JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES (GOSAJOLLCOS)

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
GOMBE STATE UNIVERSITY

MAIDEN EDITION
November, 2020

MAIDEN EDITION
November, 2020

PUBLISHED BY:
Jos University Press Ltd.,
No. 15, Murtala Mohammed Way,
Jos Plateau State, Nigeria.

COVER DESIGN:
Saviour Bassey
Phone: 08068160241
E-mail:savior4real75@yahoo.com

Loss and Desire: Poetic Form and the Play of the Unconscious in Selected William Shakespeare's Sonnets

Oluwabukola Kehinde

Abstract

This paper examines, from a deconstructionist position, the formal and thematic contradictions, impasses of meanings and inconsistencies in William Shakespeare's sonnets. This study contends that the sonnets of Shakespeare demonstrate why the violent hierarchy in the texts undermines the absolute presence of meaning-making since meaning is not present in itself and cannot be predetermined and discovered from the extraneous values which stand in sharp contrast to the text or outside and beyond the text, but it is infinitely "twisted", "teased out", discovered within language as play of "differance" and "supplementarity". Thus, through an intrinsic reading and interpretation of the sonnets, the study demonstrates the viability of the sonnets for a deconstructive reading of how text and discourse claims what it thins out, or the necessity with which what the text privileges is systematically related to what it banishes. The language of the text undoes the hierarchical oppositions within the text. The implication of this double reading or critique to the sonnets is to explain that there is no fixed and predetermined form and structure as "given" or "centre" of meaning which in turn might be referred to as the very identity of the sonnets.

Keywords: *Shakespeare, Poetry, Sonnets, Criticism, Deconstruction.*

Introduction

This paper explores the theme of love and the mobility of desire in Shakespeare's sonnets. However, the theme of love is not only limited to the sonnet form; but it also serves as a thematic concern in Shakespeare's plays such as *The Merchant of Venice*, *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet, Othello, Antony and Cleopatra* and others. For instance, in *The Merchant of Venice*, the theme of love creates a violent hierarchy between marriage and friendship. The love affair between Bassanio and Portia demonstrates marriage and procreation as a monument of love. On the other hand, the relationship between Bassanio and Antonio, and later Balthazar reveals friendship as a perfect site of love. The friendship between these three men smacks of homosexuality. The homoerotic feeling is not explicitly stated, but is carefully and deliberately suggested throughout the play. The poetic speaker in the sonnets shows himself as a "true" lover, a man who has been overtaken by the love of his "Beloved". Although he sets out to immortalize the Beloved's love and her beauty in the sonnets, paradoxically, the speaker is overwhelmed by love and desire to overcome the loss of his own love and her beauty. The mobility of desire is captured by Friedrich Nietzsche (1966) succinctly: "In the end one loves one's desire and not what is desired" (p. 93). Thus, the free play of unconscious desires and fabrication (figuration) in the selected sonnets shows that the speaker's desire for immortalization is radically mobile and contingent.

The analysis in this paper also discusses the speaker's attempt to exorcize death with words or verse, and how the fabrication (figuration) of language within the sonnets wrecks the desire for the ultimate unified, integrated, fixed, predetermined or static site of immortalization of the "Self"- "*Aesthetic order compensates for loss*" (my emphasis, Dollimore, 2001, p. 102). The Beloved is encouraged by the speaker to marry and procreate in order to gain immortality, conquer the sting of death, and swallow up death in victory. Arguably, it is not the beauty and love of the Beloved that propelled the speaker to write but rather the inevitability of death and loss. For the speaker, what connects death with desire is mutability - the sense that all being and human endeavour are governed by a ceaseless process of change and time. Mutability is the truest nature of life and desire; it is not something that can be added or subtracted from existence at will but rather it is an inevitable intrinsic feature. It is what gives value and meaning to desire, and, paradoxically, it is what undermines it to the state of self-shattering, self-defeat or deferment of desire. On this note, Dollimore argues that "mutability is the ineluctable enemy of desire … *mutability is also the inner dynamic of desire* … mutability animates desire even as it thwarts it" (original emphasis, 2001, p. xvi-xvii). The speaker fails to realise that mobility inhabits and destroys not only the mortal body but also the sonnets' form and structure. Therefore, it is the mobility of the speaker's desire that renders it as a death-driven, as impossible of fulfilment, and as self-defeating or self-shattering or self-contradicting - the speaker is in love and loves the Beloved's beauty, the sonnets' form and structure, and by implication himself, which are wrecked under the sway of passing time.

