



Research on the Appreciation of Shakespeare's Sonnet 44 and 45

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Abstract. Love is an eternal motif in Shakespeare's sonnets. Among his 154 sonnets, he reveals, implicitly or passionately, the different states of love with profuse metaphors, deep philosophy and coherent emotions. There are always connections and similarities between sonnets. Take Sonnet 44 and Sonnet 45 as an example, both express the feeling of being far away from loved ones; both use the same images of the four elements of life, body and thought; and both indicate the yearning for nimble thought and the frustration of dull body, only the return of the loved one can make the narrator's life complete and make thought and body become one.

This thesis aims to compare and appreciate the presentation of motifs of the two sonnets. The expression of emotion in these two sonnets comes down in one continuous line. Shakespeare blends abstract concepts such as thought and desire into natural elements, and uses rich and changeable rhetorical devices to show the conflict between lightness and heaviness, and spirit and flesh.

Through these introspections and reflections, the love between the narrator and his beloved becomes stronger after suffering and separation while the poet's interpretation and understanding of love and life become more profound.

Keywords: Sonnet · Appreciation · Motif · The four elements of life · Body and thought

1 Introduction

According to the classification of Shakespeare scholars Edmond Malone and George Steevens at the end of the eighteenth century, Shakespeare's sonnets can be divided into three series, Sonnet 1 to 126 are called "The Fair Youth Sequence" which are written for a young aristocrat [1]. Shakespeare eulogizes his love for the fair youth as a friend, a lover, and even a slave. He places all the truth, kindness, and beauty on the fair youth who is the embodiment of ideal love. As in Sonnet 109, the poet declares passionately that "For nothing this wide universe I call. Save thou, my Rose; in it thou art my all [2]."

Although there is much debate among critics as to whom Shakespeare's sonnets were written for, it can be inferred that under the social background of England in the 16th century, Shakespeare as an actor or operating theatres needed to get the support of the royal family and nobles, he hoped that his sonnets to win noble's support and protection, so for the elite youth, his love was more like an unrequited loyalty to his

protector. Perhaps due to the huge differences in age and status between the poet and the fair youth, such unconditional and wholehearted affection did not get the proper response. The poet was often anxious and painful in love. However, like W. H. Auden's words: "If equal affection cannot be, let the more loving one be me [3]." Because of this, even in the face of separation or betrayal from his lover, the poet is as firm as he is in Sonnet 105:

Since all alike my songs and praises be
To one, of one, still such, and ever so.
Kind is my love today, tomorrow kind,
Still constant in a wondrous excellence;

Sonnet 44 and 45 express the pain of the absence of the loved one. The two sonnets can be compared and analyzed together because they are emotionally continuous, they use the same images, those are, the four elements of earth, water, air and fire, and both the two sonnets express the same motif, namely the contradiction between thought and body. Therefore, this thesis will mainly focus on the key images and motifs mentioned in the two sonnets such as the four elements of life and the conflict between thought and body in order to discover the profound meaning of the two sonnets and to understand Shakespeare and his time.

2 The Use of Natural Images

Shakespeare's sonnets contain various kinds of images that link objective facts to the poet's thoughts and emotions. This chapter mainly analyzes the natural images of the four elements of life in Sonnet 44 and 45. As Shakespeare likes to use the sun as a symbol of youth, and sunset as a symbol of old age, in these two sonnets, Shakespeare links the natural elements of earth and water to the heavy and dull body, fire, and air to nimble thought. The use of these images gives new meaning to the common concepts and combines with the melancholy mood of the poet's separation from his friends this makes the poem vivid and full.

2.1 The Four Elements of Life

Sonnet 44 and 45 reveal the same situation when the loved one is absent from the poet. In Sonnet 44, the injurious distance stops his way from his lover, he wishes his body to be as swift as thought to jump both sea and land to his lover's side, but the dull substance of his flesh is wrought by the elements of earth and water, which are heavy and slow. Then in Sonnet 45, the poet points out the other two elements of him: the slight air is his thought and the purging fire is his desire. These two elements can always be with his lover wherever he abides and without them, the poet's life is made of four elements that will sink to death. These two elements are regarded as the embassy of love to send messages between lovers. The use of the images of four elements in the two sonnets not only makes the relatively abstract concepts such as body, thought and desire more concrete, but also reflects the emotional preference of the poet that he cares more about

his nimble, free and passionate thought than his body of earth and water. At the end of Sonnet 45, it indicates that these messages from the loved one are not enough to comfort him, he is still sad about not being together with his lover.

