

The Ideas of Love in William Shakespeare's Sonnets: An Existential-Psychological Analysis Based on Rollo May's Theory of Love

Agra Liz Tantri¹, Fatimah Muhajir²

¹Fakultas Ilmu Budaya Universitas Mulawarman

² Fakultas Ilmu Budaya Universitas Mulawarman

Email: agraliztantri@fib.unmul.ac.id

ABSTRAK

Studi ini bertujuan untuk meneliti representasi gagasan cinta dalam tiga soneta terkenal karya William Shakespeare: Soneta 18 (*"Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?"*), Soneta 116 (*"Let me not to the marriage of true minds"*), dan Soneta 64 (*"When I have seen by Time's fallen hand defaced"*), yang ditulis pada masa Renaisans. Penelitian ini menerapkan teori eksistensial cinta Rollo May untuk mengeksplorasi penggambaran Shakespeare mengenai cinta sebagai pengalaman manusia, yang mencakup empat bentuk cinta: Seks, Eros, Philia, dan Agape. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif-deskriptif dengan analisis tekstual terhadap soneta-soneta terpilih. Fokus penelitian adalah untuk mengidentifikasi bagaimana bentuk-bentuk cinta Rollo May ditemukan dan diinterpretasikan dalam soneta-soneta tersebut. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ketiga soneta tersebut tidak menekankan aspek fisik cinta (seks), melainkan menyajikan bentuk cinta yang lebih dalam dan kompleks. Soneta 18 merepresentasikan Eros sebagai kekuatan kreatif yang mendorong penyair untuk mengabadikan keindahan dan makna melalui puisi. Soneta 116 menggambarkan Philia melalui penggambaran cinta yang stabil, rasional, dan tidak berubah seiring waktu. Sementara itu, Soneta 64 dan sebagian dari Soneta 116 menggambarkan Agape sebagai cinta tulus yang bertahan meskipun ada ancaman kehilangan dan kematian. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa cinta dalam soneta Shakespeare memiliki dimensi eksistensial yang selaras dengan pandangan Rollo May mengenai cinta sebagai pengalaman manusia yang mendalam dan bermakna.

Kata kunci: Shakespeare, soneta, Rollo May, gagasan cinta

ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the representation of the idea of love in three famous sonnets by William Shakespeare: Sonnet 18 (*"Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?"*), Sonnet 116 (*"Let me not to the marriage of true minds"*), and Sonnet 64 (*"When I have seen by Time's fallen hand defaced"*), written during the Renaissance period. This study applies Rollo May's existential theory of love to explore Shakespeare's portrayal of love as a human experience. The study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach with textual analysis of the selected sonnets. The focus of the research was to identify how Rollo May's forms of love can be found and interpreted in those sonnets. The results show that the three sonnets do not emphasize the physical aspect of love (sex), but rather present a deeper and more complex form of love. Sonnet 18 represents Eros as a creative force that drives the poet to immortalize beauty and meaning through poetry. Sonnet 116 depicts Philia through a depiction of love that is stable, rational, and unchanging over time. Meanwhile, Sonnet 64 and part of Sonnet 116 depict Agape as a sincere love that persists despite the threat of loss and mortality. These findings demonstrate that love in Shakespeare's sonnets has an existential dimension that aligns with Rollo May's view of love as a profound and meaningful human experience.

Keywords: Shakespeare, sonnets, Rollo May, existential love

A. INTRODUCTION

Love is a universal theme that has consistently appeared in various literary works throughout human history. As the most fundamental emotional experience in human life, love not only describes relationships between individuals but also reflects human values, morality, and existence (Fromm, 1956). The concept of love has consistently been a focal point in literature, particularly in the English poetic tradition. William Shakespeare is one of the central figures who explored this theme through his sonnets, which represent love not only as a personal emotion but also as an existential experience related to human existence, the meaning of life, and an awareness of mortality (Greenblatt, 2020).

Shakespeare often portrayed love as a highly complex force, possessing elements of beauty, suffering, mortality, and eternity. Shakespeare's works often depict the complexity of love relationships, which are not only a source of happiness but also a gateway to suffering and tragedy. He views love as a great human force, yet fragile when confronted with ambition, jealousy, and time. Therefore, these values are universal and transcend time. Because love, justice, loyalty, and suffering are part of the human experience, wherever and whenever they are. This is also the reason why Shakespeare's works remain relevant today and are considered to represent the essence of humanity. Themes or values about love and humanity are not only found in Shakespeare's phenomenal plays, such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, etc., but are also depicted extensively in his poetry, including the sonnets.

