

THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE: COMEDY AND THE COMIC PERSONA
IN SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS

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For a better writer by far, my mother,
Margaret Ford Bickerstaff,
who would have appreciated this paper so very much

and

For my own little family, Mike, Kim, and Travis Ormond,
who may well never appreciate it,
but who, thankfully, do appreciate me . . .

With gratitude and dearest love to one and all.

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ABSTRACT

This study is premised on the thesis that, despite critical observations to date, comedy exists in William Shakespeare's sonnet sequence. To substantiate this claim, the study explicates five sonnets, numbers 104, 91, 138, 143, and 130. For social and literary context, the study relies on two seminal works, a sociological treatise examining the play element in culture by Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens, and a critical treatise examining modes of literature by Northrup Frye, Anatomy of Criticism. Selected sonnets are analyzed according to criteria set forth by these authors to determine if the poems present speakers or heroes whose attitudes and preoccupations and powers of action and expression match Huizinga's and Frye's conceptions of homo ludens and the comic hero, respectively.

The study concludes that the voice of man the player and "Everyman" are present in these sonnets. These works, therefore, represent examples of Shakespeare's comic vision and are vital to the overall impact of the sequence as a complete chronicle of the whole of human experience.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare's sonnet sequence, perhaps more than any other body of literature, might be considered a source of both pleasure and pain. For four hundred years, readers have gloried in the beauty, majesty, drama, and wisdom of these wonderful poems. Likewise, for four hundred years, readers have suffered confusion and consternation in their struggle to understand and interpret the baffling and often conflicting messages and implications in the works, both individually and collectively. In the end, of course, the pleasure far outweighs the pain, for the sonnets are incomparable works of art, but always, always the enigmatic quality of the poems persists—and for some readers, it can be overwhelming.

And this point is well-taken, for the enigma of Shakespeare's sonnets does indeed exist, both in reality and in the mind. The indisputable reality, of course, is that these poems, due to their amazing complexity, remarkable diversity, confounding ambiguity, and stubborn unpredictability, present a genuine and formidable challenge to all readers, even the most dedicated scholar. A

secondary, but equally powerful, challenge resides in the reader's psychological response to the works, for the mind reels, and often rebels, upon serious contemplation of this collection of exceptionally perplexing poems. The problem then is two-fold: one must cope with the perversely problematical nature of the texts themselves and at the same time, with one's own dismayed response to them.

As Stephen Booth implies in his magisterial work on the sonnet sequence, An Essay on Shakespeare's Sonnets, this double-edged dilemma is reflected in the scholarship devoted to these works. For in the literature, one immediately recognizes the enormous energy which has gone into attempts to solve textual riddles—such as attempts to explain or demystify the poems, to discover the identities of the male "friend" and the "Dark Lady", to reveal concrete facts about the poet's biography, and to discover some logical, definitive order or sequence to unify Shakespeare's elegant chaos—and to arrive at some comforting psychological resolution.

Therefore, a review of scholarship can be tedious and frustrating, because one soon discovers that the criticism, albeit intriguing and edifying, begins to assume a somewhat obsessive quality—again, repeatedly addressing such popular

concerns as themes, dates, sequencing, mysterious identities, sexual implications, historical context, and theoretical biographical data—and because it is fraught with almost as many discrepancies, antitheses, and unresolved questions as the poems themselves. Indeed, a review of the scholarship can be like a journey through a labyrinth, literally a trip without end. The reader twists and turns through corridors which promise to lead him to the prize at the end—the carrot, the answer, once and for all—but he never reaches the final destination. Critical literature, one finally understands, is unable to provide the reader the satisfaction of textual/psychological closure because the works themselves prevent it.

Such observations, despite skepticism, do not minimize the significance of sonnet scholarship whose inquiries have made invaluable contributions to the specialized contexts which they address. Broadening our understanding of the works as a whole, the scholarship has provoked vigorous, sometimes heated, intellectual and emotional responses and has demanded that all serious readers repeatedly examine the poems in ever-increasing detail. Eliciting reactions ranging from agreement and delight to challenge and discord,

scholarship indeed has consistently encouraged debate and stimulated the academic dialogue.¹

This study, however, will not address the traditional preoccupations of sonnet scholarship for two reasons. First, as indicated, these ideas have already been thoroughly, almost redundantly, examined in the literature. Second, and more to the point, this study does not seek to explore questions which largely defy answers, answers whose significance may be questionable, in any case, when viewed in the context of a larger issue, the sonnets' relevance to the human condition. Instead, the controlling idea behind this study is that the sonnet sequence is profoundly important, intriguing, and enlightening because it stands as a complete representation of the whole of human experience. And based upon this assumption, the study specifically focuses on the idea, heretofore virtually ignored in sonnet scholarship, that play—which is an innate, fundamental function of the human psyche and personality and which is responsible for the development of self and the evolution of culture—and comedy—which celebrates the life and times of "Everyman" and which is one of the purest, most satisfying representations of play—are integral, essential parts of this whole and thus must be parts of the sequence as well.

The purpose of this study then is to prove that comedy is indeed present in the sonnet sequence and that it not only makes a pleasant, entertaining contribution to the overall effect of the works but also, and much more significantly, that it is vital to poems' timeless portrayal of the universality of human desires, aspirations, and endeavors.

We already know that, for the most part, the sonnet sequence represents a highly stylized, formal, elegant expression of the high mimetic mode. However, knowing Shakespeare as we do from the plays, in which his comic vision shines every bit as brilliantly as his tragic vision, it is difficult to imagine that he would create a series of poems conceived entirely in the high mimetic mode. And he does not. A master of the low mimetic mode as well, he creates a group of poems which reflects both—or in other words, which reflects the sum of those experiences, myriad and complex as they are, which makes humans human. In spite of the daunting complexity of the question, this poet understands the essence of human nature, and in the sonnet sequence, he demonstrates that comedy contributes to this essence. Again, proceeding as we will under the assumption that Shakespeare intends to address all aspects of humanity in the works, the basic intent of the sonnet sequence would

be seriously compromised without the influence of his comic genius.

Five poems have been selected for the purposes of this study. They are: Sonnet 104, "To me, fair friend, you never can be old,"; Sonnet 91, "Some glory in their birth, some in their skill,"; Sonnet 138, "When my love swears that she is made of truth,"; Sonnet 143, "Lo, as a careful housewife,"; and Sonnet 130, "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun." These five poems are excellent representatives of Shakespeare's use of comedy and the function of play in the sonnet sequence. They are not the only representatives of the comedy/play element—Sonnet 135, "Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy Will," comes immediately to mind as do some of the first seventeen "young man" poems—but they are effective ones with which to illustrate it. As this study will show, the comic poems portray the aspirations, dreams, fears, and hopes of "Everyman" in search of life solutions rather than serious man in search of aretê or other lofty goals. In each case, the hero is one of us, a common man, the familiar and beloved comic hero. Further, he is homo ludens, man the player, and we see that in his approach to the situations and problems confronting him and in the rhetorical

strategies he uses to describe his response to conflict. Here Shakespeare creates heroes who recognize the power of comedy and the power of play to humanize and socialize the beast within all of us—and they use it that way. Moreover, each speaker or hero uses comedy and play not only to dramatize the point(s) he makes about his own situation but also to suggest certain universal truths about the human adventure. Once again, this feature enhances the underlying philosophical point of the study—its interest in the sonnet sequence as an accurate reflection of real life.

This study will also show that the hero in the poetry of comedy, like heroes in all forms of comedy, is a participant in real life and that he knows it. He understands the rules of the game of life and uses them to his advantage. The comic hero is concerned with the somewhat mundane, earthy, realistic preoccupations of everyday situations. He leaves idealism and nobility to serious man. Despite his down-to-earth approach, however, the study further will show how comedy and play actually act to elevate and sustain the hero; unlike his tragic or serious counterpart, he is spared the agony of a fall and enjoys the blessing of complete integration into society. In all five works selected for discussion herein, we see

just such a hero, one who takes life seriously but who understands the value of comedy and play as universal coping mechanisms to deal with life's trials and vicissitudes and, more significantly, as tools to make things better—or to achieve integration. Consequently, this study will illustrate that Shakespeare's comic heroes represent real men cursed with the common inevitability of conflict but blessed with the uncommon gift of resolution.

The theoretical basis of this study is provided by two seminal works on play and comedy, Homo Ludens by Johan Huizinga and Anatomy of Criticism by Northrup Frye, respectively. For sociological and cultural context, the study will rely on Huizinga's treatise on the play phenomenon to illustrate that play is an innate characteristic among humans, and it will show that man the player is also present in the works. Furthermore, the study will show that while comedy and play are distinct and separate entities, they nevertheless share a symbiotic relationship, and this relationship too will be explored. In addition, for psychological context, the study will refer to an important work by child psychiatrist D. W. Winnicott, Playing and Reality, whose thesis is that play is essential to the development of one's sense of self and that it is a

vital ingredient in attaining and maintaining mental health. And finally, for literary context, the study will focus on Frye's definition of the mode of comedy and its role in literature. It will apply his theories to the sonnet sequence first to reveal the existence of comedy in the works. This point established, Frye's criteria will then be used to explore the function of comedy in individual poems as well as in the entire sequence—and in real life. Reference to these important studies will explain how comedy and play work in the individual poems and the sequence as a whole, both rhetorically and philosophically, and from a more universal perspective, reference to them will illustrate how these elements relate to fundamental human concerns—among them time, love, and death—shared by all men.

For scholarly context, the study will rely primarily upon critical commentaries by Stephen Booth, Katharine M. Wilson, and Richard A. Lanham. Each of these scholars espouses a unique, innovative, and highly individual approach to sonnet scholarship, one which differs radically from the more traditional approaches described herein. Thus, all three authors have made extraordinarily significant and, to one degree or another, controversial

contributions to the field, and their theories provide exceptionally meaningful and provocative points of reference for the study.

Utilizing all of the ideas and sources mentioned herein, the overriding goal of this study is to make a contribution to the academic dialogue by revealing yet another aspect of William Shakespeare's genius and his lasting achievement in the sonnet sequence: the creation of a supremely eloquent, moving, and accurate account of what it is to be human, an account which would be incomplete without the influence of "Everyman" or the voice of the comic hero.

CHAPTER II
SOCIOLOGICAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTEXT

The human need to find release from the cares, monotony, and, often, chaos, inherent in the reality of everyday life is explored in an exceptionally provocative cultural study by Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens. Huizinga focuses on the phenomenon of the play factor and its enormous impact on culture. Huizinga's "need" to compile this study results, he says, from his complaint that "anthropology and its sister sciences have so far laid too little stress on the concept of play . . . ," an oversight that he attempts to correct in this extensive, open-ended sociological/philosophical treatise (forward 2). The problem, as he sees it, is that social scientists have preferred to concentrate on mankind's earnest endeavors—be they workaday or sublime—rather than his leisure pursuits and also that, when they have addressed the concept of play at all, their approach has been unfeasible. They have, the author explains, attempted to apply standard methods of scientific inquiry, those of quantitative analysis, to examinations of play. These methods have failed, according to Huizinga, because the objectivity of scientific analysis

cannot account for the subjective, but definitive, characteristic of play, "its profoundly aesthetic quality" (2). Therefore, although he is a social scientist himself, Huizinga abandons his discipline's traditional methods of analysis and instead assumes a humanistic rather than a scientific approach in the work.

An ambitious effort, one which Huizinga concedes lacks "detailed documentation of every word," Homo Ludens traces the history and investigates the role of the play factor in virtually all facets of society—among them law, war, religion, philosophy, art, and poetry (forward 2). Huizinga's examination is of immeasurable interest to students of all of the humanities, but it is particularly fascinating to students of literature and more specifically, poetry, for it is in this milieu that Huizinga identifies the purest expression of play.

Huizinga opens the first chapter of the work with the claim that play, rather than deriving from culture, actually precedes it and is, therefore, an integral factor in the development of culture. He supports this contention by noting that animals, as well as humans, play. Thus, play is "older than culture, for culture, however inadequately defined, always presupposes human society, and animals have

not waited for man to teach them to play" (1). In Huizinga's view, therefore, play is a "significant" function, significant in the sense that although it is an innate and universal phenomenon among animals and humans, it is more than an instinct, "more than a mere physiological phenomenon or a psychological reflex" (1). Play actually works to validate, to authenticate the human experience in that it represents and records it. It thus allows us not only to participate in life but to observe it as well, and such observations are valuable in that they promote insight and understanding, and, perhaps more significantly, they let us know that we are not alone. Here play acts as an integrating, unifying, and humanizing force, one which serves not only the individual but society as a whole as well. Whether we are players or observers, we benefit from play because it enables us to see ourselves and certain fundamental truths about life in a representational context, one that we can easily understand. For play, Huizinga maintains, is distinguished by an important characteristic, a distinction that the author call "sense": "there is," he claims, "some sense to it" (1). Obviously, sense leads to understanding.

The "sense" to which Huizinga refers here is specifically delineated later in the chapter. He designates three criteria which govern, and define, play as a unique phenomenon. Play is voluntary or an act of "freedom"; "play is not 'ordinary' or 'real' life" ; and play embodies a "secludedness," a "limitedness" in that it functions within set limitations of time, place, and order or rules of the game (8-10). In addition, play almost invariably proceeds in an aura of secrecy. It asks participants and observers alike to ponder the mysteries essential to the progress of the event, such as—who will win; what strategy will be employed; what are the rules; what does it mean? Thus, play involves both the player and the observer, and it is shrouded in a mystique and creates a camaraderie which captivates all those involved in the activity.

Finally, in the first chapter, Huizinga makes two more important points regarding the nature of play in the higher forms. Play, he observes, usually represents "a contest for something or a representation of something" (13). Play then is more than a simple diversion; it is a serious endeavor in that it requires intellectual commitment and evokes emotional response. Both the player and his audience have an investment in the activity: the player seeks to play the

game well, and the observer strives to understand it well. Consequently, all parties are invested in the activity in that self-esteem and personal gratification are both, in a sense, at issue here. In the succeeding chapters of the study, Huizinga applies these criteria to virtually every significant activity in organized society, but nowhere is the discussion more impressive than in the chapter devoted to poetry and play.

Huizinga notes that as societies become more advanced or civilized, the play element, so vital in the early stages of development of its various social practices (to name a few, religion, science, and politics), begins to assume a progressively less prominent role. He finds the one exception to be in the realm of the arts, most notably in poetry. For, Huizinga claims, "poiesis," in fact, "is a play-function" (119). Poetry, more than any other literary genre, is play in that it faithfully fulfills all of the criteria of the term set forth earlier in the work. He calls play the "common denominator" of all poetry in that a poem "proceeds within certain limits of time and space, in visible order, according to rules fully accepted, and outside the sphere of necessity or material utility" (132). In addition, by virtue of its form—the representation

motif, characterized by style: the unique, enigmatic, and prescribed qualities of the rhetorical and structural devices which create poetic expression—and content—the contest motif, characterized by theme: the quest for understanding of fundamental human concerns such as time, love, and death—poetry does indeed seem to reflect Huizinga's conception of play in its finest form. Further, the "profoundly aesthetic quality" of poetry, the very quality which distinguishes it from real life, from other art forms, and even from other literary genres conforms perfectly to the author's conception of the singularly elemental characteristic of play, aesthetics. Thus, Huizinga's conclusion that "finally, only poetry remains as the stronghold of living and noble play" is convincing and highly provocative.

Still another significant point which Huizinga makes in Homo Ludens concerns the fluidity of play and its relation to literature. He notes that it is "obvious enough" that "tragedy and comedy both derive from play . . ." (144). This claim may seem too bold in that we are accustomed to thinking of comedy as playful and tragedy as serious. However, if we accept Huizinga's definition of play—that it is a representation of real life proceeding according to

set rules of development and order—we can agree with this claim. And this point is vital to Huizinga's analysis of play, because he cautions the reader to avoid categorizing play as the "opposite of seriousness," a frequently erroneous conclusion in that, he maintains, "some play can be very serious indeed" (5). Moreover, if we must view the two concepts as opposites—that is, play versus seriousness—he finds the play concept of play to be of an even "higher order than . . . seriousness. For seriousness seeks to exclude play, whereas play can very well include seriousness" (45).

Despite Huizinga's somewhat cursory treatment of comedy as a feature emanating from the play-factor, his theories, nevertheless, make a valuable contribution to this study, for they present a convincing argument in favor of the idea that play is an essential component in the development of culture and that it is a universal function of human behavior, two phenomena which serve as the impetus for literary expression. He convinces us that play is significant, both in his conception of the word and, perhaps more importantly, in our own traditional conception of the word. Furthermore, that poetry, in his opinion, epitomizes the essence of play helps us to better understand both the

play concept itself and the art of poiesis because poetry provides a concrete, permanent, and essentially uniform basis for analysis of the concept. In addition, by extending Huizinga's own definition of play and his theory linking play and literature, one might conclude that comedy itself—particularly comic poetry—represents the quintessential expression of play in that by its very nature comedy even more than tragedy grants irrepressible homo ludens an extraordinary degree of "freedom" to transcend the restrictive and relentless preoccupations of "real life" (8-10).

