The Sonnets Study Guide

The Sonnets by William Shakespeare

BOOKRAGS

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Section I

Section I Summary

Sonnet 1: Shakespeare uses vivid imagery from nature to express his yearnings and frustrations that he cannot seem to connect emotionally with the object of his desire. He compares her to a spring bud locked inside itself, all its beauty and splendor not quite accessible on the surface but nevertheless very real.

Sonnet 2: Taking a somewhat different tack, the poet tells his beloved that she shouldn't wait too long to marry and have his child.

Sonnet 3: The poet extends his argument for marriage and motherhood by telling his beloved that her mother's image is in her ("thou art thy mother's glass"), and she has a duty to create another being as beautiful as herself. Although she is beautiful the poet says, she can't use that excuse for not having a child.

Sonnet 4: Shakespeare argues his case using a financial analogy: the beautiful woman he loves owes her gifts to nature, as a loan that must be repaid before she dies by giving herself to someone else. Otherwise she is a self-deluded "profitless userer" who wastes her gifts when she dies alone.

Sonnet 5: The inevitable march of time, the changing of the seasons, life and death, and the mutability of nature combine in this sonnet. The poet dwells on how the seasons change living organisms such as trees and flowers, but do not necessarily kill them.

Sonnet 6: Shakespeare hopes to compound his lady's interest by further employing his investment analogy. If beauty is a treasure, then hoarding it is foolish when it can be increased by having children, much like earning money in a savings account.

Sonnet 7: Once more, Shakespeare compares his lady to the rising sun that draws all attention with its brilliance and carries that attention into mid-day, which then fades away in the afternoon and evening as the run sets. So it is with his lady who, in the apogee of her beauty, will die unregarded without a son.

Sonnet 8: If his lady is irritated by "well-tuned sounds by unions married," it is because those voices and sounds gently remind her that by being single she'll forever be incapable of joining two songs into one. The richness of her song will never be deepened with the harmony of the other voices of husband and child.

Section I Analysis

Sonnet 1: The woman of his desire seems too self-sufficient, too unavailable even as spring sends out a few tentative tendrils. She thus makes "a famine where abundance lies," and he pleads with her to open up to him as "beauty's rose" and enable both poet

and woman to celebrate love in the springtime. "From fairest creatures we desire increase, that thereby beauty's rose might never die," the first two lines of this sonnet hinge on the meaning of "increase." In this case, the word is used in both its senses: "increase" meaning children or progeny, and "increase" meaning more exposure or contact with. His lady's lack of availability is signaled in the line: "Within thine own bud buriest thy content." The lady's scarcity makes him feel like a glutton, the poet says, in order to preserve her beauty and thus defeat death.

Sonnet 2:How else but by having a child, the poet asks his beloved, can she escape the inevitable process of getting old and dying? When asked where her beauty and youth have gone, she will be able to point to her beautiful child as "the treasure of thy lusty days," and realize that as her blood runs cold with age it still runs warmly through the veins of her child. Shakespeare plays on his lover's natural fear of growing older and barren of child in a time when large numbers of offspring were viewed as a sign of prosperity and a hedge against the odds of early death from disease or injury.

Sonnet 3: It would be a tribute to herself and to her mother to have a child, but if she dies single and unremembered, her image dies with her, Shakespeare says. He thus appeals both to his lady's sense of vanity and fear of death in this sonnet that praises the virtues of having a child. Even though she is fair, she has no right to "disdain the tillage of thy husbandry," or to refuse conception and childbirth. When she looks in the mirror and sees wrinkles, the poet says, his beloved will realize there is no way she can erase them—except by passing along her life.

Sonnet 4: The object of his affections should look upon having a child as her obligation to nature, in the same way that someone who borrows money must pay it back, the poet says. He refers to her as "beauteous niggard," meaning someone who hoards her beauty and refuses to pass it along by having children. He also calls her a "profitless userer" for the same reason. Wealth is only advantageous when it is used, Shakespeare says, adding that keeping "traffic with thyself alone" means she will be put into a solitary grave when she dies, robbing the world of her beauty and thus impoverishing everyone.

Sonnet 5: The naturalistic imagery of this poem is effective in conveying beautifully the message of living plants that survive through the seasons by adapting and having offspring. The rains of summer survive as snow and ice in the winter to nurture trees and plants, "a liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass." The beautiful abundance of summer is lead by time to "hideous winter" with its entombing snows and barren branches. But the life in those plants, long retreated inside the sap, holds itself in readiness for new life.

Sonnet 6: The poem appeals to the poet's lover to not let winter (old age) take away her beauty until her essence is distilled in her offspring. Evidently written to a woman of means, this sonnet implores his beloved to invest wisely by having children: "Ten times thyself were happier than thou art/If ten of thine ten times refigured thee." In this sonnet, another aspect of Shakespeare's protean genius is revealed in his ability to seize upon various metaphors such as the natural world, finance, and even simple human vanity to

exploit his basic theme of romance, marriage, and child bearing. If Shakespeare were a salesman, he would undoubtedly have an inexhaustible reservoir of imagination and arguments with which to "pitch" his audience.

Sonnet 7: Shakespeare creates a somewhat exotic atmosphere for this sonnet, evoking the religions of the east that draw the faithful to witness and praise the rising of the sun, and to appreciate its light and warmth throughout the day, then finally cast their eyes elsewhere at the end of day with solemn praise. But like the brilliant passage of the sun, life has its youth, midday, and evening; the poet tells his beloved, "outgoing in thy noon," that unless she begets a child she will fade out of sight, not even noticed. The poem is obviously another attempt by the lover to alarm his lady into marriage and child-bearing because of the nearly universal awareness of women that their fertile years are limited.

Sonnet 8: Music is the metaphor that Shakespeare uses to express again, in another context, his desire to have a child with his beloved. If his lady hears sadness in music that is sweet, or hears with pleasure music that is annoying, it is because she is out of tune with nature and her purpose in life, according to the poet. Shakespeare reveals a thorough knowledge of music and how it affects the emotions when he describes "how one string, sweet husband to another, strikes each in each by mutual ordering." As a description of harmonics in physics, of harmony in music, or of the balance of vitality in a family, this image works very well to convey his meaning and demonstrates once again Shakespeare's versatility.

Section 2

Section 2 Summary

Sonnet 9: Shakespeare tells his love that she can't love anyone else because she obviously has no regard for herself . He accuses her of being "possessed with murd'rous hate" for herself, and asks that she allow love to replace the hate and to have his child.

Sonnet 10: The poet fairly upbraids his lady, telling her she should realize that she can't love anyone else because she obviously has no regard for herself . He accuses her of being "possessed with murd'rous hate" for herself.

Sonnet 11: Shakespeare tells his love that she can escape age and extinction by having a child and passing her beauty and gifts on to her offspring. The poet observes that if everyone were like his lady, the human race would soon perish.

Sonnet 12: The passage of time, the day that slips into "hideous night," dark hair frosted with white, all remind the poet how quickly time passes. He urges her not to go "among the wastes of time" and to escape the cycle of birth, decay, and death by having his child.

Sonnet 13: Who would let a beautiful house fall into disrepair, the poet asks, when some diligent effort could preserve it as a refuge against the cold gusts of winter? Expanding the homestead analogy, Shakespeare asks his lady to endow her child with some of the beauty she "hold(s) in lease."

Sonnet 14: The poet tells his love that he has knowledge derived from looking into her eyes, not from gazing at stars, although "methinks I have astronomy." The knowledge he gains from her eyes seems a confluence of truth and beauty, and tells him that if she dies childless it will be the end of both truth and beauty.

Sonnet 15: Shakespeare observes how the heavens and earth combine to provide a nurturing environment for plants, flowers, and people—all of which rise from seeds to reach their zenith, then begin the process of decay and return to earth. The poet feels at war with time for the love of his lady.

Sonnet 16: The poet calls upon his beloved to defeat time by having his child, by creating something of lasting beauty that will carry her essence forward to future generations. By giving herself away in the face of time and decay, she will live longer than any of her drawings or paintings, Shakespeare says.

Section 2 Analysis

Sonnet 9: Pushing his theme further still, Shakespeare wonders why his lover maintains a single life, asking her whether it is out of compassion for other widows or simple selfishness. Widows who have children, he says, can look at their offspring and experience a bit of their deceased husbands again. But women who die childless not only die alone—having wasted their beauty and talents—but also are quickly forgotten by the world. To a feminist of today, the attitudes toward women expressed in this sonnet would undoubtedly be offensive. The idea that a woman is simply a reproductive asset and not a complete person in her own right may not have been universal even in Shakespeare's world, although it is clear that he uses every argument—including fear and shame—to coax his beloved into having his child.

Sonnet 10: "Shall hate be fairer lodged than gentle love?" Shakespeare asks his lady as he pleads with her for a relationship different than any she has with others. He asks her to change her heart toward him, that he may change his mind about her. By this point, the poet's unrelenting arguments for a child begin to sound a little desperate and he comes close in this sonnet to scorning her for not having his child. His sense of desperation is probably understandable, since the reader assumes the two are not married and thus childbirth would not be an expected outcome of their relationship. The difference in English society's mores during Shakespeare's time and the post-Puritan mores of both the British and American middle classes is nowhere more apparent than in this series of poems that implore his lover to bear his child, rather than ask for her hand in marriage.

Sonnet 11: If everyone had the same indifference as his lover toward having children, the human world would cease to exist in threescore (sixty) years, according to the poet. Once again, Shakespeare tells her in sexist terms that the gifts she has been given by nature were bestowed so she could pass them onto the next generation: "She [nature] carved thee for her seal, and meant thereby/Thou should'st print more, not let that copy die." Let those who are ugly, ungraceful and ill-equipped for life die barren, but those such as his lady who are favored by nature have an obligation to keep those genes alive, Shakespeare says.

Sonnet 12: Shakespeare throws a disparate group of images together in this sonnet to convey a sense of time passing, missed opportunities, and irreversible fate to speak with urgency to his lady. These include a clock racing through the hours, the end of each day in "hideous night," the sweet violet fading past its prime, black curls now gray, trees barren of leaves, and summer's green "all girded up in sheaves." The only way to escape this cyclical fate is to "breed," he tells his lover, "since sweets and beauties do themselves forsake/And die as fast as they see others grow."

Sonnet 13: Shakespeare tells his mistress that she should prepare herself for the ravages of age like the responsible property owner prepares his home for winter. She is like a person who holds a lease on a beautiful home, although in her case it's her own beauty that she holds in tenancy. "Who lets so fair a house fall to decay/Against the

stormy gusts of winter's day?" he asks. In lines that could be considered chauvinist by today's reader, but were probably not so in Shakespeare's time, he asks his beloved to have a son so their son can tell the world that he had a father.

Sonnet 14: Shakespeare has no powers of either prediction or prognostication, but is well-informed that unless his lover procreates, her truth and beauty will be lost and she will be forgotten. This verse brings to mind the 1950s rock 'n roll lyrics: "Don't know much about history, don't know much biology, but I do know if you loved me, what a wonderful world it would be." If those lyrics did in fact derive from the sonnets, they would not be unique in our popular culture since the melody for "When A Man Loves A Woman" is borrowed from Johann Sebastian Bach. One can legitimately wonder, given Shakespeare's prolific production of sonnets, whether that particular verse form was an icon in the pop culture of his era.

Sonnet 15: The only way his beloved can keep her life is by giving it away—to him and to their child—Shakespeare says. Many other young women of child-bearing age, if they had her beauty and charms, would happily have children, because in so doing they bring forth new life that erases the lines of age. This sonnet employs the analogy of art to make its point.

Sonnet 16: This sonnet employs the analogy of art to make its point about new and drawings in the final couplet: "To give away yourself keeps yourself still/And you must live, drawn by your own sweet skill." Perhaps this poem suggested to Oscar Wilde the theme of immortal art versus mortal human life, turned on its head in "The Picture of Dorian Gray," in which a portrait ages along with its rakish owner and subject. Shakespeare tells his beloved in this poem that even a perfect portrait can not preserve her essence in the same way as having a child.

Section 3

Section 3 Summary

Sonnet 17 : The poet says no one would believe his verse about her beauty unless her child could bear witness to the beauty of her eyes and her many graces. The poet offers immortality, both in his verses and through having his child.

Sonnet 18: Shakespeare's compares his love to a summer's day, but says unlike the fair summer day that will only last twenty-four hours, she will be immortalized in his lines of poetry.

Sonnet 19: The sonneteer challenges time to ravage his beloved, as is inevitable, but says it doesn't matter because his love in his verse will "ever live long."

Sonnet 20: The poet says "the master mistress of my passion" has the face of a woman, with a woman's gentle heart but without a woman's "shifting change" or "false fashion." Shakespeare says his beloved was first created as a woman but nature "fell a-doting" as the work was finished.

Sonnet 21 : Unlike other poets who strain for comparisons to describe their love, Shakespeare says she's most like gold candles suspended in heaven. But his love is not so ethereal, he says, that he doesn't want to possess her on earth.

Sonnet 22 : Because love for his lady keeps her eternally young in his heart, the poet can't believe that he is getting older. Because his love was conceived in youth, how can he be older than his love, Shakespeare asks.

Sonnet 23: Like an actor who forgets his lines onstage, Shakespeare confesses that he's often tongue-tied when around his love. He asks her to look into his books for his silent voice that celebrates her beauty and his passion.

Sonnet 24: The poet's heart is a canvas where his love has etched an image of his lady that captures her beauty and brightness, but not her heart. Shakespeare's poem is a lament that he does not know her feelings for him.

Sonnet 25: Great heroes and warriors may enjoy temporary fame, the poet says, but if they inevitably fail, their names are soon forgotten. But true happiness for him lies in loving and being loved.

Section 3 Analysis

Sonnet 17: Shakespeare asks his lady to do both of them a favor by having his child: the survival of her in her offspring would help to ensure the immortality of his verse by demonstrating that he was not simply a poet carried away by exaggeration, and an heir

would preserve her own genes into future generations. In effect, the poet appeals to her vanity by promising her a kind of eternal life. In this series of poems urging her to have his child, Shakespeare has appealed to her sense of aesthetics, her pride, greed, ambition, and personal vanity. He obviously knows this woman as well as any of the characters he created in his numerous dramatic works.

