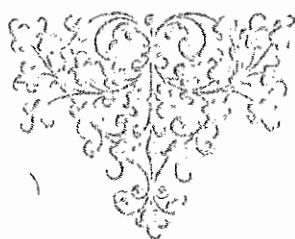




The Art of
SHAKESPEARE'S
SONNETS



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They that have pow'r to hurt, and will do none,
 That doe not do the thing, they most do shewe,
 Who moneg others, are themselves as stone,
 Unmoued, cold, and to temptation slow:
 They rightly do inherit heauens graces,
 And husband natures ritches from expence,
 They are the Lords and owners of their faces;
 Others, but stewards of their excellence:
 The foriners flowre is to the former sweet,
 Though to it selfe, it onely liue and die,
 But if that flowre with base infection meete,
 The basest weed out-braues his dignity:
 For sweetest things turne sourest by their deedes,
 Lillies that fester, smell far worse then weeds.



They that have pow'r to hurt, and will do none,
 That do not do the thing they most do show,
 Who, moving others, are themselves as stone,
 Unmoved, cold, and to temptation slow—
 They rightly do inherit heaven's graces,
 And husband nature's riches from expense;
 They are the lords and owners of their faces,
 Others but stewards of their excellence.
 The summer's flow'r is to the summer sweet,
 Though to itself it only live and die,
 But if that flow'r with base infection meet,
 The basest weed outbraves his dignity:
 For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds;
 Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.

THIS powerful and much-commented-upon poem, turning oddly from *pow'r* to *flow'r* (lines 1, 2), is remarkable for its structural experiment, by which Shakespeare "splits" the couplet into two separate lines, each of which gives closure to a different segment of the poem. Line 13 sums up the human octave of *pow'r*, which turns on the word *do* and its derivative *deeds*; line 14 sums up the following vegetative quarrain of *flow'r*, which turns on a botanical hierarchy of *weeds* and their vegetative superiors (in general, *flowers*, specifically *lilies*). The sonnet thus contains two mini-poems, represented by the several elements of the Couplet. The: *do* [*deeds*] and *thing* [-s] for the first, human mini-poem; *weed* [-s] for the second, vegetative one; and *sweet*[-est] as the ambiguous Couplet Tie, belonging to both mini-poems, linking people and flowers.

Octave: Social Realm (*pow'r*) Q₃: Vegetable Kingdom (*flow'r*)
 line 1: *pow'r*, *do* line 9: *flow'r*, *sweet*
 line 2: *do*, *do*, *thing*, *do* line 11: *flow'r*
 line 5: *do* line 12: *weed* ↓
 ½ Couplet: Social Realm ½ Couplet: Vegetable Kingdom
 line 13: *sweetest things* turn sourest line 14: *lilies* that fester smell far worse than *weeds*
 by their *deeds*

This is, so far as I can tell, the only experiment with a split couplet in the sequence. It will be seen that *sweet* [*sweetest*] is the only word that "crosses" from the "flower side" (right, line 9) to the "power side" (left, line 13), though *things* is so vague it too belongs implicitly to both.

The split couplet, and the remarkable and unforeseen substitution in Q₃ of the vegetable kingdom for the social realm described in the octave, suggest something intractable and insoluble about the argument as it is first formulated. Although the ideal of mutuality is the one that informs the sonnets, *mutual render*, *only me for thee* (125), an aristocratic social order is based not upon mutuality but upon a system of asymmetrical relations. If one expects *mutual render* from an aristocrat, one will be disap-

pointed. An aristocrat takes, but does not give. Should we resent this? After all, the speaker muses, there are many things in the *natural* order from which we expect no consideration of our wishes or needs—e.g., a flower. We benefit from the summer flower's mere existence, and we do not reproach it for its self-directed life. Perhaps (the speaker thinks) that is how he should regard the aristocratic young man: as a beautiful object, indifferent to others, in whose presence the lover should bask without any expectation of its paying attention to him.

Some such train of "logic" lies behind the poem, which is, like 129, an impersonal sonnet. The mask of impersonality is always assumed for a reason—at least in a sequence so determined to use personal pronouns throughout. Because the young man's ill *deeds* are as yet concealed (they will erupt as *vices* in 95), he seems on the surface irreproachable. Therefore, the first generalized description of people resembling him can offer only the reproach of the asymmetrical absence of mutuality: moving others, they are themselves unmoved; they are lords, others but stewards. The description can also point out a discrepancy between appearance and action: they *do not do the thing they most do show*. Linked to 93 by *face* and *show* and *sweet, heaven, husband, and live*, 94 puts these words into question afresh.

The reproach implicit in the simile of *some* and the adjective *cold* yields to the kinder metaphor of the *flower* by a process of thought in the speaker not overtly revealed. The suspicion of vice in the young man by others, who to his *fair flower* add the *rare smell of weeds* (69), recurs here, but the metaphor of the flower is put to different use. The rhyme *deeds/weeds* has been revived from 69, but is here more deliberately organized. The rapid degeneracy of *flower*; *fester, smell*, and *weeds* proves that the qualification *to temptation slow* is disbelieved even as it is uttered.

