

## 9 Shakespeare Sonnets (1609)

Modern English translations from *No Sweat Shakespeare*

- Rhyme pattern of a Shakespeare sonnet: abab/ cdcd/efef/gg
- Iambic pentameter (five pairs of syllables, with the first unstressed and the second stressed.  
Example from *Macbeth*: but screw/ your cour/age to /the stick/ing post/)

### Sonnet 2

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 tatter'd weed, of small worth held:  
 Then being ask'd 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 deserved 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.

[When forty winters have attacked your brow and wrinkled your beautiful skin, the pride and impressiveness of your youth, so much admired by everyone now, will be a worthless, tattered weed. Then, when you are asked where your beauty's gone and what's happened to all the treasures you had during your youth, you will have to say, it's only within your eyes, now sunk deep in their sockets, where there is only a shameful confession of greed and self-obsession. How much more praise you would deserve if you could answer, 'This beautiful child of mine shall give an account of my life and show that I made no waste of my time on earth,' proving that his beauty, because he is your son, was once yours! This child would be new-made when you are old and you would see your own blood warm when you are cold.]

### Sonnet 18

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
 Thou art more lovely and more temperate:  
 Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
 And summer's lease hath all too short a date:

Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
 And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;  
 And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
 By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;  
 But thy eternal summer shall not fade  
 Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;  
 Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,  
 When in eternal lines to time thou growest:  
 So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,  
 So long lives this and this gives life to thee.

[Shall I compare you to a summer's day? You are more lovely and more moderate: Harsh winds disturb the delicate buds of May, and summer doesn't last long enough. Sometimes the sun is too hot, and its golden face is often dimmed by clouds. All beautiful things eventually become less beautiful, either by the experiences of life or by the passing of time. But your eternal beauty won't fade, nor lose any of its quality. And you will never die, as you will live on in my enduring poetry. As long as there are people still alive to read poems this sonnet will live, and you will live in it.]

### Sonnet 29

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 my self 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.

[When my luck has failed and no one cares, I sit all alone and cry about being an outcast, and bother the deaf ears of heaven with my useless cries; and examine myself and curse my fate, wishing that I was like someone with good fortune; or that I looked like another, or had friends like yet another, envying this man's skill, and that man's range – totally dissatisfied with the things I usually enjoy. Yet, as I'm thinking these thoughts, almost believing myself hateful, I think of you by chance and

then my soul, like the lark rising from the gloomy earth at daybreak, sings hymns at heaven's gate. Because when I remember your sweet love, the thought brings such wealth that I'd then refuse to change places with kings.]

### Sonnet 73

That time of year thou mayst in me behold  
 When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang  
 Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,  
 Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.  
 In me thou see'st the twilight of such day  
 As after sunset fadeth in the west;  
 Which by and by black night doth take away,  
 Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.  
 In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire,  
 That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,  
 As the death-bed, whereon it must expire,  
 Consum'd with that which it was nourish'd by.  
 This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,  
 To love that well, which thou must leave ere long.

[You may see that time of year in me when few, or no, yellow leaves hang on those branches that shiver in the cold bare ruins of the places where sweet birds sang so recently. You will see in me the sunset of a day, after the sun has set in the west, extinguished by the black night that imitates Death, which closes everything in rest. You will see in me the glowing embers that are all that is left of the fire of my youth – the deathbed on which youth must inevitably die, consumed by the life that once fed it. This is something you can see, and it gives your love the strength deeply to love that which you have to lose soon.]

### Sonnet 75

So are you to my thoughts as food to life,  
 Or as sweet-season'd showers are to the ground;  
 And for the peace of you I hold such strife  
 As 'twixt a miser and his wealth is found.  
 Now proud as an enjoyer, and anon  
 Doubting the filching age will steal his treasure;  
 Now counting best to be with you alone,  
 Then better'd that the world may see my pleasure:

Sometime all full with feasting on your sight,  
 And by and by clean starved for a look;  
 Possessing or pursuing no delight  
 Save what is had, or must from you be took.  
 Thus do I pine and surfeit day by day,  
 Or gluttoning on all, or all away.