Sonnet 18: Searching about for the best way to describe his love, the poet ponders a comparison with a summer day, but rejects it because she is "more lovely and more temperate." Because May can be a climatologically violent month and because summer only lasts a while, Shakespeare notes, that would not be an adequate comparison. Sometimes the sun shines too brilliantly, so that its golden complexion is dimmed, and that also would not be an apt comparison. Suggesting that his love is above, or outside nature, Shakespeare says she will outshine and outlive nature in her own eternal summer. And, the poet says, his lines of verse will help her also to become immortal.

Sonnet 19: Shakespeare, in effect, gives permission to "swift-footed time" to blunt the lion's paws, take the tiger's teeth, ravage the earth, and create happy and sad seasons, but to leave his love untouched. The first reference to a possible homosexual love interest appears in Sonnet 19, as the poet forbids time "one most heinous" crime: that of turning his love ugly with age: "O, carve not with thy hours my love's fair brow/Him in thy course untainted do allow/For beauty's pattern to succeeding men." Whether this is a homoerotic love poem, or one of mere admiration, remains open to question and interpretation, although the clear indication it is the former.

Sonnet 20: This poem is slyly addressed to a man with feminine traits who the writer loves. "Master mistress" is an ambivalent phrase that makes no sense outside the context of a bisexual relationship. Shakespeare further delineates the picture of his lover as someone with a woman's temperament but without a woman's fickleness. His love is "a man in hue all hues in his controlling," and observes that "for a woman wert thou first created," but by the addition of "one thing" defeated his attempt to consummate his love. The concluding couplet seems quite clear: "But since she [nature] pricked thee out for women's pleasure/Mine be thy love, and thy love's use their treasure." By inserting what seem clearly to be homoerotic love poems into a collection of heterosexual sonnets, and by using slightly ambiguous language and imagery, Shakespeare appears to have attempted to disguise their intended audience. But the implication of bisexuality is obvious and unavoidable.

Sonnet 21 : Shakespeare says he doesn't get inspiration from "painted beauty," as in cheesy poems that use overblown language to express fake emotions, "making a couplement of proud compare with sun and moon, with earth and sea's rich gems." He asks to be as true in his verse as in his loving, and when he does his work will be "as fair as any mother's child." Any further embellishment of true feelings or true language is dangerously close to "hearsay," and is nothing that he wants to get close to, either in life or in art.

Sonnet 22: Even though his mirror reveals that he is getting older, his love remains as fresh and new as the day he met his love, Shakespeare says. His love lives in her heart,

as her does in his, according to the poet. But that heart is as soft and tender as a baby, "bearing thy heart, which I will keep so chary as tender nurse her babe from faring ill." But he warns her not to presume on her heart—not to assume she will be fine—when his heart dies because she's given him her heart, "not to give back again." One of the noticeable features of Shakespeare's sonnets is the frequent use of the word "heart" in exactly the same manner and with the same meaning as today. Before the advent of modern medicine, the ancients believed the heart to be the seat of the soul and emotions. Although modern psychiatrists would argue that the brain is, in fact, the seat of human emotions, the single word "heart" conveys with full force its original sense.

Sonnet 23 : The poet is so overcome with passion he fears that he may lose confidence, forget to say what is most important, or run out of energy just when he needs it most. As if in a swoon, Shakespeare tells his beloved to look for the real expression of his feelings in his books, the eloquence and "dumb presagers of my speaking breast." In his poetry, more than in his spoken words, Shakespeare says his emotions are best expressed, "more than that tongue that more hath more expressed." He implores his love to "learn to read what silent love hath writ" and to hear with the eyes of someone in love. These are the thoughts and words of a true writer, whose eloquence is on the page and not so much directly from his mouth. While many glib speakers may utter soothing blandishments devoid of sincerity, Shakespeare says his truth is in his written word.

Sonnet 24: Shakespeare compares himself to a portrait painter, one who must use his skills of perspective and accurate vision to render her likeness in sonnet form. But he quickly adds that no matter how well he portrays her exterior, he cannot know her heart. This poem expresses both an artist's dilemma and a very human one, at the same time. To render someone's likeness in a startlingly realistic fashion, the artist must know the person—their moods, beliefs, personality—so that the painted image not only resembles the subject but evokes a sense of who that person is. Existentially, the poem posits the dilemma all humans have, of achieving and maintaining intimacy with another because of the complexity of personality with its defense mechanisms, conscious and unconscious deceptions, and shifting tastes and preferences. Like the subject, Shakespeare's poem is deceptively simple on the surface but hints at a deeper, but unknown, reality.

Sonnet 25: The theme of this poem could be identified in the Latin phrase, "Sic transit gloria," or "Thus passes fame." Shakespeare observes that the great generals and "those in favor with their stars of public honor and proud titles" always find their reputations will vanish with the slightest setback, failure or misfortune, and will usually be forgotten by history anyway. But, he says, he is secure in the love he shares that he "may not remove, nor be removed." There is a tragic note in this tender and self-assured poem, in that Shakespeare later finds his love fickle and his heart broken. "Sic transit amor," may be a more appropriate theme after all.

Section 4

Section 4 Summary

Sonnet 26: The poet addresses himself to "lord of my love" and declares that his poem is a declaration of servitude, or vassalage, and should be judged as such but not by its intellectual merits, or wit. It is not until he earns her respect, he says, that he may boast of his love for her.

Sonnet 27: When physically exhausted, the poet drops his tired body to bed. While he rests, his mind races with thoughts of his beloved. By day his body and by night his spirit find no rest for thoughts of his lady

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Sonnet 28: Completely lovesick, the poet describes how his obsession with the lady robs him of his sleep and makes each day harder as he becomes more tortured. Days make his sorrows longer and night makes his grief feel more intense, the poet says.

Sonnet 29: In an outpouring of self-pity, the poet imagines himself alone and forgotten in the world; he compares himself unfavorably with everyone else. But then he remembers the treasure of his beloved, and wouldn't want to change places even with a king.

Sonnet 30: When he drifts into melancholy over losses and pains of the past, the poet says, he re-experiences those sad feelings. But if he remembers his "dear friend," all again seems well and and his sorrows end.

Sonnet 31: In his beloved lives all the loves of his past, some of whom are buried and forgotten. But when the poet thinks of those lost lovers, he realizes that all the love he once had for them now lives within the love he has for his lady, which only enriches his love for her.

Sonnet 32: The poet tells his beloved that if he dies before she does, and she someday pulls out his poetry to read, it should not be judged by the styles of the day or by the writings of other poets. Read other poets, he urges, for their style but read him for his love.

Sonnet 33: The poet lyrically celebrates the splendors of morning on earth and the way sunlight makes all brilliant and pleasurable. He also bemoans the way clouds can take away the sunshine, but assures himself that—sunny or cloudy weather—his love is always brilliant.

Sonnet 34: Shakespeare asks his beloved why she promised a beautiful day to meet him, a day that turned out stormy and rainy. On the strength of her meteorological forecast, the post says, he did not dress for the weather. But her tears of remorse are "pearls" of love that erase any ill feelings.

Section 4 Analysis

Sonnet 26: The poet says he can't expect to overwhelm her with his verbal prowess, because he could never have language exalted enough for her. Rather, he hopes that his simple message, expressed in barest language and without pretense or pretext, will be heard. Once he wins her love, he will utter words of praise and boasting, Shakespeare says. Proclaiming a lack of artistry and expressive impotency seems more a poetic conceit than straightforward flattery.

Sonnet 27: Shakespeare captures the restless, obsessive quality of new love. In fact, the final couplet foreshadows Cole Porter's lyrics in "Night and Day" when Shakespeare writes: "Lo, thus, by day my limbs, by night my mind/For thee, and for myself, no quiet find." When compared with the modern song: "Night and day, you are the one/Only you beneath the moon or under the sun." But Shakespeare finds his obsession with his love not unpleasant since it lights up the darkness "like a jewel hung in ghastly night." The light/darkness theme is also reminiscent of St. John of the Cross, a contemporary of Shakespeare who describes his journey in faith as a trek in darkness that becomes illuminated with infused enlightenment.

Sonnet 28: Shakespeare asks how much longer he can go on without enough sleep at night and all the usual "oppression" of the day? The fatigue of night, with its obsession about his beloved, is only exacerbated by the labors and worries of the day, as if the two had joined hands to guarantee his downfall. Although he greets the day with a positive attitude, each day only serves to prolong his suffering, Shakespeare says, and although he "flatter[s] the swart-complexioned" night, it always makes his grief seem longer. This poem provides an apt description of the symptoms of depression—sleeplessness, obsessive-compulsive thinking, a growing sense of futility. In other words, "the blues."

Sonnet 29: Perhaps because of its inspirational quality, this sonnet has become a perennial favorite as Shakespeare extols the power of love to lift him above the cares of the world and deliver him to a more favored place than kings enjoy. The opening lines almost ring an existentialist note of total isolation and self-reproach as he "all alone beweep[s]" his cares and curses his fate while wishing he could be like some others "rich in hope" and in worldly blessings. But then the poet says he thinks of his beloved and is filled with joy such as the lark expresses at daybreak, as he realizes he is blessed with love. If subjected to today's psychoanalysis, this poem could be said to represent pure codependency in which the subject gets his good feelings about himself from a love object. But, for the reader, the blessing is that these beautiful lines celebrating love were written before psychoanalysis existed and communicate a pure and joyful feeling of gratitude.

Sonnet 30: Another of Shakespeare's immortal and oft-quoted poems, this sonnet explains that his beloved has the power to banish melancholy and make him feel whole with his life and the world. In fact, the second line provides the title for another famous work, "A la recherce du temps perdu," or "Remembrance of things past," by the French author Marcel Proust. Some of the things that make Shakespeare sad include "the lack

of many a thing I sought," "precious friends hid in death's dateless night," love's long since canceled woe," and "many a vanished sight." Shakespeare says when he revisits those old sorrows it is like experiencing them anew. But, he says, if he thinks of his love, "all losses are restored and sorrows end."

Sonnet 31: This sonnet acknowledges the truism that only by loving does our capacity for love increase. Shakespeare recalls the tears he shed over religion, which he now sees as shallow—but the most of which he was capable at the time. Likewise with his former lovers, most of whom he thought were long since buried, for whom he can re-experience his feelings as a part of loving his lady: "Thou art the grave where buried love doth live," he says. He summarizes by telling her that she now has all the love he had for his former lovers, and more. It's as if his capacity for love has grown through love and through loss.

Sonnet 32: Shakespeare's intent in this sonnet seems to be to convince his lover of his sincerity. Once again, he seems to assume that his poetry will be immortal—not so much for his verbal pyrotechnics as for his heartfelt love. As usual, his imagery is dramatic ("When that churl death my bones with dust shall cover") as he beseeches his love to look beyond his limitations as a poet and not to be put off by his stylistic quirks. It is for his love, Shakespeare says, that he and his poetry should be remembered.

Sonnet 33: Shakespeare strikes a pantheistic note in this sonnet that employs images from the natural world to describe his emotional state in a rather striking foreshadowing of the much later romantic movement in English verse. He begins with the personification of morning as he describes it "flatter[ing] the mountain tops" and "kissing with golden face the meadows green." The sun casts a golden light on streams through some kind of "heavenly alchemy" while it allows the clouds to glide across its brilliant face. Then the clouds spread across the region and obscure the face of the sun, but the poet says he's satisfied that he art least had the sunshine on his face for an hour.

Sonnet 34: Shakespeare uses the sonnet to tell his lover that she has offended him somehow by using the analogy of promising him a walk in the sunshine that turns into a stormy day for which he has no cloak. Apologies won't do, he tells her, even though they may be sincere: "Though thou repent, yet I have still the loss. Th'offender's sorrow lends but weak relief." But in the final couplet, the poet tells her that her tears are "rich and ransom all ill deeds." The references to what kind of offense Shakespeare is writing about are as murky as the weather, but the strong suggestion is that she has been unfaithful and he is eager to forgive her because of his love.

Section 5

Section 5 Summary

Sonnet 36: The poet acknowledges that he and his lady, although bound together in love, are separate people with individual faults These faults make them both less than perfect, he says, but do not compromise their love. Despite their defects, the poet says he is more honored than she by having her love.

Sonnet 37: Like a father who delights in the triumphs of a young child, the poet says he basks in the glory of his beloved—in her beauty, worth and wit—and shines in her reflected brilliance. By living in her glory, the poet says, he experiences gifts he does not himself have.

Sonnet 38: Shakespeare tells his beloved that she ought to be considered a tenth muse, ten times more powerful than the other nine because of her ability to inspire him to write exalted poetry. If any of his poems please his readers, the work is his but the praise hers, he says.

Sonnet 39: How can he adequately praise his lady, the poet asks, when she is his better part? Absence from her is painful, but also an opportunity to entertain thoughts of love and recall the ways that her praise helps to bring them closer in love.

Sonnet 40: The sonneteer tells his beloved to take all his previous loves, but she will not have any more love than that which he has already given her—or which she has stolen with his willing consent. Although ill will may kill him with spites, the poet says they must not become enemies.

Sonnet 41: Shakespeare notes that temptations—evidently to both sexes—follows his love wherever she goes. Although the poet points to his lover's "pretty wrongs" when he is absent, he says that by her beauty his beloved is false to him.

Sonnet 42: As he ponders the implications of a bisexual triangle with his current and former lover, the poet concludes that his friend loves his lady because of the fact he loves her. The danger is that he could lose both women, but the poet reassures himself that "she loves but me alone."

Sonnet 43: Days are like darkest nights until the poet can see his beloved; nights are bright days when he can see her in his dreams. In sleep, her shadows make shadows bright, and her image carries over to his waking hours, the poet says.

Sonnet 44: The poet wishes that his flesh could leap oceans and continents in a flash, so the distance between himself and his beloved would never be great. But, alas, he is made of flesh and must move slowly through space and time in order to be with her.

Sonnet 45: Having mentioned in the previous earth and water, two of the four elements believed in Shakespeare's time to constitute all of creation, the poet in this sonnet says that air and fire—the other two elements—are with his beloved wherever he is. Air represents the poet's thoughts of her, and fire his passion.