And finally, Huizinga's explanation regarding the fluidity of play—it can be both comic and tragic—enables us to appreciate even more fully the achievement of Shakespeare's sonnets, for we recognize that the down-to-earth qualities of the poems and even the overtly humorous features of some of the poems do not diminish their worth. This realization makes all of the poems "equal" in the sense that comedy and tragedy are equal derivatives of play, and it allows us to enjoy the comedy in the sonnets in the contexts of profundity as well as frivolity. Indeed, a close reading of the comic poems reveals that they, as well as the serious sonnets, speak to some of the most

fundamental aspects of human endeavor and aspiration, such as the desire for love, the quest for personal recognition, the struggle to triumph over adversity, and the ever-present challenge to face and come to terms with the inevitability of human frailty and the certainty of human mortality. Thus, comedy in the sonnet sequence should not be neglected because it represents a notable and noble product of man's irresistible compulsion to play.

In another study on the play factor, Playing and Reality, child psychiatrist D. W. Winnicott focuses on the play phenomenon as it relates to the development of self. That is, he sees play as a function which enables the individual to integrate the two disparate realities with which he must cope from the day of his birth, "psychic reality, which is personal and inner and . . . external reality" (xi)—or all of those influences brought to bear on the individual both from without and within throughout his life, objective reality on the outside, subjective reality on the inside. To reconcile the conflict of the two realities, Winnicott maintains, the individual must create a necessary third reality, the transitional state or the state in which we play. Here internal and external influences at least cooperate and ideally integrate to enable one to deal

with these conflicting forces and to enjoy a meaningful existence. It is within this third realm that creativity develops and thrives, that the self is realized, and that cultural experience takes place. Accepting this premise, we can see how essential the integration that Winnicott describes is in all facets of life.

Winnicott's extensive clinical research with infants and young children indicates that as a baby begins to become aware of external influences—the "not me" (2)—he needs a "transitional object" to act as a bridge from internal reality to external reality (1). These "transitional objects or transitional phenomena belong to the realm of illusion which is at the basis of initiation of experience" (14). Here we see the interesting paradoxical idea that illusion actually creates its own opposite, reality. The child's transitional object may be a doll or a soft toy or a blanket; it does not matter what it is as long as he forms a bond with it which enables him to create the illusion, the transitional space, necessary for his development. And although it will be the only external object of interest to the baby for quite some time, he will eventually add others to it, thereby further incorporating the outside world into the inside world of his self-centered perception.

As the child matures, he begins to incorporate more and more external objects into his transitional space and to organize them into increasingly complex patterns and routines, an activity called play. And play is serious business for the child; for him it is work. "The playing child inhabits an area that cannot be easily left nor can it easily admit intrusions" (51). Here Winnicott compares the "near-withdrawal state" of the child at play with the "concentration of older children and adults" (51). Play is absorbing because it is such hard work.

Play is significant in childhood development for it is through choosing what toys to play with, what games to participate in, and what kind of make believe to engage in that the child develops his sense of self. Choice is the key idea here: the various choices that a child makes in his play routine and the creativity that he devotes to the effort determine his success in reconciling external and internal reality, thereby forming his own unique reality, his individuality. In this way, play enables the individual to become whom he will, to become himself.

Play, therefore, is essential to mental health, to the development of an integrated, competent, and well-adjusted personality. Indeed, "play is the universal," Winnicott

claims, "and that belongs to health: playing facilitates growth and therefore health, [and] playing leads to group relationships . . . " (41). Here Winnicott suggests that play ultimately leads to the development of social interaction and culture, and later in the work, he specifically states this idea. "There is a direct development from transitional phenomena to playing, and from playing to shared playing, and from this to cultural experiences" (51). Consequently, the cultural experiences enjoyed by adults are actually fostered in infancy, and without the progression from transitional phenomena to organized play to adult games and other playful pre-occupations, culture would not exist.

Winnicott acknowledges that in his field, psychiatry, "cultural experience has not found its true place in the theory used by analysts in their work and in their thinking" (xi). However, he maintains, it is an area which has always been recognized and explored by philosophers and theologians, not to mention artists and their patrons. Indeed, Winnicott claims, this preoccupation "appears in full force in the work characteristic of the so-called metaphysical poets (Donne, etc.)" (xi). Thus, Winnicott, like Huizinga, sees a direct relationship between play and

the development of the arts, particularly poetry. Real creativity, Winnicott asserts, is possible only in the third state of being, the transitional or play space and is vital to the realization of the self. Resolving the conflicts of external and internal demands in the play state allows creativity to "become part of the organized individual personality, and eventually this in summation makes the individual to be" (64). In the end, play empowers the individual "to postulate the existence of self" (64). Here we see Winnicott's theories assume a somewhat circular pattern: play equals creativity equals self equals play. The end result of this cycle is culture. The idea seems to be that play fosters creativity which facilitates the actualization of the potential self and that in turn the playful preoccupations of this individuated, actualized self create culture. Here again, Winnicott's theories align with Huizinga's concerning the phenomenon of the development of the individual and culture. And when Winnicott says, "and on the basis of playing is built the whole of man's experiential existence" (64), he might be speaking for Huizinga as well. Both Winnicott and Huizinga agree then that play is universal and vital not only to the arts but also to living successfully, to attaining self-fulfillment

and self-realization, and to contributing to and enjoying the fruits of the cultural experience.

Playing and Reality is an extremely complex scientific treatise focused on play and its relationship to psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. It is interesting in terms of this study because it reinforces two of Huizinga's chief hypotheses: that play is universal and that it is an intrinsic value of being human. Interestingly, this work succeeds so well in its treatment of play—that "exciting interweave of subjectivity and objective observation"—that it could be entitled Playing IS Reality (64), and the integrity of its message would remain intact. For if we accept the theory that the play experience ultimately determines who we are and what we do, its significance cannot be overstated.

CHAPTER III
LITERARY CONTEXT

Huizinga's and Winnicott's theories of the concept of play as it applies to development of the self and to the development of culture together offer a basis for the discussion of the function of comedy in literature, particularly comedy as it applies to poetry. Both Huizinga and Winnicott acknowledge that poetry is the purest observable expression of play available to us for study. Before we look at comedy in Shakespeare's sonnets, however, we need a workable definition of the concept.

Although critics readily recognize the contribution of comedy to Western literature from its earliest beginnings to the present and although it is extensively addressed in scholarship, a comprehensive and clear definition of comedy seems to be an elusive quantity. Despite their interest in comedy and the pleasure that they derive from it, the initial impulse of some scholars and many average readers to define it might be simply to echo Huizinga's somewhat facile observation that comedy is a device which provokes laughter, for, of course, we identify comedy with humor (Huizinga 6). Historically speaking, however, humor cannot be designated

as the definitive characteristic of comedy nor can the entire concept of comedy be so easily explained. For instance, during the medieval epoch, any work which ended happily or resulted in some fortuitous resolution of conflict might be termed comic; likewise, among other functions, comedy can serve as a vehicle for social commentary and as a realistic depiction of the human condition.

Even when comedy is acknowledged for all of its features, however, there does appear to be a critical bias in favor of tragedy over comedy. This bias may evolve from the comparison of tragedy and comedy, because regardless how profound its underlying message, comedy generally makes us laugh whereas tragedy makes us cry. For this reason, many of us place value judgments on these emotions and come to the conclusion that tears are more significant than smiles, that works which provoke laughter or even simply inspire identification with everyday heroes lack the merit of works which evoke pathos and empathy and reveal the plights of superior heroes.

For a better understanding of the comic vision, one must look beyond simple explanations, specialized functions, and reader bias; one theory which assumes this approach to

comedy is proposed by Northrup Frye in Anatomy of Criticism. Frye's essay explaining his theory of literary modes places emphasis on the causes rather than the effects of comedy. That is, he chooses not to address the obvious features of comedy which distinguish it from tragedy—among them, that it is light-hearted, that it is socially relevant, that it ends happily—and rather focuses on the mode of comedy as a form of literary expression based on the personality, behavior, and influences brought to bear on the hero of a work. He does not examine the "goodness" versus the "badness"—or the nobility versus the commonness—of the tragic versus the comic hero; indeed, Frye questions the widely accepted translations of Aristotle's use of poudaios and phaloux with reference to tragedy and comedy. He does not interpret these terms to mean "good" and "bad"; instead, he interprets them in a much more flexible context to mean relatively "weighty" versus relatively "light" and believes that these translations better reflect Aristotelian intent than the inflexible and morally prescriptive and proscriptive designations, "good" and "bad" (33). Thus, Frye rejects what he sees as a fairly pervasive propensity to interpret literature in "a somewhat narrowly moralistic view . . ." (33).

As a solution to this objection, Frye suggests that literature can be analyzed according to a more objective method of interpretation than that afforded by the necessarily subjective, imprecise, and somewhat random method of moral evaluation. Such an approach to criticism offers obvious advantages, not the least of which is that it provides a relatively definitive basis of analysis. This is not to suggest that Frye, any more than Huizinga before him, advocates the impossible, that he attempts to analyze aesthetic works by means of rigid quantitative standards, but it does provide a framework for looking at works of literature according to some tangible criteria. Frye condenses his theory into one simple and practical suggestion: works of fiction may be "classified," he claims, according to "the hero's power of action, which may be greater, less, or roughly the same" as ours (33).

Frye identifies the tragic hero as an individual who is "superior in degree to other men but not to his natural environment" (34). He says that this "hero is a leader" and "has authority, passions, and powers of expression far greater than ours" (34). Such a hero is not infallible, however, because he is not a god and is therefore subject to—and a victim of—his environment or society and the

"order of nature" (34). This idea, the power of the "order of nature," is important in tragedy because the hero himself is a product of nature and is often rendered impotent as a result of his natural fallibility or his humanity. The tragic hero appears in works which belong to the high mimetic mode of literature.

In his treatment of comedy, Fry avoids assigning comparative moral distinctions to the "worth" or value of the comic hero or to works of comedy themselves. While he points out that comedy belongs to the low mimetic mode, he emphasizes that "'high' and 'low' have no connotations of comparative value, but are purely diagrammatic, as they are when they refer to Biblical critics or Anglicans" (34). Frye simply and non-judgmentally points out that the comic hero is "superior neither to other men nor to his environment, the hero is 'one of us', we respond to a sense of his common humanity, and demand from the poet the same canons of probability that we find in our own experience" (34). This treatment of tragic and comic heroes is compatible with one of Huizinga's significant inferences: despite prejudice to the contrary, tragedy and comedy actually have no relative differences in value in that they

are equal manifestations of a larger concern, the vitally important play factor.

Frye, of course, does not concern himself with this cultural issue, but in his detailed explanation of the tragic fictional mode, he does indeed seem to concur with Huizinga's theories regarding the seriousness of play in that he demonstrates that both tragedy and comedy approach serious concerns of human nature. One might conclude then that Frye holds that comedy (like play) can be very serious; this assumption derives from Frye's statement that the basic theme of comedy revolves around "the integration of society, which usually takes the form of incorporating a central character into it" (43). This is the key feature in comedy, and while it might not at first seem to be as profound as the theme of most tragedies, the fall of a leader—the comic hero is "one of us" and is, therefore, not a leader—its actual significance is great. Here Frye implies that the common element which links both comedy and tragedy is isolation: in tragedy we suffer the hero's exclusion from the society of which he was once so vital a part; in comedy we must suffer the hero's struggle for admission into the society from which he is excluded. Thus, we see that the significant difference between tragedy and comedy is that

the issue of isolation is resolved differently, tragically or comically—that is, the tragic hero becomes isolated and remains so, and the comic hero becomes integrated and remains so. While tragedy and comedy obviously approach the pain of isolation from entirely different perspectives—the former "weighty" and serious and the latter "light" and light-hearted—the interesting inference in Frye's essay is that both modes derive from a common and serious human dilemma. In addition, Frye points out that psychologists recognize the close association between tears and laughter. We weep for the tragic hero, but we both laugh at and weep for the comic hero. We laugh at his frailty, his foolishness, his antics, but we cry for him too, because we see ourselves in him—he is, after all, one of us. We appreciate what and who he is, and we recognize his pain. And sometimes, our tears are tears of joy over the satisfying resolution of this hero's conflict. It is comforting to see difficulties so happily resolved. Here we see then that while it is useful to examine literature according to comic or tragic modes—they provide a basis for analysis—these modes are not exclusive. They share the common "weighty" theme of isolation, and they can evoke similar responses in the reader. Thus, tragedy and comedy

are not strictly distinct entities in that they do overlap, and this fact is significant in that it suggests that the works are equal in terms of relative value.

Frye's theories then bring us to the conclusion that the truths revealed in comedy, though couched in their own unique style and method of presentation, are not less significant than those explored in tragedy if we base our reception of them on his suggestions regarding intellectual/emotional versus moral/judgmental interpretation of the works. That is, both deal with the important issue of isolation from society and both evoke strong emotional response, and they should be evaluated according to these achievements rather than according to subjective moral judgments of "good" versus "bad." Even though it is different, comedy is as "good" as tragedy and vice versa. The two modes are equal.

The plight of the "leader," the tragic victim of hamartia or hybris, is not, but for value judgments based on a bias of interpretation of good versus bad, worthy versus unworthy, or superior versus ordinary, inherently more profound than the plight of the comic hero, who is, in fact, also a victim of circumstance or his own human frailty. Indeed, since he is "one of us," the plight of the comic

hero and his struggle with society and the forces of nature is one with which we might more readily identify than that of the "leader." The basic difference in the modes is that the tragic hero does not remain a leader whereas the comic hero does not remain a victim. These two resolutions of conflict are then equal but different—they each represent a reversal of circumstance, actually—and the one is no "better" than the other.

One more feature which argues for the recognition of comedy as a mode of expression equal to tragedy is the very quality which most readily defines it in the conception of most readers: it is funny. As Frye notes, the quality of "laughter itself" seems to offer "deliverance from the unpleasant, even the horrible," and it certainly does this and more (46). It presents a problem or conflict, but unlike tragedy, it resolves the conflict, and it does so in a satisfying, upbeat manner. While the solution may seem implausible or contrived in some works, it is nevertheless comforting and encouraging, and this element in comedy adds an extra dimension to its power to affect an audience. The happy ending represents more than the resolution of a particular conflict to the reader in that it depicts a hero who has successfully overcome some obstacle and is

integrated into the society of his choice. It thus represents life as we would have it rather than life as it often really is. In short, it makes the reader feel good, and that is a worthy accomplishment.

The purpose of this study then is to examine the role of comedy in Shakespeare's sonnets, an area which has been neglected by scholars. Using Northrup Frye's conception of comedy, the study will focus on the personality of the speaker, the "hero," in a number of sonnets—again, numbers 104, 91, 138, 143, and 130. Rhetorical analyses of these poems will demonstrate that the speakers in these sonnets, unlike their counterparts in the majority of the poems, are representative of the low mimetic mode, the mode of most comedy and realistic fiction, in which the hero is "one of us" and enjoys integration into society, that they are comic heroes. In addition, this paper will analyze the specific rhetorical features which contribute to the comic message that the hero is "one of us" with powers of action and expression no greater than our own (34) and which add humor to the sonnets but which are often overlooked or misinterpreted in the sonnet sequence.

Again, the challenge of this approach to sonnet scholarship resides in the obvious fact that the sum of the

sonnet sequence represents a formal, highly stylized exemplification of the high mimetic mode. However, for all of the profundity of the Shakespearean vision, the full range of the multi-faceted talents of this poet must be explored. The scope of his vision has been amply addressed in the abundant criticism of the plays; it has not been as thoroughly explored in the sonnets because, as noted previously, most scholars tend to view them in specialized contexts, and when the subject is addressed at all, to focus on the speaker in the poems as a "leader," as a superior being whose "passions and powers of expression [are] far greater than ours" (Frye 34).

Since Shakespeare is renowned for exploring every intricacy of human behavior and experience, it seems illogical to assume that he would ignore comedy, perhaps the ultimate expression of the play phenomenon, in the sonnets. Indeed, as Sister Miriam Joseph notes, despite Shakespeare's efforts in all of his works to shed "profound insight into human nature and its problems . . . this myriad-minded man has time for fun and nonsense, for parody and foolery . . ." (289). In addition, and perhaps more significantly, this poet, whose works represent the ultimate expression of the high mimetic mode, has the time and the grace to embrace the

perspective and viewpoint of "Everyman," the being who is "one of us and our representative," the hero of the comic sonnets.

CHAPTER IV
SCHOLARLY CONTEXT

A review of sonnet scholarship reveals that three contemporary scholars, Stephen Booth, Katharine M. Wilson, and Richard A. Lanham, have made unique and outstanding contributions to the literature. Each of these critics takes a revolutionary approach to reading the sonnets, and each one has greatly influenced this study.

