

# Mimesis in William Shakespeare's Sonnets

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**Abstract**—William Shakespeare is considered as one of the greatest Renaissance poets, writers, and playwrights. He presents on his works vivid impressions of human temperament that are timeless and universal.

Using qualitative- descriptive discourse analysis, this study determines mimetically the realities depicted in Shakespeare's selected sonnets. It also delves into an in- depth analysis of the language used to paint concrete impressions of human activities through the formalistic critical analysis. After a thorough investigation, it is found out that Shakespeare's selected sonnets reveal universal themes of admiration, rejection, unconditional love, longing, desire, and unrequited love-- unleashed through the figurative language used such as metaphor, simile, personification, symbol, hyperbaton, hyperbole, oxymoron and metonymy. From these vision or themes, life's realities are extracted. With these findings, it is concluded that William Shakespeare's sonnets reveal mimetic signification of reality.

**Index Terms**—Figurative, mimetic, realities, signification, and temperament.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Man's existence is recorded through time--his actuations, choices, beliefs and even his struggles are written to make them known through time. Lauro [1] aptly said, "Literature was present in every stage of life. It is a living witness of man's defeat and triumph; it is both a reflection and a product of the times and the circumstances it was written".

Poetry, being the highest form of literature, is not only the most elemental form of human communication but also the most sophisticated and subtle genre. Difficult and challenging to comprehend as it might be to most readers due to the language used and its intricacy, poetry as a condensed work of art is rich of universal values that anyone who reads it has to put in his emotional overtones to a particular expression so that his conversation with the creator becomes a meaningful transaction.

William Shakespeare is one of the greatest literary figures of history as his works, prose or poetry, have influenced the writing arena for over 400 years. He captures great range of human emotions in all his works that transcend their origins in England including his well- known sonnets.

It is along this contention, that Shakespeare's sonnets are chosen to be read and deduced to examine how his literary genius reflects human emotions of his time that are true and still evident until today.

## II. OBJECTIVES

This paper aims to inculcate in the readers the universal truths that can be extracted from the selected sonnets of William Shakespeare. More than the personal emotions, imagination and genius from which his works are made and created, it is just right and appropriate to give merits to his sonnets in terms of the realities that can be drawn out from his vision or state of mind.

Likewise, this study theorizes that Shakespeare's sonnets reveal textual elements that are formalistic and mimetic in nature. This paper is supported by the **formalistic theory** of critical analysis. It analyzes the whole structure of the text being studied which is to include the different elements namely: the imagery, poetic vision, and diction or language used. Imagery brings the experience conveyed in the poem to life by appealing to the reader's senses. In the formalist view Di Yanni [2], the main concern of this analysis is the work or the text itself as a distinct piece, free from its environment, era, and even its author. This is otherwise known as the theory of textuality or new criticism. According to Adams [3], it considers any literary work as an object with internal purpose. The purpose of understanding a poem entails arousal of senses. This arousal is possible if the poet successfully paints the images vividly to facilitate understanding through the powerful use of words. Together with symbols, it provides a visual facet that concretizes the poetic vision. On the other hand, poetic vision dictates the norms and values explored in the poem. It refers to the theme that reveals the message embodied in the poem. Consequently, the poet in his attempt to express incommunicable aspects of experience uses emotional overtones or associations of words. This embodies the figures of speech which according to Aguilar [4] are ornaments that strengthen attractive, elevated and dignified language use by the author. All of these elements are creatively interwoven in order to serve its purpose which is to give a moral to its readers as well as enjoyment.

This study is also anchored on the **mimetic theory** that considers a poem an imitation of life's struggles. In this critical analysis, Adams [3] considers any work of art as an imitation, a representation, or a copy of nature or some other poems. This presumption of imitation paves the idea of creation by the romantics. Critics emphasized the power of language to create or at least give significant shape to nature; thus, making it and art go together as they are inseparable. This contention is supported by Wordsworth's definition of poetry as quoted in Kennedy & Gioia [5] as the image of man and nature.

Using the two critical theories of analyzing literary works, namely: the formalistic and the mimetic, this investigation is conducted.

### III. LITERARY RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### A. Method Used

Using the qualitative-descriptive discourse content analysis, this study investigates the formalistic figurative language and the mimetic signification of reality of the six selected sonnets of William Shakespeare.

