

THE SONNET

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NOTE:

This list may seem daunting but the sonnet is a small thing (even as it contains multitudes). Many of the sonnets here are famous; some of them you may already know. Please read all of them. It is only by reading sonnet upon sonnet that one achieves a true sense of the form. Mark up the ones you like best and read them again!

Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch) ~ 'Amor, che nel penser mio' (*Canzoniere*, 140)

*Amor, che nel penser mio vive et regna
e 'l suo seggio maggior nel mio cor tene,
talor armato ne la fronte vene;
ivi si loca et ivi pon sua insegna.*

*Quella ch'amare e sofferir ne 'nsegna,
e vol che'l gran desio, l'accesa spene,
ragion, vergogna, e reverenza affrene,
di nostro ardir fra se stessa si sdegna.*

*Onde Amor paventoso fugge al core,
lasciando ogni sua impresa, et piange et trema;
ivi s'asconde et non appar piu fore.*

*Che poss'io far, temendo il mio signore,
se non star seco infin a l'ora estrema?
che bel fin fa chi ben amando more.*

The long love that in my thought doth harbor,
And in mine heart doth keep his residence,
Into my face presseth with bold pretense
And therein campeth, spreading his banner.

She that me learneth to love and suffer
And will that my trust and lust's negligence
Be reined by reason, shame, and reverence
With his hardiness taketh displeasure.

Wherewithal unto the heart's forest he fleeth,
Leaving his enterprise with pain and cry,
And there him hideth, and not appeareth.

What may I do, when my master feareth,
But in the field with him to live and die?
For good is the life ending faithfully.

Love, who lives and rules in my thought
and holds his chief seat in my heart,
sometimes armed comes into my face;
and there makes camp and places his banner.

She who teaches me to love and suffer,
and wants reason, shame, and respect restrain
my great desire and burning hope
takes offense inwardly at our ardor.

Therefore Love, fearful, flees to the heart,
abandoning it all, and cries and shakes;
he hides himself, and is seen abroad no more.

What can I do, when my master is afraid,
except stand with him to the bitter end?
He makes a fine end, who dies loving well.

Love, that doth reign and live within my thought,
And built his seat within my captive breast,
Clad in the arms wherein with me he fought,
Oft in my face he doth his banner rest.

But she that taught me love and suffer pain,
My doubtful hope and eke my hot desire
With shamefast look to shadow and refrain,
Her smiling grace converteth straight to ire.

And coward Love, then, to the heart apace
Taketh his flight, where he doth lurk and plain,
His purpose lost, and dare not show his face.
For my lord's guilt thus faultless bide I pain,

Yet from my lord shall not my foot remove:
Sweet is the death that taketh end by love.

Sir Thomas Wyatt

Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey

Sir Thomas Wyatt, 'Whoso list to hunt' (c.1535)

Whoso list to hunt, I know where is an hind, | Whoso list = Whoever wants

But as for me, *hélas*, I may no more.

The vain travail hath wearied me so sore, | vain travail = fruitless labour

I am of them that farthest cometh behind. 4

Yet may I by no means my wearied mind

Draw from the deer, but as she fleeth afore

Fainting I follow. I leave off therefore,

Sithens in a net I seek to hold the wind. 8

Who list her hunt, I put him out of doubt,

As well as I may spend his time in vain.

And graven with diamonds in letters plain

There is written, her fair neck round about: 12

Noli me tangere,¹ for Caesar's I am,

And wild for to hold, though I seem tame.

¹ *Noli mi tangere* (Latin) ~ 'touch me not': the phrase spoken by Christ after his resurrection to Mary Magdelene when she recognizes him (John 20:17).

Sir Philip Sidney ~ Sonnet 1, from his sequence
Astrophil and Stella (1582/1591)

Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show, | fain = wanting

That She, dear She, might take some pleasure of my pain;

Pleasure might cause her read, reading might make her know,

Knowledge might pity win, and pity grace obtain;

I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe,

Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain;

Oft turning others' leaves, to see if thence would flow

Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sunburned brain.

But words came halting forth, wanting Invention's stay;

Invention, Nature's child, fled step-dame Study's blows;

And others' feet still seemed but strangers in my way.

Thus, great with child to speak, and helpless in my throes,

Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite.

"Fool," said my Muse to me, "look in thy heart, and write!"

