Chapter Three: The Two Loves—Masculine Domination and Feminine Subversion in Shakespeare’s Sonnets

Different from the sonnet sequences written by his contemporaries, Shakespeare’s sonnet cycle has very different theme and motifs. Instead of being addressed to the only conventional beloved lady, Shakespeare’s Sonnets is divided into two parts: Sonnets 1-126 are generally believed to be related to or devoted to a young man, the so-called “Fair Youth” while Sonnets 127-152 are addressed to the so-called “Dark Lady”. Without creating a speaker as what Sidney has done in Astrophil and Stella, Shakespeare seems to express his own feelings and sufferings in the sequence and consequently critics have been trying to find specific reference in Shakespeare’s life to analyze his feelings toward the young man and the dark lady.  Though most of the critics’ guesses are not strongly biographically founded, Shakespeare’s sonnet sequence, Sonnets, is no doubt the most unique and perverse one in the sixteenth century Britain. Critics may have different ideas as to who the young man or the dark lady is and what the relationship is between Shakespeare and these two people, yet according to the specific pronouns, it is generally agreed that some of the sonnets are written to a young man and some to a dark lady and some concerning the triangular relation between these three persons. Besides, there are also some sonnets about a rival poet (sometimes identified as George Chapman or Christopher Marlowe), who catches the young man’s attention. Instead of investigating the life or fact behind the poems, I intend to focus on the sonnets themselves and the main concern of this chapter will be Shakespeare’s attitudes toward the young man and the dark lady he mentions in the Sonnets, and his implication and indication. Because the focus is on the sexual difference presented in this sonnet sequence, the sonnets concerning the rival poet will not be discussed.
In Shakespeare’s sonnets both the young man and the dark lady are silenced and what has been written down is more about Shakespeare’s attitudes toward them, instead of what they really are. By comparing the two parts of the sonnets we can find conspicuous similarities and differences which are indicative of Shakespeare’s similar affection and different attitudes toward the young man and the dark lady. In the first half of this chapter, Shakespeare’s intended domination of the female is scrutinized and in the second half, the feminine subversion found in the crevice of Shakespeare’s intention will be analyzed.

Many sonnets in these two parts are parallels; that is, they are similar in their presentation of the main point or the use of imagery. As Michael R. G. Spiller mentions in *The Development of the Sonnet*, in Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*, “[m]any sonnets are paired, in the sense that the phrasing or imagery of the second clearly continues from the first . . . It can be assumed that Shakespeare intended these to be read as pairs” (151). Besides, C. F. Williamson in “Themes and Patterns in Shakespeare’s Sonnets” explicitly comments on those parallels in the two groups of sonnets. For instance, in Sonnet 21 as well as in the well-noted Sonnet 130, Shakespeare declares that he will not use false comparisons to depict his love as most poets do but his love is as true as or even truer than those poets who follow the traditional conceits with no sincerity in mind. In Sonnet 21, after describing how common poets are inspired by “a painted beauty” and “making a couplement of proud compare / With sun and moon, with earth and sea’s rich gems, / With April’s first-born flow’rs, and all things rare / That heaven’s air in this huge rondure hems” (5-8), Shakespeare says, “O, let me, true in love, but truly write, / And then believe me, my love is as fair / As any mother’s child, though not so bright / As those gold candles

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1 The quotations of Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* in this chapter are taken either from Stephen Booth’s *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* and or from Thomas Blaikie’s *Shakespeare’s Love Poetry*. 
fix’d in heaven’s air” (9-12). Then in the final couplet, the poet declares, “Let them say more that like of hearsay well: / I will not praise that purpose not to sell” (13-14).

In Sonnet 130, Shakespeare similarly argues against the conventional conceits and then, at the very end, he asserts, “And yet, by heav’n, I think my love as rare / As any she belied with false compare” (13-14). In Sonnet 67 Shakespeare condemns the fashion of artificial beauty and praises the fair youth’s true beauty by asking “Why should false painting imitate his cheek, / And steal dead seeming of his living hue? / Why should poor beauty indirectly seek / Roses of shadow, since his rose is true?” (5-8).

In Sonnet 68, Shakespeare praises the fair youth because

In him those holy antique hours are seen,
Without all ornament, itself and true,
Making no summer of another’s green,
Robbing no old to dress his beauty new;
And him as for a map doth Nature store,
To show false Art what beauty was of yore. (9-14)

Analogically, in Sonnet 127 Shakespeare shows his disapproval of artificial beauty by saying “Fairing the foul with art’s false borrowed face, / Sweet beauty hath no name, no holy bow’r, / But is profan’d, if not lives in disgrace” (5-8). Therefore, Shakespeare believes that the young man’s true beauty surpasses artificial beauty, which is false and profanes true beauty. Although black is not taken as beautiful originally, the dark lady now seems more beautiful than the false beauty. And Shakespeare takes the dark lady’s black brows and eyes as the mourning for those who use unnatural means to get a fair look: “Therefore my mistress’ brows are raven black, / Her eyes so suited, and they mourners seem / At such who, not born fair, no beauty lack, / Sland’ring creation with a false esteem” (9-12). And at the end the poet indirectly praises the dark lady and concludes, “Yet so they mourn becoming of
their woe, / That every tongue says beauty should look so” (13-14). Through these similarities, it can clearly be seen that Shakespeare is attracted to the fairness of the young man and the dark lady. Although at that time “black” is not regarded as beautiful, Shakespeare still considers the dark lady beautiful.

