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**Breaking the Conventions:  
Shakespeare, the Fair Young Man and the Dark Lady**



**VS**



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## Introduction

*What we need most, is not so  
much to realise the ideal as to  
idealise the real.*

*Francis Herbert Hedge*

According to Meyer H. Abrams, in the competitive and vital world of Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo, the overcoming of the human spirit unleashed curiosity, individual self-assertion, and a powerful conviction that man was the measure of all things (472). In the Renaissance, the literary images of the human being appeared to be perfect and unattainable, aiming to improve society through the perfection of the individual. It was achieved by means of literature and its different forms. The most explicit form for conveying the beauty and perfection of a human being to be used was the poem. Love verses, odes devoted to queens and lyrical songs of various kinds were the best weapon in the love arsenal of poets. Regardless of a vast variety of different poetic forms, however, poets in their verses encompassed all possible themes and, therefore, were searching for something new, more expressive, unique and revolutionary to some extent.

In order to achieve this uniqueness and to make their poetry sound in a different and special way, some poets started to use a new poetic form called the *sonnet*. The term sonnet is derived from the Provençal word *sonet* and the Italian word *sonetto*, which means “little song.” By the thirteenth century, it had come to signify a poem of fourteen lines following a strict rhyming scheme and logical structure. Traditionally, in the Romance languages such as Italian, French and Spanish, the most widely used metres are hendecasyllable and Alexandrines, whereas English poets usually use iambic pentameter when writing sonnets. Although its rules of arrangement might seem limiting, the sonnet was actually a challenging ground for poets where they tested their poetic creativity before branching off into other forms of poetry or prose.

The first to discover the sonnet as a poetic form was Giacomo da Lentini, the head of the Sicilian School under Frederick II. The Italian sonnet in its original form was divided into an octave followed by a sestet. The former stated a proposition whereas the latter stated its solution with a clear division between the two. Initially, Giacomo da Lentini's octave rhymed as *a-b-a-b, a-b-a-b*, later it became *a-b-b-a, a-b-b-a*. Unlike the octave, the sestet had two different patterns: *c-d-e-c-d-e* or *c-d-c-c-d-c* ("Sonnet," Wikipedia). The Italian sonnet reached its height in the fourteenth century under Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch) (1304-1374), an Italian poet and humanist who was a major force in the development of the Renaissance. He is famous for his poems addressed to Laura, an idealized beloved whom he met in 1327. Attempts have been made to identify her, but all that is known is that Petrarch met Laura in Avignon (France). She is generally believed to have been the 19-year-old wife of an influential cardinal, Hugues de Sade. According to several modern scholars, it is possible that Laura was a fictional character. However, she was a more realistically presented female character than in the conventional songs of the troubadours or in the literature of courtly love.<sup>1</sup>

Being a sort of a medium in the development of the sonnet, one of the most progressive forms of literature, Italy dictated the fashion to the rest of the world. Thus, in the court of Henry VIII, a group of poets arose who would make significant contribution to the development of English literature. With the translations of Petrarch's works, Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, introduced the sonnet form to the English audience. The first sonnets in English, written by the pioneers of English poetry, were composed according to the Italian scheme. Nevertheless, these poets tended to ignore the strict logical structure of proposition and solution ("Sonnet," Wikipedia). Both Wyatt and Surrey created their own sonnets in English,

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<sup>1</sup> See also: <http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/petrarca.htm>

thus establishing a poetic form and a poetic tradition for those writers who followed them, notably William Shakespeare (1564-1616). Shakespeare's sonnets are quite unlike the other sonnet sequences of his time, especially in his choice of a Man Right Fair (so described in Sonnet 144) as the object of love, praise and idealising devotion, and a dark lady as a sexually promiscuous mistress rather than a chaste blond beauty, as noted by Meyer Abrams (1028). The Shakespearean sonnet was named after Shakespeare, not because he was the first to use the fourteen lines form, but because he became its most famous practitioner.