**Edmund Spenser ~ sonnet 75, from his sequence
Amoretti (1595)**

One day I wrote her name upon the strand, | *strand* = beach

But came the waves and washed it away:

Again I wrote it with a second hand,

But came the tide, and made my pains his prey. 4

Vain man, said she, that dost in vain assay, | that does in vain try

A mortal thing so to immortalize;

For I myself shall like to this decay,

And eke my name be wiped out likewise. 8

Not so, (*quod* I), let baser things devise | *quod* = said

To die in dust, but you shall live by fame:

My verse your virtues rare shall eternize, | *eternize* = make eternal

And in the heavens write your glorious name: 12

Where whenas death shall all the world subdue, | *whenas* = when, at the time

Our love shall live, and later life renew.

**William Shakespeare, sonnet 94 from
*Shakespeare's Sonnets (1611)***

They that have power to hurt and will do none,
That do not do the thing they most do show,
Who, moving others, are themselves as stone,
Unmoved, cold, and to temptation slow:

They rightly do inherit heaven's graces
And husband nature's riches from expense;
They are the lords and owners of their faces,
Others but stewards of their excellence.

The summer's flower is to the summer sweet
Though to itself it only live and die,
But if that flower with base infection meet,
The basest weed outbraves his dignity:

For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds;
Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.

**William Shakespeare, sonnet 135 from
Shakespeare's Sonnets (1611)**

Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy *Will*,
And *Will* to boot, and *Will* in overplus;
More than enough am I that vex thee still,
To thy sweet will making addition thus.

Wilt thou, whose will is large and spacious,
Not once vouchsafe to hide my will in thine?
Shall will in others seem right gracious,
And in my will no fair acceptance shine?

The sea, all water, yet receives rain still,
And in abundance addeth to his store;
So thou being rich in *Will* add to thy *Will*
One will of mine, to make thy large *Will* more.

Let no unkind, no fair beseechers kill;
Think all but one, and me in that one *Will*.

**Lady Mary Wroth, sonnet 2 from
*Pamphilia, to Amphilanthus (1621)***

Love like a juggler, comes to play his prize,
And all minds draw his wonders to admire,
To see how cunningly he, wanting eyes,
Can yet deceive the best sight of desire:

The wanton child, how he can feign his fire
So prettily, as none sees his disguise!
How finely do his tricks, while we fools hire
The badge, and office of his tyrannies,

For in the end, such juggling he doth make
As he our hearts, instead of eyes doth take
For men can only by their sleights abuse

The sight with nimble, and delightful skill;
But if he play, his gain is our lost will:
Yet childlike, we can not his sports refuse.

**John Donne, sonnet 14 from
Holy Sonnets (1633)**

Batter my heart, three-person'd God, for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new. 4
I, like an usurp'd town to another due,
Labor to admit you, but oh, to no end;
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captiv'd, and proves weak or untrue. 8
Yet dearly I love you, and would be lov'd fain,
But am betroth'd unto your enemy;
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I, 12
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

George Herbert, 'Redemption',
from *The Temple* (1633)

Having been tenant long to a rich lord,
Not thriving, I resolvèd to be bold,
And make a suit unto him, to afford
A new small-rented lease, and cancel th' old.

In heaven at his manor I him sought;
They told me there that he was lately gone
About some land, which he had dearly bought
Long since on earth, to take possession.

I straight returned, and knowing his great birth,
Sought him accordingly in great resorts;
In cities, theaters, gardens, parks, and courts;
At length I heard a ragged noise and mirth

Of thieves and murderers; there I him espied,
Who straight, *Your suit is granted*, said, and died.

John Milton, sonnet 19, 'On His Blindness' (c.1652-1655)

When I consider how my light is spent,
Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest He returning chide;
"Doth God exact day-labor, light denied?"
I fondly ask. But Patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need
Either man's work or His own gifts. Who best
Bear His mild yoke, they serve Him best. His state
Is kingly: thousands at His bidding speed,
And post o'er land and ocean without rest;
They also serve who only stand and wait."

William Wordsworth,
'Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802'

Earth has not any thing to show more fair:

Dull would he be of soul who could pass by

A sight so touching in its majesty:

This City now doth, like a garment, wear 4

The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,

Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie

Open unto the fields, and to the sky;

All bright and glittering in the smokeless air. 8

Never did sun more beautifully steep

In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;

Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!

The river glideth at his own sweet will: 12

Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;

And all that mighty heart is lying still!

Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Ozymandias'

I met a traveller from an antique land,
Who said—"Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown, 4
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed; 8
And on the pedestal, these words appear:
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay 12
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away."

John Keats, 'On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again'

O golden-tongued Romance with serene lute!

