

Language of Praise versus Language of Degradation In Shakespeare's Sonnets [In English]

Abbas Goudarzi ^{1*}

1 Hamedan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Hamedan, Iran

*Corresponding author: goudarziabbas@gmail.com

DOI: 10.22034/jltll.2021.528502.0

Received: 21 Aug, 2019

Revised: 19 Jan, 2021

Accepted: 17 Aug, 2021

ABSTRACT

Concerning the scandal about the sexuality of the people, a young man and a dark lady, addressed in the Sonnets of William Shakespeare and their true identities, the present study aims at highlighting the fact that too much concern for such matters has been paid for by ignoring the discrimination that the poet had brought against the lady. This oppressive measure is tangibly present in both the language of degradation that he uses for describing the dark lady versus the language of glorification for the young man, and also the uneven number of the sonnets devoted to each of them. To this end, the reason for this defect in the sonnets is critically detected through general and particular discussions of them in the light of New Historicism and French Feminism as theoretical frameworks.

Key words: The sonnets, Shakespeare New Historicism, Feminism, language of degradation, language of praise

1. Introduction

1.1. The Scandal

"Probably, more nonsense has been talked and written, more intellectual and emotional energy expended in vain, on the sonnets of Shakespeare than on any other literary work in the world" (xviii). This is how W H Auden opens his Introduction to the Signet Classic's *The Sonnets*. The greatest part of the energy and time that Auden refers to has certainly been wasted on the problem of sexuality, that is on the gender of the people addressed by the poems or what has come to be notoriously termed, in Margreta de Grazia words, "the scandal" (1994: 36) of the sonnets. Since nothing is historically certain about them, however, such commentaries have, mostly, ended up in speculations concerning such important cases as the exact time of their composition, the exact identity of the addressees and the true order in which they should be arranged. The scandal rose when the first major Shakespeare scholar Edmond Malone, paid the first substantial critical attention to the sonnets in 1780. He divided the sonnets into two sexed groups; of 154 poems, 126 are addressed to a young man and the remaining 27 to a "dark lady". Upon this event, attempts have been made by different scholars and critics to exempt the Bard from the charge of homosexual longing which the first group of

the sonnets has made him liable of. Pleading to the Platonic concept of love is one defense that some have brought against the scandalous relation. As Douglas Trevor has put it:

Neoplatonism,” [as an excuse for Shakespeare’s homosexual love in the sonnets] as I am using the word, would substantiate in philosophical terms the following beliefs: the soul is purer than and substantively different from the body and will eventually return to its creator, who is likewise immaterial; the soul lives forever, while the body – in its earthly form at least – does not; love names the coupling of souls, not the pairing of bodies; in that love therefore is about spiritual and intellectual congress rather than physical, men might love men, and women might love women, without such love being besmirched by a lower, sexual appeal. (2007: 226)

Another excuse as much conjectural perhaps is the Renaissance ideal of friendship according to which such affectionate epithets had been rather considerate regards than forbidden taboos. Among the defenders of this stance, Benson is the most radical because he did not just theorize about the problem, rather in “his *Poems: Written by Wil Shake-speare Gent*, [1640] changed the masculine pronouns to feminine and introduced titles which directed the sonnets to the young man to a mistress” (De Grazia, 1994: 89). The scandal became all the more terrifying when Malone, the first major Shakespeare scholar identified the experience of the sonnets with that of the poet himself. Other critics have variously tried to refute this charge, too. De Grazia quotes from the case of one such critic, James Boswell Jr., for whom among other things “male desire for males could not have been an acceptable way of even speaking, even back then” (1994: 95).

