

SONNET 75

So are you to my thoughts as food to life,
Or as sweet-season'd showers are to the ground;
And for the peace of you I hold such strife
As 'twixt a miser and his wealth is found;
Now proud as an enjoyer and anon
Doubting the filching age will steal his treasure,
Now counting best to be with you alone,
Then better'd that the world may see my pleasure;
Sometime all full with feasting on your sight
And by and by clean starved for a look;
Possessing or pursuing no delight,
Save what is had or must from you be took.
Thus do I pine and surfeit day by day,
Or gluttoning on all, or all away.

PARAPHRASE OF SONNET 75

As food is to the body so are you to my soul and mind,
Or as spring showers are to the ground;
And for the contentment you bring me I allow such inner strife
As the conflict between a miser and his money;
Who takes joy in his wealth, but soon
Fears that ruthless competitors will steal his treasure,
Now thinking it best to have you alone,
Then thinking that the world should see how happy I am;
At one moment wholly satisfied by feasting on your sight
And the next moment utterly starved for a look at you:
Having or seeking no pleasure
Except what you have given me or what I will demand.
And so I starve or feed to excess depending on the day,
Either gorging on you, or not having you at all.

COMMENTARY

The sonnet opens with a seemingly joyous and innocent tribute to the young friend who is vital to the poet's emotional well being. However, the poet quickly establishes the negative aspect of his dependence on his beloved, and the complimentary metaphor that the friend is food for his soul decays into ugly imagery of the poet alternating between starving and gorging himself on that food. The poet is disgusted and frightened by his dependence on the young friend. He is consumed by guilt over his passion. Words with implicit sexual meanings permeate the sonnet -- "enjoyer", "treasure", "pursuing", "possessing", "had" -- as do allusions to five of the seven "deadly" sins -- avarice (4), gluttony (9, 14), pride (5), lust (12), and envy (6). Such language of sensual "feasting" (9), uncontrollable urges, and sinful consumption makes it hard to ignore the erotic relationship between the poet and the young man. The notion asserted by critics like A. L. Rowse that the poet's feelings for his friend are "not at all homosexual" (Rowse xvii) is indeed hard to justify.

Although evidence is not conclusive, it is assumed that Shakespeare is discussing his patron, the Earl of Southampton. Identifying the young man as Shakespeare's patron adds a deeper facet to the sonnet. No longer is the poet afraid that the young man will be stolen by another, younger lover simply for a sexual relationship, but by another young poet in need of patronage. Shakespeare is worried that his "treasure" is being "filched" by another

emerging writer. Thus Shakespeare is in jeopardy of losing not only a friend and lover, but also his financial backing. Which emerging poet is about to steal Shakespeare's treasure? It is probably the rival poet, the wielder of the "alien pen" (78.3) who takes the foreground in sonnets 78-86. From other sonnets (in particular, 82) we see that the young patron liked to associate with his intellectual friends who were highly educated at the most prestigious universities. Maybe the rival poet was an Oxford man, like Lyly, Sidney, or Chapman. Maybe he was a Cambridge man like Marlowe, Greene, or Nashe. Whoever the rival poet was, he caused the insecure and covetous Shakespeare no end of grief.

SONNET 147: ANNOTATIONS

My love is as a fever, longing still
For that which longer nurseth the disease,
Feeding on that which doth preserve the ill,
The uncertain sickly appetite to please.
My reason, the physician to my love,
Angry that his prescriptions are not kept,
Hath left me, and I desperate now approve
Desire is death, which physic did except.
Past cure I am, now reason is past care,
And frantic-mad with evermore unrest;
My thoughts and my discourse as madmen's are,
At random from the truth vainly express'd;
For I have sworn thee fair and thought thee bright,
Who art as black as hell, as dark as night.

SONNET 147: PARAPHRASE

My love is like a fever, still longing,
For that which feeds the disease,
Feeding on that which prolongs the illness,
All to please the unhealthy desires of the body.
My reason, love's doctor,
Angry that I do not follow his directions,
Has left me, and desperate I find that desire
Leads to death, which physic (reason) will not allow.
Now reason is past caring, now I am past cure,
And I am frantic with continual unrest;
My thoughts and my words are like a madman's,
Lies foolishly uttered;
For I thought you were moral and bright (shining as a star),
But you really are black as hell and dark as night.

SONNET 147: COMMENTARY

The poet's scathing attack upon the morality of his mistress exemplifies their tumultuous and perplexing relationship. The three quatrains outline the poet's inner struggle to cope with both his lover's infidelity and the embarrassing self-admission that he still desires her to gratify him sexually, even though she has been with other men. The poet yearns to understand why, in spite of the judgment of reason (5), he still is enslaved by her charms. Confused by his own inexplicable urges, the poet's whole being is at odds with his insatiable "sickly appetite" (4) for the dark lady. He deduces in the final quatrain that he surely must be insane, for he calls his mistress just and moral when she obviously is neither. Not until later sonnets (150-1) do we see a change of tone and a cool-headed

acknowledgment of the recklessness of the whole affair. In Sonnet 151, the poet admits that he cannot continue the relationship because it betrays his "nobler part" (6) i.e. his soul, and in Sonnet 152 we are witness to the end of the affair.

Is Sonnet 147 autobiographical? Did Shakespeare really have an affair with a raven-haired seducer? Critics are divided on this matter, and, until some new documents are uncovered, we shall never know the truth. Attempts have been made to solicit possible historical candidates for the role of the dark lady, based on their likely association with Shakespeare. The most famous contenders are Mary Fitton, lady-in-waiting to Queen Elizabeth; Lucy Morgan, a brothel owner; and Emilia Lanier, the mistress of Lord Hunsdon, patron of the arts. I'll leave you with a skeptic's view of the autobiographical nature of the sonnets:

Every sonneteer of the 16th century, at some point in his career, devoted his energies to vituperation of a cruel siren....In Shakespeare's early life the convention was wittily parodied by Gabriel Harvey in an amorous odious sonnet entitled *The Student's Looove or Hatrid, or both or neither, or what shall please the looving or hating reader, either in sport or in earnest, to make of such contrary passions as are here discoursed*. The Dark Lady of Shakespeare's sonnets may therefore be relegated to the ranks of the creatures of his fancy. It is quite possible that he may have met in real life a dark-complexioned siren, and it is possible that he may have fared ill at her disdainful hands. But it was the exacting conventions of the sonneteering contagion, and not his personal experiences or emotions, that impelled Shakespeare to give the dark lady of his sonnets a poetic being (Tyler, 359).

<http://www.shakespeare-online.com/sonnets/>