As a great poet and playwright during the Renaissance, Shakespeare imbued his writings with a spirit of humanism. Humanism is a view that places humans at the center of life and the source of values. During the Renaissance period, Shakespeare wrote in a cultural context influenced by humanism, an intellectual movement that placed humans and human experience at the center of moral, philosophical, and aesthetic values (Tarnas, 1991). In this spirit of humanism, Shakespeare wrote not only about love as a romantic desire but also as an existential force that gives meaning to human existence. This study explores Shakespeare's works, which not only made significant contributions to the development of world literature but also presented existential psychology relevant to the values of modern humanism. The idea of eternal love, as depicted in his sonnets, demonstrates a humanist perspective on human existence.

Several previous studies have discussed love in Shakespeare's sonnets, but most have focused on the aesthetic, structural, and historical aspects of Renaissance literature or the social relations of the time (Burrow, 2013). Studies connecting Shakespeare's sonnets to existential psychology, particularly the thinking of Rollo May, are still very limited. Yet, May's theory of love offers a deeper understanding of human emotional and existential dynamics, including freedom, anxiety, and the need to build meaningful relationships (May, 1983). This approach allows for a new reading of Shakespeare's sonnets as reflections on human struggles with time, uncertainty, and the vulnerability of love.

This is also the reason why Shakespeare's works remain relevant today and are considered to represent the essence of humanity. The enduring nature of Shakespearean themes is not merely a matter of historical prestige but is rooted in their capacity to mirror the complexities of human attachment and loss (Lewis, 1960). By examining these poetic works through the lens of human affection, we can uncover the underlying spiritual and psychological needs that drive human relationships across centuries. Furthermore, the integration of literary analysis with psychological frameworks allows for a more holistic understanding of how narrative structures represent the internal struggle for emotional significance in a seemingly indifferent universe (Neill, 2003). This interdisciplinary approach provides a robust foundation for exploring how the sonnets function as existential maps, guiding the reader through the precarious terrain of love, time, and mortality."

Therefore, this research is important to fill the research gap in literary studies that integrate Shakespeare's works with modern existential psychology. Through an analysis of Sonnet 18 ("*Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?*"), Sonnet 116 ("*Let me not to the marriage of true minds*"), and Sonnet 64 ("*When I have seen by Time's fallen hand defaced*"), this study seeks to uncover how Rollo May's four dimensions of love (sex, eros, philia, and agape) are manifested in Shakespeare's metaphors, imagery, and emotional structures. This research is expected to provide a new perspective in the study of English literature and broaden readers' understanding of the relationship between literary works and existential psychology theory is expected to enrich our understanding of the relationship between literature, humanity, and the universal meaning of love

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Rollo May was an American therapist. He worked at the William Alanson White Institute of Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis, and Psychology. As a therapist, May was heavily influenced by existentialism. He developed new ideas and perspectives on humankind. He is recognized as a prominent figure in existential psychology in America. Existential psychology is based on the writings of the German philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard believed that humans are not objects and opposed subjective perception as the only reality a person has. He emphasized the balance between freedom and responsibility. To achieve freedom and responsibility, humans must let go of their anxiety and take responsibility for their destiny, experiencing the burden of freedom and the pain of responsibility. Rollo May emerged as the figure most responsible for integrating European existentialist philosophy into American psychology (Olson, 2013).

One of the topics addressed in existential psychology is love. Love can transform the individual who experiences it because it possesses powerful energy. Each individual's journey with love is unique. Moreover, according to May, human existence—"being-in-the-world" (akin to the German existential concept of *Dasein*)—can be understood via three fundamentals, interrelated "world-dimensions." These are *Umwelt* (the "around-world"), *Mitwelt* (the "with-world"), and *Eigenwelt* (the "own-world"). The function is somewhat different in relation to our bodily existence, our existence with others, our existence with ourselves, and our existence in relation to a system of meaning (Emmy, 2010: 135).