Stephen Booth is recognized today as the chief authority on Shakespeare's sonnets. Much of his reputation rests on a landmark work published in 1969, An Essay on Shakespeare's Sonnets, a work which is, according to Richard A. Lanham, "the major—and in a sense really the only—book on Shakespeare's sonnets" (226). Certainly, it is a profound study which opens many doors of scholarly inquiry in that it encourages a broad rather than a narrow reading of the works. Calmly observing that the poems are "hard to think about," Booth devotes the essay to explaining why and to offering an alternative to scholarly endeavors of the past, such as attempts to organize the poems into a coherent whole, to identify the "Dark Lady" and the "young man," and to settle biographical questions (Essay 1). The

Shakespearean sonnet defies classification, Booth claims, because it "is organized in a multiple of different coexistent and conflicting patterns—formal, logical, ideological, syntactic, rhythmic, and phonetic" (Essay ix). Further, Booth maintains that it is this "multiplicity of organization" of the poems which renders them timeless and universally appealing (Essay ix). That is, the very characteristics which frustrate scholars—ambiguity, contradiction, and unpredictability—are the selfsame ones which intrigue and engage them. Booth concludes that these disparate characteristics function in an indivisible coaction/reaction/counteraction relationship to create works of unsurpassed mystery and artistry, an achievement which serves to entice the reader's imagination, to challenge his intellect, and to arouse his passion. Consequently, in that he sees the incongruities in the works as the essence of their power, Booth encourages the reader to accept and embrace the inscrutable quality of the sonnets and to channel interpretative concerns away from the impulse to define the indefinable and toward the ideal of reading the poems on many levels, in multiple contexts, and from various perspectives. Critical flexibility, Booth assumes, is the key to appreciating these baffling, multi-dimensional poems.

In An Essay on Shakespeare's Sonnets, Booth emphasizes that he does not "intentionally give any interpretations of the sonnets"; rather he seeks to "describe" them (x), and he adheres to this policy in another important work published in 1977, his own edition of the poems, Shakespeare's Sonnets. Here again he provides extensive explanatory commentary on each of the poems, in even more exacting detail than he did in Essay. The anthology is unquestionably the most valuable annotated edition of the sonnets available to serious students of Shakespeare in that it is the most comprehensive one of its kind. In it Booth furnishes the reader innumerable relatively brief glosses on such matters as vocabulary, unfamiliar diction, difficult syntax, historical context, and noteworthy criticism, and when applicable, he provides longer discussions highlighting particularly significant and/or controversial scholarship. However, despite the plethora of analytical material contained in the volume, Booth never violates his own dictum in Essay that the poems must be appreciated for the peculiar and enigmatic magic that they work in the "eyes of the beholder" and that they must be appreciated for the conflict that they spark rather than in spite of it. Therefore, as extensive and immeasurably enlightening as his notes and

commentaries are in both books, they do not preclude a wide range of interpretation on the part of the reader. In fact, Booth's bombardment of challenging possibilities actually encourages, rather than discourages, fresh, creative response in that his glosses and textual apparatus seem designed to do open readers' minds to myriad possibilities of multiple meanings.

One area that Booth does not address, however, is comedy in the sonnets. While he does briefly note various humorous qualities in the works, such as witticisms (part of the courtly love tradition), puns, and frivolous subject matter, he does not extend his inquiry to include the possibility that comedy is present in the sequence. Lanham comments upon Booth's failure to examine the influence of homo ludens in Essay (and the same comment might apply to the anthology) by explaining that Booth focuses on the "serious issues" of the works rather than the playful ones (226). And although Booth is far ahead of his fellows (with the exception of Lanham) in his assessment of the way the sonnets really work and his insights are not only thought-provoking but also immensely helpful to the reader, he nevertheless shares the historical scholarly propensity to ignore the poems' comic qualities in favor of their serious

ones—to view the poems exclusively in the high mimetic mode—and in this regard, he upholds scholarly tradition.

One scholar does boldly question the canon of sonnet scholarship. In Shakespeare's Sugared Sonnets, Katharine M. Wilson proposes a revolutionary thesis—that the entire sequence should be read as parody. The sonnets, she contends, represent parodies of such Renaissance preoccupations as the sonnet convention itself, the love philosophies of Petrarch and Ovid, and the aphorisms of Erasmus, and that is absolutely all they represent, she claims. Each and every poem is a parody of one thing or another or a combination of parodies, and the sequence is correct as it stands. Wilson takes an adamant stand on the issues of parody and order, and noting that "nothing is more difficult to prove than a joke," she proceeds to examine the sonnets in exhaustive and exhausting detail in an effort to prove her thesis (82).

According to Wilson, she solved this four-hundred-year-old mystery, one which has stumped some of the most brilliant thinkers in history, quite by accident. "By a stroke of luck," she says, "I made a chronological study of the main Elizabethan sonneteers for another purpose, and was surprised into laughter when I arrived at Shakespeare" (83).

Apparently, she immediately saw the joke, again one that has eluded other serious scholars for centuries. Upon further study, Wilson concluded that the trouble with the sonnet sequence is that it has been misread all of these years "through being studied out of context" (82). In this work, she furnishes the context necessary to "understand" the works as she does.

Wilson finds particularly obvious parodies in the "young man" and the "Dark Lady" poems, and she devotes a chapter to each group in which she analyzes them in scrupulous detail. She finds the "young man" poems particularly "ridiculous" and "absurd" (82), and in these poems and those addressed to the "Dark Lady," she claims that Shakespeare reduces "the whole thing [the sonnet convention, the male/female relationship] to the absurd" (82). While most of us will agree that many of these poems are parodies, we could not agree that that is all they are, for if that were true, these poems would not endure and remain relevant even today. And if this claim were not enough, Wilson goes on to make even bolder assertions. She holds not only that "many others [of the sonnets] are certainly parodies of prevailing sonnet attitudes" but also

that all of the sonnets "allow of an explanation of parody" (320).

Wilson deals with the familiar, age-old problem of interpretation by suggesting that "difficulties in interpretation are best cleared up by referring them to a source in other sonneteers" (320). That is, we would be able to understand all of the poems if only we were familiar with the sources they parody.

Wilson's study is exceptionally provocative on several levels. First, it opens an interesting area of inquiry—certainly there is truth in many of her insights on the sonnets, and these ideas need to be discussed and examined. Also, her study demands a response from the academic community in that it is so controversial. And finally, Wilson's work forces the reader to examine the works yet again in scrupulous detail, if for no other reason than to refute her thesis. Wilson's study is interesting in terms of this study in that she sees humor and parody, elements of comedy, in all of the poems. However, because her thesis is so debatable and her focus so specialized, her book is only marginally connected to this study; it does, however, make an intriguing point of reference for the ideas explored herein.

For the scholarly context which most closely matches the ideas in this study, we look to Richard A. Lanham in Motives of Eloquence. In this work, Lanham examines the Western view of life, serious and rhetorical, passed down to us from Plato and Aristotle. Lanham refers to Gerald F. Else's definition (Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument) of the Greek conception of the serious versus the rhetorical or playful view of life: serious men are "those who take themselves and life seriously and therefore can be taken seriously," whereas rhetorical men are "those who do not" (111-112). According to Else and Lanham, for ancient Greek philosophers, this distinction was final and clear cut, and it left no room for compromise. Here the cause and effect of the quest for aretê versus the propensity to play are not only separate and unequal concerns but also must not, cannot, ever overlap. From this view of life devolve the two poetics of the Western world which Lanham describes as serious and rhetorical (111).

Rhetoric and the poetry of play deal with the somewhat frivolous and self-aggrandizing pursuits of homo rhetoricus, and while rhetorical or playful man is not "vicious," his poetic "allows the whole range of sordid motive—money, spleen, urge to shine, narcissistic posturing . . ." (112-

113). In short, rhetorical man is all-too-human. The serious poetic, on the other hand, mirrors the aspirations and endeavors of homo seriosus, and it allows no latitude for deviation from the serious view of life, either in content or form. This poetic involves the concerns and preoccupations of noble, superior beings "who spend their lives, and if necessary lose them, for the prize of aretê" (111). In its purest essence, the serious poetic must tolerate no lesser motive—nor any obvious displays of rhetoric to explicate this motive—for to do so would be to taint and distort the standards of Western philosophy, the pure expression of the heroic self. And thus the vision of life and poetry bequeathed to us is serious indeed.

The only problem with the Greek legacy, Lanham argues, is that it does not accurately reflect life or art, for man, by virtue of his very humanity, cannot be wholly serious or wholly playful and consequently neither can art. Neither quantity lends itself to division and classification. Thus, Lanham sees the conflict as first a philosophical one and then an artistic one, since art reflects life, a conflict which derives from Western man's mistaken notion that one must be serious or playful; he cannot be both. On a deeper level, it derives from a fundamental, closely held, almost

sacred psychological motive, Western man's need to see himself as he would be—exclusively serious, noble, high-minded—rather than as he really is—fun-loving, self-centered, light-hearted and serious, noble, high-minded. Real man embodies both homo rhetoricus and homo seriusus. The conflict that Lanham detects in the creation and interpretation of Western art is, in the end, a battle of the selves (5-6).

Thesis (Plato), antithesis (Aristotle), and synthesis (Lanham)—this is what Lanham is working toward in Motives of Eloquence. While Plato refuses to tolerate the poetry of rhetoric and Aristotle views it as a "mixed blessing" (6), Lanham embraces both and finds them inextricably interwoven throughout Western poetics. While Lanham agrees that all poetry is serious, comedy and tragedy alike, he holds that a serious poet does "play games just for his own amusement," for example, when he effects stylistic flourishes and rhetorical strategies. Poets are players, too, by virtue of their being human. Here we see Lanham's views coincide with Winnicott's theories on the nature of the self. Play is a function of the integrated personality, and it is essential to the realization of the self. Serious man and rhetorical man occupy the same space; they are not separate, but they

are equal. Together they enable the individual "to postulate the existence of self" (Winnicott 64), the self as it really is, not the self of Greek philosophical ideals. Both are essential to the construction of the marvelous, yet perplexing, identity that we inherit, "the complex, creative, unstable, painful Western self" (Lanham 6).

As Lanham sees it, recognition of the integrated self—the serious/rhetorical self, the genuine Western self—creates the need for a third category of poetics, and he envisions and proceeds to define just such a category in Motives of Eloquence. In this poetic, serious and rhetorical applications are equal, and they are applied one upon the other and vice versa, thereby forming the third category. The two concepts are distinct and identifiable as such, and at the same time, they are intertwined and inextricable: divided yet united, independent yet dependent. Lanham calls this vision of art "superposed poetics" (111–112).

According to Lanham, serious poetry can exist and flourish within the parameters of superposed poetics. The serious nature of any message—for example, a hero's quest for aretê or the price he pays for straying from that quest—is not compromised by the poet's use of rhetorical

devices to communicate his message. In this poetic, "style and subject" do not have to "cohere into a decorum," for the rhetoric can be, in fact necessarily must be to really work, playful and purposely manipulative, depending upon devices like "puns and other false wits" to move, convince—and yes—delight the reader (113). To delight would not have been among Plato's goals—to delight, in the overall larger scheme of things, would have been considered trivial or even undesirable, for he believed that the poet's job is to enlighten, not entertain.

Lanham thus envisions a much more flexible, a much more functional, and in many ways, a much more effective and pleasing poetic than that demanded by Plato and his disciples through the ages. It is much more satisfying even than Aristotle's poetic in which the two poetics can exist only as separate entities, for it allows the poetics not only to co-exist but also to cohere within the same work—and more. It allows them to share a symbiotic, mutually dependent relationship, and this relationship is magic. The result is a rich, textured, and lively work of art, one which is broad and deep and contains many layers and shades of meaning and intent. This approach is important in interpreting individual works because it opens so many

windows of possibility, but more significantly, it is important because it describes what poetry actually does.

Lanham views both the Platonic and Aristotelian definitions of poetry as problematical as they relate to all of Western literature, due to the conflict of philosophy versus reality, and his discussion of his view of the resolution of the conflict, superposed poetics, is particularly effective in the chapter devoted to Shakespeare's sonnets. He finds that the conflict is striking in these works because while clearly the sonnet sequence is profoundly serious, the poems are also playful, narcissistic, and stylistically obvious and as such surely represent the hopes, dilemmas, and approach to life of rhetorical man as well as serious man. Indeed, Lanham finds the rhetoric of play—the work of rhetorical man—evident in all of the poems in the sonnet sequence. He bases his conclusion on the fact that the poems' rhetorical devices, the deliberately manipulative and propagandizing techniques so evident in the works, hark back to rhetorical rather than serious man, regardless how serious the intent and impact of a given work. For example, he finds play even in Sonnet 116, "Let me not to the marriage of true minds," widely and

justifiably regarded as one of the most serious and weighty poems in the sequence.

The poem is about the relation between the two poetries. A poem about defining essence—the marriage of true minds—it yet leans on its words in such a way, varying their sense with repetition, that essence dwells first in words: Love, love; alters, alteration; remove, remove. Is such a subject serious? It is and it isn't. The poem seems at once the most profound and the most playful in the sequence. Two different poems share the same words (125).

Lanham's comments here might apply not only to Sonnet 116 but further to the true nature of poetry itself, for all poetry does consist of some dominant impression, some overriding message, playful or serious, and this message is rendered by means of rhetorical strategies, which may be obvious or subtle. Regardless how obscure, the rhetoric is present, and despite Plato's disdain for contrivances, for artifice, and Aristotle's desire for serious poetries, it is the skill of the rhetorician in blending serious and rhetorical poetries which determines the success of a poem. Lanham suggests that the reason that the sonnets are so successful is that they match the essence of humanity, the synthesis of man's rhetorical and serious selves.

Lanham's discussion of superposed poetics is most provocative and innovative as applied to Western art as a whole, and it certainly supports the purpose of this study, to show that comedy exists in the sonnet sequence. If homo rhetoricus is present in all poetry, then he must realize the full extent of his power, expression, and skill in comedy, the celebration of the common man. For if, Lanham suggests, we deny man the player, man the sinner, fallible common man, we also deny our "capacity for forgiveness" as well as our recognition of real life and our place in the scheme of things (9). To deny homo rhetoricus "invites us to think ourselves divine" (Lanham 9), a dangerous and ridiculous temptation, for ultimately it is the sum of our aspirations, both serious and rhetorical, rather than our inevitably doomed imitations of divinity, which results in our own unique state of grace, the state of being human.

CHAPTER V

SONNETS 104 AND 91:

SUBTLE COMEDY AND THE VOICE OF THE COMMON HERO

According to Frye, comedy can be discerned in a work by examining the role of the hero to determine whether he is "one of us." The comic hero is not a leader, and his powers of expression are similar to our own. Further, he is an individual who is integrated into, rather than isolated from, the society of his choice—he is thus, as Winnicott suggests, also a well-adjusted, socially competent individual. Two poems which portray such heroes are Sonnet 104, "To me, fair friend, you never can be old," and Sonnet 91, "Some glory in their birth, some in their skill." These sonnets, usually attributed to the "young man" series, are not overtly humorous, but they do fulfill Frye's criteria for comic expression. This chapter then will explore the roles of these poems' heroes or speakers as well as the sonnets' subtle humorous qualities and will argue in favor of their acceptance as comic works.

Although it addresses quite a serious subject, the destructive effects of the aging process, Sonnet 104 is positive in tone and contains an element of humor as well. This poem might be considered a comedy in that it depicts a hero who recognizes and accepts reality, one who has come to terms with mortality and who does not rail against the inevitable, thus fulfilling the requirement of realistic fiction suggested by Frye. Furthermore, the poem ends happily; it offers a positive resolution of a conflict; and it contains word plays and puns, features which provoke laughter. While a rhetorical analysis of the poem will reveal that this speaker has "powers of expression" which are probably greater than our own, he nevertheless expresses himself in a relatively straightforward manner, one which we are readily able to understand (Frye 34). Finally, we identify with the speaker and are most interested in what he has to say because he is talking about subjects of great interest to all men—the inexorable progress of time—and the power of love to overcome it.

Critical commentary on Sonnet 104 is scarce. While Booth devotes several pages in his anthology to the examination of the seasonal and temporal imagery in the poem, he passes over the larger issue of the poem's overall

function with the comment that "this sonnet and Sonnet 107 have figured largely in circularly argued attempts to read the sonnets as autobiography" (333). Wilson sees the poem as a parody of the love sonnet in that it mockingly promotes the idea that a courtly love affair might have "a life-span of perhaps three years" (286). She also suggests that the poet might have borrowed the idea of this three-year time span from Daniel's Sonnet XXXVI, "My privilege of faith could not protect it, / That was with blood and three years' witness signed." She considers the poem ridiculous because it makes so much of such an insignificant passage of time (285).

Another interpretation of Sonnet 104 is proposed by William Bowman Piper in an article entitled "A Poem Turned in Process" in which he finds the sonnet to be basically negative and serious in tone. Calling it a poem of "consummate greatness" which is "shattering in its final impact," Piper fails to mention the sonnet's positive, light-hearted tone (which supersedes its serious subject matter) and its conclusion on an obviously comic note (460). Thus we see that scholarship is not only limited but also brief in its scope, perhaps because many scholars view the construction in line two, "when first your eye I eyed" as an

unforgivable flaw in the work. As Booth suggests, this "construction can never have been subtle, but it is now unfortunately made gross and puerile by the semantic strain a modern must feel in the use of 'eye' as a general synonym for 'see' or 'gaze upon'" (Sonnets 333). Despite this perceived flaw, however, the poem is worthy of study (perhaps not as worthy as Piper suggests, for it does not seem to be a poem of "consummate greatness") on the basis of its reflection of comedy in the sonnet sequence.

