

The Design of *Shake-speares Sonnets*

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Overview. *The 1609 Sonnets present pictures, stories and allegories related to a family of 3-- a son "thee", a father "he", and a mother "she". I propose here how the first 126 sonnets form a complete sequence in two parts on Sons and on Sonnets, divided by the death of the father in S63. The 12-line Dedication to "Mr. W.H." from "OUR.EVER-LIVING.POET" provides puzzles that are answered in the parallel 12-line concluding Sonnet 126 to Father Time from Mother Nature. The stories of the Sonnets are identified with the ambitions of William Herbert (1580-1630) 3rd Earl of Pembroke, his father Henry Herbert, 2nd Earl of Pembroke (c. 1537-1601), his mother, Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke (1561-1621), and his uncle Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586). The viewpoint of the mother-poet is central to the hidden messages, especially in S11, S22, S126 and S143, where the mother becomes the first-person author associated with Mother Nature who creates life and poetry.*

The ideals of Sir Philip Sidney in "The Defense of Poesy" are used throughout the cycle. The allegorical forces of Beauty and Growth (associated with Mother Nature and Roses) are opposed by Aging and Death (associated with Father Time and descending Arrows). The descending Arrows of Life throughout the pictures and Sonnets are associated with the 3-into-1 Sidney Spear, with the 3-quatrain, 1-couplet structure of sonnets, and with repeated use of 3-into-1 imagery for the family, roses, virtues and Nature. S126 defines the descending Arrow of Life as "time's fickle glass" with 3 couplets for the son's life, and 3 couplets for poetry. These lovely Sonnets thereby identify Mary Sidney as the poet "Shake-speare", celebrating a mother's love for her son, her sonnets and her Sidney family heritage.

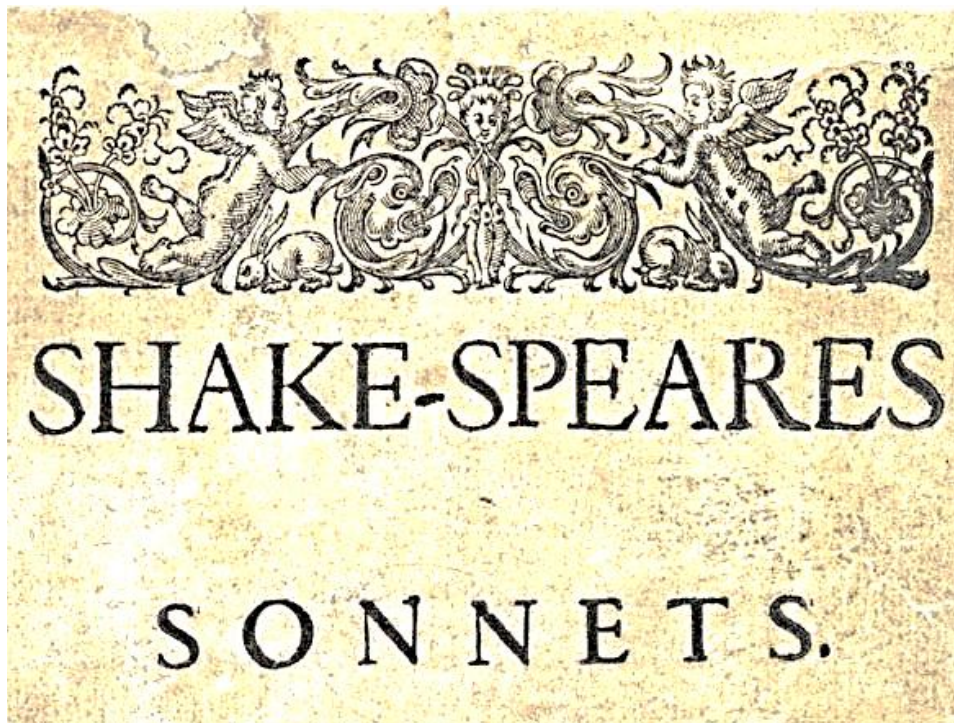
Defense of *Shake-speares Sonnets*. The Sonnets, composed over at least 2 decades, are Shakespeare's most personal work, describing contemporary events using first-person pronouns over 1000 times. Three sets of poems, each with different viewpoints, are apparent in the Quarto: The Main Sonnets (S1-126, written from the viewpoint of a mature poet), the Dark Lady Sonnets (S127-154, most of which are from the viewpoint of a young man) and *A Lover's Complaint* (47, 7-line stanzas, most from the viewpoint of a young woman).

Most critics have doubted the value of the Sonnets as a complete work of poetic or moral worth. The more-polished Main Sonnets are said to lack "any coherent story" (reviewed by Burto, 1988; Vendler, 1997; Duncan-Jones, 2010), due to a change of views from urging procreation of a son in S1-17, to obsessive love of the poet for a lovely male child or youth in S18-126.

I propose here that the poet achieved a complete sonnet sequence, following the models of Sir Philip Sidney, who advocated that "ever-praiseworthy poesy is full of virtue-breeding delightfulness." Delight is achieved by stories in meter and rhyme, which are elevated to moral meanings through allegories about the human condition (*The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*,

1598). Shakespeare's plays describe the psychological worlds of men and women of many ages and stations. By presuming that the Main Sonnets express only the viewpoint of an old male poet, the moral and poetic virtues of the Sonnets have been missed. Northrop Frye (1962) sensibly advised readers to trust Shakespeare, that is, his words and poetic judgments, not his biography; Further, the Sonnets are not just about "infatuations with beautiful and stupid boys".

I provide evidence here that the Sonnets are about a mother's love for her son (following Williams, 2012). They use Pembroke and Sidney family stories and symbols to reflect on the nature of Life (exemplified by Sons) and Poetry (exemplified by Sonnets). In particular, the Dedication and pictures of the first 3 pages are compared with the first 3 sonnets and S126 to show the design of the complete sequence. In this way, the Sonnets can be seen as a virtuous achievement of English literature by a great woman poet.

