

# Shakespeare's Senior Sonnets

Translations by Laura Bemell

Not all of Shakespeare's sonnets are about love. Indeed, many reflect on aging and old age. One might call these, Shakespeare's Sonnets for Seniors.

The scope and depth of Shakespeare's plays and poems render them poetry for all seasons. Whatever one's age or station in life, there exists a Shakespearean sonnet or passage that articulates our deepest hopes and fears and our most poignant joys and sorrows.

The beauty and power of Shakespeare's sonnets reside in the language. I have translated Shakespeare's language into more contemporary English, with an effort to retain the poetic feel. But after reading the translation for the meaning, it is best to return to the poem itself for the full experience of the beauty, profundity, and poignancy of Shakespeare's language.

## Like as the Waves Make Toward the Pebbled Shore (Sonnet 60)

Like as the waves make toward the pebbled shore,  
So do our minutes hasten to the end;  
Each changing place with the one that goes before,  
In sequent toil all forwards do contend,  
Nativity, once in the main of light,  
Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crown'd  
Crooked eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,  
And time that gave, his gift doth now confound.  
Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth  
And delves the parallels in beauty's brow,  
Feeds on the rarities of nature's truth,  
And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow.  
And yet, to times in hope, my verses shall stand,  
Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand.

- W.S.

## Translation into Contemporary English

Like waves moving toward the shore covered with pebbles,  
The minutes of our lives hasten to the end,  
Our future quickly becomes our past,  
Every minute of our life pushes us further into the future, toward old age and death.  
New life, once the most important event,  
Crawls slowly to maturity, and when we finally reach maturity  
Forces of time overshadow the glory of young life,  
And time, that gave life, now begins to take away life.  
Time changes the beauty and vitality of youth  
And digs into and wrinkles the beauty of our eyes;  
Time and its effects on life are facts of nature,  
And nothing can withstand time. It mows life down like a scythe mows down grass.  
And yet, the poet's words endure and stand up against time,  
And forever keeps your value, no matter that time ravages your beauty and youth.

- Laura Bernell

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## **When to the Sessions of Sweet Silent Thought (Sonnet 30)**

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought  
I summon up remembrance of things past,  
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,  
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste;  
Then can I drown an eye, unused to flow,  
For precious friends hid in death's dateless night,  
And weep afresh love's long since cancell'd woe,  
And moan the expense of many a vanished sight.  
Then can I grieve at grievances forgone,  
And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er  
The sad account of fore-bemoaned moan,  
Which I new pay as if not paid before:  
--But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,  
All losses are restored, and sorrows end.

- W.S.

## **Translation into Contemporary English**

When it is quiet enough to think,  
I call up memories of past events;  
I sigh sadly about never acquiring things I tried to get,  
And cry again about old sorrows, wasting my precious time:  
Then my eyes fill with tears, though I rarely cry,  
For precious friends now dead forever;  
And I weep again about old loves lost and almost forgotten;  
And I moan and complain about things I'll never see again.

During these silent musings, I grieve again at sorrows long gone,  
And feel depressed, as I recount losses from long ago,  
And the pain feels as intense as when I first experienced the loss or sorrow.  
But if during these sad thoughts I think about you, dear friend,  
All losses are restored, and sorrows end.

- L.B.