

# A Light in the Darkness

## —Imagery of Light in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*—

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In that famous balcony-scene, Romeo speaks thus;

But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?  
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.  
Arise, fair sun, . . .

(2. 2. 2–4)

For Romeo's enraptured mind, Juliet is the sun, and her unexpected appearance on the balcony is just like a fresh morning sun rising in the east. In general, the imagery of light was often used in the literature of Shakespeare's time, especially in love-poetry. The main reason why it flourished in the Elizabethan literature is to be found in the great influence of neo-Platonism. The neo-Platonists' conception of light, e.g., that of Marsilio Ficino's, among others, may be summarized roughly as follows: the absolute truth is in the pure light of the heaven; this light spreads out and flows down through several regions in the air onto the earth; the light on the earth is less pure and more weakened than the light issuing from the source in the heaven, but there are still some fragments of the absolute truth in it; these fragments were considered to be embodied in earthly beauties; therefore, to love beauty in nature or in art, especially to love a beautiful woman is to climb up one step of the Platonic ladder, by which man's soul can be ascending gradually to the absolute truth of the heaven.<sup>1</sup> Dante's Beatrice and Petrarch's Laura are the typical heroines based on this Platonic conception.

But the time of Shakespeare was undergoing a violent change in politics, religion and science. It was very difficult to maintain such an ideal but naive way of thinking. P. Cruttwell called this changing period, the late years of the 1590s as 'the Shakespearean Moment.' In his view, this period was the one when a great change of literary taste occurred, and it was the change from the golden age of the Elizabethan literature to the dark one of the literature of the seventeenth century, that is, from Spenser to Donne. He says that one

remarkable instance of this change can be observed in Shakespeare's *Sonnets* which was generally supposed to be written during the late years of the 1590s. In this controversial work, Shakespeare expressed his spiritual affection towards a young nobleman and his chaotic physical connection with a dark-haired, dark-eyed woman. Cruttwell concludes that this change from a spiritual friendship to a physical love is one manifestation of the change of the larger literary movement.<sup>2</sup> His view is very convincing and sheds much light on the literature of this changing period, but still it seems to me that his view simplifies the question a little. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to trace the imagery of light in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, following the order of poems generally admitted, and to consider how the imagery of light is changing with Shakespeare's internal strife towards the two lovers.

### 1. Gracious Light

The first impressive metaphorical usage of light is observed in the sonnet 7;

Lo, in the orient when the gracious light  
 Lifts up his burning head, each under eye  
 Doth homage to his new-appearing sight,  
 Serving with looks his sacred majesty;  
 And having climb'd the steep-up heavenly hill,  
 Resembling strong youth in his middle age,  
 Yet mortal looks adore his beauty still,  
 Attending on his golden pilgrimage:  
 But when from highmost pitch, with weary car,  
 Like feeble age he reeleth from the day,  
 The eyes ('fore duteous) now converted are  
 From his low tract, and look another way:  
     So thou thyself out-going in thy noon,  
     Unlook'd on diest unless thou get a son.<sup>3</sup>

All the sonnets from 1 to 17 have a common theme: a poet's recommendation for a young man to marry and get a son while he is in youth and beauty. For that purpose, the poet introduces Time, conventionally personified as an old man with a scythe, and repeats a warning that Time never stops and will soon reap up all the mortal beauties. In the sonnet 7 quoted above, this theme is repeated by referring to the sun's movement during the daytime, from sunrise to sunset, with an allegorical allusion that no one will take much interest in him if he loses his shining beauty. The poet is persuading a careless young man that the only way to eternalize his beauty is to leave posterity, i.e., to 'get a son,' as the last line shows. Here the pun, *son-sun*, is obvious. To get a son is nothing but to get a new sun. If a new sun rises, 'each under eye [will do] homage to his new-appearing sight' again.