The serious, perhaps even tragic, theme of Sonnet 104, aging and its inevitable consequence, death, is mitigated by the poem's positive tone and by the rhetorical features which lend humor to the piece. One of these is the very feature to which scholars object, the word play in line two, "when first your eye I eyed." True, this clause may seem excessively contrived to modern readers, but it was a valid rhetorical structure in Shakespeare's time, a humorous courtly conceit celebrating platonic love, and even in our day, we recognize the play going on here, and it adds an extra dimension of levity to the work. Further, the poem actually turns overtly amusing in the final couplet when the speaker, with exaggerated and audacious bravado, issues a command to posterity: ". . . hear this, thou age unbred: /

Ere you were born was beauty's summer dead." These humorous touches, the courtly conceit and the speaker's humorous stance in the final couplet, seem to align Sonnet 104 more closely with the low mimetic mode, the mode of comedy, than with the high mimetic mode.

Another feature which argues in favor of the poem as comedy is that the speaker is neither a fallen hero, nor is he excluded from society. He is happily integrated into the society that he chooses, the close relationship with his beloved—indeed, the only thing he has to fear is the one thing over which he has no control: time. Rather than being defeated by this obstacle, however, the speaker finds a way to deal with it: he will immortalize his love in the poem. Then neither the friend nor true love will ever die, a most fortuitous resolution to a serious problem—or comedy.

In Sonnet 104, the speaker uses effective temporal and seasonal imagery to tell the story of a deeply committed relationship, to deal with the unpleasant truth of mortality, and to confront an abstract philosophical problem, the conflict of perception versus reality. His comic persona is suggested by the manner in which he tells his tale. He uses relatively sophisticated rhetorical strategies to make his points, and yet, the poem is very

accessible and easy to understand. Therefore, while his "powers of expression" are assuredly above average, they are certainly not beyond the grasp of the ordinary reader, and the speaker is "one of us" for that reason alone (Frye).

The most immediately striking characteristic of Sonnet 104 is its profusion of seasonal imagery. In lines three through eight, this imagery evokes a dynamic panorama of the changing seasons. The most obvious effect of these lines is to establish the length of the relationship described in the poem, three years. Another effect is to suggest the speaker's consternation and confusion about time. He knows that three years have passed, and yet, his love looks "yet . . . green," as "fresh" and young as when they met (8). The repetitious, almost redundant, quality of these lines may suggest a bemused speaker's attempts to understand and to come to terms with the effects of the aging process. On this level, the lines carry significance relevant to this particular situation, the love affair under discussion in this poem.

On a second level, the first eight lines convey a more universal message. Following the phrase "three winters cold," the next five lines constitute one sentence.

. . . Three winters cold
Have from the forests shook three summers' pride,
Three beauteous springs to yellow autumn turned
In process of the seasons have I seen,
Three April perfumes in three hot junes burned,
Since first I saw you fresh, which yet are green.

On the surface, the continuity of this sentence suggests the unbroken, perpetual cycle of seasonal change as it relates to the speaker's situation. On a deeper level, this technique suggests the corresponding cycle of birth and death that we recognize as the fundamental core of human experience. We identify strongly with this cycle because we live our lives constantly in its shadow, dominated by its control. Despite this sober reminder of our mortality, however, the passage maintains its positive tone because it promises everlasting rejuvenation, mankind's key to immortality. While we know that we as individuals are doomed to certain and rapid extinction, we take comfort from the fact that our species will survive, that our children and their children and their children will live on and that as part of this larger perspective we, too, are immortal. Here we see a positive resolution of mankind's ultimate conflict, death—the humanist's equivalent of the Christian promise of everlasting life.

On a more subliminal third level of meaning, the poem shifts from the general back to the particular returning to the speaker's love relationship, and this message has a positive sexual connotation. In the first cycle, the juxtaposition of "cold" and "pride" may suggest the Renaissance courtly love convention in which a distant, proud young woman spurns an ardent suitor. The implicit use of this convention suggests that in the beginning, the speaker's friend rejected his suit and scorned him. In the second cycle, the progression of "spring" to "yellow autumn," which has a warm, rich, mellow connotation, implies that the friend's attitude softened in the second year and that the relationship evolved into a close, comfortable, loving friendship. The final cycle, "Three April perfumes in three hot junes burned," implies that the good friends eventually became lovers and that the relationship became sexually intimate (7). This progression from "cold to warm to hot" and the seductive connotations of "burned" and "perfumes" make these lines sexually suggestive and, at least subliminally, lend a passionate quality to the passage. The poem's subliminal messages regarding mortality and sexual desire strike a strong chord of recognition in

the reader in that these are two of the most elemental concerns of human nature, concerns which unite all men.

In addition to commemorating his friend and commenting on their relationship, the speaker in Sonnet 104 uses the poem as a vehicle to address a more philosophical concern: the literal and abstract applications of the concept of "appearance." The sonnet is concerned with both the physical and metaphorical implications of this idea—or with what is literally "seen" by the eyes versus what is metaphorically "seen" by the mind and heart.

Theoretically, the eyes should do no more than objectively reflect objects; however, the poem implies, this is not always the case. The eyes are often influenced by the heart, which can "see" things as it wants them to be rather than as they really are. Thus, by exploring the myriad physical and intuitive senses of perception, the poem confronts the problem of perception versus fact, both of which, the speaker suggests, are revealed as well as concealed by the sense of "sight." The concept of "sight"—or of "seeing" things as they appear to be versus as they really are—is vital to the impact of the sonnet, and as Booth suggests, although he does not follow up on the idea, the word "see . . ." could act as a common denominator of the

poem" (Sonnets 336). This common denominator begins in the first line of Sonnet 104 when the speaker assures his friend that to him he or she "never can be old," or in other words, will never "look" old (in his heart, at least), and it is strikingly introduced in line two when the speaker describes his initial encounter with his love as that time "when first your eye I eyed." This clause not only specifically refers to the "sight" motif but also reinforces the positive, humorous tone of Sonnet 104 because this conceit is such playful rhetoric; it is funny, and we appreciate that, for it immediately takes the edge off of the poem's serious message.

The themes of "sight" and perception versus fact continue throughout the sonnet, as the speaker establishes a loosely structured pattern of alternate references to what he knows as opposed to what he perceives to be true. For instance, the speaker is concerned that even though his love appears to look as young as when they met, he or she is nevertheless aging: "For as you were when first your eye I eyed, / Such seems your beauty still . . ." (2-3). Line two addresses the objective fact of the way the friend looked in the past, whereas line three, in which the key word is "seems," addresses the illusion of the way he or she

looks in the present. The speaker's propensity to slip back and forth from subjective perception to objective fact reflects his confusion about the illusion of the friend's "fresh" appearance versus the fact that beauty "hath motion" and is continuously altering with time. Thus, throughout Sonnet 104, the "sight" and "perception versus fact" paradoxes are quite pronounced and are, in fact, literally defined in lines eleven and twelve: "So your sweet hue, which methinks still doth stand / Hath motion, and mine eye may be deceived." Thus, throughout the poem, we witness the confusion, uncertainty, and ambivalence of an ordinary being, one whose powers of perception are not all that extraordinary. And recognizing the limitations of this speaker reminds us of the fallibility and frailty shared by all of us as a condition of our humanity, a feature which adds another dimension of universal appeal and application to the work. Therefore, we can identify with this poem on two levels because it accurately reflects our status as individuals and our place in the larger scheme of things, our membership in the human race, as well.

The speaker's message in the final couplet of Sonnet 104 consists of intricately developed references to the poem's themes: "For fear of which, hear this, thou age

unbred; / Ere you were born was beauty's summer dead."

Literally it refers to the beloved's beauty, and by implication, it alludes to the "sight"/"perception versus fact" themes. As a result, the couplet echoes the sense and structure of the preceding twelve lines. The implication in line thirteen is that although future generations may think that they "see" perfect beauty, such an impression will be but an illusion, since genuine beauty will have long been dead. In addition, the pun in line thirteen, "unbred," which refers to future generations as both without good breeding and not yet born, ends the sonnet on a comical note. Still another, and more serious, implication in the final couplet is the progression in line fourteen suggested by "born" and "dead," which evokes the progression of seasonal imagery and allusions to the life cycle occurring earlier in the poem. The final couplet of Sonnet 104 not only embodies its previous themes but also introduces a new idea: that this sonnet will honor the speaker's friend and therefore, will "preserve" perfect beauty by maintaining this individual's fame throughout all the ages. And here we see the main purpose of the poem, the speaker's desire to thwart death, to defy time. This promise of immortality is both comforting and inspirational, and it is a profoundly

significant issue as well. That it is phrased in such an amusing, tongue-in-cheek way illustrates Huizinga's comments on the seriousness of comedy, and it reinforces the dominant impression of this serious work as positive rather than negative and relatively light rather than relatively weighty. In the end, the eloquent, yet understandable and playful, voice of the speaker, the voice of the people, transforms a potentially tragic subject into a comedic one by resolving mankind's ultimate conflict and deepest fear, death, in such a positive, humorous, and comforting manner.

A poem which provides an an even stronger portrayal of the comic persona as "Everyman" is Sonnet 91, "Some glory in their birth, some in their skill," a straightforward poem which is probably one of the less ambiguous sonnets in the sequence. Like Sonnet 104, this work is among those which scholars generally assign to the "young man" group of poems, and also like it, the poem's comic qualities are quite subtle. Further, Sonnet 91 is a love poem, as is Sonnet 104, and both poems share a distinction in that they not only convey their respective speaker's affection and esteem for his beloved, the addressee in each sonnet, but also serve as tributes to these individuals.

Since the point of the sonnet, that the speaker values his love far more than personal riches or glory, is so clear and easy to understand, it, like many of the works in this study, has elicited very little scholarly attention. Wilson reads it as the "beginning of a new group [of sonnets] where the couplet presents a contradiction which is resolved in the next sonnet, that in its turn ends with a contradiction, and so on" (267). In addition, she asserts that the poem itself parodies a "selection of Sidney's, Sonnet XXIII" (267). Wilson's comments on Sonnet 91 are a good example of her determination throughout her analysis to focus on her single preoccupation, her contention that the sonnets represent parodies, both individually and collectively. In this case, her evaluation of the function of Sonnet 91—in addition to the obvious, in her view, parody of Sidney—reflects her opinion that the whole sequence consists of an interdependent and elaborately conceived structure and order. Again, Wilson is adamant about the idea of order, an issue which has perplexed scholars for centuries. Typically, she chooses not to examine the work independently, that is, according to the text itself. Moreover, her reading of Sonnet 91 illustrates her penchant throughout her study to embrace a narrow, specialized

approach rather than a broad and universally applicable approach to reading the works. Although she has little to say about Sonnet 91, her brief comments do support her thesis, despite the text of the poem itself, her overriding goal throughout the work.

Booth's glosses on Sonnet 91 are also relatively brief. He offers no interpretative comments of his own with the exception of one observation, that " the poem presents a running play on two traditional (and traditionally confused) expressions: 'all and some' ('each and every one') and 'all and sum' (the whole sum, the entirety')" (Sonnets 297). Neither does he address the contributions of other scholars, an omission which probably reflects the fact that this poem is so simple to interpret that it resides in relative obscurity. If we look at the sonnet from the perspective of this study, however, it may prove to be more interesting than it has heretofore appeared to be.

From the outset, the speaker in Sonnet 91 indicates that his priorities are of an intangible rather than a material nature:

Some glory in their birth, some in their skill,
 Some in their wealth, some in their body's force,
 Some in their garments, though newfangled ill,
 Some in their hawks and hounds, some in their
 horse. [t/o]

Here the speaker establishes that he has no real use for the commonly accepted signs or trappings of success and fulfillment. He is neither concerned with nor impressed by social status or high birth, other individuals' "skill" or "cleverness, knowledge" or the "body's force" or "strength" (Booth, Sonnets 297). Here the idea of "body's force" also might be interpreted to suggest the idea of good looks—the power of beauty to dazzle and impress, to attain recognition and inspire admiration. This idea might then suggest that this speaker is more concerned with substance or character in an individual than with artifice or beauty.

And in lines three and four, the speaker becomes even more specific regarding his scorn of visible and tangible rewards, such as material possessions. He points out that some men take pride in fine clothing even when the "garments" are "newfangled ill." This reference to clothing, unattractive clothing at that, pinpoints the speaker's particular derision for those who prize passing fads—in this case, "fashion for fashion's sake"—over possessions of real value. Here the speaker makes a pointed statement about the foolishness of false pride and misplaced values. In line four, however, he refers to a legitimate source of pride to men of his time, "hawks, hounds, and

horses." Yet, he indicates that he does not cherish or covet even these desirable possessions at the expense of spiritual fulfillment. Further, that each line in the first quatrain begins with "some" sets up a contrast between the speaker and other men: "some, not I," the lines imply, value these things. This contrast establishes that the speaker seeks internal rather than external rewards from life.

These ideas are continued, but softened somewhat, in the second quatrain in which the speaker becomes slightly more philosophical and adopts a more flexible tone. In lines five and six, he concedes that "every humor hath his adjunct pleasure, / Wherein it finds a joy above the rest," but he is also quick to point out that he is not among those who value the "pleasures" that he has outlined in the first quatrain. In line seven, we see explicitly rather than implicitly the culmination of the repetition of "some," and this line signals the first turn in the sonnet: "But these particulars are not my measure" (emphasis added). In this pronouncement, we hear a note of pride, an idea which is unequivocally expressed in line eight, "All these I better in one general best." Here we understand that the speaker considers his own "measure," his own judgment to be

superior to that of society at large and further that among "some" people, those of the character portrayed in the first quatrain, he is superior. He is "better" than them or surpasses them or "outdoes them" (Booth, Sonnets 268) in that he both possesses and, possibly even more significantly, recognizes that he possesses "one general best."

Although we are not, until the third quatrain, enlightened about the nature of the "general best" to which the speaker refers, we have, probably as early as line one, realized that it is the love of the sonnet's addressee. Thus, while the third quatrain is predictable and certainly comes as no surprise, it does reiterate and specify the ideas presented in the first eight lines. Indeed, the third quatrain is even more effective because it lacks the tone of condescension implied in lines one through four.

Thy love is better than high birth to me,
 Richer than wealth, prouder than garments' cost,
 Of more delight than hawks or horses be;
 And having thee, of all men's pride I boast.

Here in lines nine through eleven, the speaker admits that "high birth," wealth, fancy garments, and horses and hawks are desirable possessions and are sources of some

pride. Nevertheless, that he does not possess these things is of no real consequence to him because the one thing which he does possess, his friend's love, is priceless, the only thing that he really wants and values. This one precious possession, he maintains, places him above all other men in that he can take pride in the fact that he possesses a treasure dearer than that of any man, and he is steadfast in his belief that his pride is justified: "And having thee, of all men's pride I boast" (12). With this line, the speaker proudly proclaims his own superiority as well as the superiority of his beloved. The speaker is peerless because he possesses the love of a peerless individual.

Having established his absolute satisfaction with and deep gratification for his lot in life, the speaker's final remark in Sonnet 91 signals another, and more surprising, turn in the poem "Wretched in this alone, that thou mayst take / All this away and me most wretched make" (13-14). The final couplet, for the first time in the poem, suggests a certain insecurity on the part of the speaker. The first twelve lines of Sonnet 91 create a tone of such strong conviction and unhesitant self-confidence that one is hardly prepared for the abrupt change of mood in the final couplet. The word "wretched" is repeated twice here, and it seems

quite alien to the piece as a whole. Throughout, the poem is so upbeat, so positive that the last two lines seem out of place. Further, the couplet represents a departure from the progress and resolution presented in so many of Shakespeare's sonnets. Time and again throughout the sequence, we encounter poems in which a dilemma is presented in the first twelve lines and then resolved positively in the final couplet. Sonnet 91, however, apparently represents an opposite strategy by the poet. This is not to suggest that many of the poems do not end on a negative note, because, of course, they do. In such cases, however, the sonnets are often rather negative or "tragically" conceived throughout; this situation certainly is not the case in Sonnet 91. Consequently, the final couplet of this poem is somewhat unique and may warrant additional examination.

