

*“A Rose by Any Other Name Would Smell As Sweet”:*  
**Rethinking the Imagery of the Rose in Shakespeare’s Sonnets**

WLL 499: Capstone Project

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## **Abstract**

Shakespearean sonnets have myriads of symbols threading from one to another. Rose and canker, young man and dark lady, time, seasons, flowers - these are just a few of the numerous symbols Shakespeare uses in them, narrating a story of love and praise and life. Rose appears to be one of the most prominent of them, making people all over the world question: what could it mean? The most popular theory states that rose indicates sublime beauty and eternal youth and passionate love for the beloved. Rather than a symbol of poetical romance, I think that the rose imagery bears much more than that. This capstone argues that the rose is the representation of the poet himself, the marker of author's presence in own works, and that through the rose Shakespeare talks and devotes the sonnets' lines to himself delivering deep self-reflecting messages. The study of Shakespeare's sonnets is broad and well-researched. Yet, it somewhat lacks the variety in interpretation of the rose imagery. My project could contribute to widening this variety, proposing the new alternatives for the floral symbolism. This capstone project applies close reading of Shakespeare's sonnets, complemented by the historical, biological, psychological, and literary theories to disclose the imageries and elaborate their messages. The Shakespearean scholars' works will also be used to compare and contrast the interpretations of the rose.

The analysis of the sonnets explores three main symbolic images that are mirror glass, rose, and rosewater, each of which complements each other. Mirror establishes the connection

between the author (the addresser) and the "beloved" (the addressee) in a way that both addresser and addressee are demonstrated as the same person talking to himself in a reflection. The rose, which is used by the author as an almost a synonymic reference to the addressee, is observed. Rose here will be examined as the symbol of the author - it grows, it lives, ages and decays, bearing the beautiful virtues within and suffering from the canker of the humane vices. Finally, the rose remains the rose even after decay. It is distilled into the third symbol, that of fragrant rosewater, which reminds the people of the beauty and youth of the flower, just like the poet is distilled into the black ink on the paper which is saved as a poetic legacy for future generations. Shakespeare the Rose lives eternally in his sonnets up until our days, being the same old beautiful man he once was back then.

## Introduction

“The rose is one of the most omnipresent and powerful symbols in all literature, in addition to being one of the most complex for us to understand, especially across the mist of time” (Buchmann 2015 quoted in Xue 2023, 3).

The rose for Shakespeare is much more than a mere flower in its physical shape. It is a metaphor, a literary trope, a paralleling symbol that twines the sonnets with its beautiful vines. The rose right from the first sonnet is used as an explicit allegory of youth and beauty. In Sonnet 1, Shakespeare writes: “From fairest creatures we desire increase, / That thereby beauty's rose might never die...” (sonnet 1, lines 1-2),- praising the eternal virtue of rose’s beauty. In Sonnet 11, the flower’s virtues are elaborated: “As fast as thou shalt wane, so fast thou growest, / Herein lives wisdom, beauty, and increase...” (sonnet 11, lines 1 and 5). The rose is not just beautiful by itself, but also gifts the world with the blooming gardens of noble pleasures. Moreover, not only by its looks, but by its fragrance does the rose enchant its praisers: “The rose looks fair, but fairer we it deem / For that sweet odour which doth in it live” (sonnet 54, lines 3-4). The rose for Shakespeare is an immaculate gift of nature that provides its beholders with the joy of sweet beauty and noble shape. However, if the rose in the sonnets is a symbol, then what imagery does it bear within? I argue that the rose could represent Shakespeare himself, acknowledging his presence in the sonnets and metaphorically tell the life story of the poet.

## Shakespearean Sonnet

Sonnet is a traditional poetic form with strict structure, strong rhyming and brightly emotional meaning. Standard structure of the sonnet is 14 lines that must convey a certain emotion and deliver it through the wise use of the rhymes, word placement, rhythm and word colouring. Edward Thomas once said that “a man must be a tremendous poet or a cold mathematician if he can accommodate his thoughts to such a condition (quoted in Philip 1972, 101). Shakespearean sonnet fits the defined requirements and elevates the emotional colouring of the thought through the sequence/clusters of sonnets united by the single plot line.

Generally, there is the universal struggle with the historical context of the sonnets. “It so happens that we know almost nothing about the historical circumstances <...> [neither] to whom they are addressed or exactly when they were written” (Auden quoted in Rudenstine 2014, 4). The publication date of the sonnets, although in fact unknown, is agreed to be around mid-1590s, when Shakespeare was in his thirties. The date in general is hard to identify due to the fact that Sonnets were not initially supposed to be published, and they were not by Shakespeare himself. The sonnets were found to be some kind of a personal diary written for unknown purposes. The fogginess which occurred as a result of absence of the exact recorded date, somewhat complicates the study of them as it poses difficulties for connecting the biographical events with the interpretation of them in his works. For the sake of more or less close interpretation, the researchers agree on the time division according to the ruling of the royal family, i.e. works written before 1603 are Elizabethan (after Queen Elizabeth I), after - Jamesonian (King James I), or Scottish-influenced

as a result of the unification of England and Scotland (and later Ireland) under the single rule of the legitimate heir of both thrones by birthright. Nonetheless, although some of the sonnets could have been written in the Jamesonian period, Shakespearean sonnets mostly belong to the works of the Elizabethan period.

