Chapter 2

The portrayal of reflective life in action in poetry: Shakespeare's dramatization of the poet in Sonnets 1–126

In the sonnets of Shakespeare we can find another approach to art as a form of analytical thought, and a close examination of some of these poems will enrich our sense of the ways in which literature is able to represent reflective life in accordance with *its* form. In the interests of giving a definite shape and purpose to this examination, the sonnets in question have been chosen from those that are addressed to the young man (that is, from within the sequence 1–126). It is generally understood that this aristocratic subject of the sonnets is also their patron, and that they were originally intended for the entertainment of a circle that included other poets with whom Shakespeare would have had to compete. However, it is reasonable to suppose that he was easily capable of satisfying the demands of competition, while exercising an altogether more serious purpose that could only be fulfilled in revision. Thus, we can discover in the sonnets a profound enquiry into the nature of poetry as the representation of reflective life in action. It is evident that Shakespeare's own position in relation to the young man is, at least, an inspiration for the general features of the sequence. But beyond this inclusion of personal experience in the work, certain of the poems can also be seen as the dramatization of a poet's attempt to represent the world to which he belongs and this transforms the underlying purpose of the sequence. As we will see, the dramatization of artistic activity itself can affect our understanding of art as a way of representing reflective life.

It is significant, therefore, that the sequence is introduced by two sonnets in which the dramatization of a poet's attempt to represent life is central to their meaning. Thus, when Sonnets 1 and 3 are read with such dramatization in mind it becomes clear that they have been conceived as a pair.

Sonnet 1
From fairest creatures we desire increase,
That thereby beauty's rose might never die,
But as the riper should by time decease,
His tender heir might bear his memory:
But thou, contracted to thine own bright eyes,
Feed'st thy light's flame with self-substantial fuel,
Making a famine where abundance lies,
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,
Within thine own bud buriest thy content,
And, tender churl, mak'st waste in niggarding:
    Pity the world, or else this glutton be,
    To eat the world's due, by the grave and thee.

Sonnets 1 and 3 share the same principle of organization, in that these sonnets can be understood as being spoken by two personae, contrasting voices which implicitly act both against and in co-operation with each other. This is what makes it possible for these pieces to dramatize a poet's attempt to represent life. In order to appreciate how this is done, and how the same words can be uttered similtaneously by different voices, we must recognize from the outset that their meaning depends upon the employment of polysemous language running through the entire poem, which is evinced in such elements as wordplay, syntax and various kinds of allusion.

The dominant persona resembles a practical moral philosopher in the style of Montaigne and Erasmus, whose role is to guide us in our reflections on how to live and evaluate the things that are important to life. Erasmus' writings include ideas that are very close to those of Shakespeare's persona, who assumes the place of a mentor in relation to the poet's young patron (see 'Epistle to persuade a young man to marriage'). It is significant also that Shakespeare's humanist mentor represents a modern attitude to his vocation; the important elements of his thinking are not connected to each other in accordance with an established philosophical (or theological) system, but

are put together experimentally and rely as much upon poetic sensitivity as upon strictly logical argument. His inclination to use this method in order to establish the value of things can be seen in the opening quatrain of the first sonnet, where eternal values of beauty are tied into a scientific conception of inherited characteristics and the processes of nature. Hence, what we desire from 'fairest creatures' is regarded by this persona as being a true reflection of relations between our experience of life and the natural world to which our lives belong. Thus he sees the continuation of our species as dependent upon the further generation of beauty by those who are most beautiful. This experimental line of thought is powerfully developed in line 4, where the phrase 'might bear his memory' is highly suggestive in relation to our experience of life. Along with the primary sense that an heir might possess the features of a parent, the phrase incorporates the idea that memory itself is transferred from one generation to the next, and that, therefore, the capacity to sustain a life that is valued and the continuation of beauty are intimately connected. In other words, civilization depends upon the preservation of memory, and this depends upon the regeneration of beauty.

Turning, in the second quatrain, from general reflection to the individual whose character he wishes to reform, the mentor persona indicates the precise nature of his critical purpose. The young man is 'contracted' to his own bright eyes in behaving according to the natural laws that govern our emotional development, but also, self-defeatingly, because his vision is narrowly and narcissistically centred upon himself. Preoccupation with his own beauty leads him away from its true purpose and into a distracted self-aggrandisement (line 6). In the voice of the mentor these lines intend to make the young man aware of the larger world to which his qualities also belong, and to which he has a serious moral responsibility. This argument is reinforced, in lines 7 and 8, by uniting the idea of a procreative famine with that of unconsciously harming oneself, in the sense that failure to take an appropriate sexual interest in others is a form of moral failure that rebounds upon the person concerned. Thus the octave sketches out a general argument and indicates the ways in which it can be applied to the situation of the young man, while preserving an air of balance and authority in the mentor himself.

In the sestet, where the mentor seeks more directly and personally to exert his authority, the sense of balance is rather less secure, as the more he attempts to make his influence felt the more aware he becomes of the intractability of his pupil. This is already betrayed in lines 9 and 10, where the eulogy reflected in 'fairest creatures', 'beauty's rose', 'thine own bright eyes' and 'thy sweet self' is suddenly qualified by 'fresh ornament' and 'gaudy spring'. Here the beauty

and vitality of nature are tarnished by suggestions of artifice and ostentation, and the young man's narcissism appears to be something less innocent than a natural expression of adolescent development. The tone is increasingly severe in lines 11 and 12, in which self-absorbed eroticism is seen as interfering with the fruition of natural processes. Burying one's 'content' unites the ideas of personal happiness and genetic material, as being withheld in opposition to the budding of the person and regeneration of the community. In line 12, where 'tender churl' suggests a resistance to reason and authority that is familiar in the young and 'niggarding' stands out as an uncharacteristic choice of words for the humanist mentor, this persona becomes decidedly insecure. From his initial stance as a generous and speculative mind at the beginning of the poem he has dwindled into an irascible schoolmaster, the word 'niggarding' uniting meanness with a playground expression for playing with oneself. The closing couplet is fittingly blunt and aphoristic, summarizing the ideas that have been developed in the preceding lines. In this light 'Pity the world' is a way of exhorting the young man to attend to the world and consider his responsibility to it. The word 'glutton' expands upon the sexual meaning implied in 'niggarding', while the closing phrase associates line 11 with the grave, in the sense that not having children is to join with death in the obliteration of a personal contribution to life.

The other persona is much less obvious, and might be described as an antagonist to the mentor's protagonist, making his presence felt only in the play of language and allusion that has already been mentioned. This is the figure of the court jester, or fool, whose shadowy existence in the poem is in keeping with his nebulous character, nebula being a name for him that indicated his lack of social standing and power. However, the dependence of the fool upon a monarch or wealthy noble often meant that he shared with his master a license to use the language without regard for decorum. Thus the nebulous character of the fool and his freedom of speech are central to the poem's opposition of personae, as the humanist mentor is quietly mocked in his own words. The fool does this by imposing a crudely physical construction upon language that tends to be abstract and metaphorical, and this is evident in the opening line. When considered in isolation 'increase' appears to be quite innocent, but acquires a further meaning in the context of the octave as a whole. The physical construction that can be put upon lines 5 and 6 is not very difficult to detect. As 'thou' may refer both to the person and his penis, the opposition of 'contracted' and 'self-substantial' suggests the physical process of erection, while 'thine own bright eyes' denotes not only beauty but also desire. Line 7 indicates the outcome of this desire (making a famine

where abundance lies is 'th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame'), and 'to thy sweet self too cruel' is an elaborate way of saying self-abuse. In terms of these puns and allusive shifts of meaning, we do desire increase from the fairest creatures, in the sense that without proper basic functioning the organism cannot reproduce, or obtain sexual pleasure. However, in proximity to the lofty speculations of the humanist mentor, these ideas are perilously comic, and threaten the dignity of his purpose.

In relation to the fool's shadowy reinterpretation of his opposite in the poem, the transition from octave to sestet employs a skilful displacement that is closely associated with the change of tone already observed in the language of the humanist mentor. Where, in the octave, the latter is concerned with matters of spirit, and is constrained by common sense to acknowledge the body in the second part of the sonnet, the fool begins by taking a full-blooded interest in the body, which in the sestet becomes exaggerated and grotesque. We have seen that 'fresh ornament' and 'gaudy spring' denote for the mentor persona an unwelcome interest in artifice and display. For the fool, this narcissism is subjected to wordplay that is more forthrightly pathological. This depends upon punning on a key word, for 'bud' can refer not only to the growing point of a plant but also to a small, rounded part in human anatomy, as in taste bud. The fool combines these two senses to allude to the anus, which can be seen as a botanical bud in reverse, being associated not with growth but with waste. This wordplay, of course, reinterprets the narcissism of the young man, as both a fantasy of physical self-love and a metaphor for wasting his essence within himself; 'niggarding' is now given the wider conotation of any sexual activity that is diverted from its natural purpose. Moreover, excess is more brutally implied in the fool's use of 'tender churl', which can be referred to the condition of the 'self' in question when it has been continually abused. To complete this pattern of reinterpretation, the fool also gives another sense to the couplet, for the phrase 'by the grave and thee' can be read as meaning alongside the grave and thee. In other words, the fantasy of physical self-love is lying with oneself and death at the same time, which is a decidedly harsher interpretation of the young man's narcissism than that of the mentor persona's admonition.

In order to interpret with appropriate care the significance of Shakespeare's use of opposing personae, we should ward off the temptation to see the fool too simply, as nothing more than a device for the ironical disposal of all that the humanist mentor has to offer. In the first place it is the mentor who presents the argument while the fool merely reframes that argument for his own purpose, and, in addition to this, the difference between the two is not

very great, and does not amount to a deep disagreement. Rather, the fool's reinterpretation is more akin to a distorted echo that provides, with unerring consistency, a kind of psychological realism to the optimistic aspirations of the mentor. This opposition of personae dramatizes the poet's attempt to represent life, as the ridicule is aimed at the effect of personal inclination upon the mentor's thought. Both as a moral guide and as a philosopher he pursues a sensitive and imaginative line of thought that is at once fruitful and biased by his own values, especially with respect to moral and intellectual development. Like any other moral guidance of this kind, the mentor's thought obscures certain possibilities and assumes immunity from dissent. It merely acknowledges the threat of what can be known from everyday experience (in this case, for example, that young men are excessively given to sexual activity in private). Thus the psychological realism of the fool, whose perception is also affected by personal inclination, exposes the humanist mentor to what may be obscured. In this respect, he also mocks what the mentor imagines himself to be doing for the young man.

A fundamental difference of attitude between the two personae can be found in what might be regarded as the strongest and most distinctive insight in each. We have already noted the suggestive way in which line 4, in the voice of the humanist mentor, associates procreation with the regenerative mechanisms of civilization, and this idea is integrated with the conception of intellectual growth and freedom in his argument as a whole. The antagonistic response argues that the essence of civilization cannot be divorced from the use that we make of beauty for our own ends, regardless of its regenerative value. The significance of the fool's inclination to turn youthful narcissism into grotesque and fantastic forms lies in his powerful sense of what is obscured by the mentor's strongest fear, namely that human qualities can often be debased by the irresistible need to make use of them for our own benefit. Just as the mentor's thought is carried through to the end of the sonnet, so the fool completes his opposition to the 'enlightened' conception of the life to which they belong in the severity of his reinterpretation of the closing phrase.

However, we can also see that behind this contrast there is some degree of unanimity in the attitudes of these personae. This is clear in the aspects of the poem which, to a large extent unavoidably, they share. For example, there are strikingly different uses of internal rhyme in lines 4 and 12: the use of sounds and how they are spaced, in the former, creating a strong feeling of freedom and forward movement ('heir might bear'), while in line 12 the sounds are squashed together in keeping with the spiritual constriction they describe ('mak'st waste'). The connection between these lines is signalled

by their different employment of the word 'tender': 'tender heir' uses this word to suggest the sense of renewal and the physically and psychologically sensitive growth of the organism, while 'tender churl' refers – in one case sympathetically and in the other dispassionately – to the coarse immaturity of youth. Similarly, the phrases in the couplet fall decisively into place, in contrast with the subtly varied flow of the quatrains and their shaded responsiveness. In these phrases the fool does not challenge the mentor's speech, but develops it in keeping with his own character.

Therefore, in exposing the thought of the mentor to the subtle distortions of his adversary, this sonnet throws light upon the nature of self-knowledge and our understanding of human experience. Shakespeare's use of an antagonism concealed within the very words that are employed by the humanist mentor can be seen as the dramatization of a poet's attempt to enlighten and inform, and thereby to assume a socially important role in his society. There is a clear affinity between the analytical thought employed here and Sophocles' use of opposing genres in *Oedipus*. In both cases a genre is challenged from within the work, in a way that enables the reader to see into the effect of personal inclination on judgement and understanding.

Before turning to Sonnet 3, I should comment on the controversial nature of this interpretation of the sonnets in relation to what we know of their composition. It may seem unlikely that such a potentially offensive work should be written and presented to an aristocratic patron in the setting of a shared circle of friends and acquaintances. Since very little is known about the circumstances of its original presentation we can only guess at the degree to which the vigorous exercise of wit might have strayed into playful aggression, and at how much of the subtleties of the sonnets could be grasped by their audience. However, far more significant is the fact that the sequence as a whole was published long after the poems were first conceived, in the case of Sonnets 1 and 3 some fourteen years later. This means that they could have been rewritten and extensively revised, as their complexity strongly suggests they were, and that the published work might bear only a partial resemblance to what was presented by the poet to his patron and their circle. Moreover, it is possible that, in the process of developing the poems in accordance with his serious purposes, Shakespeare found it necessary to remove any signs of his patron's identity; this would help to explain why a number of sonnets that immortalize the young man leave us in the dark as to who is being immortalized.

Sonnet 3

Look in thy glass and tell the face thou viewest
Now is the time that face should form another,
Whose fresh repair if now thou not renewest
Thou dost beguile the world, unbless some mother.
For where is she so fair whose uneared womb
Disdains the tillage of thy husbandry?
Or who is he so fond will be the tomb
Of his self-love to stop posterity?
Thou art thy mother's glass, and she in thee
Calls back the lovely April of her prime;
So thou through windows of thine age shalt see,
Despite of wrinkles, this thy golden time.
    But if thou live remembered not to be,
    Die single, and thine image dies with thee.

