

Shakespeare's Sonnets – Then & Now

(Text | Context | Transmedial Reception)

TUE 10-12

Building Z6 (Zentrales Hörsaal- und Seminargebäude),
Room 0.002

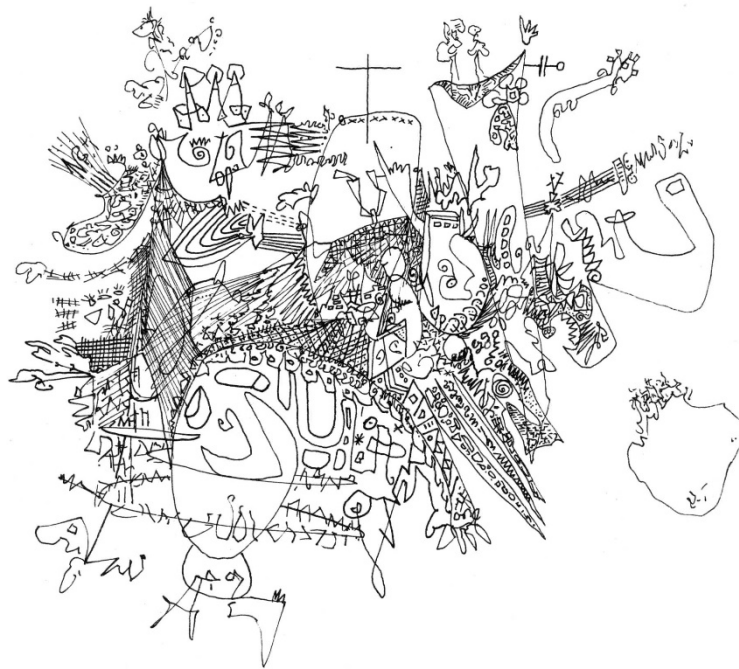


Image from: Dieter Häussler, *Federzeichnungen zu Sonetten von William Shakespeare: Ein Versuch* (Akademie für das Graphische Gewerbe München) 1964.

The lecture centres on a single literary text: the famous (as well as infamous) collection of 154 short poems published in 1609 under the title *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. However, we will make sure to look at this baffling text from all sorts of angles:

- On the one hand, we will investigate the literary traditions and sociocultural contexts from which the sonnets emerged.
- At the same time, we will be interested in how Shakespeare's poems have come to be (mis)understood, appropriated, adapted, transformed and responded to through the centuries.

Along this trajectory, the lecture offers an *advanced* introduction to both literary and cultural analysis. It will combine exercises in the close reading of poetry with context-oriented historical approaches and with excursions into the field of cultural as well as media studies.

Preparatory and general reading for the lecture:

Participants need to familiarize themselves with the subject of the lecture before the beginning of the lecture period.

The most important preparation is to READ AS MANY OF SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS AS POSSIBLE. An option is to begin with the poems listed in the course programme, but other approaches might be just as illuminating. The STANDARD EDITION of the sonnets for this lecture is:

- KATHERINE DUNCAN-JONES, ed., *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, The Arden Shakespeare (rev. ed., 2010).
Buying a copy of this edition would be good, but it is also OK to use a different reliable edition. Apart from thorough annotations to the poems, Duncan-Jones provides a detailed INTRODUCTION (1-106), which considers the sonnet's publishing history, literary contexts and reception over time.

Beyond engaging with the poems, participants of the lecture also need to read some introductory scholarly literature. The following text, which I wrote for an aborted collection of 'personal introductions to Shakespeare', is set as MINIMUM PREPARATORY READING:

- ZENO ACKERMANN, "'When most I wink, then do mine eyes best see': *Shakespeare's Sonnets*," unpublished manuscript [24 pp.]. [WueCampus.]
The text offers short readings of sonnets 17, 43, 71, 76, and 135.

See also the following introductions and study aids:

- DYMPNA CALLAGHAN, introduction, *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, Blackwell Introductions to Literature (Blackwell, 2007) 1-12. [UBW online.]¹
- ROLAND WEIDLE, *A Comprehensive Guide to Shakespeare's Sonnets* (The Arden Shakespeare, 2025). [UBW online.]