#### B. Sources of Verbal Data

The sources of verbal data are mainly the six selected sonnets randomly chosen namely: Sonnets 18, 56, 87, 116, 150 and 154 respectively.

#### C. Data- Gathering Procedure

The in-depth discourse content analysis undergoes two phases as follows:

*Phase One* involves a detailed inquiry of the figurative language used through identifying the commonly used figures of speech in the sonnets.

*Phase Two* involves a careful examination of the poetic vision that becomes elemental in drawing out life's realities in the selected sonnets.

### IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The figurative language that becomes elemental in drawing out Shakespeare's poetic vision is embodied through the figures of speech used in his poem. A tabular presentation of these figures of speech is illustrated in Table I.

TABLE I: FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE USED

Sonnet	Figure of Speech	Line(s)
Sonnet 18	Metaphor	1
	Personification	3/11
	Hyperbaton	4
	Metonymy	5
	Oxymoron	6
	Symbol	9/11
Sonnet 56	Personification	1/6
	Hyperbole	8
	Hyperbaton	10
	Simile	9
Sonnet 87	Simile	2/13
	Personification	8
Sonnet 116	hyperbaton	12/14
	Hyperbaton	3
	Metaphor	5/7/9
Sonnet 150	metonymy	12
	Metonymy	1
	Hyperbaton	14
	Personification	4/6
Sonnet 154	Oxymoron	3/8
	Hyperbaton	3
	Hyperbole	10/14

**Personification** as defined is the figure of speech used when inanimate object is given the human attribute like in the lines of Sonnets 18, 56, 87 and 150 respectively.

In Sonnet 18, it is the wind that is given the human attribute of shaking the flowers of May as if it has the hands to do it. On the same manner, the eyes in Sonnet 56 is described to be hungry like humans and animals. The use of personification is so strong that in Sonnet 87, Shakespeare gives his back being the persona the human characteristic of being able to change direction as the need arises and brightness in Sonnet 150 the incapacity to make the day

filled of love and hope like a person capable of making or unmaking one's life miserable.

**Hyperbaton** is another figure of speech used in Shakespeare's sonnets. As defined, it is the figure of speech where the writer is given the poetic license not to follow the regular sentence pattern of the poem to suit his rhythmic scheme or his intended purpose.

**Metonymy** is similar to synecdoche; it's a form of metaphor allowing an object or situation to stand for the thing itself.

The eye of heaven in Sonnet 18 stands for the sun itself as there is nothing too hot that shines in the heavens above. Considering that the sun is the biggest star in the universe, it is but logical to consider it the hottest of all. In like manner, doom in Sonnet 116 stands for death itself. What is central in the use of metonymy in this particular sonnet is Shakespeare's definition of what true love is. He defines it as unconditional that it bears life's frailties even until death.

Comparison is also used in Shakespeare's sonnets. Notably it uses simile that unveils the resemblance of two unlike things or objects using *like* or *as*. What are directly compared in Sonnet 56 are *interim* with *ocean*, *thee* with *dream* and *art* with *knowing*.

Another comparison used is **metaphor**. It is the figure of speech that makes an indirect comparison of two unlike things or objects without the use of "*like* or *as*" as clearly illustrated in the lines of Sonnets 18 and 116. Indirectly, Shakespeare compares his object of love or admiration to summer in Sonnet 18 while in Sonnet 116 he dominantly uses metaphors when he indirectly compares love to something that is steadfast and strong. In like manner, he compares love indirectly to a fixed mark or sign that never yielded the test of time and to a star that gives light in the dark and guides the lost sheep back to its flock. Thus, it makes his definition of love emanating in his ornamentation.

**Oxymoron** is also used in the sonnets. It is the figure of speech that combines two incongruous ideas as shown in Sonnets 18 and 150. The use of opposites together in one construction adds beauty and intricacy to the lines of Shakespeare's sonnets. Such are gold and dim, lie and true and worst and best. While gold is something bright and colorful, dim is entirely opposite; to lie means to speak falsely and true sight means an honest remark of something making the two preceding ideas contrast; worst and best are obviously incongruous as they are negative and positive superlatives respectively.