Therefore, the central problem of the study is to explore how, if at all, a deconstructive reading could undermine form and structure in a sub-genre of poetry whose form and structure has always been fixed and predetermined. The objective of this paper is to show that the selected sonnets exemplify the differing effect of form and structure to the extent that the centre deconstructs and decentres itself, and becomes an irreducible process of signification or writing. Thus, the basic question concerning the selected sonnets of William Shakespeare in relation to this paper is the extent to which the "warring forces" or the irresolvable conflicts and contradictions within the texts lead to irreducible plurality of meaning.

The choice of Deconstruction as an analytical tool for this study is reinforced by its radical and influential conception of "meaning" in literarydiscourse. While other theories posit that "meaning" and intention are inseparable, Deconstruction, on the other hand, conceptualises texts as *writing* (text as an "intertext"), not about the world but about texts, so that we cannot judge the standard of texts by referring them to a world outside them: the real world of the text is the text itself. For Derrida, deconstruction is "the name of a problem" (1976, p. 99), a "search for the other of language" (1986, p. 15), and a "mistrust of proper name" (2001, p. 6). Despite this,

however, Derrida does not view Deconstruction as a methodological reform that should offer a better theory of meaning, but what happens in the process of interpretation and within a 'con-text': "Deconstruction is what *happens* [within a context of reading]" (Derrida 2001, p. 55). Context, Derrida strongly argues:

> is a question of context or text that is not limited to immediate context of…a text written on paper, but a non-closed set of difference, in the process of transformation, and the value of alterity or difference in process, of differ*a*nce, and traces of differences, in a process of differ*a*nce, then the text or non-closed context is not here limited to what is understood by text in the everyday sense, but a field [the metaphor of a field no longer suffices since it usually serve to define regional context that are subject to a general science or philosophy), a text including everything that philosophy and the traditional language linked to it calls history, economy, politics, etc., etc. (2019, p. 12).

On this theory, the reading and interpretation of a text, so to speak, goes beyond the circle of meta-language, certainty, finality, because its very moment is unforeseeable, unpredictable, in calculable. It is not given prior to language; it comes into existence through discourse. The context in which the text finds its place is nothing more than a text which must stand in opposition to other texts. However, deconstruction is not a form of textual destruction designed to prove that meaning is impossible. That is to say, for Derrida, deconstruction is not a unified theoretical practice or theory of criticism, but a "strategic device" for reading, interpretation, and writing (Charles Bressler, 2011, p. 107). What is obtainable is not a search for methodological guidelines for or practice of reading, but rather a new strategic for a critical reading of text. This view is demonstrated in studies by Dereck Attridge (2010) and John W. Philip (2013).

A deconstructive reading of a text, in effect, is the forward and sideways movement of language in order to undo, to reverse, and to critique the hierarchical oppositions within the text. J. Hillis Miller argues that "Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself" (1975, p. 31). For Barbara Johnson, "The Deconstruction of a text does not proceed by random doubt… but by the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text" (1980, p. 5). Jonathan Culler asserts, "to deconstruct a discourse is to show how it undermines the philosophy it asserts or the hierarchical oppositions on which it relies…" (1982, p. 86). The central tenet of deconstructive criticism or reading, Eagleton notes, is to show how texts undermine their own hierarchical structure or ruling system of logic by looking for the *aporia* or the impasses of meaning, the "symptomatic" points, contradictions, where the texts get into trouble, come unstuck, offer to contradict themselves (1996, p. 116). Just like other Poststructuralist theories, deconstruction "is a commitment to the structural incompletion of all identities, objects, and systems, and a reworked concept of

human subjectivity and agency, which break decisively with humanist mode of thinking" (David Howarth, 2013, p. 12).

