Shakespearean Sonnet Thematic Groupings

William Shakespeare's 'Major' Sonnets (15)

2 When forty winters shall beseige thy brow,
15 When I consider every thing that grows
18 Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
29 When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
30 When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
33 Full many a glorious morning have I seen
55 Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
65 Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
72 O, lest the world should task you to recite
106 When in the chronicle of wasted time
116 Let me not to the marriage of true minds
129 The expense of spirit in a waste of shame
130 My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
144 Two loves I have of comfort and despair,
146 Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth,

A Thematic/Contentual Outline of William Shakespeare's Sonnets (1609)
(154 total)

I Addressed to Young Man 1-126
   A. Formal Relationship of poet to patron 1-19
      1. Procreation Sonnets 1-17
      2. Immortality of Verse 18-19
   B. Personal love between Poet and Young Man threatened by indifference,
      separation, and competition between Poet and both Rival Poet and
      Dark Lady, then final reconciliation 20-126
      1. Poet's reciprocal love for young man 20-32
      2. Unevenness 33-98
         a. First suggestions of difficulty in stability of young man's love,
            then poet's acceptance 33-39.
         b. Poet jealous of love between young man and dark lady 40-42.
         c. First physical distance separates poet and young man 43-52
         d. Poet's unworthiness, Young Man's Beauty 53-77
         e. Rival poet and poet's sense of total loss of young man 78-87
            (except 81)
         f. Poet's self-pity and self-castigation 88-90
         g. Poet's rebukes to young man for having false values, his
            beauty should inspire, not corrupt, him. 91-96
h. Second physical separation between poet and young man 97-98
3. Poet and young man apparently reconciled 99-126

II. Those primarily addressed to the Dark lady 127-152,
Poet and Young Man are both lovers of dark lady

III. Questionable sonnets, translations from Greek epigram by Marianus Scholasticus 153-154

I. Addressed to Young Man 1-126
A. Formal Relationship of poet to patron 1-19
   1. Procreation Sonnets
      1 From fairest creatures we desire increase,
      2 When forty winters shall beseige thy brow,
      3 Look in thy glass, and tell the face thou viewest
      4 Unthriftly loveliness, why dost thou spend
      5 Those hours, that with gentle work did frame
      6 Then let not winter's ragged hand deface
      7 Lo! in the orient when the gracious light
      8 Music to hear, why hear'st thou music sadly?
      9 Is it for fear to wet a widow's eye
     10 For shame! deny that thou bear'st love to any,
     11 As fast as thou shalt wane, so fast thou growest
     12 When I do count the clock that tells the time,
     13 O, that you were yourself! but, love, you are
     14 Not from the stars do I my judgment pluck;
     15 When I consider every thing that grows
     16 But wherefore do not you a mightier way
     17 Who will believe my verse in time to come,

   2. Immortality of Verse
      18 Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
      19 Devouring Time, blunt thou the lion's paws,

B. Personal love between Poet and Young Man threatened by indifference,
separation, and competition between Poet and both Rival Poet and Dark Lady, then final reconciliation 20-126
1. Poet's reciprocal love for young man 20-32
   20 A woman's face with Nature's own hand painted
   21 So is it not with me as with that Muse
   22 My glass shall not persuade me I am old,
   23 As an unperfect actor on the stage
   24 Mine eye hath play'd the painter and hath stell'd
   25 Let those who are in favour with their stars
26 Lord of my love, to whom in vassalage
27 Weary with toil, I haste me to my bed,
28 How can I then return in happy plight,
29 When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
30 When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
31 Thy bosom is endeared with all hearts,
32 If thou survive my well-contented day,

Unevenness 33-99
a. First suggestions of difficulty in stability of young man's love, then poet's acceptance 33-39:
33 Full many a glorious morning have I seen
34 Why didst thou promise such a beauteous day,
35 No more be grieved at that which thou hast done:
36 Let me confess that we two must be twain,
37 As a decrepit father takes delight
38 How can my Muse want subject to invent,
39 O, how thy worth with manners may I sing,

b. Poet jealous of love between young man and dark lady 40-42
40 Take all my loves, my love, yea, take them all;
41 Those petty wrongs that liberty commits,
42 That thou hast her, it is not all my grief,

c. First physical distance separates poet and young man 43-52
43 When most I wink, then do mine eyes best see,
44 If the dull substance of my flesh were thought,
45 The other two, slight air and purging fire,
46 Mine eye and heart are at a mortal war
47 Betwixt mine eye and heart a league is took,
48 How careful was I, when I took my way,
49 Against that time, if ever that time come,
50 How heavy do I journey on the way,
51 Thus can my love excuse the slow offence
52 So am I as the rich, whose blessed key

