

TO, THE ONLIE. BEGETTER. OF,  
THESE. IN SVING. SONNETS.  
M<sup>r</sup>. W. H. ALL. HAPPINESSE.  
AND. THAT. ETERNITIE.  
PROMISED.

BY,  
OVR. EVERLIVING. POET.  
WISHETH.  
THE. WELL-WISHING.  
ADVENTVRER. IN.  
SETTING.  
FORTH.

T. T.



SHAKE-SPEARES

SONNETS.

Neuer before Imprinted.

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AT LONDON  
By *G. Eld* for *T. T.* and are  
to be sold by *William Aspley*.  
1609.

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The dedication of the sonnets: most commentaries start with the premise that the sonnets were too compromising to the man who wrote them, and therefore could not have been authorised by him. Recent opinion however considers that the book and its dedication were done with Shakespeare's full consent, aware of Thorpe's enigmatic dedication. The sonnets were published in 1609, the year when the plague in London resulted in the closure of the theatres. The publication of the sonnets provided Shakespeare with additional income.

Poet's often referred to their poems as children of their brain (hence 'begetter'). In the sonnets he uses 'beget' (23 times), 'begets' (7 times) and 'begotten' (4 times), either with literal meanings of 'to father, to create, to procreate.', or in a metaphoric sense. Sonnets 1-126 are addressed to the youth. Of the 28 that follow to the mistress, in three of them the youth is deeply implicated, so that only 25 out of more than 150 are addressed to the 'Dark Lady'. The dedication may refer to Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, to whom both *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* are dedicated, or to William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, to whom the First Folio is dedicated. Many have thought that Henry Wriothesley, might be the youth addressed in the sonnets, especially as he is also known to have been reluctant to marry (at 26 in 1600), and to have turned down several proposed matches. William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke. (1580-1630) would have been in his late teens when the so called procreation sonnets (1-20) might have been written, perhaps from 1597-1599, and he is known to have rejected several proposed marriages. He came from a renowned literary family, a supporter of the theatres through its own company of actors (Pembroke's men). (The First Folio is the first work containing all of Shakespeare's plays published by two of his fellow actors, Heminge and Condell, some years after his death).

Unlike previous sonnets, where love was idealized, here the poet allows love to coexist with and depend on sexuality. Paradoxically, one of the consequences is the emergence of a realisation that a much deeper spirituality exists, and that love survives even the most destructive aspects of time and sexual passion.

With regard to charges on homosexuality or eroticism, Shakespeare's sexual orientation is unknown, but there is no doubt that in the Elizabethan world sodomy would have been regarded as an almost unspeakable crime. To present a sonnet sequence in which five sixths of the poems are passionate declarations of the love of an older man for a younger man was, to say the least, a challenging and dangerous approach to a description of love. The fact that the sonnets were ignored for centuries afterwards, and rarely reprinted, testifies to the challenge that they present and the disturbing effect they have had on the historians of literature.

## Sonnet 1

FRom faireft creatures we defire increafe,  
That thereby beauties Rose might neuer die,  
But as the riper should by time deceafe,  
His tender heire might beare his memory:  
But thou contracted to thine owne bright eyes,  
Feed'ft thy lights flame with selfe substantiall  
fewell,  
Making a famine where abundance lies,  
Thy selfe thy foe, to thy sweet selfe too cruell:  
Thou that art now the worlds fresh ornament,  
And only herauld to the gaudy spring,  
Within thine owne bud buriest thy content,  
And tender churle mak'ft wast in niggarding:  
Pitty the world, or else this glutton be,  
To eate the worlds due, by the graue and thee.

(1609 Quarto version)

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,  
Thy self 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.

As the opening sonnet of the sequence, this one obviously has especial importance. It appears to look both before and after, into the future and the past. It sets the tone for the following group of so called 'procreation' sonnets 1-17. Main ideas: the youth's beauty, his vulnerability in the face of time's cruel processes, nature's beauty but dull in comparison to his, the threat of disease, and the need to see the world in a larger sense than through one's own (self-centred) restricted vision.

*thereby* = in that way, by that means.

*beauty's rose* = symbolic of all things beautiful.

*riper* = older, more mature, (person, plant, thing) more ready for harvesting.

*by time decrease* = die in the course of time.

*tender* = young, delicate, soft.

*bear his memory* - as an imprint taken from a seal; also with the sense of 'bearing a child', so that the heir carries on the memory of parents through the generations.

*contracted* = being contracted to, under obligation to (in a legal sense).

*Feed'st thy light's flame* = provides sustenance for the flame that gives light.

*self-substantial fuel* = fuel from its own body.

*famine* - emptiness, starvation, lack of provision for posterity.

*abundance* - presumably a reference to the youth's rich qualities

*Thy self thy foe* = being an enemy to yourself.

*to thy sweet self too cruel* - by refusing to procreate, hence denying a future to yourself.

*the world's fresh ornament* = a fresh and youthful glory to the world.

*only* = most important, chief, unique.

*herald* = one who announces, a messenger (the lark is the herald of the morn, and the owl the herald of night)

*gaudy* = bright, colourful (not necessarily vulgar).

*content* = substance. Also, pleasure (sexual allusions to self-pleasure)

*tender churl* - probably a phrase indicating affection; *churl* countryman, rustic;

*mak'st waste* = creates waste (spills semen?)

*niggarding* = being miserly, stingy.

*this glutton* = a glutton like this, i.e. such as I am about to describe, one who eats his own share as well as the world's.

*by the grave and thee.* to consume both what the world and you yourself should have as a right.

