

Economic Imageries in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*

Ichiro Fujimoto

In the early modern period, the economy of medieval feudalism, which was based on a traditional concept of reciprocity between lord and vassal, was gradually replaced by nascent capitalism. The emerging capitalistic concept of values influences literary works at that time. Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, too, reflects the nascent capitalism of those days. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the ways in which the *Sonnets* of William Shakespeare (1564-1616), assumed to have been published around 1609, reflected the economic situation in early modern England by analysing its financial words and economic images: those of moneylending, usury, counterfeit money and transactions. This thesis is divided into three chapters.

In Chapter I, we examine what may be called linguistic inflation, the imagery of usury, and nascent capitalism. In Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, as nascent capitalism gradually emerges, the reciprocal relationship between the Fair Youth and the speaker begins to break up. And the Fair Youth is secularized and monetized by being associated with the worldly rival poets and the Dark Lady. In addition, the Fair Youth's secularization causes linguistic inflation, which lowers the value of language, poetry and the Fair Youth himself. In this context, the speaker describes the Fair Youth, who eagerly seeks for worthless poetry by rival poets, as a usurer.

In Chapter II, we analyse the separation between appearance and reality, relating it with monetary imagery. First, this chapter focuses on the Fair Youth's beautiful appearance, which is far from his inner beauty. Though, in the Neoplatonic tradition of love poetry, physical beauty without inner beauty was condemned, in the cases of the Fair Youth and the Dark Lady, this discrepancy does not do a disservice to them. At least to the speaker, the Dark Lady's sexual attraction and the Fair Youth's power bound up with money have power to make her and him accept the unacceptable. Then, taking into consideration the state of the coins that circulated in Shakespeare's day, we examine how the power of the Fair Youth's appearance and the Dark

Lady's sexual attraction are related to money in *Sonnets*.

In Chapter III, we discuss two systems of exchange. One is the non-monetary barter and exchange in medieval feudalism. Though the master-servant relationship was impaired in Shakespeare's days, the feudalistic system of economy was still in use. The other is a monetary system of exchange, and the increasingly proliferating exchanges of commodities in nascent capitalism, which are the mainstreams of the system of exchange in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*. Focusing on these two systems of exchange, we examine the way in which the characters – the speaker, the rival poets, the Fair Youth, and the Dark Lady – trade with each other, using amorous barter and the exchange of bodies in terms of economics.

In conclusion, we discuss the reason why we should read Shakespeare's *Sonnets* in terms of economic imagery. Seeking for Juliet, Romeo says, "I should adventure for such merchandise" (II.i.127). Likewise, Shakespeare might think of himself as such an adventurer. The title page of the 1609 Quarto shows us this possibility. Moreover, the dedication of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* is notable for our investigation. The word "adventurer" in the dedication of *Sonnets*, which was written by Thorpe, should be noted. Because the word "adventurer" means one who "undertakes, or share in, commercial adventures or enterprises" (*OED* 4), it can safely be argued that Shakespeare (plus Thorpe) regards himself as an adventurer. We may draw the conclusion that both Shakespeare and the speaker in *Sonnets* are adventurers as well as poets, and that Shakespeare's *Sonnets* is money-oriented.