In deconstructive readings, it is not meaning that is undermined or dismantled but the claim to privilege one element of signification at the expense of the other. Thus, deconstructive readings demonstrate how text or discourse through the play of difference produces or claims what it banishes, making possible the very element that it makes impossible, or the necessity with which what the text privileges is systematically related to what it sacrifices or thins out (see also Derrida, 2011, p. 143; Nicole Anderson, 2013, pp. 251-257; Dick and Wolfreys, 2013, p. 69-75). That is, the "other" or marginal is intimately related to the privilege or centre as the mirror or image of what it is not, and therefore is an essential reminder of what it is. Deconstruction, therefore, is a practice of reading a text as an arche-writing (as a chain of signifiers) without the interference of intent or intention as determiners of meaning: "... to be able to read a *text* as *text* without the interference of an interpretation is the latest-developed form of 'inner experience'- perhaps one that is hardly possible" (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 479).

Posterity, Form and Structure as Sites of Immortalization of the "Self" in Shakespeare Sonnet

In Sonnet 17, "Who Will Believe My Verse in Time to Come" the poetic speaker illustrates that the immortalization of the Beloved's beauty, "heavenly touched", lies not only in her children but, most important, in the "verse" or the sonnet "rhyme" (poetic form and structure). The sonnet opens with a rhetorical question which sets the pace for the speaker's argument. The first quatrain opens with a tone of uncertainty in which the speaker asks "who will believe" the authenticity and potency of his "verse" in the future ("time to come", probably when the speaker and the beloved are dead). For him, the "tomb" serves as a site where the Beloved's mortal body is buried ("hides") without revealing any of her qualities ("parts") to posterity ("time to come"). Thus, the speaker metaphorically likens the sonnet (even God, "heaven", can attest to it) to "a tomb" in which the memory ("life") of the Beloved is immortalised: "Though yet heaven knows it is but as a tomb" (line 3).

The second stanza continues on the note of the speaker's uncertainty of his creative work: note the first word of the stanza, "If" (line 5). The speaker asserts that "If" the verse should serve as a site of immortalization of the Beloved's "beauty" and "grace", then posterity ("age to come") would ridicule him, the writer, authority of the verse, by saying "this poet lies". This is because the exaggeration of the Beloved's "beauty" and "grace" would create a doubt in the mind of the "age to come" that such creature(s) ("heavenly touches") could not have existed at any point in time on the earth ("ne'er touched earthly faces").

In the third quatrain the speaker further notes that not only he will be ridiculed by the "age to come" but also his verses ("my papers"), which are a past activity and a sort of presence-absence since they are "yellowed with their age", these same verses will "Be scorned" as a mere expression without any form of "truth" or reality. Thus,

the Beloved's beauty and grace ("true rights") will also be ridiculed not only as a powerful outpouring of the poet's love ("a poet's rage"), but also as an out-dated expression of poetic form ("stretched metre of antique song") which is not obtainable "in time to come" (line 1) and for "The age to come" (line 7).

In the couplet, there is a shift in the argument of the sonnet, marked by a mixture of both affirmation and uncertainty ("But were…"). The speaker concludes that the existence of the Beloved lies in the existence of her own children in "time to come": "But were some child of yours alive that time" (Line 13). However, note that this line also serves as a follow up for the speaker's argument in Sonnet 3. The immortalization of the Beloved's "beauty" and "grace" "in time to come" depends on the ability of the Beloved to reproduce "some child" which will enable her to "live" in the memory of her children, "the age to come" or presumably in the reader, and in the speaker's poetic form: "You should live twice in it, and in my rhyme".

From a deconstructive reading, Sonnet 17 shows the inevitability of the destructive effect of "time" and "age" on the Beloved, the poetic speaker, the reader, and the sonnet form itself. This undermines the sonnet's attempt to pin down or give a definite, stable, fixed argument for the immortalization of the Beloved's beauty: death inhabits not only the poetic speaker and the Beloved, but also posterity, the reader and the sonnet form.

Formally and thematically, the sonnet is self-contradictory and self-deconstructive in nature. The sonnet plays on the opposition of life and death in the idea that the speaker has built for the Beloved a "lived-stretched meter-tomb".

