[Shakespeare's Sonnets](https://www.owleyes.org/text/shakespeare-sonnets)

Sonnets 1–10

**Sonnet 1**  
From fairest creatures we desire increase,  
That thereby beauty's rose might never die,  
But as the riper should by time decease,  
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.

**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 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.

**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, unbless 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, remember'd not to be,  
     Die single and thine image dies with thee.

**Sonnet 4**  
Unthrifty loveliness, why dost thou spend  
Upon thy self thy beauty's legacy?  
Nature's bequest gives nothing, but doth lend,  
And being frank she lends to those are free:  
Then, beauteous niggard, why dost thou abuse  
The bounteous largess given thee to give?  
Profitless usurer, why dost thou use  
So great a sum of sums, yet canst not live?  
For having traffic with thy self alone,  
Thou of thy self thy sweet self dost deceive:  
Then how when nature calls thee to be gone,  
What acceptable audit canst thou leave?  
     Thy unused beauty must be tombed with thee,  
     Which, used, lives th' executor to be.

**Sonnet 5**  
Those hours, that with gentle work did frame  
The lovely gaze where every eye doth dwell,  
Will play the tyrants to the very same  
And that unfair which fairly doth excel;  
For never-resting time leads summer on  
To hideous winter, and confounds him there;  
Sap checked with frost, and lusty leaves quite gone,  
Beauty o'er-snowed and bareness every where:  
Then were not summer's distillation left,  
A liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass,  
Beauty's effect with beauty were bereft,  
Nor it, nor no remembrance what it was:  
     But flowers distill'd, though they with winter meet,  
     Leese but their show; their substance still lives sweet.

**Sonnet 6**  
Then let not winter's ragged hand deface,  
In thee thy summer, ere thou be distill'd:  
Make sweet some vial; treasure thou some place  
With beauty's treasure ere it be self-kill'd.  
That use is not forbidden usury,  
Which happies those that pay the willing loan;  
That's for thy self to breed another thee,  
Or ten times happier, be it ten for one;  
Ten times thy self were happier than thou art,  
If ten of thine ten times refigur'd thee:  
Then what could death do if thou shouldst depart,  
Leaving thee living in posterity?  
     Be not self-will'd, for thou art much too fair  
     To be death's conquest and make worms thine heir.

**Sonnet 7**  
Lo! in the orient when the gracious light  
Lifts up his burning head, each under eye  
Doth homage to his new-appearing sight,  
Serving with looks his sacred majesty;  
And having climb'd the steep-up heavenly hill,  
Resembling strong youth in his middle age,  
Yet mortal looks adore his beauty still,  
Attending on his golden pilgrimage:  
But when from highmost pitch, with weary car,  
Like feeble age, he reeleth from the day,  
The eyes, 'fore duteous, now converted are  
From his low tract, and look another way:  
     So thou, thyself outgoing in thy noon:  
     Unlook'd, on diest unless thou get a son.

**Sonnet 8**  
Music to hear, why hear'st thou music sadly?  
Sweets with sweets war not, joy delights in joy:  
Why lov'st thou that which thou receiv'st not gladly,  
Or else receiv'st with pleasure thine annoy?  
If the true concord of well-tuned sounds,  
By unions married, do offend thine ear,  
They do but sweetly chide thee, who confounds  
In singleness the parts that thou shouldst bear.  
Mark how one string, sweet husband to another,  
Strikes each in each by mutual ordering;  
Resembling sire and child and happy mother,  
Who, all in one, one pleasing note do sing:  
     Whose speechless song being many, seeming one,  
     Sings this to thee: 'Thou single wilt prove none.'