1.2. The discrimination

Whatever the scandal, the division of the sonnets remains somehow true. This is because, as De Grazia again has pointed out, “the division has been generally accepted. It seems, after all, quite obvious: none of the 126 sonnets are addressed explicitly to a woman, and none of the remaining 28 one are addressed explicitly to a male” (1994: 66-7). As most of the mentioned defensive excuses have been persuasive enough to save the honor of the great poet, the scandal related to the sexual identity of the addressees of the poets has not seemed to be important enough to be a threat to Shakespeare’s already established grand status in world literature. Many scholars have rightly pointed out the all too tangible discrimination that the bard has worked out in the sonnets. For instance, in an article of hers, Ilona Bell holds: “The sonnets as a whole are usually read as a morality play in which the young man plays “the better angel,” the idealized spirit of male friendship while the dark lady plays “the worser spirit” (144. 3–4), the temptress who introduces lust, moral corruption, and deceit by seducing the man...” (2007: 293). In fact, the image that is presented of the dark lady is associated with certain negative feelings that have been even more obvious with the passage of time. Stephen Greenblatt maintains the same point when he writes: “she is everything that should arouse revulsion. Dishonest, unchaste, and faithless,” she “has infected [Shakespeare] with venereal disease” (2004: 255). Whatever happens to the young man and the dark lady is the effect of the language used and this is what Fineman also note when he writes of the man thus, “the young man is an ideal idol because the poetry of praise . . . displays him in its

Language of Praise versus Language of Degradation In Shakespeare's Sonnets

'wondrous scope' [l. 12]" (in Trevor, 2007: 231). My point, however, is why so many zealous editors and scholars have ignored the stark discriminatory language that Shakespeare uses for addressing the lady in comparison to grand language of praise that he employs for the young man. The case, however, is not so for the woman whose dominant trait seems to be being "foul". Regarding the portions of poems devoted to each also, if we after all accept Malone's gender division, the number of the poems for the youth are almost 4 times more than those of the lady. How we are to account for this problem is what the rest of this article tries to deal with.

2. New Historicist Perception

From a New Historicist position, there is much to be said about the sonnets. As Jan R Veenstra has succinctly puts it, New Historicism is such powerful tool for depicting the socio-cultural imperatives influential in the production of literary works:

Poetics of Culture [New Historicism] seeks to reveal the relationship between texts and their socio-historical contexts. Cultural Poetics assumes that texts not only document the social forces that inform and constitute history and society but also feature prominently in the social processes themselves which fashion both individual identity and the socio-historical situation. By means of an economic metaphor, Greenblatt explains how texts and other symbolic goods, by circulating in a society via channels of negotiation and exchange, contribute to the distribution of social energy, by which he means the intensities of experience that give value and meaning to life and that are also indispensable to the construction of self-awareness and identity. (1995: 181)

Therefore, a literary text is not a neutral means for the communication or expression of information or historical facts, it is rather an active participant in the socio-political arena of its time of production, and it can, as such, contribute to the "circulation" and maintenance of a dominant socio-political or cultural order to which it is after all subordinated. From a New Historicist stance, therefore, and in the words of its most eminent spokesman, Stephan Greenblatt, "the work of art is the product of negotiation between a creator or class of creators, equipped with a complex communally shared repertoire of conventions, and the institutions and practices of society" (2004: 12). The work of art, literature included, then is deeply involved in history and reproduces the many cultural imperatives of the time which have guided the hand of the writer.

From this perspective, the sonnets have reproduced or actively participated in the "circulation" of a socio-political order, or culturally accepted practice based on which expressing affections for a young man of noble aristocratic line is more naturally looked at, and more in line with the dominant discursive practice than doing so about a woman who is "foul". The very first line of the very first sonnet sets the discourse of the youth as the dominant one going: "From fairest creatures we desire increase" (1, 1). The key word in this line is "fairest" which designates the main trait of the young man. In the words of De Grazia here also "'fair' is the distinguishing attribute of the dominant class...that serves both to distinguish the dominant class and, by distinguishing it, to keep it dominant" (1994: 101-2). Also in accordance with our New Historicist stance, De Grazia states as the main thesis of her argument that:

It [the scandal] is not Shakespeare's desire for a boy, for in upholding the social distinctions, that desire proves quite conservative and safe. It is Shakespeare's gynerastic longings for a black mistress that are perverse and menacing precisely because they threaten to raze the very distinctions his poems to the fair boy strain to preserve. (1994: 106)

Therefore, in praising the young man, Shakespeare is moving safely along with and in support of the dominant ideological practice of his time, and as such does not feel unusual or amoral as he did for the later generations of readers and critics.