The seeming poignancy of the concluding lines of Sonnet 91 may encourage many readers to view the poem in terms of tragedy, for it unquestionably sets up a fall and for that reason, definitely summons a foreboding of a tragic resolution. Despite the couplet, however, the reader must recognize that this speaker is a common man, certainly "one of us." He tells us so. He is not extraordinary in any

way—he is not high-born, and he is not a leader. The only feature, he claims, which sets him apart from any other man in any regard is that he is loved by an extraordinary person—even though he himself is not extraordinary. He is not special, but his beloved is and therein lies his own superiority. Furthermore, he implies that to many men he would be considered inferior. The success of the poem, however, hinges upon this very feature. Because he is ordinary, we identify with him; because he recognizes and admits that he is unexceptional—and yet finds no fault with that—we like him; because he values love more than worldly goods, we admire him. Thus, the speaker in Sonnet 91 is a hero, but, the final couplet notwithstanding, he is not a tragic hero. The situation which he depicts reflects the realism of the low mimetic mode. With respect to this study, therefore, the only question is whether the speaker or hero of Sonnet 91 might be considered a comic hero.

All of us automatically think of comedy in terms of humor. In fact, in attempts to classify a work according to type, the first question that we ask ourselves is whether the work is funny. And, of course, the answer is that comedy is funny, even when it evokes simultaneous feelings of sadness or poignancy. Comedy often makes us cry,

probably because we recognize the comic hero as "one of us" and therefore empathize with him strongly. We deeply understand and identify with his trials and tribulations. Mainly, however, comedy makes us laugh, and in it we look for entertainment, for highs, for laughs. Thus, even though Sonnet 91 summons a warm, uplifting response in the reader—we wholeheartedly "buy" the genuine and democratic philosophy upon which the work is premised—it is unlikely that this poem provokes a humorous response in the majority of readers.

Despite this response, however, readers of Sonnet 91 might still apply Frye's criteria for comic expression to the work. As we have already observed, the hero or speaker in this poem speaks for "Everyman"; his voice is the voice of ordinary people. Moreover, he is completely integrated into society. He embraces his social and economic status without reservation, and he seems to be more than content and satisfied with his life—that is, until the final couplet. Therein lies the problem for the reader.

Upon first reading Sonnet 91, the exceptionally positive, resolute tone of the poem may seem to be seriously compromised by the final couplet. Here the speaker seems to contradict himself when he informs us that in spite of the

confidence, acceptance, and faith which he boldly proclaims in the first three quatrains, he, nevertheless, harbors fear and misgivings about this relationship. This conflicting message confuses us in that in only two lines, the focus and momentum of the poem shifts. The speaker's attitude seems to negate the strong message conveyed in the first twelve lines. Interestingly, this contradiction presents the only real challenge in the sonnet.

Although few critics have commented on Sonnet 91 in any context, the open-minded reader might find the conclusion of the poem noteworthy, for the final couplet might actually represent the purpose of the sonnet as a whole. These lines seem to convey a serious message, one that borders on the pathetic. However, if one considers the possibility that Shakespeare intends for these lines to be ironic, or at least facetious, an entirely different perspective is cast on the work. In order to entertain this possibility, one must evaluate the word play of sorts on "wretched" (13-14). In line thirteen and the beginning of line fourteen, the speaker allows that he is "wretched" about one thing "alone"—"that thou mayst take / All this away" Here he states that he is "wretched" over even the thought of this betrayal, and yet, at the end of line fourteen, he

claims that only the realization of this possibility would make him "most wretched." First he says that he is wretched, and then he says that he will be wretched. This is a subtle distinction, but a distinction nonetheless, and it begs this question: is he or is he not wretched? Line thirteen says that he already is, and line fourteen says that he will be wretched only if the catastrophe comes to pass. Much ambiguity exists here, and one can go back and forth, back and forth in attempts to interpret it. The overriding question then is whether at the beginning of line thirteen the speaker is really wretched. This question must be the crux of the sonnet's direction and intent.

The overall tone of Sonnet 91 suggests that the speaker is not wretched at all—he is quite self-assured; he harbors no doubts about this relationship. The first twelve lines of the poem firmly establish this interpretation. Then line thirteen comes along and raises some doubt or confusion in the reader. This doubt, however, is dispelled in line fourteen when the speaker admits that only the loss of his friend's love could produce real wretchedness. Therefore, "wretched" in line thirteen does not have the same impact as "wretched" in line fourteen. Although he does so in a convoluted way—yes, he attempts to hoodwink us—the speaker

himself reveals that he is not really wretched in the present, even though he also indicates that he could be wretched in the future. Given this reading of the final couplet, one might surmise that line thirteen is a facetious comment; the speaker has already established beyond a doubt that he is not even slightly discontent with his lot in life—he emphasizes this fact repeatedly. As a result, the comment in line thirteen may add a subtle touch of humor to this work. As in Sonnet 104, the tongue-in-cheek quality of this one line mitigates the tragic overtones of the couplet and thereby evokes a positive rather than a negative response in the reader.

One explanation for this positive response may be that we recognize the element of play in it. Since we believe that the speaker is not really wretched, we realize that his comment in line thirteen must be an exaggeration. He must be playing a little game with us and with the addressee as well. Here the speaker is setting up a fall that he does not really take too seriously. We are familiar with this type of game as one that lovers play. They often make remarks of this nature to each other as part of a game in which such a quasi-tragic remark is made as a ploy to elicit a denial—a kind of negative affirmation of love—from their

partners. This type of "reverse psychology" strategy is immediately recognizable to the average reader. Line thirteen represents real life in that it sets up a real possibility for pain, but since the speaker tells us in line fourteen that the only thing which could really cause him pain or make him "wretched" is the realization of this dreaded possibility, line thirteen might be viewed as a playful, facetious twist, exactly the kind of tactic for which Shakespeare is so famous.

The game implied in the final couplet could serve an even more significant psychological function as well. Here the speaker may be using play to exorcise the fear of loss which is an inherent part of the human psyche. We learn early on not to assume that anything in the unpredictable game of life is a "sure thing." Thus, the speaker's ploy in lines thirteen and fourteen may represent for him an exorcism of the worst thing that could happen—here he may be using a game to confront the demon head-on in an effort to disarm it. Games are often used this way. The speaker may whine a little here, but it is for a good cause, and it does lend an aura of play and humor to the piece as a whole. And play and humor are a vital part of the relationship between lovers; they serve as outlets to relieve the tension

of a love affair, a highly charged emotional situation due to its power to hurt.

In addition to the ambiguities in lines thirteen and fourteen, the poet's use of "humor" in line five may cast a certain ambiguity over the whole poem. Booth defines the word as "temperament" (Sonnets 297), and Douglas Bush interprets it as "disposition" (Sonnets 111). These definitions, of course, certainly reflect the speaker's literal and obvious intent here—to point out that all men have different personalities, interests, needs, and desires. While it seems clear that Shakespeare does not, on the surface, refer to humor here in the sense of amusing, considering that all definitions of the word derive from the same Latin source and in turn considering the context of the entire piece, the use of "humor" may possibly reflect a typically Shakespearean tickler. Certainly, if we place this poem in the comic mode, "humor" amplifies the interpretative possibilities of this perhaps deceptively simple work.

Another feature of Sonnet 91 which argues in favor of its acceptance as a comic poem is its relatively simple rhetorical strategies: effective repetition, direct, uncomplicated diction, and concrete, simple imagery. Frye's

pronouncement that the comic hero possesses powers of expression no greater than our own is certainly evident in this work. This speaker gets right to the point; he is straightforward and emphatic. He sets up the contrast between his needs and desires and those of other men in the first quatrain, elaborates upon these ideas in the second, and spells out his own viewpoint completely and absolutely in the third. This speaker strives for clarity rather than mystery, and he achieves his purpose. Thus, the diction, imagery, and figures of repetition in Sonnet 91 create a persona who speaks the common man's language, a persona who sounds more like a practical, down-to-earth layman than an eloquent courtier. Despite the final couplet, this speaker is not a tragic hero, and he himself proves this by virtue of the form and content of the poem. Throughout Sonnet 91, we know that this speaker is "one of us," and we accept him as our spokesman.

Sonnet 91 is not a funny poem, but it is warm, and it evokes a positive reader reaction. We know that the speaker is fulfilled and actually suffers very little anxiety about his love relationship. Further, the poem evokes a sense of victory for the common man in that the speaker implies that love is the ultimate treasure that one can possess and that

this treasure is available to all men, be they high or low born, ordinary or extraordinary. The socially integrated hero of Sonnet 91 not only implies these truths but also emphatically states them.

We are encouraged by this comforting, democratic message; it validates and reinforces our own way of thinking. And finally, even the contradictory tone of the final couplet fails to discourage us because we are all familiar with the stakes involved in love, and we do not perceive this situation as depressing or tragic. Rather, it is reality, the lovers' game only part of the larger game of life. Therefore, within this context, we read the final couplet with a bit of skepticism and may even appreciate a subtle humor there, for the poem as a whole tells us that the speaker is a happy man, that he is fulfilled, that he is hopeful rather than fearful. We know that he is playing with us and with his lover, that his intent is to exorcise demons rather than summon tears. In the end, that the speaker plays with "wretched" in the final couplet actually is the clue which reveals that Sonnet 91 is a comic poem and its persona the voice of the common man.

CHAPTER VI

SONNET 138:

GENTLE COMEDY AND THE VOICE OF AN UNCOMMON HERO

Sonnet 138 is a piece which might act as a bridge between the subtly humorous comic poems and the overtly humorous comic poems in the sequence, for this sonnet represents a touch of each. Many critics read Sonnet 138 as one of a number of poems addressed to the "Dark Lady." The majority of the so-called "Dark Lady" sonnets reflect, at best, the frustration and ambivalence of a speaker embroiled in a love-desire/hate-repugnance relationship. At worst, these poems reflect the bitterness, cynicism, disgust, and outrage of a speaker who realizes that he loves too much and that this love is both self-destructive and other-destructive. That is, the "Dark Lady" poems depict a beleaguered speaker who abuses himself primarily and his lover secondarily, and the worst part seems to be that he realizes, even embraces, his folly. The poems represent crimes of the heart, and they are regarded by critics as exceptionally negative, serious works. Sonnet 129, "Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame," is perhaps the most dramatic example of the poems attributed to the influence of

the mysterious "Dark Lady" on Shakespeare's works, for unlike so many of these poems, Sonnet 129 leaves no quarter for speculation regarding the poet's message. Among other rhetorical features, the harsh diction, cruel imagery, bold meter, and relentless figures of repetition throughout the sonnet stun the reader with their vicious uniformity. This poem is negative from the first line to the last.

The seemingly pervasive urge to categorize the sonnets according to some "rhyme or reason" has led many critics to interpret most of the poems addressed specifically to a woman, one who seems to be a particular or "real" woman, as "Dark Lady" poems. An example of a work which is often regarded as such a poem is Sonnet 138, "When my love swears that she is made of truth." In his discussion of superposed poetics in the sonnets, Lanham uses this sonnet to illustrate his theory regarding the oscillation and integration in good works of literature of serious and rhetorical man. He, like many critics, bases his negative interpretation of the poem on the pun in the second line, "lies," as in "lies with another man." According to Lanham, "the pun on 'lie' from the second line to the last, encapsulates the essential duplicity of passion the poem seeks to describe" (126). Likewise, although Booth lists

this reading of the word as a second definition (the first being the literal meaning of the word, falsehoods), he, too, makes much of the pun as a feature which casts the direction of the sonnet (Sonnets 477). In a similar vein, Katharine Wilson concentrates on another pun on "lie." "The aim," she asserts, "of this sonnet is obviously to arrive at the pun on 'lie' in the second last line" (122).

While one cannot deny that these puns are intentional and may well suggest the critical consensus, one might question whether they should be accorded the significance that they have inspired. Even Booth, who seeks not to interpret but rather to describe the sonnets, states that line fourteen, "Therefore I lie with her and she with me," "sums up the speaker's grounds for cynicism, bitterness, and despair" (Sonnets 481). Notably, however, in the very same sentence, Booth acknowledges that the following line, "And in our faults by lies we flattered be," reflects the ultimate resolution: it "reaches a compensating completion in the triumphantly mutual pronouns 'our' and 'we'" (Sonnets 481). Thus, "our" and "we" suggest another, and opposite, impression of the impact of the poem as a whole, the unity of lovers who love well, in all senses of the word, intellectually, emotionally, and sexually. Herein lies the

reader's dilemma. One must decide whether the pun on "lie" is sufficient cause to read the poem in a serious, negative context.

Critically speaking, the problem here may revolve around the issue of ambiguity. Or, in other words, the pun requires that one determine whether it is critically sound or responsible to assign as much significance to the explicit as the implicit, to the literal as the figurative. Poetry, of course, works only because it is ambiguous, and scholars devote themselves to discovering, explaining, and then explicating every conceivable nuance in a work. In the case of Sonnet 138, however, the study of the particular may obscure the more significant general message of the work, which is suggested by its tone. While scholars may be endlessly fascinated by the "Dark Lady," her identity and her role, if any, in Shakespeare's biography as the motivating force in the depiction of the speaker in so many of the sonnets, it seems likely that the real reason that the poem endures is that it imparts a universal, rather than a particular, message. The underlying message of the work suggested by the pun on "lies" may appear to be more significant than the obvious message in that it is weighty, but the surface message is eternal, because it depicts a

situation with which everyone can identify. Reading the work on a relatively more superficial level, one encounters a universally recognized, positive scenario, a flirtatious, mutually gratifying lover's game. The pun on "lies" notwithstanding, Sonnet 138 strikes an immediate chord of recognition among readers in that they recognize a familiar and singular variety of play, the games that lovers play.

The speaker in Sonnet 138 projects a positive, accepting persona. Without irony or bitterness, he calmly states, "When my love swears that she is made of truth / I do believe her, though I know she lies" (1-2). His willingness to play along with his lover's charade is indicated in lines two through five, "I do believe her, though I know she lies, / That she might think me some untutored youth, / Unlearnéd in the world's false subtilties." Here he acknowledges that he accepts the terms of the game; in fact, he contributes to the sport. To perpetuate the activity and to lend support to the "lies" upon which it is premised, he pretends to believe her in order to appear to be trusting and naive, to be that which both his lady and he himself would have him be, each for a different reason. He would like to be young to please her,

and she would like for him to be young to please himself. Here the lies going on are reciprocal and positive.²

In the second quatrain, the speaker elaborates on the rules of the game. Lines five through seven, "Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young, / Although she knows my days are past the best, / Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue," suggest that he enjoys the subterfuge. His vanity and ego are strengthened by his lady's "false-speaking tongue." Generally, we think of vanity and falsehood in negative terms; here, however, due to the accepting, non-judgmental, and cooperative tone established by the speaker, we view them somewhat differently. The word "simply" in line seven may be a clue to the speaker's attitude and may carry significance with regard to the overall message of the sonnet. Here he implies that he accepts her lies without question, that he does not seek absolute truth, that he relishes the ruse. He simply enjoys it, and he enjoys it simply. As lovers are wont to do, he believes what the lady says because he wants to—both for his own sake and for hers. His consideration for her feelings is indicated in line eight, "On both sides thus is simple truth suppressed."

The "simple truth," of course, is that the speaker is not young and that his lover lies. The suppression of truth

on "both sides" suggests again that this game is a cooperative effort; in the first two lines, it is clear that the lovers choose to lie to each other and to believe each other's lies. The idea of choice is crucial to the sonnet's message. The challenge for the reader here is to determine why the lovers choose to lie. What are their motives? Indeed, herein lies the central issue of the poem. Do they lie to feed a destructive, unethical, kind of unholy union, or do they lie to sustain a loving and committed relationship, to sincerely flatter each other, to extend affection? To answer these questions is simple if one unequivocally accepts the overriding importance of the pun on "lies" in line two. It is not so simple if one approaches the poem more literally than metaphorically and if one considers the warm tone of the sonnet overall. The lovers' unity, which Booth remarks on in his interpretation of the effect of the pronouns "we" and "our" in line fourteen, is first introduced in line two when the speaker proclaims, "I do believe her," and it is reiterated throughout Sonnet 138. Further, the speaker's seemingly enthusiastic cooperation in the game seems to imply a positive rather than a negative motive. Lines one through eight do not seem to suggest at all the ironic and bitter

attitude that one would expect of a participant in a game based on genuine deceit. While it is true that that type of a game is also one that some lovers play, the diction in the first two quatrains seems to be too passive, too mild, and too gracious to indicate such a situation.

The ideas of acceptance and cooperation continue in the third quatrain when the speaker notes that neither party seeks to disillusion the other with the truth, and the whole intent of the poem seems to be summed up in lines eleven and twelve, "O, love's best habit is in seeming trust, / And age in love loves not to have years told." Here "seeming" certainly conveys ambiguity and might be interpreted as unquestionably negative: obviously, lovers should have real trust in each other, not feigned or false trust. In the context of the entire poem, however, and particularly in the context of the next line, "And age in love loves not to have years told," the negative implication of "seeming" is softened and has a more positive connotation. She lies to him to make him feel good, to avoid the age stigma as it applies to love. He believes her lie out of respect for her motives, because he appreciates her kindness and, on a personal level, because, clearly insecure about his age, he

wants to believe that, to his beloved, his age truly is not important.

