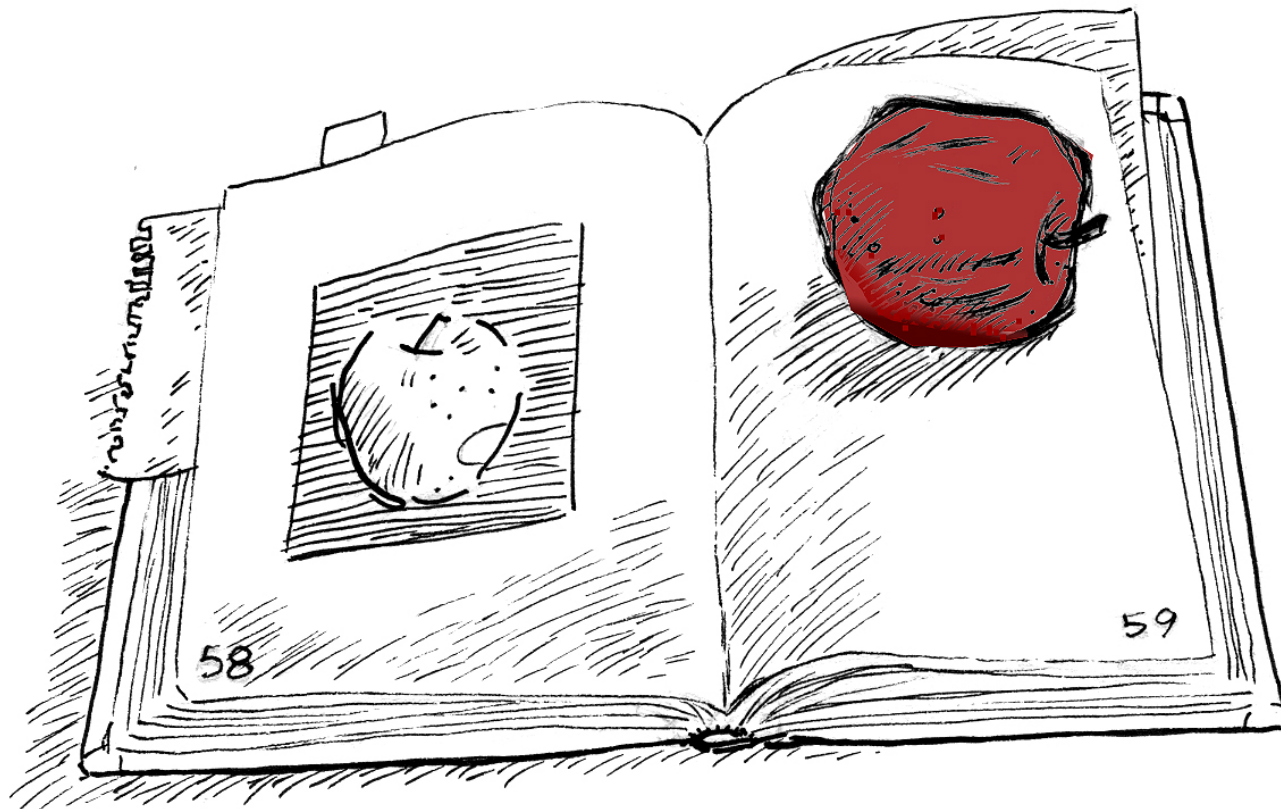


Sonnets



Sonnets

William Shakespeare (1564 – April 23 1616) || *The Sonnets*

Published under controversial circumstances, these poems remain a mystery today.

- These almost exclusively follow the rhyme scheme ABAB, CDCD, EFEF, GG the traditional English sonnet form, using mostly **iambic pentameter**.
- Like Spenser's *Amoretti* and Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*, this collection is another example of why it is important to read the entire sequence as a whole, not lift one or two poems out of the series. There is a story unfolding between all 154 of the poems in full manuscript.
- *The Sonnets* are attributed to William Shakespeare, although it has been suggested other authors may have written these.
- The themes are closely linked to the Petrarchan conceits introduced earlier in the course. However, often times the themes are twisted into something other; often the poems will use experimental forms.

Sonnets

Themes include:

- love
- sex
- beauty
- politics
- (im)mortality

Four characters appear within the poems' plot-structure:

1. The Poet-Speaker
2. The Young Man
3. The Dark Lady
4. Rival Poet

Sonnets

Looking at the entire sequence of 154 poems:

- The first 17 sonnets are written to a young man, urging him to marry and have children, thereby passing down his beauty to the next generation. These are called the **procreation sonnets**. The earliest poems in the collection do not imply a close personal relationship; instead, they recommend the benefits of marriage and children. It was a common practice at the time for tutors to leave gifts for their students upon their completion of studies.
- Sonnets, 18-126, are addressed to a young man expressing the poet's love—critics argue whether this is a spiritual love, a brotherly affection, or a gay relationship—either way they are read, these poems definitely reshape the Petrarchan model of a Beloved.

