

*Those lips that Love's own hand did make
Breathed forth the sound that said, "I hate,"
To me that languished for her sake.
But when she saw my woeful state,
Straight in her heart did mercy come,
Chiding that tongue that ever sweet
Was used in giving gentle doom,
And taught it thus anew to greet:
"I hate" she altered with an end,
That followed it as gentle day
Doth follow night, who like a fiend
From heav'n to hell is flown away.*

*"I hate" from "hate" away she threw,
And saved my life, saying, "Not you."*

At first this sonnet seems to be an unlikely presence in the sequence, partly because it is unique in having eight, not ten, syllables per line. More importantly it shows a tender side to the mistress, who has been cruel in the Petrarchan tradition – so cruel that she was called “my female evil” in the preceding poem. Though this poem seems inconsistent, it is rather the same mixture of contradictory feelings that has marked the sonnets dealing with the speaker’s friend. The story is the speaker’s and he now shows how the “comfort and despair” which are assigned to two different persons in Sonnet 144 can be found together in the mistress just as they have been in the young man.

Sonnet 145 begins with the mistress’ hate and ends with her mercy. By showing how the emotions can suddenly shift, Shakespeare gives us a more realistic treatment of love than is found in the traditional stereotypes of most previous sonnet sequences. The opening lines describing the woman’s lips “that Love’s own hand did make” recall the same intimacy found in Sonnet 128, where the mistress is addressed as “my music” and her “tender” hand has “gentle” fingers. (ll. 1, 6, 11) Moreover, that sonnet ends with the speaker’s request, “Give . . . me thy lips to kiss.”

After the mistress has breathed “I hate” (l. 2), she changes in mid sentence when she sees the speaker’s woeful state, and the same pity she was urged to cultivate before now wells up from her heart. The poem takes a neat turn in the couplet

when she “saves [his] life” by adding “not you” to “I hate.” Just prior to this, the speaker likens night to a fiend who has flown away to hell. (ll. 11-12) This clearly echoes the description of the bad angel in Sonnet 144 who turns into a fiend and lures the good angel into her hell. In Sonnet 145 she throws her hateful fiendish side away, and so saves the speaker.