The emergence of these lines from the opening sonnet is suggested, at the outset, by their appearing to respond to the line, 'But thou, contracted to thine own bright eyes'. The opening quatrain of Sonnet 3 turns the imagery and instrument of the young man's obsession against him, by challenging him to use the mirror as an aid to moral self-examination. Here, the speculative argument that he should change his life by marriage and procreation has become an injunction that is justified by an explicit appeal to moral responsibility (lines 3–4). Also, the greater directness conveyed in these lines is accompanied by a greater sense of intimacy, particularly in the use of 'beguile' which combines censure with awareness of the young man's natural charm and its power. The censure, in Sonnet 1, that to ignore the world is to 'eat the world's due' is here extended by implying that the young man uses his personal qualities in order to deceive; these qualities possess their value by virtue of the part they play in our common existence, and to use them purely for oneself is to enhance what is 'self-substantial' by denying them to others. This mixture of deepening censure with recognition of physical attraction is intensified in the following quatrain, where both the assumption of moral seriousness and the nobility of the human subject are characterized in elevated language. Thus, in making the connection between narcissism and deception, the mentor is careful to moderate his tone by means of flattery, and this enables him to complete the first section of the poem by declaring a dramatic alternative for the young man, between conformity to the laws of nature and society and a barren end to his involvement in life.

The sense of intimacy is increased in the sestet, where the abstract argument of the octave is translated into terms of personal experience. The quatrain assumes that the young man will respond to the advice he is given and follow in the pattern of behaviour and feeling established for him by his mother, and the couplet delivers a sharp warning of what will ensue if he ignores this advice. The flattering rhetoric of the sestet gives a lyrical quality to the intimacy of the third quatrain, in which the natural cycles of renewal are related to personal experience in a way that is consolingly benign. The imagery of 'lovely April of her prime' and 'this thy golden time' create, within the rhythm of this quatrain, a swell of optimistic feeling in the face of natural decline, in which physical regeneration is presented as an experience of spiritual renewal. Conversely, the couplet abruptly reverts to the minimal truth of our physical reality, by equating a single life with the mere annihilation of 'thine image'. What appears in 'thy glass' is reduced to an image that is stripped of the humanity that lies within it, the humanity that is called upon, in the octave, to respond to the demand for moral self-examination.

Within the rhetorical sophistication of the mentor's argument there are indications of another conflict that is taking place in this sonnet. For, in contrast with Sonnet 1, where the voice of the fool makes itself heard as a distorting echo of which the dominant persona is unaware, here there seems to be a deliberate effort to escape from the intervention, as though the mentor had, on reflection, become conscious of the subversive echo and resolved to exclude it. Such a dramatic possibility is suggested by the different ways in which the fool enters these poems: in Sonnet 1 he insinuates himself most purposefully at those moments when the dominant persona is himself most critical of the young man, and this softens the conflict between these personae (as in the second quatrain and in lines 11–12). In Sonnet 3, the mentor persona adopts a strategy to exclude the fool and therefore the latter is constrained to act against the flow of the writing in order to make his presence known. For this reason his appearance is less predictable and more ingenious. Thus, the elevated language of the octave, in particular the images of 'uneared womb' and 'tillage of thy husbandry', appears both as ingratiating to the young man and as a form of diction that is safe from the intervention of the fool. It is an expression of wit in the poem, and of the ingenuity of the fool, that this strategy itself becomes implicated in the target of satire in the lines that follow. Recalling the ambiguous imagery in Sonnet 1, the fool again transforms self-love into physical self-love, by the use of 'stop' to turn posterity into posterior, alluding to the sense in which a bottle is stopped by a cork. The effect of this is even more subversive because it disarms the mentor while directing

a more personal attack upon his obsequious mode of address. According to this reading 'tomb' in line 7 is anal, in opposition to 'womb', implying a contrast between being joined with life and being joined with death, while 'fond' acquires a sense that is closer than usual to madness.

The dramatic subtlety of this conflict within the language of Sonnet 3 can also be seen as a development of Shakespeare's use of the antagonist to dramatize the humanist mentor's understanding of life. For the latter is represented as assuming a greater intimacy in his address to the young man, and, correspondingly, the fool is more bitingly personal in his ridicule of ideas and attitudes that are created by personal inclination. Moreover, it is an important element in his satire that he should be forced to bend and twist the language in order to counter the strategy of his wary opponent. In conformity with his play upon 'posterity', he forces the grammar in 'self-love to stop', both in the use of the verb (love to stop instead of love of stopping) and in the ellipsis of 'self-love', which conflates love to stop with self-oriented love. It is the essence of this dramatic interaction that, in response to being excluded, the fool should take possession of his freedom with the language. However, having wrestled his way into the poem, he is able to assert himself more easily in the sestet, where language and idea play into the fool's alternative view. Contrary to the optimistic association of the young man's future with his mother's experience of life, the fool assumes that the mentor's advice will be ignored. Thus, 'windows of thine age' is understood not simply as an opening through which the past can be seen, but also as a barrier to that past; and 'Despite of wrinkles' alludes to the anguish of age as it looks back on the 'golden time' of youth.

The fool's nihilistic perception of the young man's narcissism implies that refusal to share one's youth carries with it a bitter sense of loss and isolation when youth has passed. This tendency is expressed with even greater emphasis in the closing line of the sonnet, where the idea of deviation from what is sexually natural is united again with the idea of spiritual death. Here the fool is making a familiar Elizabethan pun on 'die', while 'thine image' echoes the opening phrase of the poem, and therefore envisages the young man engaged in the fantasy of lines 7–8 before a mirror. The phrase 'thine image dies with thee' implies that his orgasm is enjoyed with a bodiless reflection of himself, as opposed to a woman who 'dies' with him, and its spiritual emptiness is intensified by another way in which the line can be read. Because 'with' is reversible, 'thine image' can die when 'thee' dies, or 'thee' can die when 'thine image' dies. So, when we interpret the line to mean that the young man will himself die when his image (appearance) dies, the fool is saying that when

the beauty of Narcissus fades so too will the sole object of his love. Hence his capacity for feeling will also wither away as his appearance changes, and he will die inwardly.

When we compare the opposition between the mentor and the fool in Sonnets 1 and 3 there is an undeniable widening of the difference in tone and attitude in the latter poem. The foregoing analysis shows that the difference is created dramatically; the mentor's attempt to shake off the fool by assuming an elevated language is thwarted by feats of verbal ingenuity. This conflict within the language of Sonnet 3 is not merely a clever way of varying the approach to similar material on Shakespeare's part, for the dramatic interaction which it serves is a significant development of the underlying dramatization of the poet's attempt to represent the life to which he belongs. Where, in the first sonnet, the innocent mentor is shadowed by unseen mockery, his strategy for defending himself, in Sonnet 3, provokes the fool into exaggerating the difference between them. We can feel a much greater severity in the satirical treatment of the humanist persona, and in the fool's bleak characterization of the young man. This develops the dramatization of judgement and understanding by showing the influence upon our thinking of social status not only in the mentor but also in the fool. As a figure of indefinite status (a 'nebula'), the fool is hypersensitive to exclusion, especially as a victim of social aspiration in others, and so the attitude of the mentor awakens a hostile reaction. And since the fool's involvement in the poem has been initiated in this way, his characterization of the young man is no less qualified by personal inclination than that of the mentor.

Those sonnets which dramatize the poet's attempt to represent the world, and to understand the life to which he belongs, do not conform to one pattern of dramatic relations. The possibilities that have already been created by the opposition of mentor and fool are exploited in yet another way in Sonnet 5. Here the mentor's address to the young man is supported by a third persona, an aesthetician, and they form an alliance in order to silence the fool.

Sonnet 5
Those hours, that with gentle work did frame
The lovely gaze where every eye doth dwell,
Will play the tyrants to the very same,
And that un-fair which fairly doth excel:
For never-resting Time leads summer on
To hideous winter, and confounds him there,
Sap checked with frost and lusty leaves quite gone,
Beauty o'ersnow'd and bareness everywhere:

Then, were not summer's distillation left
A liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass,
Beauty's effect with beauty were bereft,
Nor it nor no remembrance what it was.
But flowers distilled, though they with winter meet,
Lose but their show; their substance still lives sweet.

This allegory of time could hardly be more different from Sonnet 3, both in its deceptively simple structure and in the impersonality of its address. As a means of disarming the fool it is highly effective, for not only does it remove the tone of intimacy that exposes the mentor to ridicule, but its brief suggestion of personal approval is so non-specific that it can be taken as a generalization, referring to the gaze of any lovely person. Its connection with the young man to whom the sequence is addressed is not properly made until we reach the following sonnet (6), which expresses further thoughts upon the themes of marriage and procreation. And so, apart from its evasion of the fool, the place of Sonnet 5 in the sequence lies in its abstract reflection upon the senses in which beauty's rose might never die. In this respect the sonnet dramatizes the purpose of the humanist mentor, as he tries to establish an intellectual grounding for his advice to the young man.

Hence the language of this sonnet should not be seen as simply metaphorical; here such literary devices as allegory and personification, as well as allusion and metaphor, are used analytically in order to represent such phenomena as time, physical change, permanence and art. Also, it is essential to its purpose that this sonnet does not present a self-sufficient theory concerning these phenomena, but a dramatization of the attempt to understand them, and therefore, in keeping with the sequence as a whole, portrays reflective life in action. In this context it is the nature of the phenomena that makes the mentor's use of literary language appropriate. For it is clear that he is not engaged in a purely scientific enquiry, and so does not make use of concepts that are intended for the analysis of physical relations which exist independently of human experience. The question of how beauty can be seen to exist and survive is not simply a matter of understanding physical relations, but also involves the nature of our response to the world – to its value and significance.

In order to clarify the relations between figurative language and analytical reflection in this poem, we can begin by analysing the contrast of language between the octave and sestet. The former begins with an allegory in which time is personified at first as hours that frame with 'gentle work' an object

of delicate beauty, and then as tyrants that undo this work and reduce it to 'bareness everywhere'; while the seasons represent youth and decline. The sestet takes the idea of summer as the representation of youth, and develops it, through the idea of perfume that is distilled from the petals of flowers, into an analogy for the biological process by means of which human characteristics – and therefore personal beauty – are perpetuated and recalled. Woven into this allegory, in lines 10 and 14, is an allusion to art as another means by which beauty is recovered and sustained in opposition to natural processes.

This outline of the poetic language implies an interaction between figurative and analytical elements in the poem. Because time is seen to reveal its essence in our experience of it the personification is more than simply figurative, rather this acts as a means for the analysis of time itself. Our sense of its working with painstaking subtlety within the growth of a beautiful individual is one way in which time can be grasped, and this is continuous with a sense of our confusion and incomprehension when the moment of perfection is torn away and time assumes another 'person'. In this respect, time is even represented as morally ambiguous, as 'un-fair' and 'fairly' (line 4) place the ideas of blemish and injustice against those of beauty and worthiness. The possibility that time can be unjust is then reflected upon in lines 5–6, where 'leads' means both deception (as in leading us on) and blindness, suggesting that we are unable to evaluate the purposes of time since we do not see it in action. Being absorbed in our purposes, we can only observe its effect. Both senses are also present in 'confounds', and this word can also be linked with the sestet in so far as the confounding provokes an intellectual response. This provocation of thought by the evanescence of what we value, touching upon the moral purpose of the mentor, belongs to the dramatization of his attempt to understand and interpret life. Despite the inevitable uncertainty of this task, his intellectual energy, driven by poetic language, places him beyond the resources of the fool.

In the sestet, the idea of distillation implies more than a metaphorical association between the production of perfume from flowers and the biological transmission of personal characteristics. For while it is obvious that the theory is highly speculative, this imagery continues the analytical examination in the octave, developing the analysis of time in relation to a conception of the world in which beauty perishes and is renewed. Moreover, just as the limitations upon his vision are acknowledged in the octave, so in the sestet the image of a 'liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass' suggests that in essence the object of his speculation is hidden impenetrably within a medium that is resistant to our intuitions and imagination. In this respect 'pent in walls

of glass' exposes the idea of distillation as a means of transmitting biological characteristics, without affecting the sense of analytical purpose to which it gives expression. However, this tension within the texture of the sonnet is characteristic of its purpose, as the urgency reflects intellectual difficulty. This is made more relevant by his strong conclusion, in the couplet, where 'show' refers to the action of showing, as in the moment in which flowers bloom, and, referring to the underlying biological substance, 'still' plays on the idea of distillation.

The collaborative persona in Sonnet 5 can be identified with an aesthetician, as the mentor's thought is enriched by a Neo-Platonic pattern of ideas which create an alternative but complementary conception of how, in the life of a civilization, beauty is sustained and preserved in spite of the operations of 'never-resting' time. This alternative reading is not a re-reading of the poem but a matter of allusive touches, intended to harmonize the thinking of the two personae. Thus, the second line can be read so that the phrase 'where every eye doth dwell', which refers to the universal attraction of the lovely gaze, in the sense that our eyes dwell upon a beautiful object, also implies a Platonic conception of how every eye might dwell within the lovely gaze. The universal attraction of the gaze is caused by the relationship of every eye to an Idea, to which the 'lovely gaze' is the closest approximation in our experience. In this sense 'every eye' is a synecdoche for personal beauty, and dwells within the 'lovely gaze' by being further away from the ideal Form of Beauty. In line 4, it is even clearer that this allusion extends the argument of the mentor, for the phrase 'which fairly doth excel' acquires added force from the association of personal beauty with transcendental forms. Because the lovely gaze excels in fairness by expressing the Form of Beauty itself, its being 'un-faired' seems all the more unjust.

The pattern into which this Neo-Platonic thinking occurs, as an expression of the ideas of an aesthetician, is given focus by an allusion in line 10, which can be grasped with the help of a little reconstruction that appears to be invited by the words. In this connection 'pent' can be taken as 'paint', for the word 'glass' also means 'glaze', and therefore 'a liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass' can be read as 'a liquid prisoner, paint in walls of glaze': in other words, a painted image confined and preserved within coats of varnish. Here, of course, it is the lovely gaze, so delicate and evanescent in life, which is captured and given some permanence by the skill and imagination of the artist; this could be considered the effect, for example, of Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* or Rembrandt's *A Girl at a Window* (1645). Again we can appreciate how the ideas of the aesthetician augment those of the mentor, for, without the painter, the

distinctive expression of physical beauty in the individual cannot withstand the effects of change, and so the image he creates is a visible counterpart of the hidden process of regeneration. Finally, the painter's 'distillation' of beauty from appearances is associated with Neo-Platonism in the closing line, where the phrase 'their substance still lives sweet' unites the transient beauty of the individual with the underlying Form of Beauty. This implies that the resistance of the still image to time is both a means of enabling us to keep the transient beauty alive, and a means of penetrating appearances to glimpse the Idea that sustains them. Here, 'substance' means both the essential nature of the thing and the reality that lies behind appearance.

