

Black Box Number Fifty-Five

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“Sonnet Fifty-Five”

Not marble, nor gilded monuments  
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rime;  
But you shall shine more bright in these contents  
Than unswept stone besmear'd with sluttish time.  
When wasteful war shall statues overturn,  
And broils root out the work of masonry,  
Nor Mars his sword nor war's quick fire shall burn  
The living record of your memory.  
'Gainst Death and all-oblivious enmity  
Shall you pace forth: your praise shall still find room  
Even in the eyes of all posterity  
That wear this world out to the ending doom.  
So, till the judgement that yourself arise,  
You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes.

(Shakespeare 56)

Language is like a black box. When one reads or listens, having a certain and complete understanding of what one sees or hears seems improbable. One reason for this may be that various readers/viewers will most likely have different perceptions of any given set of words. This diminishes, if not nullifies, the possibility of one objectively “real” meaning of a language. However, in literary theory as well as any other branch of theory, evidence can be gathered from which conclusions can be drawn. In an attempt to understand the inner-workings of a linguistic object, such as a poem, one may investigate a work’s overall shape (i.e. literal structure and narrative), dimensions (i.e. connotations, denotations, and other levels of meaning), and texture (i.e. euphony, period themes, and literary devices)<sup>1</sup>. According to some scholars, William Shakespeare is among the most acclaimed creators of linguistic black boxes. One example of the intricacy of his composition is his “Sonnet Fifty-Five.” This sonnet demonstrates a transition from the negative to the positive, from death to life, using six inter-working literary elements<sup>2</sup>: structure, euphony, connotation, Renaissance themes, literary devices, and overall narrative. What follows is an attempt to explicate the interplay of the shape, dimensions, and texture of Shakespeare’s “Sonnet Fifty-Five.”

In terms of its structure, “Sonnet Fifty-Five” is a perfect Shakespearean sonnet with a Petrarchean Logic. The rhyme scheme and number of lines characterizes this sonnet as Shakespearean. Following the template of Wyatt, “Sonnet Fifty-Five” contains fourteen lines: three quatrains followed by a rhyming couplet. These four sections are distinguished by their rhyme schemes: *a-b-a-b c-d-c-d e-f-e-f g-g*. Along with the distinction made by the rhyming of

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<sup>1</sup> “Shape,” “Dimensions, and “Texture” are specialized in this essay to denote what is referred to above in parentheticals.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the term “literary elements” in this essay refers to structure, euphony, connotation, Renaissance themes, literary devices, and overall narrative.

its words<sup>3</sup>, the sections of “Sonnet Fifty-Five” can also be recognized by their punctuation. Each of these quatrains as well as the rhyming couplet form separate sentences. For example, Lines Nine through Twelve flow smoothly until they are stopped by the period at the end of Line Twelve: “’Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity/ Shall you pace forth; your praise still find room/ Even in the eyes of all posterity/ That wear this world out to the ending doom” (Shakespeare 9-12). Furthermore, this rhyme scheme creates a disconnection in the sonnet’s structure between adjacent lines. Line One exemplifies this as an *a* rhyme set against a *b* rhyme in Line Two: “Not marble, nor gilded monuments/ Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rime...” (1-2). This disjunction in rhyme is only resolved in the rhyming couplet whose first line, “So, till the judgement that yourself arise” (13), rhymes perfectly with the line that immediately follows, “You live in this, and dwell in lovers’ eyes” (14).

In addition to the discord in rhyme between lines, another disconnection occurs between each of the three quatrains and the rhyming couplet. With unique rhyme schemes<sup>4</sup>, the sections of this sonnet are disconnected from one another. Quatrain One, for example, “Not marble, nor gilded monuments/ Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rime;/ But you shall shine more bright in these contents/ Than unswept stone besmear’d with sluttish time” (Shakespeare 1-4) is disjoined in its rhyme from Quatrain Two, which immediately follows with, “When wasteful war shall statues overturn,/ And broils root out the work of masonry,/ Nor Mars his sword nor war’s quick fire shall burn/ The living record of your memory” (5-8). Although these quatrains as well as their lines form one cohesive sonnet by way of the narrative<sup>5</sup>, the disconnection that Shakespeare creates with the sonnet’s rhyme scheme allows for a more broken atmosphere than

