# WORDSWORTH - DAFFODILS

In the 1950's and 60's the world of poetry began to move in a new direction. Wordsworth had foretold the future with his *I wander'd lonely as a cloud*, written in 1804. Poets were moving from an interpretation of the "essence" of their outside world, a recording of details and an attention to truth in description of their subjects, to a new life writing, or "existence" writing. No longer would poets seek to describe life at a distance; they would now try to describe life from within, accepting their own perspective as the most truthful and valuable one.
Wordsworth's poem is one of the first recorded that attempts such a feat. He writes of daffodils that he has encountered while walking and his memory of them, "For oft, when on my couch I lie/ In vacant or in pensive mood/ They flash upon that inward eye/ Which is the bliss of solitude;/ And then my heart with pleasure fills,/ and dances with the daffodils" (*I wander'd lonely as a cloud*, 1804). Wordsworth is not trying to describe the daffodils themselves, but his experience of them.

**Literary Period: Romantic Period (1798-1832)**
Poets during this time sought to find universal truths, rather than individual ones. They challenged their readers to look at nature not with a sense of fear or apathy, but as an equal. Poets urged people to see that nature and man are one, and therefore, by experiencing nature, one can experience life more fully. To do so, people must first have an authentic experience, keeping an open mind, free from rational thought. Imagination must take over from there, providing one with not only a sense of resolution, but also independence. Although some experiences may make one sadder, it also makes one wiser in knowing the truth, and living through the experience. Wordsworth and the other Romantic poets strayed away from the common Neoclassical thought that poetry's main goal was to teach, in that he believed poetry's main goal was for pleasure. Out of teaching, comes pleasure in the learning. Lyrical poetry, a passionate speaking from the heart, was created as a result.

**Background:**
The poem, "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" is Wordsworth's interpretation of an experience that his sister, Dorothy, had. Dorothy Wordsworth says in her journals that the day to which the poem refers to was full of furious winds and heavy rain, in which they tried to run away from. This running away symbolizes man in general running away from nature. The poem by William Wordsworth expands from this thought and contains numerous similarities that classify what we know and distinguish today as a lyrical poem. Wordsworth takes his sister's experience and gains his own; one of beauty and understanding versus his sister's running away. To him, and other lyrical poets, in order for man to grow and mature, he/she must face nature. When this balance is gained, the poet has been successful. “I Wandered Lonely Under as a Cloud” is a perfect example of what Romantic poets sought, the primacy of imagination over reason. The poem begins with the evidence of an error, resolves the problem, and shows at the end a proof of authenticity. Love is created, and therefore, the poet can never hate or destroy nature.

**Analysis:**
The poem begins with someone wandering. The person is lost, not literally, but philosophically and spiritually. The person has subjected himself/herself to the restrictions and classifications that society has placed on certain ways of life. The person does not yet see nature as being anything more than society's interpretation, and therefore, nature, is not yet a part of man. In the third line, the person sees for the first time. The "crowd" of "golden daffodils" that are "beside the lake, beneath the trees" are "fluttering and dancing in the breeze". Before, the metaphors of the daffodils "fluttering and dancing" are just those--mere metaphors--but, soon enough, through experience, they will transform into much more. The metaphors were dead to the reader, but come alive at the end of the poem.
In the second stanza, the poet begins to see more and more as stars begin to "shine" and "twinkle". The poet continues to see--still at a glance--the stars dancing. In the third stanza, the waves also begin to dance. The poet is now "gay" with such "a jocund company". He begins to have the experience, as he "gazed--and gazed, but little thought". Although the poet is authentically experiencing nature, he is not yet actively involved in it. He is drawing a blank of rationality, falling in love, and not thinking, but feeling.
In the last stanza, the poet becomes part of nature. The poet's imagination now takes over when he is outside of nature. The poet now sees the dancing flowers through his mind and heart, and his "heart with pleasure fills, and dances with the daffodils". The poet is now one with nature. The poet does not run from it, but enjoys it, even when away from it physically. He is transformed; his mind changes, not the nature around him. He is filled with pleasure from being in solitude. When in solitude and tranquility, the rational mind is stopped so that unregulated emotion can begin. The imagination to which the speaker refers in the last stanza, does not displace reason--it has priority over it