### **The Rose: Generally Accepted Theories**

William Shakespeare, the master of metaphorical narration, could mark his presence through the symbols. The roses that frame the sonnets with their beautiful and deeply meaningful nature might indicate the author infusing own masterpiece with his poetic spirit. The rose, in general, is one of the most prominent symbols for Shakespeare's artistic heritage. This flower was used in more than 70 works of the author, which makes it the most frequently mentioned floral image of Shakespeare (White 2018). Sonnets are of no exception, carrying the image in numerous pieces. Xue (2023, 2) found out that in the sonnets the "rose" is mentioned exactly a hundred times (Fig. 1). Such an observation strengthens the case for arguing the importance of the rose's role in the author's narration. In this project, I would like to argue that roses, contrary to the generally accepted theories, may be the symbols of Shakespeare himself. The Rose and Shakespeare could serve as a perfect example of a literary auto portrait, where the noble flower twines round the sonnets, capturing the deep thoughts, worries and philosophy of the poet for eternity.

Way of expression	Words	Frequency	Distribution in following sonnets
Direct description of "rose"	Rose	5	54 67 95 98 109
	Roses	5	54 99 130
	Rose	1	1
	Roses	2	35 67
Description related with "rose"	Darling buds	3	18 54 70
	Sweet/sweetest/ sweetness	67	1 4 5 6 8 12 13 16 19 26 29 30 35 36 38 39 52 54 63 70 71 73 75 76 78 79 89 93 94 95 98 99 100 102 104 106 108 113 114 118 125 126 128 133 135 136 145 151
	Flowers	13	5 16 21 65 68 69 94 98 99 113 124
	Distilled/distills/ distillation	4	5 6 62
	total	8	100

Fig.1. Distribution of the "Roses" Across the Sonnets (Xue 2023)

From this table, for this project, I am particularly interested in the "roses" that are stated explicitly as well as the certain words connected to it. For instance, in order to introduce the canker into the research I needed the reference to the "buds", as the disease originates within the early form of the flower's growth. Also, the sweetness of the roses and their distillation are central to the *Rosewater* section. However, Xue does not mention one particular sonnet, which would be of help for my examination. Sonnet 11 is written in the floral language, i.e., it compares the life of a human with the life of a flower but does not use the explicit flower references. This sonnet, used for establishing connection between the poet and the flower, is essential for the research, and therefore I purposefully add this sonnet as a complement to Xue's table.



## **The Addressee: Generally Accepted Theories**

One of the central topics of the sonnets sequence is the relationship between the addressee and the addresser. The dialogue between them is led through the prism of the first-person narrator's perception, i.e., the poet himself, be it Shakespeare or imagined messenger of Shakespeare's thoughts. Meanwhile, the addressee is unknown. The main characters are supposedly tightly linked to real-life addressees.

However, the biography-related addressee theories are highly problematic due to the very mysterious biography of Shakespeare. As Danish literary scholar, the author of one of the most complete artistic biography books on Shakespeare, Georg Brandes once said: "...everything we know about him [Shakespeare] can fit on one page" (Brandes 1997, 8),- and addressee of his sonnets belongs to the area of unknown. Therefore, the scholars had to propose the theories about the potential devotee of the sonnets. Generally, they agree that first 126 sonnets are devoted to a beautiful young man, the "beloved", and the rest (Sonnets 127-154) to "dark lady" (Cousins 1999, 111). This capstone does not include the discussion about the dark lady, as the main focus lies in the interaction between male characters (or a man and himself). Therefore, the spectrum of the researched sonnets is limited to first 127, and this project examined the particular sonnets within this scope which serve as the main turning points in the relationships between the addresser and the addressee.

Interesting to note that the odes to the young man, who is the embodiment of virtue, nobility, and beauty, usually refer to him as to the second person (you), as well as third person

such as “he” in the sense of “you”, or “the beloved”. Yet, the sonnets that use “you” and “I” as the addressees pose certain questions to consider whether there are two separate people or one person with the dialogue to oneself as an interlocutor. In this paper, I support the idea that “you” and “I” refer to the same person talking to the self, creating the ambience of duality reflected in the image of the mirror glass.

The only recorded hint on the addressee we possess at this point is the short dedication to “Mr W.H.” on one of the papers. Some scholars tend to believe that it is the abbreviation for “William Herbert”, the 3rd Earl of Pembroke, English politician, and representative of the nobility (Brandes 1997, 286). However, this thought is hugely problematic due to certain reasons given by Brandes. First of all, it was prohibited to devote such emotionally explicit works to someone, especially of the noble class. Secondly, Herbert’s letters carry the intention to marry a noble woman. Finally, there is no evidence that Shakespeare and Herbert ever met in person. Some scholars followed this addressee theory as a foundation for further analysis developments, others, on the contrary, tried to challenge this idea (Dutton 2007, 130). Yet again, the mystery of Shakespeare’s biography does not allow one or another theory to be completely reliable.

As I will explain below, the gap created by the lack of exact information on the mysterious Mr W.H. is one of the reasons to believe that the addressee of the sonnets may be Shakespeare himself. There are numerous devotees proposed by the scholars, but none of them at this moment can be proved. So, the poet also could be a potential candidate for the role of the addressee. Still, as all we know is “to Mr W.H”, it would be reasonable to speculate on what it could potentially cipher, and I am going to argue that W.H. could be a reference to Shakespeare

himself. If we suppose that “W” stands for William, what would “H” denote? The poet’s biography contains plenty of possible options:

- **Hamlet:** Written somewhere around the same time as sonnets (1590s-1600s), *Hamlet* became a calling card of Shakespearean art. Other literary research comes to the conclusion that the Prince of Denmark speaks with the thoughts of Shakespeare, personifying the inner world of the poet (Brandes 1997, 377). If such an intimate connection with the hero had indeed been established, Shakespeare could have taken on the eponymous pseudonym.
- **Henley:** Artists often make special connections with the cherished places. Henley Street, Stratford-upon-Avon, is the place where Shakespeare was born and raised. Such a nickname used for the sonnets as a personal diary would have an almost sacral meaning - the thoughts and deep worries and observations addressed to the mirror reflection, to himself, to him as a once a child who was real and careless there on Henley Street.
- **Hathaway:** Shakespeare’s wife was named Hathaway. Could he have used wife’s name as a pseudonym or was it his sign of appreciation and gratitude? We will never know, but the possibility exists.
- **Honeytongued** or British **Hercules** were the nicknames given to Shakespeare by Francis Mires and Joseph Addison correspondingly (Brandes 1997, 357). The former implied the sweet lyrical side of the poet, emphasising his smooth flow of rhyming and emotionality of meaning; the latter highlighted the bravery and fearlessness of Shakespeare as the relatively explicit writer who was not afraid of expressing the emotions in own works.

Overall, it is almost impossible for modern scholars to define the identity of mysterious Mr W.H. The lack of the documented, verified information gives rise to the numerous yet imagined theories regarding the addressee of the poet. Still, this ambiguity around the addressee plays in the favour of this project, allowing the speculations of the addressee being the poet himself. This informational gap working together with the interpretation and symbolism of the sonnets hint on the possibility of sonnets' dedication to one person - Shakespeare himself.

## **Methodology**

The approaches towards the research of Shakespearean sonnets are very diversified. Although every researcher definitely uses close reading while studying Shakespeare, each scholar uses own specific method to uncover the topic. In many cases (e.g. McCurdy 1966, Duncan-Jones 1995) scholars take one sonnet as a subject of research and examine each line and the word choice closely to decipher the meanings hidden in it. The topic of such observations can be diverse, extending from the addressee examination up to the identification of the flowers within the sequence. Sometimes scholars refer to the works from other fields to complement the research. For example, by making the cross-field examination with the more scientific sphere such as biology, it appears possible to definitely state the type of the rose or any other flower and compare it to another one (Duncan-Jones 1995, 521-522). The biological differences found are later shifted into the literary field to serve as the metaphorical explanation of the imagery.

Other scholars decide to choose the single plotline/symbol to trace throughout all of the sonnets (Martin 1972 - idea of self-love; Harvey 2008 - colour theory). They pick a certain topic and then examine the evolution of its development using the change in word choice, attitude, context, addressee, themes, and other factors. As a result, the development of the sonnets' one thematic thread is elaborately observed.

Also, the scholars such as Rudenstine (2014) focus on more technical moments of the sonnets, such as their sequence. In fact, they try to explain the symbolism of the images through their strict placement in the order. Rudenstine, in particular, explains the general logic behind the symbolic development of the sonnets, providing specific examples from multiple sonnets and thematic clusters, i.e., author researches the evolution of certain symbols in the sonnets, and attempts to recreate a sequence based on the logic of development. Rudenstine often pauses at one particular sonnet and demonstrates its individual contribution to the further narration, thus emphasising its role as the turning point in the imagery evolution.

My research method does not follow the established system of examination, yet it will combine the methods similar to those from Harvey (2008) and Rudenstine (2014). This is the analysis of symbolic threads, and the latter one will show the presentation of the "turning points" the importance of which will be mentioned below. In general, I use close reading of the sonnets supported by the literary theories regarding symbolism in general and the meaning of each symbol in particular.

The three main themes examined are Mirror Reflection and mirror's metaphor, Rose, and Rosewater. First, I establish the existence of a conversation between the poet and his reflection

through the image of the mirror. Second, I connect the imagery of the rose with the “addressee”, Shakespeare. Finally, once the poet’s image is compared to a rose, the rosewater symbol is a perfect complement showing straightforward allegory: roses continue their immortal life in rosewater - poet continues his immortal life in black ink, i.e., in his poems. This three-symbol analysis both establishes the rose-poet connection and reveals that the poet literally lives in his poems.

The symbols chosen are quite popular throughout the sonnets. As was mentioned above, the rose is mentioned a hundred times. Mirror is used explicitly ten times, but the implicit mirror language can also be traced in some sonnets. Finally, rosewater is indirectly mentioned over 70 times. However, in order not to exceed the expected volume of the project, I focus on several sonnets only. In particular, I have chosen nine main sonnets to closely examine (i.e., 5, 11, 22, 31, 35, 54, 62, 65, 99<sup>1</sup>) which serve as turning points, explicit comparisons, crucial plot pillars in the mirror-rose-rosewater chain. Sonnets 22, 31, and 62 are the first to examine and are crucial for the whole project since they establish the connection between the addresser and the addressee on the basis of the principle of the mirror duality.

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<sup>1</sup> The full texts of the sonnets are provided in the appendix part on page 32.

## **Glass/Mirror Reflection and Duality of Self: Addresser and Addressee**

In her monograph on the image of glass in art and literature, Julia Chadaga (2014, 18) explains that artists and authors have repeatedly used the mirror as a symbol of mystery, fantastic realms, magic, surveillance, or simply self-reflections. In accordance with this artistic pattern, Shakespeare too used the symbols of mirrors and glasses in his works in abundance and made them ones of the most frequently mentioned central symbols of the Sonnets (in ten sonnets mentioned explicitly, not including the implicit mirror sonnets (Charalampous 2018, 3)).

