

Defining the Undefinable: A Comparative Study of the Concept of Love in Shakespeare and Mahwi's Selected Poetry

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Abstract— Love is experienced as a powerful and pervasive emotion that can affect many aspects of human life through influencing people's thoughts, feelings, and actions. The literature that revolves around this complex human emotion is extensive. Some praise it highly while others blame their melancholy and miseries on it. However, when it comes to defining the term, there are many arguments each approaching it from a different angle. This paper presents several scholarly definitions of love before looking at how William Shakespeare and Mahwi define it through their sonnets and ghazals respectively. Several examples from Shakespeare and Mahwi's poetry have been selected for study and comparison. The paper finds that both poets attribute positive and negative characteristics to love believing that it has the power to create in people feelings of completeness as well as destitute and isolation. To both poets, love has transformative powers shaping people's social, personal and spiritual connections. However, in Mahwi's ghazals, most of the connections formed in love have a spiritual dimension to them and God is presented in the center of them as the beloved, while the relationships found in Shakespeare's sonnets rarely incorporate this otherworldly aspect and instead revolve around love developed among two human beings.

Index Terms— Beloved, Ghazal, Love, Mahwi, Shakespeare, Sonnets.

I. INTRODUCTION

Love is a common and timeless theme that has been addressed by numerous poets, novelists, playwrights, and thinkers in their unique ways. The complex nature of this universal emotion has led to the emergence of many definitions of love across various historical periods and cultures. Expressing his viewpoint on the matter in *Les Miserables*, Victor Hugo (1862, 112) states "Anyone who has loved, knows the radiant meaning contained in the three letters of this word—She." Here, Hugo captures the essence of love by restricting its definition to the pivotal role women specifically play in it. Alfred Lord Tennyson (1909, 56);

however, presents a broader definition and believes that love is so central to human life that "[it] is better to have loved and lost, Than never to have loved at all." Neuroscience seems to share Tennyson's opinion and regards love as an emotion that is of utmost significance to human lives. Neuroscientist Stephanie Cacioppo (2022, 25) argues that love is "a biological necessity...needed for our well-being as exercise, water, and food."

Other influential discussions of love might be ascribed to some of the distinguished minds of humanity who have written extensively on the matter. For instance, in both *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Rhetoric*, Aristotle writes about *philia*— which translates to *love* and *friendship* as well— highlighting the importance of love as a central moral virtue that greatly affects human relationships. Aristotle's narrative of love, Konstan (2008) writes, focuses on the mutual elements this emotion raises in people i.e. the philosopher defines love as having a strong altruistic desire for the well-being of the other that is manifested through mutual affection and intention. Aristotle, Konstan further explains, also characterises love not as a feeling but as a firm intention and thus makes his argument significantly different from the more recent definitions of love. For instance, in the second edition of Webster's New International Dictionary (1959), love is defined as "a feeling of strong personal attachment" and "ardent affection." Elaine Hatfield and Richard Rapson (2000, 655) also stress the fact that love is a combination of "feelings of deep attachment, commitment, and intimacy." These definitions emphasise feelings, attachment, and closeness whereas Aristotle's does not mention feelings at all but rather focuses exclusively on an intention directed towards the well-being of the other.

Aristotle's discussion of love resonates with similar themes found in Plato's philosophy since the latter's insights into affective relationships provide a foundation for Aristotle's approach. In *The Symposium* (2003), Plato stresses the divine nature and transformative power of love and includes many

encomia to love by a variety of speakers. For example, in section 180b, there is a discussion that revolves around the nature of love and its significance. The speakers reflect on love as a powerful and venerable god, whom both humans and gods admire for its ability to inspire virtue and happiness. This segment, which is delivered by Phaedrus, emphasises love's attributes and its role in human existence, portraying it as a central force that enhances various aspects of life. Plato records a clear definition of love through one of Phaedrus's speeches and writes:

So there is my description of Love—that he is the most venerable and valuable of the gods, and that he has sovereign power to provide all virtue and happiness for men whether living or departed (2003, 180).