Although many sonnets in the two parts are paired, Shakespeare’s tone and wording are by no means the same. The differences and contrast between the two groups of sonnets are even more significant and are also indicative of Shakespeare’s different attitudes and feelings toward the young man and the dark lady. Though it seems that to Shakespeare both the young man and the dark lady are beautiful but his description of their beauty somewhat shows his different attitudes toward the two lovers. The young man is always described as a fair, pure, and noble youth while the dark lady is often depicted as a promiscuous, licentious, and immoral woman. For example, the young man’s eyes to the poet are “that sun thine eye” (Sonnet 49); while the dark lady’s eyes “are nothing like the sun” (Sonnet 130). In Sonnet 1 he praises the brightness of the young man’s eyes by saying: “But thou, contracted to thine own bright eyes, / Feed’st thy light’s flame with self-substantial fuel” (5-6). In Sonnet 99, the poet accuses flowers of stealing sweet smells and beautiful colors from the young man and in the last two lines, the poet concludes, “More flowers I noted, yet I none could see / But sweet or colour it had stol’n from thee” (14-15). Yet, in the famous Sonnet 130, the poet describes the dark lady this way: “I have seen roses damasked, red and white, / But no such roses see I in her cheeks; / And in some perfumes is there more delight / Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks” (5-8). Although, at the end of Sonnet 130, the poet’s love to the lady is still confirmed by the couplet: “And yet, by heav’n, I think my love as rare / As any she belied with false compare” (13-14), it is obvious that Shakespeare holds very different attitudes toward the beauty of the two lovers. The young man’s beauty is the prototypical beauty of nature while
the dark lady’s beauty is far inferior to the beauty of nature. It is well-known that through Sonnet 130 Shakespeare intends to show the ridiculousness of the conventional Petrarchan conceits but it is also obvious that Shakespeare discriminates in favor of the young man. Sonnet 20 can be a good evidence for that. In this sonnet Shakespeare compares the young man’s eyes with those of other women’s and says: “An eye more bright than theirs [women’s], less false in rolling, / Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth” (5-6). In Sonnet 78 the poet compliments on the youth’s eyes again: “Thine eyes, that taught the dumb on high to sing / And heavy ignorance aloft to fly” (5-6). Instead of being the bright sun, the dark lady’s eyes are black and in Sonnet 132, the poet takes that as a kind of mourning for his pain: “Thine eyes I love, and they as pitying me, / Knowing thy heart torments me with disdain, / Have put on black, and loving mourners be, / Looking with pretty ruth upon my pain” (1-4). Shakespeare has mentioned that the dark lady’s eyes are “nothing like the sun” and here in this sonnet the poet further illustrates the idea: “And truly not the morning sun of heav’n / Better becomes the grey cheeks of the east, / Nor that full star that ushers in the ev’n / Doth half that glory to the sober west, / As those two mourning eyes become thy face” (5-9). Here, Shakespeare makes use of the pun (morning / mourning) to show that instead of the bright morning sun, his mistress’ mourning eyes are black. And in Sonnet 133, the poet complains: “Me from my self thy cruel eye hath taken” (5). So, the youth has the eyes as the bright morning sun, while the lady’s eyes are black and mourning and cruel, something totally different from the brightness of the morning sun. Besides, in the young man part of Sonnets the poet insists that the young man’s appearance is the union of truth and beauty. For example, in Sonnet 14 the poet claims:

But from thine eyes my knowledge I derive,

And, constant stars, in them I read such art
As truth and beauty shall together thrive,

If from thy self to store thou wouldst convert.

Or else of thee this I prognosticate,

Thy end is truth’s and beauty’s doom and date. (9-14)

And in Sonnet 101 the poet ensures the Muse of beauty and truth from the youth: “O truant muse, what shall be thy amends / For thy neglect of truth in beauty dyed? / Both truth and beauty on my love depends; / So dost thou too, and therein dignified” (1-4). In Sonnet 53, Shakespeare praises the young man because he has not only beauty but also constancy: “In all external grace you have some part, / But you like none, none you, for constant heart” (13-14). However, the poet’s description of the dark lady is very different. In Sonnet 137, the poet asks his eyes why they “put fair truth upon so foul a face” (12) and in the next sonnet (138) the poet says: “When my love swears that she is made of truth, / I do believe her though I know she lies” (1-2). In Sonnet 152, the poet says that he tries to ignore the lady’s untruth and falseness but actually he knows he perjures himself:

. . . . I am perjur’d most;

For all my vows are oaths but to misuse thee,

And all my honest faith in thee is lost;

For I have sworn deep oaths of thy deep kindness,

Oaths of thy love, thy truth, thy constancy;

And, to enlighten thee gave eyes to blindness,

Or made them swear against the thing they see,

For I have sworn thee fair: more perjur’d eye,

To swear against the truth so foul a lie! (6-14)

Now we can see clearly Shakespeare’s distinct attitudes toward the two lovers’ appearances and it is quite understandable that his love to them should be very
different. As C. L. Barber mentions in “An Essay on Shakespeare’s Sonnets” that
the sonnets addressed to the dark lady dwell on her imperfections and falsehoods
while in the poems addressed to the young man, there is exultant contemplation of the
beloved’s beauty and cherishing of his whole identity (16).

Maybe the lady is also beautiful in Shakespeare’s eyes but her beauty is still
inferior to the young man’s and so Shakespeare’s love for the youth is also different
from that for the lady. Shakespeare shows a kind of heavenly purity in the
description of his love for the youth while a kind of earthly physicality in his love for
the dark lady. In Sonnet 29, the poet describes that when he is alone in the outcast
state and heaven becomes deaf to his “bootless cries,” only the memory of the youth
can bring happiness to him. The poet declares: “Haply I think on thee, and then my
state, / Like to the lark at break of day arising / From sullen earth, sings hymns at
heaven’s gate; / For thy sweet love rememb’red such wealth brings / That then I scorn
to change my state with kings” (10-14). Besides, the love to the youth also has the
power of purgation because in Sonnet 30 the poet says: “But if the while I think on
thee, dear friend, / All losses are restored, and sorrows end” (13-14). And the young
spirit of the youth provides a kind of redemption to the poet’s old age because the poet
makes his love “engrafted to this store” of beauty, birth, wealth and wit and so in
Sonnet 37 the poet says: “So then I am not lame, poor, nor despised, / Whilst that this
shadow doth such substance give / That I in thy abundance am sufficed, / And by a
part of all thy glory live” (9-12). Therefore, the youth is indispensable in
Shakespeare’s life and the poet points out the importance of the young man by saying:
“So are you to my thoughts as food to life, / Or as sweet seasoned show’rs are to the
ground” (75: 1-2) and then he declares that he will be “[p]ossessing or pursuing no
delight / Save what is had or must from you [the young man] be took” (11-12). In
Sonnet 91, the poet further emphasizes the importance of the young man’s love to him;
after insisting that the young man’s love is better to the poet than high birth, wealth, costly garments, hawks or horses, the poet declares: “And having thee, of all men’s pride I boast; / Wretched in this alone, that thou mayst take / All this away, and me most wretched make (12-14). In addition, Shakespeare also insists on his true love for the young man in the first half of the Sonnets. For example, in Sonnet 116, Shakespeare claims that his true love is “an ever-fixed mark. / That looks on tempests and is never shaken; / It is the star to every wand’ring bark, / Whose worth’s unknown, although his height be taken” (5-8). He also assures the young man of the immutability of his love by saying: “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 ev’n to the edge of doom” (9-12).