Unlike the Italian sonnet, the Shakespearean sonnet consists of three quatrains and a couplet. The usual rhyme scheme was *a-b-a-b, c-d-c-d, e-f-e-f, g-g*. Each of the quatrains in Shakespeare's sonnets brings up and develops a separate metaphor followed by a couplet which often summarises or characterises the ideas of the three quatrains in a mocking way, standing in some way apart and independent. Shakespeare changed not only the form and the rhyming scheme in his sonnets, but he also changed the object of praise and love and its representation as such. Shakespeare was not the first, however, to break the sonnet-writing rules, that is, the form, the rhyming scheme and the target subject of his poems. In the second half of the sixteenth century Sir Philip Sydney (1554-1586) had written *Astrophel and Stella* and sonnet 7 shows that Stella is black, dazzling and beautiful:

When Nature made her chief work, Stella's eyes,  
 In colour black why wrapp'd she beams so bright?  
 Would she in beamy black, like painter wise,  
 Frame daintiest lustre, mix'd of shades and light?  
 Or would she her miraculous power show,

That whereas black seems Beauty's contrary,  
 She even if black doth make all beauties flow?<sup>2</sup>

Another example of breaking the conventional representation of beauty can be seen in sonnet 33 from *Delia*, by Samuel Daniel (1562-1619) where he states: "Thou mayst repent that thou hast scorn'd my tears, /When winter snows upon thy golden hairs." In later editions, Daniel changed golden hairs to "sable hairs" (sable=black, gloomy) in the last line which implies the very sense of darkness and shows a break with the convention.<sup>3</sup>

Considering the works of other poets who exclusively changed the conventional way of the sonnet writing the aim of this essay is to show how Shakespeare's sonnets violated and reversed the conventional ideas in terms of beauty and idealisation. Furthermore, I will examine the way Shakespeare presented his beloved woman as an absolute opposite of the one created by Petrarch, and how he shifted all the divine metaphors from a woman to a fair young man, creating a new object of praise and admiration. I will also use the works of such scholars as Michelle Burnham and Michael Stapleton in order to support main arguments carried out in this essay. Throughout the entire essay one can encounter such expressions as "breaking the convention", "violating the conventional rules" and "shifting the convention" which mean the process of changing, alteration and diverting the commonly accepted rules and regulations used to construct the sonnet.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.theotherpages.org/poems/sidney01.html>

<sup>3</sup> See also: <http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poem/618.html>

## **Petrarch versus Shakespeare: Blonde versus Brunette**

Most sonnet sequences in Elizabethan England were modelled after that of Petrarch, whose famous sonnet cycle was written as a series of love poems devoted to an idealised and idolised Laura. Petrarch praises Laura's beauty, her values, and her undeniable perfection using an extraordinary variety of metaphors based mainly on natural phenomena and beauties. In Shakespeare's days, these metaphors had already become a cliché, and, to some extent, were still the expected technique for writing love poetry.

Why Petrarch created his beloved one as a chaste blond beauty and Shakespeare, on the contrary, created the Dark Lady, will probably remain a mystery. First, I will present some features of Petrarch's love imagery and his way of praising Laura. There is no definite information concerning Laura, except that she is lovely to look at, with golden hair, and her manners are modest and dignified. Falling in love at first sight, Petrarch would be haunted by her beauty for the rest of his life. Laura and Petrarch had little or no personal contact and she refused him for the very proper reason that she was already married to another man. Petrarch turned his feelings into love poems that were rather exclamatory than persuasive. "Then blonde hair was veiled, / and loving glances gathered to themselves," claims Petrarch in his *Canzoniere* (Sonnet 11). Then he continues in Sonnet 12 by saying: "Lady, the light quenched of your beautiful eyes, / and the golden hair spun fine as silver."<sup>4</sup> If we compare these lines to the ones taken from Shakespeare's Sonnet 130 it is easy to see what is meant by breaking the convention. Unlike Petrarch's golden-haired Laura, Shakespeare's Dark Lady has dark hair that can be seen in line four "If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head" (Kerrigan 141). In Sonnet 123 and Sonnet 133 Petrarch compares Laura to the highest divinity and says that:

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<sup>4</sup> See also: <http://petrarch.petersadlon.com/canzoniere.html?poem=12>

Every angelic vision, every humble act  
of every lady, in whom love had appeared  
would be disdained beside her I speak of (Sonnet 123)