These ideas are reiterated and summarized in the final couplet, which provides an explanation for the lovers' behavior: "Therefore, I lie with her and she with me, / And in our faults by lies we flattered be." Once again we see ultimate cooperation in these lines, the unity to which Booth refers. They lie to each other to flatter each other; they flatter each other because they love each other. In this context, the pun on "lie" in line thirteen has a positive sexual implication, and the final line indicates emotional and intellectual commitment as well. "Faults" usually has a negative connotation and could be viewed as analogous to the plight of the tragic hero whose faults or tragic flaws cause his downfall. In this work, however, that impression is not the dominant one. Here "faults" has an almost positive connotation because it reminds us that these people are very human; like us, they are flawed, and we recognize that human frailty is innate among all of us. And this idea of common humanity brings us to the realization that this speaker or hero is not an outcast; rather, from the second line to the last, he indicates that he understands the play and that he is a willing and

integral player. The speaker is not defeated by his participation in this game; instead, he is ennobled by it.

Thus, the speaker in Sonnet 138 is a comic hero, because he is completely integrated into this particular society, the society of a committed and passionate love affair. He is willingly a part of it; nowhere does the diction of the poem or any feature of the speaker's attitude suggest a hero struggling to overcome or to come to terms with a negative situation. The tragic hero would impart the isolation and agony that he would suffer if this poem depicted a scenario of genuine deceit and falsehood. Except for the pun on "lies," there is no tangible example of outright duplicity in the poem. Indeed, the speaker is an active participant in this game, a game of his own choice—and he approves of it and enjoys it: "But wherefore says she not she is unjust ? / And wherefore say not I that I am old?" (9-10). Would the tragic hero so easily and comfortably embrace lies and duplicity?

The speaker in Sonnet 138 is "one of us" in that we recognize what is going on here. We know and appreciate the value of the "white lie," especially as applied to love. We know what it is to flatter a lover, and we do not see this kind of deception as a vice but rather as a virtue. It is

simply one of many expressions of love common to the male/female relationship. The reciprocal kindnesses extended by the lovers, the one to lie, the other to believe, suggest that they are motivated by love and commitment rather than lust and manipulation.

In addition, the straightforward approach and language in the poem depict a speaker who is "one of us." Though its rhetorical strategies are many and complex—Lanham notes that Sonnet 138 contains "a complicated kind of chiasmatic pronoun pattern (she not: not I/ she is: I am), the suggestion of syllogism in 'wherefore' . . . 'therefore,' [a] symphony of verbs . . . (swears, believes, lies, thinks, thinking, knows, credits, false-speaking, suppressed, says, love, lie, flattered)"—its message is easy enough for even most average readers to understand (Lanham 126). This speaker's "powers of expression," due to his rhetorical skill, may certainly be "greater than ours," but his powers of perception are no greater than ours, and the relatively light versus the relatively weighty tone of the poem does not match the eloquence of the tragic hero (Frye 34).

Finally, the hero or speaker in Sonnet 138 does not seem to be "superior in degree to other men"; in fact, in his treatment of a universal phenomenon among lovers, the

lover's game, he describes a familiar situation in which he plays a predictable role. As a result, "we respond to a sense of his common humanity" (Frye 33-34). Furthermore, the realism suggested by Sonnet 138 is characteristic of the low mimetic mode, the mode "of most comedy and of realistic fiction" (Frye 34). It is realistic in that it depicts an everyday occurrence, one with which we all identify.

In Sonnet 138, one recognizes a particularly noteworthy example of Huizinga's theories on play. The lovers are involved in a game; they know the rules; they participate voluntarily; they recognize that it (the game) is not real life, though the emotion upon which it is based, love, is indeed real life. More significantly, they seem to understand that the game is an essential component in their relationship. These lovers recognize the importance of play. Moreover, the rhetoric of the poem demonstrates two qualities essential to play: the "contest for something," the sustenance of the love affair, and "the representation of something," here the stylistic features of poetry as well as the representation of the game itself (Huizinga 13).

The rhetoric of Sonnet 138 communicates the aesthetic quality of play, and it renders the piece, based on an almost too-familiar human activity, memorable instead of

trite and commonplace. The complex rhetoric suggests play—the poet plays when he composes it, and the reader plays when he seeks to interpret it—but it communicates a serious, in the sense of universal, message. Here we see Huizinga's, Winnicott's, and Lanham's theories come together in one work. The element of play is inextricably interwoven with seriousness—both features are necessary to the ultimate success of a work of art.

Despite the much-discussed pun on "lies," Sonnet 138 evokes a positive response in the reader. Forms of the word "love" appear three times in the poem; thus one must agree that this is a love poem, be it sacred or profane. In line two, when the speaker says "do believe" rather than "I believe," his use of this emphatic form of the verb establishes that he chooses to believe his love, that he wants to believe her. Again, this positive choice sets a positive tone for the whole poem. The understated tone of lines one and two do not suggest desperation. Rather, they suggest congenial compliance. Further, line six, "Although she knows my days are past the best," suggests a certain poignancy: the speaker admits that he is past his prime and that his lover knows it too. And here one infers still another positive choice—the lady chooses to love this man

even though she realizes that he is in his decline. These affirmative choices evoke strong and positive emotions in the reader in that he recognizes and appreciates the lengths to which lovers will go to please each other and the willingness of lovers to accept imperfections in their partners. It also summons the "love is blind" cliché, undeniably an old saw, but one which remains intriguing, romantic, and appealing. These lovers are choosing illusion over reality, and these ideas are similar to those expressed in Sonnet 104, in which the beloved "never can be old" (1), a sweet lie itself.

The positive tone of the poem is further reinforced by line eight: "On both sides thus is simple truth suppressed." Again, "both sides" indicates the unity of the lovers, and this idea of a strong bond certainly has a positive connotation. Even "seeming trust" in line eleven can have a positive implication in that it suggests that these lovers share a commitment that allows them to trust each other even in the face of lies. Finally, that the lovers flatter each other—"And in our faults by lies we flattered be" (14)—is positive. The context of the whole poem may suggest that "flattered" has a double meaning. The lovers literally flatter each other and by so doing, comfort each other.

Here one might substitute "comforted" for "flattered" and not destroy the sense of the whole poem. The motive behind attempts to comfort and spare one's lover pain must be a positive one. The point of Sonnet 138 is that lies of the sort portrayed herein are supportive rather than destructive. Again, in Sonnet 138, as in Sonnet 104, the ideas of illusion versus reality, deception versus unadulterated truth add a positive instead of negative dimension to the work because these perspectives reflect the power of love to overcome time.

Sonnet 138 projects an understated, almost subliminal, tone of warm, gentle humor. We smile at the speaker's description of his own particular lovers' game because we have played these games ourselves. He is one of us; we understand what he means; we identify with his situation in an immediate way. Lines nine and ten, "And wherefore says she not she is unjust? / And wherefore say not I that I am old," are particularly notable reflections of very real human behavior. They make us smile because we empathize with the humanity of the lovers, their human weaknesses and their strengths, and we see ourselves in the lines as well. And in the final couplet, we find a very touching, human explanation for this behavior—a loving attempt to "flatter"

the beloved—an explanation which evokes a warm response of universal recognition among all those who have ever loved.

CHAPTER VII

SONNETS 143 AND 130:

QUINTESSENTIAL COMEDY AND THE VOICE OF CLASSIC COMIC HERO

While the poems that we have examined so far match Frye's definition of comedy in that they portray socially integrated speakers whose station in life and powers of action and expression are roughly equal to our own, they are not really funny works, and some readers therefore might have difficulty thinking of them as comedy. Two poems in the sequence which fulfill both criteria—they reflect the persona of the common man, and they are funny—are Sonnet 143, "Lo, as a careful housewife," and Sonnet 130, "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun." Both of these sonnets assume the voice of the common man and evoke the warm response that we associate with comedy, and they both are hilarious and move us to laughter.

Because Sonnet 143 seems to be addressed to a specific woman and because it is sequenced among the poems generally attributed to the enigmatic mistress of the sonnet sequence, this poem is another work which is usually categorized as a "Dark Lady" sonnet. However, everyone who reads the poem

must agree that there is nothing "dark" about it. Indeed, the light, fanciful approach and the unlikely subject matter of this sonnet differ so radically from the form and content of most of the "Dark Lady" poems that it seems ludicrous to classify it as one. This is not to suggest that some of these sonnets are not humorous, for they are, most notably numbers 130, as mentioned above, and 135, "Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy Will." However, none of the sonnets assumes the unique approach to love that we find in Sonnet 143.

Very little criticism is available on Sonnet 143. For scholarly context, therefore, one must rely on glosses on the poem in various annotated editions of the sonnets and on brief references to it within discussions of larger subjects. These references are usually cursory and uncomplimentary: critics seem to agree that Sonnet 143 is irreparably flawed by the epic simile which constitutes the first eight lines of the poem:

Lo, as a careful housewife runs to catch
One of her feathered creatures broke away,
Sets down her babe, and makes all swift dispatch
In pursuit of the thing she would have stay;

Whilst her neglected child holds her in chase,
 Cries to catch her whose busy care is bent
 To follow that which flies before her face,
 Not prizing her poor infant's discontent.

The non-judgmental Booth calls this simile "mock-heroic" (Sonnets 494), and the quite judgmental Wilson complains that the simile "brings" the sonneteer's lament "to the height of the absurd" (128). Booth objects to the simile not because of its subject matter, which is, of course, decidedly non-heroic—a common domestic rather than a glorious military scenario. In fact, he is careful to note that "Homer's own similes are often so"; that is, they, too, deal with domestic situations (Sonnets 494). Booth's objection to the simile is his estimation that "the scene it conjures up is ridiculous" (Sonnets 494). Wilson, on the other hand, reads the poem in a manner which supports her thesis—she views the work as a parody of the classic sonneteer's complaint to his lady, a parody of the courtly love convention. Wilson's interpretation of the work is exceptionally negative and inflexible; she claims that the "whole situation [is so] undignified . . . so uproarious that critics looking for something serious find it difficult to swallow" (128). She refers to the work as "outrageous," a poem which, finally, serves only to produce "undignified

ridicule" of the sonnet convention as well as the sonneteer and his lady (130).

Among all of these comments, it seems that the most valid one is Wilson's remark that sonnet scholars find Sonnet 143 "difficult to swallow," for this opinion is reflected in the paucity of scholarship available on the poem. Critics seem to have concluded that the piece is a minor effort, one which is unworthy of Shakespeare's considerable talents and likewise unworthy of their own scrutiny. While there is no question that Sonnet 143 represents a radical departure for the poet, one cannot help but wonder whether critical bias rather than the text of the poem itself is responsible for the poem's unfavorable—or at least lackluster—reception. Perhaps scholars' reactions to the work are colored by their own expectations of what a Shakespearean sonnet should be, and they are thus unable to appreciate the poem for what it is—a singular and surprisingly delightful example of Shakespearean comedy.

The epic simile, mock-heroic or not, is the focal point of Sonnet 143, and it vividly portrays quite a charming, amusing scene. Unquestionably, the situation is funny; however, like all good comedy, it also suggests a serious underlying message, despite its somewhat slapstick quality.

The speaker in the poem uses the simile to introduce a dilemma of some import—his lady's preference for another man. This is the very same problem addressed in most of the "Dark Lady" poems; here, however, the ubiquitous "eternal triangle" is approached in an entirely different manner. For example, Sonnet 139, "O, call not me to justify the wrong," and Sonnet 142, "Love is my sin, and thy dear virtue hate," deal with this identical issue, but the tones of these poems are exceedingly negative. Like Sonnet 129, "Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame," the harsh, negative diction and imagery in these sonnets work to portray a speaker who is deeply tormented by his lady's duplicity. In all of these poems, the speaker's isolation, impotence, and pain are evident, and they clearly depict a pernicious love/hate relationship. In a kind of perverse, self-destructive way, the speaker both loves and hates his lady and her scorn. The relationship that these sonnets describe seems to be based on a precarious foundation of duplicity and lust rather than faith and love. Both the situation and the persona depicted in these poems impart a sense of hopelessness and helplessness, feelings which disturb, and may even depress, the reader, for their graphic illustrations of the negative possibilities inherent in the

pursuit of romantic love force him to confront some unwelcome and unpleasant truths.

Sonnet 143, on the other hand, does not evoke such a response; instead it demands a positive response in the reader as a result of the very feature to which scholars so vigorously object, the "ridiculous" epic simile. That the speaker chooses to couch his concern over the progress of his love affair in such light-hearted, even farcical, terms is the key to Shakespeare's intent in the whole poem—to illustrate how one might cope with a problematical love relationship in a positive, reasonable way.

By means of the simile and its complement, line nine, "So runn'st thou after that which flees from thee," the speaker in Sonnet 143 immediately indicates that he is not angst-ridden, out of control, or defeated like his counterparts in several other "Dark Lady" poems. Indeed, here Shakespeare creates a persona who fairly exudes tolerance, wisdom, maturity, and self-confidence. If the speaker did not possess these traits, he would never have chosen this farcical epic simile as the vehicle to communicate his plight. Thus, the first two quatrains of the poem achieve a victory of sorts: they depict a problem

which could be tragic but which is not, a triumph of optimism over pessimism.

In lines nine through twelve, the speaker continues to project a positive, accepting tone. He compares himself to the "neglected child" in the simile in an understated, yet fanciful, metaphor: "So runn'st thou after that which flies from thee, / Whilst I, thy babe, chase thee afar behind" (9-10). His comparison of himself to the "neglected child" who "holds" his mother "in chase" is an important feature in the thrust of the poem, because it sets up a paradox which highlights the speaker's real attitude toward his lover's ambivalence (5). Here the reader realizes full well that the harried housewife is not really neglecting her child; he knows that she loves her baby, that she is only temporarily engrossed in another, and obviously less significant, pursuit and that soon, probably momentarily, her attention will return to that which she "prizes" most, her beloved "infant" (8). We know this beyond question because we know something about mother love. The significant point here is that the speaker creates a hilarious situation, rather than a tragic one, to illustrate his own plight. Therefore, he must feel confident that his relationship with his lady is basically secure and that his rival presents no real threat.

He recognizes that this "chase" is most likely a brief interlude, infatuation as opposed to real love, and he seems very hopeful that he will ultimately win this contest, this game of love.

Line eleven, however, is more serious and realistic than the first three lines of the third quatrain in that in it the speaker admits the possibility that his lady may indeed "catch her hope." Despite this admission, however, the speaker refrains from succumbing to despair; instead, even in the face of this very real possibility, he remains calm, self-assured, good-humored, and optimistic. "But if thou catch thy hope, turn back to me / And play the mother's part, kiss me, be kind" (11-12). Here again we see the speaker's faith in his love, his mellow and accepting attitude toward her inconstancy, and his confidence that true love will triumph over infatuation.

Another significant implication in the third quatrain deals with the idea of indulgence—perhaps the ultimate expression of love. We get the impression of a mature and worldly speaker indulging his younger and less experienced love by allowing her to pursue a flirtation—and at the same time, begging for indulgence in his own behalf. Line eleven is very serious in that the speaker asks his lady to "turn

back" to him, but line twelve reestablishes the playful spirit of the sonnet when the speaker facetiously begs her to "play the mother's part, kiss me, be kind." Here we see the possibility of resolution of the conflict—the speaker creates an opportunity for each party to indulge the other, for each to satisfy the other's needs. The speaker freely gives, but he asks to take; the lady selfishly takes, but she is asked to give. Thus, in lines eleven and twelve, Shakespeare uses a rhetorically sophisticated implied chiasmus to lightheartedly address a most serious issue: the mutually gratifying symbiotic relationship essential to romantic love, the willingness to give as well as take. Here we see an excellent example of the kind of oscillation between playfulness and seriousness that Lanham describes in Motive of Eloquence. Certainly this poem illustrates his thesis quite well.

In the final couplet, the speaker once again demonstrates his tolerance and generosity of spirit: "So will I pray that thou mayst have thy Will, / If thou turn back and my loud crying still." In these lines, he reiterates that he wants his love to be happy, to have her way or "will," but he also makes it clear that he hopes that her fulfillment will result from a union with him. Thus the

pun on "Will." Like line eleven, line thirteen imparts a serious message: "pray," a much stronger word than "hope," indicates the sincerity and longing of the speaker—he prays that both he and his lady will be rewarded by her choice. Of course, many critics would no doubt argue that the seriousness of the speaker's "prayer" is compromised, if not cancelled, by the pun on "Will." However, if we pause to consider line thirteen seriously—to "swallow it"—we must acknowledge the poignancy of this ambiguity. This seems to be more than a simple word play or superfluous witticism because here we recognize that this speaker, who bravely and at once facetiously implores his love to "be kind" is himself an uncommonly kind man (12). Without any real complaint or self-pity or the slightest hint of retribution, he grants his lady a choice, a noble expression of love indeed.