**Sonnet 9**  
Is it for fear to wet a widow's eye,  
That thou consum'st thy self in single life?  
Ah! if thou issueless shalt hap to die,  
The world will wail thee like a makeless wife;  
The world will be thy widow and still weep  
That thou no form of thee hast left behind,  
When every private widow well may keep  
By children's eyes, her husband's shape in mind:  
Look! what an unthrift in the world doth spend  
Shifts but his place, for still the world enjoys it;  
But beauty's waste hath in the world an end,  
And kept unused the user so destroys it.  
     No love toward others in that bosom sits  
     That on himself such murd'rous shame commits.

**Sonnet 10**  
For shame! deny that thou bear'st love to any,  
Who for thy self art so unprovident.  
Grant, if thou wilt, thou art belov'd of many,  
But that thou none lov'st is most evident:  
For thou art so possess'd with murderous hate,  
That 'gainst thy self thou stick'st not to conspire,  
Seeking that beauteous roof to ruinate  
Which to repair should be thy chief desire.  
O! change thy thought, that I may change my mind:  
Shall hate be fairer lodg'd than gentle love?  
Be, as thy presence is, gracious and kind,  
Or to thyself at least kind-hearted prove:  
     Make thee another self for love of me,  
     That beauty still may live in thine or thee.

[×](https://www.owleyes.org/text/shakespeare-sonnets/read/sonnets-1-10)

0 Replies

[Sonnets 11–21](https://www.owleyes.org/text/shakespeare-sonnets/read/sonnets-11-21)

Footnotes

[1](https://www.owleyes.org/text/shakespeare-sonnets/read/sonnets-1-10#root-25893-1/60871)

In his encouragement for the fair youth to have a child, the speaker emphasizes the youth’s uniqueness by metaphorically comparing the youth’s inner beauty to a “light’s flame.” The phrase “self-substantial fuel” suggests the youth’s solitary stance—he refuses to marry or procreate and pass the metaphorical flame along. While the speaker hopes the fair youth might recapture his beauty and personality through a child, the fair youth ignores the speaker’s plea.

*— Stephen Holliday*

[2](https://www.owleyes.org/text/shakespeare-sonnets/read/sonnets-1-10#root-25893-1/60873)

By employing an oxymoron, the speaker links two seemingly opposed terms. The former adjective “tender” suggests the expression of soft emotions while the latter noun “churl” refers to a medieval, rustic peasant or countryman. The word “niggard” describes someone who is overly stingy. In his comparison of a “tender churl [who] mak’st waste in niggarding,” the speaker claims that the fair youth wastes his beauty by refusing to procreate.

*— William Delaney*

[3](https://www.owleyes.org/text/shakespeare-sonnets/read/sonnets-1-10#root-25893-2/149821)

The speaker employs words and images associated with war in order to establish a conflict between age and beauty. To “besiege” is to surround an enemy in order to capture them, implying that the fair youth’s face is a battleground and the “trenches” in the “field” are a metaphor for wrinkles caused by age. The youth wears “proud livery,” or a uniform, further evoking the idea that his youthful beauty is being attacked by time and aging. The trope of Time as an enemy is continuous throughout the sonnets and forms the basis for the speaker’s arguments encouraging the fair youth to have a child.

*— Marissa, Owl Eyes Staff*

[4](https://www.owleyes.org/text/shakespeare-sonnets/read/sonnets-1-10#root-25893-3/149828)

The idea of children as mirrors in which parents can see their own reflections ties in with the cultural expectations of Elizabethan England surrounding parent-child relationships. Sons were expected to be dutiful and to follow in the footsteps of their fathers, inheriting their titles and continuing their legacies. The speaker takes this idea a step further and posits that the fair youth’s child will be a vessel for both his legacy and his beauty, preserving his youthfulness so long as his descendants continue to have children of their own.