And your angelic singing and your speech,  
with your sweet spirit from which I've no defence,  
are the breeze (l'aura) before which my life flies<sup>5</sup> (Sonnet 133)

There again Shakespeare simply continues in the same manner: “Nor are mine ears with thy tongue's tune delighted” (Sonnet 141, Kerrigan 147) or in Sonnet 130 “I love to hear her speak, yet well I know / That music hath a far more pleasing sound” (Kerrigan 141). These and some other images that were revealed by Petrarch in his sonnets formed, in a way, the poetry conventions, whereas the bold and challenging comparisons of Shakespeare converted them. The fact that could well help to consider this case and clarify the violation of the convention is the very stereotypical division between blondes (fair) and brunettes (dark) that had gradually changed in the course of time and possibly influenced the images of love in poetry.

According to Joanna Pitman, the earliest blondes that mankind knows of were the goddesses of love Aphrodite and Venus. In some fairytales that parents read to their children most of the protagonists have blonde hair (e.g. Cinderella and Goldilocks). Since its divine ancient beginnings, “blonde has presented a distinctive imagery of youth, vitality, and wealth. The colour of gold had been established in the classical canons of beauty and power” (Pitman 13). In the west, blondes are said to be more feminine, frail and vulnerable. They are, apparently, more otherworldly and closer to the divine, while brunettes are apparently stronger physically

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<sup>5</sup> See also: <http://petrarch.petersadlon.com/canzoniere.html?poem=133>

and psychologically, braver and more practical. According to Pitman, such an explicit binary changed with time and a distinct shift occurred in Europe which put an end to the supremacy of the blonde. As France was moving away from the Baroque style, Poussin and fellow French painters such as Van Dyck, Rembrandt and Vermeer produced a great influence on cultural life. Poussin's angels, for example, were predominantly dark-haired. His Biblical paintings and his Arcadian works are abundant with brown- and black-haired women. It is arguable that Poussin and other French painters reduced or demolished the very cult of bloneness in the second half of the seventeenth century, argues Pitman (121).

In doing so the object of praise and perfection switched from fairness to blackness, from blondes to brunettes. Shakespeare shows this transition in Sonnet 127:

Therefore my mistress' brows are raven black,  
 Her eyes so suited, and they mourners seem  
 At such who, not born fair, no beauty lack,  
 Slandering creation with a false esteem:  
 Yet so they mourn, becoming of their woe,  
 That every tongue says beauty should look so (Kerrigan 140).

In his lines Shakespeare says that the mistress he worships in his sonnets appears to be that very ideal deprived of all the features of a fair beauty, but at the same time displaying the natural purity with no exaggeration.

## **The Dark Lady: an Alluring but Degraded Object of Desire**

Shakespeare's Dark Lady first appears in Sonnet 127, immediately after the last sonnet to the Fair Young Man in a predominance of references to "blackness" as a main attribute of his heroine, who appears to have a darker complexion. Nevertheless, blackness was not seen as a descriptive attribute only in terms of complexion but also as behaviour. Blackness in sonnets has different connotations derived from various backgrounds. Sixteenth-century England had a small population of African people whose skin colour became a subject of theological debate. Others tended to think that blackness was a curse inherited from their father Cush, the son of Ham. In addition, many Elizabethans frequently regarded blackness as a physical defect, although the black people who lived in England throughout the sixteenth century were treated as exotic curiosities (Abrams 478).

Sonnet 130 is one of Shakespeare's most elaborate jokes on the conventions of love poetry common to his days, and it is conceived so well that the joke remains relevant even today. According to Steven Booth, Sonnet 130 is "a winsome trifle without the aim but to be funny," who, therefore, suggests that Shakespeare in his attempt to unveil the dark beauty simply fails and that Sonnet 130 is another failure in poetry. Hugh Richmond, on the contrary, argues that Sonnet 130 "is not a sign of hostility or even ambivalence on his part but an important step towards a modern, realistic acceptance that should be neither contemptuously repudiated because of their inevitable faults, nor wilfully idealised in spite of them" (92).

