

SHAKESPEAREAN SONNETS
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Shakespeare Sonnet 19,

TEXT

*Devouring Time, blunt thou the lion's paws,
And make the earth devour her own sweet brood;
Pluck the keen teeth from the fierce tiger's jaws,
And burn the long-lived phoenix in her blood;
Make glad and sorry seasons as thou fleet'st,
And do whate'er thou wilt, swift-footed time,
To the wide world and all her fading sweets;
But I forbid thee one most heinous crime:
O carve not with thy hours my love's fair brow,
Nor draw no lines there with thine antique pen.
Him in thy course untainted do allow
For beauty's pattern to succeeding men.
Yet do thy worst, old Time; despite thy wrong,
My love shall in my verse ever live young.*

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

In sonnet 19 Shakespeare uses animal imagery to describe how time steals everything “Devouring Time even animals age” with the lion’s claws growing blunt with time. “blunt thou the lion’s paws” He says all beautiful things on earth die “earth devour her own sweet brood”. Time also makes tigers toothless “teeth from the fierce tiger’s jaws and the phoenix (A mythological firebird) burn up in its own blood “long-liv’d phoenix, in her blood;” He then tells time he can continue the change of seasons “glad and sorry seasons “and do whatever it wants “do whate’er thou wilt” to age world and its beauty “world and all her fading sweets” But he forbids time to do one thing “I forbid thee” calling it a crime “most heinous crime” He says time should not age “carve not with thy hours” his lover’s beauty “my love’s fair brow” nor create wrinkles on his forehead “draw no lines there” but allow him to retain his beauty “untainted do allow” so future generations of men can admire him “beauty’s pattern to succeeding men”.

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In the couplet he challenges time to do his worst, “do thy worst, old Time” and age his lover even though it is wrong “despite thy wrong” because it will not have any effect as his poetry will immortalize his lover’s youth and beauty “My love shall in my verse ever live young”

Sonnet 53

TEXT

*What is your substance, whereof are you made,
That millions of strange shadows on you tend?
Since everyone hath every one, one shade,
And you, but one, can every shadow lend.
Describe Adonis, and the counterfeit
Is poorly imitated after you.
On Helen’s cheek all art of beauty set,
And you in Grecian tires are painted new.
Speak of the spring and foison of the year;
The one doth shadow of your beauty show,
The other as your bounty doth appear,
And you in every blessèd shape we know.
In all external grace you have some part,
But you like none, none you, for constant heart.*

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Perhaps Shakespeare in sonnet 53, is adopting a platonic love theme praising the youth through symbolization. He compares the youth to a Greek God saying any attempt to copy him would end up a futile imitation. He expresses his love for the youth saying that he is beyond humanity and that he is incomparable to nothing. Shakespeare asks the youth what is so special about him “what is your substance” and what is he made of “whereof are you made”, that he can express a million different forms or reflections. “Millions of strange shadows on you” Everyone has one image every one, “one shade” but the youth he says has something that he can lend to everyone “And you but one, can every shadow lend”. If someone tries to paint Adonis, “Describe Adonis” the Greek God of love, it will turn out an

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imitation image of the youth instead “the counterfeit Is poorly imitated after you;” and if someone tries to paint Helen, “Helen’s cheek all art of beauty” then it will also turn out to be the youth in Grecian clothes. If one speaks about the spring and the harvest, “Speak of the spring” then these are weak imitations of the youth’s beauty “one doth shadow of your beauty show”, and a pale imitation of the youth’s richness “other as your bounty doth appear” and that everyone who sees the youth also sees one of the symbols of beauty you in every blessed shape we know. He says that although in various forms of beauty, “In all external grace” one can see a reflection of the youth, “But you like none,” none you still he is incomparable to any of such things and all because of his firm consistency of heart. “Like None, None You, For Constant Heart”

