

Do the final couplets in Shakespeare's sonnets affirm or deny the contentions of the three preceding quatrains?

Shakespeare's sonnets have an originality in structure. He perfected the Surrey form of the sonnet. His sonnet is divided into three quatrains with a concluding, often epigrammatic couplet. The rhyme scheme in general is abab cdcd efef gg.

Shakespeare's sonnet pattern permits logical exposition with its necessary contrast and opposition ending with a summary of his arguments in the rhyming couplet.

Sometimes the couplet is weak but the strong couplet recapitulates and extends the previous thoughts of the poet. Generally, the final couplet affirms the arguments developed in the three quatrains.

In the sonnet, *That time of year thou mayst in me behold*, three powerfully wrought images of ageing and decay of the poet himself, are proposed in the three quatrains, counterpointed by a dramatic reversal in the final couplet. The basic purpose of the poet is to show his decrepitude, old age and nearness to death and for this, the quatrains of his sonnets provide a ready to project images through them. In the initial quatrain, the poet compares the present state of his life to the autumn of nature, which is a season of sadness and desolation preluding chill winter. The use of the word 'mayst' suggests that if his friend has the eye to see the poet's present state of life, he will behold that the poet has fallen into the 'sear', 'yellow' leaf of his life. Shakespeare creates an exclusive picture of autumn, where leaves wither away, turn yellow and fall off, leaving only a few hanging on the boughs. Shakespeare experiments with a complex metaphor of "Bare ruin'd choirs". The poet compares the trees at the end of autumn to 'ruin'd choirs'. The poet calls forth a buried allusion to the ruins of chapels and monasteries that were suppressed by Henry VIII over the period of 1535-39. In the second quatrain, the poet compares himself to twilight, which is succeeded by dark night. As the twilight goes on deepening, the sunlight fades in western sky and death's second self, the black night, conceived as a pre-figuration of death, "seals up all in rest". In the third quatrain, Shakespeare uses the imagery of smouldering ember. When the