According to this definition, a divine nature is assigned to love that makes it one of the most powerful gods to help men gain honour and blessedness in life and death. It is also suggested that love has the power to provide virtue and happiness as rewards. Furthermore, Robert Prus and Fatima Camara (2010, 35) characterise love as an emotion that “implies a more intense, affectionate concern for the other” and outline two variations of the emotion. The first variation describes love as an affection that can be romantic, sexual, erotic, passionate, or sensory in nature and may involve, but does not necessarily require, a profound care for the other person. The second variation focuses on a deep sense of caring and affection for the other, which does not inherently include romantic, sexual, erotic, or passionate components (2010).

In addition, James Baldwin (1998, 220) defines love as “a battle...a war...a growing up,” implying that it entails many struggles and challenges alongside personal growth and development. Similarly, Bhavabhuti (1978) views love as a sanctity representing an identity that encompasses both joy and sorrow across all stages of life. To him, love serves as a destination where the heart finds peace. Bhavabhuti also asserts that love is so potent that it cannot be diminished by old age; instead, it matures into a lasting emotion over time. According to him, love can also become deeply embedded in a person's essence and, like the soul, be eternal and transcend worldly limitations as well as forge spiritual connections (1978).

Other notable writers who have addressed love and defined it in their works include Shakespeare in English literature and Mahwi in Kurdish literature. The works of both poets have been examined individually by many critics and scholars from several angles; however, there has yet to be a comparative study that highlights the similarities and differences in their views on love. This paper is an attempt to examine some of Shakespeare's love poetry in connection to examples from Mahwi's ghazals on the same theme. The reason why specific complete poems by Mahwi have not been selected for comparison is that Mahwi's *ghazals* usually tackle more than a single theme weaving together various lines that often explore various subject matters.

The paper begins with a short section on Shakespeare and his attempts at the sonnet. Then, an introduction to Mahwi,

about whom there is limited literature available in English, is presented. Another section provides an overview of the *ghazal* as a whole, with specific emphasis on the Kurdish *ghazal*. To support the claims made, the paper incorporates Mahwi's translated poetry—something that is not limited to this section only but is found throughout the paper. It must be noted that Mahwi's lines have been translated by the second researcher, Jutiari Omer Salih, who is a professional, published translator with nearly two decades of experience in the field. The original lines in Kurdish have not been provided in footnotes due to the journal's guidelines.

Another section of the paper explains the ways Shakespeare and Mahwi define love and shows the intersection of their thoughts in doing so. The section also has many examples to support the comparisons drawn. The paper closes with a conclusion where the findings are summarised.

While the poetry studied here exemplifies different facets of love in Shakespeare and Mahwi's poetry, the poets' exploration of love is not limited to the sonnets/*ghazals* included here only. Further research may bring to light other dimensions of love in their literature.

Finally, it's important to highlight that the research paper is conducted within the framework of the American School of Comparative Literature, which, in contrast to the French School, is not concerned with the study of influence, but rather draws comparisons between cross-linguistic texts to show their parallelism.

II. SHAKESPEARE AND THE SONNET

The term *sonnet* originates from the Italian word *sonetto*, meaning a *little sound* or *song*. With the exception of the curtal sonnet, a standard sonnet consists of fourteen lines, typically written in iambic pentameter, though there are significant variations in rhyme schemes. The three primary forms of sonnets are the Petrarchan, the Spenserian, and the Shakespearean. Shakespearean Sonnet consists of three quatrains and a couplet, following the rhyme scheme abab, cdcd, efef, gg (Cuddon, 2013).

The sonnet gained prominence across Europe during the Renaissance, and Shakespeare's contributions elevated it to new artistic heights. Shakespeare wrote 154 sonnets, which were published in a quarto in 1609, and these works explore themes of love, beauty, time, and mortality, connecting personal emotion with broader existential questions (Spiller, 1992).

A distinctive feature of Shakespeare's sonnets is their deep exploration of love in its multifaceted forms. The *Fair Youth* sonnets (1-126) express admiration and desire for a beautiful young man while the *Dark Lady* sonnets (127-154) reveal a more unrestrained relationship with a mysterious woman (Sarker, 1998). Through these sonnets, Shakespeare addresses the power and brevity of love, the effects of time, and the inevitability of aging and death portraying love in all its complexity, beauty, and imperfection.