2.2 The Origin and Interpretation of Image

About the four elements that make up life, according to ancient Greek philosopher Empedocles' theory on origin, all things are composed of water, earth, fire and air [4]. Each of the four elements is eternal and invariable, which cannot be transformed into each other. The four elements themselves do not have the power of combination and separation, and their separation and union need to be explained by external causes. That is the "love" that causes the elements to cling to each other, and the "hate" that causes the elements to fight against each other. Empedocles uses the four elements to explain the sensible nature of things, and uses love and hate to explain the birth and death of things. According to this view, the human body and thought should also be composed of the four elements to achieve a harmonious state. All four elements should work at the same time but in different components. However, in Sonnet 44 and 45, Shakespeare shows the estrangement and separation of the four elements, he divides the four elements into two groups and uses opposite adjectives to describe them. In the two sonnets, he creates a kind of incomplete situation due to the absence or indelible distance from the loved one. One is water and earth which sinks and leaves to him only with tears of sorrow. The other group includes air and fire which are equals to his thought or soul and has the function of refreshing and purging. There is a similar expression in Ovid's the *Metamorphosis* [5]: As God unlocked all elemental things,

Fire climbed celestial vaults, air followed it
To float in heavens below; and earth which carried
All heavier things with it dropped under air;
Water fell farthest, embracing shores and islands.

On this basis, Shakespeare gives emotional colors to the four elements and links them to more abstract motifs of body and thought so as to express the struggles with oneself in love. This also reflects that in the Renaissance, people's knowledge and perception of the world and individuals were still sensible. Writers tended to describe the universe, imitate nature, and link lifeless natural images with human emotions. For instance, Sonnet 44, gives weight to sadness, and the poet's helpless and painful mood is like mire mixed with earth and water. A gloomy atmosphere pervades Sonnet 44 and 45, with the involvement of the elements of air and fire, the depressing thought seems to have sublimated and purified. The flexible application of natural images realizes the emotional transformation between the two sonnets. In addition, the image of the four elements is a concrete representation of the real conflict between body and thought, which is also an eternal motif of Shakespeare's sonnets.

3 The Conflict Between Thought and Body

From Sonnet 1 to Sonnet 126, Shakespeare expresses more a kind of passionate and beautiful feeling for his beloved, even in the face of setback, his loved one in his heart

is the embodiment of the truth, the goodness and the beauty. About whom the poet in the sonnets eulogizes, there are a lot of statements in research circles. However, in these two sonnets, the object of praise can be regarded as a symbol of pure beauty or the embodiment of the poet's ideal, which is different from the physical love dominated by the desires of the body. In the expression of motifs, Shakespeare's sonnets show much inner conflict, in Sonnet 44 and 45, the poet uses the main conflict between thought and body to express the distance between him and his beloved. In the poet's opinion, body and mind are as clear as the opposition between happiness and sadness or heart and eye, and such opposing motifs highlight his emotional pain and entanglements, at the same time, it also expresses his hope for pure and sincere love and self-pursuit of art and beauty.

3.1 Different Properties of Body and Thought

On the one hand, the two sonnets express that body and thought have completely different properties. In the first line of Sonnet 44, the poet defines his flesh as the dull substance, and the opposite of that is his thought. The flesh, according to the Oxford English Dictionary [6], refers to the human body's physical and sexual needs rather than the mind or soul. "Thought kills me that I am not thought." The first "thought" means a deep yearning for his loved one, and the second "thought" is the thought as opposed to the body. The injurious distance between the body also means the insurmountable barrier between two hearts, which stops the poet's way of pursuing his true love. The poet in the pursuit of love and his ideal can never get rid of the sense of crisis, that is, the huge difference and estrangement of the thought and the body. This is the poet's main struggle in Sonnet 44. Because compared with the body, the thought can fly over the restrictions of time and space, and when the loved one is gone, the thought can leap large lengths of miles to keep the dull and heavy body away from moan and tears. The poet not only laments the irretrievable time and the impassable space, but also laments the irreconcilable conflict between body and thought, and the huge gap between reality and ideal. The poet lives on emotion, inspiration, and love, therefore he cannot bear the coarseness, mediocrity, and dullness of the body.