While the speaker attempts to immortalise the Beloved in the "verse", he ended up using the verse as a site of immortalisation for himself. This can be deciphered in the repetition of "my" in the sonnet: "my verse" Line 1; "my papers" Line 9; "my rhyme" Line 14. There is also the desire on the part of the speaker to write and create a mental image of the Beloved's beauty and grace in the mind of the reader, "age to come". For the sonnet, and the reader are monuments to the poetic speaker's "verse", "papers", "stretched metre", and "rhyme" (poetic genius, his living tomb). Although he fears the undecidability of the identity of "Such heavenly touches" on the part of the reader: "this poet lies". This is because the sonnet(s) ("my papers"), for the reader, which must out-live its place and time of production ("yellowed with their age") will be criticised as nothing but a mere opinion rather than a reality ("truth") of the poet's intentional meaning. The emotional outpouring of the Beloved's "beauty and grace" (or "true rights") is to offer a subjective interpretation which in one way or the other ennobles the "poet" and his "verse", "papers" "rhyme". Thus, such approach will be regarded as an out-dated approach or may not be desirable in the evaluation of the identity of the Beloved, the speaker and the "verse" by "The age to come" (the reader) and "in time to come".

The couplet of the sonnet contradicts the entire argument in the preceding quatrains. While the first three quatrains affirm the uncertainty of the sonnet and the Beloved's identity in time and age to come (reader), the couplet affirms that the entire identity of the Beloved, the speaker, and the sonnet itself lies in the existence of the

Beloved's children, the reader, and the poetic structure ("rhyme") of the sonnet itself. Thus, while the first quatrain notes that the sonnet is a "tomb" for hiding the life or existence of the Beloved without showing any trace of her mortal existence, the couplet, in sharp contrast, asserts that the Beloved will continue to "live" in the poetic structure of the sonnet. The hierarchical opposition between life and death depicts the integration of death into life, and the attempt to overcome death through posterity and poetic structure. The sonnet, therefore, places the universality of its meaning and the timelessness of its art form at the centre of writing. The sonnet's "most high deserts" (line 2), the "poet's rage" of "true rights" of the beloved, and "The age to come" (readers' subjective interpretations of the sonnet in relation to the poet's and his Beloved's) are signifying processes of reading and interpretation without any definite identity, meaning, truth and reality. In other words, the poet, the reader, the children and the sonnet's structure are differential traces. The unreadability and undecideability of the sonnet's identity is expressed from the first quatrain through to the concluding couplet of the sonnet with conditionals such as: "who will" Line 1; "if" Line 2 and 5; "Though yet" Line 3; "so should" Line 9; "But were" Line 13.

The self-contradiction of the sonnet's form and content demonstrates how the sonnet puts off its identity infinitely. The first, second, and third quatrains of the sonnet do not offer the autonomy of the formal features as determinants of absolute identity, reality, truth or meaning.

The sonnet articulates a series of questions around the idea of immortalization: What is the relationship between immortalization and reading? Do sonnet structure and form ("rhyme") become fixed, stable and absolute into its own "tomb" of "time to come", or does it change with "time to come" (context) and with "age to come" (new generation of readers)? What is at stake in the interpretive process of acceptability ("believe") and immortalization?

The beloved does not need a physical "tomb", a structure that is at once a signifier of both life and death: "Though yet heaven knows it is but a tomb/ Which hides your life, and shows not half your parts" (Lines 3-4). These lines suggest that the act of believing the "verse in time to come" (Line 1), of remembering, of immortalizing the Beloved's "most high deserts", "beauty", "grace", "true rights", is also an act of hiding, defacing and, disguising her "heavenly touches", and they create the mental picture of what is done when the dead are buried: the Beloved is honoured through a befitting burial but at the same time she is hidden from sight ("and shows not") as if she brings terror and veneration to her loved ones. The speaker's act of writing and "fresh" numbering of "the beauty" and "graces" in "verse", as a form of immortalization of the Beloved, is at the same time an act of burial. It might also be argued that the readers ("The age to come") are engaged in a similar ambivalence whenever they read and talk ("say") about the "verse". Paul de Man (1984) asserts that the task of the reader, in relation to the mortal Beloved and speaker, "is simply to bury them, to bury them in their own texts made into epitaphs and monumental graves" (p. 121). The attempt to immortalize the Beloved and the poet is, paradoxically, an attempt to bury them, to do away with them, to forget them.

