
Concept Of Time In Shakespeare's Sonnets

Time is a significant theme in many of Shakespeare's sonnets, often being expressed as cruel and destructive. The ever-lasting ruthlessness of time is often personified as the villain, rather than the hero of the story, its pestilential behaviors are evident throughout both sonnets 2 and 5.

Both sonnets 2 and 5 discuss time's corruption of beauty and the discussion that beauty should be passed on for future generations to appreciate, in sonnet 5, explaining time as a subtle yet destructive force, and in sonnet 2, comparing time to that of aggressive warfare. By using the vivid images of "beauty's field", "deep trenches", "youth's proud livery" and "a tattered weed", in sonnet 2, Shakespeare further emphasizes the ruthless lapse of time and its destruction of beauty.

In Sonnet 2, the poet looks ahead of time and attempts to convince the youth that he should not waste time on self-indulgence and is urged not to throw away his beauty, but to have children. He mentions that by replicating his father's beauty and having children, that he would satisfy the world and Nature, which will keep a tally or account of his achievements in life. Sonnet 5 further explores the fixation and preservation of beauty and its attempts to preserve that corruption of beauty over time, the first quatrain introducing the allure of youth and presenting a euphoric image of beauty before giving awareness and caution to time's deceptive nature.

In sonnet 5, Shakespeare conveys time as a destructive force by offering a reflective comparison between various stages in the fair lord's life and the four seasons, the fair lord or youth is not being spoken to directly but rather hinted at in the extended metaphor. Shakespeare attempts to relate Human life to that of Nature's four seasons by using the seasons of summer and 'hideous' winter, metaphorically to refer to periods of life, suggesting that the fair lord's prime will soon turn to old age, and time will confound the lord's prime, time will turn that gaze to betrayal and turn beauty into barrenness and emptiness if he does not procreate.

The violence and aggression of time's personification in sonnet 2, is evident throughout the poet's discussion of armed conflict to bring comparison to that of warfare. The 'forty winters' being a besieging army, which digs 'trenches' in the fields, the field being the beauty of the youth. Whereas, in stark contrast, the opening of Sonnet 5 establishes time as a 'gentle' force. The poet's imagery of trenches correspond to the wrinkles and lines which will in time, mark the young man's forehead as he ages, and by using an extended metaphor, Shakespeare contends that Beauty will reach its winter and fade eventually without summer's distillation, which is a metaphor for not having a bud, not leaving a child or not procreating.