

## Analysis of "Sonnet 130/My Mistress' eyes"

William Shakespeare's "Sonnet 130" is an unordinary love poem. Usually love poems emphasize all of the amazing qualities or traits your lover has-everything you admire. In this case, Shakespeare describes a woman he/or the man whose view we are seeing by all of her bad traits. The poem then ends with a line that states the love he has for this woman is true and deep. I will review this poem as best as I can through both Formalist criticism and Reader-Response criticism.

Through Formalist criticism, what stands out most about "Sonnet 130" is the language used. As mentioned before, even though lines thirteen and fourteen end on a good note, the language used prior to this line is not sweet or loving. The lines that stood out most to me were "I grant I never saw a goddess go; My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground" (Shakespeare). These lines made me double read the line to make sure I understood he had said that. Realistically we all know that not one person is perfect. We all have flaws and we choose to accept them. In this line however, he goes as far to say as he has never seen a goddess walk. You usually hear men that are in love mention how their partner is their all, everything. Also something that is usually along the lines of "all of her imperfections make her perfect". Here we are experiencing a man list flaws and not give even one compliment; his saying that he loves her feels to me as if he sees it as highlight. Yes she's imperfect but crazy enough, he loves her. The language used clearly emphasizes the point trying to be made-in my opinion being that he loves all of her including the flaws.

Carina Chacon  
Engl 2600  
Essay #3  
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Part of the way he uses language in "Sonnet 130" leads into my next point being the comparisons he makes. Shakespeare not only mentions the bad traits, he compares them to things we see every day as if to highlight their differences between good and bad. The following line for example "In some perfumes there is more delight/ Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks" (Shakespeare). He could have easily said her breath reeks, instead he wants you to compare the delightful smell of perfume to awful breath. The lines are also set up in a manner that you read each point separately. These criticisms do not all blend together- each line makes its own point.

Above I mentioned the way the lines are set up help make each point. "Sonnet 130" also has a rhythm to it, so to speak. Every other line in the poem rhymes. For example in the first four lines we see that line one ends with the word "sun; line two ends with the word "red"; line three ends with the word "dun"; and line four ends with the word "head" (Shakespeare). The last words of "Sonnet 130" on lines one and three rhyme and the last words on lines two and four rhyme. These help feel the flow going and the reader reading smoothly. If I remember correctly, I had once heard Shakespeare likes to change the tone at the end of his poems usually. He definitely does so in this poem. Mentioned before you get a harsh tone/vocabulary in lines one through twelve; then lines thirteen and fourteen are no longer critical but rather accepting and loving.

The reason I loved "Sonnet 130" so much was that it has a realistic view. Love may feel wonderful but really it is insane to believe the person you love is perfect or that love somehow is perfect. In fact a film I recently saw comes to mind when discussing this poem. In Spike Jonze's *HER*, there is a line one of the side characters says that paraphrased says love is an acceptable

Carina Chacon  
Engl 2600  
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form of insanity. I think this poem emphasizes it. If we were to talk about a car, house, or any other object we would see these criticisms and think it was not worth it. Why care or put any effort into something that is not perfect or good enough. Yet when we talk about love, everything seems to be romanticized. You talk about the good traits, the great times, the amazing feelings yet you will not mention the flaws, the bad times, the insecurity. Here, Shakespeare is making it known that this man is aware of all of the bad traits, but he is also aware that he loves her. She can smell badly, have ugly hair, be pale, have discolored lips and still he loves her. He does not say that they make her perfect, he does not say that those qualities make her special in any way, shape, or form- he is simply saying that despite all of the bad things he sees, and in the case of her voice, hears. He is still deeply and truly in love with her.

"Sonnet 130" has been one of the most enjoyable poems I have read throughout this semester. The poem accurately portrays what love is really like in the world. It is not this amazingly romantic thing everyone attempts to picture it as. It is a pure emotion that usually cannot be stopped or dimmed with physical flaws. Love is deep and strong while also opening the person loving to a danger to hurt.

Carina Chacon  
Engl 2600  
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## **Works Cited**

Shakespeare, William. "Sonnet 130." n.d. *Shakespeare Online*. PDF. 30 July 2014.