Although the mirror in itself is not close to the imagery of the rose on which this paper focuses, it is still essential for the argument. To demonstrate the possibility that the symbol of the rose marks Shakespeare's own presence in the sonnets, we must first demonstrate the poet's reflections on himself within the sonnets, as indicated by the symbol of the mirror. Throughout the sonnets, the reader can easily trace that the rose imagery is a straightforward metaphorical reference to the "beloved" addressee (Xue 2023, 4.1). Therefore, if we connect the figure of the mysterious addressee to Shakespeare, the rose-poet chain would become easier to justify, and here is where the mirror symbol becomes of use: narrating through the looking glass establishes the strong connection between the addressee and the addresser of the sonnets.

Mirror is generally a mysterious object. It reflects our image, duplicating ourselves and the world behind us. It seemingly demonstrates the world as it is in reality, and yet we question its accuracy. French psychoanalysis and psychiatrist Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) developed a well-known theory about the mirror stage and sophisticated psychological perception of own reflection

in the glass which can be applied to literary analysis. One of the main features of this theory is the sense of duality - you (reflection) and me (I); this world and virtual realm; inner state and outer appearance (Lacan 2007, 76). According to Lacan's theory, the duality of the mirror lies in the division of the world into the "disposition of self in dreams or hallucinations" (Lacan 2007, 96) and the visible world that is captured in the reflection. In other words, the reflection always creates the sense of the little crowd and intense internal activity or emotional tension, which is usually based on the conflict caused by the disappointment with the anticipated picture of self. This very conflict provokes deep self-reflection to occur, as the nature of it is born from the subjective perception of oneself, i.e., sometimes humans tend to apply specific imaginary features to their own appearance (Lacan 2007, 99). The person whose judgement is influenced by internal factors, such as psychological state, emotionality, energetic levels, as well as the external ones, such as social perception, can be more confident or critical about own appearance, creating and strengthening the imaginary figure within himself. The conflict occurs when the flattering imaginary appearance (young and beautiful) remains imaginary and is broken by the mirror reflection that demonstrates the true state of events (e.g., old and wrinkly).

This ambience rules over the mirror-sonnets of Shakespeare. Whenever the poet himself is standing in front of a mirror or is talking to the addressee using the mirror-vocabulary (you-me; "their images" (sonnet 31, line 13); I see; etc.) the sense of the reflective conversation is present. In other words, in the sonnets which do not explicitly mention the mirror, the reader still feels its presence because of the word choice. The poet creates the preposition duality of "you and me" that abstractly resembles the image of the mirror. In Sonnet 31 in particular, the image of the mirror is



not explicit, but the sense of the reflection dominates the scene because the poet talks to the addressee as if he was talking to his reflection in the mirror which sends back the numerous faces of the people of the past: “Thy bosom is endeared with all the hearts, /<...>/And there reigns love and all love’s loving parts, /And all those friends...” (sonnet 31, lines 1-4). Here the number of people on the stage is speculative: there can be two people - the poet and his real interlocutor who reminds the poet of his loved ones-, or it can be the same person - the poet talking to himself in the mirror. In this reading, his heart in “thy bosom” reminds him of all people he once loved, and “their images I loved I view in thee, /And thou, all they, hast all the all of me” (sonnet 31, lines 13-14). The imaginary glass makes the connection between the two characters visible and strong. Supposing the glass is real, Shakespeare’s “thee” refers to the reflection, making two people one. The poet’s interlocutor is mysteriously silent. The dialogue turns into a monologue of Shakespeare sharing his deepest worries and thoughts to someone who suspiciously reminds the poet of his life. As the readers, we do not receive the answer from the interlocutor and do not know his/her thoughts, yet we know what he/she looks like.

About the dichotomy between age and youth, that are connected through the mirror reflection, from Sonnet 22 we understand that the addressee is young (“youth and thou are of one date” ) and beautiful (“for all that beauty that doth cover thee”)(sonnet 22, lines 2 and 5). In the very same sonnet, there is a poet whose thoughts are known to us, but his appearance is not. While reading Sonnet 22, the duality raises doubts about the number of people participating in the conversation, i.e., as the readers we are not sure if there are two people in the dialogue, or one person talking to himself, which complicates the imagination by introducing the idea of oneness

of the addresser and the addressee. The mirror plays a role of the intermediary between the “two”: one (the poet) is old (“My glass shall not persuade me I am old”), but he is simultaneously young because the addressee positions himself as such (“So long as youth and thou are of one date”)(sonnet 22, lines 1 and 2). The oneness lies in the very idea of talking to the poet's own reflection. Until the poet feels himself young and beautiful inside, no glass will be persuasive enough to show him the truth.

Generally, as noted by Chadaga (2014, 67), we are tempted to claim that the mirror is actually a fair just truth-teller, which indifferently demonstrates both the advantages and the flaws of the beholder. Applying this approach to Sonnet 22, the unacceptance of the author in own ageing does not contradict the features of fair judgement inherent to the mirror. Contrarily, it serves as an important turning point in the author's self-perception towards the steady progression of self-reflection and self-esteem and leads to discovery of another important feature of the literary mirrors such as transformation. Gradually, the poet got used to the idea of his ageing. The transformative function of the mirror breaks the imaginary appearance in the poet's perception in favour of the objective truth. In the later sonnets, the poet becomes less confident in own beauty, and melancholically accepts reality: “Mine own self-love quite contrary I read; /Self so self-loving were iniquity. /'Tis thee, myself, that for myself I praise, /Painting my age with beauty of thy days” (sonnet 62, lines 11-14). The mirror's importance grows to show the real appearance in the reflection and juxtapose it to the romantic image of it for the latter one to eventually break.