Most of the poems in the sixteenth century tended to make highly idealised comparisons between nature and the poets' lover. "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun" (1), "coral is far more red than her lips' red" (2), her "cheeks" are like "roses," "her breasts" are white as snow and she is like a goddess "when she walks on the ground" (12). In many ways, Shakespeare's

sonnets subvert and reverse the conventions of the Petrarchan love sequence. If we take Sonnet 130, whatever is considered to be beautiful in nature and normally accepted as the subject in poetry, acquires an opposite meaning in Shakespeare poetry. It is often said that the praise of his mistress is so negative that the reader gets the impression of her as being almost unlovable. By breaking the convention the author shows his full intent, which is to insist that love does not need all those divine conceits in order to be real, and women do not need to look like flowers or the sun in order to be beautiful.

The sonnet is built up on comparisons, and as Kerrigan explains, these very “comparisons are false not just because ‘eyes’ cannot really compete with the ‘sun’ for brightness but because to ‘compare’ is necessarily to belie” (23). If, for instance, Robert Burns’s “love” was “like a red, red rose” because in most respects she was not, Shakespeare opens to the reader the true picture of beauty and nothing but truth by calling “a spade a spade.” Although the octet makes many negative comparisons such as “eyes are nothing like the sun” (1), and “coral is far more red than her lips’ red” (2) the sestet makes one believe that the sound of her voice is sweeter than any music when speaker exclaims: “I love to hear her speak, yet well I know / That music hath a far more pleasing sound” (8-9) and that the author “never saw a goddess go; / [his] mistress when she walks treads on the ground” (10-11), showing how she thrusts aside any goddess in her merely human beauties and mortal approachability. The author suggests that “her breasts are dun” (3) and even though skin and breasts were often described as whiter than snow, logically, one should accept that her breasts were dun coloured, that is, somewhat brownish but not black. Skin can never be as white as snow; therefore it countermands the claims of other poets that his mistress was truly dark. The speaker continues: “If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head” (4). In this context a Renaissance reader would not have visualised wire as an industrial object,

as its main use at that time was in jewellery and embroidery. The interesting point here is not the wires themselves as a sign of beauty, but the fact that they are black, which drives back any hint of being a blond beauty. By the end of the sonnet the speaker asserts “And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare / As any she belied with false compare” (13-14), concluding that divine comparisons are not relevant for his beloved as she is more beautiful without being a goddess. Here the word “rare” means precious, fine and unusual being something wonderful and rich, in comparison to the more recent meaning. Despite not being a goddess, the beloved may be as rare to him as if she were a real goddess. In describing his heroine by means of the anti-goddess, but not devilish or demonic features, Shakespeare shows how he himself perceives the beauty. Making, thus, his reader understand that the true beauty is the one we usually reject in search of something divine.

### **Shakespeare and the Fair Young Man**

Shakespeare goes even further creating another lover, devoting to him all his praise and divine expressions and calling him a Fair Young Man. The sonnets are opened in a public and ceremonial tone. The first seventeen sonnets repeatedly ask a noble and beautiful young man to bring into the world a child who will preserve his physical virtues and beauty. Starting from Sonnet 18, the speaker rejects his ceremonial tone for a new tone of personal declaration. Moreover, he provides for the young man an endless life by means of the everlasting lines.

In 1609, the author dedicated his quarto to “Mr. W.H.” We as readers may only guess whether it was William Herbert, Henry Wriothesly, William Haughton, Willie Hall, the poet William Himself, or, as some have faithfully asserted, Queen Elizabeth in another guise (Kerrigan 10). Shakespeare’s Fair Man is a mere parody of a sonnet lady and of the entire sonnet

tradition. Even so, as Michael Stapleton suggests, “Shakespeare’s severe twisting of convention may well serve as a breakout exposition of man-on-man passion” (272), a kind of manifesto one can say. The reader cannot refer to the Fair Man as masculine, though, as “in early modern English world *masculinity* was primarily a biological concept, the equivalent of what one in modern English would call *maleness*” (Smith 10). By looking at all the comparisons in sonnets devoted to W.H., especially in Sonnet 18, his femininity is demonstrated by the way he is addressed. It might also be noted that many sonnets simply do not clarify the gender of the addressee, as people in the sixteenth century did not distinguish between genders. The distinctions between men and women made by the poet can hardly be called distinctions. This implies that it is extremely difficult to identify a sonnet as an evident dedication to either a man or a woman. Still, as Alison Scott points out, “the Sonnets never actually name the ‘young man’ to whom the majority are addressed, and therefore, the only personality to ‘shine more bright in these contents’ of the poems is the poet himself” (315).

