

Critical analysis of sonnet 30



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Shakespeare uses structure, sound devices and diction to set up his argument and convey his unhappiness and the mournful tone. The Elizabethan sonnet structure is used. This consists of three quatrains and a rhyming couplet.

This structure, along with the first words of each couplet, help one to group ideas and identify elements of the argument that Shakespeare is using in his sonnet. In the first quatrain the speaker says that ??? When??? he is looking back on his life, (second quatrain) ??? Then??? he cries and is distraught, (third quatrain) ??? Then??? he moans, (couplet) ??? But??? when he thinks about his friend he is happy again. Shakespeare sets up his argument clearly by using the Elizabethan sonnet structure. The use of sound devices is prominent in this sonnet. Shakespeare uses repetition and alliteration to convey the speaker's mood in the sonnet – grief. The repetition of the word ??? woe??? in line 10 emphasizes his woeful feelings and so his misery. This adds to the mood of the sonnet.

In line 1 there is repetition of the ??? s??? sound in ??? sessions of sweet silent???. The soft sound that is created gives the sonnet a quiet, relaxed atmosphere. The ??? s??? sound could almost resemble whispering and sets the mood of this quatrain as thoughtful and contemplative. In line 4, the use of the ??? w??? sound in ??? woes new wail my dear times?? waste??? suggests heavy breathing that one experiences before crying, which comes in the next line ??? I drown an eye???. As the speaker is on the verge of crying, we can tell that he is unhappy which adds to the sorrowful tone at this section in the sonnet.

In lines 8 and 9 the alliteration in the repetition of the 'm' and 'g' sounds is used. These loud heavy sounds suggest moaning, wailing and the intense crying of the speaker, as he physically expresses his unhappiness at the friendships he has lost. The mood in these lines is one of despair, distress and misery. The diction can be seen to have three themes; legal, financial and the poet's sorrow. 'Sessions', 'summons', 'account' and 'restored' are legal terms that create the image of a court setting. This shows the reader that the speaker is in a thoughtful environment and highlights the solemnity of this inward contemplation; just as court proceedings are taken very seriously.

The quietness of the opening quatrain is shown using the legal image; in court proceedings silence is demanded. The court image helps the reader to grasp the idea that the speaker will 'summon' his past grievances and reflect over these issues; just as a judge will 'summon' a witness, who will recall past events for the jury to deliberate. The financial image is created with the use of the words, 'precious', 'cancelled', 'expense', 'tell of', 'account', 'pay', 'paid', 'losses are restored' and 'dateless'. Less obvious financial diction include words such as, 'lack', 'waste' and 'unused'. In the couplet Shakespeare explains that when he thinks about his 'dear friend' all his depressed feelings about lost opportunities, lost friends and past grievances go away and he is happy again.

His friend has a huge positive impact on his mournful feelings. This is shown using the financial image of balancing an account. The speaker's misery,

shown throughout the sonnet, could be seen as one side of the account; the effect of the speaker thinking about his dear friend the other.

This thought alone is enough to balance the account, 'all losses restored and sorrows ended' and highlights the extremity of the impact of this dear friend on the speaker. The poet's sorrow is shown through the use of the words 'sigh', 'old woes', 'new wail', 'drown an eye', 'unused to flow', 'weep afresh', 'moan', 'grieve at grievances', 'heavily', 'from woe to woe', 'sad', 'fore-bemoaned moan', and 'sorrows'. The poet's unhappiness leaves when he thinks about his dear friend. The ability of this friend to lift the poet from a state of deep despair shows us the power of friendship, a theme in this sonnet.

In summary, Shakespeare successfully uses the Elizabethan structure, the repetition of the 's', 'm' and 'gr' sounds and financial and legal images to assist the reader in understanding the sonnet on a more meaningful level.