Sonnet 46: The love-smitten poet says his eyes and his heart are at war with one another over how to handle his passion. His eyes would horde the sight of his beloved, while his heart believes that is where she lives within him. In truth, the poet says, she exists in both eyes and heart.

Section 5 Analysis

Sonnet 36: Although they may have had a falling out, Shakespeare says he's convinced they still love each other. Their conflict may at times "steal sweet hours from love's delight," but will not alter their love, according to the poet. The lingering effects of their dispute may cause them to greet each other awkwardly in public, but Shakespeare asks her not to dishonor her name by showing him "public kindness." In any event, he says the fact she still loves him is enough to honor his name and make him proud.

Sonnet 37: The romantic notions of being brought to life by another's love, and even granted immortality through having children, are encapsulated in this sonnet. Shakespeare, who says he's "made lame" by ill fortune, can experience the full joy of life including the advantages of beauty, birth, wealth and intellect by partaking of his lover's affections. When he does this, he is no longer "lame, poor or despised" while he lives in her shadow. Through her glory, the poet says, he experiences the best life has to offer. As an expression of the ideal of romantic love, the sonnet is well-crafted and splendid in its construction. Today's feminists and enlightened men might balk at its overt message of co-dependency.

Sonnet 38: The poet says he'll never lack for inspiration so long as his love lives and is near him, and even those who are not particularly gifted with language would be given the silver throats of poets because of her. By calling on her as the tenth muse, any artist could easily achieve immortality, according to Shakespeare. If he should achieve any renown as a poet, it will be because of her inspiration and not because of his talents, Shakespeare says. Once again in this sonnet, Shakespeare follows the canons of romantic (courtly) love, in which the love object (usually a woman) is lifted above the lover and elevated to an almost mythic stature.

Sonnet 39: Extending the notions expressed in the previous sonnet, Shakespeare asks how he can adequately and without shame praise his beloved, since it is she who gives him the power of verse and who inspires him. He suggests that a separation from his lover, although it would be painful, might be the best way for him to re-learn how best to praise her and for her to renew her desire for him and "to entertain the time with thoughts of love." Those thoughts of love that "so sweetly dost deceive" will inevitably lead them back together again, Shakespeare asserts. This poem, like most of the others

in this set, conveys the sense that love is everything in life, and that learning how to renew and sustain that love is of utmost importance.

Sonnet 40: Embedded within the verbal pyrotechnics of this poem is a simple, durable truth: "Love knows it is a greater grief to bear love's wrong than hate's known injury." Shakespeare enjoins his love to take all of his other loves and he will gladly give them to her, although she will have nothing she doesn't already have from him, "no love...that thou mayst true love call." The poet says he forgives the "gentle thief" for taking away all his poverty and will not harbor any bitterness, because that could destroy their love. Forbearance, Shakespeare says in this sonnet, is a vital part of love because both people may at times do things that could threaten the bonds of affection if offense is taken by the other.

Sonnet 41: This sonnet seems to suggest bisexuality on the part of his lover, just as Shakespeare hints at his own bisexuality in other poems. He blames her wandering on her youth and beauty, by which she is easily seduced and seducer. By falling into the arms of another woman, Shakespeare tells his beloved, she causes harm in two ways—the first by tempting the amorous woman to herself, and second by being false to him. The tone of this sonnet is diametrically opposite to the earlier sonnets that praise his lady and the wonders of love. By this point, Shakespeare is enmeshed in the complications of bisexual love and evidently feeling some rejection because of his lover's flirtatiousness.

Sonnet 42: There are at least two possible interpretations of this sonnet, which Shakespeare tries to resolve with a verbal flourish in the final couplet. The first possible interpretation is that the poet has two lovers, one of whom he refers to as a "friend." He describes the pain of losing his lover to his friend, but excuses them both for causing him pain. The second interpretation is that there are three people involved in a love triangle, and the confusing references to his "love" and his "friend" reflect the confusing nature of such a relationship. To add another layer of ambiguity, Shakespeare ends with this couplet: "But here's the joy: my friend and I are one/Sweet flattery! Then she loves but me alone." The verbal trickery tends to obscure the real nature of the relationship, and tantalizes the reader with multiple possible meanings.

Sonnet 43: Ambiguity appears again in this sonnet that plays with the notion of light and darkness as Shakespeare says his nights of sleep in which he dreams of his beloved are filled with light, and his days when he can't see her are dark as night. He seems to return to the lyricism of the earlier poems in this sonnet, but the juxtaposition of light and dark as opposite to what they seem is suggestive of the theology of St. John of the Cross, a Christian mystic of Shakespeare's era. St. John of the Cross says faith is a journey in darkness, until we reach contact with God in a place that is darkness to our senses and human awareness—a place that becomes light because of the infused knowledge of enlightenment. Shakespeare seems to compare his love with the process of divine enlightenment.

Sonnet 44: Shakespeare would like to travel with the speed of thought, or light (186,000 miles per second) and generally upend the laws of physics to be with his beloved. He

curses his physicality and the fact he can only move "at time's leisure." The poet's longing for instant contact with his lady is perhaps an early articulation of the motivation for faster communication that produced radio, telephones, television, and the Internet. His impatience with his physical body is somewhat analogous to the religious faithful, who believe they can make instant spiritual connection with their god.

Sonnet 45: Shakespeare compares air with his thoughts and fire with his desire and says these lighter elements lift his spirits whenever he is with his beloved, but when they are separated, the heavier elements of earth and water drag his spirits down into melancholy. He is uplifted again, however, when he receives the lighter elements of air and fire back from her that reassure him of her health. But once he returns those energies to his love, he is depleted and once again sad. This sonnet is, if nothing else, a tutorial on the level of scientific understanding in Shakespeare's time: the belief that all matter is divided into earth, fire, air and water and the belief that human health is controlled by black bile, yellow bile, phlegm, and blood.

Sonnet 46: Having explained his love in terms of the four elements and four humours, Shakespeare explores the duality of emotion (heart) and judgment (eye). His better judgment wants to deny his heart the passion that is aroused whenever he sees her, but his heart tells him that she really lives mostly in his heart. But, in claiming his beloved as their unique domain, both heart and eye reveal their limitations and the true experience of her is contained in both, Shakespeare says. Thus, his emotions and reason are always "at a mortal war" which gives him no peace. Besides presenting an apt description of the emotional roller-coaster that is early romantic love, the sonnet deals forthrightly with the supposed separation of mind (eye) and body (heart) that can be traced back to early Greek philosophers and that was by default incorporated into Christian beliefs.

Section 6

Section 6 Summary

Sonnet 47: Although between the poet's eye and heart "a league is took," both senses help to keep his love alive. Sometimes his eyes feast on his beloved and bid his hear to follow, and sometimes his heart conjures visions of her when they are apart. Thus, she is never farther away than his thoughts can move.

Sonnet 48: The sonneteer expresses his fears that, in leaving his beloved for a time, she may be "stol'n" by someone else. He compares his love to a treasure chest in which, before taking his leave, he was careful to store all his jewels. But those jewels, or thoughts of love, are but trifles to his lady.

Sonnet 49: Shakespeare extends his fears about separation into a scenario of lost love, "when I shall see thee frown on my defects," and they would pass each other "strangely" and without the sunshine of love in their eyes. He says he'll try to guard against that time.

Sonnet 50: As the poet embarks on his journey, a sense of heaviness overcomes him as he realizes that each mile takes him farther from his beloved. Even his horse seems to sense his reluctance and plods slowly along.

Sonnet 51: Why should he hurry toward his destination, the poet asks, when at the same time he is being carried farther away from his love? Although his horse plods slowly in departure, in return he will fly with the wind since there is hardly a horse that can keep pace with his desire.

Sonnet 52: Because of her love, the poet says he's like a wealthy person who has a locked treasure chest of valuable gems; he only opens it occasionally to be dazzled and keeps it closed most of the time so peering into it doesn't become just an everyday experience. Her worth in his possession defines his triumph.

Sonnet 53: Although his beloved can be compared to many other beautiful objects and people, including Greek gods and goddesses, there is only one like her in her "constant heart," according to Shakespeare. Evidently, the poet and his lady have been reunited after his journey.

Sonnet 54: Truth is the crowning jewel of beauty that makes it that much more beauteous, the poet says. For example, the sweet fragrance of a rose makes it even more wonderful and sensually delightful. Other summer plants brown, die and are forgotten, but the rose smells sweet even after death, the poet says.

Sonnet 55: In a poetic conceit, Shakespeare tells his lover that his verse written for her will endure longer than marble and "the gilded monuments of princes." War will overturn

statues and time will age and smear them, but his beloved will live forever in lovers' eyes.

Section 6 Analysis

Sonnet 47: Shakespeare continues to explore the duality of body and soul in this sonnet, extending some of the themes he presents in the previous poem. After previously reflecting that he wishes to be able to travel at the speed of thought to be with his beloved, in this sonnet Shakespeare realizes that she is always with him, either through his memories or through her physical presence. He comforts himself with the realization "So, either by thy picture or my love/Thyself away are present still with me."

Sonnet 48: In this sonnet, the poet expresses his fears and insecurities about his relationship with his lover. In preparing for a trip, he reflects that he has put all his possessions in secure hands—except for her. He wonders if his love for her is of any consequence, and worries that her favors might become "the prey of every vulgar thief." Even though she is locked within the confines of his heart, the poet says, she is free to come and go at will and thus he fears she may prove irresistible to someone else. The poem reveals a shallowness, and a lack of trust, in their relationship.

Sonnet 49: The poet expands his fears about his relationship with his lover, noting that she has every legal reason to leave him since they are not married and he can advance no solid legal or rational argument to the contrary.He fears the time when she will view his faults and reject him. Shakespeare says he's aware of his faults, but must raise up his hand to stop himself from going deeper into his fears about losing her. It's as if he realizes that going too far down that path could lead to madness and would in any event be as great, or greater, a threat to their relationship.

Sonnet 50: Despite previous sonnets wherein Shakespeare philosophizes about how he can always summon images and good feelings about his sweetheart when they are apart, this poem reveals his gut-level pain of separation. Every plodding step of his journey takes him further away from her, even though a faster pace would only mean further distance between them. The attitude toward his horse, "the beast that bears me," although no doubt commonplace in Shakespeare's time, may well be offensive to contemporary animal lovers. Shakespeare refers to "the bloody spur" that cannot make the horse go faster but which only causes him to groan, and says his groan from the pain of separation is far worse than anything the horse could experience.

Sonnet 51: Overpowering desire on his part doesn't give the poet the ability to be with his love, and he blames the situation on his horse ("my dull bearer").There are at least two interpretations of this sonnet. The first is the obvious one of Shakespeare telling his lover that he misses her and would haste to her side if he could. The other perhaps offers a commentary of how passion can burn brightest when the body is unable to reach its desired object. Even in flaming Elizabethan youth, apparently, hotheaded lovers need time apart to rekindle the flames of love.

Sonnet 52: Shakespeare defines the relationship between poverty and riches as the relationship between desiring his lover and actually having her. Like a miser who hoards his riches and only opens his chest occasionally, he is a man filled with desire who waits and hopes for the moment when she opens her robe to reveal herself, and to give herself to him. The rarity of having his beloved in his arms makes those moments more blessed, just like the miser who parses his time with his treasures, Shakespeare says.

Sonnet 53: The poet asks his love how she can encompass so many diverse types of beauty. He wonders what she is made of that enables her to surpass every other hue and to stand as the ultimate reference point for the beauty of everything from the ancients gods to the brilliant spring colors of flowers. Even her shape is more lovely than anything else human or natural, Shakespeare says. But in addition to all that, she is incomparable for her loyalty in love, the poet says. In describing her as containing and reflecting every aspect of beauty, Shakespeare employs a comparison between te ideal and the real that recalls the Greek philosopher Plato who said we humans can't experience perfection directly, but get glimpses of it by reflections in the "real," physical world of our senses and intellect.

Sonnet 54: Shakespeare expresses a wish for the immortality of his love in this sonnet by comparing the lingering beauty of a rose that gives off a sweet aroma after it dies. He hopes to capture his love's essence, or beautiful scent, in a verse that will live forever in men's hearts. Other summer plants, such as the canker, also have a richly colored bloom surrounded by thorns, like roses, but die "unwooed and unrespected" when their color is gone because they do not have the beautiful scent of roses, "of their sweet deaths are sweetest odors made." The sonnet suggests that most people will die and be forgotten, but the truly exceptional ones will be remembered for their sweetness.

Sonnet 55: Shakespeare swaggers through the immodest lines of this sonnet, telling his beloved that his poems will ensure her immortality better than all the monuments to royalty etched in stone then "besmeared with sluttish time." She will be praised "in the eyes of all posterity" and live forever in his sonnets. The poem reveals not only a writer confident of himself but unashamed to promise his lover that he will immortalize her—a promise, of course, that she can never know is true. Perhaps the expansive tone of the poem reflects a recent reunion with his beloved.

Section 7

Section 7 Summary

Sonnet 56: The poet calls for a daily satisfaction and renewal of love, because the sharp edge of passion is softened only by the object it desires. But by the next day, its sharp edge returns and demands new satisfaction, as lovers who came each day to ocean banks to renew their love.

Sonnet 57: Like a slave who awaits the command of his master, Shakespeare says love makes him so complete a fool he questions nothing his beloved does whether she is near or far. Yet like a faithful servant , the poet is interested in his beloved's whereabouts and affairs.

Sonnet 58: The poet curses the predicament of being his love's servant with "th'imprisoned absence of your liberty," but asks for patience to forebear and to recognize that the waits and absences are worth the discomfort because of her love.

Sonnet 59: If there is nothing new under the sun, it would be instructive to look back for five hundred years of human history to find one as magnificent as his beloved, the poet states. Indeed, in that glance backwards one would find very few who would even be comparable.

Sonnet 60: A somewhat melancholy paean to his lady, this sonnet notes all the ways that creatures are born, grow, thrive, and die. The poet expresses the wish that in his verse his beloved would live forever, despite the "cruel hand" of time.

Sonnet 61: Separated from his love, the poet asks her rhetorically whether it is her will that he should remain sleepless into the deep night as shadows torment him with visions of her. It isn't her fault, but his, the poet says, that he is restless and wide awake. He watches for her through the night while she is far away.

