

William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

Sonnet 23

As an unperfect actor on the stage,
Who with his fear is put beside¹ his part,
Or some fierce thing replete² with too much rage,
Whose strength's abundance weakens his own heart;

5 So I, for fear of trust, forget to say
The perfect ceremony of love's rite³,
And in mine own love's strength seem to decay,
Orecharg'd⁴ with burthen⁵ of mine own love's might.
O! let my books be then the eloquence⁶

10 And dumb presagers⁷ of my speaking breast⁸,
Who plead for love, and look for recompense,
More than that tongue that more hath more express'd.
O! learn to read what silent love hath writ:
To hear with eyes belongs to⁹ love's fine wit.

(114 words)

¹**is put beside** forgets (his lines) – ²**replete** overfull – ³**rite** ritual, what needs to be said – ⁴**Orecharg'd** overloaded – ⁵**burthen** weight, burden – ⁶**eloquence** truthful expression – ⁷**dumb presagers** silent heralds, non-verbal signals – ⁸**speaking breast** loving heart – ⁹**belongs to** is the true quality of