Shakespeare's Sonnets
Structure and Style

"A Beautiful Work of Art"
The Fair Youth

- unnamed young man
- written of in romantic and loving language
  - led people to suggest a homosexual relationship or platonic love
- physically superb
- youthful
- beloved
- politically superior and socially powerful
- represents almost everything in life accomplishments and polite character that was valued by Shakespeare's culture
- fundamental flaw treated lightly
  - refusal to wed and procreate
The Dark Lady

- betrayal of her contradicts spiritual betrayal by the fair youth
- poet's betrayal is inward and instinctive
- speaker loves, hates, and lusts for her all at once
- referred to as lover

The Overall Story

- highly personal themes
- feel of autobiographical poems
  - real events and feelings?
- voice of sonnets referred to as "the speaker"
- young man and dark lady may have had an affair that the speaker was not happy about
Shakespeare's sonnet 97

How like a winter hath my absence been
From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting year!
What freezings have I felt, what dark days seen!
What old December's bareness every where!
And yet this time removed was summer's time,
The teeming autumn, big with rich increase,
Bearing the wanton burden of the prime,
Like widow'd wombs after their lords' decease:
Yet this abundant issue seem'd to me
But hope of orphans and unfather'd fruit;
For summer and his pleasures wait on thee,
And, thou away, the very birds are mute;
Or, if they sing, 'tis with so dull a cheer
That leaves look pale, dreading the winter's near.
Sonnet 97 Explanation

- "This is addressed to a loved one, more specifically a woman who Shakespeare loved.
- 5: 'This period of separation from you was due to summer'
- 6: 'Overflowing autumn'
- In line 9, "abundant issue" as 'topic of general debate or concern',
- The first ten lines of this sonnet seem to be a reminiscense, whereas the last four relate his use of the present tense, as opposed to imperfect, as an explanation of what is always happening during the friend's absence."
Shakespearean sonnets are very different from the standards of the day. Petrarchans or Italian sonnets were a far cry from Shakespeare's advanced literary systems. Sonnets, in general, are 14 line poems written in iambic pentameter.
Petrarchan Sonnets

Petrarchan
-2 parts (Octave and seset)
-Octave is 8 lines long and follows the rhyme ABBAABBA.
-Seset is 6 lines long and follows the rhyme CDCDCD
-The two parts are usually contrasted. (Past and present)

Much have I travell’d in the realms of gold, And many goodly states and kingdoms seen; Round many western islands have I been Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold. Oft of one wide expanse have I been told That deep-brow’d Homer ruled as his demesne; Yet did I never breathe its pure serene Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold: Then felt I like some watcher of the skies When a new planet swims into his ken; Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes He star’d at the Pacific—and all his men Look’d at each other with a wild surmise—Silent, upon a peak in Darien.
Shakespearean Sonnets

Shakespeare
- 4 parts
- 3 quatrains 4 lines long
ABAB Rhyme.
- A couplet 2 lines long CC Rhyme.
- Deeper meanings and more complete than Petrarchan

My love is as a fever, longing still
For that which longer nurseth the disease,
Feeding on that which doth preserve the ill,
The uncertain sickly appetite to please.

My reason, the physician to my love,
Angry that his prescriptions are not kept,
Hath left me, and I desp’rate now approve
Desire is death, which physic did except.

Past cure am I, now reason is past care,
And frantic mad with evermore unrest,
My thoughts and my discourse as madmen’s are,
At random from the truth vainly expressed;

For I have sworn thee fair and thought thee bright,
Who art as black as hell, as dark as night.
Iambic Pentameter

definition: a line of poetry that is written in five feet of five sets of stressed or unstressed syllables

- Shakespeare's poetry has multiple examples of iambic pentameter
- iambic pentameter follows the pattern of unstressed syllable then stressed syllable
- Sonnet 97 is made completely of iambic pentameter
- a blank verse is iambic pentameter without rhymes

How like a winter hath my absence been
From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting year!