Such words as “sweet”, “beautiful”, “lovely” and “fair” widely used in the first 126 poems dedicated to the lovely boy, are English words for women, not men. “Shakespeare is even more fulsome with such verbiage for his young man than Daniel, Drayton, Sidney, and Spenser are with the same words for the women whom they make their poetical subjects. In this, Shakespeare outdoes his contemporaries and criticises them, as well as the genre itself,” argues Stapleton (277). According to Stapleton, only the word “sweet” and its variations occur in the sonnets more often than in the sequences of other authors, sixty-five times, on all but eight occasions in the first 126 poems for the boy. Shakespeare cannot match the Spenserian totals for “fair,” but the Fair Young Man appears to be as fair as Delia and Stella in terms of diction. He describes the

man (never the woman) as “lovely,” eight times. Sonnet 18 fully demonstrates Shakespeare’s intention to address his Young Fair Man the same as others addressed women in their poems.

The sonnet works at a rather interesting level of achieving its aim through dispraise. The “summer’s day” (1) is seen to be lacking in so many respects as sometimes it is too short, too hot, too rough, but, on the other hand, one is left with an impression that the Fair Young Man is in fact like a summer day at its best: fair, warm, sunny and temperate. “Thou art more lovely and more temperate,” (2) exclaims the speaker, meaning that the beauty of Shakespeare’s Man Young Fair is even more perfect than the elaborate beauty of a summer day. “And every fair from fair sometime declines” (7), like all the beautiful things occasionally become inferior in comparison with the initial state of their beauty, declining from perfection. If one focuses on the word “complexion” in line six it refers only to physical appearance: “And often is his gold complexion dimm’d” (6). In other words, clouds dim the face of the sun and thus the beauty of it is distorted, in contrast to the beauty of the young man. But, apparently, Shakespeare might have meant another meaning for the word “complexion” which was seen as the combination of the four humours of the body, that is, the temperament. In the case with the sun, the “complexion” is seen as physical face covered with clouds, whereas the “complexion” of the Fair Young Man excludes those clouds of melancholy that could darken the interior disposition of this “temperate” young man. The author concludes that a summer day will sooner or later come to an end, “but [his] eternal summer shall not fade” (9). What is eternal in Shakespeare’s lines is the fact that the Fair Young Man will live with the author’s lines and while the reader is reading the sonnet his life will never ever end.

Sonnet 20 contains some more valuable information for the curious reader and clearly might be one of the key sonnets which could unlock the secrets of Shakespeare’s love.

A woman's face with nature's own hand painted,  
 Hast thou, the master mistress of my passion;  
 A woman's gentle heart, but not acquainted  
 With shifting change, as is false women's fashion: [...]  
 But since she prick'd thee out for women's pleasure,  
 Mine be thy love and thy love's use their treasure. (Kerrigan 86)

In this sonnet the speaker claims that the Fair Young Man was created by Nature as a woman but more beautiful, as he does not have her mischievous faults. Nonetheless, Nature changed her mind as she made him, and turned into a man, for she herself adored her creation. The speaker could not love him with the fullness with which he would love a woman. But while women enjoy the physical manifestation of him, which is merely superficial, the speaker would have his real love.

While reading Shakespeare's sonnets, sooner or later the reader has to come to terms with the implicit sexuality, for it is an open declaration of love by one man for another. We should not exaggerate, as Clive S. Lewis claims, saying that: "If Shakespeare had intended in these sonnets to be the poet of pederasty, I think he would have left us in no doubt; the lovely *paidika*,<sup>6</sup> attended by a whole train of mythological perversities, would have blazed across the pages" (503). Such an exclamation shows that the love between Shakespeare and the Fair Young Man is a pure idealistic love that knows no lust and perversity.