As an enquiry into ideas that might form the basis for the mentor's guidance, Sonnet 5 is a powerful representation of the union of abstract ideas concerning time, art and the processes of nature. As the dramatization of intellectual activity this depends upon the poem's use of a richly figurative language that works as a form of descriptive analysis. Thus, in an essay unaffected by the element of dramatization, figurative language would not have the same functional purpose, even though it may contribute to the author's rhetorical intentions, in terms of style and ornament, and feeling. In order to appreciate the necessity for Shakespeare's richly figurative language in Sonnet 5, and in the sequence as a whole, we should recognize his dependence upon such language for the double meaning by which he can represent reflective life in action.

For example, when simply considering the mentor, the double meaning noticed in lines 5–6, which contrasts the ideas of deceptively leading someone on and of leading the blind, conveys different ideas which may both be in the mind of the speaker; this dramatizes the mentor's attempt to see into the hidden powers of nature that determine changes in time. Dramatization of this kind, where the alternatives arise half-consciously, can only be expressed in a language that is figurative in character. Similarly, the transition from octave to sestet turns on the image of summer's distillation, which shifts our attention from the allegory of time in the former to the image of perfume as a counterpart to the biology of reproduction. This imagery shows us the mentor using language to create significant connections.

A similar double meaning is expressed by the aesthetician in this poem, and is also present in the relationship between the two personae. The latter is evident in the opening line, which clearly describes the process of growth in language that could easily be related to the artist's attentive care for his work in framing the image. Here the double meaning can be seen as inviting the aesthetician into the creation of the poem, for the next line reveals him as fully present, in the Neo-Platonic allusion that represents his essential ideas.

His appearance in line 10, which evokes painting as the visible counterpart of the humanist's idea of regeneration, is a further example in which thought is suggested by the possibilities of figurative language. The science of human biology does not immediately suggest how beauty's rose might never die, and therefore the aesthetician seizes the language of line 10 and gives it his own Neo-Platonic slant. While this sympathy between the two personae may also be seen as a way of excluding the fool, Sonnet 5 is both abstract in relation to the young man who is at the heart of the sequence and highly speculative in its philosophical conjecture. The fool is victorious, at least, in making it very difficult for the mentor to assume the directness and intimacy that are sought in Sonnets 1 and 3. Clearly, the Neo-Platonic theory is not stated by the poem, and therefore does not express the ideas of Shakespeare, the author of the sequence. Rather the theory belongs to a dramatized collaboration between the personae concerned and this provides another way in which reflective life is powerfully represented in accordance with its form.

The opening seventeen sonnets give the humanist mentor ample opportunity to pursue his purpose in advising the young man in relation to his future, and this purpose is largely unimpeded by other personae. However, it is in the sonnets shaped by the opposition and interplay of personae that the sequence is richest in its dramatization of a poet's attempt to represent life. In this connection the second phase, particularly in Sonnets 18 and 20, reintroduces the opposition with which we are concerned.

Sonnet 18
Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date;
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed,
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimmed:
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;
Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st.
    So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
    So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

In this poem we meet a more familiar persona, that of the love poet immortalizing his subject in 'eternal lines to time'. So we can ascribe these lines to the 'poet' in another persona, who is addressing the same young man of the earlier sonnets, and giving another character to their relationship as poet and patron. Moreover, unlike the antagonistic opposition created by the fool in Sonnets 1 and 3, here the opposition between the love poet and his antagonist is muted and subtle, for though the second persona bears some resemblance to the fool, the personae in Sonnet 18 are much more akin to two contrasted 'voices' within the same divided individual. The transformation from humanist mentor, whose concern is avowedly disinterested and intellectually detached, to love poet impelled by his own artistic ambition and the fascination of his subject, can itself be seen as an aspect of the dramatization. Above all it draws our attention to the fragility of the personae that represent the 'poet' who attempts to interpret and understand his life. Thus, we can distinguish, in Sonnet 18, between the love poet, who frames his material in accordance with well-known conventions, and a sceptic who is able to reorganize the meaning of the poem from within, and satirize its deference to convention and the general instability of its conception.

The opposition of personae in this poem is established by means of a double meaning in the opening line. For 'compare' means both to measure one thing against another and to liken one thing to another; this contrast makes it possible for the poem to be read in one way as expressed by the love poet, and in another as expressed by the sceptic. Initially, the poem lures us into reading it simply in accordance with the intentions of the former, by making the comparison a matter of measuring one thing against another; and emphasizes the employment of a conventional trope by expressing it in the form of question and answer. The logic of this reading is continued in a series of images that qualify the beauty of a summer's day, and thereby enhance the sense in which the subject of the poem is more lovely and more temperate. Though a summer's day can be lovely and temperate it is preceded by the rough winds of May, and overshadowed by our awareness of its brevity; the heat of summer can be oppressive and its skies are often overcast and gloomy.

At this point, in line 7, the speaker appears to lose control of his argument, and the initial intention is oddly compromised. For 'every fair from fair sometime declines' deserts the logic of the love poet's comparison between the subject and a summer's day and simply observes that all beautiful things must lose their beauty in time. Needless to say this applies equally to the young man. The reason for this loss of footing lies in an unresolved complication in the thinking of the speaker; for at the turning of the poem there is a change of

tack from the simple comparison of the octave to a different kind of measure in the sestet, and lines 7 and 8 prepare the reader for this change. By sleight of hand we move from the idea that the young man is superior in ordinary (temporal) qualities to the idea of a superiority that is created by means of poetic language. In doing this, the love poet elevates his subject in two quite different ways, both of which are necessary to his purpose, but do not really fit together. For the ordinary qualities that give the young man his 'virtue' remain subject to decay, and the 'eternal summer' of its celebration in the poem can only be a recollection of this virtue. The point is made obliquely in the couplet, in which the affirmation of the closing line is implicitly contradicted by the sense, in line 13, in which the poet is unable to give life to his subject (once he is dead nothing will enable him to breathe or see).

A more general sense in which the speaker appears to be having it both ways is suggested in the play of irony of which these details are an expression. For the lyrical opening and its overt intention to celebrate the worthiness of its subject prepare the reader for an extended eulogy upon the virtues of the young man, only for it to digress almost immediately into a reflection upon the flaws in a summer's day. Then the shift of emphasis, from the qualities of the subject to the virtues of the poet by whom the subject is immortalized, plays mischievously with the convention upon which the poem depends for its meaning. This ambivalence in the purpose of the love poet gives him some affinity to the sceptic, and can be seen as drawing him in, in order to enrich and develop the subversive intention.

An elucidation of this aspect of the poem, for which 'compare' means to liken one thing to another, proceeds from an alternative reading of the second line: namely, thou art (like the summer) more lovely and more temperate than in the past (your turbulent spring), and in the future (your wintry decline); this interpretation being inferred in lines 3 and 4. In this reading of the poem, the imagery announced in the opening line is not intended as a contrast, but as an extended metaphor showing different ways in which the phenomena can be likened to one another. Accordingly the second quatrain, which is unstable in the love poet's address and betrays a lack of control over the material, acquires both concentration and solidity, and restores a sense of purpose to the structure of the octave. In lines 5 and 6 the young man is likened to the sun, both in the sense that he is a centre of attraction to the many satellites that orbit around him, and in the sense that he may be seen as a source of light to them. The imagery (eye of heaven) also suggests that he is god-like, and therefore that a spiritual significance is given to his value as a source of light. However, the sceptic makes this resemblance only in order

to convey dissent, for the qualified praise of the opening is now followed by more critical observations.

Our grasp of the meaning of the poem as a whole makes it clear that the subject of the poem is 'sometime too hot' in a sexual sense, and therefore that his 'gold complexion' is often 'dimmed' by careless promiscuity, the word complexion referring not only to his appearance but also to his nature. The logic of this reading is confirmed in lines 7 and 8; 'every fair from fair' alludes to the line of descent that is a familiar theme of the sequence, beauty being passed from one generation to the next. Significantly, however, there is occasionally a failure in the process of transmission, by accident or by natural causes – such as an inappropriate pairing ('nature's changing course'). The form of beauty in which the young man is seen to fail is that of character, the euphemism 'sometime too hot' being sardonically echoed in 'every fair from fair sometime declines', and this is accentuated by the rhyme (shines/declines). The sceptic insinuates that those who are favoured by beauty 'sometime' decline to *be* fair to others, and explain their moral failure by the force of a sudden attraction ('chance') or a change in one's natural affections ('nature's changing course'). Hence the sceptic suggests that the love poet deliberately overlooks an important aspect of the young man's character, and at the same time casts doubt on the idealism of love poetry as a genre.

In the sestet, a reorientation of the central metaphor, from 'summer's day' to 'thy eternal summer', continues the sceptic's alternative perception of the subject by effectively reversing the intentions of the love poet. For 'eternal summer' can mean simply the recollection of your person in this enduring verse, while 'that fair thou ow'st' can refer both to physical beauty that is passing and to the scant moral beauty that is more lastingly engrained in your character. Lines 11 and 12, moreover, refer to the excesses alluded to in the octave, the image of enfeebled dependence, wandering in death's shade (shadow), being 'overcome' by a sexual vitality ('thou grow'st') that is ironically 'shadowed' in the poem's 'eternal lines to time' (the vitality of youth living on only in the sense that it is recorded by the poem).

Thus, when the comparison between the young man and a summer's day is interpreted as an extended metaphor, the idea that he is immortalized is replaced by the idea that this unflattering portrayal, which owes its vitality to the genius of the poet, will long outlast its subject. Accordingly, 'this gives life to thee', in the couplet, means not immortality but verisimilitude, as when a painter brings his subject to life. Also, the love poet simply adds one thing to another, as a rhetorical embellishment, 'so long as men can breathe' being extended poetically by 'eyes can see', and 'or' fits this purpose as well

as the obvious alternative. But the sceptic uses the first idea only to correct and refine his intention, 'or' being used in the sense of providing a better alternative, one that expresses more precisely what he has in mind. For this reading, the life of the poem, in terms of both vitality and survival, depends upon the vision of its readers; in putting it so, the sceptic challenges us to look into the poem for its true meaning.

Therefore, Sonnet 18 employs an opposition of personae in which a familiar genre of love poetry, that of immortalizing the beloved, is the basis for a complex play of ideas. We cannot regard the love poet as conventionally sentimental since his own tendency to manipulate the conventions of the genre gives an unresolved ambivalence to his purpose, and his lack of decisiveness and control allows for the more cogent interventions of the sceptic. It is significant that the poem begins with a deception, by leading us to read 'compare' as simply to measure one thing against another, and ends by urging us to look into the poem and discover its meaning. Thus the poem is resolved by a double transformation of its genre, and its use of genre as an instrument of analytical thought is realized by means of a polysemous language which is masked by the initial deception. When we consider this complexity in relation to what has been expressed in the earlier sonnets in the sequence, it is clear that dramatization of a poet's attempt to represent life has been given a new direction. Not only is this the point at which the venture is led by a poet, it is also one at which the subject is not a passive recipient of advice but rather an active moral agent who expresses his freedom in unsettling ways.

This creates a tension which is betrayed both in the love poet's uncertainty and in the intense lyricism that has made this a popular sonnet. We can appreciate this intensity by observing how, in both the octave and the sestet, a clear and incisive opening gradually gives way to a feeling of complication and obscurity. Thus in lines 8 and 11–12 the syntax is complicated and slows down the verse, and a sense of freedom follows these when, in line 9 and in the couplet, there is a return to simplicity. This element in the structure of the poem reflects a web of psychological complexity involving both personae. The dependence of lyricism upon this kind of complexity also serves to emphasize the importance of the venture to the 'poet', since intoxication with his own immortalizing power cannot be divorced from the uneasiness of his attachment to its flawed subject matter.

It is against this interdependence of the love poet's mission and his emotional attachment to the subject that the sceptic delineates his alternative picture of the young man, and it is evident that this latter persona includes

some characteristics of the fool and of a disillusioned humanist mentor. The fool can be seen, for example, in the reflex transformation of nobility into obscenity in line 12 (see Sonnet 1, line 6), while a disillusioned humanist mentor is obviously present in the complication of thought that closes the octave (lines 7–8). Therefore, as in the other examples, we cannot view the opposition between personae as simply the demolition of one by the other. For all his vulnerability to the sceptic, the love poet makes a genuine attempt to respond to the demands of his métier. Correspondingly, while the detachment of the sceptic gives him a greater freedom to see the subject as he 'really' is, his viewpoint is also affected by personal inclination. His resistance to the acquiescent passion of the love poet betrays a fear of humiliation ('Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines'). As conflicting expressions of the same personality, these personae represent a sustained opposition rather than the casual overthrow of a conventional genre and its characteristic attitudes.

In Sonnet 20 the complexity of 18 is augmented in keeping with a concentrated dramatization of the poet's attempt to represent life, the most penetrating expression of this tendency in the sequence so far.

Sonnet 20
A woman's face with nature's own hand painted,
Hast thou, the master mistress of my passion;
A woman's gentle heart, but not acquainted
With shifting change as is false women's fashion;
An eye more bright than theirs, less false in rolling,
Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth;
A man in hue, all hues in his controlling,
Which steals men's eyes and women's souls amazeth.
And for a woman wert thou first created,
Till nature as she wrought thee fell a-doting,
And by addition me of thee defeated,
By adding one thing to my purpose nothing.
But since she pricked thee out for women's pleasure,
Mine be thy love, and thy love's use their treasure.

Following on from 18, this sonnet possesses a degree of complication similar to that of the developments we have noted in Sonnets 1, 3 and 5. For now it emerges that the love poet assumes ideas and attitudes which were implied, in Sonnet 18, in the attitudes of the sceptic. Sonnet 20 is fundamentally concerned with the focal relationship of the sequence and its conspicuously

unconventional nature – involving as it does the composition of love poetry by one man to another – and the sceptic's thought is immediately present in the forthright portrayal of the young man as a glowing and god-like sun at the centre of their social world. In this respect the divergent and unorthodox power of the subject is celebrated by the love poet as an assertive reaction to the cool severity of the sceptic in the previous poem. We feel this in the declaration that opens the poem, and then in a cumulative expression of adulation through the octave. Hence, 'with nature's own hand painted' silences in advance any suggestion of unnaturalness in the subject, or his beauty, and this is intended to protect the love poet's interest in him. As the 'master mistress of my passion', the young man is represented in a way that is intended to remove any sense of anomaly from this term. Compared with the self-elated flight upon immortality in Sonnet 18, this eulogy is more psychologically penetrating and more serious in its artistic purpose. The subject is a mistress in the sense that he assumes the role of a mistress in poems of this genre, and the octave makes his role compatible with his being the same sex as the poet.