d. Poet's unworthiness, Young Man's Beauty 53-77
53 What is your substance, whereof are you made,
54 O, how much more doth beauty beauteous seem
55 Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
56 Sweet love, renew thy force; be it not said
57 Being your slave, what should I do but tend
58 That god forbid that made me first your slave,
59 If there be nothing new, but that which is
60 Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
Is it thy will thy image should keep open
Sin of self-love possesseth all mine eye
Against my love shall be, as I am now,
When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced
Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
Tired with all these, for restful death I cry,
Ah! wherefore with infection should he live,
Thus is his cheek the map of days outworn,
Those parts of thee that the world's eye doth view
That thou art blamed shall not be thy defect,
No longer mourn for me when I am dead
O, lest the world should task you to recite
That time of year thou mayst in me behold
But be contented: when that fell arrest
So are you to my thoughts as food to life,
Why is my verse so barren of new pride,
Thy glass will show thee how thy beauties wear,

Rival poet and poet's sense of total loss of young man 78-87
(except 81)
So oft have I invoked thee for my Muse
Whilst I alone did call upon thy aid,
O, how I faint when I of you do write,
Or I shall live your epitaph to make,
I grant thou wert not married to my Muse
I never saw that you did painting need
Who is it that says most? which can say more
My tongue-tied Muse in manners holds her still,
Was it the proud full sail of his great verse,
Farewell! thou art too dear for my possessing,

Poet's self-pity and self-castigation 88-90
When thou shalt be disposed to set me light,
Say that thou didst forsake me for some fault,
Then hate me when thou wilt; if ever, now;

Poet's rebukes to young man for having false values, his beauty should inspire, not corrupt, him. 91-96
Some glory in their birth, some in their skill,
But do thy worst to steal thyself away,
So shall I live, supposing thou art true,
They that have power to hurt and will do none,
How sweet and lovely dost thou make the shame
Some say thy fault is youth, some wantonness;
h. Second physical separation between poet and young man
97-98
97 How like a winter hath my absence been
98 From you have I been absent in the spring,

3. Poet and young man apparently reconciled 99-126
99 The forward violet thus did I chide:
100 Where art thou, Muse, that thou forget'st so long
101 O truant Muse, what shall be thy amends
102 My love is strengthen'd, though more weak in seeming;
103 Alack, what poverty my Muse brings forth,
104 To me, fair friend, you never can be old,
105 Let not my love be call'd idolatry,
106 When in the chronicle of wasted time
107 Not mine own fears, nor the prophetic soul
108 What's in the brain that ink may character
109 O, never say that I was false of heart,
110 Alas, 'tis true I have gone here and there
111 O, for my sake do you with Fortune chide,
112 Your love and pity doth the impression fill
113 Since I left you, mine eye is in my mind;
114 Or whether doth my mind, being crown'd with you,
115 Those lines that I before have writ do lie,
116 Let me not to the marriage of true minds
117 Accuse me thus: that I have scanted all
118 Like as, to make our appetites more keen,
119 What potions have I drunk of Siren tears,
120 That you were once unkind befriends me now,
121 'Tis better to be vile than vile esteem'd,
122 Thy gift, thy tables, are within my brain
123 No, Time, thou shalt not boast that I do change:
124 If my dear love were but the child of state,
125 Were 't aught to me I bore the canopy,
126 O thou, my lovely boy, who in thy power

II. Those primarily addressed to the Dark lady 127-152,
Poet and Young Man are both lovers of dark lady
127 In the old age black was not counted fair,
128 How oft, when thou, my music, music play'st,
129 The expense of spirit in a waste of shame
130 My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
131 Thou art as tyrannous, so as thou art,
132 Thine eyes I love, and they, as pitying me,
133 Beshrew that heart that makes my heart to groan
134 So, now I have confess'd that he is thine,
135 Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy 'Will,'
136 If thy soul cheque thee that I come so near,
137 Thou blind fool, Love, what dost thou to mine eyes,
138 When my love swears that she is made of truth
139 O, call not me to justify the wrong
140 Be wise as thou art cruel; do not press
141 In faith, I do not love thee with mine eyes,
142 Love is my sin and thy dear virtue hate,
143 Lo! as a careful housewife runs to catch
144 Two loves I have of comfort and despair,
145 Those lips that Love's own hand did make
146 Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth,
147 My love is as a fever, longing still
148 O me, what eyes hath Love put in my head,
149 Canst thou, O cruel! say I love thee not,
150 O, from what power hast thou this powerful might
151 Love is too young to know what conscience is;
152 In loving thee thou know'st I am forsworn,

III. Questionable sonnets, translations from Greek epigram by Marianus Scholasticus

153 Cupid laid by his brand, and fell asleep:
154 The little Love-god lying once asleep