III. ABOUT MAHWI

Mahwi (1830–1906) is the penname of the poet Muhammad Mala Othman Balkhi. He was born in Slemani in Southern Kurdistan-Iraq. Mahwi received classical education of Islamic theology and classical works of poetry in Islamic schools. These schools were branches of the mosques located on the premises in cities such as Slemani, Sablagh (Mahabad) in Eastern Kurdistan\Iran and Baghdad. Mahwi was well-versed in both Kurdish and Persian languages. Moreover, he is regarded as one of the prominent poets of the second generation of the Baban school of poets amongst other influential poets including Haji Qadir Koyi, Shekh Raza and Wafayi. Baban school of poets was a classical school of Kurdish poetry which developed in the last epoch of the semi-independent Baban principality (emirate). The school had Nali as the founder alongside celebrated poets as Salim and Kurdi (first generation) as the pioneering figures of this new literary movement in the 19th century (Amin, 2019).

IV. MAHWI AND THE *GHAZAL*

Ghazal derives its meaning from the Arabic word *ghazal* (غزل) which denotes “whispering words of love” (Khalifa, 2017). This poetic form written in Central Kurdish dialect (South *Kurmanji*) blossomed and reached new heights during the time of the first generation of the Baban literary tradition. Soon after that, Mahwi started practising the *ghazal* making it his principal verse form (Hussein, 2012).

The *ghazal* is a poem about love, the description of the feminine beauty, cherishing the moments when the lover and the beloved meet and the melancholic feeling of separation from the beloved. As a genre, it is a lyric poem that consists of no less than seven couplets and does not exceed fifteen couplets in general. It is customary for the poets to mention their penname (*takhallus*) in the final couplet of the poem (Hussein, 2012).

Kurdish *ghazal* can be regarded as an integration of Arabic and Persian *ghazals*. It shares the formal structures of *ghazal* in terms of the meter, the rhyme scheme (*qafia*), refrain (*radif*) and penname (*takhallus*). Hence, a close affinity as to form and content with Arabic and Persian *ghazals* can be perceived (Hussein, 2012). Regarding the content, the Arabic version is distinguishable by its melancholic mood of longing for the beloved. As Anna Krasnowolska observes, “Arabic *ghazal*, predominantly in its pessimistic version, (. . .) concentrates on the misfortunes of love rather than on its pleasures” (2006, 109). Equally, this feeling of sadness and loneliness over the separation from the beloved prevails in Kurdish *ghazal*. For example, Mahwi laments the misfortune he is experiencing because of being separated from his beloved and complains that since the beloved’s departure, he has become silent with no interest in talking with other people. To express this idea, Mahwi (1984, 198) compares himself to the musical instrument *ney*:

Since parting from my cherished love, I have become *ney*
Silent and still, with no melody, no *neyzen* to play.

However, the Kurdish *ghazal* can be traced back to Persian *ghazal* for it closely observes the Persian convention of this

genre. For instance, alongside with mysticism, the predominant theme in Kurdish *ghazal* is love; either ethereal or earthly. Farangis Ghaderi (2016) supports this claim by accentuating that the conventions Kurdish poets follow to describe the beloved (*mashuq*), the relationship between the lover (*ashiq*) and the beloved (*mashuq*) and the contention between the lover (*ashiq*) and the rival (*raqib*) to win the heart of the beloved all resemble that of Persian *ghazal*.

As Frances W. Pritchett (2015, 224) puts it, in classical *ghazal*, “the lover tore his clothes in distraction, raised the dust in the deserts with his wandering, and beat his head against walls — although in vain.” A couplet from Mahwi bears a significant resemblance to Pritchett’s aforementioned description of love. Mahwi advises that lovers must adhere to the customs and norms of *Majnun* i.e. “possessed,” the renowned Arab lover whose real name was Qeys and had passionately fallen in love with his beloved, Leyla. *Majnun*’s excessive love to Leyla ultimately drove him insane (Xani, 2018). Mahwi thinks that lovers cannot reach *Majnun*’s high rank in love in urban settings for these settings are filled with distractions and perhaps superficiality. Instead, they must head to the desert which, in the couplet, symbolises a place of solitude, introspection, and authenticity. Mahwi (1984, 7) writes:

In cities, *Majnun*’s norms can’t succeed,
To the desert, we lovers must proceed.