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<sup>3</sup> *a-b-a-b*: “monuments”-“rime”-“contents”-“time” *c-d-c-d*: “overturn”-“masonry”-“burn”-“memory” *e-f-e-f*: “enmity”-“room”-“prosperity”-“doom” *g-g*: “arise”-“eyes”

<sup>4</sup> For example an *a-b-a-b* rhyme scheme versus a *c-d-c-d* rhyme scheme.

<sup>5</sup> The narrative of this sonnet will be discussed later in the last section of this essay.

other sonnet forms (viz. the Petrarchean sonnet). Due to this aspect of structure, the sonnet's atmosphere<sup>6</sup> in one section of the work is divided from its subsequent.

The other relevant structural element of this piece lies in its Petrarchean Logic. "Sonnet Fifty-Five" exemplifies this structure by developing a tone and narrative in the first eight lines, which is negated by a volta in Line Nine. Afterward, the sonnet proceeds to explore the new narrative and tonal direction of the volta. Illustrated later in this essay, the first two quatrains of "Sonnet Fifty-Five" are dominantly negative in their euphony, connotation, overall narrative, and therefore tone<sup>7</sup>. Shakespeare negates these negative elements in Line Nine when he writes, "Gainst Death and all-oblivious enmity" (Shakespeare 9). Set against the destruction of the second quatrain, this line stands as the volta that transforms the previous negativity into the positive tone that follows. To reiterate: the focus of the sonnet shifts from the destruction of what "you" is not before the ninth line and transitions after Line Nine into the livelihood of what "you" is. The change in the last five lines of this sonnet, the poignant role of Line Nine as a volta, and the setup in tone found in the first two quatrains evidence this sonnet as composed with a Petrarchean Logic. Also, this structural change functions intimately with the variances of the other literary elements in "Sonnet Fifty-Five," which will be discussed more in depth below.

Wedded to the structure of this piece, "Sonnet Fifty-Five"'s euphony provides a subtle background of sound that supports the more prominent literary elements of the poem. Namely, how the various sections enact a Petrarchean Logic can be explained, in part, by the sounds of the words. This becomes most apparent when one considers the euphony of the first two

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<sup>6</sup> Other elements, such as euphony, connotation, Renaissance elements, and literary devices contribute in various ways to the tone and atmosphere of this sonnet as well.

<sup>7</sup> The role of euphony and connotation will be discussed later in the second and third sections of this essay, respectively.

quatrains as one set of sounds and the third quatrain and the rhyming couplet as another set<sup>8</sup>. In Quatrains One and Two, Shakespeare uses “r” twenty-six times<sup>9</sup>, “n” nineteen times<sup>10</sup>, “t” in fourteen instances<sup>11</sup>, “s” twelve times<sup>12</sup>, “m” on ten occasions<sup>13</sup>, “l” nine times<sup>14</sup>, “w” eight times<sup>15</sup>, “sh” in six instances<sup>16</sup>, and “th” five times<sup>17</sup>. What is notable about these sounds in terms of the structure, connotation, and overall narrative of this sonnet is the dominance of closed sounds (viz. “m” and “n”), an aggressive sound (viz. “r”), and an abrupt sound (viz. “t”). Together, these create a bestial, warlike, and negative sound schema for the first eight lines that contrasts the euphony of the third quatrain and the rhyming couplet.

With the volta of Line Nine, these abrasive sounds from Quatrains One and Two show the greatest decrease of all of the repeated consonant sounds. Also, the third quatrain and the rhyming couplet show a decrease in the frequency of almost all consonant sounds. Throughout this latter section of the sonnet, “l”<sup>18</sup> is used on eleven occasions, “r”<sup>19</sup> and “t”<sup>20</sup> have ten uses,

<sup>8</sup> The consonant sounds will be evaluated first, followed by the vowel sounds. The accounting of consonants includes alliteration and consonance, while the enumeration of vowels uses assonance, non-primary vowel sounds, and common vowel-consonant pairs.

