

LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE

MASSACHUSETTS LEVEL III HONORS 2009

Dear Mr. Shakespeare,

Several years ago I read your 130th sonnet “My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun.” This poem made a significant impact on me when I read it the first time and holds the same importance to me now. Although I relate to Ophelia in your *Hamlet* and find Juliet interesting, it is this sonnet of yours that I relate to most out of your work that I have read.

The subject of Sonnet 130 is the love interest of the speaker of the poem. The speaker describes the so-called “beauty” of the young woman he loves. What’s striking is that the girl is not beautiful in the typical sense of the word, beauty in the way the rest of the world defines it. Her “eyes are nothing like the sun,” and she is described as “dun” or brown – darker than the snow white that was so appreciated when you wrote this. As a girl who refuses to follow certain social norms that society calls for teenage girls to follow, I relate to the uncommon beauty of this young woman. She is unconcerned with adhering to the traditional requests of society.

The speaker explains how this girl’s hair is like “black wires” that grow on her head. Many teenage girls in our society feel pressured to straighten their hair if they have been born with naturally curly hair. I, in fact, have somewhat wavy hair but will not straighten it because “everyone else” thinks it would look better that way. Another common hairstyle is highlighted blonde hair. I, myself, have never had that style. I most often have “Crayola colored hair” such as neon pink and blue. I maintain this hairstyle because it is what makes me feel good. It is less common and therefore more daring and fun.

On a far more personal level, Mr. Shakespeare, I recognize this girl in myself again because of the “black wires” she sports as hair. Today’s American society has such a love-hate relationship with hair. Long, smooth, flowing, golden locks are great for caressing, but there better not be any black wires on a girl’s leg, lest she face ridicule. I think it interesting the time, energy, and money spent on shaving and hair removal, all for the sake of looking young – like a prepubescent girl – and not like a mature, experienced, adult woman. I much prefer not to shave or pluck anything, and to look and feel much more natural than to try and deny my body’s state to look more youthful or to conform my body to society’s standards of what is beautiful. The fact that both the speaker and the subject have embraced this woman’s natural beauty encourages me to maintain my standards and to resist succumbing to the beauty industry’s.

As the speaker finds this young girl attractive, so also have other young men found me. The speaker explains, “I love to hear her speak, yet well I know/ That music hath a far more pleasing sound” which I believe means that he knows there are much prettier women he could delight in being with, but there’s something about her – even in her imperfect state – that keeps him in constant adoration. The males I have known knew full well that there were prettier girls they could chase. I’m no slender, leggy, blue-eyed blonde. But there was something about me that they did not find somewhere else that kept them around. I like that this girl in the poem stands for something more than an object of love. She is a feminist, a strong individual, and an advocate for natural beauty. She is real.

Thank you, Mr. Shakespeare, for providing me with an example of a real woman that I can take heart in when I doubt myself.

Sincerely,

A. Morgan

A. Morgan Gentry
Ayer High School
Grade 12