

Sonnet 12: When I do count the clock that tells the time

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

When I do count the clock that tells the time,
And see the brave day sunk in hideous night;
When I behold the violet past prime,
And sable curls all silver'd o'er with white;
When lofty trees I see barren of leaves
Which erst from heat did canopy the herd,
And summer's green all girded up in sheaves
Borne on the bier with white and bristly beard,
Then of thy beauty do I question make,
That thou among the wastes of time must go,
Since sweets and beauties do themselves forsake
And die as fast as they see others grow;
And nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make defence
Save breed, to brave him when he takes thee hence.

Modern Translation

When I look at the clock and notice time ticking away, and see splendid day sink into hideous night; when I see the violet wilt and curly black hair turn white with age; when I see tall trees that once provided shade for herds now barren of leaves, and the summer's crops tied up and hauled to the barn as if summer itself were an old man being carried off to his grave—then I have doubts about the fate of your beauty, since you too will have to undergo the ravages of time. Sweet and beautiful creatures don't stay that way; they die as fast as they see others grow. And there's no defence against Time's destructive power, except perhaps to have children—to defy Time when he takes you away.