<sup>9</sup> “r”: “marble” (Shakespeare 1), “nor” (1), “princes” (2), “powerful” (2), “rime” (2), “more” (3), “bright” (3), “besmear’d” (4), “war” (5), “overturn” (5), “broils” (6), “root” (6), “work” (6), “masonry” (7), “Nor” (7), “Masonry” (7), “sword” (7), “nor” (7), “war” (7), “fire” (7), “burn” (7), “record” (8), “your” (8), and “memory” (8)  
<sup>10</sup> “n”: “Not” (Shakespeare 1), “nor” (1), “monuments” (1), “princes” (2), “shine” (3), “in” (3), “contents” (3), “Than” (4), “unswept” (4), “stone” (4), “When” (5), “overturn” (5), “masonry” (6), “Nor” (7), “nor” (7), “burn” (7), and “living” (8)

<sup>11</sup> “t”: “monuments” (Shakespeare 1), “outlive” (2), “bright” (3), “contents” (3), “stone” (4), “sluttish” (4), “time” (4), “wasteful” (5), “statues” (5), “overturn” (5), “root” (6), and “out” (6)

<sup>12</sup> “s”: “monuments” (Shakespeare 1), “princes” (2), “this” (2), “contents” (3), “unswept” (4), “stone” (4), “besmear’d” (4), “sluttish” (4), “wasteful” (5), “statues” (5), “masonry” (6), and “sword” (7)

<sup>13</sup> “m”: “marble” (Shakespeare 1), “monuments” (1), “more” (3), “besmear’d” (4), “time” (4), “masonry” (6), “Mars” (7), and “memory” (8)

<sup>14</sup> “l”: “marble” (Shakespeare 1), “gilded” (1), “shall” (2), “outlive” (2), “wasteful” (5), “shall” (5), “broils” (6), “shall” (7), and “living” (7)

<sup>15</sup> “w”: “powerful” (Shakespeare 2), “unswept” (4), “When” (5), “wasteful” (5), “war” (5), “sword” (7), “war’s” (7), and “quick” (7)

<sup>16</sup> “sh”: “shall” (Shakespeare 2), “shall” (3), “shine” (3), “sluttish” (4), “shall” (5), and “shall” (7)

<sup>17</sup> “th”: “this” (Shakespeare 2), “these” (3), “Than” (4), “with” (4), and “The” (8)

<sup>18</sup> “l”: “all-oblivious” (Shakespeare 9), “Shall” (10), “shall” (10), “still” (10), “all” (11), “till” (13), “yourself” (13), “live” (14), “dwell” (14), and “lovers” (14)

<sup>19</sup> “r”: “forth” (Shakespeare 10), “your” (10), “praise” (10), “room” (10), “posterity” (11), “wear” (12), “world” (12), “yourself” (13), “arise” (13), and “lovers” (14)

“n”<sup>21</sup>, “s”<sup>22</sup>, and “th”<sup>23</sup> are used nine times, “m” has four uses<sup>24</sup>, “w” is used three times<sup>25</sup>, and “sh” is used on two occasions<sup>26</sup>. When compared with the repeating consonants of the first section, all of these sounds decrease except the “th” sound. This unique increase of the “th” sound exemplifies the aural softening in this section compared to the harsh sounds of the previous portion. Therefore, the modulation of these consonant sounds parallels the changes in the sonnet mentioned above.

