging to his faith in earlier sonnets like 'Autumn Idleness' and 'The Hill Summit' is restated in the first tercet and his disillusionment presented in the chilling description in the last two lines of the sonnet -

... and turn apart
Thy visage to mine ambush at thy heart
Sleepless with cold commemorative eyes.

It becomes clear as the poem progresses that we are in fact

21. Masao Miyoshi, in The Divided Self: A Perspective on the Literature of the Victorians (New York: New York University Press, 1969), recognises this and uses it in his study of the split personality or 'divided-self' in Rossetti. Professor Miyoshi writes (pp. 257-58): 'In "A Superscription" (XCVII), the speaker is a lost self who calls himself alternately "Might-have-been" and "No-more, Too-late, Farewell." Obviously between the speaker and the "thou" (his present self) there is no hope for reconciliation.'

listening to the speaker unburdening himself of his sense of complete nullification: the element of personification involved in the speaking voice of the sonnet does not detract from its confessional status.

Again, by way of parallel rather than demonstrable source, Shakespeare's Sonnet 146 might be recalled, for here Shakespeare uses an apostrophe to distance himself from himself, yet only to bring himself forth the more clearly.

Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth,
 [Foil'd by] these rebel powers that thee array,
 Why dost thou pine within and suffer dearth,
 Painting thy outward walls so costly gay?
 Why so large cost, having so short a lease,
 Dost thou upon thy fading mansion spend?
 Shall worms, inheritors of this excess,
 Eat up thy charge? Is this thy body's end?
 Then, soul, live thou upon thy servant's loss,
 And let that pine to aggravate thy store;
 Buy terms divine in selling hours of dross;
 Within be fed, without be rich no more:
 So shalt thou feed on Death, that feeds on men,
 And Death once dead there's no more dying then.

The connection between these two poems is their common element of self-disclosure, and introspection in an address seemingly directed by, or at, another. In each of these sonnets the speaker is looking in a mirror, and although our eyes, with his, see the image, we know that we are in fact seeking the speaker himself.

By the time we reach the last poem of Rossetti's sequence, 'The One Hope', the speaker has come through the dark epiphany of 'The Superscription' and can once again self-consciously direct his thoughts and emotions in the first person.

When vain desire at last and vain regret
 Go hand in hand to death, and all is vain,
 What shall assuage the unforgotten pain
 And teach the forgetful to forget?

Shall Peace be still a sunk stream long unmet, -
 Or may the soul at once in a green plain 6
 Stoop through the spray of some sweet life-fountain
 And cull the dew-drenched flowering amulet?

Ah! when the wan soul in that golden air
 Between the scripted petals softly blown
 Peers breathless for the gift of grace unknown, -
 Ah! let none other alien spell soe'er 12
 But only the one Hope's one name be there, -
 Not less nor more, but even that word alone.

The objective appearance of this sonnet, the absence of the first-person pronoun and the very general level of the discussion do not detract from the 'Shakespearean' degree of self-disclosure present in the poem. The first two lines, echo the pessimism of 'Cloud and Wind' and 'A Superscription', just as the inclusion of the phrases 'at last' and 'all is vain' draw on the speaker's previous expressions of disillusionment and lend this generalised lament a strong intimacy of voice. In the second quatrain the conjectural beginning of line 6, 'Or may the soul ...', is followed by an imaged elaboration of an idea in line with the speaker's ingrained patterns of self-expression. In the sestet the conscious control of the speaker is evident in the reversal of his normal procedure, with the imaged tercet coming before the analytical one, in order that the sonnet, and the sequence, might end with an invocation of that transcendent hope cherished by the speaker throughout The House of Life. This last tercet does not go much beyond rephrasing in the form of a wish the question of 'The Monochord' as to the nature of the force that guides the speaker's life. It does, however, testify to the existence of the speaker, to the particular quality of his thought that makes him an individual - his visionary desire. That it does this in a monosyllabic diction that achieves a peremptory

optimistic resonance, is yet one more illustration of the fruitfulness of Shakespeare's contribution of the personal imperative to the English love sonnet sequence.

CHAPTER V

Thus far the Victorian sequences examined in this dissertation have been linked to Shakespeare's Sonnets by virtue of their strongly introspective method. The personae of these sequences have been overheard meditating on their experiences and constructing metaphysical claims on the basis of those experiences. Only in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Sonnets from the Portuguese was there very much of the dramatic in the speaker's presentation of her relationship. In George Meredith's sequence of sixteen-line 'sonnets' - Modern Love - the speaker's relationship with his wife is presented in a very dramatic fashion; his meditations upon his experiences are presented as narrative vignettes of a broader story which Meredith organises by complementing the speaker's first-person point of view with a separate third-person perspective. To put it another way, Modern Love contains two levels of narrative, one particular, operating within individual sonnets or across runs of sonnets, and the other general, spanning the whole sequence.

Not all the sonnets of Modern Love are narrative in either a covert or an overt sense. Meredith does give his speaker-

husband some straightforwardly lyrical meditative monologues which play a part in the creation of the sequence persona in the manner of the other Victorian sequences already linked with Shakespeare's model form. Before examining Meredith's innovative use of narrative in his love sonnet sequence, I want to look at the more introspective poems which will serve as a bridge between the Shakespearean style of self-expression, to which we have become accustomed in the preceding chapters of this study, and the somewhat 'novelistic' cast of the main narrative style of Modern Love.

Sonnet XI, for example, is a lyrical meditative sonnet in which Meredith demonstrates his capacity to weave emotive reflection around simple description and exploit natural images for the purpose of metaphysical speculation.¹

Out in the yellow meadows, where the bee	1
Hums by us with the honey of the Spring,	
And showers of sweet notes from the larks on wing,	
Are dropping like a noon-dew, wander we.	
Or is it now? or was it then? for now,	
As then, the larks from running rings pour showers:	
The golden foot of May is on the flowers,	7
And friendly shadows dance upon her brow.	
What's this, when Nature swears there is no change	
To challenge eyesight? Now, as then, the grace	
Of heaven seems holding earth in its embrace.	
Nor eyes, nor heart, has she to feel it strange?	
Look, woman, in the West. There wilt thou see	13
An amber cradle near the sun's decline:	
Within it, featured even in death divine,	
Is lying a dead infant, slain by thee.	

The first four lines here are objectively focused in the manner of English lyric rhapsody over Nature in the widest sense, and

1. The edition of Modern Love used for all quotations in this chapter is in The Poems of George Meredith, vol. I, ed. Phyllis B. Bartlett (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), pp. 115-44.

they could be matched with poetry from the eighteenth as well as the nineteenth century. What makes the first half of this sonnet reminiscent of the Shakespearean sonnets is the gradual but sure development of the poem as it picks up a more distinctly meditative tone. The husband brings in the operations of time upon both Nature and his own contemplation of his experience. In particular, the pause in the description at line 5 to invest the preceding description with a contemplative human significance, and the repetition and extension of this intervention at lines 7-11, reveal just that blend of observation and speculation so firmly controlled by Shakespeare. Across the first eleven lines there is no reference to the relationship that is to be brought in later and this passage is akin to Shakespeare's mutability sonnets in its concentration and privacy of thought. This sonnet, however, like many of Shakespeare's, leads its melancholy description and reverie to an arresting and vehement conclusion. Lines 13-16 function like a Shakespearean couplet but have, if anything, more power as a result of the Meredithian sonnet's additional two lines. While the husband's imperative in line 13 gives this conclusion the appearance of being directed at the wife, this is in fact a rhetorical apostrophe designed to vent the husband's spleen. The bluntness of this address is not followed up; instead, the husband reveals his meditative mood by expressing his resentment in the form of an ornate metaphor. This elaborate and violent image is a measure of the intensity of the husband's feeling as expressed in the monologue.

