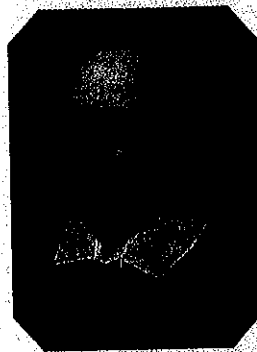


Sonnet 29 • Sonnet 106 • Sonnet 116 • Sonnet 130



William Shakespeare (1564–1616)

Shakespeare may be the most admired author of all time. If he were living today, he would be a celebrity, and the facts of his life would be widely available in magazine articles, books, Web pages, and chat rooms. Instead, we know few facts about him, and these few had to be painstakingly traced from legal and church records or deduced from references in his work.

Bare-Bones Biography Shakespeare was born in the country town of Stratford-on-Avon and probably attended the town's free grammar school. When he was eighteen, he married twenty-six-year-old Anne Hathaway. They had a daughter, Susanna, and twins, Hamnet and Judith.

Shakespeare acquired a public reputation as an actor and a playwright. In addition, he was part owner of a London theater called the Globe, where many of his plays were performed. (For more about Shakespeare and his work as a dramatist, see pages 294–299.)

The Sonnet In the years 1592–1594, London's theaters were closed because of an outbreak of the plague. This general misfortune may have had at least one benefit: It may have provided the time that Shakespeare needed to write some of his 154 sonnets.

In writing a long sequence of sonnets, Shakespeare was being fashionable. Elizabethan poets enjoyed the sonnet form, writing fourteen-line lyric poems to both real and imaginary lovers. The great Italian poet Petrarch (1304–1374) began the writing of sonnet sequences, and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, developed the English form of the sonnet that Shakespeare used.

Petrarch set the thematic course of the sonnet for generations to come. His sequence charts each pang and longing of the speaker's unfulfilled love for an idealized lady. This poetic device led to endless inventiveness—the beloved's beauty invites extravagant comparisons, and she provides a focus for the poet's ingenuity.

Shakespeare's Sequence Like the sonnet sequences of other poets, Shakespeare's 154 sonnets are numbered. Most of them are addressed to a handsome, talented, young man, urging him to marry and have children who can carry on his talents. The speaker also warns the young man about the destructive powers of time, age, and moral weakness. Midway through the sequence, the sonnets focus on a rival poet who has also addressed poems to the young man. Twenty-five of the later sonnets are addressed to a "dark lady" who is romantically involved with both the speaker and the young man. These later sonnets focus on the grief she causes by her betrayal of the speaker.

A Mystery Scholars fiercely debate the identity of the young man (Mr. W. H.), the "dark lady," and the rival poet. Leading candidates for the role of Mr. W. H. are Henry Wriothesley, third earl of Southampton, to whom Shakespeare dedicated his narrative poems, and William Herbert, third earl of Pembroke. Those favoring Southampton claim Mrs. John Davenant was the "dark lady," but the Pembroke side believes she was Mary Fitton, a woman of doubtful reputation. The many nominees for the rival poet include Edmund Spenser, Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, and John Donne—even the name of Chaucer, a poet who had been dead for two hundred years, has been proposed!

Scholarly debates aside, readers treasure Shakespeare's masterful use of the sonnet to bring the fundamental experiences of life—time, death, love, and friendship—into tight focus.

Preview

Connecting to the Literature

Feelings may sink you into gloom or send you floating with joy. If you are a Shakespeare, your strong feelings will erupt in a sonnet!

Literary Analysis

The Shakespearean Sonnet

Shakespeare uses a variation of the sonnet form, a variation that has since been named after him. Like other sonnets, a **Shakespearean sonnet** has fourteen lines, with five iambic feet to the line (an iambic foot is an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one).

Unlike Petrarchan and Spenserian sonnets, a Shakespearean sonnet follows the rhyme scheme *abab cdcd efef gg*, giving it this structure:

- three **quatrains**, or four-line stanzas
- a rhyming **couplet**—often a dramatic statement that resolves, restates, or redefines the central problem of the sonnet

Notice the artful way in which Shakespeare uses the first twelve lines of each sonnet to present a problem that he resolves or restates in the couplet.

Comparing Literary Works

Though all Shakespearean sonnets have fourteen rhyming lines, there are no rules about the number or type of sentences they contain. Shakespeare uses this freedom of **syntax**, or sentence structure, to create dazzling dramatic effects. By saving his main idea until the end of one long sentence, he makes Sonnet 106 build and build like a lawyer's statement to a jury. Using alternating short clauses, setting up and then delivering punchlines, he turns Sonnet 130 into a miniature comedy routine. As you read, compare the effects Shakespeare achieves with syntax.

Reading Strategy

Relating Structure to Theme

As you read, **relate structure to theme**. Notice how Shakespeare builds on or varies his theme—his main concern—from quatrain to quatrain, using the couplet to deliver a dramatic concluding statement. Use a chart like the one shown to record the main idea of each section of a sonnet.

