

William Shakespeare
The Sonnets

Read by **Alex Jennings**



1	Opening music	1:14
2	Sonnet 1 From fairest creatures we desire increase	1:02
3	Sonnet 2 When forty winters shall besiege thy brow	1:05
4	Sonnet 3 Look in thy glass and tell the face thou viewest	1:00
5	Sonnet 4 Unthrifty loveliness, why dost thou spend	1:01
6	Sonnet 5 Those hours that with gentle work did frame	1:01
7	Sonnet 6 Then let not winter's ragged hand deface	0:59
8	Sonnet 7 Lo in the orient when the gracious light	1:00
9	Sonnet 8 Music to hear, why hear'st thou music sadly?	1:02
10	Musical interlude	0:43
11	Sonnet 9 Is it for fear to wet a widow's eye	1:01
12	Sonnet 10 For shame deny that thou bear'st love to any	0:59
13	Sonnet 11 As fast as thou shalt wane, so fast thou grow'st	1:07
14	Sonnet 12 When I do count the clock that tells the time	1:02

15	Sonnet 13	0:59
	O that you were your self! but, love, you are	
16	Sonnet 14	1:00
	Not from the stars do I my judgement pluck	
17	Sonnet 15	1:01
	When I consider every thing that grows	
18	Sonnet 16	0:58
	But wherefore do not you a mightier way	
19	Sonnet 17	0:57
	Who will believe my verse in time to come	
20	Musical interlude	1:05
21	Sonnet 18	1:02
	Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?	
22	Sonnet 19	1:01
	Devouring Time, blunt thou the lion's paws	
23	Sonnet 20	1:06
	A woman's face with Nature's own hand painted	
24	Sonnet 21	0:59
	So is it not with me as with that Muse	
25	Sonnet 22	0:58
	My glass shall not persuade me I am old	
26	Sonnet 23	1:00
	As an unperfect actor on the stage	
27	Sonnet 24	1:01
	Mine eye hath played the painter and hath stelled	
28	Musical interlude	1:40

29	Sonnet 25	0:55
	Let those who are in favour with their stars	
30	Sonnet 26	0:59
	Lord of my love, to whom in vassalage	
31	Sonnet 27	1:04
	Weary with toil, I haste me to my bed	
32	Sonnet 28	1:02
	How can I then return in happy plight	
33	Sonnet 29	0:59
	When in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes	
34	Sonnet 30	1:03
	When to the sessions of sweet silent thought	
35	Sonnet 31	0:57
	Thy bosom is endeared with all hearts	
36	Sonnet 32	0:59
	If thou survive my well-contented day	
37	Musical interlude	0:43
38	Sonnet 33	1:00
	Full many a glorious morning have I seen	
39	Sonnet 34	1:00
	Why didst thou promise such a beauteous day	
40	Sonnet 35	1:02
	No more be grieved at that which thou hast done	
41	Sonnet 36	1:01
	Let me confess that we two must be twain	

42	Sonnet 37	0:59
	As a decrepit father takes delight	
43	Sonnet 38	0:57
	How can my Muse want subject to invent	
44	Sonnet 39	1:00
	O how thy worth with manners may I sing	
45	Sonnet 40	1:07
	Take all my loves, my love, yea, take them all	
46	Sonnet 41	1:00
	Those pretty wrongs that liberty commits	
47	Sonnet 42	1:09
	That thou hast her, it is not all my grief	
48	Musical interlude	1:08
49	Sonnet 43	1:04
	When most I wink, then do mine eyes best see	
50	Sonnet 44	1:02
	If the dull substance of my flesh were thought	
51	Sonnet 45	0:59
	The other two, slight air and purging fire	
52	Sonnet 46	1:00
	Mine eye and heart are at a mortal war	
53	Sonnet 47	1:04
	Betwixt mine eye and heart a league is took	
54	Sonnet 48	1:02
	How careful was I, when I took my way	