In this couplet, Mahwi illustrates love as a profound experience that eludes those in crowded places. He also suggests that, to truly discover and feel the depths of love, one must seek solitude and become entangled with love away from societal constraints and complexities of urban life. Thus, love is depicted as an experience that thrives in isolation and tranquility.

V. SHAKESPEARE AND MAHWI: INTERSECTION OF THOUGHTS ON LOVE

Literature is the progressive accumulation of human experiences; therefore, it is the ground where thoughts expressed may intersect and coexist. Although written in different languages and at different time periods and settings, Shakespeare and Mahwi’s poetic works register exquisite moments of life and express the poets’ views on love. A close study of the poems reveals that there are similarities between the poets’ definitions of love. However, the elements of history culture have also led to several differences in the definitions.

Shakespeare writes about love profoundly to a point that Sarkar (1998, 251) writes that, to the Renaissance reader, Shakespeare’s sonnets constituted “the greatest love poetry in the [English] language.” Amongst his sonnets, Sonnet 116 serves as a prime example of love poems. On the surface, the sonnet appears to be conveying the message that love is permanent and withstands the ravages of time; however, when the reader delves deeper into the depths of the sonnet, a more profound meaning manifests itself. Love is likened to a star in

the nautical metaphor of “star to every wand’ring bark.” Stars are used as sea-marks that, due to their fixed positions, assist the sailors in navigating the heavy seas. Thus, love functions as a beacon that can lead the mariners to navigate the seas and know their position in treacherous waters (Jane, 1982).

Another layer of metaphorical meaning is also traced by Callaghan (2007) who argues that Shakespeare’s definition of love in Sonnet 116 alludes to the notion in medieval Catholicism of the Blessed Virgin as *stella maris*, Star of the Sea. The reason for this is that the star guides all seafarers at sail in the sea of life until they chart their course towards union with God. Hence, Callaghan writes that in “claiming unwavering constancy as the mark of true love, Sonnet 116 looks toward the Christian concept of *agape*, the kind of unconditional love that transcends *eros* because it mirrors unconditional and immutable divine love” (63).

Similarly, Mahwi’s poetry also delves into the nuances of human relationships and explores the complexities of love and longing. His ghazals may address themes of separation, heartbreak, and the bittersweet and transformative nature of love as well, reflecting on the joys and sorrows that accompany deep emotional connections. An example where Mahwi (1984, 5-6) also uses images of the sea to express a similar religious concept of love that Callaghan hints to can be traced in the following lines:

Peace be upon he who has found guidance
And is lost in the vast desert of God’s love.
Unconcerned about the ship or the shipmaster
Must be anyone who seeks refuge from above.

Here, Mahwi first makes a direct reference to God’s love described as a “vast desert.” He then argues that anyone who wants to find true love must first explore that desert and be lost in it until they find the ultimate love and feel whole with God. This could be taken as one of the many examples that support the claim that mystic love constitutes a great part of Mahwi’s narrative of love. Marouf Khaznadar (2004) agrees with this view and declares that a considerable number of Mahwi’s poems combine the lover and the beloved in a rather sublime love relationship. Mahwi’s verses may superficially appear as though they are written for a mortal being, but the reader could see the fact that Mahwi circumnavigates the domain of mystic love (2004). For instance, in the above excerpt, Mahwi alludes to a verse from the Quran “Peace be upon whoever follows the right guidance (2004)” and asserts that God gives glad tidings to those who traverse and be lost in His love. So, this Quranic verse heralds that those wanderers are on the right path of love and are protected in the Day of Judgement.