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Sonnet 55

TEXT

*Not marble nor the gilded monuments
Of princes shall outlive this pow'rful rhyme,
But you shall shine more bright in these contents
Than unswept stone, besmeared with sluttish time.
When wasteful war shall statues overturn,
And broils root out the work of masonry,
Nor Mars his sword, nor war's quick fire, shall burn
The living record of your memory.
'Gainst death and all oblivious enmity
Shall you pace forth; your praise shall still find room
Even in the eyes of all posterity
That wear this world out to the ending doom.
So till the judgment that yourself arise,
You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes.*

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

In sonnet 55, Shakespeare creates Horace's theme who advocated poetry living beyond physical monuments to dead people. In the same way, Shakespeare tells the youth that regardless of how stone sculptures, statues, and monuments ultimately age and become old with time, his poems in which he has praised the fair youth (presumably Mr. W. H. whom all his poems are addressed to) will never grow old and the poetry verses will make him immortal. Shakespeare says that no statues or decorated monuments "nor the gilded monuments" can outlast the powerful poem he is writing. "Shall outlive this powerful rhyme" The fair youth will shine even brighter "you shall shine more bright " in his poems "in these contents" and even more than dirty stone statues that grow old and dull with time "unswept stone besmear'd with sluttish time". When war will destroy the statues and overturn them "wasteful war shall statues overturn", and conflict destroy the mason's art, "roils root out the work of masonry," not even the sword of the Greek God Mars "Mars his sword" or the fire of war can burn "nor war's quick fire" shall burn away the verses of his poems which are the record of the youth's memory "record of your memory." Even against

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death “Gainst death” and his enemies “all-oblivious enmity” will the youth’s name succeed in living on “Shall you pace forth” where praise for him will always find a place “your praise shall still find room” and even in future generations of people “eyes of all posterity” who may survive till the end of humanity. “wear this world out to the ending doom”.

And that the youths name will live on till judgment day when he will rise from the dead (a reference to the Christian concept of judgment day when God will judge both living and dead and give life to the righteous people again). “the judgment that yourself arise” Till this time, the youth is immortalized “You live in this, “in poetry and lives in his lover’s eyes.

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Sonnet 127

TEXT

*In the old age black was not counted fair,
Or if it were, it bore not beauty's name.
But now is black beauty's successive heir,
And beauty slandered with a bastard shame.
For since each hand hath put on nature's pow'r,
Fairing the foul with art's false borrowed face,
Sweet beauty hath no name, no holy bow'r,
But is profaned, if not lives in disgrace.
Therefore my mistress' eyes are raven black,
Her eyes so suited, and they mourners seem
At such who, not born fair, no beauty lack,
Sland'ring creation with a false esteem.
Yet so they mourn, becoming of their woe,
That every tongue says beauty should look so.*

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Shakespeare sonnet 127 is the first of the dark lady sequence of sonnets that implies that he has a mistress with a dark complexion. The poet expresses the theme of beauty saying that natural beauty is now being duplicated by people who are ugly but try to make themselves beautiful through false means. Thus he feels that fairness isn't beautiful anymore and dark complexion is more suited to the example of beauty. He feels that this hypocrisy of people trying to imitate beauty has itself given beauty a bad reputation and now his mistress who mourns at the thought of ugly people mimicking beauty looks extremely beautiful herself to the point that her mourning eyes are being regarded as the very epitome of beauty.

The poet says, In olden days dark complexions were not regarded as attractive "In the old age black was not counted fair, even if they were, they were not regarded as beautiful "Or if it were, it bore not beauty's name" but in the present time black is considered the heir of beauty "But now is black beauty's successive heir," and fair complexion is now regarded badly and illegitimate beauty "And beauty slandered with a bastard shame"

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And since every man has grabbed the power to try and make himself look beautiful “For since each hand hath put on nature’s pow’r,” where today even those who are ugly can look beautiful through artificial means ‘Fairing the foul with art’s false borrowed face,” Beauty cannot be given a name nor does it have a special place “Sweet beauty hath no name, no holy bow’r, but yet now it has been abused and corrupted to live in disgrace “But is profaned, if not lives in disgrace.”