**Symbol** is also identified as a figure of speech used in the poem. It is like simile and metaphor with the object of comparison used to associate ideas. This is where youth and immortality are exhibited in Sonnet 18.

**Hyperbole** is also used in Shakespeare's sonnets. It expresses exaggeration in making the impossible to appear seemingly possible in the minds of the reader. This is illustrated in Sonnets 56 and 154. The exaggeration posted is that of having perpetual dullness in spirited love, having perpetual heat in love's fire and bringing water to its boiling point by love's fire. The impossibility there is when one believes in forever. In love everything is possible; happiness and sadness can be inevitable. When one loves, he needs to yield sacrifices as love is not always a bed of roses. It has its ups and downs. Therefore, nothing good or bad perpetuates

in this world.

The poetic vision embodied in the selected sonnets of William Shakespeare is shown in Table II. From the poetic vision are the life's realities or universal truths extracted.

**Sonnet 18** is a poem that embodies what it takes to admire for something or someone ideal. It makes every human being capable of doing anything just to make this feeling be expressed in the most subtle and complicated way he wants it to be. The persona in this particular sonnet expresses his deep admiration to the addressee which in other books is thought to be Shakespeare's object of love. What is important here is the intensity of the feeling he had for this addressee that it makes it right and fitting to write the sonnet on his honor. He immortalizes this person as exemplified in lines 9- 10.

TABLE II: POETIC VISION AND LIFE'S REALITIES

Sonnet	Figures of Speech	Vision	Realities
Sonnet 18	Metaphor Personification Hyperbaton Metonymy Oxymoron	Admiration	Admiration moves mountains.
Sonnet 56	Personification Hyperbole Hyperbaton Simile	Longing	The longing of the heart makes one every inch human.
Sonnet 87	Simile Personification Hyperbaton	Rejection	Rejection is an acknowledgment in disguise.
Sonnet 116	Metonymy Personification Hyperbaton Metaphor Oxymoron Symbol	Unconditional love	True love surpasses the tests of time.
Sonnet 150	Metonymy Hyperbaton Personification Oxymoron	Desire	Something desirable is worth the price.
Sonnet 154	Hyperbaton Hyperbole	Unrequited Love	It's better to have loved and failed than never to have loved at all.

**Sonnet 56** expresses the poet's longing to be loved in return by his beloved. This is clearly manifested in lines 9, 11 and 12. The longing is so intense that even the mere sight of his beloved would make his day full of hope and inspiration as he expresses it in lines 5 and 6. His plea is just to be given the freedom to love his beloved infinitely in order to live his life graciously as illustrated in lines 7-8 and 11-12. This brings the reality of life that longing for someone is a natural feeling; it makes one in every inch human.

**Sonnet 87** is a clear expression of the poet's feeling of rejection. He contemplates that to be with his beloved could only be real on his dream; so that he would opt not to wake up to have it forever as shown in lines 13 and 14. Such that the reality drawn out from this sonnet lies in the acknowledgment of one's feeling: accepted or rejected.

**Sonnet 116** epitomizes the kind of love that knows no

boundaries. This is what unconditional love is as defined by Shakespeare in lines 2 and 3. He uses metaphors in his definitions with love likened to a star and a fixed mark as expressed in lines 5-7. This given definition encompasses what true love is; it transcends the worldly essentials to keep it going. It does not demand from the other person what makes and what does not make him happy. In short, this reflects the reality that when one loves, he bears all things and endures all things. Hence, true love surpasses the tests of time.

**Sonnet 150** spells out the poet's irresistible attraction or desire that turns to love to a woman. She might not be the ideal woman for him but this love is so powerful that regardless of what others may say, he is more than willing to fight for it whatever is the cost. Lines 8-12 show this proclamation.

What is tectonic about this idea is that love knows neither faults nor demerits. It does not condemn the shortcomings of the person rather it rejoices on the strengths exhibited by the other in facing life's struggles.