Thus, it might be argued that this is the fundamental tension of the sonnet, a continuous process of signification, an irreducible warring of forces and contradiction between immortalization and death.

A deconstructive reading of the sonnet demonstrates the way language of the sonnet speaks, contrary to the sonnet form and structure, to the reader as a chain of signifiers at different contexts. So, the text meaning is context-bound, but its context is boundless and illimitable. The Sonnet and the Reader as Sites of Immortalization of the "Self"

The Sonnet and the Reader as Sites of Immortalization of the "Self"

The poetic speaker of Sonnet 18, "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" sets out to make a comparison between his Beloved's beauty and that of "a summer's day". The first quatrain opens with a rhetorical question which sets the tone for a metaphorical comparison, and suggests the incompatibility of the Beloved's beauty and the summer's day. The speaker suggests that the beauty of the Beloved which is "more lovely and more temperate" (line 2) stands in sharp contrast to the destructive and temporal existence of the summer's day:

> Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
> And summer's lease hath all too short a date: (Lines 3-4)

The shift from the first quatrain to the second quatrain is marked exactly by a shift into personification. The second quatrain gives further insight into the imperfections of the summer's day. In spite of the beauty and brightness of the summer's day, it is not eternal because it declines just as every beauty in time is diminished by the inevitable course of nature. In other words, as endearing as summer can be, it cannot be permanent because it must give way to another season:

> Sometimes too hot the eye of heaven shines,
> And often is his gold complexion dimmed,
> And every fair from fair sometimes declines,
> By chance, or nature's changing course untrimmed. (Lines 5-8)

The third quatrain projects the main thrust of the ideas that the poetic persona is articulating in the previous quatrains with the use of oxymoron: "eternal summer" (line 9). The "But" (Petrarchan epithet) in the first line of the quatrain marks a shift in the tone of the sonnet, and enables the poetic speaker to transform, in a subtle manner, the beauty of the Beloved from mortality to immortality. In essence, the poetic persona affirms, in contrast to a summer's day, the eternity of the beauty of the Beloved where neither the destructive effect of time nor "Death" will have dominion over it in ages to come; but it shall continue to live in the sonnet:

But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st, (Lines 9-12)

The couplet concludes the sonnet's argument. It has a slight initial indentation. The indentation suggests the emphasis the poetic speaker intends to make. In the couplet, the poetic speaker posits that as long as readers exist and can appreciate the creative work of art (poem) so long will live the sonnet as the eternal site of immortalization of, or a monument to, the beloved's beauty. With the couplet, therefore, the poetic speaker reveals the reason he is of the opinion that neither "Death", nor the ravages of time would be able to exert any negative, destructive effect on the beloved's beauty:

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee. (Lines 13-14)

The two subjects of comparison described above are in effect opposed. One –the summer's day – implies a temporal existence in the notion of beauty. The second – the Beloved's beauty – on the other hand, suggests eternity of beauty. The sonnet, therefore, presents a number of hierarchical oppositions of a concept of beauty that is not only complicated, but contradictory. The hierarchical opposition in the sonnet not only creates an oppositional relationship between the two concepts of beauty but also develops a strange complicity. It is both "more lovely" and "Rough", both "more temperate" and "too hot", both "eternal" and "short", both "grow'st" and "declines" in physical appearance. In such opposed centres of signification or binary oppositions, the first term is generally privileged, or favoured, or given priority over the marginal term because it is traditionally held by society and culture to be superior. The privileged term (the Beloved) in the hierarchy defines its identity through the image or mirror of what it is not, its marginal, "Other" (the summer's day). From this perspective, the Beloved's beauty, which is metaphorically depicted as "eternal summer" needs "a summer's day". If there were no summer's day, we would not have eternal summer because we would not be able to identify it for what it is. On this note, the meaning and identity of the two opposing forces of signification arise out of difference. One might argue, then, that the existence of summer creates the concept of eternal summer. Paradoxically, the marginal term ("a summer's day") turns out to be the possibility of the privileged term. In other words, the marginal term is as important as the privileged term.