3. New Historicist with Foucault

A key figure of influence in the formation of New Historicism is, as we know, Michel Foucault, whose ideas about *power* and its relation to the formation of subject have been adopted and applied to various areas of critical theory. For him, as also a Poststructuralist thinker, the *subject* or *identity* is constructed by the exertion of power through the mediating role of the discourses. He maintains that all our knowledge, or how we come to understand the world around us is, at the end, the result of the workings of power through the discourses of the dominant ideology. Thus "discursive formations" as he goes on to call them, make our knowledge possible, and that knowledge, in turn, "gives the subject the impression that to comply with its dictates is the natural thing to do and thus a free autonomous decision" (Bertens, 2001: 179). For Foucault, language is essential to the workings of the discourse or discursive formations, because it is our most usual means for experiencing the world that has been presented to us via such discourses. In the light of this view, although the sonnets took an obviously unfair stance against the "dark lady", this stance is safe as long as it reproduces and re-inscribes the cultural imperatives of the dominant class, and at the same time, for Shakespeare and the readers of his time at least, the natural thing to do. Furthermore, as it is also the case, the poet's adherence to this system of thought is also unconscious and in accordance with an identity formed in subordination to the all-pervasive discourse that prescribes it as the natural thing to be.

As part of human identity, *sexuality*, for Foucault, is also culturally constructed not naturally intended. Ideological percepts or discursive formations have provided "sexed bodies" with certain social positions each of which may project certain implications as to how one is to regard a man or woman. The people have come up with such cultural concepts as femininity and masculinity to be applied in widely different areas. Under the influence of Foucault and other innovative thinkers, modern consciousness has come to realize that "in place of a universalized subject conceptualized as a cohesive, stable identity, [one shall] describe an already sexed—that is, embodied— subjectivity that is socially and discursively constructed within politically motivated relations of power" (Stephenson, 1999: 428). The problematic that such consciousness detects here, however, is that the "relations of power" are after all, relations of domination and subordination, and in the case of femininity, for example, "All ... uses of femininity are interconnected, and their interface is most often their contradictory evocation of femininity as at once sexual, transgressive, even threatening, and as inferior, weak and dependent" (Glover and Kaplan, 2000: 8). Such negative attributes of femininity have been wrought through the workings of domineering discourses among which, a prominent one is *patriarchy*.

Language of Praise versus Language of Degradation In Shakespeare's Sonnets

The same discursive formations seem to be at work in the sonnets of Shakespeare where the language of degradation is naturally used for describing the identity of the black lady. This is because the goals gratified by the sexuality present in the text are those set by the political discourse which, according to Foucault, constructs both the identity of the author and their perception of sexual norms. As Bruce R. Smith puts it:

Foucault's insistence that sexuality is a cultural construct invites a reading of Shakespeare's sonnets as part of a social process whereby erotic feelings and certain bodily acts are coordinated toward politically useful ends. Thus ... it is unruly desires expressed in the dark lady sonnets, not affection for the man right fair that threatened the social order of early modern England. Sonnet 144 epitomizes the situation by casting the man right fair as "the better angel" and the woman colored ill as "the worser spirit" (144, 4). (2003: 23)

4. French Feminism

Foucault's multi-volume *History of Sexuality* has, in fact, problematized the concept of *sexuality* as a natural given and thus, has set the agenda for the Feminism to enter a new phase also borrowing from such other fields as psychoanalysis of Lacan and Marxism. This phase, which is often termed *French Feminism*, began at mid-1970s when feminists first realized "the potential of poststructuralist concepts and arguments for [their] critiques of the patriarchal social order" (Bertens, 2001: 164). In its earlier phases, Feminism was rather concerned with the social rights of women, how women's experiences are presented in the works of male writers, and how woman writers have been affected by literary standards set by the male writers. In its phase called French Feminism, however, in the words of one commentator, it is held that:

The focus was neither on the status of women as producers of literature, nor on the representation of women's experience in literature, but rather on the production of the "feminine" in literature. Works influenced by French feminism focused on the way that notions of woman and femininity are constructed and valorized in and through literature regarded as a system of signs Masculinity and femininity both derive their meanings, and... their values, in opposition to each other, but that opposition is produced through a repression of particular qualities on one side and their projection onto the other. Hence the understanding of masculinity as powerful, reasonable and essentially of the mind is derived from the definition of femininity as vulnerable, emotional, and essentially of the body. (Weil, 1999:154)

The sonnets are exactly the site of such hierarchies in which from a Feminist viewpoint, the concepts of "femininity" as presented by the dark lady sonnets and masculinity presented by those to the fair boy are constructed out of the epithetic descriptions which the language of the speaker as a sign system provides. Such hierarchies are most naturally represented in the form of "binary oppositions" which are rendered tangible through the differential system of language. Central to Shakespeare's lingual strategies of discriminatory degradation is the binary opposition "fair/foul" from which are derived many other ones. In fact, the implications of these two words comprise all the negative and positives epithets that the discourse of patriarchal domination assigns to being feminine and masculine, respectively. Beside the implications that might not be inferred by all,

the significations tangibly stated for these words are true and natural for *fair* and false for *foul*. Therefore, considering once more the gender division of the sonnets, we notice that the first sonnet to the young man starts by referring to his most prominent feature; that is being “fairest”, and likewise, sonnet 127, the first in the dark lady series, opens in these words: “In the old age, black was not counted fair,/Or if it were it bore not beauty’s name” (1-2). The language used in the black lady’s sonnet is never for praise; it, on the contrary, sounds scolding and rude. Her beauty (if any) is “false”, it is “foul”, at best, it is a fake fair which is the result of “art’s false borrowed face” (6), not at all like the “fair” which is natural and true. Now this new beauty has slandered the fair one, slandering all “creation with a false esteem” (12). One may write a long list of such differentiating traits in the sonnets which stage an opposition between the youth and the lady. Even if the lady is actually foul in being dark, the point remains true that the speaker of the poems is degrading her, more than anything else, for being dark (foul). The famous Sonnet 144 is an important one dramatizing this opposition in a relaxed language:

Two loves I have of comfort and despair,
Which like two spirits do suggest me still,
The better angel is a man right fair:
The worser spirit a woman coloured ill.
To win me soon to hell my female evil,
Tempteth my better angel from my side,
And would corrupt my saint to be a devil:
Wooing his purity with her foul pride.
And whether that my angel be turned fiend,
Suspect I may, yet not directly tell,
But being both from me both to each friend,
I guess one angel in another’s hell.
Yet this shall I ne’er know but live in doubt,
Till my bad angel fire my good one out. (Shakespeare, 1988: 184)

Some of the oppositions constructing the gender roles in the sonnets are now discussed. The story goes that the “fair” gives “comfort”, the “foul” provides him with “despair”. A “better angel” is opposed to a “worser spirit”, he gives heavenly mercy, she hellish despair. While she is a “female evil”, he is a pious “saint”. He is of “purity”; she is of “foul pride”. She is the one who “tempteth” toward lustful hell, and communicates venereal disease; he is a “good [pious] angel” who might finally be contaminated by the lustful temptress. More than being abstract or objective media for communicating neutral information, these words with their positive or negative connotative values represent the concepts of feminine and masculine as an irreconcilable opposition.

French writer and literary critic, Hélène Cixous, who is also a leading figure in French Feminism, sees the binary opposition man/woman central to all, at least, western Civilization. In ‘Sorties’, an essay published in 1975, she begins by a long list of such binary oppositions in which the woman always occupies the inferior position:

Activity/Passivity,
Sun/Moon,
Culture/Nature,

Day/Night,
Father/Mother,
Head/Heart,
Intelligible/Sensitive,
Logos/Pathos. (in Lodge, 2000: 264)

Then she goes on to say “Thought’, has always worked by ... dual, hierarchized oppositions. Superior/Inferior” (2000: 265). She believes that everywhere in human thought, in philosophy, there comes this opposition in some guise, while the dominance of “phallogentrism” over the thought and culture of human civilization has put the woman “on the side of passivity”:

In philosophy, woman is always on the side of passivity. Every time the question comes up; when we examine kinship structures; whenever a family model is brought into play; in fact as soon . . . as you ask yourself what is meant by the question ‘What is it’; as soon as there is a will to say something. A will: desire, authority, you examine that, and you are led right back – to the father. (2000: 265)

Literature is the same in this regard; woman is at best subordinated to the patriarchal order: “And if you examine literary history, it’s the same story. It all refers back to man, to his torment, his desire to be (at) the origin” (2000: 266). And finally there comes the extreme; the total elimination of the female subject: “in the extreme the world of ‘being’ can function to the exclusion of the mother...Either the woman is passive; or she doesn’t exist” (2000: 265).

Essential to such “hierarchization”, or hierarchal presentation in the form of binary opposition is, as we know, language. The language of praise and that of degradation used by Shakespeare in the sonnets to the young boy and the dark lady, respectively, dramatizes an extreme of oppositions which, from the feminist stance, is intrinsic to the cultural milieu in which they are, after all, rooted. In the young man series, for instance, the addressee is the “fairest creature” (1, 1), he is “now the world’s fresh ornament” (1, 9), while the lady of the second series is “as a fever”, “as black as hell, as dark as night” (147 13-14).

5. The Technology of Gender

A last word on the idea of gender. In order to transcend the restrictions of the rather traditional feminist writings and studies; Teresa de Luaretis proposes the idea of “technology of gender” in an essay of the same title. By this she means first that “Gender is (a) representation”, second is the fact that this representation is not just a visionary subjective process; it rather involves the actual “construction of gender” in human relations. And finally by using the word “technology” she implies that the process of gender construction is an on-going process, that “the construction of the gender goes on today as busily as it did in earlier times” (1998: 715). Again central to this process of construction is the representation of gender through the medium of language. In fact, what we know as the natural sexual differences might well be the result of representation through the sign system of language supported by some prevailing cultural discourse. Thus, language both represents and constructs the concept of “gender” in human relations, as it is our primary source of both understanding the world and representing it in the form of tangible forms.

The same happens in literary works which reflect human lives and relations. What we can obviously see in the sonnets of Shakespeare, for instance, is that the sexual differences are highlighted and even emphasized through the representations of gender. That is, the poems present addressees of the two groups, a man and a woman, as highly different, first and foremost, by assigning them attributes which, they make plain, entail their genders. The sonnets 127 and 144 which we mentioned above can again be cited as examples of this argument. Whatever attributes they assign to the young man are positive and those to the dark lady bear negative implications which pertain to her sex.

In sonnet 20, the speaker takes from the female whatever seems desirable ("A woman's face with nature's own hand painted", "A woman's gentle heart" and "An eye more bright"), and assigns them to his "master mistress", but is careful to exempt him of what "nature's own hand" has wrought in woman as a defect: "shifting change as is false women's fashion", and "false in rolling" of the women's eyes. In its eulogizing attributes, the poem goes on to fashion the young man as a paragon of beauty about whom "women's souls amazeth", whose eye "Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth", and with whom Nature itself "fell a-doting", while the women, here in general, are said to be lustful and sensual creatures who are helplessly after pleasure from the young man. Importantly, as the word "Nature" also indicates, whatever the poet assigns to both sexes is thought to be naturally intended and thus usual, while the lingual representations of them downplays the woman and idolizes the man in a tone of all natural accord.

