

'shall i compare thee'
and 'let me not' by
william shakespeare
and 'on his blindn...



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Sonnets are fourteen-line poems. They originated in 15th century Italy and first became popular in England in the 16th century. Many English poets, including Milton, Keats, Wordsworth, Hopkins and Wilfred Owen, have used the form since the early Elizabethan period. Sonnets are so popular purely because the briefness of them means that their message has to be put across in a compact way. This makes the impact of the message so much more powerful. A sonnet can take one of two forms.

One is Petrarchan, named after Petrarch, one of the Italian originators of the form in the late medieval period. Its fourteen-line structure, called an iambic pentameter, is split into two unequal sections. The first section, the octave, consists of eight lines and the second section, the sestet, consists of six. Sometimes, when printed, there is a break between the octave and the sestet. This is called the volta. Petrarchan sonnets often follow the rhyme scheme of ABBA, ABBA: CDE, CDE although, from time to time, the sestet follows a rhyme scheme of CD, CD, CD.

The other form is Shakespearian. It is named after William Shakespeare who extensively used the sonnet form and wrote a one-hundred-and-fifty-four poem cycle. The form's iambic pentameter is split into quatrains. These are three sections consisting of four lines. The sonnet is ended by a rhyming couplet. The rhyme scheme is strictly ABAB, CDCD, EFEF, GG.

The sonnet ' Shall I Compare Thee' is, unsurprisingly, in the Shakespearian form and features the theme of love. It is one of the most famous pieces of verse in English literature and many phrases from the sonnet have passed into the English language. Several novelists, such as John Mortimer and H. E.

Bates, have used it when requiring titles for their work. The first two lines, particularly, are often quoted.

It is unclear whom Shakespeare's sonnets were intended for. Many people believe the sonnets were dedicated to a woman, possibly his wife. However, others believe them to be addressed to a man. In 1609, the printer Thomas Thorpe published Shakespeare's first collection. It was dedicated to a ' Mr W. H.' Some people believe ' Mr W. H.' could have been William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, although other people have been suggested. To avoid confusion, I will simply refer to Shakespeare's subject as his loved one. ' Shall I Compare Thee' is ultimately about Shakespeare's loved one. In the first line he compares his loved one's physical beauty to a summers day.

' Shall I compare thee to a Summers day?

Thou art more lovely and more temperate.'

However, for the next seven lines, Shakespeare proceeds to weaken this likening. He states that the comparison is not as appropriate as it first seemed, as nature is subject to time and so will fade. In the third quatrain he claims that his loved one's beauty shall not fade but the beauty of everything else will.

' But thy eternal Sommer shall not fade.'

This confuses the reader as everything, inevitably, diminishes but Shakespeare is adamant that his loved one shall not. He clarifies this in the rhyming couplet. He states that as long as people read the sonnet, it will preserve his loved ones beauty.

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' So long as men can breath or eyes can see,

So long lives this, an this gives life to thee.'

Shakespeare manoeuvred himself out of a corner with a witty remark.

The language in ' Shall I Compare Thee' is quite varied. There are several occasions of personification and metaphor. Shakespeare used personification quite effectively. One such example

' And often is his gold complexion dim'd'

is satisfying for the reader as it is an effective and different way of saying ' the clouds hide the sun'. Shakespeare also used metaphors and with great effect. He calls the sun

' the eye of heaven'

and the reader knows exactly what he means.

' Let Me Not' is also Shakespearian and features the same theme as ' Shall I Compare Thee', love. ' Let Me Not is another famous sonnet by Shakespeare and, again, it is unknown who it was intended for. Whoever it was, Shakespeare truly loved them. The sonnet is about the ever-lasting love between two people and how nothing can ever stand in their way.

Shakespeare spends the first quatrain telling us about his love and how obstacles will not impede it.

' Let me not to the marriage of true mindes

Admit impediments,'

He then moves on and in the second quatrain he uses navigational imagery, something that would have appealed to the Elizabethans, to portray love as the star which leads people through.

' It is the star to every wandring barke'

He states that, since the height and worth of a star cannot truly be known, neither can the signs or power of love.

' Whose worths unknowne, although his highth be taken.'