The oneness of the poet and his reflection steadily becomes even more explicit if the one progresses through the sonnets in numerical order, peaking in Sonnet 62. With each new piece of

information presented in the sonnets, the reader slowly shapes the images of both the poet and the devotee to start noticing that they sometimes really become the same person. In sonnet 62, previous idealisation of beauty and youth clearly falls apart in the eyes of the poet right after he takes a glance at the flawlessly truthful mirror. The two interlocutors suddenly become an apparent one person consisting of two parts. The first one - beautiful, flawless, sublime: "Methinks no face so gracious is as mine,/No shape so true, no truth of such account;/And for myself mine own worth do define,/As I all other in all worths surmount" (sonnet 62, lines 4-8). This is the image that the poet bears in his mind, based on the memory of own beautiful youth and inner psychological state. However, the mirror contrasts this part with the second one: "But when my glass shows me myself indeed,/Beated and chopp'd with tann'd antiquity" (sonnet 62, lines 9-10), - old, exhausted, unattractive - forcing the inner transformation to occur. The mirror serving as a truthful capturer of the world stops the romantic dreams of the poet to show him the truth and change his moral and psychological state.

The mirror as a transformative tool is of no novelty for Shakespeare. He had used this purpose of the glass in other works too which allows to apply the transformative feature to sonnets as well. For example, as Robert M. Schuler (2004, 152-153) found, in *Richard II*, Shakespeare introduces the image of the mirror as a mean to two parallel ends: 1) show the audience the truth and explain "visually" what is really happening at the time; 2) show the main character (i.e. the owner of the mirror) something that is supposed to change his perception of himself. The second interpretation is the tool which is called the "magic mirror": one glimpse at this mirror is enough for the character to understand the truth about himself and break all the unnecessary and false

thoughts and beliefs (Schuler 2004, 152). This point is the climax for the character's development after which he/she starts living the real life instead of the imagined one in the sense that is consistent with the Lacan's transformative tool: the person who already passed the conflict between the truthful mirror and imagined appearance accepts him/her-self and bears in mind the real state of events.

Proceeding with the Sonnet 62, it can be said that it serves as this particular "magic mirror" moment, where the inner transformation can be considered to be complete once the poet says: "Tis thee, myself, that for myself I prais,/ Painting my age with beauty of thy days" (sonnet 62, lines 13-14). The implied glimpse at the mirror in this sonnet leads to the acceptance that it is not the reality, but the inner young self that makes the poet romanticise his own appearance, which is in fact no longer young and beautiful. This very acceptance is the peak reached in Sonnet 62 changes the author's mindset. As found by Rocco Coronato (2018, 75), he rids the verse of the narcissistic idealisation which used to originate in his internal confidence in own beauty and youth. Second, if taking into account the possibility of the official ordering sequence being the correct one, it is logical to assume that the author starts to think about ways to save the remnants of youth and beauty of his soul and mind: "For such a time do I now fortify/ Against confounding age's cruel knife,/ That he shall never cut from memory/ My sweet love's beauty, though my lover's life:/ His beauty shall in these black lines be seen,/ And they shall live, and he in them still green." (sonnet 63, lines 9-14),- which serves as an implicit introduction to the images of the rose and rosewater. In this case, the accepted numbering of the sonnets seems to work, which hugely facilitates the

further observation, as both melancholic attitudes and the explicit frequent thought about leaving his poetic legacy dominate the latter narration after sonnet 62.

To summarise the points above, the addressee of the sonnets seems to be very close with the addresser in thoughts and feelings so that it becomes possible to equalise the addresser and the devotee. As a result, both of them are combined in the same person, though separated by the mirror glass. Then, if the addressee is the addresser, i.e., Shakespeare, to argue that the rose symbol also refers to the poet, we need to establish that the rose is also the addresser (“the beloved”) and trace the connecting points between the lives of the rose and of the poet within the sonnets.

### **Dualities of the Rose**

In the previous section on the Mirror Glass, it was established that there is indeed a possibility to think that the addressee of the sonnets is Shakespeare. Furthermore, as Xue (2023, 4.1) claims, the image of the rose is a straightforward metaphor to the beloved devotee. In Sonnet 35, the poet implies the connecting thread between the beloved and the rose, saying that even the immaculate roses have their drawbacks just like the devotee has: "No more be grieved at that which thou hast done:/Roses have thorns, and silver fountains mud" (sonnet 35, lines 1-2). Besides, the poet compares the beauty of the addressee with the beauty of the flowers, paralleling the topics of the human ageing and the floral decay: "Thus is his cheek the map of days outworn,/When beauty lived and died as flowers do now" (sonnet 68, lines 1-2). Based on such comparisons and juxtapositions, the addresser being the addressee combined with the addressee being referred to as the rose allows us to draw the assumption that the addresser aka the poet is

also the rose. In this section, I examine the connection between the poet/devotee and the rose. The rose appears to be the symbol which incorporates several dual images, and therefore I examine a couple of them: Youth and Ageing, and the Rose and the Canker, gradually moving then to the section of the Rosewater that helps to indicate the “true rose” and the “fake rose”.

