

Metaphorical Concepts in 17 Sonnets of Shakespeare: Reconstructing Shakespeare's Mental Atmosphere toward Marriage

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Abstract

Tracing the development of a great author's mind and his occupation with the treatment of a Specific theme can be a rewarding enterprise. The writer of this article has attempted to trace Shakespeare's attitude towards marriage by referring to his most frequently used metaphors. The notins of a few outstanding experts on metaphors such as Lakoff and Johnson are cited and considered as the model for constructing the mental atmosphere of the author.

Key Terms:

METAPHOR, MARRIAGE, SHAKESPEARE

Introduction

Metaphors are more than just figures of speech but the means of thinking and feeling which being deciphered can show the mental atmosphere of the one who has employed them, here Shakespeare's mental atmosphere toward marriage existing behind his first 17 sonnets. Through the analysis of these sonnets and classification of the metaphorical concepts underlying them, one

can see into Shakespeare's mind. 'Metaphorical concepts' used here is derived from Lakoff and Johnson's theory which renders a definition of metaphor different from the traditional one.

General sources such as Britannica Encyclopedia, Encyclopedia Americana, and Microsoft Encarta Reference Library usually place metaphor in the category of figures of speech and apply the traditional definition of metaphor ("Metaphor"). Encarta emphasizing the ornamental use of metaphor cites from Aristotle who calls metaphor "the token of genius" ("Poetic Metaphor"). Cuddon repeats the traditional definition and says that metaphor is by root a Greek word, which means "carrying from one place to another," (391). Abrams' definition of metaphor can represent the definitions given by the general sources. He says that in a metaphorical expression, a word or phrase 'with one literal usage is applied to some "word or expression with another usage "without asserting a comparison" (67). Tajalli applies two adverbs to this implicit comparison, "suggestively and imaginatively" and claims this comparison is done in a "graphic, pleasing and surprising manner" which seems only to be true about original metaphors as he himself categorizes them. He classifies metaphors in five categories: 1) dead metaphors which "relate to universal terms of space and time, the main parts of the body, general features, and the main human activities", 2) trite or worn out metaphors, which people are no more conscious of their metaphorical nature, 3) cliché or fixed and stereotyped metaphors, that as the terms suggest are employed in everyday use and are hardly recognized as metaphors, 4) standard or conventional metaphors,

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which are used commonly with some awareness of their nature, and 5) original or new metaphors which are unprecedented (106-120). These categories are blended into each other and are not clear-cut. Repetition will transform a new metaphor to a standard, cliché or trite metaphor. This classification uses some aspects of modern definitions of metaphor besides the traditional theory. This emphasis on imagination by Tajalli is confirmed by Perrine. He mentions imagination is crucial in understanding metaphors. He classifies metaphors according to their manner of depicting tenor and vehicle into four categories: 1) tenor and vehicle mentioned, 2) tenor implied, vehicle mentioned, 3) tenor mentioned, vehicle implied, 4) tenor and vehicle implied. He says that the difference between simile and metaphor lies in their manner of asserting the resemblance between tenor and vehicle and the use of connectives such as 'like', 'as', 'seems'... He points out simile shows the resemblance between tenor and vehicle explicitly by using connectives (609-612). Sokhanvar employs a semi-mathematical phrasing to say the same definition: a metaphor "assumes that x is y and then goes on to say something about x as though it were y" (55). Barnet repeats this definition in another wording and says metaphor assumes literally incompatible terms as identical without using a connective (458). Abrams asserts some other classifications such as implicit metaphor (the tenor is implied) or mixed metaphor (combination of various vehicles), 'which adds nothing to the traditional definition of metaphor (67). Ricoeur puts all these identical definitions under the title Aristotelian or Rhetorical definition and attributes four major characteristics to this definition. He argues that metaphor according to traditional definition 1) is "a word-focused figure of speech," i.e. is

applied to different parts of speech, 2) "is defined in terms of movement" i.e. in terms of "every transposition of terms" and 3) "transposes" a name which belongs to something else, and enjoys 4) "continuation of the definition" (16-24).

