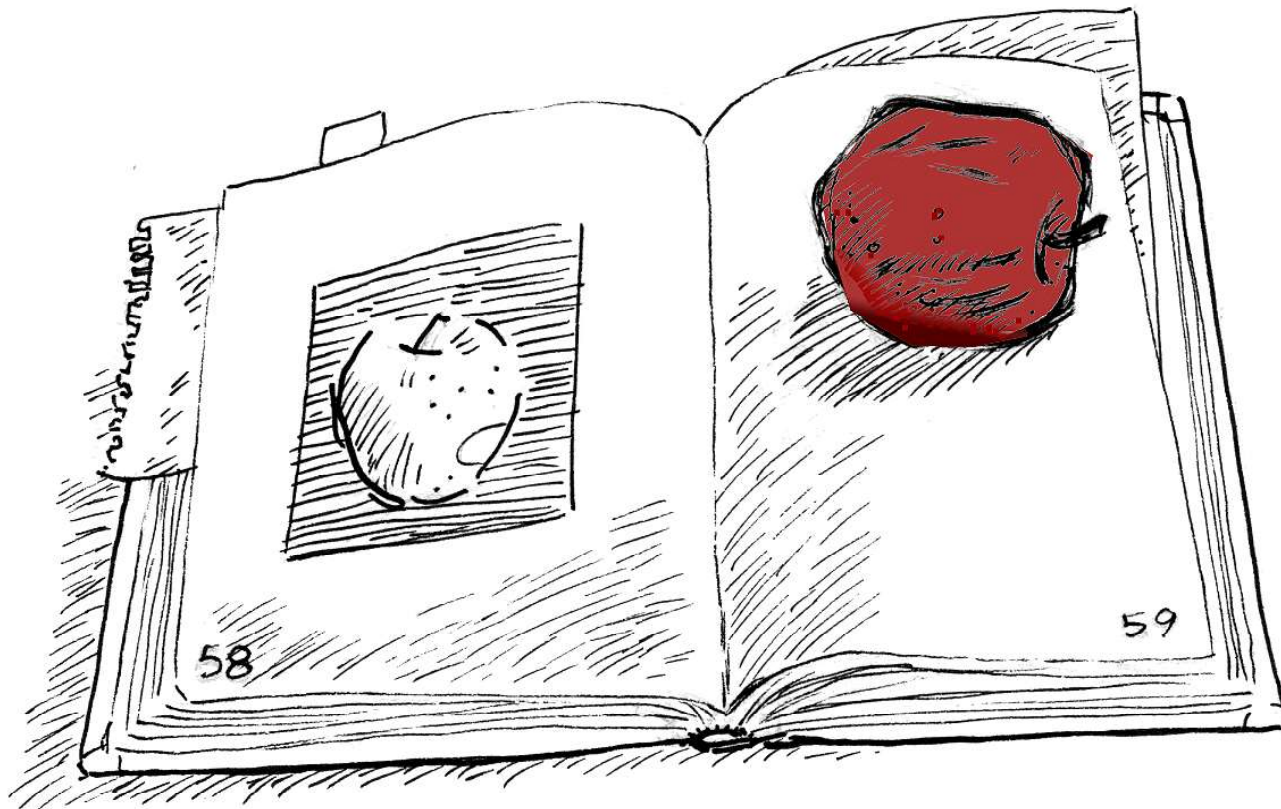


Sonnets



Shakespearean Sonnet Form

***The Sonnets of William Shakespeare* || English Sonnet**

- These poems follow the rhyme scheme ABAB, CDCD, EFEF, GG
- This 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 this collection.
- *The Sonnets* are attributed to William Shakespeare, although lately it has been suggested other authors may have written these.
- Although the themes are closely linked to the Petrarchan concept introduced earlier in the course, often times the poet twists expectations.

Shakespearean Sonnet Form

Themes include:

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

Four characters appear within the poems' plot-structure:

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

Shakespearean Sonnet Form

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. This was a common theme at the time.
- The following sonnets, 18-126, are addressed to a young man expressing the poet's love for him— 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.

Shakespearean Sonnet Form

- 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.
- All of the sonnets follow a format of three quatrains (4 lines) and a final couplet.
- Overall, most of the poems are composed in iambic pentameter, but some experimentation is evident.

Shakespearean Sonnet Form

William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616)

29

*thesis:
problem
established
and
discussed
in octave*

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweepe my outcast state,
And trouble 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 possessed,
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;

*opening of sestet
shifts in tone*

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;

*problem
resolved
in couplet*

For thy sweet love remembered 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
A	5•5
B	5
A	5•5
B	5
G	5
G	5

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

Shakespearean Sonnet Form

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/ABAB/EE

- 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 at 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

Shakespearean Sonnet Form

William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616)

130

		<i>Rhyme scheme</i> <i>Meter</i>
<i>thesis: problem established and discussed in octave</i>	My mist/ress' eyes / are noth/ing like / the sun;	A 5
	Coral / is far / more red / than her / lips' red;	B 5
	If snow / be white, / why then / her breasts / are dun;	A 5
	If hairs / be wires, / black wires / grow on / her head.	B 5
	I have / seen ros/es da/mask, red / and white,	C 5
	But no such roses see I in her cheeks;	D 5
	And in some perfumes is there more delight	C 5
	Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.	D 5
<i>sestet shifts in tone, slightly</i>	I love to hear her speak, yet well I know	E 5
	That music hath a far more pleasing sound;	F 5
	I grant I never saw a goddess go;	E 5
<i>problem resolved in couplet</i>	My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground:	F 5
	And yet, / by heav/en, I / think my / love as /rare	G 5•5
	As an/y she /belied / with false / compare.	G 5

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

Shakespearean Sonnet Form

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 as 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.

Shakespearean Sonnet Form

If you compare the Dark Lady against the characterization of Petrarch's Laura, you get a collection of extreme contrasting elements.

Laura:

beautiful

blonde/blue eyes

pale, fair skin

artificial idealism

icon/out of reach/goddess

Dark Lady:

average

brunette/brown eyes

olive tones

realistic beauty

down to earth/obtainable/mortal