Sonnets

- Finally, sonnets 127-152 are written to a female figure, the Dark Lady; these poems express a strong, earthy love—these also break the Petrarchan model of an Ideal Beauty.
- The Dark Lady is *not* blonde, nor blue eyed, but instead is a dark haired, olive skinned woman of middle class.
- Historians and critics often try to identify both the Dark Lady and the Young Man— many theories exist of course. Some plausible acrostic chains have been found in select sonnets.

Sonnets

William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616)

1

*thesis:
problem
established
and
discussed
in octave*

From fair /est crea / tures we / desire / increase,

That thereby beauty's rose might never die,

But as the riper should by time decease,

His tender heir might bear his memory;

But thou contracted to thine own bright eyes,

Feed'st thy light's flame with self-substantial fuel,

Making a famine where abundance lies,

Thy self thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel.

*sestet
shifts
in tone*

Thou that art now the world's fresh ornament,

And only herald to the gaudy spring,

Within thine own bud buriest thy content,

And, tender churl, mak'st waste in niggarding.

Pity the world, or else this glutton be,

To eat the world's due, by the grave and thee.

Rhyme scheme || Meter

A 5

B 5

A 5

B 5

C 5

D 5

C 5

D 5

E 5

F 5

E 5

F 5

G 5

G 5

The Sonnets and Narrative Poems: The Complete Non-Dramatic Poetry. Sylvan Barnet, ed.
Signet Classic, Penquin Books, New York, 1989. Print.

Sonnets

Sonnet 1: “From Fairest Ceatures We Desire Increase”

- introductory poem to the Young Man cycle of poems
- rhyme scheme is an example of typical English sonnet:
ABAB/CDCD/EFEF/GG < notice subtle difference between
quatrain 1 and 2: die/memory, eye/lies
- the meter is a perfect iambic pentameter

- ll 1-4: the Poet opens with the concept that all living beings are beautiful due to the spark of life within them— “fair” is equated to the word beauty; in the sense of agricultural practices, the fairest, strongest animals are bred to produce fairer, stronger offspring, thus producing better stock; if the young man dies, his memory (looks) will be transferred to his heirs. The remainder of the poem continues this metaphor in various manners.
- ll 5-8: “contracted” means betrothed: the Young Man sees himself as handsome and thus pre-occupied with himself alone, without a partner; he is devouring himself, wasting his energies and his potentials for having a child— the world will suffer in a famine if there is no offspring and thus he is being cruel, both to himself and the world; this is a subtle suggestion that the Young Man is wasting his time/seed on himself or loose women

Sonnets

- l 8: there exists as well the cultural belief that when one has sex, one's life span is shortened by a day; thus in some Renaissance poems the term "little death" was an allusion to the sexual act; the cruelty stated here therefore alludes to the fact he is shortening the period of his life
- ll 9-12: the Poet states the Young Man is currently an ornament for the world, a product of beauty for others to admire, respect; when the Poet uses the term "gaudy" he does not mean the current idea of crude or garish, rather he means bright and colorful. Line 11 has been suggested as continuing the anti-masturbation theme, "content" referring to energies or seed; the "bud" suggesting a phallic symbol. Remember, the poem's message is an extended metaphor for agriculture, harvest, and consumption. The other point to stress, Shakespeare loved raunchy symbols. Throughout his plays to add a level of ironic comic relief he employed many double entendres to lighten the atmosphere. The use of the phrase "tender churl" comes across as a term of endearment. The Young Man is wasting material which he hordes from others.
- ll 13-14: Therefore, the YM needs to pity the world and not let us suffer. Awkwardly worded: the Poet's point is the YM owes the world to have children and continue the family line.

Sonnets

William Shakespeare

18

*thesis:
problem
established
and
discussed
in octave*

Shall I / compare / thee to / a **sum/mer's** day?
Thou art / more love/ly and / more temp/erate;
Rough winds / do shake / the dar/ling buds / of May,
And **sum/mer's** lease/ hath all / too short / a date;
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;
But thy eternal **summer** shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:
 So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
 So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Rhyme scheme || Meter

A **5**
B **5**
A **5**
B **5**
C **5**
D **5**
C **5**
D **5**
E **5**
F **5**
E **5**
F **5**
G **5**
G **5**

*sestet
shifts
in tone*

The Sonnets and Narrative Poems: The Complete Non-Dramatic Poetry. Sylvan Barnet, ed.
Signet Classic, Penquin Books, New York, 1989. Print.

Sonnets

Sonnet 18: “Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer’s Day?”

- another of the Young Man poems; a frequently quoted piece
- rhyme scheme is an example of typical English sonnet:
ABAB/CDCD/EFEF/GG
- the meter is a perfect iambic pentameter

- ll 1-4: the Poet opens with a questioning of his creative powers, seeking an appropriate metaphor for the Beloved; through the context of the poem he discovers the Young Man is a more positive image than the season itself
- ll 5-8: the Poet brings up the concept of Apollo, the young Greek god of the sun, music, and poetry; he is also seen as a leader of the artistic Muses. The Poet also resolves that all beauty fades over time, either by casual circumstances or by seasonal changes in the year.
- ll 9: establishes the traditional volta, “But thy eternal summer shall not fade”— due to the poem itself preserving a sense of the youth’s beauty.
- ll 13-14: it has been suggested that the closing couplet encourages a sense that the youth is rather vain.

