

THEME OF TIME IN SONNETS OF SHAKESPEARE

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The word 'Sonnet' is Derived from the Italian word "Sonetto" meaning a little sound.

Here Sonnet is a poem consisting of 14 lines each line having 10 syllabus. In other words the sonnet is by definition a kind of lyrics, meaning that it is a spontaneous expression of some strong personal feelings or emotion in musical language with rhyming scheme. Though the rhyming is not uniform in all the sonnets.

The sonnets written by Shakespeare's are largely autobiographical and personal in nature and each of them express a feeling or emotion, which is always very strong and often very intense. They have a musical appeal too and there is in fact a wide range of melodic effects in them.

Sonnet is divided into two diction sections called as octave (a group of 8 lines) and a sestet (a group of 6 lines). Rhyming scheme in octave is abba abba and cdecde or cd cd in sestet. The two principal schemes are the Petrarchan (Italian) and Elizabethan (English). Rhyming schemes of Shakespeare or English is abab, cdfd, efef gg.

ORIGIN :- The sonnet are Italian in origin and was imparted to England by Sir Thomas Wyatt and developed by Henry Howard, the earl of surrey but to Shakespeare goes the credit for perfecting the latter form.

Shakespeare wrote a long sonnet sequence consisting of 154 pieces.

These sonnets were written over a number of years and hence do not have the kind of continuity to call a sequence. These sonnets were written during the years 1592 and 1597 or 98 but they were not published until 1609, only 7 years before Shakespeare death. They were not published by Shakespeare himself. The Publisher was man called Thomas Thorpe.

Thomas Thorpe had obtained the manuscripts of the sonnets from one Mr.W .H. but nobody really knows who this Mr.W .H, was Most biographers and critics believe that WH was the young lord

to whom the large majority of these sonnets are addressed In other words Mr. W.H. was the young man who inspired Shakespeare, had developed a great admiration and a profound love.

The sequence of sonnet into.

The sonnets are divided into two groups. Sonnets 1 – 26 and sonnets 127 – 152 .Sonnets of the first group are addressed to a young man who is supposed to be Carl of Southampton and sonnets of the second group are addressed to a woman has come to be known as the dark lady, whose identify again is a matter of some controversy. But most probably this woman was Mary Fitton a maid of honour in some important house hold of the time .The last two sonnets 153 and 154 stand in a class by themselves. These sonnets are a celebration of love because they describe the invincible power of cupid the God of love. They are not directly related to the first group or the second group of the sonnets.

3 or 4 persons who figure prominently in the sonnets:-

What binds the sonnets together is the inter – relationship among the 3 or person, who figure prominently in them. These persons are Earl of Southampton, the young friend to whom the first 1 and 126 sonnets are addressed, the dark lady to whom the next 26 sonnets are addressed with the exception of two sonnets. Contemporary poet not named in the sonnets, who seems to have been a rival of Shakespeare and around whom 10 to 11of the sonnets (76 to 86) centre around the rival poet has generally been thought to be one of the following 1) Christopher Marlow 2) George Chapman 3) Robert Greene. But true identify of none of them is known with any degree of certainty.

Autobiographical and Psychological Nature of Sonnets:

The sonnets are autobiographical !The 'I' of the sonnets does seem to be Shakespeare himself and the sonnets do seem to be record of Shakespeare's own relationship with the various persons who figure in the sonnets. They are a record of Shakespeare's thought meditations mental conflicts, his friendship with Carl of Southampton ,his love for the dark lady painful sense of the Carl of Southampton transfer of his patronage from him to the rival poet and his even more painful sense of the dark lady's transfer of her affections from Shakespeare friend that is Carl of Southampton.

A Couple of Sonnets Containing Some Historical References:-

2 or 3 of these sonnets contains references to certain contemporary events and have therefore some historical importance. For instance sonnet 107 refers to the Spanish invasion of England or the engrave illness, which Queen Elizabeth, the British Sovereign of the time suffered.

The central theme of the sonnets

- 1) Theme of love Carl of Southampton: The central theme of the sonnets taken collectively is Shakespeare's deep love for and his profound administration for the Earl of Southampton. The first 126 sonnets contain many tributes to the Earl of Southampton, they also express his profound attachment to him. Though a few sonnets contain his grievances against his friend.
- 2) Theme of Lust for Dark Lady:- The second theme is also of love that can be called as lust for the dark lady. This can be clearly seen from his second group of sonnets from 127 to 152 in which Shakespeare depicts his adulterous love affair with dark lady. Though his friend and mistress betrays him by falling in love with each other but still Shakespeare love both of them.
- 3) Theme of Friendship: - The theme can be friendship with the Earl of Southampton. Shakespeare's friendship for his friend is a true friendship as he is ready to sacrifice his mistress fir his friend's friendship. He Counsel himself by identifying himself with his friend. In one of the sonnets he had said "Take all my love ,my love ,yea take them all,"
- 4) The fourth important theme, which I am going to deal with in detail is of time. The power of Time.Infact Time may also be regarded as a character in the entire drama, which is enacted before our eyes in the sonnets.

