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“Sonnet 138” by William Shakespeare was part of his sonnet sequence, originally published in 1609, comprising 154 sonnets. Prior to this, some of Shakespeare’s sonnets, including sonnets from his play Love’s Labour’s Lost (1597), appeared in a poetry anthology called The Passionate Pilgrim, published by William Jaggard in 1598 or 1599. By the time the sonnets were published as a complete sequence, Shakespeare had become a noteworthy figure in the London theater scene.Shakespearean sonnets follow a specific rhyme scheme and meter within 14 lines. A key figure in the English Renaissance, Shakespeare was influenced by a number of Italian and English sonneteers (writers of sonnets), including Francesco Petrarch, Thomas Wyatt, Philip Sidney, and Edmund Spenser. “Sonnet 138” explores the themes of Truth and Lies, Age and Experience, and The Nature of Love.Poet BiographyShakespeare was born in Stratford-Upon-Avon in 1564. He married Anne Hathaway in 1582, and they had three children: Susanna, Judith, and Hamnet. Hamnet, who was twin to Judith and Shakespeare’s only son, died in 1596 at the age of 11, possibly due to the bubonic plague. By 1592, still a young man under 30, Shakespeare was well-known as an actor and playwright in London.Shakespeare is primarily known for his plays. While his first literary publication was the poem Venus and Adonis in 1593, Titus Andronicus was his first play to be published, in 1594. Starting in 1599, Shakespeare’s acting company was based in the Globe Theatre. This company, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, eventually became the King’s Men when James I took the throne. Hamlet, Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet, and A Midsummer Night’s Dream are just a few examples of Shakespeare’s plays that have endured—they have been, and continue to be, read and performed frequently.Shakespeare also earned patronage through his poetry. His narrative poetry includes Venus and Adonis, as well as Lucrece, which were dedicated to the Earl of Southampton. The Earl, Henry Wriothesley, became Shakespeare’s patron after the publication of these poems, and the poems were generally popular in Renaissance England. Shakespeare’s sonnets, which are now more famous than his narrative poems, were originally not as well received.Some scholars believe that Shakespeare’s sonnets contain clues about his life. For example, there has been much speculation over the identities of the Rival Poet, Fair Youth, and Dark Lady featured in Shakespeare’s sonnets. Shakespeare may have been bisexual, or pansexual, in that he writes love poetry to both the Fair Youth and the Dark Lady. Other scholars argue that the sonnets are not autobiographical.Shakespeare died in 1616. The first complete collection, or folio, of his works was published posthumously in 1623.Poem TextWhen my love swears that she is made of truth,I do believe her, though I know she lies,That she might think me some untutored youth,Unlearnèd in the world’s false subtleties.Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young,Although she knows my days are past the best,Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue:On both sides thus is simple truth suppressed.But wherefore says she not she is unjust?And wherefore say not I that I am old?Oh, love’s best habit is in seeming trust,And age in love loves not to have years told. Therefore I lie with her and she with me, And in our faults by lies we flattered be.Shakespeare, William. “Sonnet 138.” 1609. Poetry Foundation.Summary“Sonnet 138,” like most Shakespearean sonnets, contains 14 lines. The speaker of the poem addresses a beloved, the Dark Lady, who is referred to with only the pronouns she and her. In the first line, the speaker, who is generally considered to be Shakespeare himself, describes how his unnamed beloved claims to be telling the truth.In the second line, the speaker asserts the opposite. Even though he is aware that she is lying, he believes her.In the third line, the speaker considers his beloved’s lies, which currently include her opinion of his age. The speaker pretends to believe the lies so that she might perceive him as uneducated and immature, or younger than his years.The fourth line is a continuation of the third. The speaker wants his beloved to think that he is an innocent youth, that he has not experienced such subtle deceptions before.In the fifth line, the speaker explains that his vanity is what makes him want his beloved to perceive him as young.The sixth line reveals the truth: The speaker is past his prime.In the seventh line, the speaker describes how he supports his