### **Youth and Ageing**

The topic of human ageing and the rose decay pierce the sonnets quite often. The connection between the addressee and the flower is based primarily on this parallelism, when juxtaposing the sonnets about the poet's ageing and the rose's decay. The focus on the concern about the ageing which progressively sharpens when Shakespeare undergoes the transformation of the mindset caused by the mirror brings us even closer to the rose. This parallelism between the rose decay and the ageing cannot be met in the single sonnet, but rather it is revealed when comparing several of them. In particular, the mirror's concept of duality can be traced in floral metaphors, too. The already familiar sonnet 62 can be paralleled with the sonnet 11 (which is full of floral/plant metaphorical style) around the contrast between the beautiful self and ageing reflection. Sonnet 11 tells the audience that when the flowers bloom, “herein lives wisdom, beauty, and increase” (sonnet 11, line 5), indicating the growth and blossom of the youth and flowers. This blossom of the flowers is compatible to the blossom of the poet's youth: “Methinks no face so gracious is as mine,/No shape so true, no truth of such account” (sonnet 62, lines 4-6). However, when the flowers experience their time of ageing, the world experiences “without this folly, age, and old decay” (sonnet 11, line 6). Likewise, when the poet sees himself “beated and

chopp'd with tann'd antiquity" (sonnet 62, line 10), his world is also shattering and becomes melancholic. Thus, this cross-sonnet parallelism of the duality trope creates a bridge between the mirror reflection and the floral growth.

### **The Rose and the Canker: Virtue and Vice**

Sonnet 99 also continues to establish the connection between the devotee and the rose, by combining them within one sonnet: roses are as beautiful as they are because they steal this beauty from the devotee: "One blushing shame, another white despair;/ A third, nor red nor white, had stol'n of both,/And to his robbery had annex'd thy breath" (sonnet 99, lines 8-10). The interchange of beauty and youth between the flowers and the character equalises them, making both the direct associations of each other. However, the roses in this particular sonnet are presented in the unflattering light, as by stealing the beauty, i.e., by committing a vice, they become less perfect than the initial connotation with the Shakespearean rose seems to be. Shakespearean rose is flawless and virtuous, but Sonnet 99 seems to disapprove of it. Here, we can trace the humanisation of the rose, i.e., human nature is not ideal as the vices and drawbacks are an inevitable part of human life. Therefore, if I argue that the rose represents the poet, i.e., the human being, it also has to have the vices somehow.

However, how can the vices dwell within the rose? Justification appears through the insertion of the canker into the rose. The flower remains noble and pure, but sometimes the

canker of worries, fears, envy, jealousy enters the buds and eats the rose from the inside if the rose does not resist. First, the author indicates that the rose is prone to be suffering from the canker: "And loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud!" (sonnet 35, line 4). Second, it is established explicitly that if the canker appears in the rose, it means that the flower committed some sinful action: "How sweet and lovely dost thou make the shame/Which, like a canker in the fragrant rose,/Doth spot the beauty of thy budding name!/O, in what sweets doth thou thy sins enclose!" (sonnet 95, lines 1-4). The canker becomes then the new important imagery dependent on the symbols of the rose. Canker appears where the rose fails to be virtuous, punishing the flower for its sin by devouring it, just like the vices of the humans "eat them up" for rejecting the virtue.

In Sonnet 99, Shakespearean rose suffers from this very canker because of the crime of stealing: "And to his robbery had annex'd thy breath;/ But, for his theft, in pride of all his growth/ A vengeful canker eat him up to death" (sonnet 99, lines 10-12). These polar imageries of vicious canker and virtuous rose are explained in the theory of dual symbolism proposed by Suzanne M. Tartamella. She examines the dual symbols of the rose, "a symbol of eternal beauty, praise, and divine perfection", which appeared in the very first poem, and the canker, the "horticultural malady" that gradually enters the sonnets and destroys the image of the rose, symbolising the fight of beauty and evil (Tartamella 2010, 65). The canker makes the author doubt the virtue and fall into vices.



As Philip Martin (1971) notices, throughout the sonnets the author is sometimes harsh on himself, blaming and criticising for weakness or sin. The sin, Shakespeare is criticising himself for, is the sin of self-love (“Sin of self-love possesseth all mine eye,/And all my soul, and all my every part”), and the following feeling of guilt (“Self so self-loving were iniquity”)(sonnet 62, lines 1-2 and 12). As Martin claims, this very guilt and the desire to be in reality young and beautiful leads the poet to even more sins of envy and anger born from the conflict between the desire and the reality, but the rose growing within him helps to overcome the moral sin, accept the life as it is and keep the virtuous life. Hereby, the images of the rose suffering from the canker parallels the image of the poet suffering from the vice. However, the rose remains noble for Shakespeare, and seemingly so does the poet, the true poet, whose inner virtue, and cultivation of it helps to survive the malicious canker.

### **Rosewater: “True Rose” and “Fake Rose”**

Virtue for Shakespeare appears to be a very important topic, and he repeatedly refers to the notion of the “true rose” and its inherent virtue. As found by several scholars, the flower is the embodiment of immaculate virtue for the poet (Doran 1976, 141; Dong 2020, 245). Since we consider the rose to be the poet, Shakespeare as a human being must also have the virtues, but the question is: what are the virtues of the true poet? If we assume that the rose is the poet, then the virtues of the true rose must parallel the virtues of the poet. For example, in Sonnet 67, Shakespeare implies that both the true rose and the true poet are the gifts of Nature: “Why should false painting imitate his cheek/And steal dead seeing of his living hue?/ Why should poor

beauty indirectly seek/ Roses of shadow, since his rose is true?/...>/O, him she [Nature] stores, to show what wealth she had” (sonnet 67, lines 5-8 and 13). In other words, explicitly, the poet and the rose are beautiful both from the outside and from the inside. It implies that even if some circumstances steal the outer beauty from them, their inner beauty, i.e., nobleness and virtue, will remain. Nature, as the creator of both, understands their virtues, and want to save them for eternity. It is one of the indications of the true rose/poet - they both live forever by the light of their inner beauty.