For general introductions to SHAKESPEARE, HIS WORKS AND HIS TIMES, see:

- MARGRETA DE GRAZIA and STANLEY WELLS, eds., *The New Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge UP, 2010). [UBW online.]
Contains contributions on topics such as "The Traces of Shakespeare's Life" (1-14), "Shakespeare the Poet" (91-104), "Shakespeare, Sexuality, and Gender" (217-232) or "Shakespeare and Media History" (303-324).
- STEPHEN GREENBLATT, "General Introduction," *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. GREENBLATT et al. (Norton, 1997) 1-76. [WueCampus.]
Long but definitely readable – and particularly good in locating Shakespeare and his works in the social and cultural contexts of his time. Not accessible online, but the university library holds several copies of the *Norton Shakespeare*. Moreover, a scan is provided in our WueCampus course room.

On the contemporary RECEPTION OF SHAKESPEARE, see:

- ROBERT SHAUGHNESSY, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Popular Culture* (Cambridge UP, 2007). [UBW online.]

More reading suggestions can be found in the COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY at the end of this document.

¹ The tag 'UBW ONLINE' indicates that a publication is accessible as an eBook through the website of our university library. (You need to be connected to the intranet to get access.)

Programme

20/10 INTRODUCTION

Assigned reading²:

- **Son. 18**
- HELEN VENDLER, "Reading, Stage by Stage: Shakespeare's Sonnets," *Shakespeare Re-read*, ed. RUSS McDONALD (Cornell UP, 1994) 23-41. [WueCampus.]

Phase I: CONCEPTS

27/10 LITERATURE and POETRY

Preparatory task:

- Look up the term 'poetry' in dictionaries of literary terms and similar study aids (e.g., through the website *Oxford Reference*, which is accessible through JMU's intranet).

Assigned reading:

- **Son. 43**
- MICHAEL MEYER, "Poetry," *English and American Literatures*, 4th ed. (Francke, 2011) 21-64, esp. 22-25 ("What Are Poetic Texts?"). [UBW online.]

Further reading:

- JONATHAN CULLER, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997 [various reissues]), esp. 18-41 ("What Is Literature and Does It Matter?") and 69-81 ("Rhetoric, Poetics, and Poetry").

03/11 LYRIC POETRY & the SONNET

Preparatory task:

- Look up 'LYRIC' or 'LYRIC POETRY' in dictionaries of literary terms or similar study aids (e.g., through the website *Oxford Reference*, which is accessible through JMU).

Assigned reading:

- PATIENCE AGBABI, "North(West)ern," *Bloodshot Monochrome* (Canongate, 2008). [WueCampus.] // See also a *YouTube* video of Agbabi reciting her poem: [LINK](#).
- **Son. 29**

Further reading:

- SCOTT BREWSTER, *Lyric* (Routledge, 2009) [UBW online], esp. 1-14 (introduction).
- STEPHEN FRY, "The Sonnet," *The Ode Less Travelled: Unlocking the Poet Within* (Hutchinson, 2005) 281-292. [WueCampus.]

² Texts listed as 'ASSIGNED READING' need to be studied in preparation for the respective lectures. Please consult relevant study aids and other resources (see course bibliography) to gain a comprehensive understanding of the assigned poems and scholarly texts and to position them in relation to the lecture's topic and argument.

Phase II: CONTEXTS

10/11 **Locating SHAKESPEARE**

Assigned reading:

- **Son. 111**
- **Son. 135**
- PETER HYLAND, introduction & "Shakespeare Becomes a Poet," *An Introduction to Shakespeare's Poems* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 1-19. [WueCampus.]

Further reading:

- STEPHEN GREENBLATT, "General Introduction," *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. GREENBLATT et al. (Norton, 1997) 1-76; esp. 44-74 ("Shakespeare's Life and Art"). [WueCampus.]

17/11 **Locating SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS**

Assigned reading:

- **Dedication** of *Shakespeare's Sonnets*
- **Son. 126**

Further reading:

- HYLAND, "Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Sonnet," *An Introduction to Shakespeare's Poems* 125-147. [WueCampus.]
- MANFRED PFISTER and JÜRGEN GUTSCH, "Looking at Shakespeare's Sonnets from the Outside," *William Shakespeare's Sonnets: For the First Time Globally Reprinted*, ed. PFISTER and GUTSCH, vol. 2. (Edition Signathur, 2014) 119-141. [WueCampus.]