Sonnet 62: The poet confesses to the sin of self-love, but then he looks in the mirror he sees his own disintegration and realizes that it is only because of his beloved's beauty that he sees himself in an unflattering light.

Sonnet 63: This sonnet seems plainly written to a man, with the wish that although his lover will become old and worn, as the poet is, his beauty will live in the poet's "black lines" where he will remain forever young.

Sonnet 64: When the poet sees the ocean advance on the shore, or magnificent works of man decayed with time, he shudders to think that time will come and take his love, too. The thought is like death, the poet says, and causes him to weep of what he has but knows he must lose.

Sonnet 65: The poet asks how beauty, as exemplified by a flower, can withstand the ravages of time that not even brass, the sea, the earth, or stone can survive. None can survive, he says, unless his words in black ink may preserve the miracle of his love.

Sonnet 66: Worldweariness and melancholy are in evidence in this sonnet, as Shakespeare cries for "restful death" and enumerates all his disappointments in life. Tired and disgusted with the world, the poet says he would gladly take his leave except that would also remove him from his beloved.

Section 7 Analysis

Sonnet 56: This sonnet is similar to Sonnet 51 in its call for a superhuman ability to make love, that his physical prowess be a match for his romantic desires and aspirations to have daily satisfaction for his passions. If there is a lull in their lovemaking, Shakespeare says, let it only be ephemeral like the tides so that when the waters rise it only improves the view of the ocean for lovers who come to the seashore. Love has cycles, like the seasons, so that cold winter promises a return to warm spring. The comparison of love to the seasons is a potent image, one that presages Shelley's Ode to the West Wind: "O wind, if winter come can spring be far behind?"

Sonnet 57: This sonnet expresses the notion that the poet is so completely submerged in his obsession for his lover that he has no more personality, and is a "slave" who has no desire other than to do her will and to please her. Between serving her desires, Shakespeare says, he is so uprooted that he doesn't know what to do with himself. This is the notion of the romantic ideal taken to an almost absurd extreme in which the poet says he would be happy to be abused by his lady in order to be near her.

Sonnet 58: Shakespeare takes selfless subservience even further in this poem, in which he asks God to prevent him from trying to control his beloved's times of pleasure or even to ask her for an accounting of her time. The poet says he would endure "th'imprisoned absence of your liberty" and not accuse her of any questionable behavior as proof of his love. His task is to stand ready to serve his lover's wishes, regardless of whether he approves of where she goes and how she spends her time, Shakespeare says. In effect, Shakespeare declares his unconditional love and regard for her in a self-effacing way.

Sonnet 59: By stating that his love is timeless, yet outside of time, Shakespeare seeks to elevate her to a divine (immortal) status. When he suggests a comparison between his beloved with women from previous centuries to see "whether we are mended or wh'er better they," the poet unwittingly calls upon the then-unknown law of evolution which postulates an ever-changing, ever-improving biological condition through the rigors of survival.

Sonnet 60: Shakespeare returns to the subject of death and mortality, comparing life to the waves at the seashore and time as the enemy of life. Time furrows the brow of vigorous youth, and "nothing stands but for his scythe to mow." Once again, he repeats

his wish that his beloved will escape mortality in his poetry. Shakespeare's refrains about the passage of time and immortality would strike a receptive chord in the mind of any woman who is aware of her limited number of child-bearing years, as well as the temporal nature of her beauty.

Sonnet 61: Insomnia and doubt deprive the poet of sleep while his lady is far away. It isn't her fault, Shakespeare says, but rather his own tortured mind that flashes images of her constantly before his sleepless eyes and his own doubts and suspicions that make him restless. It is his "own true love" for her that causes his insomnia, he says, but a modern-day psychiatrist would probably ascribe his plight to separation anxiety and depression, and prescribe an antidepressant and sleep medication.

Sonnet 62: Shakespeare transfers to himself the same kind of obsessive attachment he demonstrates toward his lady. The narcissism of romantic love, previously focused on his lover, is now turned inward. The poet finds no other face as gracious as his own, "no shape so true," but when he compares himself to her as he finds the truth in his mirror of a man "beated and chopped with tanned antiquity." Once again, Shakespeare emphasizes aging and disintegration as a means to both flatter his beloved while reminding her of the passage of time.

Sonnet 63: Shakespeare continues with his lamentation on age, decay and death in this poem, but it is quite clearly written about a man instead of a woman. "When hours have drained his blood and filled his brow with lines and wrinkles," the poet says he hopes to ensure that "His beauty in these black lines be seen/And they shall live, and he in them still green." It is possible that Shakespeare was bisexual, and it is also possible that social and cultural mores of the Elizabethan age permitted and even encouraged the open expression of all sorts of romantic love, scorned later with the rise of Puritanism.

Sonnet 64: The poet expresses his chagrin that time destroys and removes everything —including love and lovers— in its wake. Even mighty towers, fine metals such as brass, change their state and decay. When he thinks that time will take away his love, he can only "weep to have that which [I] fear to lose." The thought of utter devastation and complete ruin is like a death, Shakespeare says.

Sonnet 65: Since time destroys everything from huge rocks to tough steel gates, Shakespeare wonders where anything can be hidden from its battering ram. How can beauty or "summer's honey breath" stand a chance against the destruction of time. There is no way to preserve these things, except "in black ink" the poet says. The theme of immortality through art is repeated several times throughout the sonnets.

Sonnet 66: A numb sense of inevitable loss of everything gives this sonnet a somber, suicidal tone. The world-weary poet says he's seen enough of the world with "purest faith unhappily foresworn," "maiden virtue rudely strumpeted," and "art made tongue-tied by authority." Shakespeare says he'd gladly take his own life, except that in doing so he'd leave his love bereft.

Section 8

Section 8 Summary

Sonnet 67: A morbid sensitivity to the imminent death of a friend suffuses this sonnet with en elegiac quality. Identified only as "he," the poet asks why someone of noble spirit should be dying from "infection" caused by "sin" that is graced by his involvement. Nature, though, awaits his corpse.

Sonnet 68: Shakespeare says his deceased friend has been reabsorbed into nature as a model, or a template of pure beauty that is genuine. His cheeks recorded the days of his life "when beauty lived and died as flowers do now." There should be no effort to dress up his body, the poet says.

Sonnet 69: The poet addresses himself to his dying friend, telling him that although he's been praised in many languages by many people, none fully appreciates "the beauty of thy mind" or the scope of his deeds. Common people who don't understand his friend's "fair flower" simply add the odor of weeds.

Sonnet 70: The poet refers darkly to the fact that if his friend is blamed for something, or slandered, it will not be his fault but merely the measure of her greatness. His friend has had an unstained youth, the poet says, unscathed and unblamed, and will be remembered for that above all else.

Sonnet 71: The poet tells his beloved to let her love for him die when he dies, so that she may not be subject to scorn from the world—even as "vilest worms" consume his body.

Sonnet 72: Shakespeare expands upon the theme of self-effacement, telling his lady he is ashamed of his own lack of worth and she should be ashamed of having loved him. It's best, he says, that his name should be buried with him and forgotten.

Sonnet 73: Death and final separation from his beloved are woven into this sonnet through natural imagery of autumn leaves, fading sunsets and ashes where once fires smoldered. He tells his beloved that the sad brevity of their days makes her love more powerful and poignant.

Sonnet 74: The poet tells his love that she should be contented after he dies, because she has his heart—the most important part. Although his physical body will be eaten by worms, his immortal soul is hers forever, he says.

Sonnet 75: Thoughts of his beloved are to him as food is to life, Shakespeare says. Like a miser torn between enjoyment of his wealth and hoarding it, the poet says he's pulled in different directions by his love—wanting to be alone with her and showing her off to the world, pining for her or indulging his desire.

Sonnet 76: Although his message is always the same—love of his lady—Shakespeare takes himself to task for running out of new and imaginative ways of expressing his love. He asks, rhetorically, why his verse is "so barren of new pride," but says his love is like the sun, "daily new and old."

Sonnet 77: Shakespeare tells his love that she can measure time by looking into the mirror and observing the changes in her own beauty. When her beauty is gone, she will find that sweet memories will flood her brain and enrich her life if she is willing to truly examine them, the poet says.

Section 8 Analysis

Sonnet 67: Another love sonnet concerns an unnamed male who is dying of "infection." The poet says no portrait of him that depicts him in better days when he was healthy should be painted. He should be allowed to die and return to "bankrout" [bankrupt] nature that is beggared by his sickness. Nature needs him back as a reminder of what wealth it once produced in him "in days.

Sonnet 68: Further lamenting his friend's fate, the poet says his friend's face is like a faded flower that was once vibrant and beautiful and is now faded and unlovely. Nature will store his friend's remains in her catalog of wonders, like a map to "show false art what beauty was of yore."

Sonnet 69: The world has no business looking at either the inward or outward life of his deceased friend, Shakespeare protests, because the "churls" will only judge his life by their own standards, which are abysmally low. Although their eyes might be kind toward his friend, "to thy fair flower [they] add the rank smell of weeds." In the process, those who would judge his friend only make him common and so devalue him, the poet says.

Sonnet 70: If his love is slandered, Shakespeare says, it is because beauty is always the target for those who are envious or unhappy with themselves and no reflection on the person slandered. His lover is unstained either because of blameless youth or because those who speak harmful words are proven wrong. The poet says he would be surprised if his lover were not the subject of slander, given human nature.

Sonnet 71: Shakespeare tells his love to forget him and his name when he dies, because he doesn't want the world to associate their names. If she should read his sonnet after he is "compounded with clay," she should "let [her] love even with my life decay." The poet indulges in self-effacement as a way of honoring his love even as he proclaims his own worthlessness, which is another literary canon of romantic love. The lines also suggest the much later sentiments of John Keats: "Here lies one whose name was writ in water." They underline the brief and transitory nature of love and existence.

Sonnet 72: Once again, Shakespeare tells his beloved to forget him after he dies because he is a worthless person who only brings shame to them both. He admonishes her, if she is asked about him, not to invent some falsehood to explain why she loved him "lest your true love may seem false in this." The poet requests "My name be buried

where my body is." It is difficult to tell whether Shakespeare really feels this way about his love, or if he is simply using a poetic device intended to intensify the emotions he hopes to convey. In any case, the lines have a bittersweet feeling.

Sonnet 73: Shakespeare says he is in the autumn of his life, the time when the sunset fades in the west and if there any leaves on the trees, they are yellow and spare. All that's left of the flame of youth now is a glowing bed of coals "as the deathbed whereon it must expire." The fact that he is nearing the end of life makes his love even stronger, "to love that well which thou must leave ere long." Although there is a definite tone of melancholy in this poem, there is also a sense of satisfaction that the poet expresses about the fact he has shared love with his beloved.

Sonnet 74: "When that fell arrest without all bail shall carry me away," Shakespeare tells his lover, she will inherit his best part, the soul that cannot be claimed by the grave. As he persists in his theme of death, Shakespeare becomes more graphic in his imagery and more intense emotionally. Although the language and intent of this sonnet and the previous poem seem genuine, the reader could wonder whether the mention of brief love and certain death are further devices to woo his beloved, another approach to drive his message home.

Sonnet 75: A note of hyper-emotional obsessiveness returns. Seemingly in an agitated state of mind, Shakespeare describes how he both wants to hide and hoard his lover and to consume her whole. This sonnet represents a return to the overwrought emotional tone of the earlier sonnets, before the poet became melancholy and morose. Swinging again into a manic mood, Shakespeare describes and decries his dilemma over his beloved.

Sonnet 76: If his language sometimes seems stale and repetitive, Shakespeare says, it's because his message is constant: "You and love are still my argument/So all my best is dressing old words new." This poem provides a rare glimpse into Shakespeare's artistic mind where the challenge is to produce constant novelty and invention while working with a constant and ancient theme. Although no apology or explanation is needed for the sonnets, it is clear that Shakespeare felt the need to explain to his beloved that any repetition in his words means that he is faithful to her in love and in art.

Sonnet 77: With the approach of old age, evident in the mirror as in the sundial that shows how much time his lover wastes, Shakespeare tells her that her mind like her progeny is vacant. If she truly examines the barren nature of her life, the poet says, she will be enlightened as to how much "time's thievish progress to eternmity" has decimated her life. The poem appears to be another way to influence her to bear his child.

Section 9

Section 9 Summary

Sonnet 78: The poet tells his love that she is his constant muse who gives him powers of language and expression that allow him to rise above his own ignorance and even to inspire admiration in others. With a pair of puns, Shakespeare says "thou art all my art" who gives him extraordinary poetic powers.

Sonnet 79: Evidently in competition with another poet for his lover's favor, Shakespeare tells her that the other poet robs her beauty and character to write his sonnets. Shakespeare says she should not thank him but realize that his verse is simply based on her virtue.

Sonnet 80: Because another poet has usurped his place in the eyes of his beloved, he is left "tongue-tied" when he tries to write his praise of her in verse. Shakespeare compares himself to a small, frail boat that has been jerked from the sea and landed on the deck of his rival's taller, more sturdy boat.

Sonnet 81: Shakespeare tells his lady that she will be immortal because of his verse, that her epitaph will be his poetry that people will read forever, keep her always alive and out of the snatches of death and oblivion. She will be forever alive in men's eyes, while he will rest in just "a common grave."

Sonnet 82: The poet tells his beloved that, although he has pushed language to its limits to praise her properly, she may not appreciate verse as much as he does. Nevertheless, he says, she shouldn't expect that a portrait painter could do a better job of capturing her spirit and beauty, making her immortal.

Sonnet 83: Two poets who compete with each other to capture his beloved's beauty and grace are inadequate to the task, Shakespeare says, and thus no painter could do her justice, either. Because she is fond of praise, Shakespeare tells his lover, she is the subject of empty flattery that doesn't do her justice.

Sonnet 84: Because she is fond of praise, Shakespeare tells his lover, she is the subject of empty flattery that doesn't do her justice. Anyone who seeks to capture or represent her beauty should simply represent he as she is, since she is beautiful and brilliant, the poet says.

