

Love and lust in the lyrics (shakespeare's sonnets) assignment

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A sonnet is a poem of fourteen lines that rhyme in a particular pattern.

William Shakespeare's sonnets were the only non-dramatic poetry that he wrote. Shakespeare used sonnets within some of his plays, but his sonnets are best known as a series of one hundred and fifty-four poems. The series of one hundred and fifty-four poems tell a story about a young aristocrat and a mysterious mistress. Many people have analyzed and contemplated about the significance of these "lovers".

After analysis of the content of both the "young man" sonnets and the "dark lady sonnets", it is clear that the poet, Shakespeare, has a great love for the young man and only lusts after his mistress. In order to fully understand the depth of emotion that Shakespeare (hereafter the poet) felt for the young man of his sonnets, one must be familiar with the story line of the first sub-sequence of the sonnets. When analyzing the content and depth of the poet's love, the ambiguous nature of the poet's relationship with the young man should also be considered.

Sonnets 1-126 are addressed to a salient young man: advising him, praising him, and nagging him. The first nineteen sonnets repeat the same message. They encourage the young man to settle down and have children. Because his youthful beauty will not last forever, the poet urges the man to procreate so that the young man's unmatched beauty can live on in his children. Many of the early sonnets sing the approbation of the young man and express the poet's love and emulation for him.

Shakespeare used love in the context of a deep friendship, as read in the first four lines of sonnet 26: Lord of my love, to whom in vassalage Thy merit

hath my duty strongly knit, To thee I send this written ambassage To witness duty, not to show my wit; (see appendix P for whole sonnet) The mistress then seduces the poet's friend and after he contends for her with the young man, the poet gives her up to the lord. In sonnet 42 (see appendix A) the poet confesses his alleged love for his mistress, however, he still lets her run away with his friend.

This action poses two questions to the reader. If he loved her so much, why did he let her go? How deep was his love for the young man, that he let him have his mistress? Examining what type of relationship the poet has with the young man answers both questions. Interpreters on the subject of the poet's sexuality can be divided into two groups. There are the few who find sexual attraction revealed toward the friend. Then there are the many that reassure themselves and readers that such an attraction is far from affirmed.

For the purpose of this essay, a focus on the minority viewpoint will be examined. Sonnet 20 (see appendix B) shows just one example of sexual connotation that is present throughout the sonnets of the first sub-sequence. Sonnet 75 (see appendix C) is particularly dense with sexual innuendo. Here, to begin with, is the third quatrain: Sometime all full with feasting on your sight, And by and by clean starved for a look; Possessing or pursuing no delight Save what is had, or must from you be took. Here Shakespeare makes "delight" allude to sexual pleasure.

Eric Partridge, author of *Shakespeare's Bawdy: a Literary and Psychological Essay and Comprehensive Glossary*, records that "Shakespeare does these elsewhere, a typically including among the citations 36. 8 (see appendix D <https://assignbuster.com/love-and-lust-in-the-lyrics-shakespeares-sonnets-assignment/>)

for whole sonnet) where the 'sweet hours' of 'love's delight' consists of amorous play between the lovers" (Pequigney 38). Having the poet and the young man in a relationship that goes beyond friendship allows a reader of the sonnets to better understand the depth of the poet's love for the young man.

Of all the sonnets expressing the poet's love for the young man, sonnet 116 is the most renowned. According to Freud, love is "the synthesis between the unsensual, heavenly love and sensual, earth love, of which the characteristics are: a lasting cathexis upon the sexual object, so that it may be loved in the passionless intervals between the gratification of erotic desire and its return, the phenomenon of sexual overvaluation, and a narcissistic relation to the subject's ego" (Bloom 59-60).

So the lover, the poet, treats the loved object, the young man, as he would himself. The loved object serves as a substitute for some unattained ideal. In the case of the sonnets, the ideal is love. Being in love allows the poet to have what he wants but could not acquire before and serves as a means of satisfying his self-love. Joseph Pequigney, author of *Such is My Love: A Study of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, agrees with and elaborates on Freud. He writes, "All of these characteristics belong to the poet's love for the friend.

It is a love that pays handsome narcissistic dividends; it is advantageous also for the friend, who is praised for personal qualities that would likely pass unnoticed were the poet not under the spell of his beauty." Pequigney goes on to touch on the antithesis of the poet's love for the young man, his lust for his mistress the "dark lady". Because the mistress offers no self-seeking

advantages, she is “ disesteemed with vice but never virtue ascribed to her” (Pequigney 157).

The poet attacks and questions her physical attractiveness as the affair goes on and she arouses lust that comes and goes. Sonnets 127-154 are addressed to the “ dark lady” (hereafter the mistress). Shakespeare’s relations to his mistress vacillate; sometimes sanguine, tender, teasing, or bitterly angry; yet it is a simpler relation than that with the young man. The poet does not have to justify her, as he had to justify the young man out of deep psychological need. The relation with her is for pleasure, passion, and infatuation.

When the poet first begins to court the mistress, he employs unmistakable salacious humor, exhibits the combination of desire and disrespect that is the hallmark of lust in the second sub-sequence. His lack of jealousy at the fact that she has two other men exhibits his lack of genuine love for his mistress. He does not look to get rid of his mistress’s other lovers; he simply asks that he is not gotten rid of either. As long as she grants him sexual favors as well, he will remain happy. She may be the opposite of a celibate, but he does not mind, so long as he gets his share.

The two have sexual relations, for the first time, in the period following sonnet 128 (see appendix F) and shortly before the opening of sonnet 129 (appendix G). Once desire for the woman has been satisfied, revulsion sets in. In his current frame of mind the poet delivers the monologue of sonnet 129, which anatomizes lust while dramatizing his struggle to come to terms with it. The experience is described as three successive phases: (1) carnal

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desire; (2) consummation; and (3) the aftermath (Ramsey 146). The vicious cycle continually repeats throughout part two.

Immediately after sonnet 129 the poet goes back to gaily, gently teasing his mistress, shown in sonnet 130: 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. (see appendix H for whole sonnet) Later he goes back to anger and bitterness (131, appendix I) to a mixture of teasing and strong emotion (132, appendix J) back to hatred (133, appendix K).

From there, he goes to witty obscenity, with shades of self-contempt and some hostility (135, appendix L) to delicate tenderness (143, appendix M) and back to anger (144, appendix N), to start the cycle all over again.

Shakespeare ends the poems to the dark lady savagely and appropriately: For I have sworn thee fair: More perjured eye, To swear against the truth so foul a lie. (see appendix O for whole sonnet) The fury is the fury from his conscious wavering between supposed love and lust. It is not a pleasant way to end 154 love poems, but it is a great way.

The story of Shakespeare's sonnets clearly shows, through the content of the sonnets, how deeply he feels for his young friend and how he merely lusts after his mistress. The sacrifice that the poet made for the young man, by giving up his mistress to the man he loved, proves his great love for him. The poet's reaction to the consummation of the relationship between his mistress and him characterizes his animal lust for her. Shakespeare justifies the

young man; he blames the dark lady; he struggles with himself, blames himself, and then tries to justify himself to no avail.