The technology of gender actively works on through language to demean the woman to degradation. She does, or is, whatever the poems specify to her sex as seemingly natural: she is "foul" after all, and helplessly tries to seem "fair" by applying "art's false borrowed face" (127, 6), while "my lovely boy" is fair by "nature's own hand" never false and fake. She is at best, the object of sexual pleasure, while herself lustfully seeks it and lust as shown by her is so disgusting. Here is a part of sonnet 129:

Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame
Is lust in action, and till action, lust
Is perjured, murd'rous, bloody full of blame,
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust,
Enjoyed no sooner but despised straight,
Past reason hunted, and no sooner had
Past reason hated as a swallowed bait,
On purpose laid to make the taker mad. (Shakespeare, 1988: 169)

Her "eyes are nothing like the sun" (130, 1), she is "tyrannous" (131, 1) as she is black, the poet "Beshrew" her heart and "cruel eye" (133), she is "deceitful", "a plague" and the poet feels to be deceived by loving her. He confesses that "In things right true, my heart and eyes have erred,/ And to this false plague are now they transferred" (137, 13-14), because they have "put fair truth upon so foul a face" (12). He is in another sense, accusing female sex of deceit, as Trevor says: "When the speaker rails against the dark lady, blaming himself for not trusting his own eyes and putting "fair truth upon so foul a face" (137. 12), it is the woman's

Language of Praise versus Language of Degradation In Shakespeare's Sonnets

deceitfulness he underscores" (2007: 230). Not only is she deceitful, she is also a liar and false in love¹: "When my love swears that she is made of truth, /I do believe her though I know she lies" (138). She is "unkind" and her wrong cannot be "justified" (139). In her the speaker "a thousand errors note[s]", and she "makes me sin" and "awards me pain" (141). Sonnet 142 opens in these lines: "Love is my sin, and thy dear virtue hate, /Hate of my sin, grounded on sinful loving", in which the language of praise is sarcastically used for teasing, and they are involved in a sinful (sexual) love affair. She is "as a fever", "as black as hell, as dark as night", this is the how sonnet 147 refers to her. Feeling again to have been deceived, the speaker sees the fault with his eyes which have led him to such false and foul love; this is what sonnet 148 makes plain: "O me! what eyes hath Love put in my head,/Which have no correspondence with true sight" (1-2). She is "cruel" and cannot love, she only hates: "But love hate on for now I know thy mind, /Those that can see thou lov'st, and I am blind" (149, 13-14). This one finally puts the blame with the speaker himself who against truth has deceived into believing her fair: "For I have sworn thee fair: more perjured I, /To swear against the truth so foul a lie" (152, 13-14).

The youth, on the other hand, is "music to hear" (8,1), "gracious and kind" (10, 11), a "fair house" that the speaker does everything to avoid its "falling to decay"(13,9), his eyes are "constant stars" from which "my Knowledge I derive" (14, 9-10), he ranks with celestial beings whom the speaker is unable of showing "the beauty of your eyes" and all "your graces", because if he may do, the people would wonder that "Such heavenly touches ne'er touched earthly faces" (17, 5-8), he is "more lovely and temperate" than a summer day whose "eternal beauty shall not fade" (18, 2, 9), he is "as fair/ As any mother's child" (21, 11-12), his heavenly beauty can only be shown in "table of my heart" and framed in "My body...wherein 'its held" (24, 2-3), the speaker says of him: "Lord of my love to whom in vassalage/ Thy merit hath my duty strongly knit" to whom the poems of his are "to witness duty, not to show my wit" (26, 1-4). The poet takes pride in his love to him: "For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings, /That then I scorn to change my state with kings" (29, 13-14), he is the poet's sun: "Even so my sun one early morn did shine,/With all triumphant splendour on my brow" (33, 9-10), in whose love the tears even are pearls: "Ah but those tears are pearl which thy love sheds,/And they are rich, and ransom all ill deeds" (34, 13-14). The poet excuses his sins because: "Roses have thorns, and silver fountains mud,/Clouds and eclipses stain both moon and sun" (35, 2-3), he gives the poet comfort in his soar hours: "Take all my comfort of thy worth and truth" (37, 4), he is for the poet the tenth Muse, ten times more worthy than the rest: "Be thou the tenth Muse, ten times more in worth/Than those old nine which rhymers invoke", the poets who invoke him would bring forth "Eternal numbers to outlive long date" (38, 9-11), he is the poet's better part for singing of whom he is unable: "O, how thy worth with manners may I sing,/When thou art all the better part of me?" (39, 1-2). He is a "gentle thief" in whose robbery even, he is graceful, not hostile and rude: "Lascivious grace, in whom all ill well shows, /Kill me with spies yet we must not be foes" (40, 13-14).