According to Barber, Shakespeare tries to establish a kind of identification with his friend and Barber asserts: “The poet’s sense of himself hinges on the identification: elation in realizing himself in the friend’s self is matched by desolation when he is left in the lurch of selflessness” (21). Barber further cites Sonnet 39 as an example because in this poem the poet says: “What can mine own praise to mine own self bring? / And what is’t but mine own when I praise thee?” (3-4). There is some truth in Barber’s idea but I think he is somewhat extreme in saying that Shakespeare tries to find identification with the young man. I think Shakespeare wants to elevate himself through his praise of this young man because in the first two lines of Sonnet 39, the sonneteer says: “O how thy worth with manners may I sing, / When thou art all the better part of me?” (1-2) and in Sonnet 36 Shakespeare says: “Let me confess that we two must be twain, / Although our undivided loves are one. / So shall those blots that do with me remain, / Without thy help, by me be borne alone” (1-4). Then the poet ensures the youth that only one thing can “steal sweet hours from love’s delight” that is, “I may not evermore acknowledge thee, / Lest my bewailed guilt should do thee
shame; / Nor thou with public kindness honour me, / Unless thou take that honour from thy name” (9-12). So, the youth is the better part of Shakespeare and being the youth’s love justifies Shakespeare’s goodness; he dare not identify himself with the youth but getting along with the youth no doubt will bring him honor.

In contrast with his flattery to the young man, Shakespeare’s description of his love to the dark lady is of a very different kind. In the second half of Shakespeare’s Sonnets (the dark lady part), love is described as a “blind fool” that cheats the poet. In Sonnet 137, Shakespeare questions Love and says: “Thou blind fool love, what dost thou to mine eyes / That they behold and see not what they see? / They know what beauty is, see where it lies, / Yet what the best is take the worst to be” (1-4). The poet wants to show that the lady does not deserve his love and his eyes are led and cheated by the blind fool, love, so he is made to love the lady. And in this same sonnet Shakespeare implies that the dark lady is a loose woman by comparing her to “the bay where all men ride” (6). As mentioned before, in Sonnets 127 and 130 Shakespeare puts a lot of emphasis on the darkness of the lady and tries to assure us that although black is not regarded as beautiful he still considers his mistress to be beautiful. Later Shakespeare again assures the lady, “Thy black is fairest in my judgement’s place” (131: 12). Yet, at the end the poet says, “In nothing art thou black save in thy deeds, / And thence this slander as I think proceeds” (13-14). So, to Shakespeare, it is the lady’s deeds that are black and cause the slander. Besides, in Sonnet 141 Shakespeare says that his eyes notice a thousand errors in the lady, his ears do not like her voice, and his senses of touch, of taste and of smell do not desire her either. Shakespeare declares that both his five wits and five senses do not love the lady but his heart does and that makes all the difference:

But my five wits, nor my five senses can

Dissuade one foolish heart from serving thee,
Who leaves unswayed the likeness of a man,
Thy proud heart’s slave and vassal wretch to be.
Only my plague thus far I count my gain,
That she that makes me sin awards me pain. (9-14)

Shakespeare keeps on saying that the dark lady is not considered to be beautiful by most people and her deeds are not virtuous or moral at all but he still cannot but love her. And then he talks about the triumph of his love (or desire) over his reason in Sonnet 147:

My love is as a fever, longing still
For that which longer nurseth the disease,
Feeding on that which doth preserve the ill,
Th’ uncertain sickly appetite to please.
My Reason, the physician to my love,
Angry that his prescriptions are not kept,
Hath left me, and I desp’rate now approve
Desire is death, which physic did except. (1-8)

Then, Shakespeare admits that his illness is beyond cure and he acts as a mad man because of this crazy love and says, “For I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee bright, / Who are as black as hell, as dark as night” (13-14). So, Shakespeare takes his love of the dark lady as a disease because he ignores the woman’s physical darkness and moral defects and still loves her. Besides, Shakespeare debases physical desire because he thinks “desire is death.” In the following three sonnets Shakespeare again shows the conflict between his love (or sexual desire) and his reason. In Sonnet 148, Shakespeare says that he has been blinded by the love toward the dark lady so he cannot notice her foul faults: “O cunning Love, with tears thou keep’st me blind, / Lest eyes, well seeing, thy foul faults should find” (13-14). In
Sonnet 149, Shakespeare tries to assure the lady of his love by saying that he takes sides with her even against himself and Shakespeare tries his best to serve the dark lady: “When all my best doth worship thy defect, / Commanded by the motion of thine eyes” (11-12). In Sonnet 150 Shakespeare again describes the lady’s strong power that makes him struggle against his own mind:

O from what pow’r hast thou this pow’rful might
With insufficiency my heart to sway?
To make me give the lie to my true sight,
And swear that brightness doth not grace the day?
Whence hast thou this becoming of things ill,
That in the very refuse of thy deeds
There is such strength and warrantise of skill
That, in my mind, thy worst all best exceeds?
Who taught thee how to make me love thee more,
The more I hear and see just cause of hate? (1-10)

Compared with his sacred love for the young man, Shakespeare’s love for the dark lady is more like blind infatuation than true love. Although his reason tries to stop him from loving this lady, he still cannot resist this temptation and blindly falls in love with this lady whom he regards as unworthy of his love. To Shakespeare this kind of love is at best the physical and sexual attraction because in Sonnet 151 he says:

For thou betraying me, I do betray
My nobler part to my gross body’s treason;
My soul doth tell my body that he may
Triumph in love; flesh stays no farther reason,
But, rising at thy name, doth point out thee
As his triumphant prize. . . . (5-10)
This physical love between the two sexes at that time is regarded as inferior to the nobler platonic love between the male and this may be the reason that in the dark lady part the poet always shows his failed struggle against this temptation while in the young man part he is resigned to self-abasement and is willing to be the slave of love. Therefore in Sonnet 57, Shakespeare says: “Being your slave, what should I do but tend / Upon the hours and times of your desire? / I have no precious time at all to spend, / Nor services to do till you require” (1-4). In this sonnet the poet shows that he is a willing and obedient servant who will never complain but tries to wait on his master. In Sonnets 88, 89, this kind of self-abasement is also conspicuous. Hence we can see that in front of the young man the poet is willing to submit while he struggles to be the master in facing the dark lady as Williamson suggests that these two sonnets (57 and 151) show “the contrast between the selflessness of one relationship and the degradation of the other” (233).