The pattern of this sonnet and the vehemence of its end are both renewed in Sonnet XXVI, another meditative monologue:

Love ere he bleeds, an eagle in high skies, 1
 Has earth beneath his wings: from reddened eve
 He views the rosy dawn. In vain they weave
 The fatal web below while far he flies.
 But when the arrow strikes him, there's a change. 5
 He moves but in the track of his spent pain,
 Whose red drops are the links of a harsh chain,
 Binding him to the ground, with narrow range.
 A subtle serpent then has Love become. 9
 I had the eagle in my bosom erst:
 Henceforward with the serpent I am cursed.
 I can interpret where the mouth is dumb.
 Speak, and I see the side-lie of a truth.
 Perchance my heart may pardon you this deed: 14
 But be no coward: - you that made Love bleed,
 You must bear all the venom of his tooth!

The first nine lines here serve the same function as the image of the sun's journey in Shakespeare's Sonnets 7 and 33, the image that was borrowed and reworked, as was seen in Chapter 4, by Dante Gabriel Rossetti for his sonnet 'The Hill Summit'. Meredith's 'Metaphysical' conceit of Love's fate being represented by an eagle wounded by an arrow is expressed with lyric heightening for emotive reasons. The diction of colour and movement is carefully placed to achieve maximum effect; the red symbolises both life and death, and the bird's freedom is celebrated to make his fate all the more pitiable. In these nine lines the speaker invests his diction with the private passion and disillusion expressed in the Love-eagle image, just as Shakespeare and Rossetti codified their emotions through the organisation of their sun conceits. It is worth noting that in line 5 the husband, after 'narrating' the wounding of the eagle, adds 'there's a change'. This use of the word 'change' links up with that in Sonnet XI, and in both poems the husband is observed setting his recollection of the past happiness he shared with his wife in the 'changed' light of their present conflict. The

motif of personal emotional reversal is given an objective form in both these soliloquies.

This ardent metaphorical opening passage is then appropriated by the speaker and retained as a means of organising his direct reproach of his wife for killing their love. Sonnet XXVI is able to focus sharply our attention on the husband by its double 'turn'; the first, at line 10, directs the image inwards upon the husband-speaker who then, at the second turn, in line 15, redirects it outwards towards the wife. By this means we are made familiar with the husband's self-conception as a 'serpent' (snake imagery occurs in other sonnets besides this one),² and with his attitude to his wife. The final lines, while being addressed to the wife, become unified with the speaker's introspective meditation because the image that holds this address is bound up with the preceding self-communion.

In Sonnet XLI, the Shakespearean analytical intelligence which gave point to the natural descriptions of the Sonnets finds Meredithian form:

How many a thing which we cast to the ground,
 When others pick it up becomes a gem!
 We grasp at all the wealth it is to them;
 And by reflected light its worth is found.
 Yet for us still 'tis nothing! and that zeal 5
 Of false appreciation quickly fades.
 This truth is little known to human shades,
 How rare from their own instinct 'tis to feel!
 They waste the soul with spurious desire,
 That is not the ripe flame upon the bough. 10
 We two have taken up a lifeless vow
 To rob a living passion: dust for fire!
 Madam is grave, and eyes the clock that tells
 Approaching midnight. We have struck despair 14
 Into two hearts. O, look we like a pair
 Who for fresh nuptials joyfully yield all else?

2. Norman Friedman, in 'The Jangled Harp: Symbolic Structure in Modern Love', Modern Language Quarterly, 18 (1957), p. 22, includes a discussion of the snake imagery of this sonnet in his study of the serpent/poison image cluster of the sequence as a whole.

Here the speaker does not have recourse either to nature sensuously observed (Sonnet XI), or to an extended pictorial metaphor (Sonnet XXVI), but concentrates on a direct analysis of human psychology. The husband is, like Shakespeare's speaker in his more philosophic moods, reasoning from a broad intellectual standpoint to a particular application of his hypothesis to his own predicament. Continuity - between the general use of the first-person plural pronoun of the moral reflections and its role in the particular application of these ideas to the marriage - unifies the sonnet and gives the speaker's final despondency a dignified air. The theme of the first half of the poem is not in itself so much profound as tellingly acute, and yet the husband's intensity born of hard experience makes the observation compelling. Like Shakespeare's speaker in Sonnets 15 and 60 ('When I consider every thing that grows' and 'Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore'), the husband here weaves into his speculation strands of imagery that give a lyrical quality to the baldness of thought. The effect of this method is to make the speaker's process of thinking, and his specific act of applying abstract thought to his experience, as much the focus of the reader's interest as the thoughts expressed.

Meredith's most lyrical sonnet is XLVII, in which all the Shakespearean lyric techniques are brought together in a single poem.

We saw the swallows gathering in the sky,
 And in the osier-isle we heard them noise.
 We had not to look back on summer joys,
 Or forward to a summer of bright dye:
 But in the largeness of the evening earth
 Our spirits grew as we went side by side.

The hour became her husband and my bride.
 Love that had robbed us so, thus blessed our dearth! 8
 The pilgrims of the year waxed very loud
 In multitudinous chatterings, as the flood
 Full brown came from the West, and like pale blood
 Expanded to the upper crimson cloud. 12
 Love that had robbed us of immortal things,
 This little moment mercifully gave,
 Where I have seen across the twilight wave
 The swan sail with her young beneath her wings.³

Here Meredith has, with complete assurance, brought together the speaker's lyric evocation of nature, his infusion of this description with a metaphysical awareness of the passing of time and the mutability of all things, his experience as a lover, and finally, his deliberate exercise of self-consciousness, something which unites all these elements and creates a moment of epiphanic illumination. This poem is a particularly suitable one with which to end this survey of the sequence persona's lyric soliloquies because it brings together certain distinctive features of the husband's style. The idea of change that was a part of both Sonnets XI and XXVI is mirrored here in the repetition in lines 8 and 13 - 'Love that had robbed us ...'. The association of the red colour of clouds at sunset and sunrise

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3. Swinburne's response to this sonnet is instructive, and it is contained in a letter he wrote to the Spectator quoted in full in J.A. Hammerton, George Meredith: His Life and Art in Anecdote and Criticism (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1911), pp. 101-02. On the one hand Swinburne found Sonnet XLVII a 'noble' lyric masterpiece, claiming, with his customary hyperbole, that 'a more perfect piece of writing no man alive has ever turned out'. On the other hand, Swinburne found himself unable to enjoy the poem's lyricism as much when it was isolated from its context. He explained that 'in transcription it must lose the colour and effect given it by its place in the series; the grave and tender beauty, which makes it at once a bridge and a resting place between the admirable poems of passion it falls among' (p. 102). Swinburne's reaction points to the skilful way many of Meredith's individual poems form part of a whole, and to how, ultimately, the particular level of narrative in Modern Love is subsumed by the general.

with the red colour of blood is one that the husband used, with admirable variation, in Sonnets XI and XXVI, and redeploys here in lines 11-12 to hold his 'changed' mood.

With these sonnets in mind, and particularly the rhetorical addresses to the wife with which the husband concluded them, I want now to consider the 'Shakespearean' narrative of Modern Love which has a strong meditative bias and might more properly be described as dramatic. The putative story that 'lurks in the background',⁴ of Shakespeare's Sonnets might be summarised as follows. The poet-speaker is devoted to a fair youth of noble birth, his friend and patron, of whose love he is jealous but whose favour he cannot compel. This friend betrays the speaker both by patronising another poet and by entering into sexual relations with the speaker's mistress. In response, the speaker at first gently reproaches the friend, and then turns to excusing him, accompanying this with self-effacement. The poet finally has to release his friend and after severely castigating his mistress - his only revenge - he is forced to watch and wait for outcome of that liaison. The essentials of Shakespeare's 'plot' are, like Meredith's, told in just a few sonnets. The friend's betrayal of the speaker with the mistress is prepared for from Sonnet 33 to Sonnet 41 and brought out into the open in 42. His betrayal of the speaker with the rival poet is exposed

4. The phrase is from William T. Going, Scanty Plot of Ground: Studies in the Victorian Sonnet (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), p. 114. Dr Going, in passing, links the narrative behind Shakespeare's Sonnets with Meredith's method in Modern Love, and concludes that: 'Mrs Browning and Dante and Christina Rossetti proved the sonnet sequence a still viable mode for meditations about love. Among the Victorian poets, however, it is Meredith who pushes the genre in its new [narrative] direction without destroying its indirect lyric quality' (ibidem).

in Sonnet 86. The friend's desire to be free of the speaker and the latter's acquiescence are related in Sonnet 87. The falsity of the speaker's relationship with his mistress is cogently exposed in 138, and in Sonnet 144 the speaker ends his narrative with a bitter leave-taking of both his friend and his mistress. This nebulous narrative is less dramatic in its resolution than that of Modern Love since the poet's relationship with his friend is left suspended and that with his mistress is left ambiguous. It is less dramatic in its presentation because, on the one hand, the speaker expresses himself in a more fluent, consistently reflective and controlled manner than does the speaker-husband of Modern Love (whose inner turmoil is reflected in the jagged vehemence of his speech), and on the other, the speaker in Shakespeare's narrative does not rely on the use of physical 'grounding' of his thoughts by allusion to concrete objects and settings.