beloved’s lies about his age.In the eighth line, the speaker acknowledges that they are both lying about his age.The ninth line presents a question: Why does the beloved not admit to lying and being unjust?In the 10th line, the speaker asks why he does not simply admit to being old himself.The 11th line offers an answer to these questions: One of the best qualities of love is that it includes the appearance of honesty and fidelity.This idea is continued in the 12th line. Love also contains the desire for secrecy, or flattery, about aging.In the 13th line, the speaker uses the word “lie” in two senses: He and his beloved lie about his age, as well as lie in bed together.The 14th line is an assertion that flattery makes them both feel good about their faults. Poem by William Shakespeare«» Sonnet 138Sonnet 138 in the 1609 Quarto Q1Q2Q3C When my love swears that she is made of truth, I do believe her, though I know she lies, That she might think me some untutor’d youth, Unlearned in the world’s false subtleties. Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young, Although she knows my days are past the best, Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue: On both sides thus is simple truth suppress’d. But wherefore says she not she is unjust? And wherefore say not I that I am old? O, love’s best habit is in seeming trust, And age in love loves not to have years told: Therefore I lie with her and she with me, And in our faults by lies we flatter’d be. 481214 —William Shakespeare[1] Sonnet 138 is one of the most famous of William Shakespeare's sonnets. Making use of frequent puns ("lie" and "lie" being the most obvious), it shows an understanding of the nature of truth and flattery in romantic relationships. The poem has also been argued to be biographical: many scholars have suggested Shakespeare used the poem to discuss his frustrating relationship with the Dark Lady, a frequent subject of many of the sonnets. (To note, the Dark Lady was definitely not Shakespeare's wife, Anne Hathaway.) The poem emphasizes the effects of age and the associated deterioration of beauty, and its effect on a sexual or romantic relationship. Sonnet 138 begins with the speaker discussing how his love speaks word of truth, but the next line states "I do believe her, though I know she lies." This sets the tone for the rest of the sonnet because he knows that his lover is lying. He chooses to deny it and accept her lie. The line "That she might think me some untutored youth" points to the speaker being self-conscious about his age. He stresses his awareness that his best days are behind him; a truth that his lover knows but ignores. He understands that both are lying to each other for the sake of their relationship to live. When the speaker states, "Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue" he is accepting her lies. The speaker and his lover are hiding their transgression by not bringing to light the issue that they are insecure about, i.e., "Therefore I lie with her and she with me, and in our faults by lies we flattered be." At the end of the sonnet, the speaker and his lover accept their flaws. Sonnet 138 is an English or Shakespearean sonnet. The English sonnet has three quatrains, followed by a final rhyming couplet. It follows the typical rhyme scheme of the form abab cdcd efef gg and is composed in iambic pentameter, a type of poetic metre based on five pairs of metrically weak/strong syllabic positions. The 6th line exemplifies a regular iambic pentameter: × / × / × / × / × / Although she knows my days are past the best, (138.6) / = ictus, a metrically strong syllabic position. × = nonictus. The poem is quite regular metrically. Ironically, line 7, beginning "simply" may be the most metrically complex: it begins with a common metrical variation, the initial reversal, and features (potentially) a rightward movement of the third ictus (resulting in a four-position figure, × × / /, sometimes referred to as a minor ionic): / × × / × × / / × / Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue: (138.7) An initial reversal is potentially present in line 13, and a minor ionic in line 1; however, the frequent emphasis of pronouns in this poem may argue against the latter variation. The meter demands that line 4's "unlearnèd" be pronounced with three syllables.[2] Sonnet 138 is one of twenty sonnets published in The Passionate Pilgrim (Dark Lady) collection (1599) by Jaggard. In Shakespeare's Sonnets, Carl D. Atkins stresses that although the collection title page reads "By W. Shakespeare", it features a number of poems known to belong to other authors. "Commentators have debated", he states, "whether the version of Sonnet 138 in the Passionate Pilgrim represents an early draft by Shakespeare or a poor memorial reconstruction by someone who read the version later printed in the Quarto (or some other draft)" (340).