Rollo May describes Umwelt as the biological and physical aspect of existence, highlighting that it is not simply an external environment but an essential aspect of human existence. He states, "By Umwelt we refer to the natural environment surrounding us, encompassing the realm of biological needs and physical processes in which humans are inherently immersed" (May, Angel, & Ellenberger, 1958, p. 50). This statement emphasizes that Umwelt pertains to the domain governed by natural laws and physiological realities that influence human existence independent of individual interpretation or selection. Concerning Mitwelt, May characterizes it as the interpersonal domain wherein individuals engage with others not as mere objects but as meaningful entities. He states, "Mitwelt is the domain of interrelationships, the sphere in which we engage with other human beings in meaningful ways" (May et al., 1958, p. 51). This quotation highlights May's conviction that psychological existence is fundamentally relational and that meaning arises through genuine interaction with others.

In discussing Eigenwelt, May focuses on self-awareness and the individual's relationship to the self. He explains, "*Eigenwelt refers to a person's relationship to himself, to his self-awareness and capacity to experience himself as a distinct being*" (May et al., 1958, p. 52). This passage clarifies that Eigenwelt is the inner subjective world where identity, values, and personal responsibility are formed. May later reinforces the importance of integrating these three dimensions for psychological health. In *Love and Will*, he asserts, "*To be fully human means to participate consciously in the Umwelt, Mitwelt, and Eigenwelt simultaneously*" (May, 1969, p. 14). This quotation summarizes his holistic existential view, according to which alienation from any one dimension can lead to anxiety, emptiness, or loss of meaning.

Thus, Rollo May's idea of love is one of the frameworks of ideas born from "Mitwelt," as a social world, where the realm is reciprocal relations, which are born from human interaction with other humans in a meaningful way. According to Rollo May (2018:17), individuals capable of self-actualization are those who cry, make love, and kill passionately, glorifying desire, eros, and other wild, daimonic impulses. May divides the concept of love into four types in the Western tradition: sex, eros, philia, and agape.

1. **Sex.** Sex can be defined as a biological activity that can be expressed through sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual stimulation (Rollo May in Feist and Feist, 2017:354). Sex can procreate and perpetuate the race.
2. **Eros.** May developed the idea of Eros from Greek mythology, which depicts Eros as being created to live on earth, specifically in love. However, according to May, Eros has a negative side. When an individual loves another, they must be prepared to accept all possibilities, including sadness, grief, disappointment, and loss. (Rollo May in Feist and Feist, 2017:354) Eros is formed based on caring and tenderness, so it is a dream that strengthens a lasting union.
3. **Philia.** Philia is the third form of love. It is a relationship between two people who are intimate, non-sexual friends (Rollo May in Feist and Feist, 2017:354). This means that philia does not require us to do anything for the person we love, other than to accompany them, accept them, and enjoy their existence.

4. **Agape.** The fourth form of love is agape. Rollo May (in Feist and Feist, 2017:354) argues that agape is respect for others, a concern for their well-being that transcends any benefit that can be derived from them. An example of this unexceptional love is God's love for humanity. It is love that disregards the behavior of others. This form of love feels more meaningful and unconditional. This also relates to the relationship of brotherhood and friendship, which is part of acceptance, where the loved one accepts and enjoys being loved. Thus, Rollo May focused on the concepts of love and human desire in his theory of personality. He viewed love and desire as fundamental aspects of human experience, playing a crucial role in personality formation and the search for meaning in life. He believes that love is central to the development of a meaningful and authentic self.

In the context of existential psychotherapy, love is viewed as an ontological bridge that connects the individual to the world and to others, thereby mitigating the dread of isolation (Yalom, 1980). This connection suggests that the act of loving is a vital defense against the existential void, providing a sense of belonging that transcends the solitary nature of human life. This perspective is closely linked to the idea that emotions like love are 'eudaimonistic' judgments of value, where the lover recognizes the beloved as an essential component of their own flourishing (Nussbaum, 2001). Consequently, love becomes a cognitive and emotional framework through which an individual evaluates the significance of their existence in relation to another. Furthermore, this intersection of desire and existential purpose underscores the transformative power of love as a vehicle for self-actualization and ontological security (Singer, 2009). By establishing this security, love enables the individual to confront mortality with a courage born from meaningful connection.

C. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative methodology to enhance the comprehension of the concept of love in William Shakespeare's selected sonnets and to examine their thematic and humanistic significance. Within the framework of humanistic inquiry, the methodological approach. Qualitative research is characterized by data presented contextually, precluding numerical transformation. The term "research" fundamentally denotes a structured series of activities or processes employed to elucidate an unknown phenomenon through a systematic, focused, and verifiable methodology. According to Bogdan and Biklen, qualitative methodology is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or oral words from people and observable behavior (2007: 23). The main aim of the research is to describe the ideas of love and humanistic values that are contained in poems, such as stanzas and lines. The result is based on the interpretation of the poem that relates to the topic.

The main source of this research is the texts of poems consisting of words, phrases, or diction, lines, and stanzas of the poems. The sources of the data of the research are taken from William Shakespeare's Sonnets: first, *Sonnet 18*, "*Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?*" *Second*, *Sonnet 116* "*Let me not to the marriage of true minds,*" and *third*, *Sonnet 64* "*When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced,*" were written in the Renaissance era. In data collection, there are some steps to collect the data that need to be examined, namely, first, reading and understanding

Sonnet 18, “*Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?*” *Sonnet 116*, “*Let me not to the marriage of true minds,*” and *Sonnet 64* “*When I have seen by Time’s fell hand defaced,*” are poems by William Shakespeare. Second, reading the sources of humanism and its relation to the Renaissance period. Third, collecting and categorizing the appearances of the element of poetry in the poems. The last step is to categorize and analyze the data based on the research topic. Besides, in data analysis, Miles and Huberman explain that there are several steps to analyze data, such as data reduction, data display, and conclusion.

The data reduction is the process of reducing the data that has been collected. The data were selected more specifically to answer the research problem. In this step, the researcher did two steps, they are: first, collecting the data based on thematic and humanistic values inside the poems: *Sonnet 18* “*Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?*”, *Sonnet 116* “*Let me not to the marriage of true minds,*” and *Sonnet 64* “*When I have seen by Time’s fell hand defaced,*” are poems by William Shakespeare. Second, selecting the data about humanist values in the poems through figurative language. Data display is the process of describing and analyzing data. In this step, the form of data display that the researcher used is the description form. The data that had been selected by the researcher—those data will be analyzed based on the related theories that are presented. Concluding is the last process of the research after the data has been analyzed.

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This analysis employs Rollo May’s existential-humanistic perspective on love to examine three of Shakespeare’s most renowned sonnets: *Sonnet 18*, *Sonnet 116*, and *Sonnet 64*. This section expands the discussion by analyzing how Shakespeare’s portrayals of love align with May’s four classifications of love (Sex, Eros, Philia, and Agape), as well as the existential conditions of freedom, anxiety, and mortality. Shakespeare’s poetic articulations of admiration, fidelity, fear, and longing embody not only aesthetic elegance but also the existential challenges inherent in human relationships. Rollo May’s insights into the intricacies of love, its inherent risks, vulnerability, and capacity for transformation provide an interpretive framework for understanding these sonnets as examinations of the human quest for meaning and connection.

1. The Ideas of Sex

In Rollo May’s concept, sex is the most basic form of love, related to physical attraction and biological fulfillment. In Shakespeare’s sonnet “*Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?*”, the sexual element is rarely explicitly mentioned, as the poem emphasizes ideal beauty rather than bodily sensuality. However, there are examples of metaphors, such as the lines:

“the eye of heaven shines” (Shakespeare, 5)

And in line 12

“thy eternal summer shall not fade” (Shakespeare, 12)

That subtly alludes to the physical charm of the person being praised. However, the language used does not suggest erotic or bodily desire, but rather purified beauty. Meanwhile, in *Sonnet 116* (“*Let me not to the marriage of true minds*”), the concept of Sex in this poem is the

most basic and biological form of love. As the following lines, “*Love is not love / Which alters when it alteration finds.*” (Shakespeare, 2-3) Shakespeare rejects the concept of love that changes due to physical impulse or attraction. but rather a higher level of love, emphasizing that true love is not merely physical attraction, as May asserted, as something fragile and easily shifting. The last sonnet, *Sonnet 64* (“*When I have seen by Time’s fallen hand defaced*”), also does not present sensual or physical imagery, but the imagery, the constant fear of loss, suggests that even the basic urge to maintain the presence of a loved one is threatened by time. Therefore, in Rollo May’s perspective, the three sonnets do not demonstrate the concept of love as sexual desire.