Phase III: ISSUES

24/11 "We desire increase":

PROCREATION and SOCIAL OBLIGATION

Assigned reading:

- **Son. 1**
- **Son. 8**

01/12 "My love shall in my verse ever live young":

TIME and poetry

Assigned reading:

- **Son. 17**
- **Son. 19**
- DYMUNA CALLAGHAN, "Time," *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, Blackwell Introductions to Literature (Blackwell, 2007) 89-101. [UBW online.]

08/12 "Love is not love":

Son. 116 and its POETIC RECEPTION

Assigned reading:

- **Son. 116**
- CAROL ANN DUFFY, "CXVI," *On Shakespeare's Sonnets: A Poets' Celebration*, ed. Hannah Jane Crawford and Elizabeth Scott-Baumann (Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016). [WueCampus.]

Further reading:

- CALLAGHAN, "Love," *Shakespeare's Sonnets* 58-73. [UBW online.]
- See the short analysis of sonnet 116 provided in BLADES, *Shakespeare: The Sonnets* 62-69. [UBW online.]

15/12 "For a woman wert thou first created":

GENDER and SEXUALITY

Assigned reading:

- **Son. 20**
- **Son. 129**
- **Son. 144**

Further reading:

- See the short analyses of all the specific sonnets assigned for this lecture provided in JOHN BLADES, *Shakespeare: The Sonnets*, Analysing Texts (Palgrave, 2007) 12-18 ("Sonnet 129"); 18-28 ("Sonnet 20"); 166-175 ("Sonnet 144"). [UBW online.]

22/12 **INTERIM SUMMARY and EXCHANGE**

[Christmas break]

12/01 "In the old age black was not counted fair":

FAIRNESS & BLACKNESS

Assigned reading:

- **Son. 127**
- **Son. 147**

Further reading:

- See the short analysis of sonnet 127 provided in BLADES, *Shakespeare: The Sonnets* 149-158. [UBW online.]
- ZENO ACKERMANN, "'Being your slave': Shakespeares Sonette und die Artikulation der Sklaverei," *Zeitsprünge: Forschungen zur Frühen Neuzeit* 18.3/4 (2014): 369-396. [WueCampus.] – See also the literature referred to in the article.

19/01 "I am to wait":

SOCIAL HIERARCHY and SELF-CONTROL

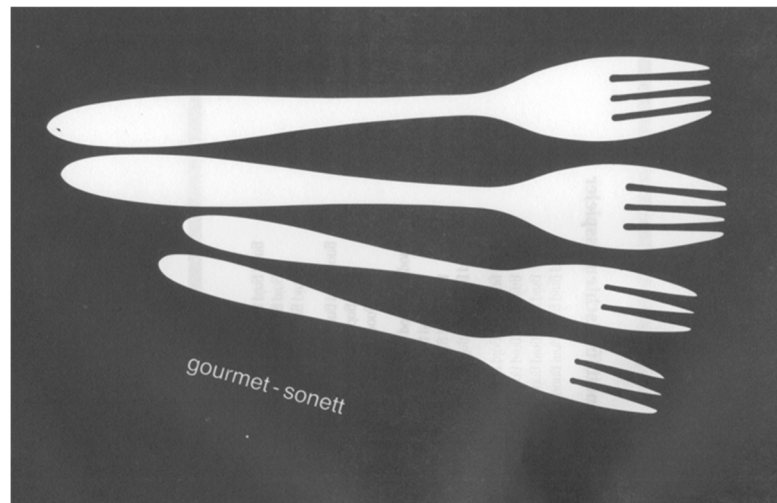
Assigned reading:

➤ Son. 58

➤ Son. 94

26/01 **CONCLUSION**

11/02, 14-16: **FINAL TEST**, room TBA (Please note the irregular time slot!)



Fish's Sonnet 18*

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* The punctuation of the 1609 Quarto has been left unchanged.

Selected Bibliography

Editions of *Shakespeare's Sonnets*:

Katherine Duncan-Jones, ed. *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, The Arden Shakespeare (rev. ed., 2010).

This is our standard edition for the lecture. However, some of Duncan-Jones's assumptions about the gestation of the sonnets are hotly debated; cf. the introductions offered in the editions prepared by Burrow and Kerrigan!

Booth, Stephen, ed. *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Yale UP, 1977.