In his book, Katz summarizes and classifies different traditional and modern approaches and definitions. Under one category named "semantic approaches" he names some theories focusing on meaning. One of them is Substitution theory or Classic explanation or Aristotelian tradition, which defines metaphor as other sources have done. Another theory in this category claims that in good metaphors "the juxtaposition of topic [tenor] and vehicle" engenders a novel meaning, which conveys the meaning of one of the topic or vehicle. "That is the act of metaphorizing creates (and does not find a preexisting) similarity between metaphor topic (the subject being discussed) and vehicle (the term being used to describe the topic metaphorically)." Another theory named Cohen's theory says that a metaphorical expression cancels incompatible semantic features of the vehicle with those of the topic; other features are treated as the bases of similarity. Another theory of this category is Maccormac's Theory, which claims, "semantic markers" are "fuzzy sets" so the combination of incongruous markers in metaphor is possible. Black's theory is a further semantic theory, which says that metaphor has two different subjects: a principle subject and a "subsidiary" one which implications are applied to the principle one, e.g. in 'her stone heart', the common associations of stone are implied to her heart. One more theory, Ortony's theory claims that metaphor gets its meaning out of the shared semantic features of topic and vehicle which

are much noticeable for the vehicle and not for the topic. Gentner's model is an additional semantic theory, which says metaphor is the mapping of "systems of relations" between vehicle and topic. Another theory included in this category is the "multidimensional semantic space model" which says: semantically similar words are "closer in proximity in semantic space" and the comprehension of metaphor takes place easily when the similarity between tenor and vehicle is high. In another category named "non semantic models" which deals with pragmatical theories, Katz mentions Searle's theory as the representative of these theories. This theory summarizes the definition of metaphor in this formula: "S is P [the utterance] = S is R [the intended meaning]" and states that the beginning point of recognition of metaphor in this process is that "S is P literally is defective" and the completion of this process is achieved through grammatical rules, background knowledge, and awareness of metaphorical use. The third major category classified by Katz includes such theories considering metaphorizing as a cognitive activity. Then Katz exemplifies Kendy's theory, which divides the pictures used in language into 1) literal, 2) metaphorical. Then it reasons even the blind can understand "pictorial metaphors" and concludes that the process of making and using metaphors is a cognitive activity. Finally Katz points to Lakoff and Johnson's theory and says this theory claims that metaphor is created by mapping of one "conceptual domain" (e.g. love) in terms of another realm (e.g. journey) (25-29).

Heidari Tabrizi explains Lakoff and Johnson's theory in terms of a cognitive activity. He reiterates this theory's definition of metaphor and says metaphorical

expressions are derived from the metaphorical concepts, which are used to order the experiences and thoughts of human being. Basic concepts including Orientational Metaphors, e.g. left, right, up, down... and Substances, e.g. solid, square... form the principle metaphorical concepts. These principle metaphorical concepts help us to order understandings of our environment, thoughts and feelings by using metaphors. These new created metaphors by their turn can be used as metaphorical concepts for new metaphors. So, we always encounter production and reproduction of metaphorical concepts and metaphors. The so-called new or poetical metaphors may root out from new metaphorical concepts or may be produced using some unknown aspect of an existing metaphorical concept. Heidari Tabrizi gives "love is a journey" as a typical metaphorical concept, which has assisted us to understand the abstract entity of love. Based on this metaphorical concept such metaphors as "our relationship isn't going anywhere or our relationship has hit a dead-end street" are made (7-9). Discovering the metaphorical concepts used by someone will lead us to the ordering of the thoughts and experiences of the one who has employed them.

Shakespearian Metaphors and Marriage

Many have perceived the importance of Shakespeare's sonnets in discovering his mind. Britannica Encyclopedia cites from Wordsworth "with this key [his sonnets] Shakespeare unlocked his heart" ("Shakespeare Sonnets"). Extracted metaphorical concepts from Shakespeare's sonnets taken from Booth's edition, which is based on the 1609 text, will help to reconstruct Shakespeare's mental atmosphere.

Booth claims that sonnets 1-17 are arguments to persuade a young man to marriage (135). Encarta affirms such a claim ("Shakespeare's Sonnets).

1.

First quatrain

a) Family is a rose bush.

*This metaphorical concept is implicit in the first quatrain. Family is a rose bush which flower is beauty's rose. See (b)

b) Beauty is a rose ("That thereby beauty's rose might never die,").

*Rose may indicate beauty's prime or the transience of beauty.