*— Marissa, Owl Eyes Staff*

[5](https://www.owleyes.org/text/shakespeare-sonnets/read/sonnets-1-10#root-25893-4/149836)

Sonnet 4 employs a monetary metaphor, using diction like “lend” and “sum.” The speaker accuses the fair youth of being a “profitless usurer,” a usurer being a money-lender who charges high interest. The implication is that the fair youth has a “bounteous” amount of wealth in terms of beauty and good qualities, but he refuses to lend it to anyone by procreating and is therefore unable to profit from the interest. The speaker further accuses the youth of wasting nature’s gifts by refusing to have children. Children inherited the wealth of their parents, so if the fair youth dies without an heir, then all of the gifts nature has given him are wasted. However, if he does have children, they become the “executors” of nature’s gift and can continue to distribute it.

*— Marissa, Owl Eyes Staff*

[6](https://www.owleyes.org/text/shakespeare-sonnets/read/sonnets-1-10#root-25893-5/149364)

For in-depth look at “Sonnet 5,” [read our expert analysis on its own page](https://www.owleyes.org/text/sonnet-5).

*— Zachary, Owl Eyes Editor*

[7](https://www.owleyes.org/text/shakespeare-sonnets/read/sonnets-1-10#root-25893-6/149818)

The speaker employs repetitive language to arrive at the crux of his argument in the sixth of the “Fair Youth” sonnets. Here, the speaker beseeches the fair youth to procreate and have “ten times thy self,” meaning ten children. With the repetition of the word “ten,” the speaker fervently urges the fair youth to have children, saving him from losing his beauty by replicating it in posterity.

*— Tess, Owl Eyes Staff*

[8](https://www.owleyes.org/text/shakespeare-sonnets/read/sonnets-1-10#root-25893-7/149819)

The closing couplets of this sonnet take on a more menacing tone than the previous sonnets. Here, the speaker employs an extended metaphor that likens the fair youth to the sun. Specifically, the speaker says that as the sun rises, “mortals adore” it; when the sun “reeleth from the day,” people look away in search of other beauty. This final couplet warns the fair youth that if he does not have children—metaphorically, if he does not rise like the sun and spread his beauty—he will fade in the same way the sun sets.

*— Tess, Owl Eyes Staff*

[9](https://www.owleyes.org/text/shakespeare-sonnets/read/sonnets-1-10#root-25893-8/150428)

The speaker uses diction associated with music throughout the sonnet to convey the idea that family life is like a musical performance. The fair youth does not like music, and the speaker claims it is because the call of family life is “chiding,” or scolding, him for remaining single. The speaker describes each “string” as being the “husband to another,” identifying a familial relationship between the different parts of a harmonious tune. Families create “one pleasing note” when they sing together, indicating domestic harmony. By contrast, the fair youth cannot enjoy music and will “prove none,” or produce no kin, if he remains single rather than allowing himself to enter into the harmony of fatherhood.

*— Marissa, Owl Eyes Staff*

[10](https://www.owleyes.org/text/shakespeare-sonnets/read/sonnets-1-10#root-25893-9/150415)

Through an extended metaphor, the speaker equates the fair youth to a deceased husband who leaves his widow, and the rest of the world, abandoned and childless. He tries to appeal to the fair youth’s sense of pathos by asking in the opening line if he is so heartless as to “wet a widow’s eye.” According to the speaker, leaving behind a childless widow is akin to murder, encapsulated in the final couplet which caustically condemns the fair youth for his “murd’rous shame.” The widow, however, is a metaphor for the world, which the fair youth will harm by choosing not to marry and have children. Truly, the youth is in a double bind.

*— Tess, Owl Eyes Staff*

[11](https://www.owleyes.org/text/shakespeare-sonnets/read/sonnets-1-10#root-25893-10/150416)

According to the speaker, in choosing not to have a child, the fair youth is “unprovident.” The word, which originates from the classical Latin *improvidus,* meaning “not foreseeing,” suggests that the fair youth has failed to account for the future by choosing not to procreate and share his beauty. To the speaker, the fair youth’s behavior is reckless. The fair youth “ruinate[s]” the “beauteous roof,” an image the speaker likens to the fair youth’s spoiled beauty.

*— Tess, Owl Eyes Staff*