Now, let us turn our attention from a general argument to our main concern, the imagery of light. As is clear from the grand, powerful beginning lines, 'Lo, in the orient when gracious light / Lifts up his burning head,' this sonnet is written in epic style. And the light, or the sun itself is an epic one, in other words, Appolo, the god of the sun in Greek mythology. The word 'epic' here is meant to suggest power and glory rather than beauty. To take up some examples, this notion is reflected in some expressions referring to the sun, such as 'gracious light' (I take the meaning of 'gracious' as 'regal or sovereign,' the first one of the several meanings suggested by W. G. Ingram and T. Redpath),<sup>4</sup> 'his burning head,' 'his sacred majesty,' and 'his golden pilgrimage.' In contrast, those who look up at the sun are presented by the imagery of a servant or subject, such as 'under eye,' 'homage,' 'serving,' 'adore,' and 'attending on.' So, the relationship between a political power and those who are under the sway of it is a dominant element in the imagery of light. I think this is due to some formal attitude of Shakespeare towards a person high above his social status. We cannot deny some detached, indifferent tone in this poem. Some critics suggest that Shakespeare possibly began to write these former group of sonnets at the request of parents of a noble family, worrying about their son who was reluctant to marry. It seems to me that there is still some emotional distance between the poet and a young man to whom these sonnets were dedicated.

## 2. A Summer's Day

A new turn in the flow of the conception of love begins in the sonnet 18. Seymour-Smith explains that this is a development from the conceptional, formal recommendation of marriage to a tender emotion the poet now seems to entertain towards the young man;<sup>5</sup>

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:  
Sometimes too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd,  
And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd:  
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.

The opening line, 'Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?' has much tenderness, and its

simple, plain expression shows the deepening intimacy between the poet and the young man. Ingram and Redpath argue that as the meaning of 'day' in 'a summer's day,' 'a single day' is better than 'a period of month, or season,' since 'the impact of the first line evokes the image of a day in summer.'<sup>6</sup> I agree to their argument. By reading the first line this way, there is felt more strongly a kind of lyricism arising from a tender emotion of the poet. This lyricism is an element that has scarcely existed in the former sequence of the sonnets. I consider that this expression, 'a summer's day,' a kind of lyric light, is shining throughout the octave of this sonnet. There, the poet disregards the patternized way of awakening a sense of mutability by the steady changing of time, such as from day to night, or from summer to winter. The young man's beauty is the more freshly appealing to our sense, since it is shining against a particular summer's day, which is always subject to a sudden, unexpected change, as suggested by such words as 'sometimes', 'sometime' and 'by chance.'

The sestet seen from the view-point of our concern, such expressions as 'thy eternal summer' and 'his shade' catch our attention. The poet is asserting that he will eternalize the beauty of the young man ('thy eternal summer') by 'lines' (by writing it into verses), and dissipate the shade of Death ('his shade'). This passionate assertion is, however, overshadowed by some lowering tone felt in the couplet, 'So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, / So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.' After all, the eternalization of beauty by verse is a limited one, and I think the following senses darkly underlie this limitation: Shakespeare's religious belief that man cannot outlive the doom, his conviction that Nature is far superior to Art, and his doubt whether men in the future can understand a true beauty depicted in his poems. But, since the beauty of the young man, i.e., his summer, stands against this shadow, i.e., deep philosophical feelings of the poet, it seems to be all the more preciously shining for the poet.

### 3. A Jewel

The poet sets off on a journey on some business from the sonnet 25. In a pair of the sonnets 27 and 28, the traveller sleepless at a lodging is sending his passionate emotion towards the young man far away from him. This is a very interesting situation, looked at from our present concern with the imagery of light. So, let us begin with the sonnet 27;

Weary with toil I haste me to my bed,  
 The dear repose for limbs with travel tir'd;  
 But then begins a journey in my head  
 To work my mind when body's work's expir'd:  
 For then my thoughts, from far where I abide,  
 Intend a zealous pilgrimage to thee,  
 And keep my drooping eyelids open wide,  
 Looking on darkness which the blind do see:

Save that my soul's imaginary sight  
Presents their shadow to my sightless view,  
Which like a jewel hung in ghastly night  
Makes black night beauteous and her old face new.  
Lo, thus by day my limbs, by night my mind,  
For thee, and for myself, no quiet find.