55	Sonnet 49	1:00
	Against that time (if ever that time come)	
56	Sonnet 50	0:54
	How heavy do I journey on the way	
57	Sonnet 51	1:01
	Thus can my love excuse the slow offence	
58	Musical interlude	1:18
59	Sonnet 52	0:54
	So am I as the rich whose blessed key	
60	Sonnet 53	1:01
	What is your substance, whereof are you made	
61	Sonnet 54	1:02
	O how much more doth beauty beauteous seem	
62	Sonnet 55	0:58
	Not marble nor the gilded monuments	
63	Sonnet 56	1:01
	Sweet love, renew thy force, be it not said	
64	Sonnet 57	0:58
	Being your slave, what should I do but tend	
65	Sonnet 58	1:06
	That god forbid, that made me first your slave	
66	Musical interlude	1:10
67	Musical interlude	1:40
68	Sonnet 59	0:55
	If there be nothing new, but that which is	

69	Sonnet 60	1:07
	Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore	
70	Sonnet 61	1:08
	Is it thy will thy image should keep open	
71	Sonnet 62	1:02
	Sin of self-love possesseth all mine eye	
72	Sonnet 63	1:00
	Against my love shall be as I am now	
73	Sonnet 64	1:04
	When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced	
74	Sonnet 65	1:03
	Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea	
75	Musical interlude	1:33
76	Sonnet 66	1:05
	Tired with all these, for restful death I cry	
77	Sonnet 67	1:04
	Ah wherefore with infection should he live	
78	Sonnet 68	0:55
	Thus is his cheek the map of days outworn	
79	Sonnet 69	1:02
	Those parts of thee that the world's eye doth view	
80	Sonnet 70	1:04
	That thou art blamed shall not be thy defect	
81	Sonnet 71	0:59
	No longer mourn for me when I am dead	

82	Sonnet 72	1:00
	O lest the world should task you to recite	
83	Musical interlude	2:05
84	Sonnet 73	1:04
	That time of year thou mayst in me behold	
85	Sonnet 74	1:02
	But be contented when that fell arrest	
86	Sonnet 75	1:02
	So are you to my thoughts as food to life	
87	Sonnet 76	1:04
	Why is my verse so barren of new pride?	
88	Sonnet 77	1:02
	Thy glass will show thee how thy beauties wear	
89	Musical interlude	0:47
90	Sonnet 78	1:04
	So oft have I invoked thee for my Muse	
91	Sonnet 79	1:01
	Whilst I alone did call upon thy aid	
92	Sonnet 80	1:03
	O how I faint when I of you do write	
93	Sonnet 81	1:01
	Or I shall live your epitaph to make	
94	Sonnet 82	0:58
	I grant thou wert not married to my Muse	

95	Sonnet 83	0:57
	I never saw that you did painting need	
96	Sonnet 84	1:03
	Who is it that says most which can say more	
97	Sonnet 85	1:09
	My tongue-tied Muse in manners holds her still	
98	Sonnet 86	0:58
	Was it the proud full sail of his great verse	
99	Musical interlude	1:39
100	Sonnet 87	1:01
	Farewell, thou art too dear for my possessing	
101	Sonnet 88	1:08
	When thou shalt be disposed to set me light	
102	Sonnet 89	1:00
	Say that thou didst forsake me for some fault	
103	Sonnet 90	1:03
	Then hate me when thou wilt, if ever, now	
104	Sonnet 91	1:08
	Some glory in their birth, some in their skill	
105	Sonnet 92	1:03
	But do thy worst to steal thyself away	
106	Sonnet 93	1:08
	So shall I live, supposing thou art true	
107	Sonnet 94	1:09
	They that have pow'r to hurt, and will do none	

108	Sonnet 95	1:08
	How sweet and lovely dost thou make the shame	
109	Sonnet 96	1:08
	Some say thy fault is youth, some wantonness	
110	Musical interlude	1:02
111	Sonnet 97	1:00
	How like a winter hath my absence been	
112	Sonnet 98	1:00
	From you have I been absent in the spring	
113	Sonnet 99	1:04
	The forward violet thus did I chide	
114	Sonnet 100	1:04
	Where art thou, Muse, that thou forget'st so long	
115	Sonnet 101	1:05
	O truant Muse, what shall be thy amends	
116	Sonnet 102	1:01
	My love is strength'ned, though more weak in seeming	
117	Sonnet 103	1:00
	Alack, what poverty my Muse brings forth	
118	Sonnet 104	1:09
	To me, fair friend, you never can be old	
119	Musical interlude	1:31
120	Sonnet 105	1:05
	Let not my love be called idolatry	
121	Sonnet 106	0:59
	When in the chronicle of wasted time	

