

# Nature in shakespeare's sonnets

[Literature](#), [William Shakespeare](#)



Nature in Shakespeare's Sonnets In Shakespeare's fair youth Sonnets, the speaker uses imagery and metaphors from nature to describe man's life cycle. While reading the Sonnets, it may seem at first that the main point of the Sonnets is that life's purpose is to reproduce. However, after reading the fair youth Sonnets, it becomes clear that imagery from nature is used to prove that death is inevitable and should be accepted. The fair youth Sonnets are ordered in a specific way to resemble the life cycle of a man. As the Sonnets progress the overall themes of the sonnets seems to change.

This cycle starts off with ' Sonnet 1' and ' Sonnet 3' and concludes with ' Sonnet 73' and ' Sonnet 74'. Sonnets 1, 3, 7, 15, 60, 73, and 74 are all used to show this life cycle and its progression through life. In ' Sonnet 1' and ' Sonnet 3' it is clear that the speaker is attempting to get the point across that reproduction is life's only purpose. However, in ' Sonnet 16' - ' Sonnet 73' it is obvious that the theme changes drastically. No longer is reproduction the main point, but it changes to death and its inevitability.

Throughout the Sonnets, nature is used as a comparison to help the speaker explain life in a way that helps the reader understand the true life cycle of man. It is understandable that death is inevitable for every living thing in nature. Reproduction is also required for every living thing to exist. In Sonnet 1 the speaker wants the reader to know that life is beautiful and reproduction is a result of that; " From fairest creatures we desire increase/That thereby beauty's rose might never die/But as the ripper should time decrease/His tender heir might bear his memory" (Sonnet 1 L. -3). The beauty of a rose is being compared to the beauty of man's ability to reproduce and pass on the ' fairest,' or beautiful, genes. In nature a beautiful

rose can stand out among the brush in a forest, or in a garden a rose can be the most beautiful flower, just the way that man's beauty will stand out among a crowd. This metaphor is used to explain to the reader that reproduction is necessary to pass on those genes that allow one man to stand out among others in a crowd. According to the speaker, this personal beauty will live on past death through reproduction.

Personal beauty is a quality that everyone possesses; however, it is important for the reader to understand that in order for his/her specific beauty to be passed on reproduction is a necessity. The Speaker uses 'Sonnet 3' to help the reader understand this requirement; "Look in thy glass and tell the face thou viewest/Now is the time that face should form another" (Sonnet 3, L. 1-2). The reader is now being told that, when looking in a mirror, it is important to notice the inner beauty that everyone is gifted with. This inner beauty must be passed on for these 'beautiful' genes to continue to exist.

The tone of these few lines is a sense of urgency. 'Now is the time' that reproduction should happen, otherwise this chance might not appear again within this life cycle. If reproduction does not happen when life is in its prime, then nature will take its toll as man continues the journey through life. After 'Sonnet 3' it is clear that the transition from youthful to aged is starting to make its appearance. The speaker's attitude toward reproduction starts to change after 'Sonnet 3' and is quickly switched to life in its prime.

It is in the following Sonnets that the main point is no longer reproduction but rather death, and maturing throughout life. Sonnet 7 uses nature imagery to show this maturation, "When from highmost pitch, with weary  
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car/Like feeble age he reeleth from the day/The eyes, ' fore duteous, now converted are/From his low tract and look another way/So thou thyself outgoing in thy noon/unlooked on diest unless thou get a son" (Sonnet 7, L. 9-14). A sunset is now being compared to the way a man's life starts to fade away.

Once the sun sets people stop admiring it as much, just the same way man won't be admired if kin isn't produced. Once the sunset reaches its peak, or the point where it finally disappears, it consistently turns darker, this closely relates the way that once life reaches a certain age, it moves faster and faster towards the end. The tone and theme of the Sonnets begin to change from this point on, focusing on the fact that life passes just as quickly as a sunset fades. After a sunset fades the sky suddenly becomes darker; and the darkness progresses as time passes through the night.