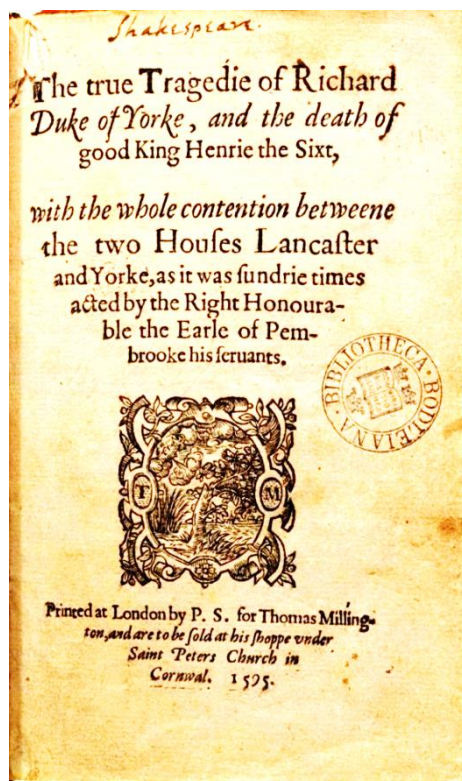


The Rising Son as Beauty's Rose. The title page picture (Figure 1, above) introduces 3 central characters, a fair child and 2 attentive adults, as 3 faces in a rose garden. The first 3 Sonnets describe 2 parents ("we desire increase") needing a "tender heir", that is, a son (S1, L1-4). Their son fulfills the ambition of an older father desiring to "sum my count...by succession" (S2, L11-12). The boy's young mother wishes to reproduce her beauty by way of her son: "Thou art thy mother's glass, and she in thee /Calls back the lovely April of her prime" (S3, L9-10). The growth and beauty of their son, called "beauty's *Rose*" (S1, L2), is shown in the central picture. The adults (shown as pollinating bees or angels) attend to his shining face, to his sustenance by food and water (shown as fish fertilizer and water splashes on his roots), and to his

safety as the central rose in their garden. Allegorically, this creation scene represents the birth of all life, as in the Garden of Eden.

The image of their son's face as "beauty's *Rose*" is developed in S7 as a rising sun and in S18, 33, 34 and 76 as the sun's glory. It appears to derive from the family history of the Pembroke in the Wars of the Roses. William Herbert, 1st Earl of Pembroke (8th creation), fought with 2 York sons in the Battle of Mortimer's Cross, Feb., 1461. Shakespeare recounts this story in Act 2, Scene 1 of *Henry VI, Part 3*, played "sundry times" by the 2nd Earl of Pembroke's Men in the early 1590s (Figure 2, below, with the 1595 title page of *The True Tragedie*). The New Oxford Shakespeare (2nd edition, 2016) provides new evidence that Shakespeare and Marlowe co-authored this early play on the War of the Roses acted by Pembroke's Men (1590-95).

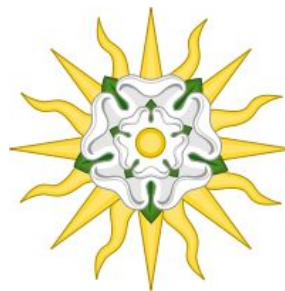
The victory of Yorkists with William Herbert in the battle was preceded by a 3-part rising sun ("parhelion") that united into 1 sun. This ominous astrophysical event was used thereafter by Edward IV as the "Rose-in-Sun" badge of the House of York (below). Edward elevated William Herbert to the nobility as a Baron in 1461, then Earl of Pembroke in 1468.



EDWARD Dazzle mine eyes, or do I see three suns?

RICHARD Three glorious suns, each one a perfect sun;
See, see! they join, embrace, and seem to kiss,
As if they vow'd some league inviolable:
Now are they but one lamp, one light, one sun.
In this the heaven figures some event.

EDWARD 'Tis wondrous strange, the like yet never heard of.
I think it cites us, brother, to the field,
That we, should join our lights together
And henceforward will I bear
Upon my target three fair-shining suns.



**"Rose-en-Soleil"
badge of Edward IV**

The son's picture on the title page of the *Sonnets* is likely a play on the rising "Rose-in-Sun" York badge. The 7 rose petals above the son's shining face, then, can also be seen as 7 rays on the corona of the sun rising above the horizon, or as the coronet of the rising son of Pembroke. The title page picture, in this sense, appears to represent the rise of the Herberts in the Wars of the Roses, and their succession as Earls of Pembroke in England's nobility.

Pembroke Family Ambitions. The ambitions of the Pembroke and Sidney families are essential to understanding the organization of the Sonnets. Henry Herbert's first two wives died without sons, and so in 1576 he married the brilliant and lovely 15-year-old Mary Sidney, a maid of honour in Queen Elizabeth's court (Hannay, 1990). William Herbert's birth in 1580 promised a successor to the Pembroke title, and retention of Henry's estates in Wales and Western England in his family. Managing his vast properties, servants and accounts were paramount for Henry.

Mary Sidney's goals were to bear a son for Pembroke, to write, edit and publish poems with her brother, Sir Philip Sidney, and to create a beautiful life for her noble family (Hannay, 1990). These goals are all implied in S9-11, for example, in S11, L11-14: "Look whom she 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."

The models for the Sonnets, and for Elizabethan poetry more generally, were provided by Sir Philip in his sonnet cycle *Astrophel and Stella* and his essay "The Defense of Poesy" edited and published in the 1590s by his sister, Mary. *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* and their translations of classical literature inspired Elizabethan writers to write poems, stories and plays of lasting value in English (Hannay et al., 2005). Sir Philip (1910) concludes: "Our tongue is most fit to honor poesy, and to be honored by poesy;...in the behalf of all poets:--that while you live in love, and never get favor for lacking skill of a sonnet; and when you die, your memory die from the earth for want of an epitaph". *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, published long after the fashion for sonnets had declined, can be seen as an epitaph for the "ever-living poet" of the Dedication (Duncan-Jones, 2010).

TO. THE. ONLIE. BEGETTER. OF.
THESE. INSVING. SONNETS.
M^r. W. H. ALL. HAPPINESSE.
AND. THAT. ETERNITIE.
PROMISED.
BY.
OVR. EVERLIVING. POET.
WISHETH
THE. WELL-WISHING.
ADVENTVRER. IN.
SETTING.
FORTH.

T. T.

Word-frequency studies show that *Shakespeare's Sonnets* are most similar to *Astrophel and Stella*, *Delia*, dedicated to Mary Sidney by Samuel Daniel, Mary Sidney's Psalms 44-63, Mary

Sidney Wroth's sonnet sequence, as well as other poems of the Sidney Circle by Donne, Raleigh and Shakespeare (Arefin et al., 2014; Cluster 1).

