

Sonnet No. 127: In the old age, black was not counted fair

By: William Shakespeare

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 power,
Fairing the foul with art's false borrowed face,
Sweet beauty hath no name, no holy bower,
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.

Summary: In the first lines of '*Sonnet 127*,' the speaker spends several lines describing the fact that nowadays, women use makeup, and he finds himself irritated by it. It's hard to tell who is naturally beautiful and who is taking nature's power into her own hands and changing her appearance. Luckily for him, his mistress, the Dark Lady, doesn't use cosmetics. She has beautiful dark features that are just now starting to be considered beautiful. She's so striking, in fact, that her eyes seem to be mourning those who aren't naturally beautiful. They also influence those around them into thinking that her sadness about this fact is a new kind of beauty all its own. In the first lines of '*Sonnet 127*,' the speaker begins by addressing the fact that ideas about beauty are changing. He knows that in the past, a dark complexion wasn't considered beautiful. Or, if it was, he adds, no one admitted they thought so. It "bore not beauty's name," meaning no one called it beautiful. But, now, things have changed. "Black" is becoming more popular. It's more legitimate to call something dark beautiful than it is to call something light beautiful.

In the next lines, the speaker asserts his opinion in regard to cosmetics. He's irritated by the fact that any woman can now turn to cosmetics as a way of enhancing their natural appearance. This feels unnatural to him, as if the woman is trying to take "Nature's power" into her own hands. They devalue beauty, he thinks. Then, when one sees something beautiful, it is less impactful than it would've been otherwise. He believes that true beauty, that which nature alone bestowed upon a woman, doesn't exist anymore.

It's not until the ninth line of the poem that the speaker brings in his mistress, the Dark Lady. She has eyes that are "raven black," a great example of a metaphor. Her beauty matches the

current fashion, but she doesn't have to improve herself with makeup. Her dark eyes appear to be in mourning for those who make themselves beautiful with makeup. These people are not naturally beautiful and are the exact demographic that Shakespeare's speaker (or perhaps the Bard himself) is annoyed with.

The poem concludes with the speaker saying that the Dark Lady's beauty is so powerful that she's transforming what others think beauty should be in her sadness.

Theme: Throughout '*Sonnet 127*,' the poet engages with themes of beauty and transformation. He considers the past and the present and decides that the way women are today is less natural and less genuine than they were in the past. Before, it was easy to tell who was beautiful and who wasn't. But, today, women wear make-up and make it much more difficult. They all darken their complexions in a way that resembles the natural beauty of his mistress. The poet also spends lines alluding to how what's considered beautiful can change over time.