Similar to the shift in consonant usage in “Sonnet Fifty-Five”, Shakespeare’s use of vowels also transitions during the volta. As in the case of the sonnet’s consonants, the clearest way to view this change is by contrasting the number of times vowel sounds are used in the first two quatrains to the remainder of the sonnet. The most common vowel sounds used in this sonnet are “i”<sup>27</sup>, “e”, “ôr/Or”<sup>28</sup>, “E”, “I”, and “χr.” In the first two quatrains, “i” is used ten times<sup>29</sup>, “ôr/Or”<sup>30</sup> has seven uses<sup>31</sup>, “e” is used in six instances<sup>32</sup>, “I” has five uses<sup>33</sup>, followed by “χr”<sup>34</sup> and “E”<sup>35</sup> which are used four times, individually. Although the “i” vowel sound serves as

<sup>20</sup> “t”: “Gainst” (Shakespeare 9), “enmity” (9), “still” (9), “posterity” (10), “out” (11), “to” (12), “till” (13), “judgement” (13), and “that” (13)

<sup>21</sup> “n”: “Gainst” (Shakespeare 9), “enmity” (9), “find” (10), “even” (11), “in” (11), “ending” (12), “judgement” (13), “in” (14), and “in” (14)

<sup>22</sup> “s”: “Gainst” (Shakespeare 9), “oblivious” (9), “pace” (10), “still” (10), “posterity” (10), “this” (11), “So” (12), “yourself” (13), and “this” (14)

<sup>23</sup> “th”: “death” (Shakespeare 9), “forth” (10), “the” (11), “That” (12), “this” (12), “the” (12), “the” (12), “that” (13), and “this” (14)

<sup>24</sup> “m”: “enmity” (Shakespeare 9), “room” (10), “doom” (12), and “judgement” (12)

<sup>25</sup> “w”: “wear” (Shakespeare 12), “world” (12), and “dwell” (14)

<sup>26</sup> “sh”: “Shall” (Shakespeare 10) and “shall” (10)

<sup>27</sup> Lower case vowels refer to soft vowel sounds according to conventional phonetic usage in the English language.

<sup>28</sup> Capitalization of vowels denotes a hard vowel sound in this essay. For example, the word “eat” would be translated as “Et” with the “E” signifying the same, hard “E” sound as the “ea” in “eat”.

<sup>29</sup> “i”: “gilded” (Shakespeare 1), “princes” (2), “outlive” (2), “this” (2), “in” (3), “with” (4), “sluttish” (4), “his” (7), and “living” (8)

<sup>30</sup> “ôr/Or” is used in this manner for two reasons: 1. The vowel “o” most commonly precedes the consonant “r”. 2. In most of the listed cases, there is an ambiguity between which of the two sounds are being implemented. Therefore, they are considered together instead of apart.

<sup>31</sup> “ôr/Or”: “nor” (Shakespeare 1), “more” (3), “war” (5), “sword” (7), “nor” (7), “war’s” (7), and “your” (8)

<sup>32</sup> “e”: “monuments” (Shakespeare 1), “princes” (2), “contents” (3), “unswept” (4), “record” (8), and “memory” (8)

<sup>33</sup> “I”: “rime” (Shakespeare 2), “shine” (3), “bright” (3), “time” (4), and “fire” (7)

<sup>34</sup> “χr”: “powerful” (Shakespeare 2), “overtun” (3), “record” (8), and “memory” (8)

the most frequently used vowel sound in this section<sup>36</sup>, in the first two quatrains this soft “i” sound is dominated by aggressive vowel sounds (viz. “ôr/Or” and “χr”) and abrasive vowel sounds (viz. “I” and ”E”) collectively.

Contrasting these hard vowel sounds in Quatrains One and Two are the softer tones of the third quatrain and the rhyming couplet. While soft vowel sounds dominate this latter section, the hard and aggressive vowel sounds recede. Evidence for this comes in Shakespeare’s twelve uses<sup>37</sup> of “i”, seven usages<sup>38</sup> of “e”, three uses of each of the “I”<sup>39</sup>, “E”<sup>40</sup>, and “ôr/Or”<sup>41</sup> sounds, and one usage<sup>42</sup> of the “χr” sound. The prevalence of the softer vowel sounds over the harder vowel sounds echoes the structural transition from death to life<sup>43</sup>.