Dedication to W.H. from Our Poet. Most commentators see the Dedication (Figure 3, above) as a clumsy advertisement by the publisher Thomas Thorpe (reviewed by Duncan-Jones, 2010). In my view, however, the Dedications are the poet's road map for the Sonnets. That is, the first 6 lines declare the temporal ambitions of the Pembrokes for future sons through William Herbert; the last 6 lines state the poet's ambitions for immortal sonnets.

"TO.THE.ONLY.BEGETTER.OF./THESE.INSUING.SONNETS./Mr.W.H." refers to Pembroke's ambitions for heirs to his estates, repeatedly urged in S1-17. Although the word "sonnet" derives from the Italian word "sonnetto" for little song, the word "son-net" can mean "little son" in English. The law of primogeniture in England required that land and titles be inherited through the first-born son (S49, L13 "Thou hast the strength of laws"). Therefore, William was the likely begetter of future sons ("insuing sonnets") to inherit Pembroke's estates. William, however, had only one daughter. This provided a motivation to publish the Sonnets in 1609 to urge William's procreation of a son. In 1630, the Pembroke title was passed to his brother, Philip Herbert, co-patron of the First Folio.

The next six lines from "OUR.EVER-LIVING.POET" welcome "THE.WELL-WISHING.ADVENTURER.../SETTING./FORTH" in reading the Sonnets. This links the poet of the Sonnets to the parents of the son (S1, L1): That is, "our...poet" continues as "we desire increase". Therefore, the Dedication identifies the poet with the parents of W.H., and with their ambitions for future sons and sonnets. These 2 Dedications again reflect the 2 roles of Mary Sidney: To provide sons for the Pembroke line, and to write and publish the works of Sir Philip Sidney and their circle through the 1590s to inspire English poetry. The "ADVENTURER.../SETTING./FORTH" recognizes that future readers are needed to further the life of these Sonnets for the poet and the publisher Thomas Thorpe.

Son and Poet. William Herbert is seen as the leading candidate for "W.H." of the Dedication by most authors (as proposed by Boaden, 1837, Tyler, 1890, Chambers, 1930, and Wood, 2003, for example). His family story becomes central to the Sonnets from the Dedication to S152. His father, Henry, died in 1601, and is mourned in S63: "When hours have drained his blood, and filled his brow /With lines and wrinkles; when his youthful morn /Hath travailed on to age's steepy night" (L3-5). The death of Henry is a personal loss to the poet: "Against my love shall be as I am now" (S63, L1) and "When I have seen by time's fell hand defaced /The rich proud cost of outworn buried age" (S64, L1).

As a result, William's rise to 3rd Earl of Pembroke is the turning point in the middle of the 126-sonnet cycle, like the peak of the "sun" at mid-day. The concluding sonnet (S126, L1 "O Thou my lovely Boy") repeats the intimate connections between "we" the parents (S1), "he" the dying father (S63) and "I", the surviving poet advising "my lovely Boy". This suggests that the poet is

presented by the author as the mother of the boy, from the first 3 sonnets to the concluding sonnet. (See earlier views on this hypothesis by Williams, 2012; Yeomans, 2017).

The first-person poet is introduced in S10 (L9, 13), as one “seeking that beauteous roof...to repair” (L7, 8). This image is repeated in S13, L9-12 (“Who lets so fair a house fall to decay, /Which husbandry in honor might uphold /Against the stormy gusts of winter’s day /And barren rage of death’s eternal cold?”). These images suggest that maintenance of the House of Pembroke requires the birth of sons. S10 is bracketed by S9 on the suffering of widows without sons, and by S11 on Mother Nature as the source of all beauty. Thus, the beauty-seeking mother of the boy (S3, L9 “Thou art thy mother’s glass” and S22, L1, 12 “My glass...as tender nurse her babe”) is linked to the poet of the Sonnets (“Make thee another self for love of me /That beauty may live in thine and thee” S10, L13, 14), and the Mother Creator of all life (S4, S11, S126).

The same parallel between poet, mother and Nature is found together in S125 and 126. The poet declares “No, let me be obsequious in thy heart, /And...mutual render, only me for thee” [that is, the poet for the boy] (S125, L9, 12). This rendering continues in the final judgments of S126: “Her *Audit*.../And her *Quietus* is to render thee”, thereby identifying “her” [Mother Nature] with the poet’s rendering of “my lovely Boy” [the mother-poet’s boy].

Throughout the Sonnets, the rising Rose/Sun image opposes the falling Arrow image (see below). Reproduction by mothers is praised (“Herein lives wisdom, beauty and increase”) and contrasted with the negative effects of Father Time (“Without this folly, age and cold decay”) (S11, L5, 6). Nature herself is then credited with creating beauty and reproduction, using the female gender 4 times (S11, L10-14). Father Time is later associated with power-seeking males called “the fools of time” (S124, L13), but excepting love (“not time’s fool” S116, L9). The conclusion is that “All men are bad, and in their badness reign” (S121, L14). These powerful feminist messages have been overlooked by previous commentators.

These lines again identify the poet with the mother of the boy and with Mother Nature: “She carved thee for her seal and meant thereby /Thou shouldst print more, not let that copy die.” The reference to publishing associates these women with Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke, the poet who completed Sir Philip’s works for publication. The continuing roles of women who create sons, poems and beauty have been missed by interpreters who have seen only “incoherent”, homoerotic stories about the presumed male poet Shakespeare after S17 (see Burto, 1988; Auden, 1907; Duncan-Jones, 2010, for reviews).



SHAKESPEARES, SONNETS.

From fairest creatures we desire increase,
That thereby beauties Rose might neuer die,
But as the riper should by time decease,
His tender heire might beare his memory:
But thou contracted to thine owne bright eyes.

Designs as Descending Arrows. The 2 Dedications (6 lines to Pembroke's sons plus 6 lines to Sidney sonnets) are displayed as 2 word-arrows pointing downward to the following Sonnets. The border picture above S1 (Figure 4) depicts a large bird on top of an urn. The feathers point awkwardly into the urn, like quills into an inkwell. The bottom of the urn points downward to "beauty's *Rose*" in S1, L2. The bird is interpreted here as a Phoenix on ashes, that allegorically represents Mary Sidney continuing the work of her late brother Sir Philip Sidney (d. 1586) (See Hannay, 1990, *Philip's Phoenix*).