Sonnet 54 tells us how the true roses live forever, serving as a key moment in the search for this very immortality potion. Shakespeare says that not every flower can live after its death. Only the true rose which possesses real virtue and noble origin is gifted with an opportunity of eternal life. The sonnet states that there are plenty of roses in the world each being visually attractive, deep-in-colour, and beautiful: “The rose looks fair, but fairer we it deem/For that sweet odour which doth in it live./The canker-blooms have full as deep a dye/As the perfumed tincture of the roses” (sonnet 54, lines 3-6). However, it divides the flowers into two: the virtuous and the vicious. They are almost indistinguishable from each other on the outside, but the inner beauty is the thing that defines their destiny, and the marker of this beauty for roses is its fragrance. The odour of the “sweet roses” is what keeps them immortal. The rosewater, distilled from the true roses seems to be the only possible way to identify which one is true: “Sweet roses do not so;/Of their sweet deaths are sweetest odours made” (sonnet 54, lines 11-12), - even if we can mistake the true rose for the fake one during its life, after decay it becomes

clear. The rosewater should be observed as the continuation of the flower's life. Once the rose dies, it is distilled into the sweet odorous perfume that reminds people of the fact that it was alive one day, and even further – that it had certain virtues that would never die out regardless of the relentless march of times.

Generally, the virtue of the rose, which is its eternal beauty and sweet odour, is often juxtaposed with the ageing of the flower, i.e. its decay within the sonnets. Shakespeare often observes how the rose decays while saving inherent nobility and virtue, which become a foundation for the further rebirth in the rosewater. Shakespeare, although desperately disappointed (at first) about own ageing, attempts to imitate the rose, saving the “true” virtues of inner beauty, youth, nobility, and talent to outlive him in the future in the form of the eternal poetic legacy. Many artists try to find the key to immortality to eventually find out they immortalise themselves in their art. Shakespeare is no exception: he is continued in his pieces just like the rose in the rosewater.

Shakespeare parallels the images of the poet and the rose and their immortal legacy within the sonnet sequence. According to Griffiths and Wilson (2018), the rose is distilled through technical intermediary into the perfume. Likewise, the poet is distilled through artistic intermediary, i.e., ink, into the poetry which becomes an eternal memory about the poet, as sweet and as fresh as always: “O, none, unless this miracle have might,/That in black ink my love may still shine bright” (sonnet 65, lines 13-14). The poet says that his legacy will remain and remind people of himself once they read his works. Since the true rose will immortalise itself by its own

virtue in the rosewater, the poet claims that the analogy can be built with the humans: a real poet continues his legacy through his true art, and fake one will not be remembered. The cankerous vicious flowers, that we have discussed above, cannot live forever - Nature is not willing to save the memory of pseudo-roses.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, other “pseudo-roses”-like people pretending to steal his fame by shifting focus on themselves will be exposed in their earthly afterlife, where the memory

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<sup>2</sup> Speaking of the true and false poets/roses, here, it is also interesting to point out the speculations brought up by the scholars in other fields (botany in particular) about rose specification. Biologists given the sonnet information on the rose’s description tried to understand what kinds of roses Shakespeare used in the sonnets: crimson rose, corn rose, dog rose – there are plenty of various interpretations of the mere word “rose”. For example, it was supposed that the author juxtaposed the Crimson Rose, which was considered the immaculate symbol of Tudor England, nobility, virtue, and beauty, and Corn Rose, i.e., poppy (Duncan-Jones 1995). The comparison between them stands out clearly, touching on the topic of the memory.

According to Greek mythology (which is also a frequent theme of Shakespeare’s sonnets), poppies are the flowers that grow in the Kingdom of Hades with a purpose of making the souls forget everything. Poppies do not have odour if they are distilled, which symbolically means that they are forgotten as soon as they stop their mundane existence. At the same time, their almost transparent odour while they are alive impose the oblivion on others: the smell puts people into a hypnotic trance state where the consciousness (including memory) leaves the mind. Later, the scent overdose can have a lethal consequence, with a person remaining in the oblivion state, i.e., death with no memories left. The real Crimson Rose would never do something like that, neither to itself nor to others. Its virtue outlives all the problems and crises and remains as sublime as it was before when it was alive. The same logic applies to the poet, whose artistic mastery and sincerity conquers the eternal world with its beauty: read the works – remember the poet, just as people think of the rose when smelling the rosewater.

about them will fade away, while the true poet, such as Shakespeare, will be the one to last for eternity. Thus, the rosewater of the poet is a blank ink where he saves his “sweet odorous” works to live forever, distinguishing his poetic virtue among the crowds of the “fake rose” contemporaries.

### **Conclusion**

To summarise, this project had examined the rose symbol within the sonnets and its potential connection to the poet that wrote them. We established that the addresser and the addressee can be the same person talks to himself through the mirror glass. Then, the connection between the addressee and the rose was established, making the poet and the rose tightly connected. They both are praised for their nobleness, and they both suffer from the canker of the vices. However, their inner virtues and beauty are what makes them the “true” ones that deserve to live forever in the liquid memory. The true poet just like the true rose will remind the generations to come about their virtue and beauty through the sweetness he leaves in own works, and the rose symbol of the sonnets is captured forever on the paper to gift the poet the eternal life. Overall, Shakespeare and the Rose in the Sonnets are the one. They both grow, bloom, and decay, leaving the legacy of their youth and beauty for eternity. The importance of this research lies in the contribution to the discovery of the alternative interpretations of the floral symbols in the sonnets.