The most narrative of Shakespeare's sonnets are those in a group running from number 76 through to 96 because in the majority of these sonnets the speaker is talking to his friend about their relationship, either verbally or in the form of a verse letter, in a more direct and immediately personal tone, more consistently and with fuller narrative implication than in earlier and later sonnets, which are generally meditative and rhapsodic. All the sonnets of this group are under the direct control of the speaker and they reflect his thoughts and illuminate his emotions, but they admit the friend to a significant degree. It is these sonnets that provide the most fruitful introduction to the main body of sonnets in Modern Love, where

the husband, speaking of his own feelings, admits the wife and mistress in like fashion.

The narrative issue at stake in Shakespeare's group of sonnets from 76 to 96 is the turning away of the friend from the speaker to the rival poet and his extension of this retreat towards a general and complete rejection of the speaker. In the octave of Sonnet 76 the speaker can be overheard talking to himself,⁵ wondering, 'Why is my verse so barren of new pride, / So far from variation or quick change?' (ll. 1-2), and then in the sestet he turns his meditation outward towards his friend whom he invokes directly, 'Oh know, sweet love, I always write of you, / And you and love are still my argument' (ll. 9-10). With this form of address the poet-speaker has stepped outside the confines of his own mind. He is no longer musing in a self-directed way, a way which supposes only himself as auditor. This, 'Oh know, sweet love,' with all the 'direct speech' to the friend that follows in this and succeeding sonnets is, at the very least, an indication by the speaker that he is involving another in his thoughts. This dramatic extension of the soliloquy into a form of colloquy will become more comprehensible as these 'narrative' sonnets unfold.

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5. Ingram and Redpath (p. 176) suggest that the first eight lines of Sonnet 76 are 'probably a reiteration of common charges against the poet's manner of writing rather than a series of self-questionings.' If they are right, then this sonnet as a whole becomes a more dramatic or narrative sonnet, since the speaker might then be imagined repeating the charges against himself to the friend whose endorsement of these complaints has hurt the speaker most.

In Sonnet 78 the speaker complains that now others are beginning to copy him in his praise of the friend -

So oft have I invok'd thee for my Muse
And found such fair assistance in my verse
As every alien pen hath got my use
And under thee their poesy disperse.

Since it becomes clear that there is only one actual rival, the phrase 'every alien pen' can, with hindsight, seem a most barbed reproach. Even as they stand, however, these lines ring with a pointed satire that suggests that they are not 'spoken' for the poet's benefit alone. In Sonnet 79 the speaker heightens both the emotional intensity of the complaint and the urgency of the tone of voice in which it is expressed:

Whilst I alone did call upon thy aid,
My verse alone had all thy gentle grace;
But now my gracious numbers are decay'd,
And my sick Muse doth give another place.
I grant, sweet love, thy lovely argument
Deserves the travail of a worthier pen;
Yet what of thee thy poet doth invent
He robs thee of, and pays it thee again

Here the speaker not only expresses his own grievance, but begins to address to his friend an argument that directly affects him. Now, whether this be imagined as a verse-letter or direct speech, the intention behind the lines is dramatic - they are an attempt at interaction. In Sonnet 80 the speaker becomes even more importunate, almost demanding that the friend respond to his alarm.

Oh how I faint when I of you do write,
Knowing a better spirit doth use your name,
And in the praise thereof spends all his might,
To make me tongue-tied speaking of your fame!

These several quotations show how Shakespeare has redirected his lyric form for purposes of narration. The first-person voice,

normally so introspective, is here able to convey the story of the relationship through the speaker's reproaches of his friend. The strident self-regarding tone of these reproaches assumes a reader or listener and thereby heightens the dependence of the arguments upon the participation of the friend for their full effect. In short, the confessional mode performs a narrative function by being made to appear conversational.

The speaker then recovers from this excessive emotionalism (part of which is the result of the conventional phrasing of some of the lines), and turns to a more dignified tone in which he quietly but persistently explains to the friend through Sonnets 82-85 that his love is more worthy of notice than another's because it is real, and because his poetry is used in its service, rather than being the overblown touting of showy talent based on insincere feeling. The 'sestet' of 85 carries the speaker's meaning through a form of address that itself testifies to the way in which the speaker is trying to influence his friend.

Hearing you prais'd I say, 'Tis so, 'tis true',	9
And to the most of praise add something more;	
But that is in my thought, whose love to you,	
Though words come hindmost, holds his rank before.	12
Then others for the breath of words respect:	
Me for my dumb thoughts, speaking in effect.	

The narrative significance of these lines lies in their direct attempt to persuade the friend to discriminate between his poet-admirers and recognise the speaker's sincerity. The intimacy of line 11 and the immediacy of the last line accentuate this sense of an active engagement with the friend. Sonnet 86 reveals that the speaker has lost the friend's favour, at least temporarily, and, through its dignified expression and heightened

language, it makes clear to the reader the emotional trauma that this has meant for the speaker. In Sonnet 87 the speaker abandons altogether the issue of the rival poet and instead offers his friend an easy escape from their now obviously soured relationship. This remarkable poem can, from the friend's point of view, be read as a generous bowing-out through self-effacement, but if read from the speaker's experience as narrated in the previous sonnets, it can be seen to be filled with a carefully disguised yet penetrating irony at the friend's expense.⁶

Farewell – thou art too dear for my possessing,
 And like enough thou know'st thy estimate:
 The charter of thy worth gives thee releasing;
 My bonds in thee are all determinate.
 For how do I hold thee but by thy granting?
 And for that riches where is my deserving?
 The cause of this fair gift in me is wanting,
 And so my patent back again is swerving.
 Thy self thou gav'st, thy own worth then not knowing:
 Or me, to whom thou gav'st it, else mistaking:
 So thy great gift, upon misprision growing,
 Comes home again on better judgment making.
 Thus have I had thee as a dream doth flatter –
 In sleep a king, but waking no such matter.

This sonnet is so varied in its modes of address, ranging from the direct salutation of the opening, through the interrogative form of the middle stanza, to its late argumentative style, that

6. While the ambiguity of 'dear', meaning both cherished and expensive, introduces an emotional ambivalence, a double-edged interpretation of this sonnet rests on the leading legal conceit. The terms of the contract between the two can be seen as a blind, adopted by the speaker to conceal his hurt while he demonstrates that right is on the side of the friend. The terms of the contract can also be seen as a means of reproaching and mocking the friend's overweening egotism. While I have never felt great curiosity as to the identity of the friend, I must confess to having wondered often how much of the irony of this sonnet was picked up by Shakespeare's friend and his broader circle of associates!

it is hard to read it as not being in some sense directed, or offered to, the friend. The speaker is expressing himself with the very evident expectation of being listened to, or read, and it is the palpable suggestion of a context of changed relations between two once-close friends that fills the poem's ambiguities with 'narrative' significance.