2. The Ideas of Eros

A. Sonnet 18: Love as Eros and the Transcendence of Time

In Rollo May’s existential-humanistic framework, Eros extends beyond mere sexual desire; it embodies the fundamental psychological impetus toward creativity, connection, and the understanding of existence. It is the desire for meaningful connection and the drive to establish something enduring and lasting. In Sonnet 18, this inspiration is directly responsible for the poem’s endeavor to transcend temporality.

Eros as Creative and Elevating Love

In Sonnet 18 (“*Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?*”), the poet extols the virtues of the beloved by employing imagery rooted in natural splendor. According to May, Eros is not simply passion but a creative force that motivates individuals to develop and establish more profound connections. Shakespeare’s portrayal of the beloved as “more lovely and more temperate” exemplifies Eros as the force that elevates the lover’s perception, transforming the beloved into an emblem of existential beauty. Eros, in the sense of May, embodies vulnerability, longing, and admiration. Shakespeare’s admiration for the beloved’s constancy—juxtaposed with the transient nature of summer—illuminates the lover’s fundamental desire to attain something lasting amidst the impermanence of human existence.

Rollo May describes Eros as a passionate yet elevating form of love that inspires creativity and deep emotional connection. In *Sonnet 18*, the speaker idealizes the beloved by comparing them to a perfect image of nature: “*Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day? / Thou art more lovely and more temperate.*” This comparison illustrates Eros as a creative act. The beloved becomes not just admired but elevated beyond natural beauty. According to May, Eros “strengthens a lasting union” through emotional tenderness, and this is evident as the poet emphasizes qualities that surpass nature’s imperfections. Furthermore, “*Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day? / Thou art more lovely and more temperate*” exemplifies Eros as the motivation to seek greater beauty. This initial rejection represents the initial expression of Eros. The drive motivates the speaker to pursue a beauty that is more refined and enduring than the fleeting perfection observed in nature. The beloved’s beauty extends beyond the physical (Sex); it embodies an elevated quality (Eros) that defies the imperfections and excesses of the natural world.

The beloved is described as “*more lovely and more temperate,*” suggesting that love enhances perception and allows the lover to recognize qualities that surpass the imperfections of nature, suggesting that love enhances perception and allows the lover to recognize qualities that surpass the imperfections of nature. Through this idealization, the poet constructs a vision of

beauty that is not confined to physical appearance but rooted in the existential capacity of love to reveal deeper truths about human experience. Eros, in May's terms, always carries vulnerability because it involves emotional openness and the willingness to encounter joy, desire, and potential loss. Shakespeare reflects this complexity through the contrast between the beloved's seemingly eternal beauty and the unstable imagery of nature, such as when "*rough winds do shake the darling buds of May*." Yet, the creative power of Eros transforms this vulnerability into artistic expression, culminating in the sonnet's assertion that the beloved's beauty will be immortalized through verse: "*So long lives this, and this gives life to thee*." This act of poetic creation demonstrates how Eros motivates the poet to transcend the limitations of time and mortality by producing a work that strives for permanence. Thus, *Sonnet 18* illustrates Eros as an elevating force that not only intensifies admiration but also inspires imaginative transformation, enabling the poet to preserve love and beauty within the enduring form of art.

Existential Anxiety and the Fear of Decay

In *Sonnet 18*, Shakespeare's celebration of beauty is intertwined with a profound sense of existential anxiety arising from the awareness of human transience. According to Rollo May, existential anxiety is a natural and unavoidable response to recognizing that all aspects of human life—beauty, love, and even meaningful relationships—are inherently fragile and subject to decay. This anxiety is reflected in Shakespeare's acknowledgment that "*every fair from fair sometime declines*," a line that captures the inevitability of deterioration despite the poet's admiration for the beloved's beauty. This acceptance aligns with May's concept of normal anxiety—the awareness of death and decay that motivates humans to seek meaning. The poet's recognition that beauty fades indicates his existential confrontation with time and mortality. The imagery of instability in nature, such as "*rough winds [that] do shake the darling buds of May*," further emphasizes the vulnerability of all things cherished, highlighting the poet's fear that external forces beyond human control will eventually destroy what he holds dear.