The poet says his mistress eyes are jet black like a raven “Therefore my mistress’ eyes are raven black,” her eyes are suitable for the fashionable trend of the times but they seem to mourn “Her eyes so suited, and they mourners seem” for those who are ugly but try to make themselves beautiful “At such who, not born fair, no beauty lack,” and who abuse the beauty of creation with false and artificial pride who give beauty a bad name “Sland’ring creation with a false esteem.”

Her eyes mourn but in mourning they look beautiful “Yet so they mourn, becoming of their woe,” so much so that everyone wants to look like her feeling that beauty should look like her eyes “That every tongue says beauty should look so”

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Sonnet 130

TEXT

My mistress' eyes are nothing 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 roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some pérfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
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.
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

In Shakespeare sonnet 130, Shakespeare invokes the theme of love but form a concept of parody where the poet expresses his love for the dark woman even though she is not the example of natural beauty. He expresses his weakness for women through a negative comparison saying that in spite of her unorthodox looks he loves her because she is not unlike those women whom other poets are habituated in praising and praising and making false comparisons of beauty.

The poet says that his mistress's eyes are not as bright as the sun "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;" and even a red coral stone is brighter and redder than her lips "Coral is far more red than her lips' red;" and when snow is white colored, her breasts instead are brown "If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;" and if hairs are like wires, then it appears as if black wires are growing on her head "If If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head;"

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He says he has seen roses both red and white “I have seen roses damasked, red and white,” but his mistress’ cheeks do not resemble the rosy hue of a rose “But no such roses see I in her cheeks;” and though some perfumes smell sweeter and stronger “And in some pérfumes is there more delight” than the breath of his mistress which reeks “Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.”

He says that he loves hearing his mistress speak “I love to hear her speak, yet well I know” even though he knows that music is sweeter to listen to “That music hath a far more pleasing sound” and he has never seen a goddess move “I grant I never saw a goddess go;” and all he has seen is his mistress who walks on the ground “My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.”

He says his mistress and love is a rare one “And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare” and she is as special as those women who poets have always made false comparisons of beauty “As any she belied with false compare.”

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Sonnet 144

TEXT

*Two loves I have, of comfort and despair,
Which, like two spirits, do suggest me still;
The better angel is a man right fair,
The worser spirit a woman colored ill.
To win me soon to hell, my female evil
Tempteth my better angel from my side,
And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,
Wooing his purity with her foul pride.
And whether that my angel be turned fiend
Suspect I may, but not directly tell;
But being both from me both to each friend,
I guess one angel in another's hell.
Yet this shall I ne'er know, but live in doubt,
Till my bad angel fire my good one out.*

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Shakespeare sonnet 144 is widely regarded as the ultimate attitude the poet has towards love. The theme here is spiritual love versus physical love where the poet adopts the traditionalist view that women have the power to corrupt love and make it only a physical need and desire or lust which is a vice that corrupts men. He feels that spiritual love can only exist between men and even then too, his mistress who is evil has corrupted the spiritual love between the poet and his friend.

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The poet says he loves two people; one comforts him the other makes him sad” Two loves I have, of comfort and despair” which are like two spirits who give him suggestions “Which, like two spirits, do suggest me still;” that the good angel is a fair man (presumably the fair lord) “The better angel is a man right fair,” and the wicked one is his mistress who is evil “The worser spirit a woman colored ill”.

To win over me so that she can put me in hell “To win me soon to hell, my female evil” the woman tempts his good angel the fair lord away from him “Tempteth my better angel from my side,” so that she can corrupt him and make him evil “And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,” by wooing and tempting his purity with her evil scheming ways of attraction “Wooing his purity with her foul pride.” And if his fair friend the good angel will become bad or not “And whether that my angel be turned fiend” the poet suspects it may be possible although he doesn’t want to say so “Suspect I may, but not directly tell;” But since both are now turned away from him being friends with each other “But being both from me both to each friend,” he presumes one angel is in the other’s hell “I guess one angel in another’s hell.”

Yet he feels he will never know the truth and remain in doubt “Yet this shall I ne’er know, but live in doubt, till the bad angel has no use for the good one and kicks him out “Till my bad angel fire my good one out.”