The sunset is used as a metaphor for the way that a life fades after the peak, or the prime of life. ' Sonnet 15' uses a metaphor similar to that of a sunset fading, but this metaphor compares man's declining quality of life after the prime to that of a plant once it reaches its full potential, " When I consider everything that grows/holds in perfection but a little moment/... When I perceive that man as plants increase/Cheered and checked ev'n by the self-same sky/Vaunt in their youthful sap, at height decrease" (Sonnet 15, L. 1-8).

The speaker shows that once life reaches its highest peak, it must begin to fall towards the end, or death. ' Sonnet 15' states that every living thing is perfect at one point in its life. A flower is the most beautiful just at its peak before it starts to wither. Life is most beautiful in its prime; however, once

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that highest peak or 'prime of life' passes then the quality of life begins to decline. Instead of using a plant's life, or a sunset's continuing darkness in 'Sonnet 60' to compare time passing, the speaker uses waves crashing on a beach.

Just as waves crashing on the beach are replaced by new ones, the minutes that pass are quickly replaced by new ones. This metaphor helps paint a picture in one's mind of the way that moments pass just as quickly as they show up; "Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore/So do our minutes hasten toward their end/Each changing place with that which goes before/In sequent toil all forwards do contend/Nativity, once in the main of light/Crawls to maturity wherewith being crowned/Crooked eclipses 'gainst his glory fight/And time that gave doth now his gift confound" (Sonnet 60, L. -8). It seems that once the prime of life passes, the days, minutes and seconds pass by much faster than life before the prime. This shows that life is quickly changing and that those days of reproduction are in the past. The tone of the Sonnets has changed from being urgent to calm and peaceful just the way listening to waves crashing is peaceful. This tone allows the speaker to accept the maturity that man faces as life passes its prime. Death seems to be rapidly drawing nearer.

The imagery from nature allows the reader to get a better idea of what life will be like past the prime. According to the speaker life seems to be more peaceful past the prime, this symbolizes that death is being accepted. The tone in 'Sonnet 73' and 'Sonnet 74' is much different from that in 'Sonnet 1' and 'Sonnet 3' this shows that the life cycle is getting closer to the end.

The tone is now dreary and melancholy as compared to the urgency and eagerness that the first few Sonnets portray.

Sonnet 73 and 74 is where the end of the life cycle approaches and death is accepted, " But be contented when the fell arrest/Without all bail shall carry me away/My life hath in this line some interest/Which for memorial still with thee shall stay" (Sonnet 74, L. 1-4). Within these few lines death has finally been accepted by the speaker. The speaker now admits to being past their prime. Within these few lines there is a slight contradiction to the main point from the first set of sonnets. In the first Sonnets the main point was reproduction and the ability to live past death through offspring.

Now the idea is that the speaker will live on through the lines of these Sonnets. This contradiction says that the speaker doesn't necessarily believe what he is telling the reader. It now seems that the idea of reproduction was never accepted by the speaker. In the earlier sonnets the speaker was stating that to live on one must reproduce, however, in Sonnets 73 and 74 this is not the case. The reader is now being told that even though it is important to reproduce it is not important for the speaker to reproduce. The speaker may feel that he is an exception to the rule.

As stated earlier the speaker feels that life is pointless without reproduction, " Too base of thee to be rememb'ed/the worth of that is that which it contains/and that is this and this with thee remains" (Sonnet 74, L. 12-14). The speaker says here that his body is almost worthless and the only worth he has is his spirit that is now written within the lines of these Sonnets. These Sonnets, which will be read for years to come, will be what keeps the

speaker alive, not reproduction. Throughout the Fair Youth Sonnets it is clear that nature is used to help describe the life cycle of man.

The tone and literary devices used in the first few sonnets in this selection imply that it is required to reproduce if beauty is to be passed on. Through the middle Sonnets the imagery shows that life is perfect right before and during its prime. After the prime has passed, life starts to fade away and the minutes pass quickly, in the same way that waves crashing on a shore pass and are replaced by new ones. In the later Sonnets the main point is no longer reproduction and its importance for existence but it is accepting death and living life peacefully until the end.