Sonnet 85: When others praise his lady love, the poet holds his tongue and "think[s] good thoughts," or simply utters a simple agreement. His praise is not expressed in speech, but rather in sublime thoughts and verse of his beloved, Shakespeare says.

Sonnet 86: It isn't the fact that his poetic rival pumps up his rhetorical sail around his beloved that renders the poet mute, according to Shakespeare. It isn't the fact that he

can raise his voice "above a mortal pitch" in praise of her. It is the fact that his beloved's countenance begins to fill his verse that throttles his own.

Sonnet 87: The poet bids a sad farewell to his love, as he feels her slipping away. He tells her he's not worthy of her and that he enjoyed her favors only at her discretion. But now that she's come to her right senses, she has no reason to give him any attention, the poet says.

Sonnet 88: The poet says he's willing to undergo any kind of wrong or criticism to prove his love. He's willing to endure any injury, he says, if it's for his beloved's good.

Sonnet 89: Shakespeare vows to change any of his habits or faults for his lady—all she has to do is point to him his defect. He vows never to mention her name, if she wishes, for fear of profaning it.

Sonnet 90: If his beloved must hate him, the poet begs her to hate him first, before she leaves him. Then other "petty griefs" will appear inconsequential compared to losing her and he'll be able to bear the loss better, Shakespeare says.

Section 9 Analysis

Sonnet 78: Inspired by his lover as his muse, Shakespeare admits that he's ransacked every literary work known to him to find the right words to praise her. Through her inspiration and his words, the poet says, her eyes "taught the dumb on high to sing, and heavy ignorance aloft to fly." He seems to suggest here that her inspiration even lifts the heavens and sky gods and has "given grace a double majesty." But for her inspiration, Shakespeare says he would be stuck with only his own ignorance.

Sonnet 79: Shakespeare voices his chagrin that another poet is also singing the praises of his beloved. Shakespeare tells her that any sense of beauty, or grace, or any other virtue his rival portrays in his poetry is stolen from her, then returned in kind—whereas his poems are a truer reflection of her stellar qualities.

Sonnet 80: His poetic competitor for his lady's affections is like a powerful yacht that plows over the deepest waters of her soul, while he can only skim the surface in his paltry rowboat, Shakespeare says. Even the slightest word of approval is enough to buoy him up, but the poet says he fears that he will be overrun and cast aside. If that should happen, Shakespeare says, "my love was my decay." The tone of this sonnet is diametrically opposed to earlier sonnets, where Shakespeare boldly asserts that he will immortalize his love by his art.

Sonnet 81: Apparently recovered from the blow to his pride described in Sonnet 80, Shakespeare once again returns to the theme of granting his lady immortality through his verse. When he dies, Shakespeare says, he will be worthy only of a common grave while she will live forever.

Sonnet 82: Art—whether literary or graphic—is inadequate to praise the beauty of his beloved, Shakespeare says. Evidently he has competition from a portrait painter who would flatter her in hopes of winning her. The poet acknowledges that she, no writer, may not appreciate all the devices that writers like himself might use to describe her. But it's clear that she could never be captured on a canvas: any attempt to do so only abuses her real beauty.

Sonnet 83: Shakespeare tells his lady that he never thought she needed to be painted and that her beauty exceeded "the barren tender of a poet's debt," and thus he can only stand mutely in awe of her. Those artists who "would give life and bring a tomb" could never do her justice, he says. And there is more life in one of her eyes than both himself and his rival poet could capture, he says.

Sonnet 84: His lady is vain and fond of praise, and thus she opens herself to exploitation by artists who would flatter her, Shakespeare says. There is no representation of her that could exceed she herself, and no artists that could flatter anyone other than themselves in trying to represent her. To be so depicted is to "add a curse" to her already-unsurpassed beauty, the poet says.

Sonnet 85: Whenever he hears his love praised he is mute, except to agree, Shakespeare says. While others attempt to coin precious praises in verse to her, he simply nods his head and says, "'Tis so, 'tis true" while in his own mind crafting higher praises than others can know. Thus he earns respect for his "dumb thoughts" that he fails to express.

Sonnet 86: Shakespeare says his poetic muse has vanished, not because of his competitor's skill or determination to win her affections, but because he noticed that she took delight in his verbal confections. First he sickened inside then found his quill and versification had been "enfeebled."

Sonnet 87: Although he worships his lady and in dreams seems to possess her like a king, Shakespeare says that when he awakens he realizes she is not his and she flutters away. Faced with competition from other suitors, the poet experiences fear that she may never be his and that his whole experience of her will be as fleeting as a dream.

Sonnet 88: Shakespeare once again prostrates himself on the altar of romantic love, telling his lady that he will bear any wrong and fight any injustice on her behalf. It is his pleasure to endure any injuries as a result of his love for her, because if they help her they also help him, Shakespeare says. He is willing to take her side, even in a fight against himself.

Sonnet 89: Whatever she wants and however she wants him to be, that's what Shakespeare says he is eager to do. If she points out some fault to him, he'll break a leg changing that fault. If she does not want it known that she is connected with him, "I will acquaintance strangle and look strange," the poet promises. If she wants him not to ever mention her name, he will also comply. This seems like another instance of self-

flagellation that may have been honorable five hundred years ago but today seems wimpy.

Sonnet 90: The poet asks his love if it would be easier for him to sustain her ultimate rejection all at once than to suffer the final coup de grace after the slings and arrows of outrageous fate that have already brought him to his knees. The sonnet is, if anything, a plea for mercy.

Section 10

Section 10 Summary

Sonnet 91: Others may find glory, or self-esteem, in their titles, wealth, physical health and possessions—but the poet says his beloved is everything to him. To lose her would be to lose all that he loves and esteems and leave him "wretched."

Sonnet 92: The poet tells his lover that he will be with her forever, or as long as she wants him. If she dies or leaves him, the poet says he'd prefer to die, as well. He asks rhetorically, what is so perfect that it is without stain? She may be false, he says, but he doesn't know it.

Sonnet 93: The poet, wondering again whether his lover is true, says he'll act like a cuckolded husband and pretend along with her that their love is intact. Her true feelings are not revealed in overt hatred, Shakespeare says, but in her preoccupations, her strange moods and wrinkles.

Sonnet 94: Those graced with beauty, wit and forbearance are an inspiration; those we love who have the power to hurt and will not do so are like sweet summer flowers, the poet says. But those sweet flowers, or people, can turn sour by their deeds and smell worse than weeds, he says.

Sonnet 95: Shakespeare tells his beloved that her beauty and charm almost outshine her sins, that her name itself can nearly makes her "lascivious" sins acceptable. But he cautions that her charms can only go but so far in excusing her behavior, and warns that he doesn't want to hear any more about her "sport."

Sonnet 96: Although some attribute his lady's faults to youthful "wantonness," the poet says her faults are as nothing to him. They are like a lesser stone worn on the hand of a queen, surrounded by more dazzling jewelry. Although less than perfect, that stone is elevated by the hand on which it rests.

Sonnet 97: Separation from his beloved has been like an especially harsh winter, frozen and barren, Shakespeare says, even though their time apart was in the summer. When she is away, the birds stop singing and the leaves lose color, just as when winter approaches.

Sonnet 98: Although it's springtime, the season's blooming flowers, singing birds, and pleasant smells of nature are only pale reflections of his lady's radiant beauty, the poet says. He plays with these symbols of spring, as if shadows of her, although it still seems like winter in his heart.

Sonnet 99: Shakespeare chides the violet for stealing its sweet scent from his beloved's breath, the buds of marjoram for taking her hair. He curses roses, too, for taking her

beauty and freshness, and wishes a canker would consume and destroy them. All beauty has been stolen from her, the poet says.

Sonnet 100: To his muse, the sonneteer asks whether it has forgotten the very source of his inspiration—his beloved. The poet chides his muse for wasting time and energy on "some worthless song," when there is scarcely enough time for both of them to immortalize his lady before they both are dead.

Sonnet 101: Shakespeare asks his muse what amends he will make for neglecting the fact that, in beauty, there is truth. The muse might claim that beauty needs no argument, no visual representation, but the poet calls upon his muse to help him better portray the truth in his love's beauty for all ages to know.

Sonnet 102: When their love was new in the springtime, the poet tells his lover, he was ecstatic and couldn't stop himself from singing "wild music" like the birds in the trees. But as their love has ripened, he sometimes holds his tongue for fear of appearing to "merchandize" their affection and thus trivialize it.

Sonnet 103: Perhaps his muse is silent because there is no way to sing his lady's praise or to describe her beauty without defacing her, the poet muses. She need only look in her mirror to understand why he is tongue-tied when trying to write about her.

Sonnet 104: For three years—three summers, three falls, three winters, three springs—the poet has known his beloved and found her increasingly beautiful. In his eyes, Shakespeare says, she is as beautiful as "when first your eye I eyed." And yet, she is growing older "unbred" and has not yet had his child.

Sonnet 105: Shakespeare proclaims the constancy of his love, the fact that today's kindness will be even more kind tomorrow. Fair, kind and true is the nature of his love, and the themes of his verse. But, unfortunately, he notes that people with those virtues often live alone.

Section 10 Analysis

Sonnet 91: His lady's love is more important to him than such things as favored birth, unique skills, wealth or physical strength may be to others. Some wealthy people take pride in their hawks and hounds, fine clothing and excellent horses; his pride is in having her love, Shakespeare says. If she should leave him, he would be left utterly "wretched." Once again, Shakespeare's language is that of the romantic who finds complete fulfillment in his lover.

Sonnet 92: Shakespeare tells his love that he deserves better than to be kept dangling about whether and when she might leave him. The humane thing would be for her to decide so she "canst not vex me with inconstant mind." If she decides to leave, then he will happily take his own life; if she stays he will be overjoyed. The poet says if she decides to stay with him, he will be hers for life. She may have her faults, he says, but to him they are nothing.

Sonnet 93: Like a cuckolded husband, Shakespeare says he'll continue to act as if his love had not betrayed him, although he knows her smiles and loving looks cannot change "the false heart's history." He tells her that she was made beautiful for love, and he will concentrate on her beauty that grows "like Eve's apple," although her virtue has been compromised.

Sonnet 94: True beauty and quality of character are defined by actions, not words, according to Shakespeare. Those who have the power to hurt but will not do so, as well as those who have the power to resist temptation, are heavenly in character, the poet says. Beautiful flowers that rot smell worse than weeds, and "sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds." It seems that Shakespeare is using the plant analogy to tell his mistress to be kind and not reject him.

Sonnet 95: She has the beauty and charm to make her shame seem to disappear, although she can't stop "lascivious' talk behind her back, Shakespeare says of his lover. Her vices are obscured because of her beauty and "all things turn to fair that eyes can see." But the poet warns her to exercise restraint because even the hardest-edged knife becomes dull with disuse.

Sonnet 96: Shakespeare tells his lover that she is beloved as much for her faults as for her graces, and that he is ennobled by being her lover. Even with her faults, she is still extraordinary and makes those flaws seem trivial, the poet says. It appears by the shift in tone that the author is now pulling the punches he delivered in Sonnets 89-90 for fear that his scorn may drive her away. He tries to reassure her that she is like everyone else in having flaws.

Sonnet 97: During a period of separation from his lover, Shakespeare says, it seems like the cold dead winter month of December, although it is actually summer. And autumn, with the stored fruits of summer, seems barren still "like widowed wombs after their lords' decease," and while they are separated the birds even stop singing. Or, if they sing at all, it is with "so dull a cheer" that their songs only presage winter.

Sonnet 98: Even in April with spring bursting out all over, it still seems like winter to Shakespeare because he and his beloved are apart. In summer, with the smells and bright colors of the flowers as well as the sweet songs of birds, it still feels like winter and he can only play with her shadow. "Nor did I wonder at the lily's white/Nor praise the deep vermilion in the rose."

Sonnet 99: Surrounded with the bounty of summer, Shakespeare is only reminded again of his lady. He chides the "forward violet" for stealing its sweet smell from her, a purple flower for taking its hue from her cheek, the lily for appropriating its color from her hand, and buds of marjoram for taking the color of her hair. There are many more flowers—all of which appear to have taken their brilliant colors from his beloved.

Sonnet 100: The poet addresses his muse, asking why he wastes his energy on others less worthy when his love surpasses all, imploring his muse to give him words and inspiration equal to his subject. Shakespeare tells his lazy muse to look upon his

beloved's face and erase any wrinkles or signs of aging so he can quickly immortalize her in another of his poems, thus fending off time and death. This sonnet may reflect, in part, the disparity in age between Shakespeare and his lover.

Sonnet 101: Shakespeare make another appeal to his muse to help him immortalize his male lover. "Because he needs no praise, wilt though be dumb?" the poet asks his muse. It's wrong that his muse is silent in the face of truth and beauty as personified in his lover, when his muse has the power "to make him much outlive a gilded tomb." So that his lover will be praised forever, and immortalized, Shakespeare says he will teach his muse "how to make him seem, long hence, as he shows now." If, in fact, Shakespeare had both a male and female lover at the same time, this sonnet and the previous one indicate that he could simply rewrite a single poem and switch genders, thus saving himself time and effort.

Sonnet 102: Paradoxically, Shakespeare says he sometimes holds his tongue in speaking or writing of his love because he doesn't want to cheapen it by "publish[ing] everywhere." And yet, this is Sonnet 102 of 154 sonnets in this collection. Unless The Bard was stricken with a severe case of graphomania, some might find it amusing that Shakespeare calls this effuse verbal outpouring measured and restrained. If he is concerned about too much communication in this area, why write yet another poem to tell the reader how restrained he is?

Sonnet 103: Juxtaposed against the previous poem, this sonnet in which Shakespeare again calls out to his muse for help seems contradictory. The reader may wonder whether Sonnet 102, in which he states his preference for restraint in praising his love, is simply a rationalization for having temporarily depleted his supply of metaphors and words of praise.

Sonnet 104: This sonnet returns to familiar themes: his lover is exquisitely beautiful and has remained so for the three years they have known each other. But the truth is, according to the poet, she is getting older just as the seasons follow one another and her time for child bearing is running out.

Sonnet 105: "Fair, kind and true" is the sum of what he has been trying to communicate about his lady, Shakespeare says. Because she is all those kinds, as well as constant, there is a certain constancy in his verse. But within those three words, or themes, the author says he has "wondrous scope" to exercise his poetic powers in her praises.

