Sonnet 30 by William Shakespeare

Read Shakespeare’s Sonnet 30, ‘When to the sessions of sweet silent thought,’ with a summary and complete analysis of the poem.

*‘*[*Sonnet*](https://poemanalysis.com/poetic-form/sonnet/)*30,’*also known as *‘When to the sessions of sweet silent thought,’*is number thirty of one hundred fifty-four [sonnets](https://poemanalysis.com/poetic-form/sonnet/) that Shakespeare wrote over his lifetime. It is part of the Fair Youth sequence of sonnets (numbers one through one hundred twenty-six). In this particular poem, the [speaker](https://poemanalysis.com/diction/speaker-in-poetry/) discusses the Fair Youth’s ability to raise his spirits even when he is at his most downtrodden.

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**Sonnet 30**

*William Shakespeare*

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought

I summon up remembrance of things past,

I sigh the lack of many a thing

I sought,And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste:

Then can I drown an eye, unused to flow,

For precious friends hid in death's dateless night,

And weep afresh love's long since cancelled woe,

And moan the expense of many a vanished sight:

Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,

And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er

The sad account of fore-bemoaned moan,

Which I new pay as if not paid before.

But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,

All losses are restor'd and sorrows end.

Explore Sonnet 30

* [1 Summary](https://poemanalysis.com/william-shakespeare/sonnet-30/#Summary)
* [2 Structure](https://poemanalysis.com/william-shakespeare/sonnet-30/#Structure)
* [3 Poetic Techniques](https://poemanalysis.com/william-shakespeare/sonnet-30/#Poetic_Techniques)
* [4 Detailed Analysis](https://poemanalysis.com/william-shakespeare/sonnet-30/#Detailed_Analysis)

Summary

‘Sonnet 30’ by [William Shakespeare](https://poemanalysis.com/william-shakespeare/) describes the speaker’s most depressed state and what it is that finally lifts him out of it and relieves his sorrows.

The poem is directed to the Fair Youth and chronicles the various things that bring the speaker to tears when he starts thinking about the past. He has many regrets, such as people he lost, loves he let go of, and places that he’ll never see again. These things bring him to tears that he can’t control. But, when he thinks of the Fair Youth, as the last lines state, this sorrow is relieved. 

Structure

*‘Sonnet 30’*by William Shakespeare is a fourteen-line [sonnet](https://poemanalysis.com/poetic-form/sonnet/) that is structured in the form known as a “Shakespearean” or [English sonnet](https://poemanalysis.com/poetic-form/shakespearean-sonnet/). The poem is made up of three [quatrains](https://poemanalysis.com/poetic-form/quatrain/), or sets of four lines, and one concluding [couplet](https://poemanalysis.com/literary-device/couplet/), or set of two [rhyming](https://poemanalysis.com/literary-device/rhyme/) lines. They follow a consistent [rhyme scheme](https://poemanalysis.com/definition/rhyme-scheme/) of ABAB CDCD EFEF GG and are written in [iambic pentameter](https://poemanalysis.com/poetic-meter/iambic-pentameter/). This means that each line contains five sets of two beats, known as metrical feet. The first is unstressed and the second stressed. It sounds something like da-DUM, da-DUM.

As is common in [Shakespeare’s poems](https://poemanalysis.com/william-shakespeare/), the last two lines are a rhyming pair, known as a couplet. They often bring with them a turn or [volta](https://poemanalysis.com/literary-device/volta/) in the poem. They’re sometimes used to answer a question posed in the previous twelve lines, shift the [perspective](https://poemanalysis.com/literary-device/perspective/), or even change speakers.

Poetic Techniques

Shakespeare makes use of several poetic techniques in *‘Sonnet 30’.*These include but are not limited to [alliteration](https://poemanalysis.com/literary-device/alliteration/), [enjambment](https://poemanalysis.com/literary-device/enjambment/), and [sibilance](https://poemanalysis.com/literary-device/sibilance/). The first of these, alliteration,  occurs when words are used in succession, or at least appear close together, and begin with the same sound. For example, “death’s dateless” in line six and “love’s long” in line seven.

[Sibilance](https://poemanalysis.com/literary-device/sibilance/) is similar to alliteration but it is concerned with soft vowel sounds such as “s” and “th”. This kind of [repetition](https://poemanalysis.com/literary-device/repetition/) usually results in a prolonged hissing or rushing sound. It is often used to mimic another sound, like water, wind, or any kind of fluid movement. For example, “sessions of sweet silent” in the first line and “summon” and “sight” in lines two and three.

Another important technique commonly used in poetry is enjambment. It occurs when a line is cut off before its natural stopping point. [Enjambment](https://poemanalysis.com/literary-device/enjambment/) forces a reader down to the next line, and the next, quickly. One has to move forward in order to comfortably resolve a phrase or sentence. For instance, the [transition](https://poemanalysis.com/literary-device/transition/) between lines one and two as well as that between lines ten and eleven.

Detailed Analysis

Lines 1-4

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought

I summon up remembrance of things past,

I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,

And with old woes new wail my dear time’s waste.

In the first [quatrain](https://poemanalysis.com/poetic-form/quatrain/) of *‘Sonnet 30,’*the speaker begins by dwelling on the past. He explains to the Fair Youth that he gets depressed when he thinks of the “many a thing [he] sought” that he doesn’t have. His life “lack[s]” these unnamed things. These emotions are especially prevalent when he is sitting in silence. There is an example of alliteration in the last line of this quatrain with the words “woes,” “wail,” and “waste”. He is explaining how while mourning he is adding to new grief to the old and increasing it. 

Lines 5-8

Then can I drown an eye unused to flow,

For precious friends hid in death’s dateless night,

And weep afresh love’s long since cancelled woe,

And moan th’ expense of many a vanished sight.

In the second quatrain, he goes on to describe what he does when he gets into this depressed state. He cries or drowns his eyes, something that is unusual for him. The speaker cries for the lost friends who he can never see again. They are lost to the darkness of night and death, somewhere in the past.

He also mourns for loves long since lost. These emotions hit him as though they are new. Lastly, he adds that he grieves for all the “vanished sight[s]” that he’s never going to see again. These are the places and experiences that won’t ever be his again except in memory.

Lines 9-12

Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,

And heavily from woe to woe tell o’er

The sad account of fore-bemoanèd moan,

Which I new pay as if not paid before.

In the final quatrain of *‘Sonnet 30,’*the speaker describes how after this initial period of grief he can move on to grieve about the “grievances” he has “foregone” or let go of. His tears reach into the past and relive everything that he had let go of but now confronts him as though it is fresh. The pain is new.

He pays it as though he had not “paid before”. Throughout this section of the poem, and the couplet, Shakespeare uses words like “account,” “losses,” and “pay”. This creates a [metaphor](https://poemanalysis.com/figurative-language/metaphor/) that connects his emotional losses to financial ones. This is an interesting use of language that helps him get to the root of his loss while also conveying the loss more clearly to the reader. 

Lines 13-14

  But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,

All losses are restored, and sorrows end.

In the final two lines of *‘Sonnet 30’*the speaker transitions into the turn, or volta. This is seen through a direct address to a “dear friend,” the Fair Youth. Whenever he is as depressed as he described in the previous lines, he thinks of the youth, and his losses are restored and his “sorrows end”.