We do not know exactly what deeds of the lady make her such a nuisance in others’ eyes; in Sonnets the only wrong deed of the lady that Shakespeare accuses of is that she robs away the youth from Shakespeare. Although Shakespeare’s love to the young man is more like friendship than homosexual love, in Sonnet 144 Shakespeare compares the two loves in similar terms and explicitly describes the two loves he has: “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” (1-4). In Shakespeare’s mind, the young man is a better angel while the dark lady is a worse spirit. What makes Shakespeare feel this way? In addition to his prejudice mentioned above, the following lines may also give us some hint;

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2 Some critics try to identify the young man and the dark lady and to prove that the dark lady is immoral and licentious in real life but those conjectures cannot be proved biographically and my focus will be put on Shakespeare’s subjective description of the two loves, instead of the objective biographical reality.
Shakespeare continues by saying, “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” (5-8). Shakespeare believes that the dark lady tempts
the young man away from him and tries to corrupt the fair youth and therefore he
regards her as the worse spirit. It is conspicuous that Shakespeare loves both the
young man and the dark lady and then unexpectedly the young man and the dark lady
fall in love with each other. This triangular relationship makes the situation more
complicated and Shakespeare’s sonnet sequence more interesting.

Shakespeare has discussed this triangular relationship in some sonnets, and, as
what we can expect from his distinct attitudes toward the two loves, he puts most of
the blame on the dark lady. In Sonnet 41, Shakespeare tries to find reasonable
excuse for the fair youth’s betrayal, and the poet says, “Those pretty wrongs that
liberty commits, / When I am sometimes absent from thy heart, / Thy beauty and thy
years full well befits, / For still temptation follows where thou art” (1-4). Because
the young man is young and fair, Shakespeare believes that it is inevitable for him to
be tempted; hence continues the poet, “Gentle thou art, and therefore to be won, / Beauteous thou art, therefore to be assailed” (5-6). Here we can see Shakespeare
tries to find excuses for the young man’s betrayal. Then in the ending couplet
Shakespeare claims that the young man has been forced to break a twofold truth:
“Hers, by thy beauty tempting her to thee, / Thine, by thy beauty being false to me”
(13-14). It seems that Shakespeare thinks the dark lady is the one to blame because
she tempts the youth while the only fault of the young man is his youth and beauty;
yet the young man’s irresistibility to the female attraction is also implied. In Sonnet
40, however, Shakespeare tries so hard to tell the fair youth that he does not get
anything more by taking away the dark lady since “All mine was thine, before thou
hadst this more” (4). Although the youth robs Shakespeare of the dark lady,
Shakespeare still forgives him: “I do forgive thy robb’ry, gentle thief,/ Although thou steal thee all my poverty” (9-10). So, deep in Shakespeare’s mind, he knows that it is not totally the dark lady’s fault since it is the young man that robs away the lady. The poet also tries to tell the young man that if he loves the dark lady because of his love for Shakespeare (therefore he loves what is loved by Shakespeare) then it is fine; if the young man does not love Shakespeare but loves the dark lady only, it is not acceptable: “Then if for my love thou my love receivest,/ I cannot blame thee, for my love thou usest;/ But yet be blam’d, if thou thyself deceivest/ By willful taste of what thyself refuese” (40: 5-8). It seems that Shakespeare attempts to convince himself that the young man loves the dark lady just because Shakespeare loves her and he shows his love to Shakespeare by loving Shakespeare’s love, so in Sonnet 42 the poet writes, “Thou dost love her, because thou know’st I love her” (6). It seems to be self-deceptive but Shakespeare still makes use of this idea to forgive the disloyalty of the youth. Although Shakespeare complains that they both put cross on him because he loses both loves when they fall in love with each other, he still comforts himself by saying: “But here’s the joy, my friend and I are one;/ Sweet flatt’ry, then she loves but me alone” (13-14). The poet feels joyful because he believes that with the strong attachment between him and the young man they are actually one and this indicates that the dark lady loves the poet alone. It is evident that Shakespeare is quite lenient and forgiving to the young man. He finds every excuse for the young man because he believes that the young man is a better angel. His attitude to the dark lady, however, is by no means forgiving since he assumes that she tempts the young man and so is the worse spirit.

In the second half of Sonnets, that is the dark lady part, Shakespeare also talks about this triangular relationship and he is quite harsh and grim to the dark lady. It is obvious that he takes the young man’s love more seriously than the dark lady’s for he
himself claims in Sonnet 42: “That thou hast her, it is not all my grief, / And yet it may be said I lov’d her dearly; / That she hath thee is of my wailing chief, / A loss in love that touches me more nearly” (1-4). At the beginning of Sonnet 133 he even scolds the lady: “Beshrew that heart that makes my heart to groan / For that deep wound it gives my friend and me” (1-2), because “Me from myself thy cruel eye hath taken, / And my next self thou harder hast engrossed” (5-6). In this case, the poet has lost himself, his friend, and the dark lady and this to Shakespeare is three-fold torment. Then the poet intercedes for his friend: “Prison my heart in thy steel bosom’s ward, / But then my friend’s heart let my poor heart bail” (9-10). So, the love between the two men can make them united as one while the love between the two sexes is just the prison that keeps them in captivity. In the next sonnet (134), Shakespeare again asks for the lady’s favor to set the youth free: “My self I’ll forfeit, so that other mine / Thou wilt restore to be my comfort still” (3-4). Of course, the poet does not succeed because “thou art covetous, and he is kind” (6). Then in the ending couplet Shakespeare concludes, “Him have I lost; thou hast both him and me; / He pays the whole, and yet am I not free” (13-14). Shakespeare stigmatizes the dark lady as a cruel and covetous torturer and imputes the youth’s betrayal to her temptation. Both the young man and the dark lady betray his love, but the sonneteer tries his best to exculpate the young man from blame and makes every effort to ascribe the blame to the dark lady. Shakespeare seems to hold the love or friendship between men superior to the love between the two sexes. Williamson similarly mentions that “a number of writers of the time argued that love between members of the same sex could achieve a disinterested purity impossible in heterosexual relationships” (234).

