

SONNET CIV

To me fair friend you never can be old,
For as you were when first your eye I ey'd,
Such seems your beauty still: Three Winters cold,
Have from the forests shook three summers' pride,
Three beauteous springs to yellow *Autumn* turned,
In process of the seasons have I seen,
Three April perfumes in three hot Junes burned,
Since first I saw you fresh, which yet are green.
Ah yet doth beauty like a Dial hand,
Steal from his figure, and no pace perceived,
So your sweet hue, which methinks still doth stand
Hath motion, and mine eye may be deceived.
For fear of which, hear this thou age unbred,
Ere you were born was beauty's summer dead.

Once again the Guide interrupts the poet's debate and delivers his next counsel. The counsel is addressed not only to the poet, but also to the present and future generations of readers. The Guide tells the poet that he should remember that his inner beauty can never be exhausted ("to me fair friend you never can be old"). But it can degenerate if not cultivated correctly. And this is the Guide's concern, because the poet's beauty has not grown since the first time he met him ("for as you were when first your eye I ey'd, such seems your beauty still"). In the meantime, three cold winters passed and shook the leaves off three proud summers ("three winters cold, have from the forests shook three summers' pride"). And three beautiful springs turned into yellow autumns ("three beauteous springs to yellow autumn turned"). In other words, the poet missed three spiritual seasons. During that time the Guide saw three springs' perfumes burnt during three hot summers ("in process of the seasons have I seen, three April perfumes in three hot Junes burned"). Yet, says the Guide, despite having been given these three opportunities, the poet still remains as immature as he was when he saw him for the first time ("since first I saw you fresh, which yet are green"). These three opportunities are a symbolic reference to the three impulses, or thee colours of the roses, to which the poet was exposed. The Guide emphasizes that there is a time limit within which the poet's beauty may grow ("so your sweet hue, which methinks still doth stand, hath motion). Because beauty's potential is like the hand of a clock, which steals away from hour to hour with no perceived movements ("yet doth beauty like a dial-hand, steal from his figure, and no pace perceived"). So it is with the poet's potentiality, which the Guide compares to sweet colours and which, he is afraid, may be lost ("so your sweet hue, which methinks still doth stand, hath motion, and mine eye may be deceived"). Fearing this, the Guide announces to all future generations of mankind ("for fear of which, hear this thou age unbred"): before the birth of this poet, true beauty remained in its latent state ("ere you were born was beauty's summer dead"). In other words, it is the first time that this particular evolutionary potentiality is within the reach of ordinary men.

(Excerpt from "Shakespeare Sonnets or How heavy do I journey on the way" by Wes Jamroz)