
Enigmatic Envy Under an Aura of Insecurity

Norman Macdonald once said, "Envy, like a false mirror, distorts the symmetry of the sweetest form." William Shakespeare, too, exhibits the abstraction of envy in his work and what brings it into existence in the first place. In both Sonnet 29 and Sonnet 78, Shakespeare intricately plaits the concept of insecurity, which in turn leads to jealousy and envy. He deftly shines a light on this idea by using various forms of figurative language to emphasize the overall tone of his sonnets.

For example, in Sonnet 29, Shakespeare adroitly uses metaphors to reveal his recurring theme of envy when he compares opprobrium with serendipity saying "When in disgrace with fortune and man's eyes." He is exhibiting the fact that when people meet with misfortune, they often turn their frustration and despair on those around them: sometimes in physical despondency and other times in envy, turning themselves into 'green-eyed monsters.' Shakespeare also puts personification to use when he describes heaven as "deaf" in line 3 and the earth as "sullen"(12), hinting subtly to the concept of envy, as when individuals are around those they envy, they are often sulky and morose. Additionally, Shakespeare incorporates similes, saying "like to the lark at break of day arising"(11), showing how the speaker of the poem is comparing his condition to that of the lark: his mood shifting from gloomy and envious to more cheerful and sanguine.

Likewise, in Sonnet 78, Shakespeare also includes various types of figurative language such as hyperboles and paradoxes. He employs the use of hyperboles, when he declares, "As every alien pen hath got my use"(3), exaggerating how everyone is imitating his habit of addressing his poems to a specific person, while in fact, it is most likely that the "everyone" consisted of a few rival poets, exhibiting his recurring theme of envy and suspicion. Finally, Shakespeare weaves in paradoxes, when he juxtaposes "heavy ignorance" with "aloft to fly" in line 6, expressing the theme that those who are ignorant about something, are usually free from the responsibility that one has when he receives knowledge and understanding, and therefore able to "fly."

By intertwining the lingering theme of envy and jealousy into both poems, candidly and subtly, with a multitude of literary devices, Shakespeare interlaces the fact that diction and choice of words plays an enormous role in causing an obvious shift in literary pieces. He expresses that the trials and barriers of envy, insecurity, despondence can be easily erased with thoughts of forgiveness, sanguineness, and acceptance.