[3] John Roe's analysis in the Cambridge collection of Shakespeare's poetry, The Poems, adds a layer of mystery to the sonnet authorship when he mentions the canceled title page of Jaggard's 1612 edition, which bears Heywood's name (58).[4] The Passionate Pilgrim went through two separate printings during 1599. Sonnet 138 is the first poem in The Passionate Pilgrim, followed thereafter by Shakespeare's Sonnet 144.[5] The poem, as it appeared in 1599, with substantive differences from the 1609 Quarto in italics: When my love swears that she is made of truth, I do believe her, though I know she lies, That she might think me some untutor'd youth, Unskilful in the world's false forgeries. Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young, Although I know my years be past the best, I smiling credit her false-speaking tongue, Outfacing faults in love with love's ill rest. But wherefore says my love that she is young? And wherefore say not I that I am old? O love's best habit is a flattering tongue, And age, in love, loves not to have years told. Therefore I'll lie with love, and love with me, Since that our faults in love thus smother'd be.[6] The sonnet talks about how lies do not hurt when their purpose is to protect lovers' feelings and preserve relationships. In the sonnet, the speaker knows that his lover is lying about his age, but decides not to make much ado about nothing because he knows her act is dictated by love and concern. The irony is that the speaker is himself aware of the lie while hiding a lie of his own. Gerald Massey's Shakespeare's Sonnets Never Before Interpreted argues that this type of irony is a characteristic of a number of Shakespearean sonnets, particularly Sonnet 96, Sonnet 131, Sonnet 137, Sonnet 142, and Sonnet 147 (357).[7] Sonnet 138 is a part of a series of poems written about Shakespeare's dark lady. They describe a woman who has dark hair and dark eyes. She diverges from the Petrarchan norm. "Golden locks" and "florid cheeks" were fashionable in that day, but Shakespeare's lady does not bear those traits.[8] The lady is shown as being both fair and foul, and both kind and unkind.[9] Alice F. Moore feels that within these later sonnets the poet is equally as dark as the lady. As the speaker reveals the mistress in her "foulness" and "deceit", he consequently reveals himself. These sonnets are shadowed by the speakers own self-hatred and anger.[10] However, Joel Fineman believes that the biggest difference between series of the dark lady and the other series of sonnets featuring the young man is that those about the dark lady use a formula of lusty misogyny that is clearly Shakespearean.[11] Throughout the sonnets, and especially sonnet 138, the lady "comes to occupy this peculiarly charged erotic place ("therefore I lie with her, and she with me,/And in our faults by lies we flattered be").[12] The sonnets addressed to the dark lady usually relate the lady with "a disjunction occasioned by verbal duplicity," ("When my love swears that she is made of truth,/I do believe her, though I know she lies").[13] The language in the dark lady sonnets is some that "one is forced to hear— to hear, that is, as language— functions as a supplementary and confirming, not a disavowing, gloss on what the poet has to say".[14] They "conceal praise under the guise of disparagement (Kambascovic-Sawers p. 293). A.L. Rowse believes that the sonnet takes us further into Shakespeare's relationship with the lady. The relationship is both "purely sexual" and "utterly unromantic".[15] However, it can also be said that the speaker is not attracted to the woman because of her "physical, intellectual, or moral excellence".[16] Instead, the attraction is portrayed as being "self-generated, with no basis in 'reality'.[17] Rowse feels that the woman discussed in the sonnet can be identified as the mistress, Emilia. Shakespeare is six years older, and is thus highly conscious of his age. Underneath all the hypocrisies there is Shakespeare's "honest candour."[18] In Shakespeare's Sonnets: The Problems Solved, A. L. Rowse notes that Sonnet 138 shows the "uncompromising realism with which he [Shakespeare] describes it all: it has been said -- rightly-- that there is no woman like Shakespeare's in all the sonnet-literature of the Renaissance. Most of them are abstractions or wraiths; this one is of flesh and blood".