Section 11

Section 11 Summary

Sonnet 106: Reviewing literature of the past, in praise of beautiful women and brave knights, the poet says he finds nothing adequate to describe his lady. All those efforts were but prelude to the majestic language required to do her justice, Shakespeare writes.

Sonnet 107: The poet tells his lady love that his verse will keep her forever young and beautiful, and ensure the immortality of his name because his lines will outlive the pomp and circumstance of petty tyrants and of time.

Sonnet 108: Addressing himself to "sweet boy," Shakespeare asks whether there are any words or art that could accurately reflect the qualities of his beloved. Their "eternal love" will outlive the dust of time and the insults of age, he says.

Sonnet 110: Shakespeare admits he's traveled far and wide, and probably looks world-weary from his pursuit of experience and knowledge. But, he says, he's found everything he's ever wanted in his love, and asks that she clutch him close to her "loving breast."

Sonnet 111: The poet tells his beloved she need not curse the fates for the fact he is not wealthy, although he is famous and must act his part as poet and playwright. He seeks no treatment or drug to ease his fate, only a bit of her pity to set his world straight.

Sonnet 112: Shakespeare says he doesn't care whether his name is embroiled in scandal, because he doesn't care what the world thinks of him. He is concerned only with what his beloved thinks of him, and can ignore both critics and flatterers.

Sonnet 113: Since leaving his beloved, the poet says his eye is firmly lodged in his mind so that he only sees her wherever he looks. Whether he sees a fair or deformed creature, a crow or a dove, they become part of his mind's eye as it focuses on her. Thus his true mind makes his eye untrue.

Sonnet 114: His brain is so besotted with images of his love's beauty that it can make cherubims of foul monsters, the poet says. But he also asks whether his perception of her is skewed because he loves her, whether it is his flattery of her that most informs his mind.

Sonnet 115: Shakespeare says the lines he's written that he could not love his lady more are false. How could he have written that he loved her best at any time in the past, when he knows that, like a baby, his love is growing all the time, he asks.

Sonnet 116: Love is steady and eternal and does not seek to change the beloved, Shakespeare observes. Love is as permanent as the stars used by sailors to navigate,

and love endures even to the end of time—which for those in love becomes very short, indeed, according to the poet.

Sonnet 117: The poet says he's been remiss in paying back the love and kindness that his lady has given him, while also traveling far and wide and seemingly forgetting about her. But he asks her to withhold her anger and realize that he has always tried to prove the steadiness and quality of her love.

Sonnet 118: As people sometimes purge themselves to restore their appetite, Shakespeare says he's resorted to "bitter sauces" to ward against his lady's sweetness and made himself sick when there was no reason. To be paranoid in love is to sicken one's self needlessly, as the poet admits he's now learned.

Sonnet 119: Shakespeare strikes a remorseful tone, calling himself to task for his "wretched errors" and admitting that he has cried profusely over his mistakes. He prays to his beloved that she will consider him a wiser and chastened man and will join him in rebuilding their love.

Sonnet 120: The poet says he can comfort himself for his own unkindness toward his lover, by the fact she has done the same to him. If she feels anything like he did when she stepped on his feelings, the poet says, then he understands that she must be going through hell.

Section 11 Analysis

Sonnet 106: "In praise of ladies dead and lovely knights" poets have in the past had adequate words and expressions for their task, Shakespeare says. All previous poetry is but prelude to the challenge of writing about his lover, whose beauty surpasses adequate description. Contemporary poets "have eyes to wonder, but lack tongues to praise." Shakespeare now says it's not his fault, nor his muse's fault that he is, in effect, tongue-tied. It's because the woman he loves is beyond adequate description.

Sonnet 107: Shakespeare defiantly mocks death, saying he'll "live in this poor rhyme. while he insults o'er dull and speechless tribes." And he tells his beloved that she, too, will be immortalized in his poetry. From a place of black despair, jealousy and even scorn, Shakespeare has come full circle emotionally and appears to once again be feeling on top of the world.

Sonnet 108: Eternal youth, flaming love, and immortal art are once again in play in this sonnet with frankly homosexual overtones as Shakespeare recounts that each day he must find something new that he's not experienced before, some new way of expressing his love by reminding himself of the love he shares. At the same time, he must remember to be grateful lest he take his blessings for granted, Shakespeare says.

Sonnet 109: The poet seeks understanding for straying from his lover, and proclaims his undying love to her. Even if he has fallen from the ideal of physical fidelity, Shakespeare

says, his soul is faithful to "Rose," and it would be preposterous for him to leave her. "If I have ranged, like him that travels, I return again," the poet says.

Sonnet 110: The sonneteer expresses remorse for his wanderings, explaining that he realizes now that he has offended his lover by being unfaithful and by "look[ing] on truth askance and strangely," or in other words being dishonest. He vows that he will not make the mistake again of seeking new romantic thrills that in the end only "made old offenses of affections new." Shakespeare says he is now content to be confined to "a god in love," in the form of his ladylove.

Sonnet 111: Shakespeare asks his lover to pity him for not having a better sense of how to behave in a romantic relationship, arguing that "the guilty goddess of my harmful deeds" knows no better and he expects to earn a bad reputation as a result. Likening his condition to that of a patient, Shakespeare says he'll take his bitter medicine to perform penance. He asks her for pity, which he says "is enough to cure me."

Sonnet 112: The only opinion in the whole world that matters, Shakespeare says, is that of his beloved. The poet says he doesn't care whether right or wrong, hers is the only voice he'll listen too. To both flatterer and critic alike, he will be like an adder, keeping them at bay. As far as the rest of the world is concerned, to him they might as well be dead.

Sonnet 113: Every experience "of bird, of flow'r, or shape" and "the mountain, or the sea, the day or night" is no longer experienced in Shakespeare's eyes but rather by the mental image of his beloved that he carries. Her form is a standard of perfection against which other creatures and objects are judged. The result is that his "most true mind thus maketh mine eye untrue" the poet says. As a description of the sensory overload that usually accompanies love, the sonnet is very effective.

Sonnet 114: The poet asks whether he is falling prey to flattery from his beloved, "the monarch's plaque" that can make sweet cherubs out of ugly monsters, or if his eyes are true. He answers his own question by stating that he knows it is flattery—but the poison cup she offers is so pleasing to his palate that he drinks it in thirstily.

Sonnet 115: Shakespeare tells his lover that previous poems to her grace and beauty were lies, because he's found that his love and desire have increased over time, "whose millioned accidents creep in 'twixt vows and change decrees of kings." He could have not known earlier when he wrote of his love that it would grow stronger and larger, like a "babe."

Sonnet 116: In one of the most sublime poems in the collection, Sonnet 116 emphasizes that true love implies total acceptance of the other person free of any desire to change or mold them to better suit another's wishes. Love, Shakespeare declares, "is an ever-fixéd mark that looks on tempests and is never shaken." Real love "alters not with his brief hours and weeks," but is steady and durable, and bears everything even to death. The spirit of this sonnet is similar to the declaration of love in Corinthians 13:4-7: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it

is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

Sonnet 117: The poet admits that he hasn't given his lover the time and attention she deserves, and that he has often been absent when he should have called on her love. She is justified in keeping a record of all his slights and disappointments, Shakespeare says, but he prays that she will merely frown upon him and not "shoot at me in your wakened hate."

Sonnet 118: Just as people sometimes take "stimulants" to sharpen their appetites, or take drugs and potions prophylacticly, Shakespeare tells his beloved that harboring doubts and suspicions about her actually caused bad things to happen in their relationship. What works in medicine doesn't work in affairs of the heart, he says: "Drugs poison him that so fell sick of you."

Sonnet 119: Shakespeare says his mind has created a perfect hell for him by "applying fears to hopes and hopes to fears," and by believing himself bereft when he is actually loved. It is the fever of love that has caused his eyes to pop out of his head with imagined illness. Accepting the blessings he has, Shakespeare says resurrected love grows stronger and greater than at first.

Sonnet 120: The poet indulges in a bit of romantic bookkeeping in this sonnet, reminding his beloved of their "night of woe" in which they fought and caused each other pain over old wounds. Shakespeare remarks how deeply sorrow cuts, and says he's grateful that they could finally make peace so that her offense doesn't become a fee, as "mine ransoms yours, and yours must ransom me." This sonnet effectively describes how two people who are emotionally close can easily hurt each other.

Section 12

Section 12 Summary

Sonnet 121: It is better to be evil and thought evil by other people than to be good and thought evil, according to Shakespeare. All people think badly of others, so therefore all people are bad, he concludes.

Sonnet 122: The poet expresses gratitude for the tables that his lady has given him because they always serve to refresh vividly his memory and experience of her, and thus they are a kind of double gift. Their receipt, he says, help to retain fading memories.

Sonnet 123: To time, whose methods often make the old appear new—as in the case of the pyramids—Shakespeare says defiantly he will neither be seduced by the way time distorts reality, nor will he allow the approach of death ("thy scythe") to efface or destroy his love.

Sonnet 124: If his love were the product of politics or affairs of state, it would be a fatherless bastard that is subject to the forces of nature and the fickleness of mankind, according to the poet. His love is heretical and derives none of its strength from pomp or fashion, Shakespeare says, and thus is timeless.

Sonnet 125: The poet pleads for a simple, genuine exchange of affection with his beloved—a small but real place in her heart in exchange for the same in his. There are too many examples in the world, he says, of those unsatisfied with their lot and who, in trying for more, lose everything.

Sonnet 126: Addressing himself to "my lovely boy," Shakespeare notes that his friend's lovers wither even though he himself grows more desirable. But his friend should not assume therefore that nature will not rein him in at last and reclaim her "treasure" through death.

Sonnet 127: The poet observes the trends in fashion that once considered black ugly and esteemed fairness. But now that black is once again in style, Shakespeare praises his love's naturally beautiful black eyes, and observes that her beauty is much greater than passing trends in art or fashion.

Sonnet 128: Whenever his lady plays music on a wooden instrument, she sways in time, which makes the experience all the more delightful, Shakespeare says. Since her instrument seems to come alive at the touch of her fingers, he asks that she save her lips for him to kiss.

Sonnet: 129: Shakespeare decries lust as "savage, bloody, cruel" and observes the lengths to which men go in pursuit of desire. Although the whole world knows that

satisfied lust is "a very woe," it is one that no one seems able to avoid because of the heaven that comes with conquest.

Sonnet 130: The poet says his lover's physical attributes compare unfavorably with many things in nature—her cheeks aren't as rosy as roses, her voice isn't as musical as music, although he loves it. But even without grandiose, false comparisons with an imagined perfection, he says his love is real and rare.

Sonnet 131: The poet tells his lover that others have said she is not really beautiful and does not have the power "to make love groan," although he thinks she is the most beautiful and fairest woman in the world. She is "black" not in her complexion, but only in her deeds.

Sonnet 132: His beloved's eyes have put on mourning black because she disdains him and because they are sensitive to his pain of rejection. Neither the morning nor the evening star can compare with her two dark eyes, the poet says. He swears that black is beautiful because of her complexion.

Sonnet 133: The poet protests to his beloved that the wound of love she gives him also wounds "my friend," thus creating "a torment thrice threefold." He petitions that she, as jailer, release his friend but not him from bonds of affection.

Sonnet 134: The poet tells his lady that, in choosing her over his male "friend," he bows to her "covetous" nature that will not tolerate another person. To give his love to her means that he must abuse his friend, and thereby he has lost his friend while she still has a hold over them both.

Sonnet 135: Shakespeare uses a pun on his own name, "Will," to refer to both himself and to his beloved's willpower. She has collected Will through her own will, much as the ocean collects rainwater and is never full. It's because of her will that she wants an abundance of Will, which he assures her she already has.

Sonnet 136: Shakespeare continues the pun on his name, Will, in this sonnet. He tells his beloved that there is abundant evidence that she loves her will and that she should forever make Will her love.

Sonnet 137: The poet asks love, "thou blind fool," what it has done to his eyes that make him see beauty as ugliness, and so distorted his perceptions and judgment that it has distorted his affections. He declares that his eyes and his heart have erred, but that he now sees clearly.

Sonnet 138: Love can not bear too much truth, according to the poet, but must be nurtured by well-intentioned but slightly distorted complements. In old age, "lie with her, and she with me," which is a pun on "lie" to mean either/both not telling the truth and/or having sex.

Sonnet 139: The poet says he'd rather his beloved kill him outright than betray his love with averting her eyes to other men, or being deceitful with him.

Sonnet 140: Shakespeare asks his love to be wise if she can't be kind, and not to press him too much for words lest his sorrow overcome him and make him mad. He'd rather hear soothing words like those a physician tells a dying man, than hear any more disdain from her lips.

Section 12 Analysis

Sonnet 121:Like Jesus, Shakespeare declares "I am that I am," and other people have no business judging him good or evil, for as soon as other men blame or judge him, they call attention to their own faults. Clues to the nature of his offense appear in the poet's description of "others' false adulterate eyes" that acknowledge with malice his "sportive blood."

Sonnet 122: His beloved lives in his memory more precisely than she could ever be described in any kind of record keeping, Shakespeare says. He needs neither books nor "tallies" to remember her in every detail because she will remain forever fresh in his mind and poetry. In fact, he says, to try and write a record of her would be to guarantee that he would become forgetful.

Sonnet 123: Shakespeare says, in effect, that he will not be rattled by time and remains unimpressed with the markers of time—such as the pyramids—because time distorts perceptions and lies to the senses. Human records of time and the changes that it brings are defective because, in a race against time, they are made and kept in haste. The poet vows to time to be true "despite thy scythe and thee."

Sonnet 124: The Bard uses a political analogy to make a point about the steadfastness of his love. If, Shakespeare surmises, his love were a political act or "the child of state," it would never have come into being and would never survive the scheming and plotting of factions against each other. His love is outside and above politics or fashion that come and go with the currents of time.

Sonnet 125: The poet describes his love as simple and pure and therefore enduring. His objective is not to make a great display of his love but to offer it humbly to his lady, a love that "knows no art" other than surrender to her. Shakespeare contrasts his love with the obsessions of others with passing "form and favor" who lose everything in trying to outdo each other in love.