After this eighty-seventh sonnet the speaker continues to mull over the friend's betrayal and his self-interested behaviour, speaking sometimes directly to the friend, and at other times more to himself. The finest of these sonnets, and one of the most moving of the sequence, is 90:

Then hate me when thou wilt, - if ever, now -
 Now, while the world is bent my deeds to cross,
 Join with the spite of Fortune, make me bow,
 And do not drop in for an after-loss:
 Ah do not, when my heart hath 'scap'd this sorrow,
 Come in the rearward of a conquer'd woe;
 Give not a windy night a rainy morrow,
 To linger out a purpos'd overthrow.
 If thou wilt leave me, do not leave me last,
 When other petty griefs have done their spite,
 But in the onset come: so shall I taste
 At first the very worst of Fortune's might; -
 And other strains of woe, which now seem woe,
 Compar'd with loss of thee will not seem so.

This sonnet begins with an urgent imperative which the speaker weighs upon with a rhetorical force that extends it right through the octave. The repetition of 'now', and of 'do not', and the use of the verbs 'Join' and 'Give' in the imperative make it impossible to miss the direct address to the friend. The emotional intensity of the expression ensures that the imagery does not obscure the personal appeal of the poet to his friend whom he has now lost. The elaborate courtesy of 87, however tinged with irony it might have been, has now given way to an overt exhibition by the speaker of the degree of pain occasioned

him by the break-up of his liaison with his friend. The couplet of this sonnet is a fitting end to the passionate rhetoric of the douzaine, since its intimacy underscores the 'narrative' relevance of the whole poem.

The important point to be made on the basis of these analyses is that Shakespeare's speaker unfolds a 'story' obliquely without great narrative detail through his active responses to shifts in his relationship with the friend. By filtering the actual progress of the story through the screen of his personality in sonnets which themselves suggest an exchange of views, the speaker adds an extra quasi-narrative dimension to his monologues. In Modern Love Meredith has adopted this same technique in order both to outline the narrative of the husband's relationships with his wife and his mistress, and to present the speaker-husband directly as a personality. Meredith's equivalent of the more dramatic and narrative form of monologue just illustrated from Shakespeare can be seen in two related sonnets to the mistress, XXVIII and XXXVIII. Here the husband reports indirectly his speech with the Lady as he explains his motives for entering into their liaison and sets forth his demands of her. In both these sonnets there is the same one-dimensional quality to the dialogue that marked the Shakespearean sonnets, with the monologue being addressed in form outwards to a recipient listener, but in effect conveying the inward thoughts and feelings of the speaker who is as much the subject of the sonnets as he is their creator.

Sonnet XXVIII, like Shakespeare's leave-taking Sonnet, 87, is both addressed to a listener and elaborated for the

speaker's own benefit. While it is directed at, or to, the Lady, every statement seemingly made about her or some aspect of her projected role in the liaison is another twist in the husband's intense enjoyment of his opening demand.

I must be flattered. The imperious
 Desire speaks out. Lady, I am content
 To play with you the game of Sentiment,
 And with you enter on paths perilous; 4
 But if across your beauty I throw light,
 To make it threefold, it must be all mine.
 First secret; then avowed. For I must shine
 Envied, - I, lessened in my proper sight!
 Be watchful of your beauty, Lady dear! 9
 How much hangs on that lamp you cannot tell.
 Most earnestly I pray you, tend it well:
 And men shall see me as a burning sphere;
 And men shall mark you eyeing me, and groan 13
 To be the God of such a grand sunflower!
 I feel the promptings of Satanic power,
 While you do homage unto me alone.

The husband's character, as revealed in this poem, is entirely self-regarding, and cynically so, but I wish to draw attention to his method rather than his matter. In lines 2-4 the speaker suggests an equality between himself and his Lady based on a measure of complicity in action, and the lines read like the report of a witty conversation. Line 4, however, is self-consciously poetical and a little distanced from the intimacy of the preceding line. The husband is both re-creating the tenor of his conversations with the Lady and remaining within the privacy of his own mind. Lines 5-8 continue to appear to be addressed to the Lady and are certainly a clear indication of how the husband would expect her to behave, but they are more meditative than dramatic, echoing the husband's thoughts rather than reporting his speech. On the other hand lines 9-11, through their clipped imperative structure, are meant to bring us closer

to the actual speech of the husband. The phrases, 'Lady dear!' and 'I pray you' are, like Shakespeare's speaker's use of the second-person pronoun, meant to give to an interior monologue the appearance of an interchange. The last five lines are, in appearance, the gloating of the husband as he contemplates the figure he will cut at society balls beside the mistress, but they also carry the heavy quality of the husband's recognition of his lust. Their rhetorical and lyrical afflatus are the fitting culmination of the swelling pride of the sonnet, which presents the husband's inner condition openly to the reader.

In Sonnet XXXVIII the husband again combines his private musing on the conflict between his lower and higher natures, with a direct address to the Lady, which, like Shakespeare's invocations to the friend, concentrate our focus on the speaker's own consciousness.

Give to imagination some pure light
 In human form to fix it, or you shame
 The devils with that hideous human game: -
 Imagination urging appetite! 4
 Thus fallen have earth's greatest Gogmagogs,
 Who dazzle us, whom we can not revere:
 Imagination is the charioteer
 That, in default of better, drives the hogs. 8
 So, therefore, my dear Lady, let me love!
 My soul is arrowy to the light in you.
 You know me that I never can renew
 The bond that woman broke: what would you have?
 'Tis Love, or Vileness! not a choice between,
 Save petrification! What does Pity here? 14
 She killed a thing, and now it's dead, 'tis dear.
 Oh, when you counsel me, think what you mean!

The first eight lines here are both a rhetorical plea by the husband for abstract deliverance from his 'urging appetite' (by the operations of 'some pure light') and an exhibition of his trauma to the Lady in order to win her sympathy. They thus combine the function of a soliloquy with that of a more dramatic

or narrative monologue informing us of the situation behind the sonnet. This second aspect of the opening lines is made clear in line 9 where the husband's words 'So, therefore, my dear Lady', indicate that the foregoing speech was in some way communicated to her. From line 9 onwards the husband directly involves the Lady, opening with a very conventional plea 'let me love!' followed by the successful line 'My soul is arrowy to the light in you' and then speaking forthrightly about the reality at hand. In the last five lines the husband is very cleverly investing his interior monologue with all the trappings of a reported dialogue. In lines 12 and 14 the questions indicate that the husband is responding to the Lady's words to him. This inference is made the more forceful by the direct and urgent address of the last line. Meredith is here, like Shakespeare in the sonnets examined above, using shifts in the matter treated by the speaker to register the narrative fact of some contribution being made by the one addressed. Shakespeare moves from speaking within a conviction of being important to his friend to pleading from outside their past relationship. The shift is a narrative one conveyed by the change in tone of voice. Meredith's husband-speaker does this more often and more vehemently, yet the sonnets are of essentially the same kind.

Even this limited juxtaposition of some of the more 'dramatic' monologues of the speakers of Shakespeare's Sonnets and Meredith's Modern Love shows how a poet writing a sonnet sequence can vary the static lyric monologue form to include elements of narrative filtered through implied verbal (or possibly written) exchange between the speaker and another person. In

both cases these cadences of speech give the impression that particular interchanges take place, but do so without fracturing the self-revelatory intimacy of the sonnet form. These two groups of sonnets show both Shakespeare and Meredith admitting evidence of a 'story' into the private reflections of a central poetic consciousness in order to illuminate the psychological and emotional state of the speaker rather than for more strictly narrative purposes.

I wish now to move away from these 'Shakespearean' sonnets of Modern Love to consider the varying degrees to which Meredith overlaid this basic monologue of the sequence persona with a significant narrative context. Quite close to the poems just examined (which combine reverie and reported or implied 'dialogue') is Sonnet XXV, addressed to the wife.