[19] Valerie Traub presents the idea that many sonnets follow a Judeo-Christian idea of procreation as "justification" for heterosexuality. Shakespeare explores more sensual and even explicit ideas in the sonnets that challenge these ideals. Though Sonnet 138 does not vastly differ from this tradition as Shakespeare's sonnets to the young boy this does fall into this contradictory tradition.[20] Here there Shakespeare references her truth and lies rather than her sensual body showing that he is differing from Christian traditions. Joel Fineman speaks on a similar topic when referencing Shakespeare. "On both sides thus is simple truth suppress'd." Fineman states, "his desire is imposed on him, not by God or by Nature, but by poetry itself." Fineman is explaining that Shakespeare is not only challenging Christianity he is examining the forms and ideas of poetry themselves.[21] Shakespeare's emphasis on truth takes away from his emphasis on procreation. J. Bunselmeyer takes it even further and discusses that Shakespeare's puns here begin to negate not only the traditional ideas of Christianity but also the words that are being presented. This contradiction plays on Fineman's idea of the form of poetry.[22] Sonnet 138 unveils a paradox that underlines the speaker's personal struggle to come to terms with issues of deceit and trust in love. The sonnet's tone shifts from a recognition of his lover's lie about her age to developing a sense of trust in exchanging the lie. The lady is portrayed as someone insecure about her age in her attempt to defy time and win compassion of her younger lover. The element of irony in this exchange is his reference to her knowledge that his age is already beyond youth. Author of Shakespeare's Sonnets Never Before Interpreted, Gerald Massey, describes the sonnet's irony as "one of a smiling kind" (337).[23] The tone shift highlights the power of love in interpolating mutual exchange of harmonious moments even at the cost of such negative values as lying. The interpolation process prompts him to transcend his earlier cynical perception of deceit to capture a rather more meaningful feeling, i.e. their lying cycle is but a moment of love performance. Using wordplay in "Therefore I lie with her, and she with me" suggests that they are not lying at each other but with each other. The sonnet concludes with this reconciling image to release the speaker from transgressing his lover's age insecurity. In The Social Context of Nonverbal Behavior, the writers suggest that the speaker's decision could be his way of preserving "his image of his love as a truthful person" (373).[24] This, however, does not exempt him from taking advantage of the benefits of sustaining the relationship. Edward A. Snow's "Loves of Comfort and Despair: A Reading of Shakespeare's Sonnet 138" presents a critical analysis of the sonnet in light of other Shakespearean works.[25] Lines 1 and 2 of Shakespeare's Sonnet 138 present a paradox where the obsessed lover is blind to what he can clearly see. Line 2 reveals that the speaker is aware of his delusion, possibly because of the word "swears" in line 1. Swearing, according to editor Stephen Booth, means there is a reason for disbelief; consequently, the statement incriminates itself.[26] Alice F. Moore also concurs with the writing of Stephen Booth in her own commentary on Sonnet 138, also proclaiming the relationship between the two lovers as one of mutual dishonesty. For Moore, line 2 highlights an internal division of the speaker because he knows that the lady lies, but he, even knowing this, chooses to believe her.[27] The speaker clearly acknowledges his lady's lies in line 2, and he acknowledges his decision to believe them.[28] Both lines 3 and 4 give reason for the speaker's beliefs concerning his and his lover's lies. He wants to appear younger, while she wants to think that she is with a more youthful lover.[29] However, the editor, Carl D. Atkins, approaches the first quatrain with a slightly different take, believing the word "lies" in line 2 to be nothing more than a set-up for the pun in the ending couplet, using the word "lies" to mean "sleep with" instead of "falsehoods". He also has a slight twist about who lies to whom, claiming that the lady lies to the speaker about her faithfulness, but he does not lie to her, only to himself, imagining that she believes him to be an "untutored youth".[30] In the second quatrain, specifically in lines 5 and 6, the speaker declares he is aware that she knows he is no longer young.