[You are to me what food is to life, or what spring rains are to the earth, and to achieve peace of mind about you I struggle with myself as a miser struggles with his wealth. One moment he proudly enjoys it and the next he's worried that the thieving world we live in will steal his treasure – now deciding it best to keep you to myself, then thinking it better if the world could see my pleasure. At times I feel full from feasting on your looks but eventually am starving for a glimpse of you, having or looking for no pleasure except what you give me and what I can take from you. That's why I both starve and feel stuffed every day, either filling myself with you or going without anything.]

### **Sonnet 104**

To me, fair friend, you never can be old,  
 For as you were when first your eye I ey'd,  
 Such seems your beauty still. Three winters cold,  
 Have from the forests shook three summers' pride,  
 Three beauteous springs to yellow autumn turn'd,  
 In process of the seasons have I seen,  
 Three April perfumes in three hot Junes burn'd,  
 Since first I saw you fresh, which yet are green.  
 Ah! yet doth beauty like a dial-hand,  
 Steal from his figure, and no pace perceiv'd;  
 So your sweet hue, which methinks still doth stand,  
 Hath motion, and mine eye may be deceiv'd:  
 For fear of which, hear this thou age unbred:  
 Ere you were born was beauty's summer dead.

[To me, lovely friend, you could never be old, because your beauty seems unchanged from the time I first saw your eyes. Three cold winters have shaken the leaves of three beautiful springs and autumns from the forests as I have watched the seasons pass: The sweet smell of three Aprils have been burned up in three hot Junes since I first saw your youthful beauty, which is still in its prime. Ah! But beauty moves forward continually, imperceptibly, like the hands of a clock. In the same way, your beauty, which seems unchanged to me, moves forward, deceiving my eyes. Because of that, listen, you unborn generations: the height of beauty was dead before you were born.]

### Sonnet 116

Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
 Admit impediments. Love is not love  
 Which alters when it alteration finds,  
 Or bends with the remover to remove:  
 O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,  
 That looks on tempests and is never shaken;  
 It is the star to every wandering bark,  
 Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.  
 Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks  
 Within his bending sickle's compass come;  
 Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
 But bears it out even to the edge of doom.  
 If this be error and upon me proved,  
 I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

[I would not accept that anything could interfere with the union of two people who love each other. Love that alters with changing circumstances is not love, nor if it bends from its firm state when someone tries to destroy it. Oh no, it's an eternally fixed point that watches storms but is never itself shaken by them. It is the star by which every lost ship can be guided: one can calculate its distance but not measure its quality. Love doesn't depend on Time, although the rosy lips and cheeks of youth eventually come within the control of Time's blade. Love doesn't change as the days and weeks go by but remains until death. If I'm wrong about this, then I've never written anything worthwhile and no man has ever loved.]

### Sonnet 130

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;  
 Coral is far more red, than her lips red:  
 If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;  
 If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.  
 I have seen roses damasked, red and white,  
 But no such roses see I in her cheeks;  
 And in some perfumes is there more delight  
 Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.  
 I love to hear her speak, yet well I know  
 That music hath a far more pleasing sound:  
 I grant I never saw a goddess go,

My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground:  
 And yet by heaven, I think my love as rare,  
 As any she belied with false compare.

[My lady's eyes are nothing like the sun; coral is far more than her lips are. If snow is white, all I can say is that her breasts are a brownish grey color. If hairs can be compared with beautiful wire then black hairs grow on her head. I know what pink, red, and white roses look like but I don't see any roses in her cheeks. And there's more pleasure in some perfumes than there is in my lady's breath! I love her voice although I know that music is more pleasing to the ear. I admit I've never seen a goddess walking; when my mistress walks she treads firmly on the ground. And yet, by heaven, I think that my love is as unique as any woman who is the subject of a romantic poem.]

### **Sonnet 147**

My love is as a fever longing still,  
 For that which longer nurseth the disease;  
 Feeding on that which doth preserve the ill,  
 The 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.

[My love is like a fever, always desiring the thing that caused the illness; feeding on the thing that prolongs it, to please the unhealthy desire of my body. My reason, the doctor of my love, angry that I'm not following his directions, has abandoned me and now I find that I'm dying from the desire that his medicine would have cured. I'm past curing now, and my reason doesn't care, and I'm anxious with increasing worry. My thoughts and words are like a madman's, randomly expressing nonsense: because I have insisted that you are good, and bright as day, whereas you are really black as hell and dark as night.]