**Literary Period: Romantic (1798-1832)**
Romanticism actually began as a reaction to neo-Classicism. Rebelling against neo-Classicism's focus on reason, progress, and scientific thought, Romantics focused on what they felt were the more beautiful aspects of literature: emotion and personal feeling. Early features of Romanticism appear in the poetry of Scotsman Robert Burns, who composed poems and songs glorifying love, the natural world, and Scottish history. William Blake also might receive consideration as an early Romantic; his poems dealt with the character of good and evil. However, scholars traditionally ascribe the beginnings of the Romantic movement to the 1796 publishing of Lyrical Ballads, a collaboration by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The work of Wordsworth stressed individualism and the translation of human feeling into words, while Coleridge wrote about mystical experiences. Both men were united, however, in their belief that writers should investigate human experience through unification with nature. Later romantic poets such as Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and John Keats focused on the dark aspects of Romance. Great Romantic works in prose often presented idealized views of life, such as the works of Sir Walter Scott: Waverley and Ivanhoe (Applebee 703-705).

**Background:**
The readers of William Wordsworth have often found that his poems bring a profound sense of peace through their focus on an idealized sense of nature. This Romantic style witnessed its formation in the picturesque landscapes of the Lake District of northern England where Wordsworth grew up as a young child. His father was an estate manager, and the family lived happily until Wordsworth's mother's death when he was age seven. His father died shortly after, and Wordsworth began living with his uncles who saw to it that he would receive an excellent education. Wordsworth attended Cambridge University , but he found school boring and longed to return to more natural settings. During a trip to France , he fell in love with a woman named Annette Vallon, but the French Revolution tore them apart. He returned to England and settled with his estranged sister in the Lake District where they had grown up. There, Wordsworth lived out his life as a popular and critically acclaimed poet. He became Britain 's poet laureate in 1843 (Applebee 722-4). The beauty of the Lake District undoubtedly contributed to the natural beauty of Wordsworth's poems.

**Analysis:**
In this poem, the speaker wanders by himself upon a field of daffodils and is awestruck by their beauty. As the daffodils sway and "dance" in the wind, the speaker captures them in his mind's eye. Later, while in solitude, the beautiful vision of the daffodils dancing brings joy to the speaker well after the event. Wordsworth presents three common elements of Romantic literature: individualism, natural beauty, and joy.
Romantic poets often accented the feelings of the individual over society. The presence of solitude in the poem appears immediately in the title and first line of the poem: "I wandered lonely as a cloud." Here, the simile used by Wordsworth indicates that the speaker is alone and therefore free to enjoy the beauty of nature unimpeded by societal tendencies towards reason. At the end of the poem, the speaker, while lying "pensive[ly]" on the couch, speaks of "the bliss of solitude." This meditative and pleasant diction underlies Wordsworth's Romantic ideal that humans could come to the greatest happiness if they individually reflected on the beauty of nature.
Ascribing beauty of the nature is anther common aspect of Romantic poems. Here in I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud, Wordsworth presents a picturesque natural setting that not only delights the mind's eye of the speaker, but the reader as well. First, he describes the daffodils as "golden," instantly giving them aesthetic value. Then he uses personification to add to the beauty of the scene by characterizing the daffodils as "dancing in the breeze." A simile adds to the effect of the natural setting by comparing the natural daffodil garden to another beautiful natural panorama: "Continuous as the stars that shine/ And twinkle on the milky way/ They stretched in never-ending line." Hyperbole emphasizes the magnitude of the scene. "Ten thousand saw I at a glance." Wordsworth continues by juxtaposing the daffodils with the waves that crash in the sea beside them. Even the waves cannot compare in beauty, he says. Later, while lying on his couch, the daffodils give the speaker a feeling of "bliss," accentuating the Romantic tenet that humans can find true beauty and joy in nature.
The presence of joy in this poem provides basis for another important comment on Romantic literature. In this poem, Wordsworth's speaker has frequent feelings of joy that he attains through his experience of nature. The presence of joy is an important part of Romantic literature, especially Wordsworth's. Wordsworth's delightful diction highlights the joy of this poem. He claims the flowers outshine the waves in "glee," that they make the poet "gay," and that they are "jocund company." Even later, when he thinks in "blissful solitude," the flowers bring him and "pleasure." Rebelling against earlier literature that reasoned away individual happiness and felt quite depressing, Romantics felt that an idealized human existence was possible and that the world should bring humanity great joy. The reader clearly sees this aspect of Romantic literature in I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud.