[31] Beginning line 5 with the words "Thus vainly" effectively negates the second half of the line, implying that the lady does not actually believe in the speaker's youth. The same can be said for line 7, with the second part of the line clearly contradicting the beginning. According to Moore, the confusing contradictions within these lines are intended to display, and help the reader to feel, the "schizophrenia" of both the poem and the two lovebirds.[32] Booth's writing agrees with Moore; lines 5 and 6 parallel the inconsistencies that the speaker discusses in line 2. Booth's interpretation suggests that the lady struggles to believe that she actually believes the lies that she pretends to believe. Boothe says line 7 simply shows line 8 as a truth "thus, we are both liars, she in pretending faithfulness and I in pretending youth", emphasizing the mutuality of the relationship.[33] It reiterates their mutual deception and recognition of said deception, believing all that they hear from each other and all that they tell to each other.[34] In line 9, the word "unjust" is taken by Atkins to mean either "dishonest" or "unfaithful"; the editor leans toward the second option because it is in keeping with the rest of his interpretation, but it is clear that the word refers to some "falseness in matters of the heart".[35] In line 13, the term "lie with" also furthers Atkins's argument for an elaborate pun, declaring that the speaker lies with the mistress rather than to her.[36] Also in lines 11 and 12, much is debated over the beginning "O" of line 11. Moore interprets this interjection as impatience or sarcasm, possibly a "reason or excuse hastily tossed off." [37] However, author Helen Vendler views it as the beginnings of proverbial wisdom; the "O" is actually an answer to a question. Both lines 11 and 12 are in proverb form, but Vendler believes the proverbs to reference the speaker, as opposed to his lady.[38] The ending couplet provides, according to Moore, an interesting twist when "deception and love making become one: to lie is to lie with" [39] However, Vendler has a slightly different take on the poem as a whole in response to the final volta. She notes that the pronouns "I" and "she" share a mutual verb, becoming "we" with "our" shared faults. The end of the poem shows the final progression of the lovers' relationship, beginning with anger, then suppressed anger, followed by game playing, then the realization of the absurdity of truthfulness, finally ending with the admission of flattery when each lover suppresses frank speech in order to lie to and with each other.[40] Booth also recognizes the significance of the mutual pronouns, with line 13 reiterating lies as necessary for a cooperative relationship, but his conclusion from the closing lines of the poem varies slightly from Vendler's. For Booth, line 14 is not a realization of the lovers situation, but it is a reason for the speaker's attitude throughout the poem, particularly that of "cynicism, bitterness, and despair".[41] Richard Johnson, for the 2002 compilation album, When Love Speaks (EMI) Paul Kelly, for the 2016 album, Seven Sonnets & a Song Ane Brun, for the 2016 single, Sonnet 138: When My Love Swears That He Is Made Of Truth ^ Pooler, C[harles] Knox, ed. 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This line sets up the central tension of the sonnet: the contrast between her claims of truthfulness and the reality of her deceit. “I do believe her, though I know she lies,” Difficult Words Meaning: Believe: Accept as true. Lies: Speaks falsely. Explanation:The speaker admits that he chooses to believe his beloved’s lies, even though he knows they are false. This line introduces the theme of mutual deception and the comfort it provides in their relationship. “That she might think me some untutor’d youth,” Difficult Words Meaning: Untutor’d: Uneducated or inexperienced. Youth: A young person. Explanation:The speaker suggests that his beloved’s lies allow her to see him as a naive and inexperienced young man. This line reveals his awareness of her deception and his willingness to play along. “Unlearned in the world’s false subtleties.” Difficult Words Meaning: Unlearned: Ignorant or unaware. False subtleties: Deceptive complexities or tricks. Explanation:The speaker implies that his beloved views him as someone unfamiliar with the deceptions of the world. This line further emphasizes the theme of mutual pretense and the comfort it provides. “Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young,” Difficult Words Meaning: Vainly: Foolishly or without success. Explanation:The speaker acknowledges that he is deluding himself by believing that his beloved sees him as young. This line highlights the self-deception at the heart of their relationship. “Although she knows my days are past the best,” Difficult Words Meaning: Days are