122	Sonnet 107	1:09
	Not mine own fears, nor the prophetic soul	
123	Sonnet 108	0:59
	What's in the brain that ink may character	
124	Sonnet 109	1:02
	O never say that I was false of heart	
125	Sonnet 110	1:09
	Alas 'tis true, I have gone here and there	
126	Sonnet 111	1:02
	O for my sake do you with Fortune chide	
127	Sonnet 112	1:03
	Your love and pity doth th'impression fill	
128	Musical interlude	1:18
129	Musical interlude	1:54
130	Sonnet 113	0:58
	Since I left you, mine eye is in my mind	
131	Sonnet 114	1:07
	Or whether doth my mind being crowned with you	
132	Sonnet 115	1:14
	Those lines that I before have writ do lie	
133	Sonnet 116	1:04
	Let me not to the marriage of true minds	
134	Sonnet 117	1:03
	Accuse me thus: that I have scanted all	

135	Sonnet 118	1:06
	Like as to make our appetites more keen	
136	Sonnet 119	1:04
	What potions have I drunk of Siren tears	
137	Sonnet 120	1:05
	That you were once unkind befriends me now	
138	Sonnet 121	0:57
	'Tis better to be vile than vile esteemed	
139	Musical interlude	0:48
140	Sonnet 122	0:58
	Thy gift, thy tables, are within my brain	
141	Sonnet 123	0:58
	No! Time, thou shalt not boast that I do change	
142	Sonnet 124	1:03
	If my dear love were but the child of state	
143	Sonnet 125	1:06
	Were't aught to me I bore the canopy	
144	Sonnet 126	0:56
	O thou my lovely boy, who in thy power	
145	Musical interlude	0:45
146	Sonnet 127	1:04
	In the old age black was not counted fair	
147	Sonnet 128	1:04
	How oft, when thou, my music, music play'st	
148	Sonnet 129	1:03
	Th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame	

149	Sonnet 130	1:01
	My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun	
150	Sonnet 131	1:02
	Thou art as tyrannous, so as thou art	
151	Sonnet 132	0:59
	Thine eyes I love, and they, as pitying me	
152	Sonnet 133	1:06
	Beshrew that heart that makes my heart to groan	
153	Musical interlude	1:07
154	Sonnet 134	1:07
	So now I have confessed that he is thine	
155	Sonnet 135	1:06
	Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy Will	
156	Sonnet 136	1:09
	If thy soul check thee that I come so near	
157	Sonnet 137	1:08
	Thou blind fool, Love, what dost thou to mine eyes	
158	Sonnet 138	1:08
	When my love swears that she is made of truth	
159	Sonnet 139	1:02
	O call not me to justify the wrong	
160	Sonnet 140	1:03
	Be wise as thou art cruel, do not press	
161	Musical interlude	1:05

162	Sonnet 141	1:08
	In faith, I do not love thee with mine eyes	
163	Sonnet 142	1:05
	Love is my sin, and thy dear virtue hate	
164	Sonnet 143	0:59
	Lo, as a careful huswife runs to catch	
165	Sonnet 144	1:09
	Two loves I have, of comfort and despair	
166	Sonnet 145	0:54
	Those lips that Love's own hand did make	
167	Sonnet 146	1:11
	Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth	
168	Sonnet 147	1:01
	My love is as a fever, longing still	
169	Musical interlude	1:13
170	Sonnet 148	1:07
	O me! what eyes hath love put in my head	
171	Sonnet 149	1:01
	Canst thou, O cruel, say I love thee not	
172	Sonnet 150	1:03
	O from what pow'r hast thou this pow'rful might	
173	Sonnet 151	1:11
	Love is too young to know what conscience is	
174	Sonnet 152	1:08
	In loving thee thou know'st I am forsworn	

