Shakespeare’s Sonnets
Background

❖ William Shakespeare first made his mark on the literary globe in the competitive theatre business from 1587 - 1598

❖ Around the year 1598, there was an enforced absence from theatre in England, which allowed for Shakespeare to focus more on poetry as opposed to playwrights.

❖ This is the assumed time in which Shakespeare wrote his 154 sonnets that are known and read today.
The text of Shakespeare's sonnets generally considered to be definitive is that of the 1609 edition, which was published by Thomas Thorpe, a publisher having less than a professional reputation.

Because Shakespeare did not title his sonnets, they are entitled by the order in which they were published, for example, sonnet 130 is the 130th sonnet that appeared in the original publishing.

It is unknown if Shakespeare intended for his sonnets to be ordered as they appear in the first publishing or if the publisher, Thorpe, organized them into the sequence they are now known in.
The Fair Young Man

- The belief that the first 126 sonnets are addressed to a man and that the rest are addressed to a woman has become the prevailing contemporary view.

- Sonnets 1-126 are all addressed to a young man. But who is he?

- Addressed to "Mr. W. H.," the dedication has led to a series of conjectures as to the identity of this person. The two leading candidates are Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton, and William Herbert, third Earl of Pembroke.
The Fair Young Man

Because Shakespeare dedicated his long poem "Venus and Adonis" to Southampton, and because the young earl loved poetry and drama and may well have sought out Shakespeare and offered himself as the poet's patron, many critics consider Southampton to be "Mr. W. H."

William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke was wealthy, notorious for his sexual exploits but averse to marriage, and a patron of literary men.

Pembroke had an affair with Mary Fitton, who bore him a child out of wedlock; this extramarital affair is considered to parallel too closely the sexual relationship in the sonnets to be mere coincidence.
The Young Man Sonnets

- With the first 27 sonnets being in reference to procreation, the first 126 sonnets are all addressed to a young man.

- In reference to love, these sonnets note that as time goes on, true love truly endures despite the fading of beauty with age.

- The young man sonnets also reference death and the fact that it will eventually happen to everyone; therefore, they almost serve as a warning to the young man in a sense that the young have a hard time realizing this reality.

- These sonnets also help to ground the young man being that they reference that some men think too highly of themselves.

- In the 126th sonnet, Shakespeare leaves the final rhyming couplet blank, which could be in reference to the fact that he is letting the young man go, just as death eventually lets everyone go.
The Dark Lady

- The Dark Lady is a married woman with whom he becomes infatuated. Similar to his friendship with the young man, this relationship fluctuates between feelings of love, hate, jealousy, and contempt.

- The question of who the Dark Lady is an unsolved, controversial issue because of the insufficiency of background detail. Some believe that she might be of Mediterranean descent with dark hair and dark eyes of Greece, Spain, Italy and Southern France. Other scholars have suggested, given Shakespeare's description of her dark, dun-colored skin and black wiry hair, that the Dark Lady might have been a woman of African descent.

- Emilia Lanier- mistress of Lord Hunsdon, someone Shakespeare knew
- Black Luce- Brothel owner/prostitute, possibly of African descent
- Wife of John Florio- mistress of Shakespeare and Earl of Southampton???
- Mary Fitton- Mistress of William Herbert
The Dark Lady Sonnets

aderoque's final sonnets, numbers 127-154, are all in reference to a dark lady.

These sonnets depict a dark lady who is grim but still admired by Shakespeare.

Although she is now what society considers to be beautiful in Shakespeare's time, she talks about likeable subject matters and is grounded.

The dark lady sonnets display a tension between idealized love and realistic love within poetry.

It is likely that Shakespeare wrote sonnets 127-154 as a parody toward his other poetic counterparts and their overdramatic, pleasurable imagery used to describe their lovers.