## Wordsworth's daffodils

Wordsworth's famous poem about daffodils was composed in 1804, two years after he saw the flowers walking by Ullswater on a stormy day with Dorothy.
His inspiration for the poem came from an account written by Dorothy. In her journal entry for 15th April 1802 she describes how the daffodils:

> *… tossed and reeled and danced, and seemed as if they verily laughed with the wind, that blew upon them over the lake;*

Wordsworth published his poem, 'I wandered lonely as a Cloud', in 1807. He later altered it, and his second version, published in 1815, is the one widely known today.

# FROST - STOPPING BY WOODS

(((((The first stanza is where I inferred the presence of divinity. "He" owns these woods, away from the village. That he "owns" the woods makes me think of a deity, because humans do not own something as expansive as woods. "He" is obviously either not present or inattentive to his surroundings ("His house is in the village though/He will not see me stopping here"). This makes me thing of a deity too focused on the hustle and bustle of a city - too focused on large things to pay attention to simple matters in life. "Snow" also has the connotation of cold, winter, hibernation, a chill. This "he" is too busy with city matters to pay attention to the fact that his woods are falling into this snow, into...disrepair. There are a few problems I see with this interpretation. First, it seems to me that Frost is usually critical of humanity and how it disregards beauty in nature for more material things. It seems like the "he" is far more likely to reflect a human then a divine presence, and that interpretation also makes some sense. Also, the word "village" gives me a problem. Poets do not choose their words lightly, and "village" is not the same thing as "city". A village implys to me a more friendly, homey atmosphere then the city, and a slower pace. Thus, the merit in the argument that this deity or human or whatever is "too focused on city matters to appreciate simplicity" seems to dissipate. However, the first two lines in the next stanza seems to support my view, as well as the first lines of the third stanza. (I'm sorry if this is really confusing - my ideas have no organization whatsoever.)

Another theme I feel is infused in here is solitude. What I seems to have trouble with is deciding whether this solitude is seen in a positive or negative way. From the first few readings, I get a feeling of the aloneness as being almost refreshing and comforting, although unusual ("my little horse must think it queer..."). Most of the lines seem positive: "He will not see me stopping here/To watch his woods fill up with snow"..."The woods are lovely, dark, and deep/But I have promises to keep/And miles to go before I sleep/And miles to go before I sleep". That last stanza seems to me the most compelling argument that solitude is a good thing. The speaker admires the woods, but cannot stay because of his ties to the human world. The last line (repeated, which of course denotes importance) emphasizes the wish for a simple life, for rest, away from the promises the speaker must keep.

However, thinking about the first two lines again, it also seems they could easily imply loneliness instead of merely aloneness. The word I think tips that off here is "snow". Like I said before, snow implies coldness, hibernation, desolation - not positive words. Of course, snow makes me personally think of sledding and gingerbread, which I see as positive! Anyway, that's another issue with the poem - is solitude beauty, or loneliness?