**Sonnet 154** laments over the poet's dismay on the unreciprocated feeling of love. He dramatizes his expression in lines 11-14 showing how he allowed himself to be enslaved for the sake of the maiden's love but was still disregarded. When one loves, he can make things possible. He can make the ugliest thing the most beautiful. However, this is not always true to the one being loved. At times, the feeling is linear; it is not always a two- way process. In short, love is not always reciprocated; to love means to be hurt. Painful as it is, it is always better to have loved and failed than never to have loved at all. What matters most, one learns to accept life's failures. It is in one's afflictions that one becomes a stronger person.

With the aforementioned discussions, it is found out that William Shakespeare's six selected sonnets through the figures of speech used unleashed the poetic vision of admiration, longing, rejection, unconditional love, desire, and unrequited love from which life's realities are extracted.

## V. CONCLUSION

The six sonnets understudy is just representations of the many sonnets of Shakespeare that mirror human actuations, aspirations and even life's battles. The universality of their themes makes his works appeal to both elite and common audiences during his time and even today. Therefore, reading his timeless works makes one learned about life and the predicaments of the people who go through it and who succeeded amidst the odds.

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APPENDIX

**Sonnets Understudy**

**SONNET 18**

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:  
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;  
And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimmed;  
But thy eternal summer shall not fade  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;  
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,  
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st;  
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

**Sonnet 56**

Sweet love, renew thy force; be it not said  
Thy edge should blunter be than appetite,  
Which but to-day by feeding is allayed,  
To-morrow sharpened in his former might:  
So, love, be thou; although to-day thou fill  
Thy hungry eyes even till they wink with fullness,  
To-morrow see again, and do not kill  
The spirit of love with perpetual dullness.  
Let this sad interim like the ocean be simile  
Which parts the shore, where two contracted new  
Come daily to the banks, that, when they see  
Return of love, more blest may be the view;  
Else call it winter, which being full of care  
Makes summer's welcome thrice more wish'd,  
more rare.

**Sonnet 87**

Farewell! thou art too dear for my possessing,  
And like enough thou know'st thy estimate,  
The charter of thy worth gives thee releasing;  
My bonds in thee are all determinate.  
For how do I hold thee but by thy granting?  
And for that riches where is my deserving?  
The cause of this fair gift in me is wanting,  
And so my patent back again is swerving.  
Thy self thou gavest, thy own worth then not knowing,  
Or me to whom thou gav'st it else mistaking;  
So thy great gift, upon misprision growing,  
Comes home again, on better judgment making.  
Thus have I had thee, as a dream doth flatter,  
In sleep a king, but waking no such matter.

**Sonnet 116**

Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments. Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove:  
O' no; it is an ever-fixed mark,  
That looks on tempests and is never shaken,  
It is the star to every wandering bark,  
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.  
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
Within his bending sickle's compass come;  
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.

If this be error and upon me proved,  
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

**Sonnet 150**

O! From what power hast thou this powerful might,  
With insufficiency my heart to sway?  
To make me give the lie to my true sight,  
And swear that brightness doth not grace the day?  
Whence hast thou this becoming of things ill,  
That in the very refuse of my deeds  
There is such strength and warrantise of skill,  
That in my mind, thy worst all best exceeds?  
Who taught thee how to make me love thee more,  
The more I hear and see just cause of hate?  
O! Though I love what others do abhor,  
With others thou shouldst not abhor my state:  
If thy unworthiness raised love in me,  
More worthy I to be loved of thee.

**Sonnet 154**

The little Love-god lying once asleep  
Laid by his side his heart-inflaming brand,  
Whilst many nymphs that vow'd chaste life to keep  
Come tripping by; but in her maiden hand  
The fairest votary took up that fire  
Which many legion of true hearts had warm'd;  
And so the general of hot desire symbol  
Was sleeping by a virgin hand disarm'd.  
This brand she quenched in a cool well by,  
Which from Love's fire took heat perpetual,  
Growing a bath and healthful remedy  
For men diseased; but I, my mistress' thrall,  
Come there for cure, and this by that I prove,  
Love's fire heats water, water cools not love.

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Fascinated in what she is currently doing, Dr. Bustos finds pleasure writing literature textbooks. As a research enthusiast, she has presented papers in local, national and international research fora. Just last April 2-7, 2015, she joined in the 5th Asian Conference on Literature and Librarianship in Osaka, Japan where she also published her paper. She always believes that success is best served to one who puts in and perseverance on his work.