The poet complains that he cannot fall into sleep, 'dear repose,' though he is weary with a hard journey during the day. The reason is that he begins an imaginary journey, 'a zealous pilgrimage' towards the young man. He keeps his 'drooping eyelids open wide, / Looking on darkness which the blind do see.' These are very moving lines and show a heart-aching, purely spiritual emotion that the poet now entertains towards the young man. Here, the poet's friendship for the young man seems to be deepened into love. In this pure stream of Platonism, however, I feel some ambiguity in the third quatrain, especially in a word, 'jewel.' The poet says full-heartedly that the sight of the young man imagined in his mind, 'like a jewel hung in ghastly night / Makes black night beauteous and her old face new.' Those adjectives attached to the night, 'ghastly,' 'black,' and 'old,' appear to have nothing strange at the first reading. Journeys in Shakespeare's time must have been far from comfortable. But, to return to the beginning line with a deep pessimistic tone, 'Weary with toil . . .,' we must take it into account that this travel was a compelled one to Shakespeare. According to D. Wilson, Shakespeare was forced to 'go on tour in the country owing to the closing of the theatre because of the plague, the hostility of a puritan mayor and corporation.'<sup>7</sup> The poet is now in a painful situation. I think this realistic tone is reflected to some extent in the adjectives, 'ghastly,' 'black,' and 'old,' and so is in 'a jewel' that makes such a night 'beauteous' and 'new.' The word, 'jewel' has some artificial connotation, suggesting the outward beauty lacking the inward truth. The poet is vainly hoping for the miraculous power of love in order to drive his real distress out of mind. We cannot deny the impression that he is giving the young man the value too overloaded for him. The light this jewel is sending forth is the one produced by the poet's vain desire to escape from his real suffering. In this sense, this light is a kind of alchemical one.

This artificial connotation felt in 'jewel' can also be detected in the word, 'gild'st' in the third quatrain of the next sonnet, 28;

I tell the day to please him thou art bright  
And do'st him grace when clouds do blot the heaven;  
So flatter I the swart-complexion'd night  
When sparkling stars twire not thou gild'st the even:

This situation is similar to that in the former sonnet. The poet is offering one solution to the rivalry between the night and the day. The young man does both of them grace alike.

The shining beauty of the young man makes both the dark, clouded day and the dark night without twinkling stars at all, bright, that is, it 'gild'st' them. This word, 'gild' has a more strong alchemical connotation, 'to ornament outwardly.'

But still in the present situation, this light has a miraculous power. And, this miracle is related triumphantly in the sonnets 29 and 30. In the sonnet 29, the poet is crying over his 'outcast state,' his present state lacking all the abilities necessary to lead a hopeful life. But, the moment he thinks of the young man, his state 'like to the lark at the break of day arising / From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate.' In the sonnet 30, he is moaning over the painful things of his past. 'But if the while I think on thee, dear friend, / All loses are restor'd and sorrows end,' he says in the end. The psychological movement of the poet's mind has the same pattern in both of the poems. The instant the poet reminds of the young man, his painful state is miraculously turned into a joyful one. But I think this bliss the miraculous power of love brings forth, is a momentary one and a disillusionment is waiting just behind it. The love between the poet and the young man is not matured enough in the present situation. It must undergo further trials in order to send forth the pure light of love.

#### 4. The Basest Clouds

The estrangement between the poet and the young man begins from the sonnet 33. This is presumably owing to the fact that the young man yielded to the seduction by an attractive but dangerous dark-haired, dark eyed woman, who is also a mistress of the poet. This shocking triangular love affair is illustrated to a considerable extent in the sonnet 144:

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 colour'd 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 turn'd 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.