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## Appendix

### Sonnet 5

Those hours, that with gentle work did frame  
The lovely gaze where every eye doth dwell,  
Will play the tyrants to the very same  
And that unfair which fairly doth excel;  
For never-resting time leads summer on  
To hideous winter, and confounds him there;  
Sap checked with frost, and lusty leaves quite gone,  
Beauty o'er-snowed and bareness every where:  
Then were not summer's distillation left,  
A liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass,  
Beauty's effect with beauty were bereft,  
Nor it, nor no remembrance what it was:

But flowers distill'd, though they with winter meet,  
Leese but their show; their substance still lives sweet.

### Sonnet 11

As fast as thou shalt wane, so fast thou grow'st  
In one of thine, from that which thou departest;  
And that fresh blood which youngly thou bestow'st,  
Thou mayst call thine when thou from youth convertest.  
Herein lives wisdom, beauty, and increase;  
Without this folly, age, and cold decay:  
If all were minded so, the times should cease  
And threescore year would make the world away.  
Let those whom nature hath not made for store,  
Harsh, featureless, and rude, barrenly perish:  
Look whom she best endow'd, she gave the more;  
Which bounteous gift thou shouldst in bounty cherish:

She carv'd thee for her seal, and meant thereby,  
Thou shouldst print more, not let that copy die.



### **Sonnet 22**

My glass shall not persuade me I am old,  
So long as youth and thou are of one date;  
But when in thee time's furrows I behold,  
Then look I death my days should expiate.  
For all that beauty that doth cover thee,  
Is but the seemly raiment of my heart,  
Which in thy breast doth live, as thine in me:  
How can I then be elder than thou art?  
O! therefore love, be of thyself so wary  
As I, not for myself, but for thee will;  
Bearing thy heart, which I will keep so chary  
As tender nurse her babe from faring ill.

Presume not on thy heart when mine is slain,  
Thou gav'st me thine not to give back again.

### **Sonnet 31**

Thy bosom is endeared with all hearts,  
Which I by lacking have supposed dead;  
And there reigns Love, and all Love's loving parts,  
And all those friends which I thought buried.  
How many a holy and obsequious tear  
Hath dear religious love stol'n from mine eye,  
As interest of the dead, which now appear  
But things remov'd that hidden in thee lie!  
Thou art the grave where buried love doth live,  
Hung with the trophies of my lovers gone,  
Who all their parts of me to thee did give,  
That due of many now is thine alone:

Their images I lov'd, I view in thee,  
And thou (all they) hast all the all of me.

### **Sonnet 35**

No more be grieved at that which thou hast done:  
Roses have thorns, and silver fountains mud:  
Clouds and eclipses stain both moon and sun,  
And loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud.  
All men make faults, and even I in this,  
Authorizing thy trespass with compare,  
Myself corrupting, salving thy amiss,  
Excusing thy sins more than thy sins are;  
For to thy sensual fault I bring in sense,  
Thy adverse party is thy advocate,  
And 'gainst myself a lawful plea commence:  
Such civil war is in my love and hate,

That I an accessory needs must be,  
To that sweet thief which sourly robs from me.

### **Sonnet 54**

O! how much more doth beauty beauteous seem  
By that sweet ornament which truth doth give.  
The rose looks fair, but fairer we it deem  
For that sweet odour, which doth in it live.  
The canker blooms have full as deep a dye  
As the perfumed tincture of the roses,  
Hang on such thorns, and play as wantonly  
When summer's breath their masked buds discloses:  
But, for their virtue only is their show,  
They live unwoo'd, and unrespected fade;  
Die to themselves. Sweet roses do not so;  
Of their sweet deaths are sweetest odours made:

And so of you, beauteous and lovely youth,  
When that shall vade, my verse distills your truth.

### **Sonnet 62**

Sin of self-love possesseth all mine eye  
And all my soul, and all my every part;  
And for this sin there is no remedy,  
It is so grounded inward in my heart.  
Methinks no face so gracious is as mine,  
No shape so true, no truth of such account;  
And for myself mine own worth do define,  
As I all other in all worths surmount.  
But when my glass shows me myself indeed  
Beated and chopp'd with tanned antiquity,  
Mine own self-love quite contrary I read;  
Self so self-loving were iniquity.

'Tis thee, myself, that for myself I praise,  
Painting my age with beauty of thy days.

### **Sonnet 65**

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,  
But sad mortality o'ersways their power,  
How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,  
Whose action is no stronger than a flower?  
O! how shall summer's honey breath hold out,  
Against the wrackful siege of battering days,  
When rocks impregnable are not so stout,  
Nor gates of steel so strong but Time decays?  
O fearful meditation! where, alack,  
Shall Time's best jewel from Time's chest lie hid?  
Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back?  
Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?

O! none, unless this miracle have might,  
That in black ink my love may still shine bright.

### Sonnet 99

The forward violet thus did I chide:  
Sweet thief, whence didst thou steal thy sweet that smells,  
If not from my love's breath? The purple pride  
Which on thy soft cheek for complexion dwells  
In my love's veins thou hast too grossly dy'd.  
The lily I condemned for thy hand,  
And buds of marjoram had stol'n thy hair;  
The roses fearfully on thorns did stand,  
One blushing shame, another white despair;  
A third, nor red nor white, had stol'n of both,  
And to his robbery had annex'd thy breath;  
But, for his theft, in pride of all his growth  
A vengeful canker eat him up to death.

More flowers I noted, yet I none could see,  
But sweet, or colour it had stol'n from thee.