Vocabulary Builder

scope (skōp) *n.* range of perception or understanding (p. 259)

sullen (sul' ən) *adj.* gloomy; dismal (p. 259)

chronicle (krän' i kəl) *n.* historical record of events in chronological order (p. 260)

prefiguring (prē fig' yər in) *v.* resembling and so suggesting beforehand (p. 260)

impediments (im ped' ə ments) *n.* obstacles (p. 261)

alters (ôl' tərz) *v.* changes (p. 261)

Quatrain 1

Speaker has bad luck, which causes him to feel isolated. He pities himself and bemoans his condition.

Theme: *bad fortune; self-pity*



Quatrain 2

Theme:



Relation of 1 and 2

Change in Theme:

S

ONNET 29

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone bewep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless¹ cries,
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
5 Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least.
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
10 Haply² I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

1. **bootless** futile.
2. **haply** *adv.* by chance.

Vocabulary Builder

scope (skōp) *n.* range of perception or understanding

sullen (sul' ən) *adj.* gloomy; dismal

✓ Reading Check

What is the speaker's state of mind at the end of the poem?

SONNET 106

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

When in the chronicle of wasted time
I see descriptions of the fairest wights,¹
And beauty making beautiful old rhyme,
In praise of ladies dead and lovely knights,
5 Then in the blazon² of sweet beauty's best
Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow,
I see their antique pen would have express'd
Even such a beauty as you master now.
10 So all their praises are but prophecies
Of this our time, all you prefiguring;
And, for they look'd but with divining eyes,
They had not skill enough your worth to sing:
For we, which now behold these present days,
Have eyes to wonder, but lack tongues to praise.

1. **wights** (witz) *n.* human beings; people.
2. **blazon** *n.* coat of arms; emblem.

Critical Reading

1. In Sonnet 29, did you find the shift in the speaker's mood believable? Explain.
2. (a) **Recall:** With whom is the speaker in Sonnet 29 in "disgrace"? (b) **Analyze:** What overall effect does this disgrace have on the speaker's state of mind?
3. (a) **Recall:** According to line 12 of Sonnet 29, what causes the shift in the speaker's mood? (b) **Analyze:** How would you describe the shifting moods in the sonnet? (c) **Interpret:** How do the last two lines summarize the theme?
4. (a) **Recall:** In Sonnet 106, what is ancient poetry "prefiguring"? (b) **Compare and Contrast:** Compare the ways in which writers past and present fail. (c) **Synthesize:** How are their failures a testament to the lady's beauty?
5. **Evaluate:** Based on what he reveals of himself, assess the character of the speaker in each sonnet.
6. **Make a Judgment:** Which sonnet, if either, presents a more convincing picture of love? Explain your answer.

Vocabulary Builder
chronicle (krän' i kəl) *n.*
historical record of events
in chronological order

prefiguring (prē fig' yer in)
v. resembling and so
suggesting beforehand

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Justa: Bartolome Esteban Murillo

◀ **Critical Viewing**
Which elements of this portrait seem idealized? Which seem realistic? [Classify]

SONNET 116

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
5 O, no! It is an ever-fixèd mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,¹
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.²
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
10 Within his bending sickle's compass³ come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.⁴
If this be error, and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

1. **star . . . bark** the star that guides every wandering ship: the North Star.
2. **Whose . . . be taken** whose value is unmeasurable, although navigators measure its height in the sky.
3. **compass** range; scope.
4. **doom** Judgment Day.

Vocabulary Builder
impediments (im ped' ə ments) n. obstacles
alters (ôl' tərs) v. changes

✓ **Reading Check**
According to the speaker, how long does true love last?

SONNET 130

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun,
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
5 I have seen roses damasked,¹ red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.²
I love to hear her speak. Yet well I know
10 That music hath a far more pleasing sound.
I grant I never saw a goddess go;³
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied⁴ with false compare.

1. **damasked** variegated.

2. **reeks** emanates.

3. **go** walk.

4. **belied** (bē līd') misrepresented.

Critical Reading

1. **Respond:** Which speaker's idea of love do you prefer? Why?
2. (a) **Recall:** To what is love compared in the second quatrain of Sonnet 116? (b) **Analyze:** Why is love similar to this object?
3. (a) **Recall:** Identify two images in Sonnet 116 that show the effects of time. (b) **Compare and Contrast:** Compare the effects of time on love with the ideal of love in the poem.
4. (a) **Recall:** How are the mistress's eyes, lips, cheeks, breath, and voice inferior, according to Sonnet 130? (b) **Interpret:** Why does the speaker say she "treads on the ground"?
5. (a) **Recall:** In Sonnet 130, what does the final couplet say about the speaker's feelings? (b) **Interpret:** What general truth does the couplet suggest? (c) **Draw Conclusions:** In his sonnets, Petrarch worshiped his mistress. Why has Sonnet 130 been called anti-Petrarchan?
6. **Apply:** In which of these sonnets does the speaker's attitude toward love seem more typical of our times? Explain.

Literary Analysis
The Shakespearean Sonnet Identify the rhyme scheme of the sonnet's first quatrain. Which line does not begin with an iambic foot?

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