Fair plumed Syren! Queen of far away!

Leave melodizing on this wintry day,

Shut up thine olden pages, and be mute: 4

Adieu! for once again the fierce dispute,

Betwixt damnation and impassion'd clay

Must I burn through; once more humbly assay

The bitter-sweet of this Shakespearian fruit. 8

Chief Poet! and ye clouds of Albion,

Begetters of our deep eternal theme,

When through the old oak forest I am gone,

Let me not wander in a barren dream, 12

But when I am consumed in the fire,

Give me new Phoenix wings to fly at my desire.

Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'Pied Beauty'

Glory be to God for dappled things –

For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;

For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;

Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;

Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;

And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;

Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)

With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;

He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:

Praise him.

Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'The Windhover'

To Christ our Lord

I caught this morning morning's minion, king-
dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing
In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
Stirred for a bird, – the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!

No wonder of it: shéer plód makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion.

W. B. Yeats, 'Leda and the Swan'

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
And how can body, laid in that white rush,
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?

A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
And Agamemnon dead.

Being so caught up,
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

Rupert Brooke, 'Love'

Love is a breach in the walls, a broken gate,

Where that comes in that shall not go again;

Love sells the proud heart's citadel to Fate.

They have known shame, who love unloved. Even then

When two mouths, thirsty each for each, find slaking,

And agony's forgot, and hushed the crying

Of credulous hearts, in heaven—such are but taking

Their own poor dreams within their arms, and lying

Each in his lonely night, each with a ghost.

Some share that night. But they know love grows colder,

Grows false and dull, that was sweet lies at most.

Astonishment is no more in hand or shoulder,

But darkens, and dies out from kiss to kiss.

All this is love; and all love is but this.

W. H. Auden, sonnet 16 from *In Time of War* (1939)

XV

Engines bear them through the sky: they're free
And isolated like the very rich;
Remote like savants, they can only see
The breathing city as a target which
Requires their skill; will never see how flying
Is the creation of ideas they hate,
Nor how their own machines are always trying
To push through into life. They chose a fate
The islands where they live did not compel.
Though earth may teach our proper discipline,
At any time it will be possible
To turn away from freedom and become
Bound like the heiress in her mother's womb,
And helpless as the poor have always been.

for Stephen Hawking

When we wake up brushed by panic in the dark
our pupils grope for the shape of things we know.

Photons loosed from slits like greyhounds at the track
reveal light's doubleness in their cast shadows

that stripe a dimmed lab's wall — particles no more —
and with a wave bid all certainties goodbye.

For what's sure in a universe that dopplers
away like a siren's midnight cry? They say

a flash seen from on and off a hurtling train
will explain why time dilates like a perfect

afternoon; predicts black holes where parallel lines
will meet, whose stark horizon even starlight,

bent in its tracks, can't resist. If we can think
this far, might not our eyes adjust to the dark?

Emily Critchley, 'A Final Sonnet'

(for Luke Heighton)

I can't simply, & why would I complicatedly

even

give up what's been so brutishly suspended,

so animated,

even tho this shared life which, travelling backwards,

separates a self

from a different self.

Another woman writes so damn

alone society stamps & digs her heels again &

willing the sweet home-coming,

involving ready demeaning portraiture,

like so much future Art House, hopes.

Then, in a different joke, about which laughing / working / loving differently
& better, & so on...

Which told, she has gotten older.

Sophie Robinson, 'nsfw'

nsfw

i'm sick of love & sad for what I've lost:
that bullshit fix of nervy hands has gone &
rude spring's a bully, sun & wavy cold air
& you are well, i having never been well i,
i want to meet you anew and be loved &
not thought of as silly — to you now i'm
a clown or a dog waiting to be put down
& so my breasts are hairy teats for cubs i love
& are not born, & not for you, my new nude
is atrocious & i wonder who you
think of in the shower, what wets your meat
if not my putrid body you once & gently
fucked & which i, promising it to you, have lost
the receipt for. go away for a long time

& meet me at the airport, run me a bath
as before with water from the kettle so
kind & we'll shiver in two inches forever,
thigh on thigh never shrinking from the
moment but cycling it around the time
we do have, having been given each other, &
never unadorned or waiting to get broke.
i'd wait to die forever to have unlost
that time & die to lose it all again,
having taken too much, having got
love unspent not wanted & staid unhappy
inside the kettle waiting to be filled kindly,
touched on the cunt or met at the airport with the
ghosts of animal kingdoms still inside me.