Closely connected to the changes in euphony explicated above are those found in the connotations of Shakespeare’s words in “Sonnet Fifty-Five”. In this connotative aspect of the sonnet, Line Nine changes the negative connotation of the first two quatrains to a prominently positive connotation of the third quatrain and rhyming couplet. This can be seen exactly by contrasting the words with distinct connotations in each of these two divisions. Quatrains One and Two are considered together as having a negative connotation because they contain seven words/phrases<sup>44</sup> with positive connotations, seven words/phrases<sup>45</sup> with neutral connotations<sup>46</sup>,

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<sup>35</sup> “E”: “besmear’d” (Shakespeare 4), “masonry” (6), and “memory” (8)

<sup>36</sup> The frequency of the “i” sound can be attributed to the same foreshowing as the consonants “s”, “I”, “w”, “sh”, “th” in footnote fifty-four. During and after the volta, this will be the only vowel sound that increases in the amount of times it is used.

<sup>37</sup> “i”: “oblivious”, “enmity”, “still”, “in”, “posterity”, “this”, “ending”, “till”, “live”, “in”, “this”, and “in”

<sup>38</sup> “e”: “death”, “enmity”, “Even”, “posterity”, “ending”, “judgement”, “yourself”, and “dwell”

<sup>39</sup> “I”: “find”, “arise”, and “eyes”

<sup>40</sup> “E”: “enmity”, “Even”, and “posterity”

<sup>41</sup> “ôr/Or”: “forth”, “your”, and “yourself”

<sup>42</sup> “χr”: “lovers”

<sup>43</sup> This structural transition is analyzed in later sections of this essay focused on the sonnet’s structure and narrative.

<sup>44</sup> Positive Connotations: “marble”, “monuments”, “outlive”, “this powerful rime”, “with”, “statues”, and “the work of masonry”

<sup>45</sup> Neutral Connotations: “gilded”, “princes”, “war”, “Mars”, “sword”, “war’s quick fire”, and “burn”

<sup>46</sup> These words and phrases are polysemies whose various meanings include both positive and negative connotations.

and twelve words/phrases<sup>47</sup> with negative connotations. The negativity found in this portion becomes positive in the last six lines that contain sixteen words/phrases<sup>48</sup> having positive connotations, one word/phrase<sup>49</sup> with a neutral connotation, and three words/phrases<sup>50</sup> used with negative connotations. Along with the other literary elements of this sonnet, the shift in connotation mirrors a similar change that occurs in a Renaissance theme used by Shakespeare.

One theme of the Renaissance<sup>51</sup>, especially in the art of this period, is the use of contrast between light and dark. In “Sonnet Fifty-Five”, Shakespeare literally and figuratively employs this theme. Literally, Shakespeare lightens what has been referred to above as “positive” and darkens that which has been called “negative.” In specific, the dark physical world before the volta is juxtaposed by the Shakespeare’s reference within Sonnet Fifty-Five to the sonnet itself and the sonnet’s “you” as being illuminated. Lines Three and Four exemplify this literal usage as Shakespeare writes that, “...you shall shine more bright in these contents/ Than unswept stone besmear’d with sluttish time” (Shakespeare 3-4). Here, the “you” of the sonnet is presented as being brightened and illuminated further by the sonnet’s brightness. This contrasts Line Four that

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<sup>47</sup> Negative Connotations: “Not”, “nor”, “But”, “unswept stone”, “besmear’d”, “sluttish time”, “wasteful”, “overturn”, “broils”, “root out”, “Nor”, and “nor”

<sup>48</sup> Positive Connotations: “death”, “all-oblivious”, “enmity”, “you”, “pace”, “forth”, “your”, “praise”, “find room”, “yourself”, “arise”, “You”, “live”, “this”, “dwell”, and “lovers’ eyes”

<sup>49</sup> Neutral Connotation: “judgement”

<sup>50</sup> Negative Connotations: “Gainst”, “the eyes of all posterity that wear this world out”, “the ending doom”,