In Sonnet 20 the octave is distinguished by an extraordinary growth of ideas from the first to the second quatrain. Lines 3 and 4 present the young man as possessing an unusual psychological integrity, as he combines the gentleness of a woman with the stability and steadfastness that is conventionally attributed to men. This leads in the second quatrain to imagery that echoes the 'eye of heaven' in Sonnet 18; here the gentleness and stability are conflated in 'an eye more bright than theirs' that is steady like the sun and radiates light so that its object is silently and effortlessly gilded. In this way the love poet reinterprets the use of imagery made by his adversary in Sonnet 18, and the unselfconscious power that emanates from the subject is conveyed in the idea of spontaneous pleasure reflected in the faces of those upon whom he gazes (the gilded object is human). This sense of a motionless and gentle action which spellbindingly influences all of those around him is further developed in lines 7 and 8, where 'a man in hue' identifies the subject as an embodiment of form and grace, and 'all hues in his controlling' refers both inwardly to the self-mastery that enables him to govern his own expression and appearance, and outwardly to the ways in which this enables him to control the response of others. With this development another degree of complexity is suggested: he makes men feel uneasy by 'stealing' their eyes from a more appropriate embodiment of feminine beauty. But in addition to this there is a subtle psychological suggestion in 'women's souls amazeth'. This is the imagined effect upon women of a man who possesses the kind of beauty to which they

themselves might aspire, which means that the attraction of his masculine qualities as a man of hue, implying position as well as grace, is augmented by arousal of an intimate feeling about the form that is taken by beauty itself.

Thus the love poet has set in motion a complicated web of ideas over which it is increasingly difficult to sustain the simple union of gentleness and stability from which he began. The implied image of the sun is ambiguously placed between lines 5–6, where it suggests the idea of light being gently reflected by the object, and lines 7–8, in which the idea of self-possession concealing a potentially chaotic energy emerges out of an extended metaphor. The unconscious descent into instability can be seen as a preparation for the change that occurs in the sestet, where the character of the subject is given an allegorical interpretation that is derived from Ovid's story of Pygmalion.

Here the feeling of instability has spread to the mode in which the poem is conceived, and we can appreciate this all the more by contrasting the experimental investigation of Sonnet 5 with the much freer imaginings of the love poet in the sestet of this poem. By conceiving nature as a sculptor who becomes entranced by his creation and so makes an accidental addition to its form, this persona employs the resources of a poet to suggest an inexhaustible field of possibilities in the processes of creation. Just as Pygmalion cannot foresee the power that his own work will have over him, so nature generates forms in a world that is unfathomably rich, and the mistake that has been made in this case is discovered in a masculine character that is uniquely rich in feminine beauty. From the gentleness and stability of the opening quatrain the subject is now placed in a world that is psychologically turbulent and unpredictable, as a consequence of what is said and the way that it is said. This is particularly so in the necessity to represent the subject as a woman to whom a masculine feature has been added and not the other way round. In this respect the change of tense in the sestet, which continues the apologia for the gender of the 'mistress' of this love poetry, provides an explanation that only deepens the incongruity of the relationship.

For the love poet, the couplet is an exercise in verbal magic that is intended to untie the knot that his argument has created. He responds to his own concession that he has been defeated by the addition of male parts by wittily devising a separation of love into its spiritual and physical components. The phrase 'Mine be thy love' can be read so as to doubly bind the young man and the 'poet', for it means both let your love be mine, and let my love be the one that you recognize. This emphasis has the effect both of strengthening the bond that is an emotional resource for his poetry, and of distinguishing him from the 'loves' whose transient involvement in the young man's hedonistic life

is simply created by his appearance. Thus the attempt to present a measured appraisal of the subject in the octave is completed in this conception of their relationship as an ideal bond that is unspoiled by the fleeting nature of beauty and desire.

The magic is enhanced when the possessive apostrophe is removed from 'Mine be thy love and thy love's use their treasure'. As there is no use of the possessive apostrophe throughout the whole of Q, we cannot draw any conclusions from the original imprint. All that can be claimed is that the standard version has the effect of weakening the poem. For example, 'thy loves use their treasure' fits into the rhythmic pattern that is created throughout the verse by the addition of a feminine ending to each line. The gently rocking movement is subtly transformed by a combination of stress and the prolonged, liquid sound of 'use' (in a verbal sense) to suggest coitus, at that point where the poem refers to it. In the standard version the sound of 'use' (in a substantive sense) is sharpened and shortened, and this destroys a rhythmic effect to which the structure of the poem as a whole is leading. Removing the apostrophe, of course, also changes the meaning of 'loves' which now refers to the myriad admirers who circle around the young man.

The opposition of the sceptic to this apologia, which occupies a central place in the overall purpose of the sequence, has all of the severity of the fool's attack upon the mentor in Sonnets 1 and 3. We have seen how the unfolding of the poem, at least from the second quatrain, draws the principal ideas into a vortex of contradiction and uncertainty, which exposes them to an unsympathetic reading. As it happens, the sceptic begins his assault in the opening quatrain, and his strategy is one of reframing the love poet's language so as to devalue its underlying purpose. Hence in line 3 'acquainted' contains a crude piece of Elizabethan slang for the vagina, while 'shifting change' is a fashion for promiscuous women, whose behaviour affects the frequency with which they change their undergarments. It is significant that in one sense this reframing of the language is less cynical than the love poet's reference to women in general, for behind his seamy imagery the sceptic refers to a particular kind of woman, and he does so in order to make finer moral distinctions. The point of this change in meaning is to diminish the claims that have been made for the subject; it clearly does little for his character to say that he is more steadfast than the loosest of women. Rather, it ridicules the very notion of his being constant; it is like the praise much faster than a tortoise.

In the second quatrain, the love poet equates the subject with the sun, following the imagery that is suggested in Sonnet 18 by the sceptic, but

avoiding the unfortunate association with heat. However, 'An eye more bright than theirs' recalls 'contracted to thine own bright eyes' in Sonnet 1, where the fool means bright with desire, and this meaning is borrowed by the sceptic and expanded in line 6. Anticipating the love poet's imaginative use of the story of Pygmalion in the sestet, the sceptic alludes to the story of Danaë, who is gazed upon by the bright eye of Zeus and then visited by him in a shower of gold coins. This, of course, gives a quite different meaning to 'gilding the object whereupon it gazeth', and in doing so it also develops the identification of the sun as a god-like 'eye of heaven' in Sonnet 18. In this development, moreover, the sceptic's reframing of his adversary's thought can be seen to be testing its strength by introducing the idea of metamorphosis as a pervasive influence upon all that the love poet wishes to affirm. For example, the light that is radiated by the subject might be transformed into an expression of sexual self-assertion, and this contradicts the notion that he possesses a woman's gentle heart. Confusion in this matter becomes a dominant interest for the remaining lines of the octave. If the subject is 'A man in hue', it could reasonably be suggested that his self-mastery is not so much a matter of integrity and honour as one of skilfully adapting his tone and image in order to control the reactions and behaviour of those who are attracted to him. The eye that is 'less false in rolling' might be more subtly false, and so more effective for being more calculatingly employed. In this respect the possibility of metamorphosis is not only a problem in itself for the protagonist, it becomes a problem by being a psychological resource of the subject, and is therefore an expression of morally disturbing tendencies. In the closing line of the octave (line 8) the sceptic invokes a labyrinthine web of impulse and feeling that threatens our understanding; 'steals men's eyes' can be read as steals their vision, and so deprives them of judgement, while 'amazeth' contains the word 'maze', and so becomes an image of the inner confusion created by erotic excitement.

In the sestet, the change of tack in the love poet's apologia prompts the sceptic to turn from the character of the subject to the attitudes of the speaker. With its concentration upon the idea that the subject embodies a sexual metamorphosis, the sestet is alive with puns referring to the sex organs. The thought to which these puns make an essential contribution is dominated by an assumption that, in keeping with the possession of a woman's gentle heart, the psychology of the subject is basically passive, and therefore can be seen as serving the dignified (and active) purposes of the love poet himself. Hence, the addition of 'one thing' (a penis) 'to my purpose nothing' defeats him, as it negates the physical characteristics that naturally go with his

purpose – a vagina being the 'nothing', or 'no thing', that is to his purpose, because it conforms to the 'passion' of his love poetry, which is conventionally addressed to a mistress. In this reading of the line, 'purpose' is also used as an adjective, as in 'purpose-built'. Adding a penis to his 'purpose nothing' is therefore redundant. The couplet represents a recovery from this setback, in which the separation of spiritual and physical love stresses the passivity of the subject in line 13, where he is seen as being pricked out 'for women's pleasure', and in line 14, where the proposal of spiritual love is made by the love poet and the subject is used by his female admirers, 'their treasure' implying their use both of their own and of his sex organs. In this it is not difficult to see much that might excite the critical scrutiny of the sceptic. The apologia for an unorthodox choice of subject for love poetry has ended with a lofty resolution at the expense of an essentially passive spirit and his 'loves', who are active only in the sense that they are driven by feelings over which they have no control.

In relation to this lofty resolution, the possibilities of metamorphosis are further exploited by the sceptic, as the polysemous language multiplies the implications of the sonnet. In *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England*, Stephen Orgel has observed that 'pricked thee out for women's pleasure' can be understood in both ways, to mean given a male organ for the pleasure of women, and designed to be a woman (as stated in line 9) and therefore to experience a woman's pleasure. This complicates the meaning of the couplet itself, for if the subject is designed equally for the pleasure of men and women then such versatility blurs the opposition that is intended in the closing line. It is no longer so easy to distinguish between a (male) spiritual love that is exclusive to the love poet and his subject, and the 'loves' that are merely the irrational agents of their feelings; 'treasure' takes on its sense of overflowing abundance which lures us in, including the love poet himself. This also turns the tables on him because it removes any assurance of passivity in the subject, as his/her will now assumes the kind of independence that is implied in the judgement of the sceptic.

A more specific confirmation of this reversal can be seen in the use of 'treasure' to echo the sceptic's allusion to Danaë, when her sexual pleasure takes the form of Zeus falling in a shower of gold coins. Poems on the immortality of their subject have no meaning when they are dedicated to gods, and so the association of the young man with Zeus tends to deprive the love poet of his rationale, while insinuating that, to his subject, he is probably no more significant than the other 'loves' that fall within his orbit for a time and then are lightly cast aside. The speaker is, perhaps, himself a man who has fallen under the spell and let his judgement escape.

If we consider Sonnets 18 and 20 as dramatizing the poet's attempt to represent life then we can see a significant development from the opposition of personae in Sonnets 1 and 3. In these earlier poems the fool's critique is brutally satirical and freely employs whatever is available to ridicule the presumptuous attitudes of the mentor. By contrast the sceptic subtly exploits weaknesses in the logic of his adversary, and this is related to a greater richness and depth in these poems, in particular in Sonnet 20. Thus, the dramatization is one in which the love poet's conception of the subject is represented so that we can see, much more clearly than in the humanist mentor, how it is determined by his ambitions and by his conception of himself. Moreover, the resources employed by the sceptic, especially in his play upon ideas associated with metamorphosis, combine a penetrating disorientation of the other's point of view with concession to the insecurity of his own position. For, unlike the grotesque images of the fool in Sonnets 1 and 3, the metaphorical allusions of the sceptic take their cue more strictly from ideas which are latent in the words of the love poet, and so generate a critical perspective which can also be applied to himself. The uncertainty, which is highlighted by repeated allusion to metamorphosis, denies the possibility of making either position definitive. Thus a limit is achieved in the dramatization of a poet's attempt to represent reflective life, for the sense of Sonnet 20 is balanced on inferences that are created by personal inclination. In this way the genre of love poetry is subjected to an analytical examination of considerable subtlety and power, as the opposing personae come more and more to resemble conflicting voices within the same individual.

While these sonnets represent a limit for the sequence, in the possibilities that are offered by the opposition of personae, they also belong to a group of poems (17–21) which suggest that the poet is concerned with something more than simply the employment of a particular genre. It is clear from the discussion of Sonnets 18 and 20 that these poems can be read as love poetry, each with its own orientation and technical resources. However, they come to life with unusual cogency and inner coherence when they are understood as the dramatization of a poet's attempt to represent life, and this depends upon the analysis of genre and its psychology in the love poet.

Sonnet 17 resembles 18 in so far as it presents an uncomplicated train of thought, in the language of love poetry, which is receptive to two conflicting readings. But while it may be fitting to see these conflicting points of view as coming from the love poet and his sceptic, Sonnet 17 makes far less of weaknesses in the thinking of the former. However, in one respect the more obscure voice in this sonnet is fundamentally sceptical, as it questions the

possibility of artistic truth in the circumstances of the love poet's project. Thus Sonnet 17 can be read in two parallel ways, and they correspond to the opposition between the protagonist and his sceptic in Sonnets 18 and 20, but without the subtle dissension that we have seen in those poems.

The remaining poems in this later group (19 and 21) fit into the pattern as different ways in which the sceptic assumes the voice of the love poet in order to satirize his project. In Sonnet 19, for example, a 'poet's rage' is mimicked in order to parody the excesses of courtly love poetry; its heightened exhortation to 'devouring time' is exposed as the hollow enthusiasm of the 'poet's' own 'antic' pen (see Colin Burrow's note on line 10), and the facile reversal of the couplet gives the impression of a mind that is propelled simply by the exigencies of its task rather than by serious interest in the life with which it should be concerned. Sonnet 21 can be seen as a comic counterpart to this, as the sceptic now represents the 'poet' in an alternative guise, that of a plain lover of truth who has no use for the artifice of a corrupted genre. The joke is evident in the mocking confidentiality of the opening lines, with its 'disarming' avowal of an attitude that diverges from all that the love poet has been striving for in the preceding poems, including the elaborate apologia of Sonnet 20 and the self-affirmation of Sonnet 18. Crowning all of this, the couplet attempts to divorce the project from its association with reward, which alludes to the protagonist's conception of his purpose in Sonnet 17.