The deep wound the poet suffered from their supposed physical connection, in other words, the betrayal of the poet by the young man, as the twelfth line suggests, is reflected in 'the

basest clouds' which hide away on a sudden a 'glorious' light of the morning sun in the sonnet 33:

Full many a glorious morning have I seen  
Flatter the mountain tops with sovereign eye  
Kissing with golden face the meadows green,  
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy, — —  
Anon permit the basest clouds to ride  
With ugly rack on his celestial face,  
And from the forlorn world his visage hide,  
Stealing unseen to west with this disgrace:  
Even so my sun one early morn did shine  
With all triumphant splendour on my brow;  
But out alack, he was but one hour mine — —  
The region cloud hath mask'd him from me now.  
Yet him for this my love no whit disdaineth:  
Suns of the world may stain, when heaven's sun staineth.

In the first quatrain, a glorious morning sun, and scenic beauties, such as the mountain tops, the green meadows, the bright streams all shining golden in the new sun's rays, promise a fair, happy day. In the next quatrain, however, a sudden change takes place; the sky is covered with dark clouds, and the sun disappears behind them. It is clear that this sudden change of the weather symbolizes the unexpected betrayal of the poet by the young man. At the same time, the contrast itself shows how wide the gap is between hope and reality. A closer observation on the imagery of light will draw our attention to some discord between the adjectives mainly qualifying the morning sun, such as 'glorious,' 'sovereign,' 'golden,' and 'heavenly' and the verbs showing the effect of the morning sun on the pastoral landscape, such as 'flatter,' 'kissing,' and 'gilding.' The former group of words show gorgeous, splendid beauty of the sun, while the latter seem to involve some allusion of the frivolity, amorousness, artificiality of the sun's action. This inharmonious coexistence of heavenliness and earthliness in the sun metaphorically represents what the young man is, that is, a great difference between his external beauty and his internal poverty of virtue. The young man, therefore, has a strong inclination in himself to be stained, in other words, to be covered with 'the basest clouds.' The superlative 'basest' shows how shameful the act is. By this word, the poet is not only flinging his contemptuous indignation at the dark lady 'who art as black as hell, as dark as night' (147), but also he is accusing the young man of his easy surrender to such a disgraceful act. Besides, though implicitly, the word, 'base' has the same alchemical connotation as the word 'gild,' concerning which I have already discussed under the heading 'A Jewel.' The poet is now confronting the inward inferior nature of the young man hidden under the outward ornamentation.

Though not a superlative, the expression 'base clouds' is used again in the next sonnet, 34;

Why didst thou promise such a beauteous day,  
 And make me travel forth without my cloak,  
 To let base clouds o'ertake me in my way,  
 Hiding thy bravery in their rotten smoke?  
 'Tis not enough that through the cloud thou break  
 To dry the rain on my storm-beaten face,  
 For no man well of such a salve can speak  
 That heals the wound and cures not the disgrace:

No doubt that this sonnet is the one that directly follows the sonnet 33 in respect of both the content and the imagery. In the first quatrain the sudden weather-change imagery is repeated with more intensification to express how unexpected the betrayal by the young man is. The expression 'travel forth without my cloak' is manifesting how naively the poet was laying his trust on the young man. The expression in the second quatrain, 'through the cloud thou break' shows that the young man is now repenting his disgraceful act and in innocent tears apologizing to the poet. But, 'it is not enough . . . / To dry the rain on my storm-beaten face.' The young man seems to be utterly lacking the recognition of what an incurable injury he gave to the poet's heart. It can be said that the poet is now fallen into a dark night of love.

### 5. Darkly Bright

The poet is still on his journey, and the sonnet 43 deals with a night at his lodging. Though the situation is considerably similar to that of the sonnets 27, and 28, the difference between them is that the poet can get to sleep this time and that the young man appears in his dream;

When most I wink, then do mine eyes best see,  
 For all the day they view things unrespected;  
 But when I sleep, in dreams they look on thee,  
 And darkly bright are bright in dark directed:  
 Then thou whose shadow shadows doth make bright,  
 How would thy shadow's form form happy show  
 To the clear day with thy much clearer light,  
 When to unseeing eyes thy shade shines so!  
 How would, I say, mine eyes be blessed made  
 By looking on thee in the living day,  
 When in dead night thy fair imperfect shade  
 Through heavy sleep on sightless eyes doth stay!



