

SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS

Shakespeare's ^{14 line lyrical poem} sonnets were published in 1609, though most were probably written much earlier (perhaps during the 1590's when this form of poem was popular in Elizabeth I court). There are 154 sonnets in all, and together they suggest a "story," although the exact details of that "story" are elusive and mysterious. The first 126 sonnets are addressed mainly to a handsome young man of great promise. The speaker expresses his admiration of the young man, urges him to marry and perpetuate his virtues through children, and warns him of the destructive power of time, age, and moral weakness. Most of the later sonnets are addressed to a lady with dark hair, eyes, and complexion who seems to be involved with the speaker romantically.

Despite speculation, there is no convincing evidence that the "story" of the sonnets relates to the facts of Shakespeare's life. Thus, the sonnets are best understood as a fictional means through which Shakespeare explores universal questions about time and death, about beauty and moral integrity, about love, and about poetry itself. In reading these works, we can also come to familiarize ourselves with the language and style used by Shakespeare in his plays.

A few key terms:

→ pattern of stressed followed by unstressed syllables

* iambic pentameter > Five sets of stressed and unstressed syllables (u/)

↳ means 5 - like a pentagon

* rhyme scheme - patterns of rhyming lines

- indicated by letters in the alphabet - each new sound receives a new letter

* quatrain - stanza that contains 4 lines

* couplet - stanza that contains 2 lines

↳ couple = 2

* inversion - syntactical reverse of the normal order of words

↳ helps to keep iambic pentameter.

* metaphor / simile - comparison of 2 unlike things

↳ use "like" or "as" to make the comparison

Sonnet 130

1	2	3	4	5
u	/	u	/	u
u	/	u	/	u

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun. a > simile
 Coral is far more red than her lips' red. b > imagery
 If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun, a
 If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head. b
 I have seen roses damasked, red and white, c
 But no such roses see I in her cheeks. d > Inversion
 And in some perfumes is there more delight c > But I see no such roses in her cheeks.
 Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks. d
 I love to hear her speak, yet well I know e
 That music hath a far more pleasing sound. f
 I grant I never saw a goddess go, e
 My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground. f
 And yet, by Heaven, I think my love as rare g
 As any she belied with false compare. g

Topic introduced quatrain

Topic explored quatrain

Topic explored quatrain

Topic resolved Couplet

4 lines total

Always the structure of 2 Shakespearean sonnet

paraphrase: word for word interpretation
summarize: overall meaning

Talking about the lack of beauty in mistress

Continues to explore all of her flaws

Poking fun at love poems - he is not going to make false comparisons just to demonstrate love

Sonnet 18

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
 Thou art more lovely and more temperate. } moderate calm
 Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May
 And summer's lease hath all too short a date. Temporary → summer doesn't last long but you do

5
 Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
 And often is his gold complexion dimmed.
 And every fair from fair sometime declines, } beauty ends
 By chance or nature's changing course untrimmed. - The season has to end

10
 But thy eternal summer shall not fade, } your beauty will not end
 Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest,
 Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade } personification
 When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st. } The Poem!

So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
 So long lives this, and this gives life to thee. } She will be kept alive through these lines
 ↳ The poem!

Change in direction

Sonnet 73

That time of year thou may'st in me behold } Inversion = That time of year you may behold in me. } Sombre mood
 When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
 Upon those boughs which shake against the cold.
Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang. } Funeral image

5
 In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
 As after sunset fadeth in the west,
 Which by and by black night doth take away.
Death's second self, that seals up all the rest, } personification - darkness of the world at night

10
 In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire,
 That on the ashes of his youth doth lie
 As the deathbed whereon it must expire, } cremation
 Consumed with that which it was nourished by
 This thou perceivest, which makes thy love more strong. } You should love me while I am here because I won't be here very much longer.
 To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

season of death, dying

5
 Night/sunset

10
 Dying Fire

Analyzing and interpreting the poems: answer the following questions in complete sentences on looseleaf.

- a) In Sonnet 18 what is the relationship in lines 1-8 between the person's loveliness and temperateness and that of a "summer's day"? b) What is the relationship in lines 1-9 between the person's "eternal summer" and the "eternal lines" of the verse? c) In what sense can the speaker make the person eternal through poetry?
- The images in Sonnet 73 are particularly effective a) How do the three principal images introduced in the three quatrains relate to the mood and theme of the poem? b) Each of these images is followed by an additional metaphor. Explain the appropriateness of each metaphor to the principal image of the quatrain and to the poem as a whole.