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<sup>6</sup> Lit. Beloved boy.

## **The Love Triangle in Shakespeare's Sonnets**

Sonnet 144, which brings up on the surface the old battle between spiritual and physical love, is considered to be the key to understanding Shakespeare's attitude towards love. The poet seems to align himself with the traditionalists who believed that the nature of woman was to corrupt pure love. In Platonic terms she was the material leftover of which bodies were made, but the true spiritual ideal love was independent of her, and could exist only between men. The poet here follows the conventional pattern that woman is the embodiment of female evil; her sexuality is seen as a threat not only to the poet who loves her, but also to the immaculate spirit of love. The ongoing battle takes place between heaven and hell, the spirit and the body, where the body triumphs over the spirit. This section of the essay, according to the title, does not seem to deal with any violation of conventions. It does, nevertheless, contribute to the main topic of the essay, as the love triangle has hardly been discussed in the pre-Shakespearean poems. Sonnets, where three persons are engaged in a love relationship and sexual affair, open to the reader two different types of love. One of the two is a pure, self-denying love of the speaker to the Fair Young Man; another is a selfish, dissolute affair between the Dark Lady and the Man Right Fair.

In the opening lines of Sonnet 144 one gets to know that the speaker has "two loves [...] of comfort and despair" (1); two different loves or beloveds, one of which is comforter and the other is destroyer. The first line, "the better angel is a man right fair" (3), is addressed to the most beautiful, both physically and spiritually, creatures endowed with divine purity and sincerity. In "The worser spirit a woman coloured ill" (4) the word "angel" is substituted by the word "spirit", which was more of the devilish character rather than of divine. The fact that she is "coloured ill" (4) is a reference to her dark complexion, mentioned in sonnets 127, 131 and 147, and also to her

moral darkness. Not only does she betray the speaker, but she also “tempteth [his] better angel from [his] side” (6) or makes an effort to seduce his fair love, “wooing his purity with her foul pride” (8). This inclines the fair angel to a sinful intercourse, which makes “[his] angel be turned fiend” (9) who, eventually, becomes a devil converted to the evil’s side. The religious imagery continues to reveal the theme, but the major meaning is directed more towards earthly saints and fiends. Eventually, the two “spirits” betray the speaker and by “being both from [him], both to each friend” (11), they separate from the speaker, each being a friend of the other. By the end of the sonnet the bad angel appears to force the good one back, which also suggests that she may get rid of him when she is sated: “Yet this shall I ne’er know, but live in doubt, / Till my bad angel fire my good one out” (13-14).

According to Scott, Shakespeare tries to justify his lover’s betrayal in Sonnet 40 and refill the gap between personal control and emotional irrepressibility, between goods that can be stolen and feelings which can only be given (328):

Then if for my love thou my love receivest,  
 I cannot blame thee for my love thou usest;  
 But yet be blamed, if thou this self deceivest  
 By wilful taste of what thy self refuseth.  
 I do forgive thy robb’ry, gentle thief,  
 Although thou steal thee all my poverty;  
 And yet love knows it is a greater grief  
 To bear love’s wrong than hate’s known injury. (Kerrigan 96)

“Pointedly, Sonnet 40 sees the Fair Young Man ‘take,’ ‘receive,’ ‘use,’ and ‘steal’ love, but it does not see him ‘give’. The only gift contained here is the speaker’s forgiveness of the theft of his mistress and his love,” concludes Scott (329). The betrayal committed by the Fair Young Man and the Dark Lady is seen as more than just adultery; it is an oblivious act of lust that implies absolutely no love. The love expressed by the speaker is the one that does not distinguish between gender, colour of skin and other binaries. The poet just loves his beloved ones and as it was suggested by Michelle Burnham, “calls himself ‘accessory’ to the affair, provoking Samuel Butler’s assertion that the poet arranged his own cuckoldry” (52). The refusal to have sexual intercourse with his beloved redirects the blame for poet’s cuckoldry back onto himself. Nevertheless, he author forgives the betrayal regardless of the grief he faces.

