Sonnet 43

by William Shakespeare

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When most I wink, then do mine eyes best see,

For all the day they view things unrespected;

But when I sleep, in dreams they look on thee,

And, darkly bright, are bright in dark directed.

Then thou, whose shadow shadows doth make bright,

How would thy shadow's form happy show

To the clear day with thy much clearer light,

When to unseeing eyes thy shade shines so!

How would, I say, mine eyes be blessed made

By looking on thee in the living day,

When in dead night thy fair imperfect shade

Through heavy sleep on sightless eyes doth stay!

  All days are nights to see till I see thee,

  And nights bright days when dreams do show thee me.

Form: Shakespearean sonnet, of course, written in iambic pentameter (five iambic feet per line: taDUM taDUM taDUM taDUM taDUM), and with the rhyme scheme ABABCDCDEFEFGG. The volta or "turn" comes in the ninth line, when Shakespeare stops talking about what he sees in dreams and starts addressing the "what if" of the loved one's return and the effect it would have on the Bard. The final couplet turns a bit farther in and sums up the point of the entire poem.

Analysis: The first four lines sets up the situation: My eyes see most clearly when I'm awake, but there's nothing good to see (because the Fair Youth is gone). When I dream, however, I see you clearly.