

Sonnets 1 to 10,  
a free sample from

A Monument to Love:  
William Shakespeare's *Sonnets* and A  
*Lover's Complaint*

Modern Language Edition  
by  
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## Sonnet 1

*The poet urges a handsome and gifted young man not to be selfish and to beget an heir.*

**F**rom the best plants, we always seek increase,  
so the fragrance of roses will not die;  
when they're full-grown, and it's time to de cease,  
their younger heirs will bear their memory.  
But you, looking only through your bright eyes,  
feed your light's flame with self-provided fuel,  
creating famine where great plenty lies;  
you are your own sweet enemy: too cruel.  
You who are the world's fresh new ornament  
and the forerunner of a bright green spring,  
you hide in your bud what would bring content;  
you, silly boy, waste your time by grasping.  
    Enrich the world, or else its glutton be,  
    feeding until the grave eats your beauty.

## Sonnet 2

*The poet dreads the young man reaching his forties  
without first having fathered a child.*

**A**fter forty winters have struck your brow  
and dug deep furrows in your face's field,  
your uniform, so well-regarded now,  
will then, a shabby rag, no value yield.  
You'll then be asked where your young face now lies,  
where went the wealth of your more lustful days;  
to tell what shows in your deep sunken eyes,  
would garner endless shame and pointless praise.  
'Twould be better if you your face did use:  
then you could answer, "This dear child of mine  
makes all worthwhile and does my age excuse."  
That he's your heir is your youth's surest sign!  
It's like being reborn when you are old:  
it heats your blood though you are growing cold.

## Sonnet 3

*The poet asks the young man to look into his mirror. He asks if he can see his mother's traits in it, and points out that these traits will disappear if he dies single.*

**T**ell the man in the mirror whom you view  
that now is the time to make another;  
if his remaking now you will not do,  
you'll rob the world and deprive some mother.  
How will her beauty serve her empty womb  
if it is not ploughed by your husbandry?  
Or will the fool find himself in the tomb  
of his self-love to stop posterity?  
You mirror your mother and through you, she  
recalls the lovely April of her prime;  
so you through your life's windows then can see,  
despite your wrinkles, this, your golden time.  
    But if you live and have no progeny,  
    your image is gone for eternity.

## Sonnet 4

*The poet reminds the young man that he does not own the personal qualities he enjoys, but that Nature only lends them to him.*

**Y**ou careless, handsome youth, why do you spend  
yourself, only to waste your legacy?

Nature gives nothing outright, but will lend,  
sharing with those who are already free.

So, charming cheapskate, why do you abuse  
the great largesse given to you to give?

You bankrupt usurer, why do you use  
such a great sum, yet find it hard to live?

For having dealings with yourself alone,  
you by yourself do your sweet self deceive:  
and how, after Death calls you to be gone,  
can you an acceptable nest egg leave?

The unborn children in the tomb with you,  
if born, would your administrators be.

## Sonnet 5

*The poet compares the transience of human existence with the succession of the seasons.*

**T**Hose early days, when Nature helped to frame  
your youthful looks on which all eyes did dwell,  
will be averted in your life's end-game,  
undoing all that made you once excel;  
Time, ever-restless, will lead summer on  
to an ugly winter and leave you there;  
sap choked by frost, wind-blown leaves away gone,  
your youth snow-drowned and everything left bare.  
Had summer's distilled essence not been left,  
a liquid prisoner trapped by walls of glass,  
youth would of its ardour then be bereft,  
not rememb'ring what it is, or once was:  
    flowers distilled. Though they will winter meet,  
    their fragrance will exude forever sweet.

## Sonnet 6

*The poet continues the theme of the transience of human life, suggesting that one of the best ways to defeat death is to have numerous offspring.*

**T**hen don't let winter's ragged hand deface  
your summer before it can be distilled;  
leave your sweet essence in some sacred place  
with youth's treasure before it is self-killed.  
Such use is not considered usury,  
which heartens those who pay it all alone:  
this way you'll make yourself a duplicate,  
and if you then make ten, then good for you,  
because ten more will cause you to elate;  
and if each one ten times does multiply,  
then Death would find that it has come too late,  
if you've left yourself in your progeny!  
Don't be stubborn, or you'll fall in the snare  
and be Death's conquest, making worms your heir.

## Sonnet 7

*The poet compares the course of human life to the daily path of the sun, suggesting that the young man beget a son before the noon-time of his own life.*

**L**ook in the east where his most gracious light  
raises his burning head, under whose eye  
men pay homage at his diurnal sight,  
paying with looks at his great majesty.  
And having climbed up the celestial hill,  
still young and vigorous in middle age,  
men do pay tribute to his beauty still,  
while he follows his golden pilgrimage.  
But when, at noon, he drags his weary car  
toward old age, he tires from the day;  
those looks, once dutiful, diverted are  
from his low arc, and look another way.  
So you, having already passed your noon,  
will die unwatched unless you get a son.



## Sonnet 8

*The poet suggest that the young man's melancholy would be cured by marriage, comparing a happy family to a consort of viols.*

**Y**ou love music: then why are you so sad?  
Good echoes with the good; joy makes for joy:  
why do you like what does not make you glad,  
or accept all the things that you annoy?  
If harmony results from well-tuned sounds  
(blended as one) then irritate your ear,  
they musically scold you, who confounds  
solos with all the parts that you should hear.  
Note how one string will echo the other,  
and vibrate in harmonic ordering:  
it's like the man who with child and mother,  
then, together, one pleasing tune do sing.  
The wordless song that they intone as one,  
proves this: 'Singing alone is good for none.'

## Sonnet 9

*The poet wonders if the young man is afraid of marrying;  
he also risks being accused of killing unborn generations.*

**B**Ecause you don't want a widow to cry,  
will you now waste yourself in single life?

If, without children, you happen to die,  
the world will mourn you like a mateless wife.  
The world will be your widow who will weep  
because you've left no progeny behind,  
when every widow would much rather keep,  
through her children, her husband's face in mind.

Look how the wealth a profligate does spend  
moves purse to purse, with all enjoying it;  
but youth's waste has a more definite end:  
unused, the user renders it unfit.

No love to'ard others in that bosom sits,  
who on himself such murd'rous shame commits.

## Sonnet 10

*The poet tells the young man that his unwillingness to consider marriage is evidence of his inability to love. He pleads with him to father a child, if only out of regard for the poet.*

**I**T's a shame that you've no love for any,  
since for yourself you are improvident.  
You will admit that you're loved by many,  
although your lack of love is evident.  
You're so preoccupied by murd'rous hate,  
that you'll against even yourself conspire,  
to bring ruin to your noble estate  
whose improvement should be your chief desire.  
O change your thoughts, so I can change my mind:  
should hate be better housed than gentle love?  
Be like your manners are: gracious and kind,  
and at least your situation improve.  
Do make another you for love of me,  
so that your youth may here forever be.