## Analysis Of Robert Frost's Stopping By Woods On A Snowy Evening

Robert Frost's Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening is by far one of my favorite works of modern poetry. The pensive, unhurried mood of the poem is reflected with a calm rich imagery that creates a vivid mental picture. The simple words and rhyme scheme of the poem give it an easy flow, which adds to the tranquility of the piece. Every aspect of the poem builds off the others to put the mind into the calm of a winter evening. The first stanza of the poem is rather simple and provides the basis for the imagery. It mentions the woods and implies that they are located away from town and civilization his house is in the village though. It also shows the easy pace that speaker is taking, having plenty of time to simply watch the falling snow. As I think about them, the words of the first stanza are not overtly somber, they do however through their order and the way they were chosen create a rather pensive mood. The second stanza provides a more in depth view of the imagery sketched out in the first; it also provides a more definite time and location. The first two lines of this stanza firmly place the reader rather deep in the woods and away from any dwelling. He is so far out in fact that his horse is puzzled by his actions. The next line gives a better image of the scene Between the woods and frozen lake; it seems to be a rather quiet and lonely place. The next line then provides that it is night and very dark, either emotionally or actually. I think that Frost intended to make that line rather ambiguous The darkest evening of the year, It can either be taken literally as the most lightless night, or it can be taken as the night of the darkest emotions. I think that it is a combination of the two, a dark moonless winter night in which the speaker experiences some form of depression or loneliness. The third stanza of the poem brings the strangeness of the situation to a head. The only other living being in this cold lonely landscape, the speaker's horse takes action to find the reason for the odd stopping. The noise from the inquisitive harness bells provide contrast to the quiet of the scene, where the only other sounds a wind and snow. The descriptions of the sounds provide a little insight to the speaker's mindset and position. He is so still that he can here the soft

fall of the downy flake and hear the movement of the easy wind. This also shows a great calm and patience that the speaker must posses. The final stanza of the poem brings all the sentiments of the poem together, an intense love and awe of nature, a never ending patience and some unknown task or problem that robs the speaker of rest. The dark and deep woods seem to reflect the speaker, his dark emotion and depth of character. There stillness also contrasts with the need of the repeated closing lines And miles to go before I sleep/ And miles to go before I sleep. These final lines represent the problem that has plagued the speaker and that is most likely responsible for his dark mood. It is something that is undefined that does not demand a rush to deal with, but is important enough to demand attention. The poem as a whole, is a simple effigy of a quiet thoughtful night. I can easily relate to the poem, the emotions it describes and the way that the images are presented. The careless ease with which the poem is read is vital to the poem as a whole. Also this is my favorite poem, I didn't have to open the book to remember it, only to see its format again. It reminds me of the moods I feel on snowy nights or early mornings. I live in the woods and before I drove; I often walked through them as a shortcut to visit friends, so I have many memories of stopping by a neighbors wood on an easy walk home, and watching the snow slowly fall.

# FROST - FIRE AND ICE

The poem is about two of man's strongest emotions, 'desire' and 'hate'. Both these emotions have the power to destroy. The poet has based the poem on his own personal experiences. The overall picture the poem gives is that these two great opposites can be as equally ruining. The opening lines refer to theories about the end of the world. Then the following lines start to use fire and ice as symbols. 'Ice' represents 'hate', which is an entirely cold, chilling emotion. Leaving us with 'fire' representing 'desire', this with love could be defined as a warm caring feeling.

The purpose of this poem is to state how man's emotions can enclose himself and others in disaster.

This poem uses a dry approach and uses understatements to make his poem more powerful, an example of this is the ending line. This poem comes across as being a bit chilling and provocative.

This well structured poem is presented the reader in a neat nine-line style, it is very short and compact, but clearly it probes in quite deep in these few lines.

The language used in this poem is not as predictable was some would think, the use of understatements without a doubt throws the reader out, leaving them to think further about it. The provocative way in which it is written is appropriate to the feelings in question, raised in within the poem.

The metaphors used in the poem gave it more of an effect as the reader can have more sense of feeling towards the words 'ice' and 'fire' and without this the only difference we may assume is that one is cold and the other hot. But these two opposites are also used as symbols, as well as the end of the world representing the obliteration of life and the feelings and relations that accompany it.

The poem does in fact rhyme, which briefly disguises the depth of feeling.