Even at this point in the sequence it is clear that interpretation of the purpose of the Sonnets 1–126 is dependent upon an absolute distinction between the intentions of the poet, Shakespeare, and those of the authorial personae through whom the poems are spoken. Whatever the personal basis for the sequence, relating to his actual circumstances and how they might be reflected in the poems, the complex use of personae analysed here makes it clear that their purpose is not autobiographical. Rather, they are constructed in a way that is intended to dramatize a poet's attempt to represent the life to which he or she belongs. All that is known about the genesis of the poems is that they were written for the benefit of a private circle of friends, and even the idea that a specific patron was responsible for their commission is not corroborated by evidence from outside the sequence itself. It is possible, even though it seems unlikely, that Shakespeare composed the sonnets for this circle with the intention of entertaining them by satirically representing the practice of creating poetry for a patron, and used the ideas of the humanist mentor and the love poet, whose métier is to immortalize the subject. It is also possible, and more probable, that Shakespeare draws upon his own experience in order to create the many different situations in the poems, in much the same

way as Dickens draws upon his own experience in order to create *David Copperfield*. However, in testing the sonnets for references to the life of the artist it is difficult to say anything that is precise and illuminating. But since the sonnets are not intended to be autobiographical the loss involved here is mainly a loss in relation to our curiosity about the poet, and does not greatly affect our capacity to understand the poems and Shakespeare's purpose in creating the sequence.

Shakespeare's dramatization takes an important turn in the development of the sequence after the group of Sonnets 17–21. For, in so far as a direct attempt is made by the love poet to immortalize his subject, this project is no sooner introduced than it is superseded by concern about his own circumstances in relation to the subject. This indicates a new orientation for the sequence, for while the project remains at the heart of the protagonist's interest in the subject, the poems are now a dramatization of his experience as he strives to execute the project. In this connection, it is significant that there is no sonnet in the sequence which unequivocally immortalizes the subject. Apart from the poems that have been considered so far, the most promising candidate might be Sonnet 55, and for this reason close attention should be given to the couplet in this poem. The forthright assertion of the power of rhyme to outlive all of the monuments that are handed down to posterity makes this sonnet the most direct and self-aggrandizing poem in the sequence. But it is relevant that this grandiloquent expression of poetic virtue follows a much more delicate and muted conception of the poet's vocation, in Sonnet 54. Here the imagery of distillation is invoked once again, recalling Sonnet 5, and its purpose is to make a distinction between show and truth ('by verse distils your truth'). On first acquaintance Sonnet 55 appears to take no particular interest in truth, but the couplet in this poem is susceptible to another, less obvious, reading. The phrase 'till the judgment that yourself arise' follows logically from line 12, and refers to the Last Judgement, in which case the verb is naturally connected to 'yourself'. However, the verb can also be connected to 'judgment', and so, by inserting inverted commas around 'that yourself' we can make it an utterance that judges the young man. Hence the phrase can mean, until the judgement arises that reveals your true nature. Not only can the primitive grammar be seen as an ironic diminution of the language of the poem (in the name of truth, which strikes back at being overlooked), the completion of the couplet consigns the poem to realms of delusion and fantasy ('and dwell in lovers' eyes'). Moreover, unlike the Last Judgement, the judgement 'that yourself' can arise to any time: for example, now in the mind of the speaker.

Dramatization of the love poet's project and of his relationship with the subject are interwoven in the greater part of the sequence: this is a basic element in the dramatization of a poet's attempt to represent life. As changes take place in their relationship so new ideas arise, which alter his understanding of the project. Thus, in the group of Sonnets 33–35, an important development in the relationship affects the use of genre as an instrument of analytical thought. The first of these makes an interesting progression from the poems that have been mentioned so far.

Sonnet 33
Full many a glorious morning have I seen
Flatter the mountain tops with sovereign eye,
Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
Gilding pale streams with heavenly 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:
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 masked him from me now.
    Yet him for this my love no whit disdaineth:
    Suns of the world may stain, when heaven's sun staineth.

Remarkable for its intricate concentration of figurative language, the structure of this poem combines a fluent forward movement with a particular kind of retrospective enrichment of meaning as we move from the octave to the sestet. Thus in outline the progression from one to the other is perfectly lucid: the octave presents a general observation of the world, one that has a metaphorical purpose, and in the sestet this observation, with its figurative sense, refers to a particular experience of the speaker. However, this means that it is not until we have come to the sestet that the metaphorical purpose of the octave can be understood. From the outset we can appreciate that light is the underlying phenomenon to which various images, in their different ways, allude. So 'glorious morning' is both a descriptive term in the poem's narrative and a trope for light itself, while 'sovereign eye' and 'golden face' are images for its source, the sun. This idea is extended in the second quatrain, in 'celestial face' and 'his visage', 'his' referring to 'glorious morning' and therefore

to light, and 'heavenly alchemy' is an image for the magical effect of sunlight on certain of its objects. Within the terms of this initial reading of the octave, the verbs 'flatter', 'kissing' and 'gilding' are examples of poetic embellishment which serve to heighten the descriptive atmosphere of the lines; the same can be said of other examples of personification in the octave, such as 'ugly rack on his celestial face', 'the forlorn world his visage hide' and 'Stealing unseen to west with this disgrace'.

The progression beyond this emotional response to meteorological change, which revises our reading of the octave, is registered in 'my sun one early morn did shine', and continued in the ideas that follow it. For light we can now read power and authority, 'my sun' being the source of these for the 'poet', in the subject. The imagery of the poem now indicates that it arises out of his rejection by the friend, in favour of others whom they might both consider to be inferior ('the basest clouds'). This interpretation of the imagery associated with light is confirmed in lines 9–10, where 'triumphant splendour on my brow' evokes the idea of honour that is bestowed expressly upon the 'poet'. Moreover, this means that we can now see a new set of ideas in the figurative language of the poem: for example, the personification in 'flatter', 'kissing' and 'gilding' can be seen as suggesting an elaborate game of deception and manipulation practised by a noble whose 'light' gives definition to the social ranks that stand in varying degrees beneath him. This is especially strong in line 4, which both employs the description 'heavenly alchemy' and echoes the same idea in Sonnet 20 ('gildeth the object whereupon it gazeth'). The intimation of an unsettling change having taken place between that sonnet and 33 is reflected not only in a feeling of disillusionment, but also in a decisive formal development in the poem. For the double meaning we have seen at work in previous poems has been organized by means of an opposition between (mainly) conflicting personae, which depends upon the 'innocence' of one persona or another (the mentor or the love poet). Here a similar double meaning can be ascribed to the poem, but now belongs solely to the 'poet', whose disillusionment has led to a crisis in his representation of the subject. The polysemous language now reflects a new sense of uncertainty, a loss of confidence from the optimism of the apologia in Sonnet 20.

The use of double meaning to suggest uncertainty, rather than to assert another attitude or opinion, is implied in line 12, where the cloud has 'masked him from me now'. In being masked, the true nature of the subject has been concealed, and the circumstances behind the event are unexplained. They could be explained by youthful weakness and gullibility, and this is implied in the idea that the 'region cloud' has masked him, which balances line 5.

But this moment of hopeful leniency is dissolved in the couplet, in which the pain of rejection generates a further line of speculation, which resonates back through the language of the poem and puts a construction upon the relationship that is more general and unsettling.

In the first place the couplet can be understood as an expression of forgiving acceptance, perhaps as something that is imposed upon the 'poet' by his desire to continue with the love poet's project. According to this reading he does not withdraw his love for the young man, for as a sun of the world his stain must be accepted as we must accept a comparable stain in a heavenly sun. Thus the poem appears to be resolved on a note of civilized irony, the laws pertaining to human relations are harmonized with the laws of nature and the mood of hopeful leniency is preserved. In the alternative reading 'my love' refers not to his feelings but to the person who is loved, and the line can be rearranged as, 'Yet my love no whit disdaineth him(self) for this'. This introduces the suspicion that the subject is unconcerned about the effect of his behaviour upon his friend, and it makes the closing line an expression of indifference to the claims of fellow feeling and morality.

In order to interpret the closing line in this way it is necessary to examine the double meanings of the poem from another angle. The octave is charged with imagery suggesting an order beyond the world of aristocrats and the ranks of those who are dependent upon them, and this is felt immediately in the luminosity of the opening quatrain. The 'heavenly alchemy' of these lines evokes the possibility of a world that is transmuted by light, and light has a metaphysical significance that is increasingly relevant as the poem unfolds. In this respect, the image of light has two distinct meanings, one which is ascribed to the social world which radiates from the authority of kings and nobles, and one which is transcendental and gives beauty and animation to the objects of this world – in connection with the latter the opening quatrain alludes to a prelapsarian Eden. Thus, the obscuring of light in the second quatrain has a Christian significance, 'forlorn world' (line 7) is very close to 'fallen world', and in the next line 'disgrace' can be read as 'dis-grace', meaning to remove the possibility of God's grace. Since this meaning of the word 'grace' refers to our hope, as fallen creatures, of an undeserved redemption, the disgrace to which the poem refers condemns us to a world that is irredeemably fallen, and it is in relation to this idea that the closing line of the poem can be understood. When it is ascribed to the young man, 'suns of the world' refers to those who, like himself, possess merely temporal power, whereas 'heaven's sun' is transcendental. In the context this suggests heaven's son, as Christ is the greatest expression of God's grace. So, the subject's imagined disowning

of his stain, by indicating the stain on heaven's sun, is a denial of redemption, a shrug which says, 'since we are fallen I behave accordingly'.

Our understanding of the language of this poem depends upon a clear recognition of the sense with which meaning is implied, and how it can be related to the dramatization of a poet's attempt to represent life. The work would lose its subtle definition if the alternative readings were intended with equal conviction, and therefore it is necessary to make some psychological distinction between them. This suggests that the secondary reading bears the sense not of an overt assertion, but rather that of a feeling of uneasiness that encroaches upon the speaker's deliberate intentions and deepens his disillusionment into a more general fear and uncertainty. The 'poet' does not have proof that his patron and subject will disregard the claims of morality when it suits him, or that he is cynically degenerate, but there is a structural sense in which the language and ideas in the poem subtly edge it from an experience of personal disappointment to a more fundamental and pervasive anxiety. This is particularly evident in the way in which figurative language is used, for unlike the earlier sonnets, which oppose different personae, Sonnet 33 uses puns and allusions that imply much slighter shifts in meaning. For example, the imagery from nature in the opening quatrain is applied harmoniously to the tenor of a world of aristocratic patronage, and then to a prelapsarian Eden, in a similar manner; while the suggestion of fallen world in 'forlorn world' and dis-grace in 'disgrace' do not involve great leaps in meaning and significance. Also, the retrospective reading of the sonnet, which leads us from the sestet back to the octave, suggests more than a feeling of uneasiness about just one individual. For the double meaning of the couplet is only understood when we see that the poem resonates with the idea of a world that is threatened by chaotic impulse and self-interest. What occurred 'one early morn' has been observed by the speaker on 'Full many a glorious morning', and so we cannot take the victim's disappointment and shock about a particular event as an isolated cause for anxiety; such an experience could well be typical of the world to which he belongs.

Thus it is clear that the language in this sonnet is related to a crisis in the project which enriches the psychological characterization of the 'poet', and that it does so by giving a new orientation to the sequence. In place of the opposition of different personae, we now have the drama of conflicting ideas and feelings within a persona that fuses the love poet and the sceptic. This creates another framework for the dramatization, and this framework possesses a complex psychology of probing enquiry and uncertainty.

The next poem in the sequence is coupled with 33, and goes more deeply into the psychological significance of the situation, subtly exploring its uncertainties for the speaker.

Sonnet 34
Why didst thou promise such a beauteous day,
And make me travel forth without my cloak,
To let base clouds o'ertake me in my way,
Hiding thy brav'ry in their rotten smoke?
'Tis not enough that through the cloud thou break
To dry the rain on my storm-beaten face,
For no man well of such a salve can speak
That heals the wound and cures not the disgrace;
Nor can thy shame give physic to my grief:
Though thou repent, yet I have still the loss.
Th'offender's sorrow lends but weak relief
To him that bears the strong offence's cross.
    Ah, but those tears are pearl which thy love sheds,
    And they are rich, and ransom all ill deeds.

From our first acquaintance with this poem we are given the sense of a psychologically sensitive experience that has the speaker in its grip. Not only does the opening quatrain take up the crucial events of the previous sonnet, and elaborate upon them by means of the same images with the same basic intention, there is also a feeling of relentless insistence in the structure of the poem, in its reiteration of the injury and refusal to be consoled, and even in the repetition of particular words (clouds/cloud and offender's/offence's). Moreover, echoes of Sonnet 33 can be discerned in the use of poetic diction in the opening line, for 'beauteous day' responds to the heightened language of 33, and so recalls the ideas of light and the sun, and their association with purity. Similarly, 'rotten smoke' is more than irate exception to the interference between the speaker and his source of illumination, as it recalls the 'ugly rack' which implies the wrack of the fallen world, 'rotten' meaning morally corrupt.

But the opening quatrain of Sonnet 34 also creates a feeling of moral uncertainty that is characteristic of these poems. Preoccupation with the intentions of the subject is therefore evident in the double meaning of certain words and forms of construction. So 'promise' implies that the illumined prospect ('beauteous day') for the speaker is merely an optimistic impulse

that has not been created by a formal agreement, or that a fully intended promise has been understood, and consequently the subject will faithfully respect the interests of his servant. According to the latter sense 'make me travel forth' implies a psychological compulsion, in that 'make' can mean simply to cause, or it can mean to induce the other person to comply with your will. In this connection, 'cloak' is highly suggestive, for the 'poet' has travelled forth without making adequate psychological preparations. The failure to cloak his own feelings has left him exposed, and so this failure may be, in some degree, the cause of his uncertainty. This is sustained in the structure of the sentence (which makes up the quatrain), by allowing 'hiding thy brav'ry' to be a function of both 'thou' and 'base clouds'. If, therefore, the beauteous day has been promised only in the sense that the speaker has felt the promise, and he has been made to travel forth without his cloak only by virtue of his own judgement, then the subject has 'let' only in so far as his actions have resulted in the speaker's estrangement from him. Alternatively, however, the sentence implies that 'to let' is compatible with deliberately allowing the base clouds to cut off the speaker, and in this case he is victim to a cruel game of deception.