In the couplet, the sonnet expresses a self-ironizing and self-deconstructive turn. The Beloved's beauty initially seems to be the centre of writing for the poetic speaker, but on closer analysis some inconsistencies emerge in the couplet. There are contradictions in the couplet that are unperceived by the speaker between what he commands and what he does not command in the pattern of language that he uses. For

instance, the poetic speaker sets out to immortalize the Beloved's beauty in his verse but fails to acknowledge that the sonnet is not only a monument for the Beloved but also for the "summer's day", and by implication for himself. The couplet, therefore, develops the idea of the reader and reading process as monuments of the sonnet itself ("eternal line to time"): "So long as men can breathe or eyes can see/ So long lives this, and this gives life to thee" (lines 13-14). This idea stands in sharp contrast and subverts the poetic speaker's promise of eternity in the third quatrain: "When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st" (line 12). On this view, the couplet posits that the eternity of the Beloved, the sonnet, and the speaker depend on the existence of the reader or the reading process.

On another level, the couplet could be viewed as an attempt by the sonnet to rank meanings in a hierarchy of significance ranging from the reader to the sonnet, and finally to the Beloved, thereby creating a hierarchical opposition among them based on significance and purpose. It can be argued that the sonnet has two categories of reader: the implied reader and actual reader. The implied reader can be regarded as the reader written into the text who gives the overall textual directions to the actual reader of flesh and blood in the interpretive process. We might also argue about the "I" of the first line as another kind of reader. The hierarchical structure of the couplet asserts that the entire existence of the sonnet depends on the reader ("men can breathe") or the act of reading ("eye can see"). On this view, the couplet offers a series of reading formations. The reader, therefore, is the central determining factor for the existence of both the sonnet and the Beloved. The reader has a central role in the creation, even interpretation of the textual identity of the sonnet and of the beloved. Indeed, the couplet claims, in the same manner as Stanley Fish (1980), that it is reader that actually produces the sonnet. The word "or" in line 13 suggests that the sonnet can also be evaluated based on the direct interaction between elements of the sonnet and the act of reading itself. This version of reading formation or reader-response is best articulated by Wolfgang Iser (1978) for whom it is the text that pushes the reader in certain directions and that it is the reader that fills gaps in the text. On this note, the meaning and identity of the sonnet and the beloved emerge from the interaction between the reader and the sonnet.

In Deconstruction, the reading process is an unending dialogue rather than an object to be nailed down or closed. The sonnet is not an object of subjective apprehension by the reader but rather the possibility which gives identity to the reading process. In other words, the sonnet is as important as the reading process. For a deconstructive model of reading, the language of both the reading process and the sonnet are figurative. Therefore, neither the sonnet nor the reading process or discourse is "readable" because the tool they use to define things, essences and, identities, namely language, is itself rhetorical, and not referential or even representational. Both the sonnet and the reading process are figuratively homogenous in tropes, and function as an indefinite chain of signifiers. On this view, Hillis Miller (1979) notes:

> The language of criticism is subject to exactly the same limitations and blind alleys as the language of the works it read .... Criticism is a human activity which depends on never being at ease within a fixed 'method'. It must constantly put its own ground in question. The critical text and the literary text are each parasite and host for each other, each feeding on the other and feeding it, destroying and being destroyed by it (p. 249).

Despite the argument of the couplet, the two levels of reading demonstrate that the meaning of the sonnet cannot be gathered at one spot but deferred to a different *context* in the interpretative process because every reader is a member of a different "interpretative community" (Fish, 1980, pp. 234-6), and the sonnet "is capable of several different realizations, no reading can ever exhaust the full potential, for each individual reader will fill in gaps in his own way, thereby excluding the various other possibilities; as he reads, he will make his own decision as to how the gap is to be filled (Iser, 1978, p. 280). Thus, the implication of this model is the effort to make the sonnet mean differently, to offer the play of *differance* not in a final process of signification (despite the claim of reader supremacy), but in an endless process of signification one in which the centres are resituated as play of meaning.