Shakespeare also reinforces the brevity of perfection through the metaphor "*summer's lease hath all too short a date*," suggesting that beauty, like a temporary contract, is destined to expire. This confrontation with impermanence parallels May's view that love deepens existential anxiety because individuals fear losing what they value most. Yet, rather than giving in to hopelessness, the poet addresses this unease by creatively asserting meaning, proclaiming that the beauty of the beloved will persist through poetry: "*So long lives this, and this gives life to thee*." In accordance with May's view of creativity as a fundamental act of self-affirmation, Shakespeare channels his fear of deterioration into a form of artistic immortality, employing poetry to counteract the ravaging power of time. Consequently, the sonnet not only glorifies the beloved but also exposes a philosophical conflict with mortality, illustrating how existential anxiety can spark artistic expression and the quest for permanence in a transient world.

Art as an Existential Act of Immortality

Another central finding in *Sonnet 18* is Shakespeare's presentation of art as a means of transcending existential limitations, particularly the inevitability of decay and death. Rollo May's existential-humanistic theory argues that creativity is one of the most profound human responses to existential anxiety. When individuals confront the awareness of mortality, they

may seek to craft meaning through creative acts that outlast their own temporal existence. Shakespeare illustrates this existential impulse most clearly in the concluding couplet of the sonnet: “*So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.*” Here, “this” refers to the poem itself, which the poet claims will preserve the beloved’s beauty against the destructive power of time. By asserting that the beloved will continue to “live” as long as the poem is read, Shakespeare transforms art into a vehicle for immortality, aligning directly with May’s notion that creativity enables individuals to transcend their finitude.

This creative endeavor transcends a mere literary embellishment; it constitutes a fundamental existential approach. Throughout the poem, the speaker recognizes the transient nature of beauty and the unavoidable process of decline, “every fair from fair sometimes declines”, which illustrates the poet’s engagement with the universal apprehension of loss. Instead of yielding to despair, the poet responds to the deterioration of the physical realm by creating a symbolic universe through language. In this symbolic realm, beauty becomes unchanging, as it resides within the enduring nature of artistic expression rather than the fragility of human flesh. Furthermore, “As long as men can breathe or eyes can see, / So long lives this, and this gives life to thee” portrays artistic creation as a transcendent act. According to May, creativity is an aspect of the daimonic—the intrinsic force that propels self-expression and the creation of meaning. Shakespeare utilizes poetry as a means to ‘grant life,’ suggesting that love achieves a form of immortality through artistic creation. In this way, he demonstrates that creativity can transform existential dread into a statement of continuity and significance. The poem acts not only as an homage to the beloved but also as an assertion of the poet’s own power in facing mortality. By framing artistic creation as a response to existential doubt, Sonnet 18 demonstrates that poetry itself becomes a form of resistance against oblivion—a way for both lover and beloved to achieve a sense of permanence in a transient world.

3. The Ideas of Philia

In Rollo May’s ideas, philia is the most stable, mature, and intimate form of love. Philia is not the passion of eros nor the sacrificial love of agape, but rather a deep friendship: a relationship that grows through presence, appreciation, emotional continuity, and a commitment to mutual growth. Philia is a love that allows space for freedom, accepts imperfection, and does not seek to dominate or control another person. Shakespeare, in “*Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?*” sonnet, portrays a relationship that is not merely aesthetic admiration but also appreciation, serenity, and loyalty. Philia is the giving of meaning, not possession, as May explains. Philia does not seek to possess but rather to nurture and enrich the meaning of a loved one’s life. Philia as a calm and stable appreciation in the opening lines:

*“Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.” (1-2)*

May describes philia as a love that is not explosive but calm (more lovely) and stable. This emerges from how the poet describes the praise: he sees the beloved not as an object of passionate eros, but as a “more temperate” figure, more balanced, calmer than the beautiful but volatile summer. Love here is not turbulent passion, but pure appreciation for the existence/presence of another person.

*Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee. (11-12)*

These lines demonstrate that the poet gives life to his lover through poetry. This is not a form of possession but rather the giving of meaning: the lover “lives” in the work, in the memory, and in the relationship that continues to resonate.

