

William Shakespeare

The Sonnets

Shakespeare's Sonnets

- Publication: 1609 (no authoritative text)
- Number: 154
- Themes: Time, Beauty, and Verse
- Common Division:
 - 1-126: to an unknown young man
 - 127-52: to Shakespeare's "dark lady"
 - 153-54: about Cupid

The Young Man? (Earl of Southampton)



[http://en.wikipedia.org/
wiki/Henry_Wriothesley
%2C_3rd_Earl_of_Sout
hampton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Wriothesley%2C_3rd_Earl_of_Southampton)

Literary Terms

- Meter
- Quatrain
- Couplet
- Sestet + Octave
- turn
- Sequence
- Rhyming (Shakespearean sonnet or the English sonnet): *abab cdcd efef gg*

Shakespeare's Meters

- iamb (\cup '): revenge
- Trochee (' \cup): midnight
- Dactyl(' \cup \cup): document
- Spondee (' '): amen
- Anapest (\cup \cup '): underneath

Can you Scan the Lines?

- A thing/ of beau/ty is/ a joy /forever:
- Its love/liness /increas/es; it/ will never
- Pass in/ to noth/ingness,/ but still/ will keep
- A bow/er qui/et for/ us, and/ a sleep
- Full of/ sweet dreams,/ and health,/ and
qui/et breathing. (from Keat's *Endymion*)

Sonnets to be Covered?

- 1,3,12,15,18,20,29,30,55,60,65,71,73,74,87,97,98,106,110,116,126,127,128,129,130,135,138,144,146,147 (not all of them, actually)

Sonnet 1

- From fairest creatures we desire increase,
- That thereby beauty's rose might never die,
- But as the riper should by time decrease,
- His tender heir might bear his memory;

- But thou, contracted to thine own **bright**
eyes,
- Feed'st thy **light's** **flame** with self-
substantial **fuel**
- Making a **famine** where **abundance** lies,
- Thyself thy **foe**, to thy sweet self too cruel.

- Thou that art now the **world's** fresh ornament
- And only herald to the gaudy spring,
- Within thine own bud buriest thy content
- And, tender churl, mak'st waste in niggarding.
- Pity the **world**, or else this glutton be,
- To eat the **world's** due, by the grave and
- thee.

Question

- Why do we find so many images in Sonnet 1 and concepts in pairs? (Many words appearing here take on special resonance in the sequence.)

Sonnet 3

- Look in thy **glass** and tell the face thou viewest
- Now is the time that face should form another,
- Whose fresh **repair** if now thou not **renewest**,
- Thou dost beguile the world, unless some mother.

- For where is she so fair whose unearned womb
- Disdains the tillage of thy husbandry?
- Or who is he so fond will be the tomb
- Of his self-love, to stop posterity?

- Thou art thy mother's glass, and she in thee
- Calls back the lovely April of her prime;
- So thou through **windows** of thine age shalt see,
- Despite of wrinkles, this thy golden time.
- But if thou live **rememb**'red not to be,
- Die single, and thine image dies with
- thee.

Question

- In which line does the whole poem appear to turn?

Sonnet 12

- When **I** do **count** *the clock that tells the*
time
- And see the **brave** day sunk in hideous
night,
- When I behold the violet past prime
- And sable curls all silvered o'er with white,

- When loft trees I see barren of leaves,
- Which erst from heat did canopy the herd
- And summer's green all girded up in sheaves
- Born on the bier with white and bristly beard;

- Then of thy beauty do I question make
- That thou among the wastes of **time** must go,
- Since sweets and beauties do themselves forsake,
- And die as fast as they see others grow,
- And nothing 'gainst **Time**'s scythe can make
- defense
- Save breed, to **brave** him when he takes thee
- hence.

Question

- What must the young man do if he wants to be a creature of human worth?

Sonnet 15

- When I **con**sider everything thing that grows
- Holds in perfection but a little moment;
- That this **h**uge stage presenteth nought but shows,
- Whereon the stars in secret influence comment;

- When I perceive that men as plants increase,
- Cheered and checked even by the selfsame sky,
- Vaunt in their **youthful** sap, at height decrease,
- And wear their brave state out of memory;

- Then the **conceit** of this inconstant stay
- Sets *you* most rich in *youth* before my sight,
- Where wasteful *Time* debateth with Decay
- To change *your* day of *youth* to sullied night,
- And all in war with *Time* for love of *you*,
- As he takes from *you*, I ingraft *you* new.

