The Eye of the Beholder

Cassidy Cox  
Utah State University

Jessica Hahn  
Utah State University

Whitney Howard  
Utah State University

Taylor Pearson  
Utah State University

William Pitcher  
Utah State University

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

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

Therefore my mistress’ eyes are raven black,
Her eyes so suited, and they mourners seem
Sland'ring creation with a false esteem.
Yet so they mourn, becoming of their woe,
That every tongue says beauty should look so.

Although the poet knows he should not love the dark lady because she is not conventionally beautiful, he does. He relies less on his eyes to inform his emotions.

His love, as expressed in Sonnet 127, is a love built around new conventions of beauty that cannot be falsified. The eyes cannot lie and he relies more on his heart.

Sonnet 141, “In faith, I do not love thee with mine eyes,” expresses how different the poet’s feelings are for the dark lady compared to the fair young man.

The poet calls love a “blind fool” (Sonnet 141) for creating confusion between what the poet sees and what the poet feels. The poet can no longer trust his eyes to understand love.

In the couplet at the end of Sonnet 127, the poet suggests that conventional standards of beauty should change to support love.