In keeping with the spirit of the poem as a whole, however, in the final line of the sonnet, the speaker returns to his former teasing mode by allowing that he hopes the lady will "still" his "loud crying." This line is effective because it underscores the speaker's intent in the work, his decision to cast a humorous light on a serious subject. Since we know that the speaker has done no "loud

crying"—again, the tone of the sonnet is decidedly tolerant and upbeat—the idea of his crying focuses the reader's attention once more on the comparison of the speaker to a helpless and bewildered baby. Once again, this comparison reveals a humorous and effective paradox because it is clear from the beginning of the poem to the end that the speaker is neither helpless nor bewildered. He understands the stakes of the game he is playing, and he is definitely in charge of his behavior and emotions. These ideas summon the realization that complications in love need not be tragic, that they can be managed with good judgment, grace, and goodwill. Thus the concluding line of Sonnet 143 serves to inspire affection and admiration for a man who is generous enough to indulge his love, kind enough to forgive indiscretion, and wise enough to understand and accept the realities of human nature.

For the reader, the greatest challenge posed by Sonnet 143 is to determine whether the poem is, as Wilson claims, no more than a deliberately and outrageously contrived parody of the sonnet convention or whether, as Booth implicitly suggests, it is an inconsequential burlesque of the Shakespearean sonnet. One must, in the end, determine whether the poem has any real merit or whether it merely

represents some whimsical aberration from the traditional mode of expression in the majority of the poems in the sequence. In order to arrive at feasible responses to these questions, one might look to Frye's theory of literary modes. First, the reader should overcome the inclination to compare Sonnet 143 to sonnets written in the high mimetic mode. The very first line of the poem tells us that this sonnet belongs to the low mimetic mode, for the subject of the simile, a common housewife's chore, is hardly a topic suitable for weighty works. Therefore, we immediately recognize that the speaker in this poem is a comic hero; he is "one of us" because he chooses such a mundane, everyday experience, a raucous domestic scene, as the vehicle to make a larger point about love (Frye 33).

As ridiculous as critics would have it, to many readers, the simile actually depicts a familiar and not-so-ridiculous scene. Undeniably, it is funny, but it is also realistic. And again, we should bear in mind that the low mimetic mode, according to Frye, is the "mode of most comedy and realistic fiction" (34). Here the speaker is describing a situation which we recognize first-hand, the necessity to provide for one's family—and in a larger sense, the struggle for survival. Like the speaker, we know something

about this struggle; we identify with him because we realize that, like us, he is an ordinary person, one who is not "superior in degree to other men" (Frye 34). Like the housewife and like us, he, too, must earn his daily bread. He understands the struggle, and he lives in the real world, our world.

Furthermore, we identify with this speaker because his "powers of expression" are not that much greater than our own (Frye 34). True, he is clever and innovative—the epic simile tells us that much—but he expresses himself in diction and imagery that everyone can understand. We simply cannot fail to notice that this speaker's voice reflects the mass of ordinary men. This distinction does not render him unworthy, however—here again we must remember Frye's evaluation that the high mimetic and low mimetic modes carry no relative distinctions of merit or value (34). The speaker in Sonnet 143 is simply "one of us," and we can appreciate him on that basis. We need not—and should not—compare him to speakers in the high mimetic mode, tragic heroes, for according to Frye's theories, such a comparison would be invalid. We must read this poem on its own, rather than our own, terms. And we need to read it realistically—that is, in terms of real and common human experiences

rather than in terms of fantasies or high-minded human aspirations. Here we have a poem which speaks to life as it really is rather than as we would have it.

Finally, in Sonnet 143, we recognize a speaker who is completely integrated into society. Again, if he genuinely felt threatened, he would never have addressed his dilemma in such a light-hearted, tongue-in-cheek, "cheeky" manner. In addition, the latitude that he allows his lover—to pursue that which she "will"—illustrates his self-confidence, an attitude which is inspired by his integration into and membership in the society which he desires, the society of his lady's love. In this hero, we also see the integrated, well-adjusted personality with a strong sense of self which Winnicott describes in his treatise. This speaker knows himself and understands human nature.

The rhetoric of Sonnet 143 is by no means imposing, but it may be more interesting than critics have allowed. The much-maligned epic simile is straight-forward enough, so much so, in fact, that critics are apparently stupefied by its simplicity. Admittedly, the housewife/chicken race is an earthy, prosaic affair, but surprisingly, herein lies the real charm of the poem. We enjoy the scene because it is so vivid; we can actually see the frenzied housewife

frantically chasing her prey; we can feel, and are touched by, the pain and consternation of the "neglected infant"; we can almost, in fact, see the amused, good-natured speaker observing the chaotic scene, even though we know that the whole episode takes place only in his imagination. Because it creates such a vivid picture, this simile must seem more evocative than silly to the open-minded reader. Moreover, the chiasmatic resolution suggested by lines eleven and twelve—gives/take, takes/give—adds a touch of rhetorical glamour to the piece.

In addition, the chase/flee theme—a common and painful dilemma—which the scene sets up suggests that the poem does address a weighty issue, albeit in a light manner. On a figurative level, we see the lady chasing an elusive lover, the speaker chasing the elusive lady. The object of the lady's affection flees from her, and the lady flees from the speaker. The speaker, on the other hand, stands fast. He runs from nothing—neither his false lover nor, and more significantly, reality. Here again the speaker's behavior and attitude further indicate his integration into society and his well-adjusted psyche. Thus, the chase/flee motif adds an extra, weighty dimension to the poem in that it depicts a common aspect of human behavior, the quest for the

unattainable, and two uncommon human traits, tolerance for imperfection and unquestioning acceptance of reality. These are rather profound considerations, and they are not compromised by the fact that they are revealed in comedy. On the contrary, that so much reality is portrayed in this highly entertaining, amusing poem argues in favor of its acceptance as a sonnet of some merit. It is fun and funny, but like all good comedy, it makes valid, significant points about the human condition.

Despite the objections of some sonnet scholars, Sonnet 143 evokes a positive, warm, delighted response in the average reader. He recognizes this game, and he feels as if he is an active participant—he is "in on" things, in the tradition of play that Huizinga suggests. Further, he appreciates the speaker's perceptive approach to life, his sense of humor, his grasp of reality, and his alignment with "Everyman." The reader identifies with the speaker in a very immediate way; he "pulls for" this common, yet uncommon, man who, in the course of only fourteen lines of verse, has become his friend.

Moreover, unlike many scholars, the average reader realizes that the simile is not as inconsequential as it may appear to be. He knows that a woman who would abandon her

child is not involved in some nonsensical, insignificant activity. The struggle for survival is a justified pursuit—it is serious—and even though the scene which depicts the struggle is funny, it is not absurd. We empathize with the industrious housewife even as we do the speaker, the would-be lover. We realize that games are in progress here, but we also understand that, while they are not real life, they do represent it, and this realization calls to mind another of Huizinga's significant points, that play "can be very serious indeed" (5). We appreciate the poem for these disparate qualities, qualities which allow us to enjoy an extraordinary example of play as well as a concrete glimpse of real life. Finally, this poem provides us with another demonstration of the compatibility of Huizinga's and Lanham's coinciding theories regarding the indivisibility of seriousness and play and its impact on poetry. This demonstration alone may be sufficient to justify acceptance and appreciation of the work.

In the end, if we read Sonnet 143 carefully and without bias or preconceived notions, we are heartened by its warm humanity, its optimistic tone, its innovative spirit. We applaud the poet's decision to compose such an unorthodox (for him) work, and, most importantly, we come to understand

how beautifully Sonnet 143 enhances rather than detracts from the sonnet sequence in that it offers a most unique and pleasant example of Shakespeare's comic vision.

Sonnet 130, "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun," like Sonnet 143, is yet another work attributed to the Dark Lady series of poems, and it, too, is a poem which represents a classic example of comedy in the sequence. And with this sonnet, we finally find accord among scholars! One and all agree to one degree or another that this poem is funny, a joke, a parody of both the sonnet convention and the ideal of femininity of its time.

Calling the sonnet a "winsome trifle" (Sonnets 452), Booth criticizes the scholarly inclination to distort the poem's intent "into a solemn critical statement about sonnet conventions" (Sonnets 454). His comment might have been directed at Katharine Wilson who opines that Sonnet 130 "could be nothing other than a parody" (83). That assessment carries validity in that it recognizes the parody in the poem, but something "other" than parody is indicated in the text as well. The problem is that Wilson is typically shortsighted and restrictive in her analysis of this work, and her discussion of it illustrates the limitations of her study as a whole. While we can agree

that the work is a parody, we must take exception to Wilson's thesis because that is clearly not all it is. Addressing her bold assertion that "the sonnets have been misread through being studied out of context" (82), Wilson proceeds to furnish us with a detailed analysis of her view of correct context for this poem. She compares Sonnet 130 with Watson's Sonnet VII, Passionate Centurie of Love, in which she finds similarities in the two poets' references to eyes (Watson's "sparkling eyes"), lips (Watson's "coral stone"), and breasts (Watson's "breast transparent") (84). While Wilson sees Watson's poem in Sonnet 130, she concludes that, in the end, Shakespeare had to have had additional references in mind because there is "so much more in Watson that could be parodied" and is not (84).

From that conclusion, Wilson goes on to find similarities among Sonnet 130 and Barnes' Sonnet LXXII, "My Mistress' beauty marked with the graces" and Sonnet XXXIV, "My mistress' eyes, mine heaven's bright sun" and to works by Spenser, Daniel, Constable, and Wyatt, among others. Wilson's research is impressive and painfully meticulous, but again, her interpretation is too narrow to be convincing. While her conclusion that "Sonnet 130 has a composite background" (88) is almost certainly true—one of

the things the sonnet does is parody the sonnet convention—it is not the only thing, or even the main thing, going on here. As Booth explains it, "The poem does gently mock the thoughtless, mechanical application of the standard Petrarchan metaphors, but the speaker's clown act in taking hyperbolic metaphors literally appears to have no target and no aim but to be funny" (Sonnets 454). Booth is probably much closer to the truth of the poet's intent than Wilson, yet it seems that even Booth does not allow the sonnet the range and depth that it deserves. This poem is comedy, and therefore something more than funny, although it is that, something more than frivolous, although it is that, too. The significant point is that Sonnet 130 has something meaningful to say in the context of human experience—like all good comedy.

Sonnet 130 is a rich poem, delightfully amusing, bombastic, "tricky." It is also an excellent example of Huizinga's theories on play. Shakespeare is playing a grand game—with his audience, with the mistress, and with himself. First, the poet asks his audience to join him in some fun; herein we see the parody. In the first twelve lines, the speaker describes his mistress in most unflattering terms, a noteworthy departure in a love sonnet.

To say the least in the kindest way, the woman he describes is dull. Her eyes do not sparkle; her skin is dark; her unfashionable black hair is wiry and wild.

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
 Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
 If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
 If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.

The speaker goes on in the next two quatrains to tell us that neither her breath nor her voice is a source of delight or pleasure, and she "treads on the ground," like a common person (8, 10, 12). Despite this somewhat unkind description, however, from line one on the reader understands that it is exaggerated, facetious, and ironic, that these lines are all in fun for the sake of humor and poetic convention. And the reader enjoys this game whether he fully understands the literary allusions and sonnet conventions or not.

The game between the speaker and his mistress is a bit more complex. We assume that if the lady reads the poem she will not be offended or hurt, and that assumption leads us to the probable conclusion that this woman is attractive in her own way, albeit not by the standards of beauty of her time, and that she is confident regarding her appeal and femininity. We realize that the speaker is "teasing" the

lady, that he is having fun with her, but out of affection, not mean-spiritedness. It is clear by the speaker's jovial, jaunty, confident tone that he finds himself clever and amusing to have incorporated so many interesting effects into the work: parody, hyperbole—which actually works to compliment rather than diminish the lady—and a representation of reality as attractive and desirable. And the fellow is correct. He is clever to have created such a deceptively complex work.

Thus we see that while the poet intends to parody several things here, this intention is only part of the story and only one facet of the game. This play, the parody, amplifies the poem's scope and enriches it, but it does not seem to be the central purpose of the work if we look at it in connection with Huizinga's and Winnicott's studies on play and Frye's study on literary modes.

Remember, Huizinga asks us to accept play as an integral and essential element of being human. So, the play going on in Sonnet 130 must be more than an intellectual exercise, as Wilson would have us believe. Indeed, Wilson's interpretation is somewhat sterile and static in that she reduces the study of this poem to an exclusively intellectual, scholarly research endeavor. How many average

readers would be familiar with the sources she quotes? Probably few. Should the poem then be "off limits" to the general readership, to all but erudite students of English literature?

No, because if that were Shakespeare's true intention, the poem would not have endured and would not remain one of the most accessible, popular poems in the sonnet sequence. It appears that Wilson fails to grasp or, at least, acknowledge the exceedingly vibrant humanity of this relatively straightforward, universally appealing work. She seems to overlook the wonderful synthesis of intellect and emotion in the work, the very qualities which make it such a memorable piece and which represent the humanity in all of us. One suspects that Huizinga would not make this mistake.

Huizinga recognizes play as a representation of "real life" (8). And this poem is the essence of real life. It describes "Everywoman"—a real woman, not a fabrication of the courtly love tradition. Again this lady has dark, unruly hair, "black wires grow on her head" (4). She is dark-complected, her "breasts are dun" (3), and she walks with common folk, not goddesses or anything close—she "treads on the ground" (12). Much less a "goddess," she is not even an exemplar of her time. This woman, therefore, is

not out of the ordinary. She is common but in a positive sense—she is down to earth; her feet are on the ground. In short, she is "one of us" (Frye 34), part of common humanity. Yet, even though she is quite ordinary in this respect, she is quite extraordinary in another—she is deeply loved, cherished, and desired: "And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare/ As any she belied with false compare" (13–14). Reading the poem this way, we see that the speaker is playing with us; he asks us to participate in the game in which the facade is that perfection is the ideal, whereas the true ideal is reality. We see that because we are "in on the game." We are participants. Obviously, this response entails much more than parody of various sonneteers, for it involves life, rather than poetic conventions. It has more weight than that. Sonnet 130 is a good example of Huizinga's theories in connection with the validating, even necessary, function of play in the human experience. And Shakespeare, throughout the sonnet sequence, seeks to address the whole of the human experience, not a specialized, narrow part of it.

The average reader appreciates the speaker's deeply comforting message: we do not have to be perfect to be desirable and worthy of love. Indeed, the overall message of the poem offers a remarkably optimistic message, the

promise of love and acceptance regardless of one's human foibles and/or shortcomings. Therefore, Sonnet 130 is more than funny and more than fun. The poem represents real people in a real situation; it represents the discrepancy between expectation and facts—the woman is not the ideal, but she is desirable—illusion in the mind versus reality in the flesh, and yet notably, rather than disappointing the reader, the sonnet reassures and inspires him. In fact, the unique qualities that the speaker sees in the lady are the very ones which attract him; remarkably, they guarantee union rather than forbid it. These are some of the same ideas that we see in Sonnet 104, but they are even more noteworthy and powerful here because in this case, they are addressed to an ordinary individual rather than the extraordinary individual commemorated in 104. This wonderfully positive message, reinforced by the phrase "And yet, by heaven . . ." (12), that all people—high or low, perfect or imperfect—are intrinsically valuable and lovable is extremely reassuring and should be most attractive to all readers, laymen or scholars.

This then is a poem about play, and it is a poem about comedy. Again, Shakespeare is playing an intricate game with himself by cleverly parodying the sonnet convention and

the sonneteers of his day, and he is playing a game with his readers by asking them to recognize and appreciate his elaborate allusions. On a deeper, more profound, and weighty level, he is playing a game of another sort with his readers. On this more significant level, he is asking all readers to recognize and appreciate real people leading real lives, and therein lies the true power and lasting appeal of Sonnet 130.

The hero, the speaker in this sonnet, is a comic hero, and his mistress is a comic heroine. The speaker lets us know this in line one of the poem: "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun"—not a particularly complimentary simile with which to open a love sonnet—and he continues in this vein through line twelve, "My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground." In these lines, the dichotomy between ideal/perfection and reality/imperfection is established. The reader is bombarded line after line with examples of the lady's flaws. The only element which saves the first twelve lines from overwhelming negativity is that the obvious hyperbole in the quatrains makes the sonnet funny. The humor softens the message and renders it ironic. In context, we know that there is a significant "but" implicit in these lines. She is all these things,

"but" . . . she is something else as well. So, we read the poem and smile because we know that the speaker is being facetious—we have known it from line one when the speaker refers to "my mistress." The possessive pronoun "my" tells us all we really need to know about this relationship because it denotes total acceptance and love. My mistress means that the lady belongs to him; he has chosen her. Therefore, the litany of complaints which follows enumerating the lady's imperfections is endearing rather than repelling; moreover, the obvious irony implicit in the insults works to underscore rather than undermine the speaker's esteem for his love.

Here we have the opportunity again to see the illusion versus reality motif so common in Shakespeare's sonnets in a comedic light. The message is that, despite convention and popular opinion of the day, physical attributes are not the appropriate standard of measure when it comes to affairs of the heart. The underlying, invisible qualities of the lady—perhaps intelligence, grace, wit, charm—are those that truly count, for it must be these which make her the object of the speaker's affection and ardor, which make her so "rare" (13) and beyond "false compare" (14). Here the word "false" specifically tells the reader that idealized

beauty is the illusion; the lady's own brand of beauty, both physical and spiritual, is the reality.