*Shakespeare expands other aspects of this metaphorical concept and says when "the riper" rose dies the young bloom lives on, so the beauty's rose never dies. In the first quatrain of the 1st sonnet, the speaker (Shakespeare uses this metaphorical concept to say beauty lies in the family and not in the individuals. He argues multiplying is the way to preserve the clan. So the family bush always enjoys the beauty's rose.

Second quatrain

a) Eye is human being ("But thou contracted to thine own bright eyes,").

b) Human's life is a candle ("Feed'st thy light's flame with self-substantial fuel,").

c) Man is ground ("Making a famine where abundance lies,").

*Using these metaphorical concepts, Shakespeare warns the young man (addressee) that he is the enemy of himself, is concerned with himself and is the cause of deficiencies to himself. So, the second quatrain is a warning and complaint.

Third quatrain

- a) Human being is ornament ("Thou that art now the world's fresh ornament,")
- b) Spring is a man ("And only herald to the gaudy spring,")
- c) Man is a plant ("Within thine own bud buriest thy content,")
- d) Fatherhood is the content of a bud ("Within thine own bud buriest thy content,")

*You are the world's ornament but by mean storage of your fatherhood you are destroying yourself and betraying the world.

Last couplet

- a) Storing is wasting ("And tender churl mak'st waste in niggarding:")
- b) Hoarding is a glutton ("Pity the world, or else this glutton be,")

*The last couplet concludes the young man should quit "niggarding" (hoarding).

*This sonnet mixes different metaphorical concepts to remind the importance of reproduction. Plant, spring, seeds of a bud and other implicit and explicit natural elements blend together in this sonnet and form a powerful argument on the behalf of marriage.

2.

First quatrain

- a) Aging is a war

*This metaphorical concept is prevalent in the first quatrain.

- b) Face is a battle ground ("When forty winters shall besiege thy brow, / And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field,")

c) Years of life are enemy forces ("When forty winters shall besiege thy brow,").

d) Wrinkles are trenches ("And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field,").

e) Youth is a dress ("thy youth's proud livery so gazed on now,").

f) Brow is a city ("When forty winters shall besiege thy brow,").

g) Beauty is a field ("And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field,").

*In this first quatrain Shakespeare uses some military metaphorical concepts to picture the old age of the addressee. The metaphorical concepts here are nature-based and war-based.

Second quatrain

a) Beauty and lust are treasure ("Then being asked, where all thy beauty lies, / Where all the treasure of thy lusty days;").

b) Eye is a place ("To say within thine own deep sunken eyes,").

c) Shame is living thing ("Were an all-eating shame, and thriftless praise.").

*Using the concept of buried treasure, the second quatrain argues that beauty and lust shall die.

Third quatrain

a) Beauty is usury ("How much more praise deserved thy beauty's use [usury],").

b) Beauty is money ("Shall sum my count, and make my old excuse").

c) Beauty is a legacy ("Proving his beauty by succession thine.").

*In this third quatrain Shakespeare employs business to emphasize that having child is the way to preserve finance.

Last couplet

a) Life is warmth ("And see thy blood warm when thou feel'st it cold.")

*Shakespeare in the last couplet concludes that not only beauty but also life is preserved through children.

3.

First quatrain

a) Reflection in the mirror is a man

*Shakespeare in this first stanza uses this metaphorical concept to express the need of "forming another" in a dramatic way.

Second quatrain

a) Sexual intercourse is farming ("For where is she so fair whose unearned womb").

b) Woman's womb is a farm ("For where is she so fair whose unearned womb").

c) Man is a cultivator or plougher of a woman's womb ("Disdains the tillage of thy husbandry?")

d) Tomb is a man ("Or who is he so fond will be the tomb, / Of his self-love to stop posterity?")

*In this quatrain Shakespeare reminds the addressee that he has some duty toward the "farm" (a woman's womb) and he cannot avoid the disdain by passing the buck to tomb because even tomb is after posterity.

Third quatrain

a) Man is mirror ("Thou art thy mother's glass and she in thee").

b) Youth is spring ("Calls back the lovely April of her prime,").

c) Age is a house ("So thou through windows of thine age shalt see,").

*This third stanza repeats the idea that beauty is preserved in the children.

And the last couplet is a paraphrase of the last quatrain in a semi-literal language.

4.

