

Sonnet 107 by william shakespeare – literary analysis essay sample

[Literature](#), [William Shakespeare](#)



Nowadays William Shakespeare is renowned as one of the world's greatest and most prolific dramatists of all times. Both tragedies such as "Romeo and Juliet", "Hamlet", "Anthony and Cleopatra", and light-hearted comedies like "The Taming of the Shrew" and "A Midsummer Night's Dream" are still box-office successes in theatres all around the globe. Yet, besides being a playwright, Shakespeare has also exercised his complex literary talents in poetry, appreciated in this domain especially due to his sonnets.

The sonnets written by Shakespeare generally follow the path opened by Petrarch in this literary genre two centuries before. These are actually poem forms consisting of 14 lines, each with 10 stressed and unstressed syllables known as iambic pentameter, with a set rhyme scheme of: a b a b c d c d e f e f g g. The rhymes may be ear-rhymes or eye-rhymes: an ear-rhyme is one that rhymes in sound, e. g. "soul" and "control"; an eye-rhyme is one that rhymes by sight, e. g. "presage" and "age".

Shakespeare wrote 154 sonnets, all addressed directly to certain implicit readers—a young friend (his patron), a rival poet and a dark mistress. There have been numerous controversies in today's literary critique regarding the exact identities of the sonnets' subjects.

Among the most recurrent themes are beauty, love, wit, nobility, but also doom, fallibility and separation. Thus, Shakespeare doesn't deal solely with the pleasant aspects of life, but also exploits the flaws and downfalls of humanity. These very general themes are exploited in an extremely personal context. This correlation between the author's personal micro-universe and

the macro-universe also appears in Sonnet 107, in which the poet seems to suggest a demise in his relationship with his patron.

Not mine own fears, nor the prophetic soul,
Of the wide world, dreaming on things to come,
Can yet the lease of my true love control,
Supposed as forfeit to a confined doom.

The mortal Moon hath her eclipse indured,
And the sad Augurs mock their own presage,
Incertainties now crown themselves assured,
And peace proclaims Olives of endless age.

Now with the drops of this most balmy time,
My love looks fresh, and death to me subscribes,
Since spite of him Ill live in this poor rhyme,
While he insults o'er dull and speechless tribes.

And thou in this shalt find thy monument,
When tyrants' crests and tombs of brass are spent.

Sonnet 107 is one of Shakespeare's most ambiguous sonnets. It may be interpreted in several different ways, as it abounds in what seem to be allusions to contemporary events, situations and personalities, meant to outline and somehow justify his own feelings. Shakespeare's intention, in my opinion, is to emphasize the contrast between the perishable physical side of the world and its eternal aspects. Thus, true love and art prevail, despite the apocalyptic predictions of augurs and the incessant passing of time, to which only the physical world is subjected.

The poem begins with a tone of impending revelation, but in the following quatrains the references to peace, mortal moons, augurs, and balmy times evaporate into uncertain generalisations, creating an atmosphere of mysticism. Yet, judging by the époque in which the poem was written, and taking into account the historical background, one could easily identify the events to which Shakespeare alludes. A very plausible theory is that the mortal Moon represents Queen Elisabeth I, who at her death left a country on the verge of civil war, as no official successor had been assigned and fights for the throne were looming ominously on the people of England. But while the Queen is mortal, the monarchic institution is not. The augurs' pessimistic predictions didn't come true, as James I ascended to the throne. Although his crowning initially generated more uncertainty than confidence, his reign was ultimately peaceful, also bringing an end to decades of war with Spain: "Incertainties now crown themselves assured/And peace proclaims Olives of endless age".

Still, undoubtedly, the main theme of Sonnet 107 isn't the political welfare of Elizabethan England, but the everlasting strength of the author's feelings and devotion towards his patron, feelings which defy the poet's own doubts, the augur's predictions, time and even death. In the first quatrain a temporary rupture or hardships of some kind between the two are evoked, while in the same time the reader is assured that these troubles have been overcome.

This is the basic idea from which the rest of the poem develops: the poet's love, supposed by many to be "forfeit to a confined doom", is too deep to be controlled -neither by his own inner fears, nor by the world's prophetic soul. The "prophetic soul of the wide world" strikes me as an ironical expression, criticising people's tendency of thinking about the future, "dreaming on things to come", instead of siezing the moment; also, this might be a vague way of referring to some gossip which had altered the poet's relationship to his patron. So two main causes for the problems between the author and the fair youth may be identified: the external interference of others and Shakespeare's own internal doubts, lack of confidence.

Yet, the tensionate situation is solved, and those "sad augurs" who had forecasted (probably even wished) a rupture between the two must "mock their own presage". From this perspective, the mortal Moon may be the poet's friend himself, who, after having endured his "eclipse" in the author's eyes (suggesting the downfall of their friendship), has regained his favoured position.

The last six lines are extremely optimistic, revealing the author's joy and bright view of the future. His happiness has a number of clear sources, and good reasons for him to see the present as "a most balmy time" can be identified.

One reason of relief is the solving of the problems concerning England's future, through the coronation of James I. In this respect a significant detail is that balm was a rich unguent used at the coronation to anoint the monarch, and Shakespeare seems to cite it as symbolic of the sacred person of the king.

Secondly, and most importantly, as a calm after a tempest, his love for his friend is refreshed, and through the result of this love-the poem itself- he holds the key to immortality. Although modestly admitting his verse to be "poor", Shakespeare attributes it with an enormous strength, as he will survive through his rhymes inspite of dying physically. Therefore Death can only have power over "dull and speechless tribes", which may represent the ones already dead or the tribes from distanced and then unknown continents, which had no language available for them to write immortal verse.

Death affects ordinary people and tyrants likewise, only the beauty of art may elevate one above the status of simple mortal. Kings uselessly attempt to keep their memory alive through "crests and tombs of brass", as these have no value and are perishable in time, while the poem will eternally

remain a monument for the poet's friend. In this way, not only the creator, but also the recipient of art benefits from its unique preservation in time.

In my opinion, Sonnet 107 is one of Shakespeare's most challenging and concentrated works, as in just 14 lines it encompasses an entire universe, a complex, mysterious world, with many subtle parallel meanings which are difficult to grasp. In order to perceive the message conveyed by the poet, a thorough documentation is necessary to any reader. Yet I believe that no exclusive interpretation can be given to it and I would go as far as saying that this poem might have as many perspectives as readers.