<sup>51</sup> It is worth noting that Shakespeare uses many other themes typical of the Renaissance in Sonnet Fifty-Five. Some of these are the focus on the individual, the use of Classic, human-made objects, an allusion to Roman mythology, and a general use of ancient Greek philosophy. In “Sonnet Fifty-Five,” the focus on the individual comes from the use of the second person narrator who uses the exalting “you” in reference to an individual in parts of the piece. Secondly, most, if not all, of the human-made objects present in this sonnet can be tied to Greek culture or art. An exemplar of this is “...gilded monuments...” (Shakespeare 1) that serves as a physical representation of a Greek and Roman method of ornamentation and art. In addition to this reference to Classic culture and/or art, mythology is also alluded to with “...Mars...” (7) in Line Seven. (To avoid misinterpretation, an important distinction should be made between the Roman Mars and the Greek Ares. Edith Hamilton, the mid-Nineteenth to mid-Twentieth Century classicist, distinguishes that, “The Romans liked Mars more than the Greeks like Ares. He never was to them the mean whining deity of the *Iliad*, but magnificent in shining armor, redoubtable, invincible...They ‘rush on glorious death’ and find it ‘sweet to die in battle’” (Hamilton 34). This variance in how these two Classic g-ds of war were viewed should be figured into a reading of “Sonnet Fifty-Five,” especially in terms of the connotations of all things related to war and battle-induced death.) Lastly, and most subtle in Sonnet Fifty-Five is the use of Plato’s idea of Forms. This usage ties closely to Shakespeare’s use of physical then abstract entities. These Renaissance themes relate to this essay but will not be explicated further than this notation.

includes, "...unswept stone..." (4), "...besmear'd..." (4), and "...sluttish time..." (4), all of which denote dirtiness and darkness.

After the volta, this literal juxtaposition transforms into a figurative opposition of light and dark. Shakespeare expresses this theme using the figurative lightness and darkness of life and death, respectively. Instead of physical forms, darkness is embodied more generally as, "...death and all-oblivious enmity..." (Shakespeare 9) after the volta. Opposing this figurative darkness of death is the light of life associated with the sonnet's "you." When Shakespeare writes that out of this type of darkness, "Shall you pace forth..." (10) and that, "You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes" (14), the life expressed in these lines manifests a figurative light.

Directly related to the structure and Renaissance elements illustrated above is Shakespeare's use of literary devices<sup>52</sup> in "Sonnet Fifty-Five". Enjambment serves as the most pervasive of these devices. Working with the previously mentioned disconnection in rhyme of the quatrains, enjambment ties the lines of the quatrains and rhyming couplet together while dividing the sections from one another. An exemplar of this can be found in Line Nine and Line Ten where the sonnet reads, "'Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity/ Shall you pace forth..." (Shakespeare 9-10). This example of enjambment provides a microcosm of its pervasive use as a means of dividing the poem in terms of its rhyme scheme as well as sentence structure.

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<sup>52</sup> Two other literary devices that are used in "Sonnet Fifty-Five" that are not explicated in this essay are personification and polysemy. Shakespeare uses personification on at least two occasions to characterize non-human phenomena with negative human attributes. As explicated later in this section on literary devices, the sonnet itself offers new life to "you". This transfers a human, if not general, characteristic of life or animation to the sonnet, a thing which is typically considered inanimate. In addition to this attribution, Shakespeare also personifies war as being "wasteful" in Line Five. The denotation that defines "wasteful" as something, "That causes devastation, desolation, or ruin...of a person or animal, thing personified, personal action or attribute" (Simpson and Weiner, Volume XIX, 961) states a human characteristic of a non-human phenomenon.

Polysemy is also employed in this sonnet on at least one notable occasion when Shakespeare describes "time" with the word "sluttish" in Line Four. In addition to referring to things as, "Unclean, dirty, grimy, untidy" (Simpson and Weiner 763), "sluttish" also refers to people as, "Dirty and untidy in dress and habits, esp. to an extent which is repulsive or disgusting..." (763). If this second denotation is used, then "sluttish time" attributes "time" with these human habits.