For the deconstructionist, both the poetic speaker and the reader should only wear the mask of rhetoric in order to offer a discourse that would not allow a desire for closure or for anything which might exist beyond and outside of the sonnet: "no meaning can be determined out of context, but no context permits saturation" (Derrida, 1988, p. 136).The implication of this is that the summer's day, the beloved's beauty, the reader, the poetic speaker and the text itself are not desirable but language is. Language structures all our thoughts and actions, speech and writing, experience and understanding, and indeed all social institutions; that is, language escapes our conscious control. For Derrida, language is completely unreliable and unstable. It operates on a system of difference in which discourse moves in and out of the hierarchical oppositions, which never leads to meaning but "engages it within its own economy to go on signifying and to differ/defer" (Derrida, 1978, p. 42).

Conclusion

This paper has analysed the central thematic and formal concerns in some selected sonnets of William Shakespeare with a view to showing their differing effects of form and structure. The above analysis explores how the speaker attempts to immortalize love and exorcize death with verse, and how the language (figuration) within the sonnets wrecks the desire for a fixed site of immortalization. On this note, the study highlights that the sonnets are open to further deconstruction, infinite postponement, undecidability and irreducible process of reading and interpretation. By implication, the semblance of meaning or a centre that is suggested in the study may be seen contradictory to the argument of no centre. However, the study is conscious of the instability and flush of its own argument and susceptibility to subversion and deconstruction.

References

Anderson, N. (2013). "Derrida's language: Play, *Différance* and (Con)text", in Dillet B., Mackenzie I. and Porter R. (eds), *The Edinburgh Companion to Poststructuralism*, Edinburgh University Press, 249-269.

Attridge, D. (2010). *Reading and Responsibility: Deconstruction's Traces*, Edinburgh University Press.

Bressler, C.E. (2011). *Literary Criticism: Introduction to Theory and Practice*, Longman.

Culler, J. (1982). *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. Cornell University Press.

De Man, P. (1979). *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*, Yale University Press.

De Man, P. (1984). *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, Columbia University Press. Derrida, J. (1976). *Of Grammatology*, trans. G.C. Spivak. The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Derrida, J. (1978). *Writing and Différence*, trans. Allan Bass, Routledge.

Derrida, J. (1982). *Dissemination*, trans. Alan Bass. Chicago University Press.

Derrida, J. (1986). *Mémoires: For Paul de Man*, trans. C. Lindsay *et al.*, Columbia University Press.

Derrida, J. (1988). *Limited Inc*, Northwestern University Press.

Derrida, J. (1998). *Monolingualism of the Other, or the Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. P. Mensah, Stanford University Press.

Derrida, J. (2001). *A Taste for the Secret: Jacques Derrida in Conversation with M. Ferraris and G. Vettimo*. Trans. G. Donis, Polity Press.

Derrida, J. (2011). *Dissemination*. Trans. B. Johnson, Continuum.

Derrida, J. (2019). *Theory and Practice*. Trans. D. Wills, The University of Chicago Press.

Dick, M.D. and Wolfreys, J. (2013). *The Derrida Wordbook*, Edinburgh University Press.

Dollimore, J. (2001). *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture*, Routledge.

Eagleton, T. (1996). *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd Edn., University of Minnesota.

Fish, S. (1980). *Is There A Text In This Class?* Harvard University Press. Howarth, D. (2013). *Poststructuralist and After: Structure, Subjectivity and Power*, Palgrave Macmillan.

Johnson, B. (1980). *The Critical Difference: Essay in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading*, John Hopkins University Press.

Iser, W. (1978). *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, John Hopkins University Press.

Miller, H. (1975). "Deconstructing the Deconstructors", *Diacritics*, 5(2): 24-31. Miller, H. (1979). "The Critic as Host", in Bloom et al. (eds.), *Deconstruction and Criticism*, Seabury, 217-253.

Nietzsche, F. (1966). *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Kaufmann, W., Vintage Press.

Nietzsche, F. (1968). *The Will to Power* (WP), trans. Kaufmann, W. and Hollingdale, R. J., Vintage Press.

Philip, J.W. (2013). "Derrida, Deconstruction and Method." in Dillet B., Mackenzie I. and Porter R. (eds), *The Edinburgh Companion to Poststructuralism*, Edinburgh University Press, 122-142.

Shakespeare, W. (1988). *Complete Works*, S. Wells and G. Taylor (eds.), Clarendon Press.