First quatrain

a) Beauty is a legacy ("Upon thy self thy beauty's legacy?").

b) Nature is a woman ("Nature's bequest gives nothing but doth lend, / And being frank she lends to those are free:").

*In this quatrain Shakespeare reminds the addressee his bequest of beauty from nature and warns him to be generous.

Second quatrain

a) Beauty is a largess ("The bounteous largess given thee to give?").

b) Beauty is money for usury ("Profitless usurer why dost thou use").

*This quatrain also insists on being generous to preserve beauty.

Third quatrain

Nature is auditor ("Then how when nature calls thee to be gone,").

*The poet here says the addressee that cheating in the beauty's commerce has no justification before nature.

Last couplet

a) Beauty is a living thing ("Thy unused beauty must be tombed with thee,").

*Beauty can continue living in the children otherwise would be buried with the owner.

5.

First quatrain

a) Time (hour) is a frame-maker ("Those hours that with gentle work did frame").

b) Beauty is a painting ("The lovely gaze where every eye doth dwell").

*Hours will destroy your beauty though they have created your beauty.

Second quatrain

Time is a man ("For never-resting time leads summer on").

*Passing of time leads summer's beauties to 'winter's barrenness, so it will destroy your beauty as well.

Third quatrain

a) Perfume (plant distillation) is man (prisoner) ("A liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass,").

b) Glass is a jail ("A liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass,").

*Summer's beauty is preserved by perfumes and you children will preserve your beauty.

Last couplet

*These two lines continue the discussion of the last quatrain.

First quatrain

a) Winter is man ("Then let not winter's ragged hand deface,").

b) Beauty is summer ("In thee thy summer ere thou be distilled:").

c) You are flower ("In thee thy summer ere thou be distilled:").

d) You are perfume ("Make sweet some vial; treasure thou some place,").

*This quatrain asks the addressee to become distilled (have children) and to escape winter's destruction.

Second quatrain

Breeding is usury (That use is not forbidden usury, / Which happies those that pay the willing loan; / That's for thy self to breed another thee, / Or ten times happier be it ten for one,).

*This quatrain repeats the commercial metaphor and says breeding is a profitable usury and informs the addressee by a child he'll profit 10 times.

Third quatrain

a) Children are figures of parents ("If ten of thine ten times refigured thee:").

b) Death is man ("Then what could death do if thou shouldst depart,").

*This quatrain also repeats the idea that one can continue living in his posterity.

Last couplet

Worms are human beings ("To be death's conquest and make worms thine heir.").

*Shakespeare concludes that the defense against death is having children.

7.

First quatrain

Sun is man ("Lo in the orient when the gracious light / Lifts up his burning head, each under eye").

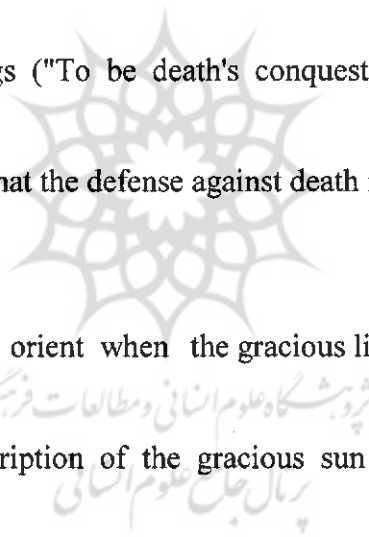
*This quatrain is a description of the gracious sun and the homage people endow him.

Second quatrain

a) Sky is a hill ("And having climbed the steep-up heavenly hill,").

b) Sun is pilgrim ("Attending on his golden pilgrimage:").

*It's noon and the sun is at its height like a man in his middle ages. People still adore him.



Third quatrain

Sun is a god on a chariot ("But when from highmost pitch with weary car,").

*It's sunset and people's eyes look another way.

Last couplet

You (addressee) are sun ("So thou, thy self out-going in thy noon:").

*This last couplet warns the addressee of his approaching sunset and insists on having a son to escape death.

8.

First quatrain

Your voice is music ("Music to hear, why hear'st thou music sadly?").

*In this quatrain Shakespeare asks the reason of the addressee's peculiar enmity toward joy and delight.

Second quatrain

Sound is human being ("If the true concord of well-tuned sounds, / By unions married do offend thine ear,").

*Here the poet rebukes the addressee because he destroys the harmony of the music by his singleness.