The uncertainty of this opening can be seen as a strict dramatization of the 'poet's' attempt to clarify his situation, in which there is no clear indication of which view of the subject is true, or indeed if either is true. This conforms ideally to the purpose of dramatizing the poet's attempt to represent life. In keeping with this, the second quatrain spreads the double meaning, so that the uncertainty expressed about the subject is cast over the speaker. As there is more than one sense in which the 'poet' travels forth without his cloak, giving voice to his reactions and ideas exposes him to the reader and in ways of which he may be unconscious. So the wounded response to being comforted, in lines 5–6, leads into an aphoristic judgement on the reparation that is due to him for his injured self-esteem. There is, after all, more than one sense in which he has been assaulted, an obvious one in which he suffers a breach of ordinary decency, and a less obvious one in which the offence is a 'disgrace', recalling the dis-grace of Sonnet 33. In terms of the latter, which the friend has 'let' happen, the 'poet' suffers a crisis in the kinship that has meant so much to him. Thus, 'For no man well of such a salve can speak' is an elaborate way of complaining that wiping away my tears is not enough. This makes use of inversion, where the more natural order is 'no man can speak well of such a salve'. However, the inversion creates another way of reading the line, for the construction 'no man well' can be understood as no man who is well, or, more specifically, no man who is morally sound. In other words, the 'poet'

is using the inversion to suggest that any morally sensitive person should know that 'such a salve' is inadequate in this case. But the double meaning is inadvertently spread, as 'no man' refers equally to the subject and to himself, where the line is taken to mean 'I cannot speak well of such a salve' (in this line 8 is the consequent of 'such a salve' instead of 'no man'). This reading raises doubts about the speaker, and the implications of his wounded pride. When applied to the subject, 'no man well of such a salve can speak' implies that no sound man can justify or defend such a salve, and when applied to the 'poet' the same words imply that no sound man can dispute such a salve (the seriousness of the disgrace being grossly exaggerated). His own aphorism, and how it works in the poem, creates a psychological conflict about what is sensitive in this case.

An awareness of what can be accepted as morally sensitive becomes an important issue for this poem. It is significant that the third quatrain imitates the structure of the second, in that two lines of description are succeeded by an aphoristic judgement upon the actions of the friend. And the same structure occurs in diminished form in the couplet, the penultimate line being descriptive and the closing line epigrammatic. Its sententious character betrays an uncertainty concerning the moral ground of the poem. For though the friend is in shadow throughout the sequence, and we see him only through the eyes of the speaker, we could feel that the 'poet's' enterprise is suffocating to his subject. In this sonnet, the spirit of the humanist mentor returns, with an unwelcome addition of biblical authority.

Sonnets 33 and 34 are obviously composed in response to a slight caused by the subject's preference for supposedly less worthy acquaintances. But the tone of these poems suggests that the interference of the 'poet' in his friend's affairs may be excessively intrusive and presumptuous. We are drawn into feeling that the speaker's own arrogance is partly responsible for 'the disgrace', and this justifies the dual reference that has been attached to 'no man well'. Whatever doubts there may be about the moral soundness of the subject there is also some uncertainty about the 'poet', and this is tied to his self-affirming project in pursuit of an artistic vocation (his passion), by writing love poetry intended to immortalize his friend. Conjecture of this kind may be supported by the attitudes in the apologia of Sonnet 20, where, as we have seen, the closing line makes a distinction between the claims of the 'poet' upon his subject and the kind of recognition that is due to his 'loves'. The base clouds of Sonnet 34 could be comprised of a selection of these 'loves'.

Special force is given to the speaker's tone in this poem by the shift in attitude that is implied in the progression from octave to sestet, and this is

intensified by a psychological complexity in the couplet. The god-like stature of the subject, bestowed on him, in particular, by imagery that associates him with light and with its source, is implicitly questioned in lines 7–8 by the negative use of 'salve' and 'disgrace'. The biblical resonance of these words can be seen as anticipating a reversal in the sestet, in which an expressly moral authority is transferred from the subject to the 'poet', as he seeks an appropriate form of repentance from his wayward friend. Thus, in line 12, the speaker equates himself with Christ, the God who suffers and is reviled, and thereby assumes the authority of the misrepresented. A sense of unjustified pleading is accentuated by the conflict between a self-attributed moral endurance ('bears the strong offence's cross') and the 'poet's' aggrieved and fragile introspection. However, in spite of his transparency, we should also be aware of the dense texture of overlapping speculations and uncertainties from which the couplet emerges. This gives the couplet both a sense of dramatic reversal that is literally intended, and further meanings that respond to the density of the preceding lines.

At first reading of the couplet, a recognition of the young man's repentance appears to reverse the growing severity of the 'poet', completing a contrary movement from solicitude in line 5 and regret in line 9. Tears are 'pearl' because they can be seen as a true expression of penitence and the expression of love. In this respect, the penitential attitude restores the 'poet's' place in the heart of the subject. The idea of spiritual wealth that is contained in true repentance is confirmed by its power to redeem us from our sins, and this appears to invest the penitential tears of the subject with life-affirming significance. However, this spiritually charged restoration implies a recognition of the 'poet's' authority, since it is from him that forgiveness is supposedly being sought, and there is room for doubt concerning both his authority and its acceptance by the subject.

In Shakespeare's language a wish can be expressed as a statement, so the penultimate line can be read as a regretful wish, embellished at the beginning by an 'ah' not of recognition but of loss. Even more subversively, 'thy love sheds' can mean both weeping and a complete abandonment of feeling. In the sense that the friend's love might be so attenuated that he disowns the tears that would reconcile them, the 'poet' revives the uncertainties of the situation as they are expressed in the opening quatrain. Thus the appearance of tears would be suspect since there is no guarantee that they are genuine. In this connection 'they are rich, and ransom all ill deeds' can also mean that social position permits the friend to use any means that suit him to 'salve' his offensive behaviour. Furthermore, the 'poet's' compromised grasp of things is

suggested by an internal play between the alternate readings of the couplet. For his disillusioned response to the possibility of true repentance, in this case, can be seen as intensifying the desire to believe in that possibility.

These comments show that developments in the relationship between the 'poet' and his subject are accompanied in the sequence by subtle changes in the ways in which genre is used as an instrument of analytical thought. In the earlier sonnets Shakespeare makes use of extended double meaning by creating personae in opposition, in order to expose the mentor's or love poet's assumptions to an alternative view of the situation. This all changes with the disillusionment of the 'poet', as the subject increasingly strays from the image that is desired of him. So, in Sonnets 33 and 34, the double meaning is applied not to opposing personae but to opposing trains of thought in the 'poet', who now 'controls' the poem as a single persona. In place of the consistent formulation of certain related attitudes, in earlier sonnets, we now have a highly dramatic representation of a mind thrown into turmoil and beset by uncertainty.

Thus, the need of a person to understand the life to which he or she belongs is represented in action with an intimacy and vitality that may possibly only be found in this sequence of poems. Moreover, because they subvert the expectation that poetry will present us with perfectly resolved representations of human character and behaviour, these poems re-orient our reading, and encourage us to see into our reflective life in its true complexity. The effect of personal inclination on judgement and understanding has become a vortex from within which the substance of the poetry is created. And in the midst of this we can appreciate that the genres that make these representations possible, such as that of love poetry with its refinements of diction and imagery, and its emotionally inflected syntax and formal music, are worked and transfigured in order to explore our reflective life anew.

Since the sequence of sonnets to the young man consists of 126 poems, and the disillusionment of the 'poet' with his initial purpose is evident in Sonnets 33 and 34, we must conclude that some change of direction has been forced upon the 'poet' by the effect of their relationship upon his project. The purpose is no longer simply, or even primarily, to immortalize the subject, for increasingly the illusions of his poetic genre become an interest of the fictional poet himself. In the sequence as a whole, there are many ways in which the relationship between the significance of love poetry as a literary genre and the reality of interpersonal experience is explored, and this relationship is always implicit, whatever the immediate concern of a particular sonnet. Therefore,

the 'poet's' concern with this relationship leads to a further development in the use of extended double meaning, in the series of Sonnets 71–74. An interpretation of these poems brings to a conclusion this illustration of my theory, and, for reasons that will be explained, I begin with Sonnet 73.

Sonnet 73
That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou seest the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west,
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
In me thou seest the glowing of such fire
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed whereon it must expire,
Consumed with that which it was nourished by.
This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well, which thou must leave ere long.

Here the 'poet's' interest in the illusions created from within a poetic genre, such as that of love poetry or moral instruction, and his sensitivity to psychological realism are evident in the way in which he now turns against his earlier impersonation as a humanist mentor. This sonnet is remarkable in the first place for its multiple satire, as the 'poet' mockingly assumes the voice of the mentor, in order both to 'instruct' and to ridicule the attitudes of the subject. The satirical dimension of this voice, as distinct from a simple reappearance of the mentor, is signalled by the mock gravity of the opening line of each of the quatrains; its repeated phrases (in quatrains 2 and 4) and rhythmic shape give an impression of the speaker raising himself to his full height in order to deliver his pronouncements upon the distorted perceptions of youth. In addition to this, the poem assumes a pedagogical structure in its demonstration of the attitudes of the subject by producing a thematically related series of images, arranged in order to intensify both the meaning that is attributed to him and the exaggeration that makes him look absurd. The rhetorical effect of this progression from the change of seasons through the decline of day into night, and then the brief concentration of a funeral pyre that is dying down, is completed in the couplet, in the schoolmasterly 'This

thou perceiv'st', followed by a gnomic and unconvincing moral. Presenting the mentor as a caricature exposes the conventionality of his thinking, which is merely a token of his training, and the conclusion that he draws from his observations does not form a coherent insight into the subject. For if the distorted perceptions of youth appear as little more than the casual disposal of a life which has lost its vitality, then there is nothing that 'makes thy love more strong', and the lesson of the mentor is consumed by his own irony. The argument of the couplet, that love is greater when it is for something that will soon pass, loses its conviction if the imminence of this passing is of no interest to the person who is being addressed.

Within this framework, the densely textured exposition of Sonnet 73 employs an extended double meaning which is threefold in purpose. Hence, we are able to see how the structure and language in this sonnet are related to the psychology of the subject who is being mocked and instructed by his mentor, to that of the mentor who is being parodied by the 'poet', and to that of the 'poet' himself, for whom this complex satire with its resonant images is also an elegy for the loss of a dream. The opening lines of the poem already contain this threefold double meaning, as the gravity of the first line leads into a schoolmaster's scrupulous attention to the number of leaves, and at the same time this hesitation mimics the young man's cruel and sardonic weighing of the scant life that he allows to be left to his friend. Then, while continuing these tendencies in the mentor and the young man, the succeeding two lines take up the autumnal image of falling leaves and transform them into an intimate expression of exposure and transience. The 'Bare ruined choirs' suggest more than the passing of youthful energy and its fullness of life; the nature of the poem and the circumstances of the 'poet' give this image a ghostly sense of estrangement, which our knowledge of the sequence can help us to interpret. By association with the seasons, these lines evoke an enervated light, and this imagery increases in intensity throughout the main body of the sonnet. Recalling the light imagery of earlier sonnets, such as 20, 33 and 34, this pattern has a clearly defined resonance. In Sonnet 33, in particular, the young man is equated with the light of the sun, as the source of spiritual vitality to his circle, which includes the 'poet' himself. Thus, we can see that such loss plays its part in the 'Bare ruined choirs', which stand in bleak fragments, now reduced to a skeleton and deprived of the birds' sweet song.

The second quatrain is more directly concerned with the idea of light, as its imagery is governed by the transition from day into night. Here the mentor is parodied in his pedagogical insistence, in which the same thought is reframed in different ways, as though to drive the point home: lines 5, 6

and 7 all describe the same process of quenching light, and line 8 concludes the description with a proverbial expression for the ensuing darkness. However, within his regimented thinking there is some room for irony, and the proverbial tendency may be directed against the subject, as it follows hard upon the storybook language of the previous line ('by and by black night doth take away'). In this we can sense the 'poet' similtaneously playing games with his persona and expressing his feelings of disenchantment. But allusion to the childishness of the subject in this way does nothing to diminish another tendency in the imagery and music of these lines, which deepens the elegiac aspect of the poem. For the images of transition into night do not simply reiterate the same idea in slightly different ways, they also register changes in psychological perspective, as the idea of life fading in line 6 is reinterpreted as a kind of robbery in line 7, and then as an immutable law of nature in line 8. Similarly, the transformation in language from simple descriptive reference to the time of day in line 5, through the visual imagery of 'after sunset fadeth in the west' and the fable of line 7, to the proverbial expression that ends this quatrain, uses modulated rhythm, sound and image to close, one by one, the possibilities of escape for the 'poet'. Thus, the multiple satire of mentor and subject is a vehicle for the 'poet's' elegy, which uses the idea of approaching death as a metaphor for the now irreversible collapse of his high ambitions and the end of his optimism for their friendship. The irony with which he turns upon the wisdom of his earlier persona is integrated with a forcefully satirical view of the subject, to convey the disappointment of being ultimately no more to him than the other 'loves' of Sonnet 20.

Sonnet 73 is not divided, as so many of the sonnets are, into octave and sestet; rather the third quatrain continues the trend of creating a metaphor for decline by means of imagery suggested by a central idea. Here, therefore, the mentor is allowed to conclude the main body of his sardonic instruction so that his image of personal extinction combines that satirical exaggeration with the invulnerable wisdom of philosophical resignation. The light imagery which has figured in the previous lines is intensified in effect to a dying glow, and in this there is an inward movement, so that the light is more specifically related to spirit as the very essence of the person is gradually extinguished. To the mentor's generalizing cast of mind, 'Consumed with that which it was nourished by' means simply that spirit is consumed by the experience of life that sustains and enriches it. Such reflective detachment enables him to rise above the youthful distortions of the subject. But for the 'poet', who is creating this parody, the line has a more precise and a more acid intention that includes the mentor as its target. Now that his dream has been stolen from him, the 'poet'

sees that his spirit has been consumed by the illusions that have nourished it; at the root of his elegy is a sense that his obssession and its destruction have deprived him of an essential inner strength. In its enactment the project which was assumed with some self-assurance has been turned against the 'poet' in a profoundly disturbing manner. This means that the couplet can be read in a way that subverts the ironic complacency of the mentor, in a much harsher judgement upon the moral insensitivity of the subject.

When it is taken at face value the couplet reads as a moral lesson to the subject, exhorting him to develop his feeling for others by caring with due attention to a friend, who should be all the more cherished for being on the point of leaving him. But these lines can be read in another way, which is consistent with a syntactical freedom that is characteristic of Shakespeare. First, the order of subject and verb can be inverted in the phrase 'which makes thy love more strong', and this leads to changes in the meaning of the words. Inversion of this kind, one that is more complex than 'says he', for example, can be seen in 'take Antony / Octavia to his wife' (*Antony and Cleopatra*, Act 2, scene ii, lines 132–133). Thus, the couplet can be saying 'thy love more strong (or your undisciplined sexual appetite, as opposed to love that can be equated with moral feeling) makes (in the sense of pretending, as in making tough or making innocent) this perception of me as ebbing away in feeble decline'. In accordance with this reading, the closing line should be repunctuated as, 'To love that, well, which thou must leave ere long' ('well' being an ironic gesture feigning weary resignation). This kind of gestural speech is typical of the series of Sonnets 71–74, occurring twice in both 71 and 72 (again using 'well', in 72). Contrary to the sense that he gives to the mentor, therefore, the 'poet' is saying, 'Your kind of love makes up the character of its object, which in this case is of no importance anyway, since it has so little time left to it'.