Time is depicted by Shakespeare in his sonnets as a great destroyer time is the greatest enemy of man as well as of nature .Time brings old age decline in energy and strength and death to human beings and Time wrecks the beauty of flowers of meadows and of all the vegetation, Nothing - neither the youth and beauty of human beings nor the hardness of the rocks and the gates of steel can with stand the assaults of Time. This view of Times as a great Wreckers and Destroyer is expressed by Shakespeare in a large number of sonnets. But Shakespeare also finds a way defeating Time in some of the sonnets by claiming that this poetry would be perused and studied by all the coming generations and would therefore last forever thus frustrating the endeavours and efforts of the 'bloody tyrant Time 'to put an end to everything.

Examples from the sonnet regarded the theme of time .His early sonnet 5 namely Those Hours that with 'Gentle Work did Frame. Those hours that with gentle work did frame the lovely gaze where every eye do in dwell will play the tyrants to the very same and that unfair which fairly do the excel for never resting time leads summer on to hideous winter and confounds him there. Sap checked with frost and lusty leaves quilegone beauty o'er - snowed and bareness everywhere.

The poet in this sonnet speak simply of the operating of time. The time that passed gently brings beauty into existence at which everybody fondly would also work as destroyer. Thus time which never stop but keep passing, puts an end to the summer which is followed by the terrible winter. Winter destroy all the vitality inside the trees and vegetation because of the effects of the frosts of winter, so that the strong green leaves of summer disappear slowly is to be seen everywhere.

Sonnet 15 when I consider everything that grows:

When I consider everything that grows holds in perfection but a little moment that this huge stage presenteth nought but shows

Whereon the stars in secret influence comment

When I perceive that men as plant increase cheered and checked even by self –same sky

There are two important ideas in this sonnet, one is that plants spout from the earth, grow and bear beautiful flowers and subsequently they being to decline with their flowers ultimately fading away and being forgotten. Men are like plants, they too make their appearance on the earth ,grow young, achieve the highest development of their faculties and then being to decline enter old age and die only to be forgotten like the flowers.

“And all in war with Time for love of you,

As he takes from you, I engraft you new”

Here in these two lines the poets says that he would himself save his friend from being forgotten after his death. The poet is writing these sonnets in order to undo the damage which time can do and

would do to his friend. The poet is writing these sonnets to immortalize the youth and beauty of his friend.”

Sonnet 19 Devouring Time Blunt Thou the Lion's Paws

Devouring Time blunt thou the lion's paw and make the earth devour her own sweet brood pluck the keen teeth from the fierce tiger's jaws and burn the long –lived phoenix in her blood make glad and sorry reasons as thou fleets travel and do whatever thou wilt swift –footed time to the wide world and all her fading sweets, but I forbid thee one most heinous crime o carve not with thy hours my love's fair brow.

Nor draw no lines there with thin antique pen

Him in thy course untainted do allow for beauty's pattern to succeeding men.

He says that time has the power to swallow thing. Time can deprive the claws of a lion of their sharpness and can make the earth destroy its own off spring. Time can snatch away the sharp teeth of the ferocious Tiger from jaws. It can destroy the phoenix by letting it burn itself to death though it is a bird having a long life of several hundred years. You can do anything you like but the poet call upon time and tell him not to comment one terrible and hateful crime .He forbid time to produce any wrinkles on the beautiful forehead of his beloved friend. Shakespeare has promised immortality to his friend the Earl of Southampton though the sonnets which he has written in his honour.

And he want his beloved friend to retain his beauty for ever.

Shakespeare wants him to be the model of male beauty for coming generations.

Shakespeare has inter –related the theme of old age and death to the theme of time. Shakespeare strongly felt the contrast between his own advancing years and the youth of his friend, though he did perceive that his friends' youth and beauty were also fading with the years. In several sonnets Shakespeare depicts the contrast between his getting old and older and his friend's youthful charm and beauty. Though he also points out that the wrinkles of old age would appear even on his friends face in due course.

There are some sonnets which asserts the power of poetry to defeat time Shakespeare speaks of time's injurious hand crushing him, filling his friends forehead with lines and wrinkles and depriving his friend of all those beauties of which at present he is the king. He further says that he is now trying to fortify himself against the cruel knife of time, which is bringing his old age nearer and nearer but says Shakespeare time would never be able to cut from memory his sweet friend beauty though time may cut his friend's life .Shakespeare claims that his poetry is more powerful than time .Through his poems his friend would remain immortal for all times to come yet thy worst old time despite they wrong. My love shall in my verse ever live young.

Shakespeare's treatment of time is both realistic and unrealistic. It is realistic because Shakespeare speaks repeatedly about the ravages to time, giving us concrete examples but some time unrealistic in speaking about the greater power of love. Shakespeare's love is immortal and the loved one though mortal and perishable can achieve immortal through his poetry.

However we must here disagree with Shakespeare's contention because in reality even poetry view opinion and progeny cannot with stand the assaults of time. In course of time, poetry artist and other claimants to immortality would also be forgotten and their works however great would cease to exist. Eventually it is time which would emerge as the greatest victor.

In view of this variety and multiplicity of themes these sonnets are for us a rich store house and a rich treasure of ideas and feeling.

References:-

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