You like not that French novel? Tell me why.
 You think it quite unnatural. Let us see.
 The actors are, it seems, the usual three:
 Husband, and wife, and lover. She - but fie!
 In England we'll not hear of it. Edmond,
 The lover, her devout chagrin doth share;
 Blanc-mange and absinthe are his penitent fare,
 Till his pale aspect makes her over-fond:
 So, to preclude fresh sin, he tries rosbif.
 Meantime the husband is no more abused:
 Auguste forgives her ere the tear is used.
 Then hangeth all on one tremendous IF: -
If she will choose between them. She does choose;
 And takes her husband, like a proper wife.
 Unnatural? My dear, these things are life:
 And life, some think, is worthy of the Muse.

There are two narrative situations here, one immediate, and the other penumbral. The specific narrative focus of this poem is the 'chat' the husband and wife have over the 'French novel'; this discussion is also a monologue by the husband who indulges in this reverie as a way of mentally castigating his wife for

her having failed him. The more indefinite narrative context of this sonnet is its place in the broader sweep of the story of the sequence, the breakdown of the marriage, ending, after an attempt at reconciliation, in the wife's suicide. The appearance of direct speech between husband and wife being reported to the reader enlivens the poem, adding an extra element of tension to the obvious agitation of the speaker.

The end point of this development of the Shakespearean 'narrative' monologue made 'dramatic' by Meredith is seen in Sonnet XXXIV:

Madam would speak with me. So, now it comes:
 The Deluge or else Fire! She's well; she thanks
 My husbandship. Our chain on silence clanks. 4
 Time leers between, above his twiddling thumbs.
 Am I quite well? Most excellent in health!
 The journals, too, I diligently peruse.
 Vesuvius is expected to give news:
 Niagara is no noisier. By stealth 8
 Our eyes dart scrutinizing snakes. She's glad
 I'm happy, says her quivering under-lip.
 'And are not you?' 'How can I be?' 'Take ship!
 For happiness is somewhere to be had.' 12
 'Nowhere for me!' Her voice is barely heard.
 I am not melted, and make no pretence.
 With commonplace I freeze her, tongue and sense.
 Niagara or Vesuvius is deferred.

Here Meredith has brought together a cacophony of voices: the husband tells us facts of both a domestic (l. 1) and topical (ll. 7-8) significance; he speaks in metaphors (ll. 2,3,4,9,16), he narrates an interview with his wife presenting both its superficial (ll. 2-3, 5) and more profound (ll. 10-13) dimensions; and he also offers us his self-interested commentary (ll. 14-15). This poem does present the reader with a vignette from a sour marriage, and it also offers us a character sketch of the husband-speaker. Its satire is cruel and heavy-footed because the husband

is speaking from deep anger and resentment. For a quite different example of satire emerging from a narrative report of a particular incident (real or imagined), we must turn to Sonnet XXVI in which the husband recounts an interview between his wife and his mistress at which he was present. Sonnet XXVI begins,

My Lady unto Madam makes her bow.
 The charm of women is, that even while
 You're probed by them for tears, you yet may smile,
 Nay, laugh outright, as I have done just now.
 The interview was gracious:

Here the husband gives us in just two lines (1 and 5) the narrative fact of the icily polite meeting between the two women and uses the other three (ll. 2-4 inclusive), to introduce the complex subjective frame through which we will view the outcome of this meeting. This frame is the husband's consciousness, the mind of the sequence persona, which will be further revealed to us even as we learn of this particular event. The poem continues:

... they anoint
 (To me aside) each other with fine praise:
 Discriminating compliments they raise,
 That hit with wondrous aim on the weak point:
 My Lady's nose of Nature might complain.
 It is not fashioned aptly to express
 Her character of large-browed steadfastness.
 But Madam says: Thereof she may be vain!
 Now, Madam's faulty feature is a glazed
 And inaccessible eye, that has soft fires,
 Wide gates, at love-time only. This admires
 My Lady. At the two I stand amazed.

If we omit the parenthetical phrase, we are left with a Jane Austen-like scene in which each woman praises in the other the very feature that ought least to be singled out. With this omission the poem becomes a straightforward report of an incident by a third party. Meredith, by including the phrase '(To me

aside)', complicates his narrative presentation. By refracting this verbal sparring match between the two women through the husband's eyes, Meredith is able not only to present his narrative moment but also to reinforce the husband's position as the central consciousness of Modern Love. This stratagem gives point to the earlier lines:

The charm of women is, that even while
You're probed by them for tears, you yet may smile,
Nay, laugh outright, as I have done just now.

The dénouement of the poem makes it clear that the husband is here compensating with satire for the pain his double relationship is causing him. This is, however, verging on a second level of narration - a character study from the outside - and this is the result both of such individual sonnets as this and of the sequence method as a whole.

The specificity of Sonnet XXXVI, with its concentration on a discrete narrative moment which is reported whole to the reader in a dramatic manner, is matched in Modern Love by another, more descriptive, method of particularising Meredith's equivalent of the kind of 'introspective narrative' present in Shakespeare's Sonnets. In Sonnet XXXVII the husband is again meditating privately on his predicament, but his soliloquy is grounded in a solid setting.

Along the garden terrace, under which
A purple valley (lighted at its edge
By smoky torch-flame on the long cloud-ledge
Whereunder dropped the chariot), glimmers rich,
A quiet company we pace, and wait
The dinner-bell in prae-digestive calm.
So sweet up violet banks the Southern balm
Breathes round, we care not if the bell be late:
Though here and there grey seniors question Time
In irritable coughings. With slow foot
The low rosed moon, the face of Music mute,
Begins among her silent bars to climb.

6

12

As in and out, in silvery dusk, we thread,
 I hear the laugh of Madam, and discern
 My Lady's heel before me at each turn.
 Our tragedy, is it alive or dead?

The first six lines of this sonnet set a physical scene. They paint a descriptive portrait of a particular place at a particular time and they add the information that an assembled company is about to go in to dinner at some large house. The fact is unimportant and even the addition to it in the following lines, the old people coughing with impatience, is insignificant in itself because it is the moment of meditative appreciation of this scene by the speaker that is the motive behind the lines. We read the rich, even Shakespearean, diction of the description of the setting sun for its lyrical rather than factual import. In the rest of the sonnet the primary action is the imposition of an atmosphere of reverie upon the rising of the moon; the secondary action of the last lines, the wife's laugh and the turn of the mistress's heel, serves only to turn the husband back to himself. In the last line the husband's incredulous questioning of the burden of his sadness, in the midst of such natural loveliness and peace, serves the crucial function of uniting the description (and the consciousness behind it) with the reminder of the narrative source of the speaker's emotional burden, contained in the references to the wife and the mistress. This last question and the two lines preceding it function in relation to the rest of the sonnet in much the same way as a Shakespearean couplet serves to shoot through the lyric reflection of the douzaine with a darker emotional tone.

Meredith's 'novelistic' particularisation of the monologue model of the Shakespearean Sonnets is at its most complete in those sonnets of Modern Love which contain an incident that the husband-speaker has to report from the outside and to which he then adds his own interpretative reaction. One such Sonnet is XXI:

We three are on the cedar-shadowed lawn;
 My friend being third. He who at love once laughed,
 Is in the weak rib by a fatal shaft
 Struck through, and tells his passion's bashful dawn 4
 And radiant culmination, glorious crown,
 When 'this' she said: went 'thus': most wondrous she.
 Our eyes grow white, encountering: that we are three,
 Forgetful; then together we look down. 8
 But he demands our blessing; is convinced
 That words of wedded lovers must bring good.
 We question; if we dare! or if we should!
 And pat him, with light laugh. We have not winced. 12
 Next, she has fallen. Fainting points the sign
 To happy things in wedlock. When she wakes,
 She looks the star that thro' the cedar shakes:
 Her lost moist hand clings mortally to mine.

Here the husband-speaker's monologue is a presentation of an event that took place because of a third person rather than at the instigation of either the husband or the wife. The husband does not select a moment to act for some end of his own but is forced to cope with consequences of his friend's behaviour. For most of the poem, even the husband's interpretative comments (ll. 2-4, 7-8, 11), are in response to the direction the friend's conversation is taking. Only in the final lines does the husband speak from his point of view and in his own lyrical meditative language. While it is the wife who dominates the end of the sonnet, the husband's voice has by then taken on a sufficiently different tone from his narration during the main section of the poem's 'story' to arrest our attention. When the husband

describes the wife as a star the conventionality of the image is less important than the new note of tenderness in his voice. This poem forms part of our familiarisation with the husband as the 'Shakespearean' persona of Modern Love but it does so with an original Meredithian twist.