In the third quatrain Shakespeare personifies love and reminds people of love's humanity and relationship to us. Shakespeare tells the reader that love conquers time and death and will never change or fade, therefore, it will last forever. The finale, the rhyming couplet, challenges the reader to say he is wrong. He is convinced he has written the truth and claims that, if anyone can prove he is wrong, everything is a lie, he never wrote anything and nobody ever loved anyone.

' If this be error and upon me proved

I never writ, nor no man ever loved.'

This is obviously an absurd statement but one that people know is true.

The language in ' Let Me Not' is highly effective and extremely varied.

Shakespeare uses personification, hyperbole, repetition and imagery all to good use. An example of personification is

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' Lov's not Times foole'

Shakespeare was insinuating that love would not be taken for a fool by time. Hyperbole has been very effectively applied to the sonnet. Its aim is to convince the reader, or possibly convince someone dearer to him, that his love is permanent and will never fade. Repetition is used at the end of the first quatrain.

' Which alters when it alteration findes,

Or bends with the remover to remove'

It was used to emphasise the words from the first two lines. Imagery is used in the second quatrain to portray love as the star that leads wandering ships.

' It is the star to every wandring barke,'

This is greatly effective and would have been pleasing to the Elizabethan audience who loved to explore the unknown seas and continents.

Shakespeare also used ' not' in the first two lines, in an unorthodox fashion.

' Let me not to the marriage of true mindes,

Admit impediments, love is not love'

The idea was that, by using the negative, the positive is emphasised and people are convinced of the truth of the words.

' On His Blindness' is a Petrarchan sonnet and discusses the resentment Milton feels at becoming blind at a young age but, being a religious man, he

bears it and continues to write in God's name. Milton began losing his sight in his thirties and felt that he could not continue to write. The sonnet expresses his thoughts of this. This sonnet is another famous sonnet, with several phrases adapting into the English language.

The octave tells us how half of Milton's days are going to be spent in a 'dark world and wide' but he feels it is 'death to hide' his talent from God and should use it still. He is concerned that if he fails to use his talent, a God-given gift, he will have to face the punishment of hell when he dies.

However, Milton is resentful that God expects him to write when he can see nothing. The sestet starts with 'but' clearly suggesting an opposing thought is going to be mentioned. Having stated his resentment, Milton then states Patience's response. He believes that God wants him to accept his misfortune patiently, rather than use his talent in a frantic fashion. The last few lines of this sonnet are the most famous part. They tell how, while some people are required to show lively physical movement in God's service, others can be soberly quiet and still.

There are a few religious references in the sonnet. The first is

'Ere half my days'

Milton obviously has in mind that the expected life span is 'three score years and ten', the biblical norm, and, since he started to lose his sight in his thirties, he feels he has lost half his days. Another reference is the mention of talents. In the New Testament, Matthew Ch. 25 v. 14-30, the parable tells how a master, departing on a long journey, leaves his servants behind. He gives five talents (Roman coinage) to the first one, two to the second and <https://assignbuster.com/shall-i-compare-thee-and-let-me-not-by-william-shakespeare-and-on-his-blindness-by-john-milton-essay-sample/>

one to the last. The first two servants use their talents well and manage to double their original number of talents. The last servant, however, buried his in the earth to keep it safe and was unable to give his master more than the original talent. This servant was cast into outer darkness. Milton obviously believed that to not use his talent, which is now used more generally, would result in him being cast into outer darkness.

The language in ' On His Blindness' is simple compared to ' Let Me Not' and ' Shall I Compare Thee'. Milton used personification alone. He used personification when he mentioned patience. He wrote as if he was giving patience's opinion.

' but Patience to prevent

That murmur, soon replies'

The sonnets all conform to their forms. ' Let Me Not' and ' Shall I Compare Thee' to the Shakespearian and ' On His Blindness' to the Petrarchan. Whereas the first two sonnets are about love, Milton's is about his resentment.

' Shall I Compare Thee' is a beautiful sonnet about Shakespeare's love for a person. He believes that they will have their beauty forever whereas others will fade away.

' Let Me Not' is slightly different. Shakespeare is trying to convince either the reader or his loved one that love is true and cannot be changed no matter what obstacles it comes against.

' On His Blindness' is completely different to the Shakespearian sonnets. It explains Milton's resentment towards the fact that he was made blind in his thirties.