In the second couplet, the ship and shipmaster metaphor evokes the image and idea of love defined as “an ever-fixed mark/That looks on tempests and is never shaken (Combellack, 1982)” in Shakespeare’s Sonnet 116. Mahwi argues that anyone who seeks help from God should not be worried about anything else because God’s love has the power to overcome any potential misfortune. Mahwi then brings forth a maritime allusion of the sea, ships, and sailors to announce something

important about love. He states that if passengers aboard of the imaginary ship that is the world depend solely on God and ask his favour, they would not need the favours from the captain or any service provided by the ship. Therefore, travellers of this worldly life are only guided by the love of God and once they forsake that love, they adrift and go astray (Mahwi, 1984). It can be deduced from Mahwi’s words that human beings must not be attached to earthly love and instead constantly strive to reach the true beloved: God (Zand, 2020).

This type of love described in Mahwi’s couplet is very strong and stable like the star in Sonnet 116 that is not affected at all by anything that happens down on earth. However, the difference is that, in his sonnet, Shakespeare describes a type of love that is earthly and between two human beings not a human being and God. The opening line of the sonnet supports this claim because Shakespeare uses the phrase “marriage of true minds” in it to indicate that minds/hearts true to each other in love can always find a way to be together.

Another point worthy of mention with regard to Sonnet 116 and one of Mahwi’s other couplets is that, to Shakespeare, there is indeed a way for true lovers to be together without facing any obstacles. This is the concept of earthly love with the lover and beloved as its main characters. Mahwi captures a rather similar idea and type of love when he addresses his tangible relationship with the woman he loves. However, he announces that he is hopeless about the reality of his relationship and the possibility of getting together with his beloved in marriage. Mahwi is hopeless because his beloved has already revealed to him that their union- unlike as presented in Sonnet 116- is impossible because there are “impediments.” Mahwi recollects the reason as given by his beloved and states that his beloved’s beauty is the elixir of life while his love for her is a heart-burning fire. This vivid imagery underscores the tragic reality that fire and water, representing Mahwi’s love and his beloved’s beauty respectively, cannot share the same space in harmony simultaneously. Mahwi’s couplet (1984, 144) reads:

"Me and you, O! Mahwi," she announced "shall never unite."
Your love: a burning fire; my beauty: the elixir of life.

Mahwi’s poignant sentiment about love and separation suggests a sense of inevitability or resignation about his relationship. It is settled that despite any feelings Mahwi and his beloved may have, circumstances prevent them from being together. Thus, Mahwi captures the bittersweet nature of love when he announces the presence of intense feelings and admiration alongside the painful reality of separation.

Furthermore, Shakespeare’s definition of love in Sonnet 116 is longer than Mahwi’s since it runs through almost the entire sonnet. However, it starts with a negative statement because Shakespeare defines love by explaining what it is not. To him, anything “Which alters when it alteration finds,/Or bends with the remover to remove,” (Combellack, 1982) or falls weak to the trials and tribulation of life cannot be taken as love. This is where he differs from Mahwi for the latter thinks that lovers may “never unite” regardless of how purely the lover holds the beloved in his heart.

Love as an emotion that possesses the ability to confront challenges is also addressed in Shakespeare's Sonnet 29 where the speaker first expresses feelings of despair and alienation but eventually realises that love can uplift the spirit in a way that no hardship or feeling of despair and/or isolation can defeat. At the beginning, the speaker is in an "outcast state" which later "Like to the lark at break of day aris[es]/From sullen earth [and] sings hymns at heaven's gate" (McRae, 1987). The speaker laments his social status and feelings of isolation but ultimately finds solace in the thought of a loved one. This shift from despair to joy suggests a universal experience of love and longing, making the speaker's emotions relatable to many. The sole reason this transformation in the mood of the speaker happens is the remembrance of his beloved's "sweet love" which is so effective it brings such wealth and power to the speaker. He ultimately reaches a point where royals seem to classify inferior to him and he refuses to exchange his status with that of kings [Salem Press, 2014]. This notion of love has also been addressed by Mahwi (1984, 317):

A true traveler to Love shall never fear rises and falls
But climb mountains of sorrow and valleys of anguish.