The downward arrow is associated with the Sidney Pheon (Figure 5, below). This family badge has been used from 1575 to the present. (For examples, see *Astrophel and Stella*, S65, L13, 14, and Sir Philip's funeral procession.) The 3 broad points at the top descend into one sharp point at the bottom of the arrowhead. This resembles an English sonnet, in which 3 quatrains descend into one concluding couplet, or a quill pen that points onto a page.

"Pheon" badge
of Sidneys



The pictures on the title page, Dedication page, and first Sonnet page display an aligned series of arrows pointing downward. The series of arrows begins with the face of the son flanked by 2 roses. The joined stems of these 3 roses point to "SONNETS" by way of "SHAKE-SPEARE" on the title page (Fig. 1). On the Dedication page, the word-triangle dedicated to the future life of

the son “Mr. W.H.” points to the word-triangle for the future life of the Sonnets, by way of “OUR.EVER-LIVING.POET.” (Fig. 3). On the next page, the triangular urn points from the Phoenix by way of “Shake-speares, Sonnets” to “*Rose*” in italics in S1 (Fig. 4). The picture of the Phoenix on the urn, with quills into the inkwell, therefore, may represent the second part of the Sonnets dedicated to poetry by “OUR.EVER-LIVING.POET”.

The top of each picture presents life and beauty in many forms, as flowers, bees, birds or human faces. The bottom of each triangle represents the waning course of life toward earth, ashes or the grave. (Two angry rabbits in the title page picture are seen as unsuccessful foragers on roses, defended by the parents from above.) Many Sonnets begin similarly with descriptions of beauty at the top (e.g., S1 “fairest creatures”, “beauty’s *Rose*”, S126 “my lovely Boy”) toward death at the bottom (S1 “by the grave”, S3 “thine image dies with thee”, S126 “to render thee”). Unlike most decorative artwork in Elizabethan quartos, these Sonnets use art to identify the central characters and the goals of these Sonnets: That is, the central images of “beauty’s *Rose*” represent the rise of Pembrokes, and “downward arrows” as Pheons represent the poetic judgments of Sidneys.

This descending course of life is further depicted in the concluding S126 as “time’s fickle glass” placed in the center of line 2, similar to “beauty’s *Rose*” in S1. This central image represents a waning, hourglass-like cone that counts time. The 2-part, downward-arrow design of the Dedications is also explained by “time’s fickle glass” for the lives of the Son and the Sonnets. In the Dedications, therefore, the many dots that surround each word and the names of “Mr.W.H.”, “.EVER-LIVING. POET.” and “ADVENTURER.” suggest the sands of time in the glass, that carry all life downward toward death. And so “glass” is transformed from a mirror of female beauty and reproduction (S3, S22) into an unrelenting gravitational force of Father Time toward death in S126. This is reinforced in S64, 65 where the unrelenting sea washes away the sands on the shore following the death of the father in S63.

Similarly, the newborn son and beauty’s *Rose* of S1, L2 is transformed in S126, L2 into Father Time holding an hourglass and sickle. His temporal power now derives from his old title, and the farm products reaped seasonally from his lands. Yet these powers wane as he ages.

Three-into-1 Themes. Many sonnets reflect the inner joys and conflicts of the Pembroke family from 1580-1609, using groups and images of 3s. The first 42 sonnets appear to be organized into 14 sets of 3. The 3 central characters are introduced in S1-3 by specific pronouns, “thee” for the son, “he” for the father, and “she” for the mother, each of whom desires “increase”, that is, by eating and growing for the son S1, by summing his estates with a son for the father S2, and by creating beauty via the son, roses and poems for the mother S3.

The next 3 sonnets (S4-6) introduce the central images of Nature vs. Death, beauty vs. aging in flowers for the mother, and investing “treasure” in the father’s son. Metaphors of sun and music

for happy families with sons vs. widows without sons are found in S7-9: For example, family harmony for “sire, and child, and happy mother” is compared with music in S8.

In S10, they “repair” Pembroke’s “beauteous roof” by making “another self for thee and me”. In S11, virtuous women devote themselves to “printing...copies” by making sons and poetry, similar to Mother Nature. In S11, the 3 virtues of “wisdom, beauty, and increase”, associated with Mother Nature, are contrasted with the negative effects of “folly, age, and cold decay”, associated with Father Time. In S12, the father cuts his harvest across the seasons with a scythe as does Father Time. S10-12, then, celebrate the growth of Pembroke’s power by hard work.

Sir Philip’s family losses in S13-15 are contrasted with Pembroke’s successes by introducing the new pronoun “you” 16 times in S13. Sir Philip died in battle in 1586, leaving his wife without a son (“Who lets so fair a house fall to decay” S13). He invested in “stars” (Stella) and military adventures (“wasted time”), rather than in his family’s future through a son (S14, 15).

Philip’s legacy in poetry, however, is treasured in S16-18, since poetry can overcome time. “His eternal summer shall not fade.../When in eternal lines to time thou grow’st” (S18 L9, 12). His poetic legacy after death is carried on by his sister Mary Sidney in S19-21 (“And burn the long-lived Phoenix in her blood.../My love shall in my verse ever live long.” S19 L4). After the goals of men and women are contrasted in S20, the poet chooses not to use Philip’s romantic verse “So is it not with me as with that Muse, /Stirred by a painted beauty to his verse, /Who heaven itself for ornament doth use, [i.e., Stella]/ And every fair with his fair doth rehearse” (S21 L1-4). She seeks truth through lasting poems on a mother’s love (“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 in heaven’s air” L9-12), that is, not through the stars and romance imagined by Sir Philip in *Astrophel and Stella*.

In S22, the mother-poet seeks beauty in “her babe” (L12) using the first-person singular 14 times. She expresses herself in silent books of plays and poetry (S23) and in painter-like images hidden in her “heart”, “bosom’s shop” and “breast” (S24). These are contrasted in the next 3 sonnets with male family images of knights and nights (S25-27), beginning with her husband Henry’s pride as “The painful warrior famoused for fight” (S25, L9). Henry Herbert was noted for his prowess in tilts and battles. (For example, see his glorious 1585 jousting armor at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on-line.) She compares her duty and loyalty to Henry with that of medieval knights, to be passed on to her son (S26). She goes to bed dreaming of her son’s future journeys (S27).