The purpose of the poem was to express the thoughts and feelings of the poet; this I feel was achieved in such a short but compact poem, cleverly masked by its distinct rhythm and rhyme. The length of this analysis clearly displays what I as a reader took in from this nine line poem, noticeably showing how deep these few lines are. I enjoyed this reading this poem as the words fluently and rhythmically flowed out, although grasping its concepts did require some thought.

## Fire And Ice By Robert Frost

Fire and Ice The poem Fire and Ice is a poem written by Robert Frost, and published in 1923. This is a nine-line poem: Some say the world will end in fire, Some say in ice. From what I have tasted of desire, I hold those who favor ice. But if I had to parish twice, I think I know enough of hate To say that for destruction ice Is also great And would suffice. This is one of Robert Frost simplest poems. When I initially read this poem, the first thing that came to my mind was the biblical theory. In the second line "Some say in ice" furthered my theory. In the Bible it is told that God destroyed Earth with water the first time he came to get his people (the story of Noah's Ark). Ice being a form of water I related the two to each other. In the first line of the poem "Some say the world will end in fire" this is where I compared the stanza to the theory. In the Bible, the book of Revelations also say that the next time that God comes to take his people that he is going to destroy the world by fire. This is the biblical aspect of the poem. As I read the poem further to get a deeper understanding I thought of other relations to the poem Fire and Ice. I was thinking that Frost wanted to basically put a question on our minds, If you had to choose a way to die would you choose fire or ice? In lines seven through nine, "To say that destruction ice is also great and would suffice". To me this is saying you would have to choose the lesser of the two evils. Weighting the pros and cons of the two. Asking which one is better for you, a cold slow death or a hot slow death. But in the end of the poem Frost is saying the no matter which one he picks they are both going to give you the same results, death. To analyze the poem better I took each word as if it symbolized a certain characteristic. In lines three and four, "From what I've tasted of desire I hold those who favor fire" it led me to believe that Frost was trying to use desire as a metaphor to fire. Desire, can usually be used a negative or a positive manner depending on the context it's use. In the poem I think that Frost is using it in a negative sense, because he is uses words like end, perish, and destruction in the poem. Negatively the word desire can mean the drive to win or receive something at any cost, the urge for power, which is very destructive. In lines six and nine "I think I know enough of hate to say that for destruction ice is also great and would suffice". Saying that ice is a metaphor to hate. The word hate is worldly known to have a negative condensation. Hate is also a destructive component that can never be put in a positive light. The words apart can be destructive, but putting them together they are lethal. The two-element fire and ice are in a never-ending conflict with each other. Fire and ice are the complete opposite of each other in the literal sense, they can never exist with each other, you can not have fire and ice (water) exist at the same time without an added component such as oil. But, fugitively speaking two bad things makes things even worst. Violence throughout history is related to desire and hate. For example the wars that go on between

different country is wars of desire and hate. The Holocaust is a great example of the ill stricken desire and hate that brings this world down. In line nine “and would suffice” is saying that no matter if they are together or apart it would be just as destructive. This is a very simple yet complex poem. The simplicity is what makes the poem so had to interpret. You have two basic words that can be compared and contrasted to in multiple ways. These are just some points that I feel strongly about. Frost did this poem very simple because he want his reads to expand the minds and give some educated thought to this age old question.

In his poem “Fire and Ice” Robert frost compares and contrasts the two destructive forces: fire and ice. In the first two lines of the poem he presents two options for the end of the world: an end by fire or by ice. He takes the position of fire in the next two lines and relates fire to desire. This comparison suggests that Frost views desire as something that consumes and destroys. Desire does indeed have a way of consuming those it infects. However, in the next stanza Frost makes the case for the destructive force of ice. He compares ice to hate. This comparison relates to the reader a view of hate as something that causes people to be rigid, unmoving and cold. Also, ice has a tendency to encompass things and cause them to crack and break. The last line of Frost’s poem asserts that the two destructive forces are equally great. Fire, or passion, consumes and destroys quickly, leaving ashes in its wake. Ice, or hatred, destroys more slowly. It causes object to become so immovable that they crack from the pressure created, leaving split fragments that once were whole. From the views frost states in this poem it would be fair to extrapolate that he believes the world will end in violent war for coveted things. However, Frost also could conceive of an end of the world caused by people becoming too rigid, unmoving and set in their ways and ideas that the world breaks apart into factions. Perhaps the destructive force of ice described in the poem was at work in the “cold” war. The Soviet block was set in its belief in communism, and the NATO countries were firmly convinced of the virtues of capitalism and individuality. Cracks formed, creating fragments of a former whole, Europe. Fire was at work in early wars in which nations desired more money and territory. It may be fitting then that Frost said the second destruction would be brought about by ice. Fire destroyed Europe in the World Wars, but was rebuilt and then destroyed by ice. Care must be taken, evidently, to keep the world at room temperature.