past the best: His youth is behind him. Explanation:The speaker admits that his beloved is aware of his age, even as he pretends to be young. This line underscores the mutual understanding and acceptance of their deceptions. “Simply I credit her false speaking tongue:” Difficult Words Meaning: Simply: Naively or unquestioningly. Credit: Believe or trust. Explanation:The speaker confesses that he naively believes his beloved’s lies. This line reinforces the theme of mutual deception and the comfort it provides in their relationship. “On both sides thus is simple truth suppress’d.” Difficult Words Meaning: Suppress’d: Hidden or concealed. Explanation:The speaker concludes that both he and his beloved are hiding the truth from each other. This line encapsulates the central theme of the sonnet: the mutual acceptance of deception as a way to maintain their relationship. “But wherefore says she not she is unjust?” Difficult Words Meaning: Wherefore: Why. Unjust: Dishonest or unfaithful. Explanation:The speaker questions why his beloved does not admit her dishonesty. This line reflects his awareness of her deceit and his curiosity about her motivations. “And wherefore say not I that I am old?” Difficult Words Meaning: Explanation:The speaker also questions why he does not admit his age. This line highlights his self-awareness and the mutual nature of their deceptions. “O, love’s best habit is in seeming trust,” Difficult Words Meaning: Habit: Custom or practice. Seeming trust: Apparent honesty or trustworthiness. Explanation:The speaker suggests that the best practice in love is to maintain the appearance of trust, even when it is based on lies. This line underscores the theme of mutual deception as a foundation for their relationship. “And age in love loves not to have years told:” Difficult Words Meaning: Years told: Age revealed or acknowledged. Explanation:The speaker notes that older lovers prefer not to acknowledge their age. This line reflects the societal pressures and insecurities surrounding aging and love. “Therefore I lie with her and she with me,” Difficult Words Meaning: Lie: Deceive or engage in falsehood (with a possible double meaning of physical intimacy). Explanation:The speaker concludes that both he and his beloved deceive each other. This line encapsulates the central theme of the sonnet: the mutual acceptance of deception as a way to maintain their relationship. “And in our faults by lies we flatter’d be.” Difficult Words Meaning: Faults: Flaws or imperfections. Flatter’d: Praised or comforted. Explanation:The speaker acknowledges that their lies allow them to overlook each other’s flaws and find comfort in their relationship. This line provides a bittersweet conclusion to the sonnet, emphasizing the complexity of love and deception. Sonnet 138 explores the theme of mutual deception in a romantic relationship. The speaker and his beloved both choose to believe each other’s lies, finding comfort in their shared pretense. The sonnet delves into the complexities of love, aging, and the human desire for connection, even when it is based on falsehoods. The playful tone and clever wordplay (e.g., “lie” meaning both deception and physical intimacy) add depth to the poem, making it a nuanced exploration of love’s contradictions. In Sonnet 138, Shakespeare explores the mutual deception in his relationship with the Dark Lady. His mistress swears that she is honest, yet he knows she lies—perhaps about her faithfulness or sincerity. Despite this, he chooses to believe her falsehoods, not because he is truly deceived, but because he wants to maintain the illusion of youthful ignorance. Similarly, his mistress pretends that he is still young, even though she knows he is aging. He plays along with her flattery, allowing himself to be fooled by her words, just as he lets her believe that he trusts her. Ultimately, the poem suggests that both partners willingly engage in deception, because love thrives on illusion. Neither wants to confront the truth: she is unfaithful, and he is growing old. The final couplet delivers the playful but ironic twist—they “lie” together both physically (as lovers) and metaphorically (by telling lies to each other), using flattery to sustain their relationship. This sonnet presents a skeptical and realistic view of love, in contrast to Shakespeare’s earlier idealistic sonnets about the Fair Youth. Here, love is not built on honesty but on mutual deception, where both parties flatter each other with comforting falsehoods rather than facing harsh truths. The speaker’s self-awareness is key—he is not truly deceived by his mistress; rather, he chooses to accept her lies because