Question

- In the succeeding three quatrains, the poet comes closer and closer to the young man until the poet can no longer examine him philosophically. Any significance?
- Note: in sonnets 15 and 18, the poet tries to deal with mutability by immortalizing him in sonnets.

Sonnet 20

- A woman's face with Nature's own hand painted
- Has thou, the master-mistress of my passion,
- A woman's gentle heart, but not acquainted
- With shifting change, as is false women's fashion,

- An eye more bright than theirs, less false in rolling,
- Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth;
- A man in *hue*, all *hues* in his controlling,
- Which steals men's eyes and women's souls amazeth,

- And for a woman wert thou first created
- Till Nature as she wrought thee fell a-doting,
- And by addition me of thee defeated,
- By adding **one thing** to my purpose **nothing**.
- But since she **prick**'d thee out for women's pleasure,
- Mine be thy love, and thy love's **use** their treasure.

Question

- It seems that the poet feels bitter. Why does he attack the falsity of women?

Question

- Mutability is an important theme in those dedicated to the young man. Can you explain how the poet copes with mutability?

Sonnet 29 (on the power of love)

- When, in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes,
- I all alone beweep my outcast state,
- And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
- And look upon myself and curse my fate,

- Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
- Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
- Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
- With what I most enjoy contented least;

- Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
- Haply I think on thee, and then my state
- (Like to the lark at break of day arising
- From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven's gate;
- For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
- That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

Question

- Do you like this poem? In this poem we find the hierarchy in the social world. We also find the hierarchy in the n world.

Sonnet 30 (on the power of love)

- 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 canceled woe,
- And moan th'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-bemoanèd moan,
- Which I new pay as if not paid before.
- But if the while I *think* on thee, dear *friend*,
- All losses are restored and sorrows end.

Question

- In Sonnet 30 the speaker talks of his present and of his past. By the way, why do we find all those repetitious sounds?

Sonnet 55 (about the permanence of poetry)

- *Not marble, nor the gilded monuments*
- *Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme;*
- But you shall shine more bright in these contents
- Than *unswept stone, besmeared with sluttish time.*

- When **wasteful war** shall statues overturn,
- And broils root out the work of masonry,
- Nor Mars his sword nor **war's quick fire** shall burn
- The **living** record of your memory.

- 'Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity
- Shall you pace forth; your praise shall still find room
- Even in the eyes of all posterity
- That wear this world out to the ending doom.
- So, till the judgment that yourself arise,
- You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes.

Question

- Why does the poet's poem better preserve the young man?

Sonnet 65 (about the permanence of poetry)

- 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 batt'ring 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.

Question

- In which line do we find the shift? Do you agree that the poet no longer believes that his poem can immortalize the young man?

Sonnet 71 (death of the speaker)

- No longer **mourn** for **me** when I am dead
- Than **you** shall hear the surly sullen bell
- Give warning to the **world** that I am fled
- From this vile **world**, with vilest worms to dwell;

- Nay, if **you** read this line, remember not
- The hand that writ it; for I love **you** so,
- That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,
- If thinking on me then should make woe.

- Oh, if, I say, you look upon this verse
- When I perhaps compounded am with clam,
- Do not so much as my poor name rehearse,
- But let your love even with my life decay;
- Lest the wise world should look into our moan
- And mock you with me after I am gone.

Question

- Do you find the poet narcissistic or selfless? (C. L. Barber says the poet is selfless here, but Booth accuses the poet of “narcissistic smugness.”) Also, what might be the poet’s purpose in dedicating this sonnet to the young man?

Sonnet 74 (death of the speaker)

- But be contented: when that fell arrest
Without all bail shall carry me away,
- My life hath in this line some interest,
Which for memorial still **with thee** shall
stay.