The direct reporting of a single event across a whole sonnet does not often take so fully outward a form as in Sonnet XXI. In Sonnet XXIII, for instance, Meredith seems in the opening lines to be introducing another narrative reworking of the theme of public harmony's concealing private estrangement that was the basis of XXI -

'Tis Christmas weather, and a country house
Receives us: rooms are full: we can but get
An attic-crib. Such lovers will not fret
At that, it is half-said. The great carouse
Knocks hard upon the midnight's hollow door

- but then he goes on to present an interior monologue from the husband. He confronts introspectively his continuing sexual desire for a wife he no longer loves, and ends with a visionary consummation:

But when I knock at hers, I see the pit.
Why did I come here in that dullard fit?
I enter, and lie couched upon the floor.
Passing, I caught the coverlet's quick beat: -
Come, Shame, burn to my soul! and Pride, and Pain -
Foul demons that have tortured me, enchain!
Out in the freezing darkness the lambs bleat.
The small bird stiffens in the low starlight.
I know not how, but shuddering as I slept,
I dreamed a banished angel to me crept:
My feet were nourished on her breasts all night.

In Sonnet XXXIX the husband reports a significant narrative advance in the sequence's general narrative, the sexual submission of the mistress in just one repeated phrase, 'She yields: my Lady in her noblest mood / Has yielded ...' (ll. 1-2), and after a

ten-line lyric effusion over this victory the husband finally reports the intrusion of his wife and her admirer upon the scene of this rapturous contemplation. Even this narrative moment is turned to meditative account by the husband-speaker.

What two come here to mar this heavenly tune?
 A man is one: the woman bears my name,
 And honour. Their hands touch! Am I still tame?
 God, what a dancing spectre seems the moon!

Thus far three things are clear. First Meredith does continue that quality of lyric meditation from the Shakespearean model that most dominated the sequences of the other Victorians already examined. Secondly, Meredith's use of the dramatic mode of direct speech controls the fragments of narrative included in many of the sonnets, and this element of conversational narration does not fracture the consistency of the speaker's confessional method, nor constitute any radical departure from the Shakespearean model. Thirdly, Meredith does include in Modern Love sonnets in which the narrative element is more highly developed than in any previous love sonnet sequence, but these narrative sonnets are still under the control of the husband-speaker - Meredith's sequence persona.

Before moving from this particular level of narrative in Modern Love to the general, that is, to the 'plot' of the sequence in its entirety, it is worth pointing out that although other readers of Meredith's sequence have made a connection between Modern Love and Shakespeare's Sonnets, they have not done so in the systematic way made possible by my focus on the Shakespearean sequence persona and its counterpart in the husband of this Victorian sequence. The connection is more often made

in a general way by placing Meredith's sequence within the broad tradition of the love sonnet sequence. Arline Hersch Golden takes this standpoint.

Viewed within the context of both Renaissance and Victorian sequence traditions, Modern Love demonstrates that Meredith was as traditional as he was innovative; that in fact he deliberately utilized ancient and contemporary sonnet conventions to better expose and illuminate the 'sentimental passion' of modern love.⁷

Arline Golden's article contains many telling comments which reveal a responsiveness to both Shakespeare and Meredith, and to the link between them, but she fails to draw the full conclusions implicit in what she says. In the following paragraph, for instance, she misses the very connection I have tried to establish:

As Swinburne was the first to point out, Modern Love demonstrates a progressive, almost flowing continuity that is one of the most significant features of its unconventionality. Shakespeare's sonnets do imply a story, but this is a departure from the traditional sequence, which is essentially a prolonged lyrical meditation. Modern Love, however, is dramatic and narrative, with individual sonnets serving almost as chapters or episodes.

(p. 267)

Dr Golden is right to point to the 'flowing continuity' of Modern Love and to the storyline that is a departure from convention in Shakespeare's Sonnets. She is right to point out that the 'traditional sonnet sequence' is 'essentially a prolonged lyrical meditation.' What she does not do, however, is link all these observations in the correct relationship. Shakespeare's Sonnets

7. Arline Golden, "'The Game of Sentiment': Tradition and Innovation in Meredith's Modern Love", ELH, 40 (1973), p. 264. Page numbers of further quotations from this article are given in the text.

are unconventional because their 'flowing continuity' derives from the presence of a distinct sequence persona whose reflections, both lyric and dramatic, convey the interest of a hidden storyline. Meredith's Modern Love is 'dramatic and narrative' in just this 'Shakespearean' way. Ironically, Dr Golden is aware of this feature of Modern Love and expresses it most succinctly:

the real significance of Meredith's sequence structure is not its depiction of external, but of internal action. Narrative incidents are not presented but only implied, through the husband-narrator's interior monologues. His responses to events, not the events themselves, are of primary significance: Meredith's aim is to reveal the change in those responses. The sonnets record the husband's progression from self-pity and recrimination to compassionate insight.

(p. 267)

This paragraph could, with the appropriate name changes, stand as a valid characterisation of the essential form of Shakespeare's Sonnets!

Arline Golden also notices the similarity between Shakespeare's and Meredith's views of the relationship of libido to psyche. When discussing Meredith's undermining of romantic ideas on love and women, she writes,

'My Lady' is the blonde angel, the 'golden-crowned rose' who breathes 'the violet breath of maidenhood' (XXXIX). 'Madam,' on the contrary, is seductive, false, and brunette; she is obviously meant to evoke Shakespeare's promiscuous dark lady rather than the dark-eyed Laura or Stella. Furthermore, the husband's feeling for 'Madam' is ... primarily sexual attraction accompanied by disgust and hatred, which also mark Shakespeare's sonnets.

(p. 274)

Some pages earlier, Dr Golden remarks that,

Meredith's imagery and language primarily reflect the inversion of established concepts of love and the gulf between such concepts and the couple's relationship - between illusion and reality.

(p. 270)

This is precisely the point. Meredith's inversion of the conventions of the traditional love sonnet sequence, like Shakespeare's before it, assists in the creation of a speaking persona whose treatment of love and sex are based on a first-person reality. Meredith's matter and his method are both Shakespearean in this sense, and it is important to recognise the use in Modern Love of the 'Shakespearean' technique of the sequence persona if the purpose of all the particulars of the poetry is to be properly understood. It is not merely that one aspect or another of Meredith's realist critique of an idealist tradition is like something in Shakespeare; the essential connection between the two is the way they both create a distinct, individualised speaker for their execution of the critique.

Cynthia Grant Tucker makes the connection between Meredith and Shakespeare more tidily than Arline Golden, recognising that 'If the tradition provides an analogue to the ... [husband's] ambivalence, it is Shakespeare's unusually plausible and intense response of attraction and repulsion toward his highly unorthodox mistress ...'.⁸ Cynthia Tucker elaborates this perception at several more points in her article and in her conclusion she comes close to recognising the broader affinity between Meredith and Shakespeare that I have drawn.

To be sure, even as Meredith's sonnet-persona, who condemns the style and content of sonnet love and would declare himself independent of its hateful poetic fiction, emerges

8. Cynthia Grant Tucker, 'Meredith's Broken Laurel: Modern Love and the Renaissance Sonnet Tradition', Victorian Poetry, 10 (1972), p. 356.

as an anti-sonnet sonnet-protagonist, his role is not without a traditional ancestry of its own. Shakespeare had rejected the ideal heroine in favour of reality ...⁹

The point to make next, however, is one which Dr Tucker misses. Meredith seems like Shakespeare in his recognition of the reality of love and sex rather than like the Petrarchans who idealised the one and sublimated the other, because both poets allow the speaker of their sequences to express individual, 'real' experience. They do not let them talk in conventional formulae that have an artificial life of their own.