Sonnets

William Shakespeare

29

*thesis:
problem
established
and
discussed
in octave*

When in / disgrace / with For/tune and / men's eyes,

I all / alone / bewEEP / my out/cast state,

And trou/ble deaf / heaven / with my / bootless / cries,

And look / upon / myself / and curse / my fate,

Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,

Featured like him, like him with friends possess'd,

Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,

With what I most enjoy contented least;

*sestet
shifts
in tone;
ending couplet
confirms*

Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,

Haply I think on thee, and then my state,

Like to the lark at break of day arising

From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;

For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings

That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

Rhyme scheme || Meter

A **5**

B **5**

A **5•5**

B **5**

C **5**

D **5**

C **5**

D **5**

E **5•5**

B **5**

E **5•5**

B **5**

F **5**

F **5**

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Sonnets

Sonnet 29: “When in Disgrace with Fortune and Men’s Eyes”

- one of the Young Man poems; most quoted from the full sequence
- the poem is presented as *one* long sentence
- rhyme scheme is an experiment in this case; the opening quatrain establishes same rhymes used in the third quatrain:

ABAB/CDCD/EBEB/FF

- ll 1-2: the Poet announces he is alone in the world, in disgrace
- ll 3-4: like Job, he complains to heaven, cursing his lost reputation
- ll 5-6: because of his bad luck, he wishes for other’s successes, another man’s popularity,
- l 7: another’s creativity, another’s vision
- l 8: at close of octave, the Poet is least satisfied with his chosen career
- ll 9-10: Yet, despite these thoughts of self-hatred, just by thinking of the Young Man, the Poet feels a contentment
- ll 11-12: he forms an analogy comparing himself with a lark: just as a common bird sings to heaven at dawn: Poet (bird) to Young Man (sun)
- ll 13-14: The love of the Young Man is enough to help the poet survive; so much so he wouldn’t change his lot in life

Sonnets

William Shakespeare

126

*thesis:
problem
established
and
discussed
in octave*

O thou, my lovely boy, who in thy power
Dost hold Time's fickle glass, his fickle hour;
Who hast by waning grown, and therein show'st
Thy lovers withering, as thy sweet self grow'st.
If Nature, sovereign mistress over wrack,
As thou goest onwards, still will pluck thee back,
She keeps thee to this purpose, that her skill
May time disgrace and wretched minutes kill.

*shift
in tone*

Yet fear her, O thou minion of her pleasure!
She may detain, but not still keep, her treasure:
Her audit (though delayed) answered must be,
And her quietus is to render thee.

Rhyme scheme || Meter

A 5•5
A 5
B 5
B 5•5
C 5
C 5
D 5
D 5
E 5•5
E 5•5
F 5
F 5

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Sonnets

William Shakespeare

130

*thesis:
problem
established
and
discussed
in octave*

My mist/ress' eyes / are noth/ing like / the sun;
Coral / is far / more red / than her / lips' red;
If snow / be white, / why then / her breasts / are dun;
If hairs / be wires, / black wires / grow on / her head.
I have / seen ros/es da/mask, red / and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.

*sestet
shifts
in tone,
slightly*

I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;
I grant I never saw a goddess go;
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground:

*problem
resolved
in couplet*

And yet, / by heav/en, I / think my / love as /rare
As an/y she /belied / with false / compare.

Rhyme scheme || Meter

A 5
B 5
A 5
B 5
C 5
D 5
C 5
D 5
E 5
F 5
E 5
F 5
G 5•5
G 5

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Sonnets

Sonnet 130: “My Mistress’ Eyes Are Nothing Like The Sun”

- The first line is ironic in the sense that all of the poems addressing the Young Man compare him to the sun, or assert he is as beautiful as Apollo, the Greek sun-god; the Dark Lady is of opposite characterization.
- The full poem explains the contrast of idealism and reality.
- The sonnet ends with an assertion that his beloved is as beautiful as any that has been falsely complimented by other poets.

A slight rewording of the final couplet for modern clarification:

And yet, I swear by heaven, I think my love is rare

As any she (*that is*: any other woman) misrepresented with false compliments.

The word “compare” in this case is being used by the Poet as a noun not a verb.

Sonnets

If you compare the Beloveds in these sonnets against the characterization of Petrarch's Laura, you get a collection of extreme contrasting elements.

Laura:

named

beautiful

blonde/blue eyes

pale, fair skin

artificial idealism / icon

out of reach/goddess

laurel tree

Dark Lady:

unnamed

average

brunette/brown eyes

olive tones

realistic beauty

down to earth/obtainable

mortal

—

Young Man:

unnamed

handsome / pretty

blonde / blue eyes

—

superficial beauty

approachable

false immortal

sun / summer