- When thou reviewest this, thou dost review
- The very part was consecrate **to thee**:
- The earth can have but earth, which is his due;
- My spirit is thine, the better part of me:

- So then thou hast but lost the dregs of life,
The prey of worms, my body being dead;
The coward conquest of a wretch's knife,
Too base **of thee** to be remembered,.
- The worth of that is that which it
contains,
- And that is this, and this **with thee**
remains.

Question

- We find some pronouns in the couplet. Can you explain to what do those pronouns refer? Also, why does the poet use pronouns there?

An Answer

- The worth of *that* [body] is *that* which it contains [the spirit],
- And *that* [spirit] is *this* [this line] and *this* [the poet's spirit embodied in verse] with thee remains.

Question

- What does the poet hope that the young man will do after the poet's death?

Sonnet 87 (farewell)(experiment in feminine endings)

- Farewell: thou art too dear for my poss**essing**,
- And like enough thou know'st thy *estimate*.
- The charter of thy worth gives thee rele**asing**;
- My bonds in thee are all *determinate*.

- For how do I hold thee but by thy gr**anting**,
- And for that riches where is my deserving?
- The cause of this fair gift in me is w**anting**,
- And so my patent back again is swerving.

- Thy self thou gav'st, thy own worth then not knowing,
- Or me, to whom thou gav'st it, else mistaking:
- So thy great gift, upon misprision growing,
- Comes home again, on better judgment making.
- Thus have I had thee as a dream doth flatter:
- In sleep a king, but waking no such matter.

<http://homepage.ntu.edu.tw/~karchung/prosody.htm>

- Rhyme is the effect created by matching sounds at the end of words. Ordinarily this includes the last accented vowel and the sounds that follow it, but not the sound of the preceding consonant(s).

Masculine rhyme falls on **one syllable**: *fat, cat; repair, affair*. **Feminine** or **double rhyme** includes **two syllables**, of which **only the first is stressed**: *better, setter; pleasure, treasure*.

Question

- Basically, sonnet 87 has feminine endings. Can you give a reason why Shakespeare uses this rhyme here?

Sonnet 97 (absence)

- How like a winter hath my absence been
- From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting year!
- What freezings have I felt, what dark days seen!
- What old December's bareness everywhere!

- And yet this time removed was summer's time,
- The teeming autumn, big with rich increase,
- Bearing the wanton burthen of the prime,
- Like widowed wombs after their lords' decease:

- Yet this abundant issue seemed to me
- But hope of orphans and unfathered fruit;
- For summer and his pleasures wait on thee,
- And, thou away, the very birds are mute;
- Or, if they sing, 'tis with so dull a cheer
- That leaves look pale, dreading the winter's near.

Question

- What metaphor does Shakespeare use in this sonnet?

Question

- Q2 corrects Q1. Q3 corrects Q2 and returns the reader to the stance of Q1. What does this cycle suggest?

Sonnet 98 (absence)

- From you have I been absent in the spring,
When *proud-pied* April, dress'd in all his
trim,
- Hath put a *spirit* of youth in every thing,
That heavy Saturn laugh'd and leap'd with
him.

- Yet nor the lays of birds, nor the sweet smell
- Of different flowers in odour and in hue,
Could make me any summer's story tell,
Or from their *proud lap* pluck them where
they grew:

- Nor did I wonder at the lily's white,
- Nor *praise* the deep vermilion in the rose;
They were but sweet, but figures of delight,
Drawn after you, you *pattern* of all those.
- Yet seem'd it winter still, and you away,
- As with your shadow I with these did
play.

Question

- So many [p] sounds in this sonnet. We find proud-pied, April, spirit, leapt, proud lap pluck, praise, deep, pattern, and play. Scholars say that we find here an erotic use of p. Do you agree with them?

Sonnet 106 (Prefiguration)

- When in the chronicle of wasted time
- I see descriptions of the fairest wights,
- And beauty making beautiful old rhyme
- In praise of ladies dead and lovely knights

- Then, in the blazon of sweet beauty's best,
- Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow,
- I see their antique pen would have expressed
- Even such a beauty as you master now.