Sonnet 126: Addressing "my lovely boy," Shakespeare notes how his youthful beauty may make others look and feel old, but reminds him that he too will face death. Even though nature can "detain" him in seemingly eternal youth, he should not be fooled that the "sovereign mistress over wrack" will find him. Although his death may seem distant, nature won't be satisfied until he is claimed by death, according to the poet.

Sonnet 127: Although in previous times black was not considered beautiful, times and fashions have changed, Shakespeare says. His mistress' eyes are "raven black" and cause those who try to follow fashion trends dismay because they are fair. The poet

makes a pun on "fair" meaning light complexioned and "fair" attractive. His lady is fair although she is dark and has black eyes, he says.

Sonnet 128: Shakespeare tells his ladylove that he envies the keys of her piano that "kiss the tender inward of thy hand" when she plays. Meanwhile, his lips would gladly change places with the keys over which her fingers dance tenderly. He tells her she can give her fingertips to the keyboard, but must give her lips to him.

Sonnet 129: Lust is a very destructive emotion that is sometimes confused with love, according to the poet. It is "perjured, murd'rouns, bloody, full of blame, savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust." Lust when satisfied is bliss but also woe; before satisfaction lust is "a joy proposed," but afterward a lost dream, Shakespeare says. Although everyone knows this, no one knows "to shun the heaven that leads men to this hell."

Sonnet 130: By most conventional measures of beauty, his mistress is quite ordinary, the poet declares. Her cheeks are not rosy, her hair is like black wires, and some perfumes smell much better than her breath. Although he likes her voice, it isn't particularly musical, Shakespeare writes. She walks on the earth, not on a cloud, but nevertheless his love is rare and real.

Sonnet 131: Shakespeare tells his lover that to him she is the most beautiful and most precious jewel, and yet "thy face hath not the power to make love groan." So it is not malicious envy that causes other people to speak ill of her. She is black only in her deeds, the poet tells his lover.

Sonnet 132: The poet tells his lover that he loves her dark, mournful eyes even though they show disdain for him in his pain. Her eyes are not like bright like the rising sun, nor brilliant like the evening star, but seem made for mourning—and Shakespeare asks that she mourn for him. Then he will swear that black is beautiful and everyone who doesn't have her complexion is foul.

Sonnet 133: This sonnet suggests a love triangle involving both sexes—Shakespeare, his friend ("him"), and his lady love. If Shakespeare stands in the middle of a triangulation involving both sexes, that would appear to be evidence of his bisexuality, unless the "friend" is a deeply-veiled reference to another woman, which seems most unlikely given the circumstances and previous references to another man as a love object. True to form, Shakespeare is somewhat duplicitous in his choice of language, an indication that he wants to conceal the third party in this triangle. He says the three-cornered dilemma in which he finds himself causes him to be forsaken "of him, myself and thee."

Sonnet 134: The poet and lover laments that his lady has released neither himself nor his friend from bonds of slavery to her, while his friend has become estranged. Shakespeare uses a legalistic analogy to make his point: she is "covetous" and his friend is kind. Shakespeare is "mortgaged" to her will, and she is a "usurer" who has made his friend a debtor for his sake.

Sonnet 135: Shakespeare uses a pun on "Will," his first name and "will," as in his lady's willpower, to describe how she has taken him emotional hostage. "Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy Will/And Will to boot, and Will in overplus," he writes. He asks if she has any respect for his will, or whether she wants more Will to add to her Will. This poem seems to suggest the notion of a sorceress, or "femme fatale," who has cast a spell on him over which he is powerless.

Sonnet 136: Continuing the wordplay, Shakespeare asks that his name, Will, be admitted into her soul which is the proper place for will (power). The poet asks that he become just one of her many wills, allowed anonymously into her soul but beloved still, "and then thou lovest me for my name is Will." In suggesting that he become a cipher in her soul, Shakespeare seems presciently aware of what Sigmund Freud would centuries later call the subconscious mind.

Sonnet 137: Shakespeare calls love a "blind fool" that distorts every thing. His eyes recognize beauty and become obsessed with that while ignoring other, more important virtues. He asks love why it has created men so that their hearts are so directly connected to their eyes, overruling common sense. It seems that the poet recognizes the fact he is "bewitched, bothered and bewildered."

Sonnet 138: The mysterious process of falling in love, in which each partner enters a state of near-hysterical self-delusion, puzzles Shakespeare. In this sonnet, he says he knows his lover is a liar, but that they both deceive each other. He accepts her falsehoods, including the statement that he is not old, and thus "on both sides is simple truth suppressed." Using another pun, Shakespeare observes that "I lie with her, and she with me, and in our faults by lies we flattered be."

Sonnet 139: The poet calls upon his ladylove to cause him no more suffering by her flirtatiousness and unkindness. He feels overpowered in their relationship and asks that if she is unfaithful, to keep it out of his sight and mind. Shakespeare says he cannot justify her behavior but asks her that since he is already mortally wounded, "kill me outright with looks and rid my pain."

Sonnet 140: Shakespeare asks his lover to be faithful to him, because if she pushes him too far he may go mad and slander her name everywhere. The world is so crazy, he says, that "mad slanderers by mad ears believed be." To prevent this from happening, he asks her to keep her eyes straight even though her heart may roam.

Section 13:

Section 13: Summary

Sonnet 141: The poet says he loves his lady not with his eyes, though she is beautiful, but with his heart whose five senses only want to serve her. His reward for being led into sin with her is nothing but pain.

Sonnet 142: Shakespeare tells his lady that she should consider her own behavior before she reproaches him for being unfaithful, since she herself has "robbed others' beds" and profaned her scarlet lips by uttering false words of love.

Sonnet 143: In a rather amusing analogy, Shakespeare says his love is like a frazzled housewife who puts her baby down to chase after a runaway chicken: though the baby cries, the mother's attention is diverted. The poet says his lady is like the busy housewife, and he prays that she'll turn around and kiss him.

Sonnet 145: The sonneteer tells of his chagrin when his love utters the words "I hate," for fear that the object of her hate is himself. But then he is relieved when she adds "not you."

Sonnet 146: Shakespeare ruminates on the life-death, body-soul duality that has puzzled men for ages. He concludes that denying the body to feed the soul is preferable to feeding the body—only to be eaten by worms—and starving the soul.

Sonnet 147: Shakespeare reflects on how his love, which he describes as "a fever," distorts his senses and his reason. Love is a disease, and "desire is death," the poet says, which makes him act and speak like a madman and to allow himself to be deceived by his lover.

Sonnet 148: Shakespeare extends his thoughts on the deceptive nature of love and asks himself why love has placed eyes in his head that see things completely out of connection with reality. He concludes that it is the tears in his eyes that cloud his vision and keep him blinded.

Sonnet 149: The poet proclaims his love even though his lady is a tyrant, filled with hatred, but says his steadfast love for her despite her fickle nature is proof of his constancy. Whatever defects she may have, Shakespeare says, he is blinded to them by his love for her.

Sonnet 150: What strange power does his lover have to make the poet love her even more because of her obvious defects and obvious "just cause of hate." Shakespeare says that if her unworthiness provokes love in him, that's all the more reason why she should love him.

Sonnet 151: Although some say love is too young to have conscience, love itself is what produces a conscience, according to Shakespeare. Although his love is a "gentle cheater," he implores her not to expect him to do the same because his love is true and faithful.

Sonnet 152: Shakespeare tells his lover that although she has committed adultery with him, and then with a second man, he should not scold her because he has broken at least twenty "bed-vows." Although he has sworn to himself that she is constant, loving and truthful, the poet says he knows he lies to himself.

Sonnet 153: The poet tells of Cupid falling asleep by the fire and being visited by a wood nymph ("a maid of Dian's"). The fire created a pit of hot water where they bathed, which is why men still seek hot baths for health. But for Shakespeare, the only real source of heat and health is his mistress's eyes.

Sonnet 154: The poet concludes that while love's fire heats water, water can not cool love's ardor.

Section 13: Analysis

Sonnet 141: Love for his woman has turned him into her "slave and vassal wretch," Shakespeare laments. None of his five senses or five wits can convince his "foolish heart" that he should stop serving her—a heart that loves her despite his eyes that discern "a thousand errors." His only satisfaction is that "she who makes me sin awards me pain."

Sonnet 142: Shakespeare does a verbal "gotcha" in this sonnet, wherein he says his sin is love and his lover's virtue is hate. He grants that he has been fickle, just as she has, and "sealed false bonds of love as oft as mine." But the poet says he doesn't wish to reproach her, but seeks only pity. If she in return expects pity from him, first she needs to find a place for it to grow in her own heart.

Sonnet 143: The poet tells his lady he is the crying baby that the housewife puts down as she runs out the door to corral an errant fowl. As she runs after the thing she wants, she ignores him, He prays that she will "have her Will" and turn back after she gets her quarry and pay attention to him. Shakespeare apparently thought of another pun on his name to use in this sonnet.

Sonnet 144: The poet acknowledges that he has two loves, one of comfort and one of despair, that he equates with good and evil angels tugging him in different directions. The good angel, Shakespeare says, is a man and the evil angel a woman who woos the other with "foul pride."

Sonnet 145: This sonnet seems like a huge sigh of relief, as Shakespeare describes his lover beginning a sentence, "I hate..." but upon seeing his downcast face, immediately finished the sentence with"...not you." This light-hearted verse confirms once again the way that romantic love immediately makes lovers dependent upon each others moods.

Sonnet 146: The final couplet of this sonnet seems to foreshadow a more modern poem by Dylan Thomas, "And Death Shall Have No Dominion." Both Shakespeare's couplet and Dylan Thomas's poem envision the death of death itself, so that life can be eternal. Whereas Christianity and other religions hold that the soul leaves the dead body and goes onto a life eternal of its own, both poets seem to accept the death of body and soul as inevitable, and only escapable if/when death dies and life goes on forever. Shakespeare asks why the soul expends such energy in making the body appealing when the soul itself "feed[s] on Death, that feeds on men, and Death once dead, there's no more dying then."

Sonnet 147: The final couplet of this poem distills its essence: "I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee bright, who art as black as hell, as dark as night." Although these lines that compare love to a fatal illness read with all the sense of novelty with which they were surely written, they are undoubtedly the feelings of people throughout the ages who have fallen in love. At some point, most will look back on the early days of their love and realize how distorted their perceptions were because of the power of attraction. In this sonnet, the poet expresses his revulsion upon coming to the realization that his love is neither sweetness nor light, but dark and evil.

Sonnet 148: Shakespeare gets a bit smarmy while wallowing in self-pity. He asks rhetorically whether love has skewed his vision or his sanity—or both. In his state of "love," the poet says, he can't tell any more what is true and what is false. It is the nature of love, according to the poet, to vex the vision with "watching and with tears." He hopes his tears will go away and the sun dry the skies, so he can see clearly.

Sonnet 149: As if to prove his point that love has deranged his reason, Shakespeare engages in a circular soliloquy about love and hate. He asks his lover whether she can cruelly say that he doesn't love her because he's on her side in criticizing himself. Who can she name who hates her and is a friend of his? Doesn't his self-loathing prove that he loves her"? he asks. Shakespeare concludes that she really does love him, but he is blind to it.

Sonnet 150: What insanity has possessed him that he mistrusts his own senses, "and swear that brightness doth not grace the day?" Shakespeare asks. No matter what faults others may find in his beloved, he says, it doesn't stop him from admiring and loving her. For that, she should not disdain him but know that he is more worthy of her love because her unworthiness makes him love her more. This rumination on the nature of love brings to mind the Christian notion that God loves us "not in spite of, but because of, our defects."

Sonnet 151: The poet answers his own questions posed in the previous sonnet by observing that his moods are directly linked to how his lady seems to feel about him. Calling his lover "gentle cheater," Shakespeare says it's love that makes him want to be her slave and servant, and since conscience is born of love, she should not expect him to betray his nobler instincts merely to satisfy his body's instincts.

Sonnet 152: It doesn't matter that his mistress twice broke her "bed-vow," because he has broken tentimes as many vows, Shakespeare says. All of his vows were to misuse her, because he's lost all honest faith in her. The poet says he's sworn oaths of his mistress's love, truth and constancy, but knows that he is deceiving himself when he "swear[s] against the truth so foul a lie." To get the full meaning of this sonnet, some verbal untangling is necessary. Beneath the clever turns of phrase, the poet is saying with a bitter voice that they should both be ashamed of deceiving each other.

Sonnet 153: Some men jump into hot baths for health, Shakespeare says, but they do him no good. Unlike those who benefit from hot baths created in myth when a forest maiden threw Cupid's burning torch into a cool fountain, the poet says his only cure is to find the fire in the same place where Cupid got his flames—his mistress's eyes.

Sonnet 154: Love is hot, Shakespeare says—so hot that it can boil water without itself being cooled. He tells the myth of Cupid sleeping by the fire, who falls asleep and drops his torch, which is then snatched up by a forest nymph. The nymph throws the burning torch into a nearby well. It is not extinguished, but creates a hot bath instead that men use to heal disease. So, the poet says, he came there to be cured of his mistress' thrall, or spell.

The Sonnets

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The Sonnets

Analysis

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Characters

Shakespeare, appears in All poems

There are no characters identifiable by name in these sonnets, except in a couple of instances noted below where Shakespeare juxtaposes his own name, "Will," with the use of "will," as a pun on willpower.

Rose, appears in Sonnet 109

The only instance of a personal name, other than Will, is Rose who appears in the last line of Sonnet 109. Shakespeare says Rose is everything in the universe that matters to him. The reader can probably assume this is the name of his female lover.

Heart, appears in Many poems

Since these are poems of love, the heart motif almost assumes the role of a character. Not only his own heart, but also those of his lover(s) are major driving forces in many of the sonnets. Sonnet 24: "Mine eye hath played the painter and hath steeled/Thy beauty's form in table of my heart...Yet eyes this cunning want to grace their art/They draw but what they see, know not the heart."