In addition to the literary devices mentioned above, Shakespeare also utilizes two metaphors that are central to “Sonnet Fifty-Five”. The first of these is an implicit comparison between a horse as a vehicle and “you” as a tenor. In Line Ten, the words, “Shall you pace forth...” (Shakespeare 10) refer to a horse in at least one definition of the polysemic word “pace.” Related to this animal, “pace” denotes, “Of a horse, etc.: to move with the gait called a pace...” (Simpson and Weiner, Volume XI, 34). When considered in the context of the war in the second quatrain as well as the opposition to death and destruction in the volta, “Shall you pace forth...” (10) compares a horse’s strength, sturdiness, and championship in war to the sonnet’s “you.” Adding to the amelioration of “you” by way of metaphor is a second, and more ubiquitous, comparison between “you” and the sonnet itself. As the vehicle, the sonnet transfers its qualities of light, life, and perseverance onto “you.” This can be seen most readily in Line Fourteen with the phrase, “You live in this [Sonnet Fifty-Five]...” (Shakespeare 14) as well as in Lines Three<sup>53</sup> and Eight<sup>54</sup>. These attributes of light, life, and perseverance are emphasized further at the end of Line Fourteen when “...lovers’ eyes...” (14) adds life and gives survival to the “you” of the sonnet. By presenting “you” as he does in these two metaphors, Shakespeare’s use of the metaphor works with the other literary elements of the sonnet to create its transition from the negative to the positive, the dark to the light.

After considering the five areas mentioned above, the overall narrative of “Sonnet Fifty-Five” can be read in its full intricacy<sup>55</sup>. In Quatrain One, Shakespeare creates a venerated

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<sup>53</sup> In Line Three, the light explicitly mentioned is implicitly transferred onto “you” as evidenced by the words, “...you shall shine more bright in these contents” (Shakespeare 3).

<sup>54</sup> This line, “The living record of your memory” (Shakespeare 8), illustrates the life and survival of the sonnet being attributed to the “you” of the poem.

<sup>55</sup> Other elements of the sonnet’s narrative have been omitted here. Specifically, there is a parallel between the use of tense in the narrative and the sonnet’s foreshadowing in the narrative. This connection comes with the distance of the past and future tenses contrasted with the proximity of the present tenses as analogous to the foreshadowing in the narrative. Foreshadowing also occurs in the sonnet’s euphony, which relates to this parallel. In terms of sound,

physical world that is outlived and outshined by the sonnet and “you.” This section lays the groundwork for the substitutive relationship between the sonnet and “you” that develops later in the poem. While these initial images are being created, Shakespeare also foreshadows the narrative that follows. He accomplishes this by foreshadowing destruction of the revered physical realm and the survival of “Sonnet Fifty-Five”/“you.”<sup>56</sup> The destruction that is made explicit in Quatrain Two is foreshadowed by Shakespeare in the word “gilded” (Shakespeare 1). Although its use of gold contains a positive connotation, the denotation of gilding refers to an object that has been, “Overlaid wholly or in parts with a thin coating of gold” (Simpson and Weiner, Volume VI, 509). This thin characteristic of gilding hints at the weakness of the physical environment of the first quatrain. Another instance of foreshadowing immediately follows “gilded” (Shakespeare 1) with the word “...monument...” (1). One possible definition of this term refers to, “A sepulchre, place of sepulture” (Simpson and Weiner, Volume IX, 1045). With this denotation of death in the word “monument” coupled with that of the preceding term, “...gilded...” (Shakespeare 1), a narrative foreboding begins in the first line of the sonnet and ends in Line Eight.

Paired with this negative harbinger is a positive foreshadowing in Quatrain One: the fusion between the sonnet and “you.” Shakespeare begins this technique with the first two lines of the sonnet, which propose, “...this powerful rime...” (Shakespeare 2) as living longer than the physical world “Of princes...” (2). Line Three initiates the fusion between these two by presenting that, “...you shall shine more bright in these contents” (3). Although the connection may be more subtle here than in later lines of the sonnet, Lines Two and Three enable the

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foreshadowing occurs with the minor use of the softer sounds in Quatrains One and Two, which become dominant in Quatrain Three and the rhyming couplet.

<sup>56</sup> “Sonnet Fifty-Five/you” and “the sonnet/you” are used as a simplified referent which refers to the sonnet and the sonnet’s subject, “you”, as substitutable terms.

substitutive relationship between “Sonnet Fifty-Five” and “you.” Therefore, with the survival of the sonnet in Line Two is a premonition of the survival of “you” explicated later in the poem.