# SHAKESPEARE - SONNET 130

Sonnet 130 is Shakespeare's rather lackluster tribute to his Lady, commonly referred to as the dark lady because she seems to be non-white (black wires for hair, etc). The dark lady, who ultimately betrays the poet by loving other men, appears in sonnets 127 to 154. Sonnet 130 is clearly a parody of the conventional and traditional love sonnet, made popular by Petrarch and, in particular, made popular in England by Sidney's use of the Petrarchan form in his epic poem "Astrophel and Stella". If you compare any of the stanzas of that poem with Shakespeare's sonnet 130, you will see exactly what elements of the conventional love sonnet Shakespeare is light-heartedly mocking. In sonnet 130, there is no use of grandiose metaphor or allusion -- he does not compare his love to Venus; there is no evocation to Morpheus, etc. The ordinary beauty and humanity of his lover are what is important to Shakespeare in this sonnet, and he deliberately uses typical love poetry metaphors against themselves. In Sidney's work, for example, the features of the poet's lover are as beautiful and, at times, more beautiful than the finest pearls, diamonds, rubies, and silk. In sonnet 130, the references to such objects of perfection are indeed present, but they are there to illustrate that his lover is not as beautiful -- a total rejection of Petrarch form and content. Shakespeare utilizes a new structure, through which the straightforward theme of his lover's simplicity can be developed in the three quatrains and neatly concluded in the final couplet. Thus, Shakespeare is using all the techniques available, including the sonnet structure itself, to enhance his parody of the traditional Petrarchan sonnet typified by Sidney's work. But Shakespeare ends the sonnet by proclaiming his love for his mistress despite her lack of adornment, so he does finally embrace the fundamental theme in Petrarch's sonnets -- total and consuming love. One final note: Shakespeare's reference to hair as 'wires' confuses modern readers because we assume it to mean our current definition of wire -- a thread of metal -- which is hardly a fitting word in the context of the poem. However, to a Renaissance reader, wire would refer to the finely-spun gold threads woven into fancy hair nets. Many poets of the time used this term as a benchmark of beauty, including Spenser: "Her long loose yellow locks like golden wire" (*Epithal*).

***Sonnet 130: an Analysis***

Shakespeare mocks the stock comparisons of Petrachan love poetry in Sonnet 130, and flouts the reader's expectations that "the blazon of a mistress will involve hyperbolic praise" *(Kerrigan, 1986).* Sonnet 130 is not an anti-Petrachan exercise, but one wholly noble in deed, for Shakespeare refuses to submit his mistress to a stereotype, even by inversion, and rejects the conventions of praise. The beloved is always beautiful in the impersonal sense of the word as well as the personal, and the Petrachan distinction, employed in Sonnet 130, between the love of the eye and the love of the heart, is perhaps an attempt to express the difference between these two kinds of beauty and human response to them.

Sonnet 130, in which Shakespeare spent the duration of the piece highlighting his mistress' flaws and imperfections, is supreme in its effectiveness due to Shakespeare's use of negation: "nothing like"; "no such"; "never". In all three quatrains, he focuses on none other but his mistress' shortcomings, and demonstrates that his love is the ultimate love, for he has no reason to love her other than her identity; had he plied her with adulations, he is expressing that he loves her for what she is and not for who she really is.