S28-30 portray the sorrows of longer days and nights (S28) besieged by envy of men (S29) and loss of “precious friends hid in death’s dateless night” (S30, L6), but consoled by thoughts of her son (L13, 14). Again, the images of the past that make up her life (S31-33) inspire her escape to happier thoughts and images of love for her brother (S32) and her son (S33).

S34-42 show the first wounds of suffering with her son's independence. The hurt of words (S34) is followed by the pain of "thorns" and "thy sensual fault" (S35), and loss of his love and loyalty (S36). She praises the wealth and loyalty of the "decrepit father" (S37) and the inspiration of her son when her invention fails (S38). The son is "all the better part of me" (S39), a phrase that Mary Sidney used in her private letters (see Hannay et al., 2005). The son, however, takes a lover (S40-42) leading to his mother's anger and jealousy (S40-41). Her loss to this lover in S42 "That she hath thee is of my wailing chief, /A loss in love that touches me more nearly", appears to parallel the phrase addressed by the poet to the Dark Lady in S134 "So, now I know that he is thine" (see postscript below).

Sonnets to Love, Poetry and Power. The poet's loving memory of the late Sir Philip (S76, L9, "O know sweet love, I always write of you") (S30-32, 52-59, 71, 72, 75, 76, 103-106) is compared to that of rival poets of their Sidney Circle, possibly Christopher Marlowe, Edmund Spenser, and Ben Jonson. The identification of these Sonnets with the Sidney name is clearest in S76 L5-8: "Why write I still all one, ever the same, /And keep invention in a noted weed, /That every word doth almost tell my name, /Showing their birth, and where they did proceed?"

In S99, the only poem with 15 lines, disharmony between the poet and her son results from "theft" and "pride" in the form of 3 competing flowers: violets, lilies and marjorams. Then roses add to the conflict with thorns and disease: "The roses fearfully on thorns did stand, /One blushing shame [red], another white despair; /A third, nor red nor white, had stolen of both, /And to his robbery had annexed thy breath; /But for his theft, in pride of all his growth, /A vengeful canker ate him up to death" (L10-13). This anger and disease may relate to bitter battles between Mary Sidney and her son in 1603-4 after the theft of her jewels, leading to her civil case against Edmund Mathew. Many of her letters (often signed with Sidney Pheons) complained that William did not support her case (Hannay, 1990, pp. 173-81). After 1601, Mary Sidney's financial situation worsened, since Henry left her little in his will. So she depended in large part on her estranged son for support, a test of his loyalty and hers. Her downward arrow of life, then, reflects aging, family conflict, dependence and waning resources: S49, L13 "To leave me poor, thou hast the strength of laws", and later "poor but free" (S125, L10).

In several later sonnets, a second, healing "you" is introduced (S113-120), perhaps referring to the sympathetic late-life partner of Mary Sidney, Dr. Matthew Lister (Williams, 2012). After 1604, her relationship with Dr. Lister (later Sir Matthew) improved her situation. Poetic harmony is restored in S105: "Fair, kind and true is all my argument.../Three themes in one, which wondrous scope affords" (L9, 12). "Three themes in one" is seen here as the "wondrous" power of the 3-in-1 Sidney sonnet form.

The Sonnets Are about Power. The family stories and pictures of the sonnets (re. Pembrokes and Sidneys) are always embedded within larger allegorical messages about Life and Poetry. The first 6 sonnets introduce the central messages of Nature vs. Time. The poet repeatedly cautions her son that immortal power (lasting beyond death and empires) comes from art and beauty ("ars

longa, vita brevis” is the Roman translation of the Greek aphorism) not from “policy, that heretic” (S124, L9, referring perhaps to Machiavelli’s *The Prince*). This continues Sir Philip’s thesis in *The Defense of Poesy* that poetry is greater than facts, history, science, religion or philosophy, since it combines all of these by wise judgments. His power was cut short by his unwise, early death in battle, however, and by his failure to beget a son (S13-15). And so her final messages (S121-126) are that immortal sonnets outlast the temporal power of first-born sons: i.e., Poetry outlasts primogeniture. The themes of the sonnets that develop gradually from the title, Dedication, pictures, families and badges, to their allegorical meanings in the final messages in Sonnet 126 shown in Figure 6, below.



<u>Title:</u>	Sons (Life)	Sonnets (Poetry)
<u>Dedication:</u>	W.H.	Poet
<u>Picture:</u>	Rose Garden	Phoenix
<u>Family:</u>	Pembrokes	Sidneys
<u>Badge:</u>	Rose/Sun	Arrow/Pheon
<u>Strengths:</u>	Wealth, Battles	Knowledge, Wisdom
<u>Archetype:</u>	Father Time	Mother Nature
<u>Tools:</u>	Hourglass, Scythe	Mirror, Quill
<u>Scope:</u>	Temporal	Eternal
<u>Author:</u>	Man	Woman

The Sonnets further reveal a woman who has lost wealth and power due to loss of her husband, but who has achieved more through enduring love of her son and by creation of immortal poems. Nature, the “sovereign mistress” of S126, L5, and ultimate creator of all life and beauty, is similarly praised. The poet’s feminist message is that women who create life and beauty (like Mother Nature) are wiser and more powerful than men who foolishly contend for power.

O Thou my lovely Boy who in thy power,
 Doeſt hold times ſicke glaſſe, his ſicke, howe;
 Who haſt by wayning growne, and therein thou'ſt,
 Thy louers withering, as thy ſweet ſelfe grow'ſt.
 If Nature (ſoueraigne miſteres ouer wrack)
 As thou goeſt onwards ſtill will plucke thee backe,
 She keepes thee to this purpoſe, that her ſkill.
 May time diſgrace, and wretched mynuit kill.
 Yet feare her O thou minnion of her pleaſure,
 She may detaine, but not ſtill keepe her treſure!
 Her *Audire* (though delayd) anſwer'd muſt be,
 And her *Quietus* is to render thee,
 { }

Conclusions in Sonnet 126. S126 is not a proper sonnet with quatrains, but 12 lines made up of 6 rhyming couplets (hence 12-6) that provide 6 major conclusions. S126 also reveals the meanings of the parallel 12-line Dedications: That is, the 12-line structure of the 2 Dedications (6 lines to the son W.H. and 6 lines to the poet's Sonnets) are repeated by the 12-line structure of S126 (6 lines on the life of the son, and 6 lines on the poet judgments) (See Figure 7 above).