All days are nights to see till I see thee,  
And nights bright days when dreams do show thee me.

As M. Praz points out, dream was one of the conventional themes in the Elizabethan love-poetry.<sup>8</sup> In general, its typical argument is that lovers must experience a deep disillusionment when awakened, though their vain emotion is rewarded in their dreams. In such a love-poetry of the courtly manner, the perfect devotion towards their idolized women must exist on the part of the lovers. At first sight, this sonnet 43 is not so far from such a convention, but on a closer reading, there seems to remain some ambivalence in the relationship between reality and dream. To say more directly, the poet's suspicion of the physical connection between the young man and the dark lady underlies his confession of genuine love. This connotation is discernible especially in the oxymoron, 'darkly bright' in the line 4, and the repetition of such words as 'shadow' and 'shade.' J. D. Wilson interprets 'darkly bright' as 'secretly cheerful' and 'are bright in dark directed' as 'can see clearly what they are looking at in the dark.' And he comments further that 'now 61 is, like 43, a nightpiece, but as unhappy as 43 is happy.'<sup>9</sup> Apart from Wilson's interpretation of 'darkly bright,' and 'are bright in dark directed,' I can hardly agree with him when he says that this sonnet is 'happy' compared to the sonnet 61. In my view, the opposition of the brightness and the darkness, that is, the poet's sense of crisis, i.e., his feeling that the brightness is being threatened by the darkness, is expressed by the oxymoron 'darkly bright.' As manifested in the sonnet 144, the poet has 'two loves,' that is, 'a man right fair' and 'a woman coloured ill.' The former, 'better angel' gives him 'comfort,' while the latter, 'the worsen spirit' gives him 'despair.' To his still more dismay, the ill-coloured woman tries to tempt the right fair man into corruption:

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.

This misgiving of the poet took the actual form in the sonnet 33; 'the basest clouds' disgraced the bright clear light of the morning sun. The acute pain that the poet suffered from cannot be so easily put out of his mind. I think that the sad event in the sonnet 33 throws a dark shadow on the following sonnets, and that in the case of the sonnet 43, it is reflected in the oxymoron 'darkly bright' and the repetition of 'shadow' and 'shade,' though they mean in the context the image of the young man in the poet's mind in contrast with his real form. In the 'unhappy' sonnet 61, the poet imagines more directly;

For thee watch I, whilst thou dost wake elsewhere,  
From me far off, with others all too near.

In the poet's sad imagination, the young man lies awake in bed too near a mistress, probably the dark lady, though the expression is modified as 'others.' Now the spiritual distance between the poet and the young man seems to be widening afar.

## 6. Twilight

As the whole sequence of the *Sonnets* do so, those following the sonnet 43 show too complex a movement to summarize in a few words, but there is no doubt that the poet's love for the young man is gradually deepening through the hard internal strife of the poet. Now, from the sonnet 71, the poet begins to speculate on Death, the final aspect of the destruction by Time. In the sonnet 73, the poet's awareness of approaching death is presented impressively by the imagery of light, such as a desolate scene of an early winter, a twilight gradually fading into darkness, and a faint glowing of embers;

That time of year thou mayst in me behold  
 When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang  
 Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,  
 Bare ruin'd choirs where late the sweet birds sang:  
 In me thou see'st the twilight of such day  
 As after sunset fadeth in the west,  
 Which by and by black night doth take away,  
 Death's second self that seals up all in rest:  
 In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire  
 That on the ashes of his youth doth lie  
 As the death-bed whereon it must expire,  
 Consum'd with that which it was nourish'd by:  
     This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong  
     To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

