

Topic: Imagery in Shakespearean Sonnets

The theme of Shakespearean sonnets is mainly love and friendship. Love is the running passion all through his sonnets. The best estimation of the sonnets, as to their literary value, will probably be an analysis of the machinery of imagery employed in the sonnets. Imagery as a whole is the best indication of poetic sensibility and this sensibility springs out from his sonnets, which contain precise, graphic images of all that matters in the glorification of Shakespeare's love theme. Shakespeare's sonnets are not merely idealistic appraisals of love, but also grand specimens of art. The Elizabethan imagery is basically emblematic. Marlow, Spencer, Lyly all have a stock-in-trade of images which are emblems of the ideal. Rose stands emblematic of youth, Helen of beauty, Diana of purity. Shakespeare's sonnets are so conceived with images that they become caskets enclosing the finest pearls of Elizabethan poetry. Shakespeare is found to bear the characteristic English love for nature in an abundant measure. Of course, he is no philosopher of nature like Wordsworth, but of course, he is a sensuous painter of Nature. The poet in him perceives and presents the world of nature in all its exuberance. In the Sonnet 18, *Shall I compare thee to a summer's day*, Shakespeare compares his friend's youth and beauty to that of a summer's day, but finds the analogy inadequate. Shakespeare brings out the effects of the tide of time on the natural objects. The rough winds destroy the fair buds of 'May' before they fully blossom. Here the Rose metaphor is deftly humanized. The timespan of "summer's lease" is "too short". Shakespeare here has employed a legal metaphor which recurred in *Macbeth*: "But in them nature's lease is not eternal". Here the evanescence of summer is hinted at, in contrast to his friend's intransient beauty. His friend's beauty is a model of Platonic Archetypal beauty. 'the eye of heaven', a commonplace metaphor for sun, is sometimes 'too hot' but sometimes its golden splendor is dimmed by the shadowy cloud. Sooner or later every 'fair' thing of beauty falls away from its beauty, either accidentally or gradually and inevitably by natural course. The poet contrasts the 'eternal summer', a transferred epithet for his friend's unfading beauty, to the fading