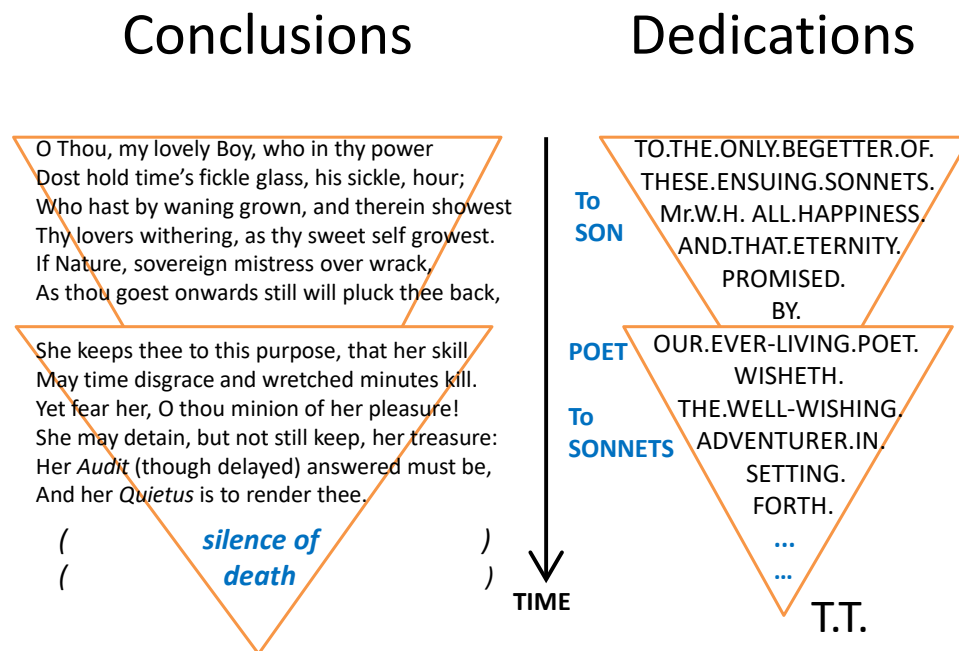
The first 6 lines of S126 describe the son ("my lovely Boy" couplet 1) and his loving parents ("thy lovers" couplet 2) within the conflict between Time and Nature (couplet 3). The son's life is traced in the first couplet, where he becomes Father Time, holding his hourglass and sickle. His growth in the second couplet ("by waning grown", as in S11, L1; "thy sweet self grow'st", as in S108, L5) results in aging and death in the third couplet ("Nature...still will pluck thee back"). The power of the son and Father Time over life is less than that of Mother Nature. Allegorically, the first 3 couplets recapitulate the 3 phases of life. And so life results from the creative force of mothers vs. the destructive force of time.

The final 3 couplets (6 lines) epitomize the goals of immortal poetry. The first goal is to provide delight that kills Time ("that her skill / May time disgrace, and wretched minutes kill", L7, 8). The poet then warns the boy of the power of poets ("Yet fear her, O thou minion of her pleasure", L9). In the last couplet, the judgments of the mother-poet are delivered without mercy ("Her *Audit*, though delayed, answered must be, / And her *Quietus* is to render thee", L11, 12). Allegorically, this final judgment of the poet, represent her Revelations, delivered here by a female creator and judge. The poet becomes Mother Nature ("she", "her" 8 times) in a classic Shakespearean gender switch.

These 3 themes of poetry may also represent the 3 types of plays, i.e., delightful comedies, powerful histories and merciless tragedies exploring the human condition. Thus, the 3 themes for poetry in S126 may also recapitulate the 3 phases of the poet's life, in the order that they were

later assembled in the First Folio (1623) dedicated to Mary's two sons, William and Philip Herbert. In this sense, S126 may be seen as a distillation of Mary Sidney's life, from creating sons for her family (Genesis), to creating poems inspired by her brother Sir Philip, to writing comedies, histories and tragedies reflecting her own deep experiences. Together, then, the Dedication and Conclusions form a worthy epitaph for the greatest writer of the English language. The beauty, meanings, virtues and authorship of the Sonnets are thereby revealed, after 4 centuries of misunderstanding.

Final Judgments as Silence. At the end of S126 are two empty lines enclosed by parentheses, indented like the final couplet of a sonnet, to complete the 14 lines. These parentheses represent the Conclusion of all Conclusions for the Sonnets. The empty parentheses (in italics) imply that her final judgments are followed only by the silence of death (extending the meaning of "*Quietus*" from "settling accounts" to "silence"). This contrasts with the conclusions of the New Testament, or Dante, that final judgments result in salvation by an ascent to eternal Heaven, or a permanent descent into the fires of Hell. The poet of the Sonnets does not defend the Christian dogma of personal life after death.



The hidden messages of the Sonnets are revealed best by comparing the conclusions of S126 with the Dedications to the future (Figure 8, with my interpretations added). The silent conclusion of S126 is paralleled in the Dedications, where 2 empty lines (L13, 14) before the

initials “T.T.” follow the 12 lines of the Dedications. The poet’s hopes for the future are through progeny (L1-6) and immortal poems (L7-12), not through personal salvation.

Many commentators presume that the conclusions of S126 are by delivered only by “Nature” without reference to the family, that is, the son (“Will Herbert”) and his mother, Mary (see Duncan-Jones, 2010, pp. 364-6). This does not fit, however, with the purposes of allegory to proceed from human models to larger themes. In the present view, 3 representations of women come together here, in the persons of the loving mother Mary of “my lovely Boy”, the powerful mother-poet, Mary Sidney (“Her *Audit*... answered must be”), becoming allegorically the Creator of all life, Mother Nature, making judgments on the nature of existence. This Maternal Trinity, then, contrasts with the 3-in-1 Father, Son and Holy Ghost of Christian dogma, but is delivered in the Sonnets from the viewpoint of the mother-poet-creator, Mary Sidney Herbert. These judgments are designed to re-set the balance toward women in a male-dominated world.

The identity between the giving mother-poet in S125 “And take my oblation, poor but free, /But mutual render, only me for thee” continues in S126 as “And her *Quietus* is to render thee”, the final words of the Sonnet cycle: The word “render” expresses multiple meanings from “create”, to “portray”, to “serve”, and to “offer final judgment”. The mutual renderings continue in the Dark Lady Sonnets S127-152 from the viewpoints of both son and mother (see below).