3.2 The Combination of Body and Thought

On the other hand, the poet expresses in Sonnet 45 that the human body and thought should be harmonized and unified to achieve a perfect fit. Therefore, although there are different properties of the body and the thought, they cannot be regarded in isolation. In Sonnet 45, it seems that the messages from the poet's lover lighten the poet up to him it is better for his thought to drift back and forth between his beloved and himself than to stay stuck. The person he writes about is important to him more than intimate friendship or physical attraction. To the poet, his loved one is his source of inspiration. There is a hint in Sonnet 38 that he compares his lover to his Muse. His love for his Muse is so extreme that Shakespeare claims in Sonnet 39 that "thou art all the better part of me", not to mention in Sonnet 45 he believes that it is his love's presence that makes his life fresh and complete. Without using metaphors, he makes no secret of his disappointment and helplessness of losing the youth's love. In Shakespeare's other

sonnets, for the inevitable separation, he also gives his explanations and predictions like after separation the lover will be unencumbered by the poet his humble self, and he can still praise and looks up to his lover. However, it is just self-deception. When the real separation comes, he soon gets himself into a state of anxiety and pain, and most painful at all, these are feelings that the poet has to digest on his own, feelings that the fair youth he loves may never understand. What is insignificant to the youth is all to the poet. Because of the separation from the loved one, the poet loses the nimble part of himself and this sense of incompleteness is the principle cause of his "oppressed with melancholy." Even if his thought can always follow his love, it is only the present-absent. The separation from the loved one is equivalent to the separation of body and thought. The loved one to the poet has become more than a concrete person, but an absolute spirit. This intense emotion can only be released by transforming into poetic words. Therefore, the "distance" in Sonnet 44 and 45 is not only physical, but also spiritual estrangement. The conflict between body and thought reflects the poet's projection of his ideal, joy and desire on his fair youth. At the same time, the poet often realizes that his humble status and intense passion bring more pain than joy to himself and his lover. The critic Robert Matz also argues that in these sonnets the poet's claims of close friendship may be an intrusive or even embarrassing relationship for the aristocratic fair youth [7]. Perhaps the poet himself suffers the most for he uses his honey-tongued lines to write his desperate heart, which plunges him deeper into psychological ambivalence and split personality [8]. The higher his love to the fair youth rises to the sublime, the lower he himself sinks down to death. He is always like an outsider to his beloved. Many of the motifs of Shakespeare's sonnets are in a state of contradictory unity; this usage of motifs is based on Shakespeare's full understanding of emotion and life. In this way, the contradiction between body and thought is visualized, reconciled and sublimated. That is, the unity and combination of body and thought to symbolize the completion of his love and ideal.

4 Conclusion

In Sonnet 44 and 45, the poet Shakespeare expresses two kinds of pain that cannot be changed, one is the heavy body is not as light as the thought, the other is the distance and space between the loved one and himself. Above the two sonnets, Shakespeare praises the fair youth not only out of deep love, but also because the poet regards him as the embodiment of truth, goodness, and beauty and he invests in the fair youth the lightest and most beautiful part of his thought, so he uses simple images, opposite motifs to express the fear of losing the love of the fair youth, of losing the source of inspiration. These two poems are like the author's inner monologue which reflects his mood of struggling and pain. In the two sonnets Shakespeare expresses his helplessness and dissatisfaction with the current situation, as well as his anxiety and uncertainty about personal value and identity. This thesis explains and analyzes the use of images and the expression of motifs and emotions in these two sonnets. Due to cultural differences and the limitation of my understanding of Shakespeare's sonnets, there are still many deficiencies in this thesis, which will be improved in the future research.

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