it serves his own vanity. Similarly, she knows he is not young, but she allows him to pretend. Their relationship is, in many ways, a performance where both lovers play their roles to keep the illusion of romance alive. The tone of the poem is ironic, wry, and even humorous, as Shakespeare acknowledges the absurdity of love’s self-deceptions. There is a sense that both lovers understand the game they are playing, and neither resents it—rather, they embrace the lies as part of love’s necessary illusions. The sonnet highlights the idea that love is not always based on truth, but often requires a degree of self-deception. Both the speaker and his mistress know they are lying to each other, but they willingly accept it. The speaker acknowledges that he is past his prime, but he enjoys the illusion that his mistress still sees him as young. Love, for him, becomes a way to escape aging, even if it is through flattery and falsehoods. “Love’s best habit is in seeming trust” → True trust is not necessary in love; what matters is the illusion of trust. The sonnet suggests that in mature relationships, absolute honesty is not always desirable—sometimes, lies can sustain love better than truth. The Dual Meaning of “Lying” The poem plays on the double meaning of “lie”—both to deceive and to sleep together. This pun suggests that deception and physical intimacy are deeply intertwined in relationships. The speaker knows that his mistress lies, yet he chooses to believe her. He is not deceived, yet he allows himself to act as though he is, which is a classic example of dramatic irony. The final line: “Therefore I lie with her and she with me,And in our faults by lies we flatter’d be.” “Lie” means both to deceive and to sleep together. This clever wordplay reinforces the idea that love and deception go hand in hand. “Love’s best habit is in seeming trust” → Love is personified as wearing a “habit” (a costume), suggesting that trust is merely an appearance, not a reality. Alliteration and Repetition The phrase “she with me / and me with she” creates a rhythmic balance, emphasizing their mutual deception and complicity. The repetition of “lie” drives home the pun’s dual meaning. Sonnet 138 offers a cynical but witty take on love, arguing that mutual deception is sometimes necessary in relationships. The speaker and his mistress both know the truth but prefer the comfort of lies, using flattery and pretense to sustain their romance despite aging and infidelity. The poem’s tone is ironic, self-aware, and even humorous, showing that Shakespeare is not condemning deception outright, but rather suggesting that a little dishonesty can be part of love’s charm. The pun on “lie” cleverly encapsulates the theme—love and deception are intimately linked. Ultimately, Sonnet 138 presents a mature, realistic perspective: love is not always about truth and virtue—sometimes, it is about playing along with the beautiful lies that keep passion alive. William Shakespeare, an English poet and playwright, wrote “Sonnet 138.” The poem was most likely written in the first half of 1590. The poem delves deeply into an incongrous and complex relationship. The speaker and the lady he loves lie to each other all the time, about little things like whether or not his mistress is cheating on him as well as bigger things like that.The two lovers find themselves in a counterintuitive scenario where they choose to seek comfort in one other’s lies rather than the love they feel for one another.Shakespeare was a playwright, poet, and actor from England. He is largely recognized as the greatest playwright and writer of English literature ever. He is frequently referred to as the “Bard of Avon” and England’s national poet.When my love swears that she is made of truth, I do believe her, though I know she lies, That she might think me some untutored youth, Unlearn� d in the world� s false subtleties. The speaker says that he trusts his love when she “swears that she is made of truth” in the opening words of “Sonnet 138.” The second line, however, complicates things.� Even though he is aware that “she lies,” he continues, “I believe her.” He claims in lines three and four that she is not the only one who lies.He also lies. To give the impression that he is youthful and naive, like a child, he acts ignorant about her lies. He believes that his age is his vulnerability and that acting younger will help him win her love. She is aware that he is lying about not comprehending “the world’s false subtleties,” just as he is aware that she is lying.Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young, Although she knows my days are past the best, Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue: On both sides thus is simple truth suppressed. The speaker admits that the Dark Lady is aware that he is not a young man. He is old since his� “days are past the best.” This has a loose connection to the fact that she finds him old and unattractive. He is aware that in order to capture her attention given that she has a choice of lovers, he must portray himself as attractively as possible.He claims that just as she acts as though she believes his act, he pretends to believe her lies. This restores their harmony since both sides are blatantly lying.But wherefore says she not she is unjust? And wherefore say not I that I am old? Oh, love� s best habit is in seeming trust, And age in love loves not to have years told. Therefore I lie with her and she with me, And in our faults by lies we flattered be. The speaker poses two questions. He questions why she lies to him rather than just telling him the truth. And why doesn’t he just remark that he’s “old”? Undoubtedly, doing it that way would be simpler. In response, he claims that their feigning to be in love with one another is the best part of their relationship. But the speaker says that the lies they tell one another aren’t a problem. They actually find solace in them both. 1When my love swears that she is made of truth,2I do believe her, though I know she lies,3That she might think me some untutored youth,4Unlearnèd in the world’s false subtleties.5Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young,6Although she knows my days are past the best,7Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue:8On both sides thus is simple truth suppressed.9But wherefore says she not she is unjust?10And wherefore say not I that I am old?11Oh, love’s best habit is in seeming trust,12And age in love loves not to have years told.13 Therefore I lie with her and she with me,14 And in our faults by lies we flattered be. Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially. 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For example, other rights such as publicity, privacy, or moral rights may limit how you use the material. Shakespeare's Sonnet 138, which concerns a difficult relationship in which both the speaker and the lover lie to each other, was initially published in 1599 in a collection called The Passionate Pilgrim. The book was attributed to William Shakespeare. However, the book also included poems belonging to other writers. Due to these inconsistencies, scholars think that the book was pirated and unauthorized by Shakespeare. It is the version published in the 1609 Quarto Shakespeare’s Sonnets that is best known and loved by readers. The 1609 version is quite different from the version published 10 years earlier. Sonnet 138 is written in the typical form of the English sonnet. The English sonnet has 14 lines written in iambic pentameter. It has a rhyme scheme of ABAB CDCD EFEF GG. The last two lines are a rhyming couplet that marks the poem's "volta" or "turn" in which the argument or tone shifts. In the sonnet, the speaker lies about his age and the lover lies about not cheating on him. In the end, the speaker says that fake trust is the foundation for the best kind of love because it allows lovers to flatter each other. This is an unusual kind of sonnet. Starting with the Italian poet Petrarch’s sonnets written during the Renaissance, this poetic form typically describes an idealized lover with a pale face and golden hair. Sonnet 138 is part of the “Dark Lady” series in Shakespeare’s sonnets, which includes sonnets 127 to 154. These describe a woman who is not particularly beautiful (according to the beauty standards of Shakespeare’s times). She has dark hair and a dark complexion. Their relationship is also far from ideal, as she is often cruel to the speaker and cheats on him. Poetry Sonnet 138 Poem Summary & Analysis By William ShakespeareTo view related topics Click Here.William Shakespeare, an English poet and playwright, wrote “Sonnet 138.” The poem was most likely written in the first half of 1590. The poem delves deeply into an incongrous and complex relationship. The speaker and the lady he loves lie to each other all the time, about little things like whether or not his mistress is cheating on him as well as bigger things like that.The two lovers find themselves in a counterintuitive scenario where they choose to seek comfort in one other’s lies rather than the love they feel for one another.Shakespeare was a playwright, poet, and actor from England. He is largely recognized as the greatest playwright and writer of English literature ever. 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