In the earlier sonnets conflicting intentions between opposing personae are usually created by some exaggeration or 'correction' on the part of the fool or sceptic. The double meaning is such that one sense of the lines contradicts the other, and this plays an essential part in the development of the sequence. In the series of Sonnets 71–74 (as in 33 and 34) the 'poet' is in control of the voices that appear; so his parody of the mentor and allusion to the attitudes of the young man are calculated so that the verse says what he wishes to say in exactly the way that he wishes it to be said. We have seen, for example, that the use of the mentor in Sonnet 73 is an attack by the 'poet' on his earlier more innocent persona, and this can be understood in relation to what has happened to the tie between the love poet and his subject. However, the contradiction that is employed in the couplet, as part of the 'poet's' satire

upon the mentor, makes us wonder why the 'poet' does not communicate more directly, by simply giving unambiguous expression to his feelings about the subject. The drawback with such openness is that it can result in nothing more satisfying than open denial, and this is just what the contradictory double meaning of the couplet is able to avoid. By combining an obvious reading which is lacking conviction, and can be ascribed to a persona who is being parodied, with a more obscure sense which preys upon the moral insecurity of the subject to whom the lines are addressed, the 'poet' lures the young man by means of his inquisitive sense of involvement in what the poem is actually saying. In this there is no escape from the severity of the lines, for on one hand the poem now strips the subject of the moral and personal distinction that has been a fundamental concern of the sequence, and on the other it incriminates him by means of the uneasy fascination with which he will discover the 'poet's' hidden intention.

Superficially, the series of Sonnets 71–74 is thematically connected by their interest in the death of the 'poet', and how this is regarded, or should be regarded, by the subject. However, this thematic connection is only a conceit in the mock-dramatization that is designed to reveal the experience and feelings of the two men, and how these are related to the composition of the sequence. This deeper purpose can be seen in the links that tie each of these poems to the next in the series, and from the nature of these links we are able to make a reasonable guess at the order in which they should be read.

Once they have all been studied and understood it is clear from the unfolding revelation what their order should be, but which has been misrepresented by established editorial practices. Sonnet 73 precedes 71, as the latter turns from the idea that the poet is approaching death to that of mourning, and the wishes of the poet for his young friend in relation to this ritual. The opening line of 71 is ambiguously constructed, as we discover when we have finished the sentence, but initially it evokes the couplet of 73, by responding to the mentor's conception of a love that is intensified by the imminence of death. In this respect 71 redefines this expression of love as mourning which is already enacted, and makes the demand that mourning should end 'when I am dead'. The link between 71 and 72 is not very difficult, as there is an overt connection between 'Lest the wise world should look into your moan' and 'O, lest the world should task you to recite / What merit lived in me that you should love'. Sonnets 72 and 74 are linked by an association of shame and guilt; the clear insinuation of something morally unworthy is made in the couplet of 72, and then picked up in the allusion to death as justice in action, at the beginning of 74 ('when that fell arrest / Without all

bail shall carry me away'). In conformity with the sequence 73, 71, 72 and 74 an explanatory background, revealing significant details about the experience of the 'poet' and his friend, is provided for the elegy of Sonnet 73; and at the same time this sequence takes us more and more deeply into the crisis that is created for the 'poet' and his project. Thus, we can only understand these poems properly if this order is followed since it creates a carefully organized structure of meaning.

Sonnet 71
No longer mourn for me when I am dead
Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell
Give warning to the world that I am fled
From this vile world with vilest worms to dwell:
Nay, if you read this line, remember not
The hand that writ it, for I love you so
That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,
If thinking on me then should make you woe.
O, if, (I say) you look upon this verse
When I (perhaps) compounded am with clay,
Do not so much as my poor name rehearse;
But let your love even with my life decay,
    Lest the wise world should look into your moan
    And mock you with me after I am gone.

This poem represents a transition from parody of the mentor's ironic persuasion to the 'poet's' self-parody, especially concerning the attitudes that have sustained his relations with the subject. Whereas in Sonnet 73 the extended double meaning creates a tension between satire and elegy, implying the collapse of their relationship and the 'poet's' enterprise, Sonnet 71 uses death as a conceit for certain delusions which lie within his project. This is suggested in the affectation of sensitivity and delicacy of feeling between the 'poet' and his subject, both in the attitudes assumed by the 'poet' and in how they are expressed. A telling change of tone is therefore created in the movement from the couplet of 73 to the self-abnegation, 'No longer mourn for me when I am dead'. Of course, the tone changes again when we complete the quatrain, but the shift in feeling created by 'this vile world' does not efface the impression of selfless concern. Rather, the succeeding quatrains both sustain and expand the sense of solicitude, and also intimate a shared sensitivity that sets them apart from the world (the expression of this concern being completed in the couplet).

So, in line 3, the 'poet' ironically suggests that the bell announcing his death gives 'warning to the world', pretending that the loss of a poet is a momentous event. This idea of loss is elaborated in the line that follows, and with particular emphasis in the double meaning of 'with vilest worms to dwell'. Its immediate effect, as a commonplace, ridicules the 'poet's' superiority to the world, his assumption that the world should grieve as he is transported from this vile world to that of vile worms under the ground. However, 'with vilest worms to dwell' can also function with 'this vile world', meaning (that I am fled from) 'this vile world, dwelling with the vilest worms' which subversively defends his position by conceding its melancholy 'truth'. If this world belongs to the 'vilest worms', then the poet who seeks to defend its value is estranged and without purpose, which justifies his desire to be forgotten.

At the beginning of the second quatrain the 'poet's' address moves into an ambiguous mood, and remains in this mood until the end of the sonnet. Superficially, this change is related to the delicacy of feeling that is (ironically) assumed to exist between them, and which may be thought to set them apart from the 'vile' world. So, the 'poet' tactfully submits himself to the possibility that 'this line' *might* be read, and his tact is complemented by a preference for being forgotten over causing the pain of loss by being remembered. The tortuous perversity of this sentiment would only be lost on a reader without a sense of humour. A normal response to loss of this kind is not to forget but to remember, even though the memory is painful; and, following Sonnet 73, this poem combines satire upon the 'poet' with a sardonic view of the subject. Thus, while 'this line' is appropriate to the expression of tact, it is equally appropriate to the expression of doubt. In this case there is doubt if the subject would be affected in any way by the death of his friend, and so the 'poet' can be seen as decorously neutralizing this indifference in advance, by forbidding mourning. It should also be observed that the octave follows the pattern established in the opening line, in that line 8 represents a false ending, as the idea to which it belongs is not fully realized until the completion of the poem as a whole. In this respect, the deceptive play of attitudes upon which the meaning of the poem is constructed depends upon a suspension of its primary sense.

Bearing in mind the use that is made of this kind of ambiguity in the structure of Sonnet 71, the sestet takes the form of a single, unbroken utterance that ties itself to the octave by reiteration of the main idea, and resolves it by disclosing the reason behind this idea. In the complex irony with which it uses mood, delicacy of feeling is allowed to descend into artifice, in the gestural '(I say)' and '(perhaps)' of lines 9 and 10 (in the former, removing

the brackets exposes the pretence that characterizes the speaker's stance in the poem as a whole), while the metrical variation of line 12 draws our attention to a further syntactical double meaning. The immediate sense of this line directs the young man to allow his love to fade at the very moment the poet dies, but 'your love even with my life' can also be read, in accordance with the speaker's ironic posture, as 'your sensitivity which is even-handed in passing judgement upon me (my life)'.

In keeping with this posture, an attitude of self-abnegation in the couplet accompanies the reason for this command. Here 'the wise world' is a variant of 'this vile world' and its 'vilest worms', and is constituted by their knowing circle of acquaintances, who may find something to ridicule in the subject's grief for his friend. This revises the sense of 'give warning to the world', in so far as the 'poet' now represents himself as a sacrifice to what is worthy in their relationship, and, in the same spirit, revises the sense of line 8, as it is not only grief that should 'make you woe' but also public humiliation. That the 'poet' is making this sacrifice as a matter of moral necessity is suggested in his reference to 'my poor name' (line 11); there can be no greater imperative than the need for his noble friend to be rescued from ignominy. By the end, however, the nobility of the subject has been turned inside out. The privilege dictated by social convention is allowed to surface from within the elaborate representation of character and sensibility which gives the sonnet its subversive tone.

The ultimate reason for the 'poet's' constraint upon his friend, forbidding mourning, is only clearly revealed in the sonnet that follows in the series (72), but this reason is indicated allusively in the couplet, and it is essential in holding together the meaning of this sonnet. Hence, a source of the ridicule from which the poet must protect his friend is suggested in the use of the 'moan'. Words like moan and groan can allude to sexual pleasure in Shakespeare, and so the couplet can be read as, 'those who are in the know about us will hear the sound of love-making in your moan of grief, and laugh at its absurdity'. This meaning is confirmed in the phrase 'mock you with me' which can be taken as 'you with me' in a physical sense, while 'mock' can mean both to make fun of somebody and to mimic their actions, in this case their sexual activity.

There is also a sense to the closing line that can only be fully substantiated by our reading of Sonnet 72. However, some intimation of it can be found in a satirical exaggeration of the 'poet's' nearness to death, both in this poem and in Sonnet 73. For the sexual implication in 'after I am gone' makes it appear that the participation of the 'poet' is somewhat too brief for his friend's

liking, so 'mock you with me after I have gone' can be read as, 'act out your annoyance with me at the moment when I have had my pleasure and lost interest'. In this, the idea of mocking 'you with me' acquires an even richer comic potential, while the idea that the poet is too old for it becomes a key to the young man's attitudes to ageing in these four sonnets. This reading of the couplet revises some of the fundamental images. Now we can see the 'vilest worms' as including the young man himself for subjecting the 'poet' to ridicule, especially by making too much of his age. This is implied in the way that everything hinges, in 'this vile world', upon how things are made to appear. We also feel more vividly the irony that is intended in lines 7–8, and in 'your love even with my life' in line 12. The affectation of noble self-sacrifice turns out to be an elaborate exposure of the young man's betrayal of the 'poet' and his high ideals.

The 'poet's' self-parody in Sonnet 71 exposes his poetic enterprise in a way that is central to the unfolding of the sequence as a whole. Against the elevated purpose of immortalizing the nobility of the subject, actual experience of the person has transformed the poetry into a tortured exploration of the relations that play beneath the surface of this convention and its illusions of spiritual grandeur. This replaces the uncertainties conveyed by the opposition of personae in earlier poems in the sequence. Hence the parody of the humanist mentor, in Sonnet 73, can be seen as a preparation for the concentration of insight upon these matters in 71.

What we have learned about the relationship between the two men in Sonnet 71 is reflected immediately in the sardonic swing with which the next poem opens.

Sonnet 72
O, lest the world should task you to recite
What merit lived in me that you should love
After my death (dear love) forget me quite,
For you in me can nothing worthy prove;
Unless you would devise some virtuous lie,
To do more for me than mine own desert,
And hang more praise upon deceasèd I
Than niggard truth would willingly impart.
O, lest your true love may seem false in this,
That you for love speak well of me untrue,
My name be buried where my body is,
And live no more to shame nor me, nor you.

For I am shamed by that which I bring forth,
And so should you, to love things nothing worth.

Though the humanist mentor and love poet are recalled in the attitudes and language of this sonnet, they are not parodied, as in Sonnets 73 and 71. Rather they appear as a muted echo of their original purposes, now serving a violently transfigured passion in the disillusioned 'poet's' irony, which is now of labyrinthine complexity. This poem is clearly divided so that the mentor's voice is predominant in the octave and the voice of the idealistic love poet is predominant in the sestet; this accords with the structure of the verse, in which the basic thought is turned over in the former, leading to a decision based on underlying feeling in the latter. Thus, in the opening lines, an echo of the mentor as schoolmaster is present in the words that are chosen for how the world might question the subject about his attachment to the 'poet'. But here it is the world that uses the language of the classroom, 'merit' being suited to its assimilative purposes, while 'recite' describes the mechanical reproduction of ideas that have already been thought out. In its self-assured, imperious way, the 'world' has already decided what interest the subject takes in the 'poet', and its tasking the young man in this connection can only be seen as a way of 'mocking' him.

A sense of moral inadequacy, also reflecting the 'poet's' disappointment, is accentuated in the syntactical double meaning of 'you should love', which can be applied both to the merit and to 'me', the latter sense suggesting that you should love but do not. The chiming of 'dear love', in line 3, against 'me that you should love' only serves to amplify the expression of loss, before a deceptive equilibrium is produced in line 4. Here the mentor is present in the language of mathematical equation ('you in me can nothing worthy prove') and suggests an attitude of resignation. But considering the 'poet's' feigned deference to the judgement of his friend, the line changes in meaning from 'there is nothing worthy to be found in me' to 'you, specifically, find nothing worthy in me'. In accepting this view of himself, the 'poet' also indicates more explicitly what it is that the 'wise world' will mock, for there is a coarse physical intention in the phrase 'you in me'. Therefore, saying that this 'can nothing worthy prove' implies that you should 'forget me quite' because, in your view, this is my only merit. The point is made all the more forcefully if we rectify the inversion and register the line as also saying you in me proves nothing to be worthy, implying that the value of this behaviour is less than nothing (or morally unworthy).

The spirit of the mentor continues to be felt in the second quatrain, where the opening statement is qualified by the facetious proposal of a psuedo-scientific reinterpretation of their behaviour. In its direct and obvious sense this completion of the sentence presents the 'poet' as seeing himself at his friend's estimation, and suggesting that his name might be rescued by an invention ('some virtuous lie') which, while being false, would be a 'virtuous' gesture of magnanimity. However, this meaning is no more than a thin superficial layer for a dense interplay of ideas, in which the dramatic circumstances behind the poem are interwoven with a subtle enquiry into their moral significance. Thus, the air of scientific experiment is invoked in the secondary meaning of 'virtuous lie', for in the context of this work 'lie' inevitably suggests a sexual embrace, the morally impossible challenge, therefore, being to represent their embrace in such a way as to make it seem virtuous. The contradiction in this whimsical idea is even plainer when we read 'virtuous lie' not simply as a lie that is virtuous, but also as a lie about virtue, and what can be considered virtuous. Behind this obsequious plea, the 'poet' insinuates that the subject is given to bending and distorting our sense of what is virtuous to serve his own ends.