In the sonnet, “*Let me not to the marriage of true minds.*” Philia can be interpreted as the love of a united friendship. The sonnet opens with the famous line, “*Let me not to the marriage of true minds / Admit impediments.*” The idea of philia describes the most intimate form of friendship, where two individuals come together not out of eros, but out of sincerity and emotional maturity. There are no “impediments,” because philia does not seek possession or control but rather mutual recognition. This aligns with May’s existentialist view that love is the encounter of two free existences.

Meanwhile, in “*When I have seen by Time’s fallen hand defaced,*” there is an emphasis on a very non-physical, emotional confession that can be found in line “*But weep to have that which it fears to lose.*” (14) This line reveals that what he weeps for is his lover’s presence, not her body, not her face, not any beauty, but the emotional connection and inner depth they share. Philia allows people to live together in mutual growth. May said, a bond in which two individuals sustain each other emotionally despite time, loss, or change. This sonnet reveals a form of love very close to philia, a love that focuses on the meaningfulness of the relationship rather than physical attraction.

4. The Ideas of Agape

The idea of Agape in Rollo May’s theory of love is the highest form of love that emphasizes sincerity, sacrifice, and unconditional commitment, or a type of love that is more oriented towards giving than orientation or seeking personal satisfaction. The idea of agape, according to Rollo May, in William Shakespeare’s can be found in the sonnet “*Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?*” (*Sonnet 18*), is presented in an analytical form based on the criteria of agape, such as unselfish, giving love, and oriented towards goodness and deeper meaning. Within the framework of May’s theory of love, agape is the highest form of love because it is a love that is sacrificial, compassionate, selfless, and imbued with existential meaning. This love is not oriented toward desire like eros or purely personal affection or philia, but rather toward the well-being and continued existence of another person.

In Shakespeare’s poem “*Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer’s Day?*”, the agape aspect is evident in the poet’s way of immortalizing the lover’s beauty and worth through the power of poetry, rather than through personal possession or sensual desire. In this poem, Shakespeare demonstrates a selfless form of love by immortalizing the beloved’s beauty through poetry, which aligns with the characteristic of agape as a love that gives life. As the following lines:

*So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee (Shakespeare, 13-14)*

Through this line, the poet does not express a desire to possess or enjoy the beloved personally but rather ensures that the beloved will live forever in human texts and memory. Agape can be described as love that gives life, not takes it.

Meanwhile, the characteristics of agape are particularly evident in Sonnet 116, “Let me not to the marriage of true minds,” where Shakespeare asserts that true love is not always dependent on external conditions or the changing times. For example, the opening line to 4:

*"Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments; love is not love
Which alters when it alters,
Or bends with the remover to remove,"* (Shakespeare, 1-4)

The lyrics emphasize the essence of agape as a love that remains unchanging even when circumstances and partners change. In Rollo May's view, this kind of love is founded on a deep commitment to the other person's existence. “*Love is not love / Which alters when it finds alteration.*” (2-3) If love easily changes due to changing circumstances, such as difficulties, imperfections, or changes in a partner, then Shakespeare called it not true love. If love can waver just because of changing circumstances, then it is not “genuine.” Or, “love cannot be called pure love.” Shakespeare also emphasizes in the next line, “*Or bends with the remover to remove,*” that true love will not “bend” (4-5), become brittle, or even disappear when someone tries to remove it. This means that if any force, situation, or person tries to separate them, it illustrates that true love will remain, like a lighthouse or a fixed marker that never shifts, even when rocked by storms. The following lines:

*"Oh no, it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken,"* (6-7)

These lines illustrate that true love will remain, like a lighthouse or a fixed marker that never shifts, even when shaken by storms. From Rollo May's perspective, this aligns with the nature of agape, a love that is steadfast, stable, and firm, unshaken by changing circumstances, momentary emotions, or the challenges of the external world, even when “storm-shaken.” For May, agape is not a temporary feeling but an existential decision. Shakespeare visualizes this steadfastness through the metaphor of a storm and a fixed marker, emphasizing that true love remains present as the center of moral orientation despite adversity.