It is now time to notice, however, that Meredith goes much farther than Shakespeare in giving a general narrative context to the particular experiences and meditation of his sequence persona. In the opening and closing stages of the sequence Meredith complements the husband's first-person point of view with the third-person view of a narrator. The sonnets spoken by this narrator, either wholly or in part (I-IX, XLIX-L), have given rise to much critical commentary. Three of the best discussions are those of William T. Going, John Lucas and Willie D. Reader. William Going introduces his discussion of the issue after having just considered Meredith's relation to the Renaissance and Victorian love sonnet traditions:

[Meredith's] spirit of working - with a difference - within the sonnet tradition makes Modern Love seem both timeless and modern. The point of view, which most commentators take pains to explicate as if Meredith ineptly shifts he and I, is still another example of broadening the genre. When the poet-husband speaks of himself as he, he lends omniscient distance to the narrative element. When he uses the I, the immediacy of the first-person rushes in.

9. Cynthia Grant Tucker, p. 365.

This is peculiarly effective in the sonnet sequence with its blend of action, implied action, and lyric meditation, as well as its separateness of stanzas and its unity of the whole.¹⁰

John Lucas also has a good word for Meredith's device:

'Modern Love' comprises fifty sixteen-line sonnets (Meredith's own term), of which the first five and last two are spoken by a narrator, and the remainder by the husband with the narrator's occasional interpolations. The husband's sonnets are not all spoken in the first person; on one or two occasions he becomes a narrator himself, seeing himself from the outside, and the tactic, which is not overworked, allows for some brilliantly exploited ironies. Meredith's choice of form is extremely tactful.¹¹

Lucas, however, does not like the narrator, who utters 'pious inanities' (p. 23), and who 'is much more sympathetic to the husband than our own viewpoint allows us to be' (p. 24). Willie D. Reader accounts for the narrator's sympathy for the husband by a detailed examination of the first stanzas, concluding that,

the point of view [of the narrator] is more precisely that of an omniscience limited to one person rather than that of a total omniscience.¹²

Reader complements his view that the narrator is used specifically to present the husband's inner life to us with a close linking of the two which amounts to identification.

What we have in Modern Love, in fact, are two main points of view, with variations in between. However, despite their technical inconsistency, the two main points of view are so juxtaposed as to reflect an underlying psychological coherence and to form a total structure, a non-technical and shifting point of view, as it were, which incorporates and unifies the other two. This non-technical and shifting

10. Scanty Plot of Ground, p. 113.

11. John Lucas, 'Meredith as Poet', in Meredith Now: Some Critical Essays, ed. Ian Fletcher (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 22.

12. Willie D. Reader, 'The Autobiographical Author as Fictional Character: Point of View in Meredith's Modern Love', Victorian Poetry, 10 (1972), p. 135.

point of view I have chosen to term that of 'the autobiographical author as fictional character.' In using this term I should emphasize that I am concerned primarily not with the content of the poem but with its form: that is, I am concerned not with the degree to which Meredith may have incorporated experience from his own life into the poem, but with the way in which he makes it appear as if the speaker of the poem, even in those sections which are technically third-person past tense, or dramatic, were speaking of his own past experience and were at times reacting immediately to it.¹³

While Reader does not make a connection between Shakespeare and Meredith, his term 'autobiographical author as fictional character' is synonymous with my term 'sequence persona' in this context.

With respect to the actual poems, I find Reader's thesis most helpful with the penultimate sonnet:

He found her by the ocean's moaning verge,	1
Nor any wicked change in her discerned;	
And she believed his old love had returned,	
Which was her exultation, and her scourge.	
She took his hand, and walked with him, and seemed	
The wife he sought, though shadow-like and dry.	
She had one terror, lest her heart should sigh,	
And tell her loudly she no longer dreamed.	8
She dared not say, 'This is my breast: look in.'	
But there's a strength to help the desperate weak.	
That night he learned how silence best can speak	
The awful things when Pity pleads for Sin.	
About the middle of the night her call	
Was heard, and he came wondering to the bed.	14
'Now kiss me, dear! it may be, now!' she said.	
Lethe had passed those lips, and he knew all.	

This poem is narrative in both a particular and general sense. It recounts the final meeting of the husband and the wife (l. 1), notes the attempt each makes to deceive the other (ll. 2-3), and presents the scene of the wife's suicide with a telling intimacy and immediacy (ll. 13-16). This particular narrative moment has the additional function of closing the narrative of the sequence as a whole. The story of this failed marriage,

13. Reader, pp. 132-33.

begun in media res in the first sonnet, is now brought to its desperate end. While the development of this sonnet is fundamentally narrative, it does exhibit an identifiable lyric quality which suggests Reader's point that the husband might well be standing back from his own experience, narrating it in the third person with the wisdom and compassion of hindsight. This lyric quality is created in part by the archaic diction of the first few lines, 'verge' and the biblical sounding 'exultation' and 'scourge', and in part by the poetic self-consciousness of the death scene, created by the deliberately evasive use of 'Lethe' and the focus not on the wife's suffering but on the husband's experience. And yet for all this, I cannot escape John Lucas's nagging doubt about the moral tone of smugness and unctuous dignity assumed by the narrator, here in lines 11-12 - 'That night he learned how silence best can speak / The awful things when Pity pleads for Sin.' Meredith's sequence persona, the husband of the middle poems, has shown himself to be too alert in his mind and feelings to take refuge in such psychological obfuscation. Such generalities are much more typical of the third-person narrator.

I would like to conclude by saying that I find the husband of Modern Love a solid artistic creation whose dominance of the sequence is a testament to the new life that the example of Shakespeare's Sonnets breathed into the genre of the love lyric sequence in Victorian England. If the question of narration be susceptible to final pronouncement, let it be through the last poem of the sequence. It may belong to the narrator for the first ten lines, but it surely is all the husband in its last six:

Thus piteously Love closed what he begat:
The union of this ever-diverse pair!
These two were rapid falcons in a snare,
Condemned to do the flitting of the bat.
Lovers beneath the singing sky of May,
They wandered once; clear as the dew on flowers:
But they fed not on the advancing hours:
Their hearts held cravings for the buried day.
Then each applied to each that fatal knife,
Deep questioning, which probes to endless dole.
Ah, what a dusty answer gets the soul
When hot for certainties in this our life! -
In tragic hints here see what evermore
Moves dark as yonder midnight ocean's force,
Thundering like ramping hosts of warrior horse,
To throw that faint thin line upon the shore!

CONCLUSION

When speaking of Shakespeare's Sonnets, I identified two sides to the sequence persona, the psychological and the philosophical. From the study of the major Victorian sequences undertaken since then, it can now be seen that each of these Shakespearean modes of self-expression touched responsive chords in the nineteenth-century poets. Shakespeare's persona as an anatomist of human emotion was followed by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti and George Meredith, while the philosophical reach of the mind of Shakespeare's speaker was most nearly approached by that of Tennyson's persona and by Dante Gabriel Rossetti's. Both Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti invested their personae with individuality by focusing on their traumatic emotional development. George Meredith brought to life the speaker of his sequence by dramatising specific stages in the breakdown of his marriage in such a way as to throw light on their significance to him and on his reactions to them. The speakers of In Memoriam and The House of Life set their emotions in a broader metaphysical context in order to give meaning to individual experience.

For the Shakespearean speaker of the Sonnets, love and sex involved compromise. He was able to make sense of either only by recognising the fallibility of all human judgements. As a lover, the Shakespearean persona was highly sensitive to the ulterior motives behind any human action or spoken vow; he acknowledged that the more intelligence one brought to bear on emotional transactions, the more one was forced to sacrifice one's integrity. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's persona tried, initially, to hide from the recognition that love demands as much personal courage as it confers joy. By exaggerating her inferiority to her suitor, dressing it in elaborate and loaded images, the speaker of the Sonnets from the Portuguese constructed a false self which was only overcome by the true self it concealed after much 'Shakespearean' introspection and soul-searching. The speaker of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's sonnets achieved personal wholeness through an acceptance of love, and this acceptance was possible because she applied an analytical intelligence to her hysterical or neurotic insecurity. The interest of the Sonnets from the Portuguese derives from the conflict of a romantic 'heart' and a rational 'head' evident within the sensibility of the speaker.