This sonnet is often referred to as a typical form of the Shakespearean sonnet. The same theme is repeated in the three quatrains with different images consistent to one another, and they fuse organically into one vivid impression. When observed closely, however, it seems to me that the imagery of fading light has different connotations in the three quatrains. In the first quatrain, the line 4, 'Bare ruin'd choirs where late the sweet birds sang' catches my attention. It is generally pointed out that a historical allusion, that is, the dissolution of the monasteries about the year 1535 is implicated by the expression 'Bare ruin'd choirs.' But I think that another historical allusion is also possible here, that is, the closing of the theatre. This thing is more directly concerned with the poet and his present situation. As I mentioned before in relation to the sonnet 28, the poet is now on his journey, forced by this unfortunate event. Hence my interpretation of 'choirs' as 'stages,'

and 'birds' as 'actors.' It seems to me that a desolate scene of an early winter is symbolizing an unpromising future of the poet as dramatist. In the second quatrain, I think the poet's aspiration to escape from his hard life is lurking under the word 'twilight.' This connotation seems to be suggested especially by the line 8, 'Death's second self (sleep) that seals up all in rest.' Besides, another evidence can be added from the sonnet 66. There, the poet is manifesting his strong discontentment with his society filled with absurd, unjust things. Weary with them, he is yearning for a 'restful death';

Tir'd with all these for restful death I cry, --  
As to behold Desert a beggar born,  
And needy Nothing trimm'd in jollity,  
And purest Faith unhappily forsworn.

In the third quatrain, I conjecture that the poet's sense of sin might be suggested by the imagery of embers. It seems to me that 'glowing of such fire' is suggesting that of the fire of his lust, that is to say, his physical connection with the dark lady. Other expressions such as 'the ashes of his youth,' 'expire' and 'consumed' also have a slight connotation of 'lust.' We can never fail to forget the dismal expression about the sexual intercourse in the sonnet 129, 'Th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame / Is lust in action.' It seems that the poet is now prepared to be sentenced to death as the punishment of his sin. As a whole, the total effect of the imagery of light where these sorts of the poet's consciousness seem to be included is a self-sacrifice or self-abnegation of the poet. As shown by the poet's address to the young man, 'thou mayst in me behold,' the poet is presenting the ugly damages on his own body done by Time's cruel hand in order to awaken a sense of mutability in the mind of the young man and make him cherish his short summer more dearly. The poet's love is now on a rare stage.

## 7. An Ever-Fixed Mark

Now, I want to hasten to my final consideration of the imagery of light. As shown by a line in the sonnet 107, 'The mortal moon hath her eclipse endured,' the poet seems to have endured his crisis. Though various historical allusions are inferred concerning 'The mortal moon' mainly for the aim of dating the *Sonnets*, the word, 'eclipse' has by itself enough metaphorical meaning in the context. I think it is suggesting the poet's painful situation which resulted from several causes, such as his long separation from the young man, forced by the closing of the theatre, the infidelity of the young man, the demonish temptation of the dark lady threatening the faithful love between the poet and the young man, and the appearance of a rival poet who falsely depicts with his false art the true beauty of the young man. When the poet endured this 'eclipse,' a pure light reappears, this time, on a dark, stormy night; it is the light of 'an ever-fixed mark' and the star' in the 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.  
 Oh 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 prov'd,  
     I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.

In the nautical image of the second quatrain which arouses my special concern, 'mark' is a sea-mark or lighthouse, in contrast to the waves as an image of time, and 'the star' is, needless to say, the lodestar. J. W. Lever says in his notes on this sonnet that 'the traditional image of love as a storm-tossed ship is replaced by love as the guiding star.'<sup>10</sup> Conventionally the troubled waves were the symbol of a mistress's cruelty and the ships on the verge of wrecking was that of a lover's unrewarded emotion, as exemplified in the following sonnet by Wyatt;