As Shakespeare remodels the sonnet form and the idea of the subject, he also transforms the idea of the speaker and the reader’s reception of him. “In the Sonnets, a poet creates an older speaker, ‘Will’, who repeats blandishments to a younger male person, the Man Right Fair,” suggested Stapleton (272). Shakespeare invites us to anatomise Will and even to treat him with scorn. Northrop Frye’s assessment of the young man, “an unresponsive oaf as stupid as a doorknob and as selfish as a weasel,” (89) seems to fit Will somewhat better. In counter-revenge to the Man Right Fair’s vengeful indifference and mistress-stealing, Will, selfish but not stupid, does him one better. He does not kill his subject, as Petrarch does Laura. He finds it much more effective to stop writing about him, instead, concludes Stapleton.

## Conclusion

Shakespeare's skill in satirically converting the conventions reflects the approved technique of the Renaissance artist who is skilled in imitation and parody. Such Renaissance authors as Shakespeare transmuted their contemporaries and competed with their eminent predecessors. Stapleton points out that:

The sonnets provide an excellent example of this process. They feature dual addressees, one male, the other a dark-haired woman; a speaker whose psychological agony answers the intellectual urbanity of Sidney, the bemusement of Spenser, the sugary complaint of Daniel, and the dry and wry bitterness of Drayton. Granted, these apparent deviations from convention owe something to sequences of the past: Barnfield and Michelangelo address romantic poetry to men; Ronsard describes Marie and Helene in sexual terms; Daniel and others precede Shakespeare in praising the brown beauty. (279)

Yet, at the same time, the sonnets diverge from all these texts, and not simply by feminising a male subject. In fact, rewriting the idea of passion itself through parody, Shakespeare reinvests and refounds the sonnet as a genre with a fresh intensity as he comments on his predecessors. "He subtly mocks his speaker's self-inflicted torment as well as his vacuous object of desire, a creature of savage and 'genuine' sexual frustration for Will" (Stapleton 280).

Summing up Shakespeare's rather unusual and at the same time magnificent technique of representing two different types of beauty, one could assume that the two completely different heroes of his sonnets had been created and praised in rather dissimilar ways. In the first place, the author claims that all the magnificence and the beauty of Mother Nature cannot be put side by side with the loveliness of a temperate young man whose beauty is far more explicit and

sincere. The figure of the Dark Lady, on the contrary, appears to be an absolute opposite to a wonderful goddess with all the attributes she is apt to possess. Shakespeare declares that real beauty is more natural and more simple than an idealised blond beauty, rejecting all the canonical beauty standards. The poet presupposed exactly the words of the British philosopher Francis Herbert Hedge who said: “What we need most, is not so much to realise the ideal as to idealise the real,”<sup>7</sup> and this is precisely what Shakespeare does in his sonnets.

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<sup>7</sup> See also: <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/f/francisher158320.html>

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Lady." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*: 46.3 (2004): 271-295.

## Appendix

### *Sonnet 130*

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;  
 Coral is far more red than her lips' red;  
 If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;  
 If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.  
 I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,  
 But no such roses see I in her cheeks;  
 And in some perfumes is there more delight  
 Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.  
 I love to hear her speak, yet well I know  
 That music hath a far more pleasing sound;  
 I grant I never saw a goddess go;  
 My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground:  
 And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare  
 As any she belied with false compare. (Kerrigan 141)

### *Sonnet 18*

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
 Thou art more lovely and more temperate:  
 Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
 And summer's lease hath all too short a date:  
 Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
 And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;  
 And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
 By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;  
 But thy eternal summer shall not fade  
 Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;  
 Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,  
 When in eternal lines to time thou growest:

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee. (Kerrigan 85).

*Sonnet 144*

Two loves I have of comfort and despair,  
Which like two spirits do suggest me still:  
The better angel is a man right fair,  
The worser spirit a woman coloured ill.  
To win me soon to hell, my female evil,  
Tempteth my better angel from my side,  
And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,  
Wooing his purity with her foul pride.  
And whether that my angel be turned fiend,  
Suspect I may, yet not directly tell;  
But being both from me, both to each friend,  
I guess one angel in another's hell:  
Yet this shall I ne'er know, but live in doubt,  
Till my bad angel fire my good one out. (Kerrigan 148)