The couplet suggests that love compels those who pursue it to undertake grueling endeavors such as experiencing deep sorrow or suffering from long quests of love. Yet, for a true seeker of love, the impediments, alterations and/or temptations encountered along the way always fail to be effective. Like Shakespeare, Mahwi also asserts that love can remove barriers and misery and instead provide rank and wisdom i.e. lovers can also ascend from low positions to the level of kings. Zand (2020) argues that when falling in love, the beloved is at the centre of love and is the core of passion, while the lover is on the periphery. The existence of the lover is dependent on the presence of the beloved and concurrently the beloved dictates the value and the status of the lover (2020). For instance, Mahwi remarks that his rival sees him in her quarter and mockingly addresses him "Your Highness!" to which Mahwi replies "even being regarded a beggar at her gate makes me greater than hundreds of Kings" (1987, 125). Thus, to Mahwi, when someone, regardless of how hollow or inconsequential they may seem in the eyes of the society, endures suffering and ultimately dies because of love, that death transforms them and provides them with wisdom surpassing the wisdom of a hundred wise men combined. Mahwi (1984, 125) writes:

At the gate of Love, he who sacrifices his head,
Though seemingly hollow, is wiser than sages by a hundred.

This shows the transformative power of love and how it uplifts and inspires lovers to transcend to higher realms. Garrigues (1887, 257) confirms that love in Shakespeare's poetry also transforms lives and places people "within the stream of wisdom, power (. . .) and [carries them] by it into peace and perfect living — freedom." She also argues that also Sonnet 97 proves the poet himself has entered a new atmosphere and his "turbid, restless, uneasy style is exchanged for one [that

is] clear and sunny" (257). Garrigues states that after the first part of the love sonnets, Shakespeare's experiences with love have enabled the poet to be "calm, serene, cheerful, (. . .) wise with all wisdom of the intellect and heart (257)" and discover his moral side as well. Garrigues adds that love has also provided Shakespeare the courage to "rid himself of the desire for fame" and be happy only to be "obsequious in thy heart" (257). To Garrigues, the true mission of love is growth and Shakespeare has managed to learn that through suffering. Besides, "[i]t has taught him patience too, — with himself as well as with others" (258). Garrigues also argues that once the poet lets love exercise its transformative powers over him,

[h]e can faithfully fulfill all the duties of life and so be enabled, without disturbance from without, to retire into the depths of his own soul, there to hold communion with all that in the outer world is denied him (. . .) he will convert the ideal into the true real; or, rather, he will see that they are interchangeable terms and really have no separate existence (258).

The above lines illustrate that love, no matter how painful it may become, still has much to offer and can turn an ideal world into a real one for lovers. It is also suggested that when this happens, lovers are granted more experience and courage to explore their own souls. Similarly, Mahwi (1984, 171) describes love as a fire that is destined to burn lovers but, as a result, transforms them into real "men":

Who he catches the fire of Love is transformed into a real man
No matter how dark his days, Love brightens them all.

In another instance, Mahwi also thinks that love leads to a profound sense of loneliness that makes lovers avoid everyone and everything. The reason lovers do so, Mahwi writes, is to find solace in solitude because that allows the lovers to contemplate their hearts' desires and gain insight into their emotions. Using hyperbole to express the thought, Mahwi (1984, 18) states that lovers are so immersed in their loneliness they do not even want their own shadow nearby. The reason for this is that the transformation they experience is deep and productive enough that they do not need anyone or anything else to console them:

Hearts ensnared by love escape the sun and moon's glow
He who longs for ultimate desolation shuns own shadow.

Mahwi also reflects on love as a necessity for the heart's fulfillment. He sees it as a profound element that ultimately contributes to the completeness of the heart. He embraces the idea that once an individual experiences the depths of love, the superficial aspects of beauty and earthly attractions matter little to them. When this happens, Mahwi states, lovers find solace and feel complete richness within. Mahwi (1984, 292) contently accepts the weariness of his appearance and trades his young, lively looks for the completeness of his soul in the following couplet:

If my heart carries love, frail and worn my appearance shall be.

When I am whole within, what need have I for beauty?