My galley, charged with forgetfulness,  
     Thorough sharp seas in winter nights doth pass  
     'Tween rock and rock, and eke mine enemy, alas,  
     That is my Lord, steereth with cruelty;  
 And every oar a thought in readiness,  
     As though that death were light in such a case.  
     An endless wind doth tear the sail apace,  
     Of forced sighs and trusty fearfulness.  
 A rain of tears, a cloud of dark disdain,  
     Hath done the weared cords great hinderance,  
     Wreathed with error and eke with ignorance.  
 The stars be hid that led me to this pain;  
     Drowned is reason that should me consort,  
     And I remain despairing of the port.<sup>11</sup>

As Lever says, Shakespeare is reshaping such a convention. The situation has a far more profound significance. It seems to me that the night, the sea, and the storm are all sym-

bolizing, first, the tyranny of Time and Death, secondly, the rapid changing of the society of his time and a hardship of his life, and, thirdly, the inconstancy of human love and the frail mind of man that easily surrenders to sin. Man's brief lifetime will soon come to the end, so his youth, his 'rosy lips and cheeks' cannot help coming 'Within his (Time's) bending sickle's compass.' He is a 'wand'ring bark' on the troubled waves, that is, he is forced to alter amid the tumult of the time when he lives. Moreover, he easily bends to sin which deeply roots in himself. These are the darkness he is involved in, and the 'impediments' against 'the marriage of true minds.' A true love strongly resists them. It is 'an ever-fixed mark' which is 'never shaken'; it is the lodestar which sheds a pure ray down over the stormy sea and leads the wandering navigators through darkness to a true destination; the mysterious value of its light can never be measured by science. Thus, Shakespeare is confirming love with so much emotion and elevating it so high. In this respect this sonnet is a very rare one throughout all the sonnets.

So far I have been considering the imagery of light in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, under the seven headings, 'gracious light,' 'a summer's day,' 'a jewel,' 'the basest clouds,' 'darkly bright,' 'twilight,' and 'ever-fixed mark.' I am afraid that this list of expressions taken out of the context and arranged as headings are apt to give stronger senses than those they give in the context, but I am confirmed that one general feature of the imagery of light becomes considerably clear. I think the function of the imagery of light changes from decoration, through the indication of psychological ambiguities, to mystification. In other words, it is a change from a broad sunshine, through shadows, to a light in the darkness. The darkness in the *Sonnets*, I think, is brought forth from the two springs, Time and the dark lady, in other words, the physical destruction by Time and the spiritual corruption by the dark lady. The latter is a more serious aspect, for she represents sin which the young man, the poet and every human being also share. Light springs from love which the young man stands for. Amid many layers of darkness, it is very difficult for love to shed a pure light. But, when it once shines, it becomes the more impressive illumination like 'an ever-fixed mark' in the sonnet 116, due to this depth of darkness and the accumulated sufferings of the poet.

A general trend of the imagery of light in the poetry of the seventeenth century seems to accord to this final aspect of the imagery of light in the *Sonnets*, that is, a light in the darkness. For example, Crashaw says in one of his religious poems that the Nativity is 'Summer in Winter! Day in Night!' A more remarkable example is 'dazzling darkness' in *The Night*, one of the religious poems by Henry Vaughan;

There is in God (some say)  
A deep, but dazzling darkness.<sup>12</sup>

There is, however, a difference between them. In Shakespeare's works, it is very rare for a

religious light, that is, Christ's redempting light to shine. In Shakespeare, I think, light comes from man and his life on this world, however brief and absurd they are.

#### Notes

1. Kristeller (1964 : 121–45)
2. Cruttwell (1954 : Chapter 1)
3. All the quotations are from the *Shakespeare's Sonnets* ed. by Ingram and Redpath (1964). The page numbers are omitted.
4. Ingram and Redpath (ibid. : 18)
5. Seymour-Smith (1963 : Introduction)
6. Ingram and Redpath (op. cit. : 44)
7. Wilson (1955 : 128)
8. Praz (1958 : 53–72)
9. Wilson (op. cit. : 148)
10. Lever (1974 : 168)
11. Lever (ibid. : 33)
12. Rudrum ed., *Henry Vaughan The Complete Poems*. (1976 : 289–90)

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