

William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

Sonnet 53

What is your substance¹, whereof are you made,
That millions of strange shadows² on you tend³?
Since every one hath, every one, one shade⁴,
And you but one, can every shadow lend⁵.

5 Describe Adonis, and the counterfeit

Is poorly imitated after you;
On Helen's cheek all art of beauty set,
And you in Grecian tires⁶ are painted new:
Speak of the spring, and foison⁷ of the year,

10 The one doth shadow of your beauty show,

The other as your bounty⁸ doth appear;
And you in every blessed shape we know.
In all external grace you have some part,
But you like none, none you, for constant heart.
(107 words)

¹**substance** essential nature – ²**strange shadows** images of others – ³**tend** attend (like servants) – ⁴**every one hath ... shade** each individual has their own unique appearance – ⁵**lend** supply, match every excellence – ⁶**Grecian tires** Greek dress or headdress – ⁷**foison** rich harvest (autumn) – ⁸**bounty** rich harvest, generosity