Following these two lines of foreshadowing, Quatrain Two destroys the physical realm of Quatrain One while the sonnet and/or “you” remains unscathed. In this quatrain, Shakespeare is careful to annihilate every object from the first quatrain that is not the sonnet/“you.” Both the royal stone and the gold of Quatrain One have been decimated by time and war. The quatrain then ends with, “The living record of your memory” (Shakespeare 8), a furthering of the bond between the sonnet and “you” from Line Three. Specifically, Line Seven leads into Line Eight with the invincibility of the sonnet/“you,” which have been fused more closely here than in Line Three.

Considering these two opposing forces, that of death and that of life, the second quatrain segues into the sonnet’s volta. Line Nine begins the focal change of the sonnet from death to life that bridges the destruction in Quatrain Two to the transcendence in the rhyming couplet. As the volta, Line Nine opposes the dominant theme of death that is found within the first two quatrains. Here, Shakespeare writes, “Gainst Death and all-oblivious enmity” (Shakespeare 9), which directly negates the destruction building prior to the volta. This opposition to the negative<sup>57</sup> is then directly stated in the positive throughout the remaining lines of the quatrain where Shakespeare writes, “Shall you pace forth: your praise shall still find room/ Even in the eyes of all posterity/ That wear this world out to the ending doom” (10-12). In these lines, the sonnet/“you” outlives death after the opposition to destruction in Line Nine. This life that survives destruction sets the stage for the transcendence of the rhyming couplet.

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<sup>57</sup> The negation of a negative here is logically positive by the inferential rule of Double Negation. This is the reason why words such as “death” and others that typically have negative connotations were given positive connotations above.

True to its Petrarchean Logic, the rhyming couplet of “Sonnet Fifty-Five” also recapitulates the themes of the entire sonnet. The foreshadowing that has been building as well as the fusion between the sonnet and “you” both come to a head in Shakespeare’s concluding lines, “So, till the judgement that yourself arise,/ You live in this, and dwell in lovers’ eyes” (Shakespeare 13-14). In this couplet, the foreboding of Quatrains One and Two are referred to in “...the judgement...” (13). The strongest example of the survival foreshadowed earlier in the sonnet is the clause that follows: “...yourself arise...” (13). To reiterate the fusion between the sonnet and “you,” Shakespeare mentions this relationship explicitly when he writes, “You live in this [“Sonnet Fifty-Five”]...” (14). Then, he ends the sonnet with the clause, “...and dwell in lovers’ eyes” (14). This clause could refer to those who love anyone and/or those who love the subject, the “you”, of “Sonnet Fifty-Five” by reading its words<sup>58</sup>. Nevertheless, this clause, as well as the entirety of the rhyming couplet, captures the essence of the entire sonnet: the sonnet and “you” survive and transcend the destruction that the physical world undergoes.

To summarize what has been said above, this sonnet demonstrates a transition from the negative to the positive, the dark to the light, using six interwoven literary elements: structure, euphony, connotation, Renaissance themes, literary devices, and overall narrative. However, one should ask, what can be drawn from the uncertain investigation of this essay? Perhaps the most profound lesson applies to the lines of “Sonnet Fifty-Five” as well as it does to words spoken on street corners. In both the academic and everyday life, it seems common for people who use language to be able to paraphrase entire sets of words, from sonnets to short stories to ordinary conversation. Despite how common this act may be, here Shakespeare may call to one’s attention some of the various types of reasons that could influence how one paraphrases and/or

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<sup>58</sup> This distinction and a great deal of the meaning of this couplet lies outside of the breadth of this essay, namely in relation to Platonic Forms.

understands words. In using language, people may be automatically affected by its intricacies, or they can become aware of such through investigation. Regardless, whether or not people pay attention to it or are certain of its inner-workings, language seems to be affecting everyone.

Most importantly, linguistic black boxes are not only academic, in this case Shakespearean, they are also found in the words that people use everyday.

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