The gender of the poet is revealed indirectly in S11 (4 references to Nature as poet-mother) and S22 (14 uses of the first-person singular re “As tender nurse her babe”) then more directly in the final poem S126 in parallel language (8 references to Nature as poet-mother). The link between “OUR.EVER-LIVING.POET” of the Dedication to W.H. and the judging poet of the final 6 lines of S126, as mother of “my lovely Boy” becomes clear only when the parallel design is seen here.

Authorship. The name “Shake-speares Sonnets” is seen on the title page, the first sonnet page, and 30 running heads. The assumption that the stories of the Sonnets are entirely about the personal life of the Globe actor, William Shakespeare, involving his obsessive love for the boy W.H. is not supported by the text. Rather, the stories follow the lives of William Herbert, Henry Herbert, and the celebrated poet, Mary-Sidney.

So why do the Sonnets use the name “Shake-speare” so prominently? Three hypotheses are worth considering: 1) Wm. Shakespeare wrote the Pembroke family story through the viewpoint of the Dowager Countess, and dedicated the Sonnets to his patron, William Herbert. 2) Wm. Shakespeare wrote these Sonnets together with Mary Sidney, William Herbert, with Shakespeare given the public credit to protect the noble family from criticism. 3) The Sonnets were written solely by Mary Sidney Herbert, in part to reveal that she used the pen-name “Shakespeare”, as suggested here and in the Sonnets. This hypothesis is supported by the feminist advocacy for women throughout the sonnets and plays, consistent with the life and leadership of Mary Sidney.

If Mary Sidney is identified as the poet of *Shake-speares Sonnets*, then who wrote other plays and poems attributed to Shakespeare (Williams, 2012)? Margaret Hannay (1990) documents

glowing tributes to Mary Sidney from many leading poets of the time, such as Edmund Spenser, John Davies of Hereford, John Donne the Elder and others. Christopher Marlowe (1592) praised her as “Muse of the poets of our time”. Samuel Daniel in dedicating 3 major works to the Countess in 1594 wrote: “I must so work posterity may find, /How much I did contend to honour thee.” Aemelia Lanyer (Rowse’s candidate for the Dark Lady) wrote in 1611: Mary Sidney will be “the eyes, the hearts, the tongues, the ears /Of after-coming ages”. Ben Jonson at her death in 1621 wrote: “The subject of all verse...Learned, fair and good is she.” As Marlowe (1592) concluded “(T)o sum up all, thy virtue, which shall overcome virtue herself, shall likewise overcome even eternity.”

Hannay wonders why publications under Mary Sidney’s name suddenly stopped in 1600, despite evidence of her continuing poetic activity in letters and tributes. Her biographer therefore proposes that there are “lost or misattributed works” (Hannay et al., 2005). Thorpe’s entry in the Stationer’s Register May 20, 1609 lists “a Booke called Shakespeares sonnettes” with no author specified (Conner, 2017, p. 1438). S123 appears to challenge the official listing of publications in the Stationers’ Register “Thy registers and thee I both defy, /Not wond’ring at my present fate, nor the past, /For thy records, and what we see doth lie, /Made more or less by thy continual haste” (S123, L9-12). The present interpretation of the Sonnets suggests that many of Mary Sidney’s works after 1590 were misattributed to Shakespeare, and that she chose the pen-name “William Shakespeare” in 1593 to honor her son’s given name, and her family badge, the Sidney spear, or Pheon, as her pen.

Mary Sidney’s Viewpoint. This view of the Sonnets is supported by her final portrait (1618) confidently identifying her image with quills and scrolls over a laurel wreath, a coronet, and a Sidney Pheon over her head (Figure 9, below). Around and below her picture are dedications to the “most Virtuous Lady, Mary Sidney” in Latin and English. The portraits of Henry and William Herbert, and Sir Philip Sidney, by contrast, show symbols of male power, e.g., staffs, heraldry and swords (Figure 10, below). These pictures represent Mary Sidney as an immortal poet with books and quills, pearls of wisdom, crowned by the laurel wreath and the downward 3-in-1 arrow of the Sonnets.



Swan quills with scrolls, and more swan quills
downwards into inkwells (below `

Laurel wreath over coronet.

Sidney Pheon.

34 Swans on lace collars.

David's Psalms, praising the Creator.

Swan wings and scrolls.

“Right Honorable and most Virtuous Lady
Mary Sidney, wife to the late deceased Henry
Herbert, Earle of Pembroke” (in Latin and
English). Passe, 1618.

(Comments after Williams, 2012).

Henry Herbert,
2nd Earl of Pembroke



William Herbert,
3rd Earl of Pembroke



Dark Lady Sonnets Further Identify “Will” and His Mother. The Dark Lady Sonnets (S127-152) portray the strained relations between an anguished young man, “Will”, his Dark Lady lover, and his unhappy mother. S138 and S144 were published in *A Passionate Pilgrim* in 1599 when William Herbert was only 19 years old.

The author of 3 Dark Lady Sonnets (S135, 136 and 143) is identified as “Will” 11 times in italics. He begs his mother to love his name as her “number one” son (S135, L12-14; S136, L6, 8): “Make but my name thy love, and love that still /And then thou lov’st me, for my name is Will” (S136, L13, 14). The naming of Will as first son of the poet, and lover of the Dark Lady, is like *Astrophel and Stella*, wherein Sir Philip identifies Lady Rich as his love Stella (“Rich she is” A&S S37, L14, added by Mary Sidney 12 years after Sir Philip died in *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia*, 1598).

His mother replies in S134 that she has lost him to his lover “So now I have confessed that he is thine” (L1), which resembles the words of the mature poet in S42, L9, e.g., “my loss is my love’s gain”. Her reference to “Prison my heart in thy steel bosom’s ward” (S133, L9) may refer to William’s winter in Fleet Prison in 1601 after impregnating Lady Mary Fitton yet refusing to marry her (“How like a winter hath my absence been /From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting year”, S97, L1, 2). His recently widowed mother describes this trying time as “Like widowed wombs after their lords’ decease.../But hope of orphans and unfathered fruit” (L8, 9 as previously in S9 re. widows). William was released from prison in April, 1601 after the newborn baby died: “But then my friend’s heart let my poor heart bail; Whoe’er keeps me, let my heart be his guard; Thou canst not then use rigor in my jail” (S133, L10-12) (Hannay, 1990).

