

Close Reading of Harryette Mullen's "Dim Lady"

In her 2002 poem "Dim Lady," the American poet Harryette Mullen presents a mockery of William Shakespeare's well-known Sonnet 130, "My mistress' eyes..." She creates a hyperbole of his sonnet to showcase the absurdity of the objectification of women in poetry, both negatively and positively. Mullen's poem follows Shakespeare's sonnet in content almost line by line. For instance, Shakespeare writes "Coral is far more red than her lips red;" but Mullen replaces this with, "Today's spe- / cial at Red Lobster is redder than her kisser." While Shakespeare's tone throughout most of the sonnet seems critical and disappointed, we can hear in Mullen's speaker a voice that is more playful, rhythmical, and sarcastic: "And in some **m**inty-fresh **m**outh-washes there is more sweetness than in the garlic breeze my main squeeze wheezes." In this line, we see Mullen employing comical alliteration in the words "minty-fresh mouth-washes," as well as assonance in the words "sweetness," "breeze," "squeeze," and "wheezes." The poet jam-packs these lines with all of these literary devices to give a sense of fun and comparative mockery – almost ridiculing Shakespeare through hyperbole and exaggeration.

As for conclusions, Shakespeare ends his sonnet with the famous heroic couplet: "And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare / As any she belied with false compare." In essence, he is saying that his admiration for the woman is unique and unusual, unlike stereotypical loves. Mullen ends her poem by writing, "And yet, by gosh, my scrumptious Twinkie has a much sex appeal for me as any lanky model or platinum movie idol who's hyped beyond belief." With this final juxtaposition of the lover and the "lanky model" or "platinum movie idol," we get a sense of how absurd and provocative the speaker is in his exaggeration of these beauty ideals.