Third quatrain

Strings (of a musical instrument) are family ("Resembling sire, and child, and happy mother,").

*The strings are a family and their mutual vibrations make a pleasing note.

Last couplet

Music is a song ("Whose speechless song being many, seeming one,").

*Shakespeare in this last couplet concludes that being single "proves nothing."

9.

First quatrain

a) Single life is consuming oneself ("That thou consum'st thy self in single life?").

b) World is a woman ("he world will wail thee like a makeless wife,").

*If it's for fear of wetting a woman's eye, you're misled because the entire world will weep if you die.

Second quatrain

Children are forms of parents ("That thou no form of thee hast left behind,").

*Widows remember their husbands shape by their children but the world, your widow, has nothing to remind her of you.

Third quatrain

Beauty is money ("But beauty's waste hath in the world an end, / And kept unused the user so destroys it:").

*The place of all the properties change but beauty, your property, will be destroyed by Unthriftiness.

Last couplet

Love is a man ("No love toward others in that bosom sits").

*Unthriftiness toward beauty is a "murderous shame."

10.

First quatrain

*Using a straightforward language, Shakespeare condemns the addressee of having no love to the ones who love him.

Second quatrain

You are a house ("Seeking that beauteous roof to ruinate").

*You may not love because you are filled with hate and have evil intention toward yourself.

Third quatrain

Love and hate are human beings ("Shall hate be fairer lodged than gentle love?").

*Be kind to yourself and I'll change my mind.

Last couplet

Beauty is a living thing ("That beauty still may live in thine or thee.").

*Change yourself or get a child so that beauty keeps living.

11.

First quatrain

a) One is present in his child ("As fast as thou shalt wane so fast thou grow'st, / In one of thine, from that which thou departest,").

b) Blood is life ("And that fresh blood which youngly thou bestow'st,").

*You get a child in youth and keep living in him / her when you are old.

Second quatrain

a) Wisdom, beauty, increase, folly, age and decay are living things ("Herein lives wisdom, beauty, and increase, / Without this folly, age, and cold decay,").

b) Time (year) is human being ("And threescore year would make the world away:").

*If all people were of your mind, generations of men would have been destroyed with them and all the virtues as well.

Third quatrain

a) Good people are nature's store ("Let those whom nature hath not made for store,").

b) Nature is a woman ("Look whom she best endowed, she gave thee more; / Which bounteous gift thou shouldst in bounty cherish:").

c) Beauty is a gift from nature ("Look whom she best endowed, she gave thee more; / Which bounteous gift thou shouldst in bounty cherish:").

*You are nature's reservoir and your beauty is nature's gift, so you have to get children to return nature's blessing.

Last couplet

a) You (addressee) are nature's seal ("She carved thee for her seal, and meant thereby,").

b) Children are copies of a person ("Thou shouldst print more, not let that copy die.").

*You are nature's seal and have to make copies of yourself (have children).

12.

First quatrain

a) Day is ship and night is sea ("And see the brave day sunk in hideous night,").

b) Grey hair is silvered black one ("And sable curls all silvered o'er with white:").

*When I see the passing of time and its consequences ...

Second quatrain

a) Tree is canopy ("When lofty trees I see barren of leaves, / Which erst from heat did canopy the herd").

b) Sheaves-collector is a bier ("Borne on the bier with white and bristly beard:").

*When I see trees and sheaves in the autumn and winter...

Third quatrain

Beauty is a human being ("Then of thy beauty do I question make / That thou among the wastes of time must go,").

*Beauty will be destroyed by time.

Last couplet

Time is a reaper with a scythe ("And nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make defence").

*The only defense against time is offspring.

13.

First quatrain

Semblance is something to give ("And your sweet semblance to some other give.").

*As long as you live in this world, you are subject to death and change. You have to prepare for this mischief by 'giving your semblance to others'.

Second quatrain

Beauty is a house ("So should that beauty which you hold in lease" see also line 9).

*If you want to keep living and hold your beauty, you have to get children.

Third quatrain

You are the guardian of the house (beauty) ("Who lets so fair a house fall to decay,").

*You have to keep your beauty alive.

Last couplet

*Here Shakespeare directly asks the addressee to get a child.

14.

First quatrain

Stars are birds ("Not from the stars do I my judgement pluck,").

