

Sonnet 127 by William Shakespeare (c. 1564 – 1616)

Synopsis:

The speaker of the poem defends his love of a mistress who does not meet the conventional standard of beauty by claiming that her dark eyes and hair (and, perhaps, dark skin) are the new standard. The old version of beauty—blond hair and light skin—are so readily counterfeited that beauty in that form is no longer trusted.

1. In the old age, black was not counted fair,
2. Or, if it were, it bore not beauty's name;
3. But now is black beauty's successive heir,
4. And beauty slandered with a bastard shame.

5. For since each hand hath put on nature's power,
6. Fairing the foul with art's false borrowed face,
7. Sweet beauty hath no name, no holy bower,
8. But is profaned, if not lives in disgrace.

9. Therefore my mistress' eyes are raven black,
10. Her eyes so suited, and they mourners seem
11. At such who, not born fair, no beauty lack,
12. Sland'ring creation with a false esteem.

13. Yet so they mourn, becoming of their woe,
14. That every tongue says beauty should look so.

