

*What's in the brain that ink may character,  
 Which hath not figured to thee my true spirit?  
 What's new to speak, what now to register,  
 That may express my love or thy dear merit?  
 Nothing, sweet boy, but yet, like prayers divine,  
 I must each day say o'er the very same,  
 Counting no old thing old (thou mine, I thine),  
 Even as when first I hallowed thy fair name;  
 So that eternal love in love's fresh case  
 Weighs not the dust and injury of age,  
 Nor gives to necessary wrinkles place,  
 But makes antiquity for aye his page,  
     Finding the first conceit of love there bred,  
     Where time and outward form would show it dead.*

**T**hough this sonnet is very tender—the friend is addressed as “sweet boy” (l. 5) for the only time in the sequence—it is really quite thoughtful. The exuberance and optimism of Sonnet 107 gives way to a meditation on age and decay. Sonnet 108 begins with the speaker’s nagging question concerning his capacity for finding new expressions of his own “true spirit” (l. 2) and his friend’s “dear merit” (l. 4). And thus the speaker continues his uneasy search for “what’s new to speak” (l. 3).

In the second quatrain, though he calls his praises just the same each day, he uses a religious simile, “like prayers divine” (l. 5), to describe them, and ends with the recollection of the time “when first I hallowed thy fair name.” The word *hallowed* gives a new sanctity to his love for his friend, and the clause as a whole echoes the Lord’s Prayer. How does this square with Sonnet 105, in which he declares that his love is not idolatry? Such a love as this might well incur the wrath of the devout.

And so the eternal love returns in a fresh guise. It does not worry about dust or wrinkles or the other injuries of age. Now, instead of slighting the visions and prophecies of ancient times (as in Sonnet 106), the speaker makes antiquity his “page” (l. 12), both his servant and his book. This is a swing towards the conservative and another assertion of his mastery. Most important, his search recovers his first conception (“conceit,” l. 13) of love, which has only the appearance of being dead.