It is important to recognize that both Shakespeare and Mahwi employ exaggeration when defining love, aiming to enhance the impact and persuasiveness of their views. For instance, back in Sonnet 116, Shakespeare's final couplet displays hyperbole intended to compel readers to accept the definitions of love presented in the preceding lines. He asserts, "If this be error and upon me proved, I never writ, nor no man ever loved" (Shakespeare, 2004). Similarly, Mahwi (1984, 318) exaggerates when he suggests that he struggles to articulate the essence of love but offers, paradoxically, a profound definition within the same couplet. He writes:

What could I say of the troubling boundless ocean of love?
When Al-Futuhat is but a drop of it and Masnavi a bead.

The element of exaggeration in Mahwi's couplet lies in his claim that no matter how diligently he attempts to address love, he remains unable to define it. He supports his claim by saying that even *Al-Futuhat- Revelations* by Muḥyiddīn Muḥammad ibn al-'Arabī (1165-1240) which encompasses 37 volumes and 560 chapters- represents merely a drop of the vast sea of love and *Masnavi*, a Persian poetic work and the great masterpiece of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, consisting of six volumes on Sufism, is only akin to a single bead of water in that immense sea. This hyperbolic expression serves to emphasize the depth and significance of love while also highlighting the limitations inherent in language when grappling with such an intricate emotion (318).

Another example of the definition of love can be found in Shakespeare's Sonnet 71, where the poet portrays love as something that fades and is ultimately forgotten over time and through death. The speaker announces that his passing will bring sorrow to his beloved. To alleviate this pain, he writes a sonnet urging the beloved not to utter his name after he is gone, as doing so would only result in more grief. Shakespeare values his beloved so profoundly that he would rather she forget him than endure the sorrow of his absence. He suggests that love should not endure beyond death, but rather "decay" alongside it, implying that the end of life must also mean the end of love in the heart. This idea is introduced at the beginning of the sestet quoted in (Barnstorff, 113):

O, if (I say) you look upon this verse,
When I (perhaps) compounded am with clay,
Do not so much as my poor name rehearse,
But let your love even with my life decay,

However, Mahwi holds a different belief, positing that the absence of love in one's heart is equal to death. From his perspective, a person is not truly dead unless they stop harbouring love within themselves. In this view, love brings joy and happiness that can persist even after the physical departure

of the lovers involved, effectively transcending death. Mahwi (1984, 83) articulates this sentiment as follows:

The heart lives on, for love it possesses. Fear death not.
Surrender to love's embrace so you find immortal grace.

To Mahwi, it is the divine force of love that breathes life into the heart and grants it immortality. Although to describe love, Mahwi uses the word *dard*, which translates to "affliction" in English, he truly believes that those whose hearts are illuminated by this affliction, i.e. love, do not need to fear death for they will never truly die. Even if physical death claims them, they will be honoured as martyrs, living on forever in the hearts and memories of others. This unique and seemingly ironic standpoint on love encourages lovers to embrace the emotion so fully that it can consume them, because that is the only way love allows them to transcend death. This idea of love as immortalising matches J. Hart's argument regarding the Victorian convention of sonnets because, Hart (2009, 45) writes, "Mortality and immortality are concerns of the Renaissance sonnet." However, this does not mean that Mahwi has consciously followed this convention.

Mahwi (1984, 242) defines love as an *affliction* in another instant when addressing the complexity of the emotion.

A cure for the affliction of love the sages of Europe sought
Their efforts falter and like those of simple folk's, fell short.

Describing love as an "affliction" for which no remedy has been found supports the claim that love is a controversial and complex concept. Mahwi asserts that not only the simple villagers from his homeland struggle to grasp the essence of love, but even the esteemed thinkers of Europe with all their wisdom and eloquence, are equally perplexed and find themselves helpless in the face of love's mysteries.

Mahwi also characterizes love as a pathway to the ultimate truth. He asserts that the hardships, struggles, and suffering encountered in love reward lovers with answers humanity has been seeking since antiquity. Therefore, he believes that the wise should continually seek love and perceive everything through its lenses, for that is the way to enlightenment. Mahwi (1984, 18) writes:

Without love, the heart knows not the flavor of truth;
It is the eyes of love the sage must behold through.