Sonnet 143

Lo, as a careful housewife runs to catch
One of her feathered creatures broke away,
Sets down her babe, and makes all swift dispatch
In pursuit of the thing she would have stay;
Whilst her neglected child holds her in chase,
Cries to catch her whose busy care is bent
To follow that which flies before her face,
Not prizing her poor infant's discontent;
So runn'st thou after that which flies from thee,
Whilst I thy babe chase thee afar behind;
But if thou catch thy hope, turn back to me,
And play the mother's part, kiss me, be kind;
So will I pray that thou mayst have thy 'Will,'
If thou turn back and my loud crying still.

In S143 (Figure 11, above) “*Will*” complains that his mother prefers “her feathered creatures” to him. These “feathered creatures” are her poems, not her “barnyard chickens” as proposed by Rowse (1973) and Duncan-Jones (2010). “Feathered creatures” remind us of the opening words “From fairest creatures” of S1, and the 3 birds and quills above (Figure 4).

The conflict of the poet with her “crying babe” in S143 reminds us that he was the suckling newborn in S1, the “glutton” who demands “the world’s due” (L13, 14). Their relationship declines with the teenaged boy’s affairs with women (S41-42), reflected in his sonnet to his mother seeking pity (S142). In S146 she faces the costs to the family’s reputation “thy fading mansion” (L6). As the aging Dowager Countess, she is dependent on her son, and facing death: “Within be fed, without be rich no more, //So shalt thou feed on Death, that feeds on Men, /And Death once dead, there’s no more dying then” (L12-14).

To the Angel Spirit of the Most Excellent Sir Philip Sidney. Before 1600, Mary Sidney Herbert wrote a tribute to her brother, remembering their poetic translations of David’s Psalms. Many of the phrases in *Angel Spirit* are similar to those in the “The Defense of Poesy”, *The Phoenix and the Turtle* and the Sonnets. Sir Philip is credited with reviving classical literature (“Phoenix thou wert” L38), and with immortality: “Yet there [in Heaven] will live thy ever-praised name” (L77). The word “render” is used again as in S125, “I render here: these wounding lines of smart, /Sad characters indeed of simple love, /Not art nor skill, which abler wits do prove, /Of my full soul receive the meanest part.” The comparison of her love for Sir Philip with the “art and skill” of “abler wits” resembles the concluding lines of S32: “Reserve them for my love, not for their rhyme, Exceeded by the height of happier men.../ But since he died and poets better prove, theirs for their style I’ll read, his [Sir Philip’s] for his love.”

Overall Design of the 1609 Quarto. The Main Sonnets conclude in S126 with the allegorical triumph of Mother Nature over Father Time. The “Dark Lady” Sonnets conclude in S153 and S154 with the allegorical triumph of Love (Cupid) over Youth (as exemplified by the Son). Finally *A Lover’s Complaint* concludes with the allegorical triumph of Poetry (in the form of a seducing male poet) over Chastity (in the form of a young noblewoman).

These themes demonstrate the author’s familiarity with the works of Petrarch, father of the sonnet form and of humanism. In particular, *The Triumphs* of Petrarch are six allegorical poems beginning with the Triumph of Love, the Triumph of Chastity over Love, and the Triumph of Death over Chastity. This last poem was translated into English by Mary Sidney before 1600 (Hannay et al., 2005). In this sense, the 1609 Quarto may be seen as a 3-part homage to Petrarch, on the Triumph of Poetry over Death in the main sonnets, of Love over Youth in the Dark Lady sonnets, and of Poetry over Chastity in *A Lover’s Complaint*.

Shakespeare’s Legacy. *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* and *The First Folio* were published at the end of Mary Sidney’s life to summarize her achievements in poetry and plays, respectively. The Sonnets are Shakespeare’s final poetic works, full of family and historical meaning. The Sidney

Sonnet form is developed into a complete allegorical cycle for comparison with *Astrophel and Stella*, and with Petrarch's *Il Canzoniere* and *I Trionfi*. Sidney Pheons, Phoenix feathers and nests, and maternal images are used to gradually identify "Shake-speare" as the nom de plume of Mary Sidney. These conclusions are re-affirmed in her 1618 portrait, where the plumes, Pheon, and Psalms of Mary Sidney are linked with her self-declared laurel wreath and coronet (Williams, 2012).

Future Directions. The texts of the 154 Sonnets and 47 stanzas of *A Lover's Complaint* (1609 Quarto) should be compared with Mary Sidney's poems *Angel Spirit* and *Even Now That Care* (c. 1600) to test whether these poems share rare words and, perhaps, authors. *The Phoenix and the Turtle* (1601) commemorates the spiritual love between a male turtledove and a female Phoenix. That poem can be seen as another tribute to the love between Mary and Philip Sidney, written by Mary Sidney near the time of her husband's death. The final 5 stanzas are called "Threnos" (3-in-1), suggesting the birds above S1 and in S105 in the Sonnets:

"Beauty, Truth and Rarity. /Grace in all simplicity, /Here enclos'd, in cinders lie.

Death is now the *Phoenix* nest; /And the *Turtle's* loyal breast, /To eternity doth rest.

Leaving no posterity, /'Twas not their infirmity, /It was married Chastity.

Truth may seem, but cannot be: /Beauty brag, but 'tis not she; /Truth and Beauty buried be.

To this urn let those repair, /That are either true or fair; /For these dead Birds sigh a prayer."

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Figure Captions.

Figure 1. Title page of 1609 Quarto (top half).

Figure 2. Title page of *The True Tragedie* (1595), with an edited excerpt from Act 2 Scene 1, along with the Rose-en-Soleil badge of Edward IV. Bodelian Library.

Figure 3. Dedication page of 1609 Quarto.

Figure 4. First Sonnet page of 1609 Quarto (top half including picture and first quatrain). Folgers Library on-line edition.

Figure 5. Pheon Badge of Sidney Family (on-line).

Figure 6. Sonnets Themes from Title, Dedication, Pictures and Badges, to Nature vs. Time

Figure 7. Sonnet 126 from original 1609 Quarto.

Figure 8. Parallel structure of Sonnet 126 and Dedications, with interpretations added by the present author. (Original PowerPoint figure).

Figure 9. Mary Sidney portrait from 1617 with comments added (After Williams, 2010) (by van Passe, on line).

Figure 10. Portraits of Henry Herbert (c 1589) and William Herbert (1617 van Passe online)

Figure 11. Sonnet 143.