Through this close scrutiny we may conclude that Shakespeare tries to find all the possible excuses for the young man and put all the blame on the dark lady. As
mentioned above, Shakespeare takes his relationship with the young man as a kind of elevation of himself and while he compliments the young man he also gets some self-praise at the same time. Hence it is understandable that he will try every means to justify the young man’s betrayal since the young man represents the better part of the poet. As to the dark lady, since he regards her as inferior to the young man, he, of course, keeps degrading the lady, saying that she is so immoral that he should not fall in love with her. And then he accuses the lady of tempting the young man as what she has done to him and makes him lose his mind and love her. Both Shakespeare and the young man seem to be fascinated by the lady’s physical charm and what Shakespeare really wants is the satisfaction of his physical desire instead of the lady’s true love.

It seems that Shakespeare holds the traditional ideas of binary oppositions; that is, the male is superior to the female and the mind or reason to the body or passion. In addition, the famous, mysterious Sonnet 20 also provides some indication of his ideas. In Sonnet 20, Shakespeare points out the feminine quality of the young man and stresses that he is, however, far better than women:

A woman’s face, with Nature’s own hand painted,
Hast thou, the Master Mistress of my passion—
A woman’s gentle heart, but not acquainted
With shifting change, as is false woman’s fashion;
An eye more bright than theirs, less false in rolling,
Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth;
A man in hue all hues in his controlling,
Which steals men’s eyes and women’s souls amazeth. (1-8)

So, the young man has a woman’s face, a woman’s gentle heart without her capriciousness, and an eye brighter, yet less false than women’s. Here Shakespeare
presents the traditional ideas in Western culture; that is, the male is superior to the female. Besides, in the same sonnet Shakespeare separates love and sex. After describing the feminine beauty of the young man, the poet says that nature makes him a man “[b]y adding one thing to my purpose nothing” (12) and then the poet further comforts himself by saying: “But since she [nature] pricked thee out for women’s pleasure, / Mine be thy love, and thy love’s use their treasure” (13-14). Although Nature equipped the young man something for women’s pleasure, the poet believes that he can enjoy the young man’s love. To Shakespeare love is shared between two men while only sexual pleasure exists between the two sexes and of course the love between two men is purer than and superior to the pleasure between man and woman. And spiritual, platonic love can only exist between the male. It is common in the sixteenth century to value spirituality higher than physicality and love than desire. Under the subversive influence of recent decades, however, we can still find crevice in Shakespeare’s Sonnets to subvert his ideas of binary oppositions.

Although Shakespeare degrades women and debases sexual desire yet he knows the value of procreation and even stirs the young man to it. Shakespeare knows very well that the power of time will destroy everything, especially the young man’s beauty so in the first seventeen sonnets he encourages the young man to have more offspring so that his beauty can pass down. For example, in Sonnet 6 the poet tries persuade the young man to have posterity to defeat Death: “Then what could Death do if thou shouldst depart, / Leaving the living in posterity? / Be not self-willed, for thou art much too fair, / To be death’s conquest and make worms thine heir” (11-14). In Sonnet 11, Shakespeare assures the young man that Nature has given him all the good things and he should cherish the gift and have it pass down to his posterity: “Look whom she [Nature] best endowed, she gave the more; / Which bounteous gift thou shouldst in bounty cherish. / She carved thee for her seal, and meant thereby / Thou
shouldst print more, not let that copy die” (11-14). In some other sonnets the poet emphasizes the destroying power of time and convinces the young man that only through having a son can he defend against the destruction of time. Sonnet 12 reads: “And nothing ’gainst Time’s scythe can make defence / Save breed to brave him when he takes thee hence” (13-14). Although Shakespeare has mentioned in quite a few sonnets that his poetry will help the young man get immortality (e.g. 18, 19, 32, 54, 55, 60, 63, 65, 74, 81, 101, 107, etc.), in Sonnets 16 and 17, Shakespeare convinces the young man that his own child is more powerful than poetry in conquering time. In Sonnet 16, the poet writes: “But wherefore do not you a mightier way / Make war upon this bloody tyrant Time? / And fortify yourself in your decay / With means more blessed than my barren rhyme?” (1-4). Shakespeare thinks that he cannot truly depict the young man’s inward worth or outward fairness and he suggests at the end: “To give away your self keeps your self still, / And you must live, drawn by your own sweet skill” (13-14). In the next sonnet (Sonnet 17), the poet humbly says that his poetry is but “a tomb / Which hides your life, and shows not half your parts” (3-4). And the poet worries that in the future people will not believe his words and will say: “. . . ‘This poet lies— / Such heav’nly touches ne’er touched earthly faces’” (7-8). Yet, in the ending couplet the poet raises a solution: “But were some child of yours alive that time, / You should live twice in it and in my rhyme” (13-14). Here we can see Shakespeare persuades the young man to have offspring regardless of what kind of woman or wife he will get as the mother of his son. In Sonnet 3, he even says: “For where is she so fair whose unear’d womb / Disdains the tillage of thy husbandry” (5-6). So, only if he wants, any woman can, and will be willing to, be the mother of this young man’s offspring.

To Shakespeare it seems that the function of woman is just to bring offspring, to be mother. Shakespeare’s idea corresponds with Irigaray’s in “The Fecundity of the
Caress” in An Ethics of Sexual Difference, in which she says: “As the fruit of communion between lovers, male and female, the son becomes the male lover’s ornament and display of the same as himself, the position of his identity in relation to, and through, paternity” (202). Women, thus, have no identity or subjectivity but only a function, the function of being mothers. Besides, assigned to the role of mother, woman is given the passive position because “. . . man is the procreator, that sexual production-reproduction is referable to his ‘activity’ alone, to his ‘pro-ject’ alone. Woman is nothing but the receptacle that passively receives his product . . . .” (Irigaray Speculum of the Other Woman 18). Kristeva also endeavors in the discussion of woman’s role as mother. In “Stabat Mater” Kristeva mentions this kind of stereotype of femininity in the Western society and says that “that [the mother] is the only function of the ‘other sex’ to which we can definitely attribute existence” and “we live in a civilization where the consecrated (religious or secular) representation of femininity is absorbed by motherhood” (Tales of Love 234).