175	Sonnet 153	1:08
	Cupid laid by his brand and fell asleep	
176	Sonnet 154	1:08
	The little Love-god lying once asleep	
177	Closing music	1:19

Total time: 3:09:04

The music on this recording is taken from the NAXOS catalogue

DALL'AQUILLA/DE CREMA RICERCARS 8.550778
Christopher Wilson, lute

DA MILANO FANTASIAS, RICERCARS & DUETS 8.550774
Christopher Wilson, solo lute/Shirley Rumsey, lute duettist

Music programmed by Neville Jason

William Shakespeare

The Sonnets

*To the onlie begetter of these insuing sonnets
Mr. W.H. all happinesse and that eternitie promised
by our ever-living poet wisheth
the well-wishing adventurer in setting forth. T.T.*

Everyone knows something of Shakespeare's Sonnets, even if only in memorable fragments like 'the darling buds of May', or 'remembrance of things past', or 'the marriage of true minds'; and for many people these wonderfully-crafted, intense lyrics stand for something valued about youth, love and the emotional complexities belonging to that time of life.

Shakespeare, of course, did not invent the sonnet, nor was he the first important English writer to use it: Spenser and Sidney, for example, had already done so. The sonnet originated in Italy in the dawn of the Renaissance and, in its earliest form, is named after Petrarch (1304-1374) who used it to eulogise his beloved Laura. A Petrarchan sonnet consists of fourteen lines split into an octave (the first eight lines) and a sestet (the last six): the break between the two sections usually marks a shift, development or re-

evaluation in the poem's argument. The Shakespearean sonnet, on the other hand, is conventionally made up of three quatrains (groups of four lines each, rhyming ABAB/CDCD/EFEF), and a final rhymed couplet. The metre is almost invariably iambic pentameter: each line contains ten syllables, divisible into five metrical feet of two syllables each. Beginning with the second syllable, every other syllable is stressed or accented, thus:

'When I/ do count/ the clock/ that tells/
the time'

In practice, of course, these rules are not rigidly observed – the stress may be inverted, there may be an extra syllable in a line, or one missing, and so on – but the formal constraints remain as a means of compelling the poet into concentration of thought and feeling, entirely appropriate in a sonnet sequence where he wishes to explore over

time a wide range of emotions, situations and reflections.

Shakespeare's Sonnets were first published in 1609 by Thomas Thorpe. The dedication is quoted above, and is itself somewhat enigmatic; G. Blakemore Evans, editor of the New Cambridge Shakespeare edition, offers the following straightforward paraphrase: 'To the sole inspirer of these following sonnets, Master W.H., all happiness and that eternity promised by our ever-living poet [William Shakespeare], wishes the well-wishing adventurer [Thomas Thorpe] in publishing [these sonnets]'. We cannot be sure either when Shakespeare began to compose them, or when he completed the sequence, but the critical consensus would probably be that they were written over a number of years, possibly beginning as early as 1592 and probably ending about 1606. The question of dating, however, is the least of the problems confronting the editor or scholar of these works. How far, crucially, should we see the sonnets as autobiographical, how far as purely imaginative or even playful exercises in a then-fashionable form? If autobiographical, should we accept Shakespeare as actively bisexual, or can we see his love for the young man of Sonnets

1–126 as merely platonic?

Proponents of the autobiographical reading have theorised endlessly about the identity of both the young man and the 'Dark Lady', but there is no conclusive proof behind any of these theories, interesting as they often are. Chief candidates for the young man are probably Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton, and William Herbert, third Earl of Pembroke. Both young men were at different times dedicatees of work by Shakespeare.

Most readers will, I suspect, concur (in my view, rightly) with the belief that the emotional intensity, the sheer pressure of thought and feeling in the sonnets seem to suggest a background of real experience. The loose, even rambling structure of the sonnets also poses problems since we do not know whether Shakespeare was involved in the Sonnets' publication, or even whether they were published with his knowledge and permission.