*Love's not time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come.
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks.* (9-11)

This means that love is not dominated and controlled by time; for example, the symbol of physical beauty, such as “rosy lips and cheeks,” as a manifestation of the physical beauty of youth, will still fade with time. However, in the concept of Agape, love will not fade until the end of life. Because true love does not depend on physical perfection or youth, as the line “Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks” emphasizes, true love does not change just because time passes. The word “*brief*” emphasizes that human life and the period of falling in

love are relatively short, but true love transcends that duration. Agape is the most mature and transcendent form of love, characterized by a willingness to “seek the good of the beloved” unconditionally and selflessly.

The ideas of Agape in the last sonnet “**When I have seen by Time’s fell hand defac’d**” as follows:

*“Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminate,
That Time will come and take my love away.” (11-12)*

The speaker in the poem acknowledges that time will take the person he loves. However, he realizes that this will not destroy love but rather deepen it. In May’s idea, agape arises when someone continues to love even though they know the outcome cannot be theirs forever. Agape is love that demands no return, or giving and loving without strings attached or permanence. This poem demonstrates that loving does not mean guaranteeing; love means acknowledging the vulnerability of something but choosing to be present nonetheless. Agape as an act of caring born of loss, as illustrated in the following lines:

*“This thought is as a death...”
“But weep to have that which it fears to lose.” (13-14)*

This is the essence of agape in this poem. Love does not ask for eternity; it weeps because it realizes the lover’s existence is so precious that losing them is terrifying. According to Rollo May, agape is life-enhancing love. Love is non-demanding, loving without possessing, appreciating the present moment, and finding meaning through vulnerability. Grief is not weakness but the deepest form of ontological caring.

The findings of this study significantly expand the academic discourse surrounding Shakespearean sonnets by bridging the gap between classical literary analysis and modern existential psychology. While previous scholars, such as Burrow (2013), have largely focused on the aesthetic, structural, and historical nuances of Renaissance literature, the current analysis demonstrates that these poems function as more than just linguistic artifacts. By identifying the manifestations of Sex, Eros, Philia, and Agape, this research supports the humanistic view that Shakespeare’s work transcends its original cultural context.

The identification of Eros in Sonnet 18 as a creative force against decay aligns with May’s (1969) assertion that creativity is a fundamental human response to existential anxiety. This provides a psychological depth to the “immortality through verse” trope that is often discussed only as a rhetorical device in traditional studies. Furthermore, the presence of Philia and Agape in Sonnets 116 and 64 reinforces the idea that Shakespeare viewed love as a “being-in-the-world” experience (Mitwelt), involving a meaningful encounter between two free existences. Unlike prior studies that emphasize the social relations of the Renaissance period, this study highlights how these sonnets address universal human struggles with mortality and the vulnerability of love, thereby validating the relevance of Rollo May’s existential-humanistic theory in interpreting classical texts.

D. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that William Shakespeare's Sonnets 18, 116, and 64 present a multidimensional concept of love that aligns closely with Rollo May's existential-humanistic theory of love, which encompasses four forms of love: sex, eros, philia, and agape. Although these sonnets were written in the context of Renaissance humanism, a reading from the perspective of existential psychology demonstrates that Shakespeare's conception of love remains relevant to the existential dynamics of modern humankind, particularly in its themes of mortality, vulnerability, the meaning of life, and emotional commitment.

May notes that Shakespeare's conception of sex as the most basic form of love in the sonnets is not a primary emphasis in the three sonnets. The poet emphasizes non-physical love. Eros is strongly evident in Sonnet 18, where love becomes a creative force that drives the poet to immortalize his lover through art as a form of resistance to time. Philia is particularly evident in Sonnet 116, which depicts love as a stable, equal, and change-resistant friendship. Meanwhile, Agape appears in Sonnet 116 and Sonnet 64 through depictions of sincere, unconditional love that endures despite vulnerability and the threat of loss.

Overall, this study concludes that Shakespeare's sonnets present love as a complex existential experience, encompassing beauty, vulnerability, the struggle against time, and the search for meaning. Through the lens of Rollo May's theory, it is evident that love in Shakespeare's works is not merely a romantic emotion, but a human effort to overcome mortality, process anxiety, and build meaningful and lasting relationships. By integrating Renaissance humanism and modern existential psychology, this study enriches our understanding of how Shakespeare's works continue to reflect universal experiences and remain relevant throughout time.

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