The most renowned, ambitious and extensive edition. This is how Booth, in the preface, defends the complexity of his "analytical" notes: "All of us were brought up on the idea that what poets say is sublime – takes us beyond reason; my commentary tries to describe the physics by which we get there" (x). Booth reproduces a facsimile of the Quarto text alongside a modernized version of the poems.

Burrow, Colin, ed. *William Shakespeare: The Complete Sonnets and Poems*. The Oxford Shakespeare. Oxford UP, 2008. [UBW online.]

Kerrigan, John, ed. *The Sonnets and a Lover's Complaint*. The New Penguin Shakespeare. Penguin, 1986.

Vendler, Helen, ed. *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1997. [UBW online.]

Various other editions are available at UBW (some of them online). The WueCampus course room will additionally feature the sonnets as reprinted in The Oxford Shakespeare (both in original and modernized spelling).

General study aids (esp. concerning poetry & poetry analysis):

Baldick, Chris. *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. 4th ed. Oxford UP, 2015. [Accessible online through UBW and/or through *Oxford Reference*.]

Brewster, Scott. *Lyric*. The New Critical Idiom. Routledge, 2009.

Culler, Jonathan. *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford UP, 1997. [There are various later editions.]

Eagleton, Terry. *How to Read a Poem*. Blackwell, 2007.

JSTOR. Web.

Digital library of academic journals, books, and primary sources. Accessible through the university's intranet.

Meyer, Michael. *English and American Literatures*. UTB basics. 4th ed. Francke, 2011. [Accessible online through UBW.]

See esp. the section on "Poetry" (21-64).

Oxford Reference. Web.

Preminger, Alex, ed. *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Princeton UP, 1993. [UBW online.]

Strachan, John, and Richard Terry. *Poetry*. 2nd ed. Edinburgh UP, 2011. [UBW online.]

On Shakespeare's sonnets / *Shakespeare's Sonnets* and their contexts:

Bellamy, Elizabeth Jane, ed. *Critical Survey of Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Grey House, 2014. [UBW online.]

Contains not only essays by important scholars but also useful commentaries on a large number of Shakespeare's sonnets.

Blades, John. *Shakespeare: The Sonnets*. Analysing Texts. Palgrave, 2007. [UBW online.]

Booth, Stephen. *An Essay on Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Yale UP, 1969.

Callaghan, Dymrna. *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Blackwell Introductions to Literature. Blackwell, 2007. [UBW online.]

Cousins, A. D. *Shakespeare's Sonnets and Narrative Poems*. Routledge, 2000. [UBW online.]

Crawforth, Hannah Jane, Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, and Clare Whitehead, eds. *The Sonnets: The State of Play*. Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2017. [UBW online.]

Edmondson, Paul, and Stanley Wells, eds. *All the Sonnets of Shakespeare*. Cambridge UP, 2020. [UBW online.]

Hyland, Peter. *An Introduction to Shakespeare's Poems*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Muir, Kenneth. *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Routledge, 2005. [UBW online.]

Pfister, Manfred, and Jürgen Gutsch, eds. *Shakespeare's Sonnets: For the First Time Globally Re-printed – A Quatercentenary Anthology (with a DVD)*. Edition Signathur, 2009.

Schalkwyk, David. *Speech and Performance in Shakespeare's Sonnets and Plays*. Cambridge UP, 2002. [UBW online.]

Schiffer, James, ed. *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Critical Essays*. Routledge, 1999. [UBW online.]

Schoenfeldt, Michael, ed. *A Companion to Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Blackwell, 2007. [UBW online.]

Vendler, Helen. *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1997. [UBW online.]

On the reception of 'Shakespeare,' especially in contemporary culture and media:

Burt, Richard, ed. *Shakespeare after Mass Media*. Palgrave, 2002.

Burt, Richard, ed. *Shakespeares after Shakespeare: An Encyclopedia of the Bard in Mass Media and Popular Culture*. 2 vols. Greenwood Press, 2006.

Greber, Erika, and Evi Zemanek, eds. *Sonett-Künste: Mediale Transformationen einer klassischen Gattung*. Edition Signathur, 2012.

Kingsley-Smith, Jane. *The Afterlife of Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Cambridge UP, 2019. [UBW online.]

Lanier, Douglas. *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002.

Shaughnessy, Robert, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Popular Culture*. Cambridge UP, 2007. [UBW online.]

Weidle, Roland. *A Comprehensive Guide to Shakespeare's Sonnets*. The Arden Shakespeare, 2025. [UBW online.]