Focusing on the true love that lies behind their relationship, Shakespeare describes it best in Lines 9-10: "I love to hear her speak, yet well I know, / That Music hath a far more pleasing sound" *(Lines 9-10)*. With this, there is a strong implication that he "loves to hear her speak" the substance of her mind, rather than be enthralled by the musicality of her voice. Another verse which drives home the point is: "I grant I never saw a goddess go, / My Mistress when she walks treads on the ground" *(Lines 11-12)*, indicating that Shakespeare recognises the mortality of his mistress, and therefore accepting the imperfections that come with the essence of her humanness, as compared to putting her up on a pedestal because of her appearance.

In Sonnet 130, Shakespeare exposes the competitive roots of similitude by reminding his readers that "as", the key-word in comparison, "carries a judgement of value and extend as well as of resemblance" *(Kerrigan, 1986)*. Betraying the word's competitiveness, Shakespeare refuses to compare: "And yet, by heaven, I think my love *as* rare / *As* any she belied with false compare [emphasis added]" *(Lines 13-14).* Comparisons are "false" in Sonnet 130 not just because there is no common ground for competition between the "mistress" eyes' and the "sun" *(Line 1)* for brightness but also because to "compare" is necessarily to "belie" *(Line 14)*. In Sonnet 130, as like other sonnets, Shakespeare writes with a keen

sense of the difference in similitude, for in Sonnet 130, the poet reacts more profoundly against the mendacity of metaphor which describes his "mistress" eyes'. He derides similitude because it belies the nature of things and finds comparisons odious because, when they conceal what his "mistress" eyes' might actually be, or obscure what the "sun" in itself is, they neglect particularity, being and identity *(Kerrigan, 1986).*

| SONNET 130 | PARAPHRASE |
|---|---|
| My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun; | My mistress's eyes are not at all like the sun; |
| Coral is far more red than her lips' red; | Coral is much more red than her lips; |
| If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun; | If snow is white, then her breasts are certainly not white as snow; |
| If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head. | If hairs can be compared to wires, hers are black and not golden. |
| I have seen roses damask'd, red and white, | I have seen roses colored a combination of red and white (thus pink), |
| But no such roses see I in her cheeks; | But I do not see such colors in her cheeks; |
| And in some perfumes is there more delight | And some perfumes give more delight |
| Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks. | Than the breath of my mistress. |
| I love to hear her speak, yet well I know | I love to hear her speak, but I know |
| That music hath a far more pleasing sound; | That music has a more pleasing sound than her voice; |
| I grant I never saw a goddess go; | I also never saw a goddess walk; |
| My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground: | But I know that my mistress walks only on the ground. |
| And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare | And yet I think my love as rare |
| As any she belied with false compare. | As any woman who has had poetic untruths told about her beauty with false comparisons. |

## ANALYSIS

Sonnet 130 is Shakespeare's rather lackluster tribute to his Lady, commonly referred to as the dark lady because she seems to be non-white (black wires for hair, etc). The dark lady, who ultimately betrays the poet by loving other men, appears in sonnets 127 to 154. Sonnet 130 is clearly a parody of the conventional and traditional love sonnet, made popular by Petrarch and, in particular, made popular in England by Sidney's use of the Petrarchan form in his epic poem "Astrophel and Stella". If you compare any of the stanzas of that poem with Shakespeare's sonnet 130, you will see exactly what elements of the conventional love sonnet Shakespeare is light-heartedly mocking. In sonnet 130, there is no use of grandiose metaphor or allusion -- he does not compare his love to Venus; there is no evocation to Morpheus, etc. The ordinary beauty and humanity of his lover are what is important to Shakespeare in this sonnet, and he deliberately uses typical love poetry metaphors against themselves. In Sidney's work, for example, the features of the poet's lover are as beautiful and, at times, more beautiful than the finest pearls, diamonds, rubies, and silk. In sonnet 130, the references to such objects of perfection are indeed present, but they are there to illustrate that his lover is not as beautiful -- a total rejection of Petrarch form and content. Shakespeare utilizes a new structure, through which the straightforward theme of his lover’s simplicity can be developed in the three quatrains and neatly concluded in the final couplet. Thus, Shakespeare is using all the techniques available, including the sonnet structure itself, to enhance his parody of the traditional Petrarchan sonnet typified by Sidney’s work. But Shakespeare ends the sonnet by proclaiming his love for his mistress despite her lack of adornment, so he does finally embrace the fundamental theme in Petrarch's sonnets -- total and consuming love. One final note: Shakespeare's reference to hair as 'wires' confuses modern readers because we assume it to mean our current definition of wire