- So all their praises are but prophecies
- Of this our time, all you prefiguring;
- And, for they looked but with divining eyes,
- They had not skill enough your worth to sing:
- For we, which now behold these present days,
- Have eyes to wonder, but lack tongues to praise.

Question

- In the first twelve lines, we find the young man's glory in the now and his prefigured beauty in the then. Why do we not find "you" or any word associated with him in the couplet?

Sonnet 110 (Experimenting with Love)

- Alas! 'tis true, I have gone here and there,
And made my self a motley to the view,
Gor'd mine own thoughts, sold cheap what
is most dear,
- Made old offences of affections new;

- Most true it is, that I have look'd on truth
Askance and strangely; but, by all above,
These blenches gave my heart another
youth,
- And worse essays prov'd thee my best of
love.

- Now all is done, save what shall have no end:
- Mine appetite I never more will grind
- On newer proof, to try an older friend,
- A god in love, to whom I am confin'd.
- Then give me welcome, next my heaven the best,
- Even to thy pure and most most loving breast.

Question

- So it seems that the poet once betrayed the young man. Anyway, why do we find so many comparisons (ranging from positive to comparative to superlative to super-superlative)?

Sonnet 126 (Last of the Sonnets Dedicated to the Young Man)

- O thou, my lovely boy, who in thy power
Dost hold Time's fickle glass, his fickle
hour;
- Who hast by waning grown, and therein
show'st
- Thy lovers withering, as thy sweet self
grow'st.

- If Nature, sovereign mistress over wrack,
As thou goest onwards, still will pluck thee
back,
- She keeps thee to this purpose, that her
skill
- May time disgrace and wretched minutes
kill.

- Yet fear her, O thou minion of her pleasure!
She may detain, but not still keep, her
treasure:
- Her audit (though delayed) answered
must be,
- And her quietus is to render thee.

Question

- 1. This sonnet has no couplet.
- 2. In this poem we find a power game between Time and Nature. When we read, the strong caesuras of lines 9-11 check the lines' onwardness. What might be the poet's purpose in presenting those caesuras?

Sonnet 127

- In the old age black was not counted fair,
Or if it were, it bore not beauty's name;
- But now is black beauty's successive heir,
And beauty slander'd with a bastard
shame:

- For since each hand hath put on Nature's power,
- Fairing the foul with Art's false borrowed face,
- Sweet beauty hath no name, no holy bower,
- But is profan'd, if not lives in disgrace.

- Therefore my mistress' eyes are raven black,
- Her eyes so suited, and they mourners seem
- At such who, not born fair, no beauty lack,
Sland'ring creation with a false esteem:
Yet so they mourn becoming of their woe,
That every tongue says beauty should look so.

Sonnet 128 (More Traditional)

- How oft when thou, my music, music play'st,
- Upon that blessed wood whose motion sounds
- With thy sweet fingers when thou gently sway'st
- The wiry concord that mine ear confounds,

- Do I envy those jacks that nimble leap,
- To kiss the tender inward of thy hand,
Whilst my poor lips which should that
harvest reap,
- At the wood's boldness by thee blushing
stand!

- To be so tickled, they would change their state
- And situation with those dancing chips,
O'er whom thy fingers walk with gentle gait,
Making dead wood more bless'd than
living lips.
- Since saucy jacks so happy are in this,
- Give them thy fingers, me thy lips to kiss.

synecdoche

- a figure of speech in which a part is used for the whole or the whole for a part, the special for the general or the general for the special, as in ***ten sail*** for ***ten ships*** (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/synecdoche>)

Question

- How does the poet manage to represent sexual jealousy in comic terms?

Sonnet 147 (Reason vs. Desire)

- My love is as a fever, longing still
- For that which longer nurseth the disease,
- Feeding on that which doth preserve the ill,
- Th'uncertain sickly appetite to please.

- My reason, the physician to my love
- Angry that his prescriptions are not kept,
- Hath left me, and I desperate now approve
- Desire is death, which physic did except.

- Past cure I am, now reason is past care,
- And frantic mad with evermore unrest;
- My thoughts and my discourse as madmen's are,
- At random from the truth, vainly expressed:
- For I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee bright,
- Who art as black as hell, as dark as night.

Question

- What is the paradox in this poem?