Besides, in An Ethics of Sexual difference Irigaray raises the idea that woman as mother serves as an envelope, or a container, and hence “a thing” for man to load the things that he can claim the possession of. Irigaray says that “as a mother, woman represents place for man, such a limit means that she becomes a thing . . . . She finds herself delineated as a thing. Moreover, the maternal-feminine also serves as an envelope, a container, the starting point which man limits his things” (10). It seems that in the patriarchal society women are treated as things or objects for men to guarantee the generation of their species and therefore, women are expropriated of their identity and existence except for the identity and existence as mothers, which Shakespeare also takes for granted in his sonnets.

According to Kristeva and Irigaray, however, this special identity and existence as mothers provide mothers or the female the possibility to subvert the masculine
symbolic. Irigaray says that “the woman-mother is castrating” because as a subject being degraded to a thing or an object, the woman-mother has the ability to disturb the masculine order. Man designates woman’s status as envelope or thing and determines her being; yet, as a subject, woman’s subjectivity cannot be concealed by man’s designation or determination. Therefore Irigaray claims: “If after all this, she is still alive, she continuously undoes his work—distinguishing herself from both the envelope and the thing, ceaselessly creating there some interval, play, something in motion and un-limited which disturbs his perspective, his world, and his/its limits” (An Ethics of Sexual Difference 10). Besides, Irigaray also suggests that because the male dose not admit woman to a subjective life and fails to experience the intersubjective dynamic of her place and her thing, the male “remains within a master-slave dialectic” and the man, secretly or obscurely, is a slave to the power of the maternal-feminine which he diminishes or destroys (An Ethics of Sexual Difference 10).

Kristeva also discusses the subversive power of the maternal body. In “Stabat Mater,” pointing out the ambivalent principle of the maternal, she says: “Let us call ‘maternal’ the ambivalent principle that is bound to the species, on the one hand, and on the other stems from an identity catastrophe that causes the Name to topple over into the unnamable that one imagines as femininity, nonlanguage, or body” (Tales of Love 234-235). In Kristeva’s opinion, mother is inevitable in the lasting of the species but the patriarchal society does not admit mother to identity and mother remains to be the unnamable feminine body. In “Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini,” Kristeva analyzes the maternal body as the threshold of culture and nature:

. . . the maternal body is the place of a splitting, which, even though hypostatized by Christianity, nonetheless remains a constant factor of social
reality. Through a body, destined to insure reproduction of the species, the woman-subject, although under the sway of the paternal function (as symbolizing, speaking subject and like all others), more of a filter than anyone else—a thoroughfare, a threshold where “nature” confronts “culture.” (Desire in Language 238)

Naturally, to insure the procreation or immortality of the species, the Father needs the maternal body; culturally, however, in order to establish the paternal symbolic order, the maternal body should be deprived of its subjectivity. Kelly Oliver thus explains this splitting: “The mother’s body guarantees the continuation of the species; and yet her questionable identity threatens symbolic unity. Maternity is impossible for the Symbolic order” (Reading Kristeva 66). As a split body, the mother is forever a threat to the symbolic:

... no signifier can uplift it [the maternal body] without leaving a remainder, for the signifier is always meaning, communication, or structure, whereas a woman as mother would be, instead, a strange fold that changes culture into nature, speaking into biology. Although it concerns every woman’s body, the heterogeneity that cannot be subsumed in the signifier nevertheless explodes violently with pregnancy (the threshold of culture and nature) and the child’s arrival. ... (Kristeva Tales of Love 259)

As a split body, the maternal body represents a kind of heterogeneity that cannot be subsumed in the homogeneity in the symbolic order and therefore, the heterogeneity provides the maternal/female body the ability or possibility to overthrow the masculine symbolic. Maybe we can boldly conclude that this is the reason that the maternal body (the threshold of culture and nature) eludes the masculine language, the symbolic order. And this results in the male’s ambivalent feelings toward the maternal body, or the female body.
Because of the female’s ability of procreation, the relationship between man and woman is complicated. In pregnancy, the mother’s body contains both a “one” and an “other.” As a body which guarantees the reproduction of the Name of the Father, the mother is no doubt the one, the subject; however, in order to insure the son’s subjectivity, the son should separate from the mother and deprive her of her subjectivity. This is why in a patriarchal society, women are reduced to only the function as mothers, with no identity or subjectivity. The son’s separation from the mother is inevitable but this separation results in a lack in the son and hence the son’s desire for the m/other. Both Kristeva and Irigary agree that this desire for mother closely relates to the child’s love of self. Kristeva puts it this way: “this motherhood is the fantasy that is nurtured by the adult, man or woman, of a lost territory; what is more, it involves less an idealized archaic mother than the idealization of the relationship that binds us to her, one that cannot be localized – an idealization of primary narcissism” (Kristeva Tales of Love 234). Irigaray also expresses a similar idea in “Love of Self”: “The male version of love of self often takes the form or sounds the note of nostalgia for a maternal-feminine that has been forever lost” (An Ethics of Sexual Difference 60). In order to separate from the mother, the child makes the mother the abject and yet his primal narcissism leads him back to the mother. This explicitly explains the male’s ambivalent feelings toward the female (maternal) body: he wants to separate from and unite with it at the same time. Consequently, Kristeva, in order to express this kind of ambivalent feelings, calls the semiotic maternal body the “abject” maternal body and explains that abjection . . . is an extremely strong feeling which is at once somatic and symbolic, and which is above all a revolt of the person against an external menace from which one wants to keep oneself at a distance, but of which one has the impression that it is not only an external menace but that it may menace
us from inside. So it is a desire for separation, for becoming autonomous and also the feeling of an impossibility of doing so. . . . (Women Analyze Women 135-36)

In Kristeva’s account the abject is “what disturbs identity, system, order” (Powers of Horror 4). Abjection appears first as the struggle to separate from the maternal body. This is epitomized in male’s rage and fear toward the female body. This female body, as “an idealization of primary narcissism,” nonetheless, is also the object of love. This kind of ambivalent feelings toward the female body surprisingly corresponds with Shakespeare’s attitude toward the dark lady and abjection can appropriately explains Shakespeare’s feelings toward the dark lady.