-- a thread of metal -- which is hardly a fitting word in the context of the poem. However, to a Renaissance reader, wire would refer to the finely-spun gold threads woven into fancy hair nets. Many poets of the time used this term as a benchmark of beauty, including Spenser: "Her long loose yellow locks like golden wire" (*Epithal*).

**Summary**

This sonnet compares the speaker's lover to a number of other beauties--and never in the lover's favor. Her eyes are "nothing like the sun," her lips are less red than coral; compared to white snow, her breasts are dun-colored, and her hairs are like black wires on her head. In the second quatrain, the speaker says he has seen roses separated by color ("damasked") into red and white, but he sees no such roses in his mistress's cheeks; and he says the breath that "reeks" from his mistress is less delightful than perfume. In the third quatrain, he admits that, though he loves her voice, music "hath a far more pleasing sound," and that, though he has never seen a goddess, his mistress--unlike goddesses--walks on the ground. In the couplet, however, the speaker declares that, "by heav'n," he thinks his love as rare and valuable "As any she belied with false compare"--that is, any love in which false comparisons were invoked to describe the loved one's beauty.

**Commentary**

This sonnet, one of Shakespeare's most famous, plays an elaborate joke on the conventions of love poetry common to Shakespeare's day, and it is so well-conceived that the joke remains funny today. Most sonnet sequences in Elizabethan England were modeled after that of Petrarch. Petrarch's famous sonnet sequence was written as a series of love poems to an idealized and idolized mistress named Laura. In the sonnets, Petrarch praises her beauty, her worth, and her perfection using an extraordinary variety of metaphorsbased largely on natural beauties. In Shakespeare's day, these metaphors had already become cliche (as, indeed, they still are today), but they were still the accepted technique for writing love poetry. The result was that poems tended to make highly idealizing comparisons between nature and the poets' lover that were, if taken literally, completely ridiculous. My mistress' eyes are like the sun; her lips are red as coral; her cheeks are like roses, her breasts are white as snow, her voice is like music, she is a goddess.

In many ways, Shakespeare's sonnets subvert and reverse the conventions of the Petrarchan love sequence: the idealizing love poems, for instance, are written not to a perfect woman but to an admittedly imperfect man, and the love poems to the dark lady are anything but idealizing ("My love is as a fever, longing still / For that which longer nurseth the disease" is hardly a Petrarchan conceit.) Sonnet 130 mocks the typical Petrarchan metaphors by presenting a speaker who seems to take them at face value, and somewhat bemusedly, decides to tell the truth. Your mistress' eyes are like the sun? That's strange--my mistress' eyes aren't at all like the sun. Your mistress' breath smells like perfume? My mistress' breath reeks compared to perfume. In the couplet, then, the speaker shows his full intent, which is to insist that love does not need these conceits in order to be real; and women do not need to look like flowers or the sun in order to be beautiful.

The rhetorical structure of Sonnet 130 is important to its effect. In the first quatrain, the speaker spends one line on each comparison between his mistress and something else (the sun, coral, snow, and wires--the one positive thing in the whole poem some part of his mistress *is*

like. In the second and third quatrains, he expands the descriptions to occupy two lines each, so that roses/cheeks, perfume/breath, music/voice, and goddess/mistress each receive a pair of unrhymed lines. This creates the effect of an expanding and developing argument, and neatly prevents the poem--which does, after all, rely on a single kind of joke for its first twelve lines--from becoming stagnant.