## Sonnet 2

When fortie Winters fhall befeige thy brow,  
And digge deep trenches in thy beauties field,  
Thy youthes proud liuery fo gaz'd on now,  
Wil be a totter'd weed of fmal worth held:  
Then being askt, where all thy beautie lies,  
Where all the treafure of thy lufty daies;  
To fay within thine owne deepe funken eyes,  
Were an all-eating fhame, and thriftleffe praife.  
How much more praife deferu'd thy beauties ufe,  
If thou couldft anfwere this faire child of mine  
Shall fum my count, and make my old excufe  
Proouing his beautie by fucceffion thine.

This were to be new made when thou art ould,  
And fee thy blood warme when thou feel'ft it  
could.

When forty winters shall besiege thy brow,  
And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field,  
Thy youth's proud livery so gazed on now,  
Will be a totter'd weed of small worth held:  
Then being asked, where all thy beauty lies,  
Where all the treasure of thy lusty days;  
To say, within thine own deep sunken eyes,  
Were an all-eating shame, and thriftless praise.  
How much more praise deserv'd thy beauty's use,  
If thou couldst answer 'This fair child of mine  
Shall sum my count, and make my old excuse,'  
Proving his beauty by succession thine!

This were to be new made when thou art old,  
And see thy blood warm when thou feel'st it  
cold.

(1609 Quarto version)

The poet looks ahead to the time when the youth will have aged, and uses this as an argument to urge him to waste no time, and to have a child who will replicate his father and preserve his beauty. The imagery of ageing used is that of warfare. The trenches correspond to the furrows and lines which will mark the young man's forehead as he ages. He is urged not to throw away all his beauty by devoting himself to self-pleasure, but to have children, thus satisfying the world, and Nature.

*besiege* = lay siege to. Forty winters (forty years)

*dig deep trenches* = furrows dug in a field when ploughing.

*livery* = uniform worn by servants in a nobleman's house. It could be quite sumptuous, if the nobleman wished to make a show of wealth.

*totter'd weed* = a tattered garment. Tottered is an old spelling of tattered. *weeds* - often refers to clothing in Shakespeare.

*being asked* = if you were to be asked; in the future, when you might be asked.

*lies* = is; is buried; is hidden.

*lusty days* = the days of youthful exuberance; days of lustful behaviour.

*treasure* contains a sexual innuendo, implying sexual parts

*to say* = to reply (to the question posed before)

*within thine own deep sunken eyes* - caused by the process of ageing. Possibly also a hinted reference to the supposed effect of sexual excess

*all-eating shame* = a shame which devours all sense of right and decorum.

*thriftless praise* = praise which produces no result or advantage. A praise of yourself which is clearly misplaced and damaging to you.

*thriftless* = showing no sense of thrift, or economy.

*thy beauty's use* = the use which you make of your beauty, the profit you derive from it/sexual meaning

*sum my count* = add up the balance sheet of my life; probably a bawdy pun on *count*, pronounced *cunt*.

*make my old excuse* = justify my life when I am an old man;

*proving 'testing, trying out'*

*This were to be new made* = this would be as if you were being newly created.

Cold and freezing blood was thought to be the traditional accompaniment of old age.

### Sonnet 3

Looke in thy glaffe and tell the face thou veweft,  
Now is the time that face should forme an other,  
Whose fresh repaire if now thou not reneweft,  
Thou doo'ft beguile the world, vnbleffe some  
mother.

For where is she so faire whose vn-ear'd wombe  
Disdaines the tillage of thy husbandry?  
Or who is he so fond will be the tombe,  
Of his selfe loue to stop posterity?  
Thou art thy mothers glaffe and she in thee  
Calls backe the louely Aprill of her prime,  
So thou through windowes of thine age shalt see,  
Dispight of wrinkles this thy goulden time.  
But if thou liue remembered not to be,  
Die single and thine Image dies with thee.

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 unear'd 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, remembered not to be,  
Die single and thine image dies with thee.

The youth is urged once more to look to posterity and to bless the world by begetting children. No woman, however beautiful, would disdain to have him as a mate. In his old age he could look on this child and see an image of what he once was. But if he chooses to remain single, everything will perish with him.

*glass* = mirror; *glass* in the Sonnets usually means mirror.

*the face thou viewest* = your reflection.

*Now is the time that face should form another* -by having a child.

*beguile* = cheat; deprive of its due rights.

*unbless* = make unhappy, deprive of fruitfulness and marriage

*some mother* = some woman whom you might marry and cause to be a mother.

*For where is she so fair* = beautiful

*unear'd* = unploughed used metaphorically.

*unear'd womb* - The reference here is to sexual intercourse. which is Agrippa's description of Julius  
*Disdains* = is contemptuous of.

*tillage of thy husbandry* The farming and ploughing metaphor continues. *Tillage* is cultivation, working of the land; *husbandry* is farm and estate management, with a pun on 'being a husband'.

*fond* = foolish

*the tomb of his self-love* in this context self-love leads to death, since there is no children

*to stop posterity* = to ensure that there are no descendants,

*Thou art thy mother's glass* = you are effectively a mirror in which your mother can look to see a reflection of herself as she was in her youth.

*Calls back* = recalls, remembers, brings back to mind.

*the lovely April of her prime* = her springtime, when she was most beautiful. April was the beginning of Spring,

*through windows of thine age* - This suggests not only looking back from old age, upon the past, as if through a window, but also looking at a child,

*Despite* = in spite of.

*thy golden time* = the time of your golden youth, the time of your glory.

*remembered not to be* = determined not to be remembered, not being remembered. It ties in with the theme that the consequence of dying childless is to be erased from the book of memory.

If you die, as a single man, with no children, there will be no image to carry on your memory.