In the dark lady part of the Sonnets, Shakespeare seems to categorize his love toward the lady as lust or desire and he despises this kind of feelings but cannot resist its temptation. For Shakespeare, the love for the dark lady is a sin (Sonnets 141, 142, 146) and a disease which requires the Reason’s prescription (Sonnet 147). This reflects Shakespeare’s patriarchal degradation and repression of the desire for woman, and Irigaray in “The bodily encounter with the mother” attests this attitude: “Desire for her, her desire, that is what is forbidden by the law of the father, of all fathers . . . . Moral or immoral, they [fathers] always intervene to censor, to repress, the desire of/for the mother. For them, that corresponds to good sense and good health, when it’s not virtue and sainthood” (The Irigaray Reader 36). This desire, however, is so strong that the poet cannot resist it and claims: “My reason, the physician to my love, / Angry that his prescriptions are not kept, / Hath left me, and I desp’rate now approve / Desire is death, which physic did except” (4-8). According to Jonathan Dollimore, the reason that “Desire is death” is the “impossibility of desire” (370). In his account of Lucretius, Dollimore explains that “desire becomes impossible – i.e., the frustration which it experiences is an internal necessary condition of itself (rather than
being, for instance, the consequence of the contingent unattainability of the object of desire . . .” (370). This seems to correspond with the idea of those French Feminists. This desire is the desire for the lack, for the maternal body, which is unquenchable but also impossible. And this is why in the end of this sonnet Shakespeare seems driven mad by this kind of love: “My thoughts and my discourse as mad men’s are, / At random from the truth vainly expressed” (11-12). Through this sonnet, we can see that the poet intends to keep himself at distance from the “external menace” (the temptation of the dark lady) but finds that actually it is also the menace from inside (his desire for her), which is hard to resist. In the symbolic binary opposition, reason is superior to desire and the poet intends to suppress his desire by the application of his reason but fails. In Sonnet 141, the sonneteer surrenders to this desire: “But my five wits, nor my five senses can / Dissuade one foolish heart from serving thee, / Who leaves unswayed the likeness of a man, / Thy proud heart’s slave and vassal wretch to be” (9-12). Maybe, in Shakespeare’s mind, reason is superior to desire but his physical desire cannot be reined by his reason. And through this Shakespeare shows exactly the ambivalent attitude toward the abject maternal/female body, as Kristeva’s analysis in Powers of Horror. What is more surprisingly coincident is that Shakespeare also applies the mother-son relationship to his relationship with the dark lady. In Sonnet 143, Shakespeare compares the dark lady to the mother and himself her babe: “So run’st thou after that which flies from thee, / Whilst I, thy babe, chase thee after behind; / But if thou catch thy hope, turn back to me, / And play the mother’s part, kiss me, be kind” (8-12, my emphasis). In Sonnet 41 he also says: “And when a woman woos, what woman’s son / Will sourly leave her till she have prevailed” (7-8). Shakespeare seems to acknowledge the impossibility for a woman’s son to refuse a woman’s love. After the separation from the mother, the son is always in search for the lost mother. The desire for the beloved woman, as
explicated by the psychoanalysts, is, in a way, the desire for the lost mother, for the lack. In order to enter the father’s symbolic order, this desire should be suppressed and the mother should be made abject. This desire, however, as what Shakespeare has shown in his sonnets, is so strong that it will run off the track and cannot be controlled by reason. Oliver explains this kind of abject threat in Reading Kristeva: “The abject threat comes from what has been prohibited by the Symbolic order, what has been prohibited so that the Symbolic order can be. The prohibition that founds, and yet undermines, society is the prohibition against the maternal body . . . .” (56).

Sonnet 129 is a good example of this kind of ambivalent attitude toward the desire for woman:

Th’ expense of spirit in a waste of shame
Is lust in action, and till action lust
Is perjured, murd’rous, bloody, full of blame,
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust,
Enjoyed no sooner but despised straight;
Past reason hunted, and, no sooner had,
Past reason hated as a swallowed bait,
On purpose laid to make the taker mad;
Mad in pursuit, and in possession so,
Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme,
A bliss in proof, and prov’d, a very woe,
Before, a joy propos’d, behind, a dream.

All this the world well knows, yet none knows well
To shun the heav’n that leads men to this hell. (1-14)

In this sonnet we can see that Shakespeare does admit that he enjoys the experience of lust and lust shows him the heaven but he still denounces lust since it leads him to the
hell. Before he experiences lust, lust is “perjured, murd’rous, bloody, full of blame, / Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust” (3-4). After he has lust in action, he seems to have swallowed the bait that makes him mad, mad both in pursuit and in possession of lust. Being influenced by the traditional Western ideas, Shakespeare insists that spiritual love is superior to physical lust or desire but in reality he cannot help but be attracted by the physical desire. Shakespeare is stuck in the masculine symbolic, which is the order of borders, discrimination, and difference (Kristeva *Powers of Horror* 69) and so he tries to resist the abject, which is “ambiguous,” “in-between,” “composite” (Kristeva *Powers of Horror* 4). His symbolic borders, discrimination, and difference, nonetheless, are subverted by the abject female body and he feels confused and lost. The dark lady part of the Sonnets is full of Shakespeare’s confusion and ambivalence since “[w]hen the male lover loses himself in the depths of the beloved woman’s sensual pleasure, he dwells within her as in an abyss, an unfathomable depth” (Irigaray *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* 194). Since it is impossible for the Symbolic order to subsume the female body, Shakespeare’s confusion is quite understandable and this indicates the subversion of masculine symbolic by the desire for the female.

Besides, Shakespeare’s confusion and ambivalence maybe result from the special heterogeneous feature in the dark lady, which is beyond the One and the Same in the masculine symbolic. In the young man part, most of the time the poet emphasizes that the young man is the unity of beauty and truth (as “truth in beauty” in Sonnet 101). The dark lady part, however, is full of contradiction and opposition. For example, in Sonnet 127, at the beginning the poet says: “In the old age black was not counted fair” (1) and then later, after he justifies his mistress’ raven black brows and eyes as mourning for those artificial beauties, he asserts: “That every tongue says beauty should look so” (14). In Sonnet 131, the poet again says: “Thy black is
fairest in my judgment’s place” (12); then, in the very next line, he claims: “In nothing art thou black save thy deeds” (13). This kind of juxtaposition of praise and blame is quite common in the dark lady part. In Sonnet 138, the poet says: “When my love swears that she is made of truth, / I do believe her though I know she lies” (1-2). In Sonnet 150 there are obvious opposition and juxtaposition of good and evil, love and hate:

Whence hast thou this becoming of things ill,
That in the very refuse of thy deeds
There is such strength and warranties of skill,
That, in my mind, thy worst all best exceeds?
Who taught thee how to make love thee more,
The more I hear and see just cause of hate?
O, though I love what others do abhor,
With others thou shouldst not abhor my state;
If thy unworthiness raised love in me,
More worthy I to be belov’d of thee. (5-14)

Through the description of the dark lady’s ill deeds and unworthiness, the poet emphasizes the worth and value of his love. Different from the young man’s unity of beauty and truth, the dark lady, in the poet’s eye, is a combination of beauty and lies. The lady’s heterogeneity is thus re-presented. Joel Fineman in “Shakespeare’s ‘Perjur’d Eye’ comments as follows:

Such is the strangeness of a lady whom the poet alternately praises and blames for being other than what at first sight she appears. As an image of that which she is not, the lady is presented as the likeness of a difference, at once a version of, but at the same time a perversion of, that to which she is, on the one hand, both positively and negatively compared, and that to which
she is, on the other, both positively and negatively opposed. For this reason, as she is presented, the lady is, strictly speaking, beyond both comparison and opposition. The lady both is and is not what she is, and because she is in this way, in herself, something double, the lady cannot be comprehended by a poetics of “The one, of one, still such, and ever so.” (156)

In the phallogocentric masculine symbolic, the female is always judged by the parameter of the male and sexual difference is suppressed by the economy of sameness and oneness of the male. Irigaray regards this as “a ho(m)o-sexual monopoly” and she says: “From this point on, patriarchal society might be interpreted as societies functioning in the mode of ‘semblance’” (This Sex Which Is Not One 171). In Irigaray’s account, phallus is the focus of the Western phallogocentric society and hence the female sexuality, which is plural, is repressed or excluded. In Shakespeare’s Sonnets, however, we can see that heterogeneity of the female body, which is embodied in the dark lady part, is beyond the interpretation of the masculine symbolic and hence results in Shakespeare’s ambivalent feelings. Different from the unity and homogeneity in the young man part, the dark lady part, however, presents diversity and multiplicity, which is more significant. Shakespeare intends to despise the dark lady and debase the female body but the diversity and multiplicity in the dark lady part far surpass the oneness and homogeneity in the young man part.

Furthermore, in the dark lady part we can see the dark lady’s struggle for subjectivity while Shakespeare tries every way to assign her to a passive role. Women’s passivity is quite popular in the patriarchal society. In order to be the sole manipulating subject, man tends to take the active role while woman most of the time is resigned to passivity. Irigaray in “Questions to Emmanuel Levinas” criticizes Levinas’ description of pleasure by saying: “The description of pleasure given by
Levinas is unacceptable to the extent that it presents man as the sole subject exercising his desire and his appetite upon the woman who is deprived of subjectivity except to seduce him” (*The Irigaray Reader* 185). So, except when she seduces him, most of the time the woman is reduced to an object for his desire and appetite. Most of the love sonnets in sixteenth century are examples of male’s courting and the female can only passively be courted. In the whole *Sonnets*, Shakespeare keeps on accusing the dark lady of tempting both him and the young man. He debases her by saying: “In nothing art thou black save in thy deeds” (131), “Only my plague thus far I count my gain, / That she that makes me sin awards me pain” (141), “. . . all my best doth worship thy defect, / Commanded by the motion of thine eyes” (149), “If thy unworthiness rais’d love in me, / More worthy I to be belov’d of thee” (150) and “For I have sworn thee fair—more perjur’d I, / To swear against the truth so foul a lie!” (152). The most obvious example is Sonnet 144, in which the poet says:

Two loves I have of comfort and despair,
Which like two spirits do suggest me still;
The better angel is a man right fair,
The worser spirit a woman coloured ill.
To win me soon to hell, my female evil
Tempteth my better angel from my side,
And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,
Wooing his purity with her foul pride. (1-8)

It seems that to Shakespeare the dark lady is evil or unworthy because she tempts and destroys the young man. In the patriarchal society, woman should remain servile and passive in the love relationship; she functions as an object of the man’s desire, without her own free will. In Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* the dark lady becomes the object of Shakespeare’s desire and he insists on his true love because he still loves her
after he knows her unworthiness. Shakespeare assumes that the lady should be happy to receive his true love since in Sonnet 150 he says: “If thy unworthiness raised love in me, / More worthy I to be belov’d of thee” (13-14). Yet, the lady’s reaction is beyond his expectation. According to Shakespeare, she accepts Shakespeare’s love but later she tempts the young man. In discussing the triangular relationship, Shakespeare always puts the blame on the dark lady and finds excuse for the young man. In Sonnet 41, Shakespeare declares: “Gentle thou art, and therefore to be won, / Beauteous thou art, therefore to be assailed” (5-6). In Shakespeare’s account, the dark lady seduces the young man because of his beauty and the young man yields because he is gentle. Here, Shakespeare deprives the young man of his subjectivity since he becomes the object of the lady’s desire and the lady becomes the active subject who is brave enough to show her love. Most of the time Shakespeare attributes the young man’s betrayal to the dark lady’s temptation and through this we can find the reversal of the roles of active male and passive female. The young man is passively tempted by the dark lady while the dark lady actively seduces the young man. So, the dark lady becomes the “woman lover,” instead of the “beloved.” This is what Irigaray suggests in “Questions to Emmanuel Levinas,” in which she says: “In ‘Fecundity of the caress,’ I used the term ‘woman lover’ [l’amante] and not only, as Levinas does, the word ‘beloved’ [aimée]. In this way, I wanted to signify that the woman can be a subject in love [un sujet amoureux] and is not reducible to a more or less immediate object of desire” (The Irigaray Reader 185). Although Shakespeare tries to reduce her to the passive object, finally his sonnets grant her the subjectivity that is hardly found in other male writings.

Shakespeare tries every means to elevate the young man and the love between men and debase the dark lady and the physical desire for the dark lady; however, the consequence is quite the opposite. The dark lady part is of more significance since it
shows Shakespeare’s ambivalent feelings toward the maternal/female body; it presents the heterogeneity of the female sex, in sharp contrast to the homogeneity in the young man part; and it provides the dark lady with subjectivity, which is rare in male writings, and besides, Fineman says, “[T]he dark lady sonnets regularly characterize their literary peculiarity and novelty in terms of the way they differ from the specular ideality of a previous Petrarchist poetics” (155). Thus we can boldly conclude that Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* is extraordinarily meaningful in the feminist perspective.