

SONNET 73

That time of year thou may'st 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.
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
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 perceivest, which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

—William Shakespeare

If William Shakespeare (1564-1616) had only written the One Hundred and Fifty-Four Sonnets and none of his plays, he would still be revered as one of the great poets of the English language. Sonnet 73 is among his most famous, written as if it is a personal look-back on life—when, from the perspective of old age, the poet says that knowing one will soon die makes one love more strongly those things that he has loved and will leave behind. It is a wonderful evocation of old age considering the poem is likely to have been written before 1601, when Shakespeare would have been 37.