Sonnet 23

**Synopsis:** Shakespeare blames his inability to speak his love on his lack of self-confidence and his too-powerful emotions, and he begs his beloved to find that love expressed in his writings.

As an unperfect actor on the stage  
Who with his fear is put beside his part,  
Or some fierce thing replete with too much rage,  
Whose strength’s abundance weakens his own heart;  
So I for fear of trust forget to say  
The perfect ceremony of love’s rite,  
And in mine own love’s strength seem to decay,  
O’ercharged with burden of mine own love’s might.  
O, let my books be then the eloquence  
And dumb presagers of my speaking breast,  
Who plead for love and look for recompense  
More than that tongue that more hath more expressed.  
    O, learn to read what silent love hath writ.  
    To hear with eyes belongs to love’s fine wit.
Sonnet 113

Synopsis: In this first of two linked sonnets, Shakespeare confesses that everything he sees is transformed into an image of the beloved.

Since I left you, mine eye is in my mind,
And that which governs me to go about
Doth part his function, and is partly blind,
Seems seeing, but effectually is out;
For it no form delivers to the heart
Of bird, of flower, or shape which it doth latch;
Of his quick objects hath the mind no part,
Nor his own vision holds what it doth catch.
For if it see the rud’st or gentlest sight,
The most sweet favor or deformèd’st creature,
The mountain or the sea, the day or night,
The crow or dove, it shapes them to your feature.

   Incapable of more, replete with you,
   My most true mind thus maketh mine eye untrue.
Sonnet 121

**Synopsis:** In this sonnet, Shakespeare responds to criticism about his behavior by claiming that he is no worse (and, perhaps better) than his attackers.

‘Tis better to be vile than vile esteemed,
When not to be receives reproach of being,
And the just pleasure lost, which is so deemed
Not by our feeling but by others’ seeing.
For why should others’ false adulterate eyes
Give salutation to my sportive blood?
Or on my frailties why are frailer spies,
Which in their wills count bad what I think good?
No, I am that I am; and they that level
At my abuses reckon up their own.
I may be straight though they themselves be bevel;
By their rank thoughts my deeds must not be shown,
  Unless this general evil they maintain:
  All men are bad and in their badness reign.