The mixed feelings toward the unnamed powerful *they* that have power to hurt press for resolution. Are they good (they are apparently favored by heaven and responsible to nature, as well as sparing of their power) or are they bad (in their deceptive appearance, their coldness, and their immobility)? Balked on this level, the speaker attempts to shift the venue of description, and brings forward a new hypothesis: How would I feel (speculates the speaker) if he really *were* (as I have already named him in 69) a *flower*? By this move, the speaker makes a bid to take metaphor as the literal truth. If the young man *is* a flower, then how would one feel about his indifference?

Most of the putatively admirable qualities mentioned in the octave—discretion in the exercise of power, resistance to temptation, frugal-

ity in the expenditure of nature's riches—drop away, in Q₃, as irrelevant. The only qualities persisting into the quatrain of the flower are heaven's graces and self-possession, proving those to be the crucial qualities the speaker cannot bear to be without. The flower, wholly the owner of its face, living and dying only to itself, is nonetheless a balm to those moved *others* (here generalized into the season, the *summer*) surrounding it.

The speaker's powerful set of mixed responses to the beautiful but indifferent young man has led to a self-protective retreat from the social to the vegetative realm—to the invention of the flower and its adoring summer. But contaminating that idyllic scene—drawn from the lilies of the field of Jesus' parable—is the repressed suspicion of 93, that the infection of the flower has already taken place. By phrasing this intuition as a hypothesis ("But if that flower"), the speaker attempts to preserve his sweet flower, and to blame, in the event his suspicions prove true, the flower's corruption on a meeting with *base infection*, the villain of the piece. The speaker admits that he himself is a *base weed* by comparison to his aloof *flower*; but even if he should be the *basest* weed, he would be higher in the order of vegetation than an *infected* flower. There is a retort to the young man here embedded in the word *outrages*: "You have in the past scorned me (perhaps defensibly); but if you have now sinned, your sweetness is lost, and I outrank you in dignity." The double superlatives predicated of *things* (*sweetest, sourest*) act out the proverbial corruption of the best into the worst, and connect semantically and phonetically the *sour* (formerly *sweet*) *flower* to the *pow'r* of the octave. The concluding proverb revealingly leaves out any mention at all of *base infection*: lilies can *fester* (in the sense of "decay") all by themselves. The retaliatory overturning of normal vegetative hierarchy in the last line is connected to *outrages* in Q₃, while the lingering look at *deeds* in the penultimate line connects its *sweetest things*—a last nostalgia—to the undone "shown" *thing* which now—unspecified—must have been *done*. (Cf. *Othello*, to "do the deed of darkness.")

The shift from *pow'r* to the alternate venue of flower-metaphor has been proved unavailing: both "lines of thought," the social one and the flower one, have ended up in the same place, a place where no excuses for the young man persist. By *deeds, things* have become *sour*; and festering flowers *smell worse* than the weeds around them. With the failure of 94's hopeful diversion into organic metaphor, the accusations suppressed in 93 and 94 can burst out in full cry in 95: *O what a mansion have those vices got / Which for their habitation chose out thee!* The fiction of the external villain that *chose out* and corrupted the young man is hard to maintain, but still

clings in 95. The sternness of tone in 94—a tone not of infatuation but of social reproof and moral authority—grows in the sequence from its origins in such poems as 66 through its exertions in 94 on to such famous sonnets as 116, 124, and 129.

DEFECTIVE KEY WORD: DO [DEEDS] (missing in Q₃, the flower quatrain)

Couplet Tie: do [*deeds*] (1, 2, 2, 2, 5, 13)

thing [-s] (2, 13)

sweet [-est] (9, 13)

weed [-s] (12, 14)

95

How sweet and lovely dost thou make the shame,
Which like a canker in the fragrant Rose,
Doth spot the beauty of thy budding name?
Oh in what sweets dost thou thy sinnes inclose!
That tongue that tells the story of thy daies,
(Making lascivious comments on thy sport)
Cannot dispraise, but in a kinde of praise,
Naming thy name, blesses an ill report.
Oh what a mansion have those vices got,
Which for their habitation chose out thee,
Where beauties vaile doth couer euery blot,
And all things turnes to faire, that eyes can see!
Take heed (deare heart) of this large priuiledge,
The hardest knife ill vs'd doth loofe his edge.

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Where beauty's veil doth cover every blot,
And all things turnes to fair that eyes can see!
Take heed (dear heart) of this large privilege:
The hardest knife ill used doth lose his edge.

WHo euer hath her wish, thou hast thy *Will*,
 And *Will* too boote, and *Will* in ouer-plus,
 More then enough am I that vexe thee still,
 To thy sweet will making addition thus,
 Wilt thou whose will is large and spacious,
 Not once vouchsafe to hide my will in thine,
 Shall will in others seeme right gracious,
 And in my will no faire acceptance shine:
 The sea all water, yet receiues raine still,
 And in abundance addeth to his store,
 So thou beeing rich in *Will* adde to thy *Will*,
 One will of mine to make thy large *Will* more.
 Let no vnkinde, no faire beseechers kill,
 Thinke all but one, and me in that one *Will*.



Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy Will,
 And Will to boot, and Will in overplus;
 More than enough am I that vex thee still,
 To thy sweet will making addition thus.
 Wilt thou, whose will is large and spacious,
 Not once vouchsafe to hide my will in thine?
 Shall will in others seem right gracious,
 And in my will no fair acceptance shine?
 The sea, all water, yet receives rain still,
 And in abundance addeth to his store;
 So thou being rich in Will add to thy Will
 One will of mine to make thy large Will more.
 Let no unkind, no fair beseechers kill;
 Think all but one, and me in that one Will.

The superfluity of *-ill* in the rhyme is matched by the superfluity of the sound *-ous*, as both Q₁ and Q₂ rhyme in that sound (*-plus, thus, spacious, gracious*), which, together with their identical rhymes in *-ill* makes them seem a double-quatrain parody of "overplus." Q₂ is composed of two ironic rhetorical questions, one mirroring the ontological grandeur of the addressee, the other her generous benevolence toward others. The Q₃ exemplum of the sea reinforces them both, the first by *the sea, all water* (ontology), the second by *receives ruin* (which is connected by alliteration to line 11's *rich*). The conclusion of Q₃, *So thou*, repeats the pattern of the exemplum: she is ontologically *rich in Will*, and can therefore generously add *one [other] will*, the speaker's own.

The couplet, by a repetition of an earlier word, *fair*, suggests that "fair beseechers" (line 13) deserve "fair acceptance" (line 8). (The parallel is made more noticeable by having both of the twin phrases prefaced by *no*.) But the outcome of the plea is left in abeyance.

The alternatives after all, from the rhymes, are either *kill Will* or *still Will*, and if *still Will* wins, two to one, yet *kill Will* has the last word. (I agree with Evans' support for the reading, "Let no unkind [persons] kill no fair beseechers," as more consonant with the Quarto's punctuation.)

The conspicuous urbanity of this sonnet can be appreciated only when measured against the humiliation of its putative occasion: the lover is refused access by his mistress, though she is freely receiving at least one other sexual partner. The "normal" requests arising in such a condition would be either that she should dismiss the other lover or that she should at least afford her previous lover a turn at her "rich will." However, the speaker's request is neither of these: it is that she can cram him in as well, as lines 11-12 explicitly say. This shocking plea—shocking if it were said less lightly—argues for the view that the speaker is aroused by participating vicariously in the promiscuity of the mistress.

KEY WORD: WILL

Couplet Tie: *will* (passim) 13 times, and perhaps meant to be seen in
with
no fair (8, 13)

THIS perplexing, even maddening sonnet is full of implications of a divided subjectivity teased out, notably, by Joel Fineman in *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye*, where he treats it together with its companion "Will" sonnets. Though it begins in statement, it quickly becomes, from line 5 on, a prayer, in fact, in another poem, lines 5-10 could be addressed to God: *wilt thou . . . not once vouchsafe . . . right gracious . . . acceptance shine . . . in abundance addeeth*. Such echoes of liturgical prayer make the sonnet one of several blasphemously parodying an alternate discourse. Against the discourse of divine generosity Shakespeare sets a mercantile discourse of *addition (addeeth, add)* and surplus (*overplus, rich, large, and more*). Mediating between the "divine" discourse and the mercantile discourse is the discourse of what might seem, as Booth suggests, natural and/or proverbial exemplum: *the sea, all water, yet receives ruin still*. (In fact, the sea, though the speaker's phrasing is proverbial, may come from Ecclesiastes 1:6-7, "All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full.") The second line of the exemplum uses all three discourses: "And [the (proverbial) sea] *in* [divine] *abundance addeeth* [the linking word used in all three discourses] *to his store* [mercantile]."

The difficulties raised by the conjunction of these three discourses suggest the ontological confusions with respect to the woman. Is she an idealized Petrarchan goddess, above good and evil? Is she a natural essence, like the ocean? Or is she a calculating accumulator of goods? The speaker perceives his own superfluity very clearly in Q₃: *More than enough am I that vex thee*. This superfluity is enacted by the cloying superfluity of the rhyme in *-ill*, appearing in Q₁, Q₂, and C, and even more by the superfluity, within this rhyme scheme, of the word *will* as end-rhyme (lines 1, 11, 14) as well as its presence as internal rhyme (2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 12). The presence of thirteen uses of *will* in a fourteen-line poem suggests, perhaps, that the woman, even to the end, has not accepted the speaker's *will* (which, if she had, would add one *will*, making a perfect parity of lines and *will*). (If, on the other hand, one counts the secret "will" in *with*, the parity hoped for is hidden in the poem.) Q₁ and Q₃ use the same rhyme reversed: *Will/will, still/Will*, proposing a happy outcome; but the devastating reversal in C—*kill/Will*—forbodes a worse ending, however much the speaker implores the reverse.