In Monna Innominata, Christina Rossetti presents a persona whose initial emotional intensity is also soon tempered by reason, but with more negative results. The speaker of Monna Innominata, like that of Shakespeare's Sonnets, sees that sacrifice is necessary if one is to love disinterestedly. The romantic weakness of Christina Rossetti's speaker, evident in the elevation of the suitor to a station beyond his deserts, is dominated by

religious convictions which force her to place her human emotions in a direct relation to her conscience. The individuality of Christina Rossetti's speaker is the result of her withdrawal from unconditional involvement with her suitor to a more objective standpoint. This enables her to turn her analytical intelligence and her emotional ardour inward upon herself. She becomes an object of the reader's pity as she becomes ever more isolated and lonely.

The lyric introspection of these two personae is changed in Modern Love into a more dramatic style of character revelation. The speaker-husband of Meredith's sequence is, on the one hand, a cynic who exposes the hypocrisy of his loveless marriage (in which truth is less important than conformity to the expectations of society), and, on the other hand, he is an egoist who demands that his libido and his vanity be constantly appeased. By the fusion of these two, Meredith creates a rounded, if not very likeable, sequence persona. The speaker of Modern Love is an individual because he is unpredictable. We never know just which way his reveries will turn, nor whether he will be bitter against his wife or against himself. It is because the husband chooses both the particular incidents and the specific emotions that he will present to us, that we are able to respond to him as a distinct personality. Meredith appears to have been aware of the obsessional character of his husband-speaker. In order to compensate for this, he has added at the beginning and the end of the sequence a third-person narrator. This narrator presents the more general lessons of wisdom gained too late that are so often the fruits of painful experience.

Tennyson and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, while revealing their personae as individuals, adopted Shakespeare's more philosophical method. Tennyson's speaker is of a highly moral character, and he weighs his emotional affection for his dead friend on scales that hold love and grief on one side and faith and duty on the other. It is the task of the persona of In Memoriam to make them balance. He does this by giving vent to his despair and then seeking some personal strength of mind to offset this emotion; only then can he move on to a quest for enlightenment, the quest which brings him back to his 'risen' friend. The gradual emergence of a decidedly Christian feeling to this search for peace distinguishes the In Memoriam persona as a rounded individual rather than simply as a grieving lover. Tennyson presents his speaker as one who interweaves his language of reasoning with a sensuous strand of nature imagery which in itself becomes part of his individual search for spiritual peace. Shakespeare's philosophical bent in the sonnets is contained in his many ruminations on mutability, and Tennyson's In Memoriam persona presents this theme in the course of his quest for some degree of orthodox faith in God's omnipotence.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti's House of Life persona also expresses himself in visionary terms but without Tennyson's specifically moral bias. Like Shakespeare and Tennyson, Rossetti uses the mortality of love, and more specifically of an individual beloved, to spark off his meditations on mutability in general, but for the speaker of The House of Life visionary meditation on Love and Life and Death constitutes a means of self-exploration rather than self-justification. Rossetti's speaker achieves his

individuality by combining a Utopian vision of nature in which all natural phenomena signify the existence of a world, or at least a state of being, beyond the empirical and mortal one of human experience, with an acute Shakespearean sense of isolation. For a time, Love is regarded by the speaker of The House of Life as a means of deliverance from personal disorientation, but when this proves to be subject to 'Change and Fate' the sequence persona is left with his idiosyncratic 'one Hope' as his only comfort.

I have chosen these five major sequences and examined them in some detail because they reveal the direct link between the Victorian love lyric sequence and Shakespeare's Sonnets at a high level of poetic achievement. A reader who felt so inclined might apply the method of this dissertation to the disjointed 'group' of poems that Matthew Arnold originally called 'Switzerland' (especially 'Isolation To Marguerite' and 'To Marguerite - Continued'), or to Thomas Hardy's more disciplined, brief, and audibly 'Shakespearean' sonnet sequence, 'She to Him'. Arnold's speaker in the 'Switzerland' poems succeeds when he is most Shakespearean, when he concentrates his reveries and his intelligence within a small compass. In these 'Switzerland' poems, Arnold at times loses his grip on the 'logic of feeling', allowing his reveries to become sentimental and his intelligence to become didactic. Hardy, with his title 'She to Him', serves notice that his four sonnets are a deliberate creation and revelation of a specific speaking voice. Hardy's speaker exhibits that quintessential Shakespearean quality of emotive discourse - an intelligent anatomy of emotions which does not lose its hold on their subjective significance for the speaker.

One could also use the method of this dissertation - though I believe with less reward - to reappraise Robert Bridges' sonnet sequence The Growth of Love, in which he speaks directly of Shakespeare, or to discriminate, in Coventry Patmore's The Angel in the House between the lyric monologues and the narrative cantos which give the work an overall structure different in kind from that of each of the major lyric sequences discussed here.

I have not extended the chronological reach of the dissertation beyond 1881, the year of the publication of The House of Life, because there was nothing written in the 1890s that can match the quality of the five sequences that I have selected. In any case, the sequences of the lesser poets of that decade, such as Edmund Scawen Blunt or Arthur Symonds, looked back to Rossetti and Meredith.

In my alignment of the five major Victorian sequences and Shakespeare's Sonnets I have concentrated on the poets' methods of presentation rather than undertaking a systematic study of the matter of the poems. The objective has been to focus on the speaking voice of each sequence rather than on thematic issues, because it is in this aspect of poetic construction or procedure that the influence of Shakespeare was most powerful. For these five Victorian sequences to appear at all, it was necessary that there should exist a means of poetic expression of personal emotion in an extended and yet lyric form. This need was met by the genre of the love sonnet sequence. Now, while it is a fact that Arthur Hallam died when still young, that Robert Browning wooed and won the reclusive Elizabeth Barrett, that Christina Rossetti rejected two suitors and remained unmarried

all her life, and that both Dante Gabriel Rossetti and George Meredith lost their wives and felt remorse over the loss, it is also a fact that Sir Philip Sidney loved Penelope Rich and that Edmund Spenser married Elizabeth Boyle. Simple biographical facts alone cannot account for the greater investment of intense emotion distinguished by a strong element of individuality evident in the five Victorian sequences of this dissertation, in comparison with those of Sidney and Spenser. While Sidney and Spenser filtered their emotions through the artifice of Petrarchan convention, Shakespeare used his to produce an altogether new amalgam of established form and individual method. What swayed the Victorians was the emergence in Shakespeare's Sonnets of a first-person consciousness, capable not only of analysing love but also of using the analysis as 'autotherapy' by means of an interweaving of ratiocinative comment upon emotion and imaged embellishment of thought.

After Shakespeare's Sonnets, there was still room within English love poetry to accommodate a large range of emotional sensibilities and philosophic minds. Shakespeare's underpinning of amatory confessions with metaphysical speculation helped the Victorians to incorporate their individual visions of life as well as their experiences of love within the confines of the love-lyric sequence. The alignment of Shakespeare and the Victorians in this dissertation has provided a method of analysis which enables the reader to recognise in each Victorian sequence the Shakespearean gift of an imperishable poetic personality independent of the extra-poetical, documentary activity of biographers.

I should like to conclude this study by borrowing the words of the late Kenneth Allott. When less than totally convinced of the greatness of Victorian poetry, he was still able to find enough inspiration in the work of the Victorians, including those studied here, to prompt the remark that 'Even English poetry with all its glories is not so rich that it can afford to forget them.'¹

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1. Kenneth Allott, 'Victorian Poetry and the Legacy of Romanticism', in Literature of the Romantic Period: 1750-1850, ed. R.T. Davies and B.G. Beatty (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1976), p. 206.

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