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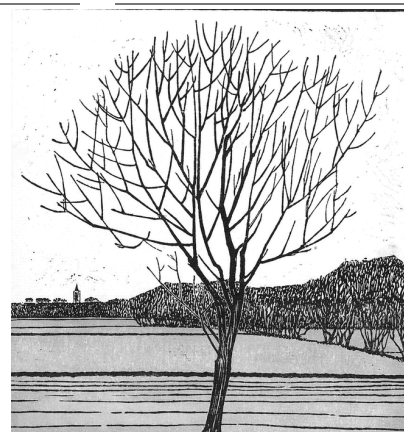
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Sonnet 73

by William Shakespeare

Grades 9–12 · Common Core RL.9–10.4, RL.9–10.2, RL.9–10.5

Shakespeare's 154 sonnets were published in 1609. Sonnet 73 is a Shakespearean sonnet: three quatrains and a final couplet, rhyming ABAB CDCD EFEF GG, in iambic pentameter. Each quatrain offers a new image for aging, and each image covers a shorter stretch of time than the one before.



THE POEM

- 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 ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
5 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,
10 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.

VOCABULARY

behold — see, look at**boughs** — tree branches**choirs** — the part of a church where singers stand**twilight** — the dim light after sunset**by and by** — soon**seals up** — closes up, shuts away**expire** — die, go out**nourish'd** — fed, kept alive**perceiv'st** — notice, understand**ere** — before

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What season does the first quatrain describe, and what does it say about the speaker's age?

2. What are the "Bare ruin'd choirs"? Why is this a powerful image?

3. In the second quatrain, what is "Death's second self"?

4. Explain the fire image in the third quatrain. What is it "Consum'd with"?

5. What does the final couplet say the listener's love should do once they see the speaker is aging?

WRITING PROMPT

Write three short stanzas, each comparing a stage of life to something in nature (a season, a time of day, a weather pattern). Finish with a two-line couplet that sums up your message.

Sonnet 73 — Answer Key

1. Late autumn, “When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang.” The speaker is growing old.
2. The bare branches, where “late the sweet birds sang,” look like a ruined church where a choir once sang. It joins the loss of leaves and song to the loss of youth.
3. Night (“black night doth take away”), which is like death because it “seals up all in rest.”
4. The speaker is like a fire glowing on “the ashes of his youth,” burning out. It is “Consum’d with that which it was nourish’d by”: the life that fed it also uses it up.
5. Seeing this “makes thy love more strong,” so the listener should “love that well, which thou must leave ere long.”

Read the full poem online: poetrycatalog.com/sonnet-73-that-time-of-year-thou-mayst-in-me-behold-william-shakespeare/