*Shakespeare claims to have the power of prediction not by using stars but...

Second quatrain

*Using normal language, the poet distinguishes his power of predicting from that of ordinary fortunetellers.

Third quatrain

a) Eyes are heaven ("But from thine eyes my knowledge I derive,").

b) Truth and beauty are living things ("As truth and beauty shall together thrive").

*The poet says that he derives his knowledge of prediction from the addressee's eyes. Then he continues that truth and beauty stick together.

Last couplet

*The poet prognosticates from the addressee's eyes that death is 'truth' and 'beauty' is "doom and date."

15.

First quatrain

*Shakespeare directly says that perfection is of short duration.

Second quatrain

Sky is a human being ("Cheered and checked even by the self-same sky:").

*Human beings like plants must die at their heights.

Third quatrain

Time and decay are human beings ("Where wasteful time debateth with decay").

*Time and decay will destroy your youth and beauty.

Last couplet

Versify is engrafting ("As he takes from you, I engraft you new.").

*All the world love you and I love you too and by my verse I'll give you what time is taking form you.

16.

First quatrain

a) Time is a tyrant ("Make war upon this bloody tyrant Time?").

b) Rhyme (verse) is land ("With means more blessed than my barren rhyme?").

*Find a mightier way to battle time and prevent decay.

Second quatrain

a) Hours are hills ("Now stand you on the top of happy hours,").

b) Women's wombs are gardens ("And many maiden gardens yet unset,").

c) Man is a planter (And many maiden gardens yet unset,").

d) Children are flowers ("With virtuous wish would bear you living flowers,").

e) Painting is a man (your painting is your counterfeit) ("Much liker than your painted counterfeit:").

*You have to marry and have flower-like children resembling yourself.

Third quatrain

a) Life is a painter ("So should the lines of life that life repair").

b) Poet's is his time's pupil ("Which this (Time's pencil) or my pupil pen").

*Your children not my (the poet's) verse can keep you living in the eyes of men.

Last couplet

Get children is an art (skill) ("And you must live drawn by your own sweet skill.").

*You have to father children and give life to yourself.

17.

First quatrain

a) Verse is a container ("If it were filled with your most high deserts?").

b) Heaven is a sacred being ("Though yet heaven knows it is but as a tomb").

c) Verse is a tomb; your life is a dead body ("Though yet heaven knows it is but as a tomb / which hides your life, and shows not half your parts:").

*My poetry cannot show your beauties.

Second quatrain.

Heaven is a human being ("Such heavenly touches ne'er touched earthly faces.").

*Following generations will consider your graces in my verses as exaggeration.

Third quatrain

Papers are human beings ("So should my papers (yellowed with their age) / Be scorned, like old men of less truth than tongue,").

*People will deem my poetry as false description.

Last couplet

One lives in his child and poetry ("But were some child of yours alive that time,
/ You should live twice in it, and in my rhyme.").

*Shakespeare implores the addressee to get children.

As was seen, Shakespeare's mind is mostly nature-oriented. When arguing, Shakespeare uses some metaphorical concepts as follows:

Nature: plants, rose bush, ground, field, farming, ploughing, spring, winter, flower, hill, sun, tree, reaper, scythe, birds, stars, sky, sea, heaven, engrafting.

Human being (Shakespeare usually personifies abstract entities and conveys his intended meaning).

Commercial and business affairs: storing, usury, treasure, money, legacy, largess, gift, and seal.

Battle and war: battle, ground, enemy forces, and trenches.

Ordinary properties: candle, dress, mirror, house, window, perfume, canopy, container, bier and ship.

Art: painting, verse, music, engraving.

Social matters: city, jail and prisoner.

Religious matters: pilgrimage, heaven.

Mythology: Sun god on a chariot.

So, mostly using natural elements, Shakespeare draws his argument to persuade the addressee to marry.

Conclusion

Based on the examples cited from the sonnets and considering the notions and ideas of the experts on the subject the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Rendering an all_inclusive definition for "metaphor" is somehow impossible.

2. The metaphors considered in this article have been selected for the tracing of a preconceived theme and therefore certainly possess other merits and might invoke and reflect other themes or motifs.

3. The examples cited from the poems reveal that marriage was a significant topic for the poet to pursue and his first seventeen sonnets have provided ample room for the poet to handle the theme.

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