What we can say about the order and organisation of the Sonnets is that numbers 1–126 are addressed to a 'beauteous and lovely youth' with whom the writer is passionately in love, while numbers 127–152 concern the writer's (sometimes rather more worldly and cynical) relationship with the

so-called 'Dark Lady' ('then will I swear beauty herself is black...' – although by this Shakespeare almost certainly refers to a swarthy complexion, or dark hair and eyes, or a combination, rather than a truly black skin as we would understand it). Within the first part of the sequence we may distinguish the 'procreation' sonnets (1–17), in which the poet urges his beloved to marry so that *'thereby beauty's rose might never die'*. If this seems surprising in a homosexual relationship, we should remember that Renaissance attitudes to male friendship were heavily influenced by the classical notion that an older man (the poet describes himself – 'beated and chopped with tanned antiquity' – as significantly older than his beloved) should contribute to the emotional, cultural and even military education of a younger favourite, who would inevitably move on to heterosexuality and marriage. We may also note the poems concerned with a rival poet – the 'better spirit' of Sonnet 80.

The 'narrative' of the first part is shadowy and uncertain, but one can easily detect a shift from the prostrate adulation of the earlier poems, where the writer can allow no imperfection in his beloved, to the gradual encroachment of jealousy, grief, self-doubt

and resignation upon the relationship. In the second part, the poet is at times openly mocking and cynical about both himself and his mistress, so that one has a sense of a much more mature and perhaps 'real' relationship – but there is little, if any, feeling of narrative progression.

The language of the Sonnets is really remarkably direct and accessible; the difficulties, where they occur, have much more to do with syntax – i.e. sentence structure, word order etc. – and with subtle, complex developments of thought and feeling within the tight confines of the form. The themes are often what we might expect to find in any close examination of love relationships, but they are treated with an intelligence and a degree of emotional exposure which make the poems painfully (but sometimes joyously) compelling. The famous Sonnet 18, for instance, brims with a sense of joyful celebration of the beloved – in an ecstatic hyperbole, the writer contrasts the fickle and transient nature of summer's beauty with the immortality his poetry will confer on the young man's beauty: 'summer's lease hath all too short a date', but:

'So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,

So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.'

Sonnet 94, on the other hand, is disturbing in its ambivalence – is the poet praising or disparaging the apparently admirable qualities he sees in his beloved? Is he in fact bitterly condemning him for his unresponsive complacency? The 'beautiful people' of this world can perhaps afford a kind of frigidity, a lack of commitment masquerading as benign impartiality:

'They that have pow'r to hurt, and will do none,
That do not do the thing they most do show,
Who, moving others, are themselves as stone,
Unmoved, cold, and to temptation slow
They rightly do inherit heaven's graces...'

Sonnet 129 (early in the second part of the sequence – in other words, concerning, at least indirectly, the 'Dark Lady') is a profound analysis of the self-contempt and sense of futility induced by acting upon the impulse of mere lust. It is similar to 94 in this analytical quality but, again, it is far from coldly rational: one feels in it the weight of

bitter experience, as the poet savagely piles on harsh adjectives:

'Th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame
Is lust in action, and till action, lust
Is perjured, murd'rous, bloody, full of blame,
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust...'

But, lest the emphasis should seem unduly negative, there is the stern, almost heroic, and deeply moving assertion of true love's enduring quality in Sonnet 116. Here, love transcends transience and 'alteration', and the language has a grave simplicity which carries enormous emotional authority:

'...love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds...'

And again, in the last four lines of the sonnet:

'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.'

Notes by Perry Keenlyside

Cover picture: Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton (1573-1624),
c.1594 by Nicholas Hilliard (1547-1619).
Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge/Bridgeman Art Library, London.

William Shakespeare

The Sonnets

Read by **Alex Jennings**

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This new recording presents all 154 of Shakespeare's Sonnets, using the New Cambridge Shakespeare texts.



Alex Jennings trained at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre Company and has played numerous leading roles for Royal Shakespeare Company productions including *Hamlet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Measure for Measure*, *Richard III*, *Peer Gynt*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. His film credits include *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Derek Jarman's *War Requiem* and *The Wings of the Dove*.

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