



Victoria University  
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# ASSIGNMENT

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**1. How does William Shakespeare represent love in sonnets? Elaborate your answer referring to all the sonnets you have read.**

**Answer:** In the love sonnets of Shakespeare critics over the centuries have always been fascinated by the love sentiments portrayed in them. The two main subject of these sonnets have mostly been 'dark lady and the 'fair young man'. In these sonnets love is dealt with comprehensively which address the deep issues of life and are intensely personal. Many scholars have tried to identify and discover the 'dark lady' and the 'fair young man' and theorize that he might have been Shakespeare's patron the Earl of Southampton. It is interesting to consider these living breathing figure who Shakespeare knew so intimately to be the characters in his love sonnets.

In the love sonnets of Shakespeare love is something that is not tangible and it is a collection of intangible characteristics which make up a powerful force together. Love is depicted as an overwhelming force that defeats all obstacles and triumphs over time. In sonnet 'Let Me Not to The Marriage of True Minds', love is portrayed as an immortal force, which overcomes time, age and death itself. Love is also depicted as the invincible force which defies the effect of age on beauty and youth. Love does not decay like physical beings. In another sonnet 'My Mistress' the force of love is portrayed through physical beauty. Shakespeare expands his definition of love in this sonnet where he describes how love can overcome social pressures. In 'My love is as a fever, longing still' portrays how the absence of partner can override one's mind by the desires and overwhelming emotions.

From Shakespeare's Sonnets 1-126, we see that they are addressed to a male friend younger than Shakespeare. In these sonnets, Shakespeare expresses his admiration of this man's beauty. We see a growing friendship between Shakespeare and this young man throughout sonnet 1-126. And gradually the poet starts to love this young man. It shows that love can come in any forms. These sonnets reveal a deep admiration for this young man. Then there is another character the 'dark lady'. This lady could be a black African woman or maybe she is just a non-blonde or an English brunette. Some scholars suggest that there was no such woman. Many scholars believe this woman is one of his inventions to express intense sexual passion or distress in sonnets 127-152. The sonnets depict an erotic and painful relationship in which the poet remains attached to his mistress through a combination of lust and love.

In the sonnet Let Me Not to The Marriage of True Minds can give the best response to the 'What is Love' question. Here Shakespeare expresses the deep and profound feeling of love in the most beautiful language. Here, the love is given the identity of such a force which can overcome time, age and death itself. Love is not a subject to decay unlike any physical being. To convey the eternal nature of love, Shakespeare employs an amazing array of poetic device. And he is so confident in his conviction that he asserts that no-one ever loved or wrote anything if they think he is wrong. And in these love sonnets Shakespeare says so many things in only fourteen lines. Here, Shakespeare starts with expressing that he cannot interfere when two people are together in love. To him love, that changes with circumstances is not love at all and it doesn't change even if someone tries to destroy that love. Love is like a star that travelers use for navigating when lost. Love endures as the days and weeks go by and if the speaker is wrong about this then he emphasizes that he never written anything and no man has ever loved. By this statement he expresses his firmness in his belief.

In the sonnet *My Mistress' Eyes*, Shakespeare spends most of his time describing the physical beauty of his mistress in great details. The words used by him to describe the mistress shows how much he adored the beauty of this mistress. His description and words exclaims that not even the lovers who describe their loved ones by comparing them to the nature can match the love he has for his mistress. In this sonnet each line describes a quality of the speaker's beloved. The speaker compares the body of his mistress with the things which people consider the symbol of beauty such as snow, roses, sun, goddess etc. The speaker tries to imply that, he loves his beloved so much that even if the music might be more beautiful than her voice, he would rather hear her talk than listen to music. He loves to hear her not because of the sound of her voice, but he loves to hear what she says because he loves her so much. Here, the love between the speaker and the mistress is not traditional. The sonnet kind of mocks the traditional love poetry by humorous impossible comparisons used to describe one's beauty in a traditional love poem. In this sonnet Shakespeare is saying that his beloved is not conventionally beautiful, but unlike other women, she doesn't need to be compared with the impossible standards to describe her beauty. Although many critics don't agree that this poem has a good message but everyone agrees that this is a very good poem.

Another sonnet *'My Love is as a Fever, Longing Still'* by Shakespeare shows another aspect of love. Here, the speaker describes the love like a disease which robs the ability of someone to act rationally. This poem portrays a dark side of love, where love is a powerful force that fills one with both passion and misery. Here the man struck by love and longing for his loved ones is like a sick patient beyond saving. Love is like a fever and it can destroy the capacity of man to act logically or think rationally. The speaker can very well understand that his obsession and love is unhealthy and toxic but still he can't stop himself. Here, the speaker mentions *The Dark Lady* whose obsession has consumed his life. This obsession with the dark lady has robbed his ability to think clearly. This obsession is like an evil presence in his life and he is well aware of it. Still, he cannot be cured from this maddening disease. This disease in order to preserve itself is feeding on his common sense and reasoning. The speaker refers to his reasoning to his doctor who can cure him from this disease. But this doctor is about to abandon him out of frustration because of the speaker's refusal to listen to the reasoning, leaving him in the endless cycle of despair. The reasoning realized that it can do nothing to fix him. The speaker feels like he is becoming a mad man unable to sit still. This disease has stripped him of his self-confidence. At the beginning of the sonnet, it seems like the speaker is afraid of losing his mind and becoming sick with obsession. And at the end of the sonnets, it seems like he became the person he was afraid to become.

By reading the love sonnets of Shakespeare the above-mentioned poems give a clear idea of how he represented love in his sonnets.