¹. *The Signet Classic Shakespeare* notes that "truth" here means "fidelity" (p. 178).

6. Concluding Remarks

The language of praise, through which the youth is represented to our eyes, goes on in full force all through the 126 sonnets addressed to him. The poet does his best in paying him his dutiful service; applies the power of his verse for saving him from the “tyrannous” Time, for immortalizing him and “distilling his truth”. In short, from all such praiseful remarks, we might distill such epithets as “fair”, “true” and “pious”, while the demeaning language used against the dark lady can be reduced to such key concepts as “foul”, “fake”, “lustful” and “deceitful”. These form binary oppositions which, at one level, can form the subjectivity of the subjects whom we see, first, totally different and next, as good and bad or moral and amoral. At another level, however, these oppositions are the results of what Cixous calls “the solidarity of logocentrism and phallogentrism” (2000: 167), and extend from male/female opposition which according to Cixous underlies Western cultures (if not all cultures). And finally the problem with this elemental opposition is that it has been set, supported and circulated through the discursive formations held by the power of the dominant, in some respect at least, patriarchal order according to which in such oppositions “The inferior term is always associated with the feminine, while the term that occupies the privileged position is associated with masculinity” (Bertens, 2001: 165). Whatever the cause behind Shakespeare’s such discriminatory stance toward the lady, and the eulogizing language he uses for the youth might be we may never come to know. The bodies, which his language creates for us, however, are not what we ourselves may want to see, rather what the discourse mediating his hand want us to see. We now quote from Alan Hyde words that can succinctly and all wisely sum up and conclude our discussion:

We surely have knowledge of others’ bodies only through the mediation of discourse. The very ease with which we construct the body as machine, as property, as consumer commodity, as bearer of privacy rights or of narratives, as inviolable, as sacred, as object of desire, as threat to society, demonstrates that there is no knowledge of the body apart from our discursive constructions of it. (1997: 6)

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our thanks to reviewers for their valuable suggestions on an earlier version of this paper.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

REFERENCES

- Bell, I. (2007). "Rethinking Shakespeare's Dark Lady" in Michael Schoenfeldt (ed.) *A Companion to Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Bertens, H. (2001). *Literary Theory: The Basics*. London: Routledge.
- Cixous, H. (2000). "Sorties", in David Lodge and Nigel Wood (eds.). *Modern Criticism and Theory A Reader*. 2nd ed. New York: Pearson Education, Inc.
- De Grazia, M. (1994). "The Scandal of Shakespeare's Sonnets." *Shakespeare Survey* 46, 35–49.
- De Lauretis, Tresa. (1998). "The Technology of Gender", in Julia Rivkin and Michael R, (eds.), *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Hyde, A. (1997). *Bodies of Law*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Glover, D., Kaplan, C.. (2000). *Genders*. London: Routledge.
- Greenblatt, S. (2004). *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*. New York: Norton.
- Shakespeare, W.. (1988). *The Sonnets. A Signet Classic*. William Butro (ed.). New York: Penguin group.
- Smith, R B. (2003). "Shakespeare's Sonnets and the History of Sexuality: A Reception History" in Richar Dutton and Jane E Howard (eds). *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works: Poems Problem Plays, Late Plays*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Stephenson, K. (1999). "Subjectivity", in Eva Martin Sartori, (Editor-in-Chief), *The Feminist Encyclopedia of French Literature*. Westport: Green Wood Press.
- Trevor, D. (2007). "Shakespeare's Love Objects" in Michael Schoenfeldt (ed). *A Companion to Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Singapore: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Language of Praise versus Language of Degradation In Shakespeare's Sonnets

Veenstra, J. R. (1995). "*The New Historicism of Stephen Greenblatt: On Poetics of Culture and the Interpretation of Shakespeare*". *History and Theory*, 34, (3) , 174-198

Weil, K. (1999). "*French Feminism*", in Eva Martin Sartori, (Editor-in-Chief). *The Feminist Encyclopedia of French Literature*. Westport: Green Wood Press.