Eye, appears in Many poems

Shakespeare uses "eye" to mean vision, which can often be at odds with reality when one is in love, but also to mean perception. Sometimes he plays the two different meanings off against each other, as in Sonnet 69: "Those parts of thee that the world's eye doth view/Want nothing that the thought of hearts can mend/By seeing farther than the eye hath shown/They look into the beauty of thy mind/And that in guess they measure by thy deeds; Then, churls, their thoughts, although their eyes were kind/To thy fair flower add the rank smell of weeds."

Beauty, appears in Many poems

Beauty, whether masculine or feminine, plays a large role in the sonnets. Shakespeare praises his beloved for her beauty, says the world doesn't appreciate her inner beauty, but cautions that her exterior beauty will fade and therefore she should have his child.

Cupid, appears in Sonnet 153

Cupid, the god of love, comes to the fore in this sonnet as Shakespeare briefly recites the story of Cupid sleeping by a fire as Diana, goddess of the hunt, who took a burning stick and plunged it into a cold mountain lake that grew hot—a bath to heal the sick.

Imperfection, appears in Several poems

In several instances, Shakespeare points an accusing finger at his lover and berates her for some defect of character—such as infidelity—only to point the finger back at himself and admit that he has the same defect.

Muse, appears in Sonnets 38, 78, 85, 100, 101, 103

As a poet, Shakespeare has an easy scapegoat when he feels the need to write a sonnet to his beloved but is not pleased with the result: he blames it on his muse, who he says has been taking an unauthorized vacation from his mind.

Time, appears in Many poems

Time is present in these poems as an immutable force, one that sweeps aside everything and everybody in a sort of mindless march to oblivion. Frequently, Shakespeare alludes to time as an the enemy of man. More often, he uses time as an element to lend poignancy to his lines.

Loss, appears in Sonnet 30 and others

In some of his more somber moods, Shakespeare reflects on loss—the loss of youthful beauty, health, and ultimately life itself. In Sonnet 30 where he lists his losses, Shakespeare concludes by telling his love that contemplation of her restores his losses and removes his sorrows.

Objects/Places

The Human Heart, appears in All poems

The great subject of all these poems is love, without reference to specific individuals other than Shakespeare himself, his lover(s) and his emotions. There is also no mention of specific objects or places, although the reader may assume sixteenth century England as the locale in which the poems were written.

Death, appears in Most poems

The imminence of death appears overtly and covertly throughout this collection as an emotional undertone that serves to intensify the emotions of love, aging and childbirth. Shakespeare make countless references to the need for his lady to bear a child to defeat death, for example.

Painting, appears in Several poems

Portraiture is mentioned several times as a symbol for art as the enemy of death, and in some of these instances the poet tells his lover that no portrait could ever do her justice, as in Sonnet 83: "I never saw that you did painting need." In some ways, this notion seems to prefigure Oscar Wilde and "The Picture of Dorian Gray" in which his portrait seems to age as he does.

Bisexuality, appears in Several poems

Homosexuality or bisexuality appears several times in these sonnets (as noted above), usually soft-pedaled and blended in smoothly with the tone and texture of the others. In several poems, it seems quite plain Shakespeare is addressing a love sonnet to another man.

Unfatihfulness, appears in Several poems

The woman of his affections, to judge from Shakespeare's sonnets, is a younger woman who while she may love him is also flirtatious and sometimes unfaithful. This causes him pain which he tries to make light of in earlier sonnets, and in later poems to express his sorrow.

Travel, appears in A few poems

Shakespeare expresses his dread of taking journeys that separate him from his beloved and possibly provide her with opportunities for being unfaithful; he also expresses his joy at returning and reuniting with his lover.

Obsession, appears in Many sonnets

In the earlier poems, Shakespeare describes how he can't stop thinking about his love during the day and how her image robs him of sleep—or if he does sleep, haunts his sleep with dreams about her.

World-Weariness, appears in Several poems

The fever pitch of most of these earliest sonnets, in which romantic love burns brightly, is tempered by a few that show a more reflective melancholy side to the post, as in Sonnet 66: "Tired with all these, for restful death I cry."

Writer's Block, appears in Several sonnets

Although the term "writer's block" probably din't exist in Shakespeare's time, there are numerous instances in which he calls upon his poetic muse to wake up and get to work helping to write another poem.

Slavery, appears in Many sonnets

Perhaps as a part of the literary convention of romantic love, Shakespeare calls himself a "slave" to his beloved so many times that to a modern reader's sensibilities it might be offensive. In any event, the poet makes it clear that he is at his lover's beck and call.

Themes

Immortality

Shakespeare frequently returns to the importance of his lover having his child, so as to preserve her beauty and charms. He tells her that her beauty will soon be robbed by time, that she must make a copy of herself with him, that it would be a tremendous waste if all her attributes were to die with her. He pleads directly with her to have his child in Sonnets 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16 and 17, and references to having a child appear indirectly in many other poems. Here's how he expresses it in Sonnet 9:

"Is it for fear to wet a widow's eye

That thou consum'st thyself in single life?

Ah, if thou issueless shalt hap to die,

The world will wail thee like a makeless wife;

The world will be thy widow and still weep,

That thou no form of thee hast left behind."

Shakespeare also appeals to her pride by confidently offering her immortality in his verses, as in Sonnet 81:

"Your monument shall be my gentle verse,

Which eyes not yet created shall o'erread,

And tongues to be your being shall rehearse

When all the breathers of this world are dead."

The importance of having children was, no doubt, greater in Elizabethan times because of the higher rates of disease and death related to childbirth and childhood. In fact, fear of death in childbirth may have been one reason why Shakespeare is so adamant in his arguments to his lover about having a child, although it is a double-edged sword that holds the potential for death as well as immortality.

Idealization of the beloved

Throughout the early sonnets, Shakespeare refers to his lover in highly idealized terms as was the convention of the day in romantic love, when gallant knights and swooning ladies were still living memories. The tone persists for at least the first half of the collection, but then shifts when Shakespeare realizes that she is human with flaws and

shortcomings. At that point, the mood of many of the sonnets turns dark and morbid before returning in the end to a new affirmation of life and love. In Sonnet 53, Shakespeare exults that his love is finer than any Greek god:

"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."

In Sonnet 57, the poet says he is a "slave" to his mistress:

"Being your slave, what should I do but tend

Upon the hours and times of your desire?"

And in Sonnet 58:

"Being your vassal bound to stay your leisure,

O, let me suffer, being at your beck."

After suffering rejection by his lover, Shakespeare reveals a more earthly perspective in Sonnet 94:

"The sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds;

Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds."

The questions of honesty and fidelity haunt the poet in Sonnet 138:

"When my love swears that she is made of truth

I do believe her though I know she lies...

Therefore I lie with her, and she with me,

And in our faults by lies we flattered be."

And in Sonnet 147, Shakespeare sounds a note of disgust:

"My love is as a fever, longing still

For that which longer nurseth the disease...

For I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee bright,

Who art as black as hell, as dark as night."

One of the elements that makes these sonnets powerful is Shakespeare's ability to see and speak the truth, no matter how intense his emotions. So it is not surprising that after an initial period of euphoria when he declares his lover perfect and himself her slave, he would come back to earth for a glimpse of reality. Yet, through his tears and disappointment at her mortality, the poet admits he still loves her and is "frantic-mad" about her.

Bisexuality/homosexuality

Perhaps nowhere in these sonnets is Shakespeare's subtle use of language to both elucidate and obfuscate simultaneously at play than in fleeting references to men as love objects. In Sonnet 68, Shakespeare praises the beauty of another man:

"Thus is his cheek the map of days outworn,

When beauty lived and died as flowers do now...

In him those holy antique hours are seen,

Without all ornament, itself and true,

Making no summer of another's green.

Robbing no old to dress his beauty new:

And him as for a map doth Nature store,

To show false Art what beauty was of yore."

In Sonnet 63, the poet says that although his lover will grow older his beauty will be preserved in the sonnet:

"When hours have drained his blood and filled his brow

With lines and wrinkles, when his youthful morn

'Hath traveled on to Age's steepy night,

And all those beauties whereof he's now king

Are vanishing, or vanished out of sight...

Against confounding Age's cruel knife...

Shall never cut from memory

My sweet love's beauty, though my lover's life.

His beauty shall in these black lines be seen,

And they shall live, and he in them still green."

And in Sonnet 67, Shakespeare laments the "infection" that results from his lover's "sin" and that is slowly draining him of life. The infection Shakespeare refers to is probably syphilis:

"Ah, wherefore with infection should he live,

And with his presence grace impiety,

That sin by him advantage should achieve,

And lace itself with his society?

Why should he live, now Nature bankrout is,

Beggard of blood to blush through lively veins,

For she hath no exchequer now but his,

And, proud of many, lives upon his gains?"

These and other poems are interspersed among the rest of the sonnets clearly addressed to a woman. Once again, there is a certain ambiguity in these lines most likely intended to disguise their real meaning. On the other hand, it is possible that a verbal celebration of homosexual love might not have shocked or offended anyone during Shakespeare's time, and possibly was accepted as merely a reflection of the mores and behavior of the age.

Style

Style

Point of View

The point of view for all sonnets is subjective—the emotions and experiences of the poet as lover, sometimes exuberant, sometimes despairing, always passionate often to the point of obsession. In many poems, the point of view is very narrow and personal as Shakespeare reflects the intensity of romantic love. He often assumes the point of view of a worshiper, or even a slave, to his beloved. In other verses, his vision leaps from the immediate situation to encompass time itself as he ruminates on the meaning of birth, youth, old age and death. Although most of the poems vibrate with the fever of love, some are more philosophical, as in Sonnet 30:

"When to the sessions of sweet silent thought

I summon up remembrance of things past,

I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,

And with old woes new wail my dear Time's waste."

Or in Sonnet 66:

"Tired with all these, for restful death I cry,

As, to behold a desert a beggar born,

And need nothing trimmed in jollity,

And purest faith unhappily forsworn,

And gilded honor shamefully misplaced,

And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,

And right perfection wrongfully disgraced

And strength by limping way disabled."

Setting

The setting for this collections is the human heart.

Language and Meaning

The poems in this collection are in standard sonnet form of twelve lines in iambic pentameter (U/), each with ten feet, and a final couplet. (The only exception is Sonnet 126, which is only twelve lines long.) The rhyming pattern for the first twelve lines is ABABCDCDEFEF and the final couplet is end-rhymed GG. Shakespeare makes liberal and effective use of enjambment, abbreviation, syncope and accenting to mold his words into the sonnet form. as in these opening lines from Sonnet 100:

"Where art thou Muse that thou forget'st so long,

To speak of that which gives thee all thy might?

Spend'st thou thy fury on some worthless song,

Darkening thy power to lend base subjects light?"

He also uses puns and ambiguous phrases to add an element of surprise, as in these lines from Sonnet 136:

"If thy soul check thee that I come no near,

Swear to thy blind soul that I was thy Will,

And will, thy soul knows, is admitted there:

Thus far for my love-suit, sweet, fulfill.

Will will fulfill the treasure of thy love,

Ay, fill it full with wills, and my will one."

Throughout, Shakespeare creates rich metaphors to describe the various aspects of his relationship with his lover. He is a "decrepit father" who takes joy in seeing the active deeds of youth in his child (lover) in Sonnet 37; he is a slave to her (Sonnet 26); he is a painter intoxicated with her beauty (Sonnet 24); he is an abandoned child crying out for his mother's affections (Sonnet 143). He draws on astronomy, the judicial system, the family, the banking system, politics and the arts—and more—to mine metaphors that will elucidate his passions.

Although some of the language, naturally enough, consists of words and phrases that are outside the functional vocabulary for most speakers and readers of modern English, their meaning can often be readily discovered. One example is the frequent use of the word "show" to mean appearance of image, or "bankrout" for bankrupt, "strumpeted" for disgraced, and so on. Rather than inhibiting the modern reader, the language can be an enrichment of the poetry especially when read aloud because the music and word play that is so much a part of Shakespeare comes alive.

Structure

As a collection of sonnets, there is no discernible structure beyond the internal structure of each poem as described above in 3. Language and Meaning.

Quotes

"Who will believe my verse in time to come/If it were filled with your most high deserts?/But were some child of yours alive that time/You should live twice, in it and in my rhyme." (Sonnet 17, p. 17)

"When to the sessions of sweet silent thought/I summon up remembrance of things past/I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought/And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste." (Sonnet 30, p.30)

"Those pretty wrongs that liberty commits/When I am sometime absent from thy heart/Thy beauty and thy years full well befits/For still temptation follows where thou art." (Sonnet 41, p. 41)

"Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminate/That time will come and take my love away/The thought is as a death, which cannot choose/But weep to have that which it fears to lose." (Sonnet 64, p. 64)

"No longer mourn for me when I am dead/Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell/Give warning to the world that I am fled/From this vile world with vilest worms to dwell/Nay, if you read this line. remember not/The hand that writ it, for I love you so/That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot." (Sonnet 71, p.71)

"O, never say that I was false of heart/Though absence seemed my flame to quality./As easy might I from myself depart/As from my soul, which in thy breast doth lie." (Sonnet 109, p. 109)

"Let me not to the marriage of true minds/Admit impediments; love is not love/Which alters when it alterations finds/Or bends with the remover to remove./O, no, it is an ever-fixed mark/That looks on tempests and is never shaken;/It is the star to every wand'ring bark/Whose worth's unknown/Although his height be taken/Love's not time's fool, tough rosy lips and cheeks/Within his bending sickle's compass come/Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks/But bears it out even to the edge of doom./If this be error and upon me proved/I never writ, nor no man ever loved." (Sonnet 116, p. 116)

Topics for Discussion

What explains the occasional use of "he" and "him" as love objects in several of these poems?

Does it appear that Shakespeare intended these sonnets to be published, or did he write them for strictly personal circulation?

Name five objects to which Shakespeare compares his love.

What is the character flaw in his beloved to which Shakespeare alludes several times in the sonnets?

Would footnotes for some archaic words be helpful, or is it possible to decipher the sixteenth century English from context?

How does Shakespeare's attitude toward his lover change throughout the course of these sonnets?

Who does the poet name as his muse?

Does it appear from the sonnets that the poet is older than his lover?

What quality of his beloved tends to obscure her defects?

What is the one thing Shakespeare most wants from his beloved, in the earlier sonnets?