This notion can also be traced in Shakespeare's poetry where love is considered to provide personal growth and self-discovery consequently leading to profound changes in one's life. Sarkar (1998) argues that in Shakespeare's sonnets the immense emotional strength love provides is shown in love's capacity to find a connection between the existence and the essence of human beings serving as a pathway to deeper intellectual reflection.

Another perspective on defining love in Mahwi's poetry emphasizes the importance of suffering and sacrifice when in love. Mahwi asserts that anyone who truly loves must be willing

to face death as the ultimate act of sacrifice, as love is seen as a spiritual journey rather than merely a physical experience. To him, the *head*, which symbolizes *life* and/or the *soul* in this context, must first be relinquished in order for one to enter the realm of love. Mahwi (1984, 29) announces:

You enter not the battlefield of love, unless you sacrifice your
head.

In this journey, it's not your feet but your head that should first
tread.

Mahwi (1984, 79) also defines love as a fire that ignites within the heart and continues to burn intensely. The fire not only consumes the heart but the entire being of the lover. Yet, despite the pain that accompanies it, the lover, once acquainted with the fire's flames, yearns to be burnt by it repeatedly:

Oh Love! you are a fire, fierce and deep within the heart!
Once burnt by you, a longing for your flames will never part.

Here, Mahwi takes a straightforward approach by personifying love and directly addressing it with statements like "you are fire." He suggests that love inevitably leads to the lover's death; however, before this happens, one must navigate through several essential stages and face each one in order before fully surrendering to love. Skipping any of these stages would render the sacrifice incomplete. Mahwi communicates this concept in a couplet where he employs a first-person perspective with the pronoun *I*. This signifies that he has consciously chosen to embrace all that love offers and is fully aware of the pain and sorrow it inflicts. Through this couplet, Mahwi (1984, 219) offers one of the most lucid definitions of love found in his poetry, articulating several facets of the emotion:

Love is but swooning, adulation, grieving, burning to death.
I keenly surrender to each until I finally draw my last breath.

After exploring the various definitions mentioned above, it is evident that, when defining love, the complexity of the emotion poses significant challenges, even for well-regarded poets. Perhaps this explains why Shakespeare refrains from directly defining love, instead choosing to say what it is not in part of Sonnet 116.

CONCLUSION

It is not infrequent to find that the thoughts and emotions expressed in one author's literature closely align with those of another, even if the wording, genre, and/or language is different. Extensive literature on love has been produced yet it has always been a challenge to define this multifaceted human emotion. This research paper underscores the varied definitions/interpretations of love in Shakespeare's selected sonnets and Mahwi's *ghazals*, demonstrating how the poets contribute to the ongoing discourse on love. The poetic works of Shakespeare and Mahwi invite readers to reflect on the nature

of love, its challenges, and its potential for personal and spiritual growth. Employing different metaphors, both poets emphasise the transformative power of love through an interplay between earthly and heavenly love. They suggest that love can elevate individuals to higher emotional and spiritual states, despite the suffering it may entail. However, Mahwi's poetry often incorporates a spiritual dimension, presenting God as the ultimate beloved and framing love as a journey of the soul rather than the body. In this sense, love is not merely a romantic emotion but a spiritual and philosophical concept that transcends mortal limitations. There are a few exceptions to this in Mahwi's poetry. In contrast, Shakespeare portrays love- in the examples provided above, as rather earthly with two human lovers at its core and tangible aspects of romantic relationships. In their definitions of love, the poets also highlight the importance of suffering and sacrifice in love. Mahwi asserts that true love requires a willingness to face death, viewing love as a spiritual journey. In contrast, Shakespeare, while also acknowledging the challenges of love, presents a more optimistic view of love's endurance and constancy. Furthermore, Shakespeare and Mahwi both claim that love can conquer any challenges. However, Mahwi believes that despite the intensity of feelings between two individuals, their union may still be impossible at times. Despite their differences, both Shakespeare and Mahwi share common themes, such as the idea that love transcends physical existence and can lead to a form of immortality through memory and legacy.

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