Sonnet 130 provides an excellent example of Frye's theory of comedy. The heroine of the poem is "one of us" (Frye 34), and so is the speaker. If he were superior to us or to the lady, it is unlikely that he would love and appreciate her, that he would have chosen her. As in Sonnet 138, these two lovers are completely integrated into their own society, the society of a comfortable, secure love affair. The lady is less-than-perfect, and the speaker not only accepts but also rejoices in her difference; she is "rare" (13) to him both for what she is and for how she differs from the standard of the time.

Sonnet 130 is interesting on another note because, also like Sonnet 138, it is a positive, conciliatory, and uplifting poem commonly grouped with the generally negative sonnets attributed to the "Dark Lady" sequence. Again, this difference argues against the arbitrary assignment of the sonnets to any sort of grouping or classification. Sonnet 130 can stand on its own for what it is, and we, as readers, should allow it to do so. This is a poem of many facets, one far more interesting and demanding than it is commonly held to be.

As a poem of parody, Sonnet 130 stands as a work which illustrates the human need for intellectual challenge. As a poem of play, Sonnet 130 stands as a work which illustrates the need for games as release from everyday cares and as an affirmation of being human. Indeed, the obvious play going on in the poem validates Huizinga's and Winnicott's theories about the significance of play, both in the development and the actualization of self and the ultimate realization of culture, and it illustrates Lanham's theory regarding the contribution of rhetorical man to works of art. And finally, as a poem of comedy, Sonnet 130 stands as a work celebrating "Everyman" and as an example of the satisfaction that all of us, as a condition of our humanity, derive from acceptance by and integration into the society of our choice—and this integration represents the essential quality, according to Frye, of works of comedy. For all of these reasons, Sonnet 130 epitomizes the thesis upon which this study is based, that comedy does indeed exist in Shakespeare's sonnets. As indicated by the progression suggested herein, it is the quintessential comic poem in the sequence in that it embodies all of Frye's requirements for works of comedy—its hero is "one of us" and is integrated into society; its perspective is realistic; and its message

is easy to understand. And last, it is funny—it "provokes laughter" and delivers us from the "unpleasant" let alone the "horrible," perhaps the most significant feature of comedy in that it is the feature which we most readily recognize and certainly that which we most sincerely appreciate in comic works (Frye 46).

Therefore, we see that Sonnet 130 is more than an amusing "trifle" (Sonnets 451–52) and more than a complex parody (Wilson 83–88). It is a multifaceted, interesting, and challenging work in that it, like all of Shakespeare's sonnets, embodies shades of meaning, multiple intentions, and a hierarchy of messages. At the top of this hierarchy, despite critical opinion to date, is the idea that this is a weighty poem, not due to elaborate parody but rather due to the way, through comedy, it positively and beautifully addresses some of the strongest and most elusive of human needs: the need to find love, to be appreciated, and to enjoy unconditional acceptance by "significant others" as well as society at large. This message is what makes this funny, accessible, endearing poem worthy of inquiry and recognition.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

First exposure to Shakespeare's sonnets convinces the reader that these poems are among the most elegant and eloquent verses ever composed and that they speak for leaders rather than common men, and this reaction is, for the most part, correct and justified in that the speakers in these poems certainly do seem to possess "authority, passions, and powers of expression far greater than" our own (Frye 34). And again, there is no question that the sonnets are incomparable works of art, works which are predominately representative of the high mimetic mode. Frye points out that the low mimetic mode introduces the influence of the middle class to literature, and he comments that these works dominate it from "Defoe's time to the end of the nineteenth century" (34). This, too, is a generally correct assessment.

Despite this assessment, however, the influence of comedy, part of the low mimetic mode, is evident throughout the history of literature, and therefore, its influence should not be discounted when we examine the sonnet sequence. Though the voice of the courtier or leader is

dominant in so many of the poems, the voice of "Everyman," albeit more subdued, is present as well. And this only seems right and logical in that Shakespeare, his eloquence notwithstanding, was not a courtier himself. Even though our knowledge of his biography is sadly limited, we do know that his roots were humble compared to those of the society in which he flourished during his productive years as poet and playwright. Perhaps that is why we hear the voice of the common man, even if only quietly, in all of his works. This idea corresponds to the theory that Lanham develops in Motives of Eloquence in the chapter devoted to the sonnets. Rhetorical man is present, he claims, in all of Shakespeare's sonnets from the most solemnly profound, such as Sonnet 116, "Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments," to the most riotously frivolous, such as Sonnet 143, "Lo as the careful housewife." None of the poems, according to Lanham, is exclusively serious or exclusively rhetorical—they are mixed.

Douglas Bush further points out that many of the poems are "uneven, and many are far from great" (10). Few serious scholars would argue with this claim either, and to date, relatively few scholars have sought to explore the more obscure, the more "uneven" or the less-than-"great" works—

perhaps because in them they detect too much influence of the "English schoolboy" and too little of the Bard—the common man, rather than the courtier (Bush 10). This inclination, too, is understandable because the great works are so great that their brilliance does tend to overshadow the achievement of lesser works. Nevertheless, as this study suggests, some of the more obscure works warrant attention as well if the poems are judged as representatives of the low mimetic mode rather than the high mimetic mode, a different, but equal poetic—equal in the sense that both poetics address the very same fundamental concerns of human nature, the issues of integration and resolution versus disintegration and isolation.

Bush also points out that "Shakespeare's diction (often monosyllabic) and images can be colloquial and homely, even when his argumentative conceits are most intricate," and this inclination toward the common as well as the courtly can be documented throughout the sequence (12). The poet's use of colloquial, earthy language and imagery inextricably interwoven with extraordinary and challenging rhetoric and language and lofty, ennobling ideas may well be the secret to the sonnets' power and impact. That is, by virtue of their intermingling of the diverse language and rhetoric

familiar to the various strata of society, the poems contain something for everyone and are universally appealing as a result. Kings and common men enjoy Shakespeare's sonnets because the poems represent all of us, and that—more than their beautiful language, more than their moving rhetoric, and even more than their inspirational and instructive ideas—is their true appeal. These poems are democratic; they belong to "Everyman" and every man, equally and unconditionally.

The works focused upon in this study illustrate the strain of democracy present in all of Shakespeare's works, but in this case, the focus of selected poems is on the common man rather than the courtier. Granting Lanham the idea that the influence of rhetorical man and serious man oscillates throughout the sonnets, this study concentrates on rhetorical man as the comic hero in the five poems explicated herein. The chief impetus for this focus was the realization that certain poems among the sonnet sequence portray a speaker who moves us, at the very least, to recognize and empathize with a hero whom we perceive to be "one of us," a common man whose dilemmas and "powers of expression and action" are roughly the same as our own (Frye 34), and the realization that a few of the poems' speakers

and situations actually move us to laughter—and that these elements, or the comic hero and his milieu, have been ignored in sonnet scholarship. With everything else that has been postulated about the sonnet sequence, it seems justified to explore these ideas as well.

Although other sonnets could have been included in this discussion, the poems selected prove that comedy exists in the sonnet sequence. The personae in these poems speak both for us and to us, as our representatives and as our models—and we recognize and identify with these common men who are part of our perception of real life. Sonnet 104, "To me, fair friend, you never can be old," and Sonnet 91, "Some glory in their birth, some in their skill," portray speakers who are not themselves extraordinary but who are rendered extraordinary due to whom they love and due to the degree and commitment of their love. Furthermore, they are extraordinary because they recognize and appreciate reality rather than illusion or ideals, because they value substance over form. We recognize that these lovers are "one of us" as well—and we are comforted by the poems' implicit message that common men are just as worthy and capable of real love as leaders or extraordinary men. The humor in these poems

is subtle—detectable in puns, word plays, irony, and tone—but it is present for the open-minded reader to enjoy.

Sonnet 138, "When my love swears that she is made of truth," is particularly interesting for the rhetorical reader in that this poem, which is commonly held to be serious and negative, is actually a positive, uplifting example of gentle Shakespearean comedy. Here again, the speaker is a common man—we can discern this from his tone, language, and rhetorical skills—but he, too, understands the essence of love and the consequences of loss just as keenly, as exquisitely, as painfully acutely as the aristocrat. Here is a hero, again, the beloved comic hero, who recognizes his own shortcomings and those of his beloved—yet, unlike the tragic hero, he accepts these shortcomings and finds a way to cope with them. Sonnet 138 is a powerfully affirmative statement about life and love—in this poem, the "lie" has a wonderfully positive connotation in that, in the end, it is the lie that tells the truth here about love and about art, for it is the pun on "lie," the feature about which scholars so vigorously debate, that actually makes the poem so memorable and universally applicable. The focal point of the poem, the pun is an outstanding device which evokes an unusually

mixed emotional and intellectual response from the open-minded reader—is it truth or is it fiction? is it love or is it lust? is it comedy or is it tragedy?—and it is because of this feature, rather than in spite of it, that the poem succeeds so well.

In the end, the pun on "lies," which elicits contradicting emotional and intellectual responses—positive and negative—proves to be a humorous, delightful rhetorical strategy because the good finally outweighs the bad due to the speaker's positive, sanguine, upbeat tone. Here the positive, accepting tone overcomes the ambiguous subject matter to create a poem of comedy, a poem in which the speaker makes gentle fun of his and his lover's situation and of the motives behind it. For that reason, this study views Sonnet 138 as a bridge poem illustrating a progression from subtly humorous poems to overtly humorous poems in the sequence in that its comedy seems even more obvious and more intentional than that in Sonnets 104 and 91 and yet less obvious and intentional than that in Sonnets 143 and 130. The degrees of comedy evident in this progression argue in favor of Lanham's theory about the commingled influence of rhetorical man and serious man in works of art—it can be

subtle or overt—and it supports Huizinga's idea that poetry is play, all poetry, to one degree or another.

In the final poems discussed herein, Sonnet 143, "Lo as a careful housewife runs to catch," and Sonnet 130, "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun," the comedic elements are clear and unmistakable. Sonnet 143 is funny by any reader's standards, yet despite the positive reaction it provokes, it has been maligned due to its epic simile depicting the housewife chasing a chicken. As this study suggests, however, the simile is not as ridiculous as has been suggested by critics. True, compared to the pre-occupations of the courtly love convention, this affair may seem trivial and silly, but examined in the context of real life, it is not so inconsequential. Again, the struggle for daily bread is a justified pursuit. Further, one must consider the speaker's intention in the poem. If his idea is to create a poem of comedy, he succeeds very well, and since that is what appears to be going on in this poem, it should be judged according to appropriate standards. And according to comedic standards, this poem is outstanding and brilliant in its own way. It presents everyday people in an everyday situation; it provokes laughter; and it demands that the reader consider a serious situation—a contest of

the heart. Again, like all good comedy, it couches a serious problem in positive comedic terms by suggesting acceptance of reality and resolution of conflict or the triumph of integration over isolation.

Like Sonnet 143, Sonnet 130 is an exceptionally funny, amusing poem, and as suggested earlier, it represents the exemplar poem of comedy in the sonnet sequence. There are so many things going on in this poem. As Wilson suggests, the sonnet parodies both the sonnet convention as well as the conceptions of beauty and aristocracy of the time—but it also does much more. The traditional Elizabethan love sonnet represents a glowing, effusive tribute to a lady. It depicts the lady herself as blond, fair, perfect, and often unattainable. She is bigger than and better than real life in every regard. The heroine of Sonnet 130 is not such a woman. She is the opposite of the typical sonnet mistress—again, she has dark hair and a dark complexion; she is somewhat clumsy, and she is decidedly common. And yet, obviously, she is deeply loved, and that is the paradox that Shakespeare establishes in the poem. Here the speaker is poking fun at the sonnet convention itself and at the ideal of beauty of his time, and more importantly, he is asking the reader to recognize—and appreciate—a living

woman, one who represents reality rather than fantasy, genuine values rather than false ones. This poem is so much more significant than it is held to be, for it makes the statement that beauty really is only "skin deep," that real people will be loved for whom and what they are rather than what they look like or appear to be. Moreover, it implicitly suggests that reality is superior to idealism. Here the lady is admired and cherished because of—not in spite of—her common, down-to-earth qualities. In this poem, we are asked to share the speaker's appreciation of the genuine beauty of reality versus the deceptive beauty of illusion.

Thus, Sonnet 130 deals with Shakespeare's familiar theme of illusion versus reality in an exceptionally humorous, satisfying manner. And by all definitions of play and comedy discussed herein, this poem is the ultimate expression of Shakespeare's treatment of these elements in the sonnet sequence. Here we encounter a confident, psychically healthy speaker who understands all of the intricacies and ramifications of the game he is playing both with his mistress and with his audience. And thus in this poem, we see how significant play is in that it is the way in which the speaker approaches his love affair and in that

it is the way in which the speaker communicates his love for his lady, a love that he wants the world and all posterity to recognize. And finally, although the poem is undeniably funny and highly entertaining, it makes important comments about human nature and human values. Therefore, we see that the message here is not compromised by the medium, and we must acknowledge that Sonnet 130 not only is one of Shakespeare's most famous and lovable works but also is a significant work, both in Huizinga's conception of that word and in our own.

Douglas Bush agrees with Sir Walter Raleigh's opinion that Shakespeare's sonnets "have been used like wedding cake, not to eat but to dream upon" (7), and that idea does seem legitimate in that the so many of the poems do speak to our hopes, dreams, and aspirations rather than our real life situations. The poems discussed in this study, however, are a bit different from—and perhaps in a way, more satisfying than—many of the works in the sequence in that they allow us to dream and to eat. That is, these poems, like all of the sonnets, effectively and beautifully address some of our dearest concerns as humans, and yet they speak to these concerns in an immediate, realistic fashion which we readily understand and with which we identify because their heroes

represent individuals whom we recognize as essentially real people, because their language and rhetorical applications are accessible and clear, and because their humorous elements deliver us from our everyday trials and cares. Consequently, the comic poems particularly are more than "wedding cake," more than mere sources of delight and pleasure. They are also the stuff of real life, and at the same time, they do give us something to dream upon in that they provide us with a picture of ourselves as we are—for better and worse—and of ourselves as we would be. They are thus at once realistic and inspirational; they both accept reality and embrace nobility in that they tend to see these traits as one and the same, a profound insight indeed. And finally, the comic sonnets are important because they provide us with the opportunity to observe the full range of Shakespeare's talents, for in the comic poems, we definitely recognize the poet's playful antics—"Will to boot, and Will in overplus" indeed—and they invite all readers to appreciate them on that basis alone, as memorable and singular expressions of the remarkable comic vision of the poet William Shakespeare.

NOTES

¹ For traditional scholarly commentary, see the following critical works grouped according to primary area of inquiry. In many cases, of course, the subject matter of these texts overlaps.

Annotated anthologies:

Bush, Douglas and Alfred Harbage, eds. The Sonnets. Rev. ed. Rpt. 11. New York: Penguin, 1985.

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Analyses attempting to explain or demystify the sonnets by examining such concerns as theme, rhetoric, diction, sexual implications, and the like:

Booth, Wayne C. Shakespeare and Elizabethan Poetry: A Study of his Earlier Work in Relation to the poetry of his Time. New York: Oxford UP, 1952.

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Note: Many of these commentaries also make reference to one or more of the following specialized contexts.

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The Dark Lady:

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Biographical/historical context:

- Anspacher, Louis Kaufman. Shakespeare as Poet and Lover and the Enigma of the Sonnets. New York: Island, 1944.
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² For another positive reading of Sonnet 138, see a 1980 article by Edward A. Snow, "Loves of Comfort and Despair: A Reading of Shakespeare's Sonnet 138," in the History of the English Language, pages 462-83. Snow points out that the poem is usually read in negative terms and that this reading recognizes a speaker whose attitudes and viewpoints are comparable to the heroes in some of the plays (he mentions Hamlet, Troilus and Cressida, and Othello), in which the protagonists reveal their "disgust with sexuality, their distrust of women, and their cynical, disillusioned . . . subjectively male" isolation (462). According to Snow, however, the speaker in Sonnet 138 more accurately reflects the protagonists in plays like Anthony and Cleopatra and Romeo and Juliet, satisfied individuals who realistically accept the true nature of sexuality and all of the other realities—for example, "lies" in the name of love rather than duplicity—inherent in the male/female relationship. The key here is reality—Snow calls the poem the "'realistic' opposite of the high-minded Sonnet 116" (479), a work in which "aesthetic value inheres naturally in the unembellished texture of human realization, instead of becoming something created and imposed in despair" (469). Here Snow seems to be saying that reality does not spoil but rather enhances romance.

In a line by line rhetorical analysis, Snow makes his point by comparing the more positive semantics and syntactical structures of the 1609 Quarto version of the poem to those of the 1599 version published in the Passionate Pilgrim and by comparing it to various passages from the plays which support his thesis. While he does not address the notion of comedy in the poem, Snow's analysis does agree with the idea in this paper that the 1609 version of the sonnet embraces a "complex, humane breadth of vision" (469), that it is a poem of affirmation rather than one of cynicism and despair.

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