Vigorous developments upon this line of thought emerge in lines 7–8, where the virtuous lie in question is comically portrayed as heroic action. The expression 'niggard truth' recalls the mentor's use of 'niggarding', in Sonnet 1, as a schoolyard term for masturbation, and other forms of sexual pleasure, and so 'niggard truth' refers to the values that apply to behaviour of this kind. Hence, in line 7, the 'poet' 'imagines' himself as a hero of sexual enterprise, exhausted to the point of death by his endeavours and honoured with wreaths, the pathos of his sacrifice being accentuated by a minor tampering with the grammar ('upon deceased I'). Moreover, in these two lines the noble sentiment is lightly compromised by three allusions to the male part, in 'hang more praise' and 'willingly impart' (hang, will and part). In the guise of mentor, the 'poet' conforms to the attitudes and behaviour of the subject while satirizing their situation.

In the sestet the guise of love poet acts as an instrument for satire. So, in its immediate sense, the sonnet continues by feigning, in the eloquent language of love poetry, a withdrawal of the optimistic qualification in the second quatrain. Here the affectation of care and sensitivity is quite transparent, and this is in keeping with the facetious employment of the mentor's voice in the octave. Hence 'your true love may seem false in this', where 'true love' refers both to the 'poet' as the object of love and to the young man's feeling for him, is unduly fastidious – the response of the world to this 'virtuous lie'

is known in advance and leaves no room for uncertainty. Similarly, in line 10, the artificial syntax which makes 'untrue' describe both the subject's defence of the 'poet' and the 'poet' himself ('me') ties the unworthiness of the latter to the magnanimity of the subject, and this quatrain responds by returning the favour. Therefore, the complete oblivion of the 'poet' would protect the subject from humiliation, or 'shame', which might ensue from their association.

As in the use of the mentor's voice, this use of love poetry is not intended simply as parody, it reveals the distortion and betrayal of values upon which their relationship has been established. So, as in the octave, the language of care and solicitude contains another perspective, and this is where the 'poet' says what is intended. Accordingly, 'your true love may seem false in this' echoes the secondary meaning that has been traced for the octave, with particular emphasis in the second quatrain. The interpretation of virtue to serve one's own ends can here be taken as an illustration of the debasement of 'true love'. Moreover, the elevated tone of line 10 is subverted when we read 'for love' not as 'out of love', but 'for the love of it' (synonymously with 'for the fun of it'), and 'well' as gestural, following Sonnet 73. Thus, the line can be read, 'That you for love speak, well, of me untrue', and mean, 'frankly, you make up stories about me, just for the fun of it'. Here 'well' at once feigns cautious hesitancy, knowingness and weary resignation. This is a clear echo of the suggestion already noted in the discussion of Sonnet 71, that the 'poet' is a victim of rumour and gossip at the hands of his subject. In response to this, the next line resonates with particular severity, for 'my name be buried where my body is' implies 'my name' as opposed to 'your penis'. Behind the shame of public disgrace is the defilement of higher values like mutual respect and honour, and this is a sufficient reason to welcome oblivion.

The same extended double meaning can be seen in the couplet. On the surface, the 'poet' admits to being shamed by the confession of his own worthlessness, and casts the same shadow over the subject by charging him with the shame of loving someone who is worthless. This can be seen as acquiescing to the world's perception of them, and is related to other meanings in this sonnet. In connection, therefore, with the theme of deviant sexuality, 'that which I bring forth' alludes to the 'nothing' that issues from sexual behaviour which is disconnected from its natural purpose, and the last line admonishes the subject for loving a form of behaviour that is seen as worthless. However, more profoundly for the aims of the sequence as a whole, the 'poet' is shamed by this confession, in which he concedes defeat. The defilement of mutual respect and honour in these circumstances can only represent the annihilation of his dream. Hence the phrase 'that which I bring forth' refers

not simply to his confession in this particular poem, but also to the sequence itself, which has been constructed on illusory foundations. It may be seen, moreover, as an impulsive reaction to this moment of awareness, that 'to love things nothing worth' implicitly ascribes to the subject a desire to wreck and destroy things which are of genuine value, perhaps as a consequence of his immersion in what is worthless.

Sonnet 74
But be contented when that fell arrest
Without all bail shall carry me away;
My life hath in this line some interest,
Which for memorial still with thee shall stay.
When thou reviewest this, thou dost review
The very part was consecrate to thee.
The earth can have but earth, which is his due;
My spirit is thine, the better part of me.
So then thou hast but lost the dregs of life,
The prey of worms, my body being dead,
The coward conquest of a wretch's knife,
Too base of thee to be rememberèd.
The worth of that, is that which it contains,
And that is this, and this with thee remains.

Here the artifice and play-acting of the other sonnets in this series are replaced by a plain and devotional language which is both penitential and consolatory. The measured character of the verse, with its rhythmic stability and balancing of phrases and sentences, gives an air of candour to the speech, and complements its progression from one considered judgement to the next. And the couplet mimics a biblical play upon abstract nouns so as to reflect the authority and finality of such language, and so relaxes the tense gravity of its preceding lines.

However, as we respond to the language of the poem we are soon aware of characteristic ambiguities. In the opening quatrain the 'poet' contradicts his own note of censure at the close of Sonnet 72, and the plea in that poem for an oblivion in which he is no longer of any significance to the subject. At the same time the reassuring tone is qualified by a feeling of dissonance in 'fell arrest' and 'without all bail', which might suggest a hidden purpose. It has already been noted that this sonnet is linked to 72 by images of punishment, and we can see why he might have strong reason to feel that these images are

appropriate. Hence, the idea of the fall is suggested by 'fell', while 'bail' invokes 'bale' and implies that he is happy to part with 'this vile world'. In line 3, 'this line' refers both to the sonnet which he is writing, a source of consolation to the friend, and to the 'line of thought' that runs through this series of poems and through the sequence as a whole. There is therefore a connection to the ideas of death and remembrance in Sonnets 73, 71 and 72 which creates a sense of internal contradiction between the consoling 'memorial' and the desire to be forgotten. We can also see the second quatrain as a change of perspective in which this contradiction is intensified by a conventional contrast between body and spirit. By giving emphasis to what he bequeaths to his friend, the 'poet' magnifies the sense of what has been exposed to harm, and this is enhanced by the use of 'consecrate' and 'spirit'.

In so far as the speaker, in Sonnet 74, expresses his devotion to the subject, unguardedly placing his own spirit at the heart of his address, the element of self-exposure is not merely incidental, it is deliberately implicit in the attitude that he assumes. Thus the sestet, in expanding upon the proverbial reflection in lines 7–8, completes his argument in the third quatrain by denigrating the body in order to affirm the spirit in the couplet, and the spirit is magnanimously identified with 'this' (the sonnets, which are nominally composed in honour of the friend). Here the plainness and gravity of the address give expression to a fragile sincerity in which the 'poet' is almost pathetically exposed to the risk of being scorned and rejected. Familiar religious language is continued in the imagery and symbolism of line 11, evoking the figure of death and his scythe ('a wretch's knife' being akin to 'his scythe and crookèd knife' in the couplet of Sonnet 100). Thus 'coward conquest' both reflects the poet's denigration of the body and extends this attitude to death itself, as its conquest is only a triumph over the body. This language, combined with repetitive phrases, is abruptly relieved in the couplet, where the witty play of sound with abstract nouns and rhyming verbs has the effect of suddenly reversing the tone of the preceding lines, and suggests that there may be a sense in which the 'poet' is rather more robust.

When, therefore, we see how extended double meaning works in this poem we are able to appreciate the irony within its devotional tone. In this sonnet, the 'poet' conveys his reaction to the catastrophe that has been brought upon his deepest aspirations by the actions of his friend, and it is violently dramatized by an inner contradiction between the religious genre of the poem and what is concealed in its language. Appropriately, the violence is reflected even in the polysemous language, as we can see in the play on 'contented' and 'fell arrest' in the first line. In the former, behind its consolatory intention, the

'poet' invites the subject to have the 'content' of his actions revealed by the poems in this series, and especially in this poem (this is clear in a reading of the opening quatrain as a continuous unfolding of the 'poet's' thought), while behind the legal sense of arrest, 'fell arrest' alludes to the fall, to represent death as the ultimate point of rest in the 'poet's' own fall from grace, and evokes the idea of divine retribution.

The collapse of his noble project is implicit in his fall, as the greater his ambition to achieve something of lasting spiritual value the more devastating his 'fell arrest'. This makes it clear why 'bale' is concealed within 'bail' in the second line, since the end of his life can only be seen as a consoling end to the anguish of disillusionment and moral failure. A desire, moreover, to retaliate against the subject is pursued in the effect of 'in this line' (referring now to the content of his actions) upon 'memorial still with thee shall stay'. While a memorial is obviously an object or monument by which somebody is remembered, it can also be understood, more literally, as an aid to the memory, and echoes of 'fell arrest' in 'still' create the sense of a memory that is fixed and immutable. So, whenever the subject returns to this memorial he will be faced by the same portrayal of his actions and its moral significance.

The nakedness of the second quatrain is now the exposure of an open wound. In the repetition of 'review' the 'poet' betrays his anxiety that this poem should be read and re-read by the friend until its 'message' is fully absorbed. Another repetition, that of 'part', is equally significant, for line 6 identifies the spirit of the poet with his dedicated toil in creating the work 'that was consecrate to thee', and the reiteration of this thought in line 8 ('My spirit is thine') is disowned in the succeeding phrase by a play on 'part'. Behind the surface reading of 'the better part of me' the 'poet' is making a characteristically flexible use of the preposition and saying, it is better that you part from me. This alludes to his damaged spirit, as something that is no longer worth keeping, and the sestet now becomes an elaborate clarification of this closing line in the octave. Contrary to its primary sense, the 'dregs of life' refers to the 'poet's' ruined spirit, and lines 10–11 make the most telling reference in the series to the events that have caused its ruin.

In this connection, the clause and phrases of the third quatrain unfold the truth in a measured process of disclosure, at the end of which the intention of the images becomes clear. The double meaning in 'prey of worms' employs a conventional phallic allusion that can be found elsewhere in Shakespeare, and this affects the meaning of the phrase 'my body being dead'. Such a reading is justified by the different senses that can be given to 'coward conquest' and 'wretch's knife', for the latter can be seen as a further reference to the penis,

a 'weapon' that any wretch can own, in contrast with the expensive dagger which would also be possessed by the subject. This image gives him the air of a well-born cut-throat, and in doing so unites the ideas of sexual and coward conquest; while 'coward' also describes the behaviour of the victim, who, by acting as a lifeless and uninvolved body ('my body being dead'), has allowed himself to be the prey of 'vilest worms'. This analysis also provides us with an explication of the initial sense of these lines. Death's conquest is cowardly, and therefore morally wretched, because he kills without taking any personal risk. Furthermore, his scythe is a 'wretch's knife' in being blunt and inefficient, like the knives of the poor, when compared with the knife that is used by the living upon the living.

In the closing line of the third quatrain, 'too base of thee' refers not only to the 'poet's' body (and to his spirit) but also to the 'coward conquest', implying, with some irony, that this action is too negligible to be remembered. This is extended in the double meaning of 'base', for while this conquest is not too base for the subject to perform, it is too base to be included in a memorial to him, and must therefore be regarded as too insignificant to be remembered. The line bitterly alludes to a general disposition in 'this vile world' in favour of the socially distinguished, which condones their vile behaviour. The bitterness is made all the more acute for the 'poet' by the fact that this sonnet belongs to a project which exemplifies the general disposition in question, having evolved into a sequence of love poems intended to immortalize an unworthy subject. So, in the couplet, the important underlying ideas of the poem coalesce in the form of a conclusion to both this sonnet and the series of Sonnets 71–74. 'The worth of that' refers both to the body, which is of value only in so far as it contains the spirit, and to the 'coward conquest', which has value strictly in accordance with the moral content of an action, and not as determined by social convention. In saying so, the 'poet' implicitly disengages himself from the purpose of the sequence as it has been understood, and the closing line ('that is this') refers both to the damaged spirit of the 'poet' and the moral worth of the young man as it is revealed by the poem. The significance of the whole sequence lies not in the immortalization of the subject, but in 'what it contains', namely the insight into life that has emerged from its failures. In a poem in which reiteration is used to impress its thought upon the recipient, 'this with thee remains' acts as a transfigured repetition of the opening quatrain. It is a memorial in the sense of 'that yourself' (Sonnet 55), and the sceptic's 'this gives life to thee' in the couplet of Sonnet 18.

Finally, I should make an important qualification to this discussion of Sonnet 74. For the psychological portrayal of the 'poet' would be grossly

simplified if we were to read this work as an exercise in irony, in which the preliminary sense of the verse were no more than a simulation embodying a darker truth. This poem is not a parody of a memorial, which simply invites the reader to see through its surface to a deeper intention. Rather, the strength of the lines in their preliminary sense conveys the strength of the 'poet's' dedication to his 'passion', even when the project is collapsing around him. This is essential to Shakespeare's dramatization of a poet's attempt to represent his experience. Here, the 'poet's' elegy for his loss in Sonnet 73 has become a complex lament, his poetic ambition being penetrated, in the polysemous language of the writing, by allusion to the act of penetration that finally leaves his project in ruins.

In this respect our analysis reveals more clearly the nature of this sequence of four sonnets. The first in the sequence, 73, mockingly attributes to the young man a view of the 'poet' as old to the point of extinction, and makes this an elegy for the loss of an impassioned relationship. In 71, the conceit of death's imminence for the 'poet' is developed by a reflection upon the effect of his demise upon his friend, which leads, via the couplet, into a reflection, in 72, upon its effect upon the world to which they belong. Thus, it is not difficult to see a logical development in the sequence for which the severity of 74, a crowning memorial to the young man, represents an ultimate expression of disillusionment. For here the 'poet' allows the language of his poetry, and its internal violence, to reflect the violence that has been done to his love for its subject, and to the project in which each plays a part.

In this chapter I have shown how Shakespeare's poetry can be seen as a profound representation of reflective life in action. By analysing sonnets from four different phases in the sequence 1–126, I have been able to indicate the development of his thought in the dramatization of a poet's attempt to represent experience. Whereas Sophocles uses an opposition of the genres of tragedy and the riddle in *Oedipus*, and this opposition determines the central characterization and how it is related to the action, Shakespeare relies upon the invention of multiple personae, or 'voices' and trains of thought within a persona, and a variety of genres that are directly related to the creation of personae. Because these genres are life-defining forms through which we acquire an understanding of ourselves they constitute the raw material of the work. They are given expression and meaning by the use of polysemous language, so that the writing itself, and not simply what it describes, generates the substance of this portrayal of life.