

William Shakespeare (1564–1616)
The Sonnets

Please consult the annotations to the assigned sonnets in the digital version of the [Oxford Shakespeare](#) edition. The number of each sonnet here is a link to the corresponding page of notes. The sonnets were first published in 1609; a convenient facsimile is available in the [Internet Shakespeare Editions](#).

Sonnet 18

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
5 Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course untrimmed:
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
10 Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:
 So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
 So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Shakespeare, Sonnet 30

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste;
5 Then can I drown an eye, unused to flow,
For precious friends hid in death's dateless night,
And weep afresh love's long since cancelled woe,
And moan th'expense of many a vanished sight.
Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,
10 And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er
The sad account of fore-bemoaned moan,
Which I new pay as if not paid before;
But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restored, and sorrows end.

Shakespeare, Sonnet 116

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments; love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
5 Oh no, it is an ever-fixèd mark,
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wand'ring bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
10 Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

Shakespeare, Sonnet 129

Th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame
Is lust in action; and till action, lust
Is perjured, murd'rous, bloody, full of blame,
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust;
5 Enjoyed no sooner but despised straight;
Past reason hunted, and no sooner had,
Past reason hated as a swallowed bait
On purpose laid to make the taker mad;
Mad in pursuit, and in possession so;
10 Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;
A bliss in proof, and proved, a very woe;
Before, a joy proposed; behind, a dream.
All this the world well knows, yet none knows well
To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

George Herbert (1593–1633)
Prayer (1)

Prayer the Churches banquet, Angels age,
 Gods breath in man returning to his birth,
 The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth;
5 Engine against th' Almightye, sinners towre,
 Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,
 The six-daies world transposing in an houre,
A kinde of tune, which all things heare and fear;
Softnesse, and peace, and joy, and love, and blisse,
10 Exalted Manna, gladnesse of the best,
 Heaven in ordinarie, man well drest,
The milkie way, the bird of Paradise,
 Church-bels beyond the starres heard, the souls bloud,
 The land of spices; something understood.

George Herbert, *The Works of George Herbert*, ed. F.E. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1945), 51.

George Herbert
Jordan (1)

Who sayes that fictions onely and false hair
Become a verse? Is there in truth no beautie?
Is all good structure in a winding stair?
May no lines passe, except they do their dutie
5 Not to a true, but painted chair?

Is it no verse, except enchanted groves
And sudden arbours shadow coarse-spunne lines?
Must [purling](#) streams refresh a lovers loves?
Must all be vail'd, while he that reades, divines,
10 Catching the sense at two removes?

Shepherds are honest people; let them sing:
Riddle who list, for me, and pull for [Prime](#):
I envie no man's nightingale or spring;
Nor let them punish me with losse of rime,
15 Who plainly say, *My God, My King*.

Ibid., 56–57.

John Milton (1608–1674)

Sonnet 19

When I consider how my light is spent,
E're half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one Talent which is death to hide,
Lodg'd with me useless, though my Soul more bent

5 To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, least he returning chide,
Doth God exact day labour, light deny'd,
I fondly ask; But patience to prevent

10 That murmur, soon replies, God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts, who best
Bear his milde yoke, they serve him best, his State

Is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
And post o're Land and Ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and waite.

The John Milton Reading Room, ed. Thomas H. Luxon (Dartmouth College, 2020), [Sonnet 19](#). Consult this digital edition for notes. The sonnet first appeared in *Poems, &c., upon Several Occasions* (London, 1673) but probably dates, says Luxon, to 1652.

Walt Whitman (1819–1892)
When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer

When I heard the learn'd astronomer;
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me;
When I was shown the charts and the diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them;
When I, sitting, heard the astronomer, where he lectured with much applause in the
lecture-room,

5 How soon, unaccountable, I became tired and sick;
Till rising and gliding out, I wander'd off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

Walt Whitman, *Drum-Taps* (New York: 1865), 34, [The Walt Whitman Archive](#).

Wallace Stevens (1879–1955)
The Snow Man

One must have a mind of winter
To regard the frost and the boughs
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

5 And have been cold a long time
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
The spruces rough in the distant glitter

Of the January sun; and not to think
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,
In the sound of a few leaves,

10 Which is the sound of the land
Full of the same wind
That is blowing in the same bare place

For the listener, who listens in the snow,
And, nothing himself, beholds
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

Wallace Stevens, *Harmonium* (New York: Knopf, 1923), 24, [Internet Archive](#).

Wallace Stevens
Man Carrying Thing

The poem must resist the intelligence
Almost successfully. Illustration:

A brune figure in winter evening resists
Identity. The thing he carries resists

5 The most necessitous sense. Accept them, then,
As secondary (parts not quite perceived

Of the obvious whole, uncertain particles
Of the certain solid, the primary free from doubt,

10 Things floating like the first hundred flakes of snow
Out of a storm we must endure all night,

Out of a storm of secondary things),
A horror of thoughts that suddenly are real.

We must endure our thoughts all night, until
The bright obvious stands motionless in cold.

The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens (New York: Knopf, 1954), 350–51, [ProQuest](#). The poem appeared in *Transport to Summer* (New York: Knopf, 1947).

Gwendolyn Brooks (1917–2000)
We Real Cool

The Pool Players.
Seven at the Golden Shovel.

We real cool. We
Left school. We

Lurk late. We
Strike straight. We

5 Sing sin. We
Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We
Die soon.

Gwendolyn Brooks, "The Bean Eaters," *Poetry* 94, no. 6 (September 1959): 373, [JSTOR](#).

Terrance Hayes (1971–)
The Golden Shovel

I. 1981

When I am so small Da's sock covers my arm, we
cruise at twilight until we find the place the real

men lean, bloodshot and translucent with cool.
His smile is a gold-plated incantation as we

5 drift by women on bar stools, with nothing left
in them but approachlessness. This is a school

I do not know yet. But the cue sticks mean we
are rubbed by light, smooth as wood, the lurk

10 of smoke thinned to song. We won't be out late.
Standing in the middle of the street last night we

watched the moonlit lawns and a neighbor strike
his son in the face. A shadow knocked straight

Da promised to leave me everything: the shovel we
used to bury the dog, the words he loved to sing

15 his rusted pistol, his squeaky Bible, his sin.
The boy's sneakers were light on the road. We

watched him run to us looking wounded and thin.
He'd been caught lying or drinking his father's gin.

20 He'd been defending his ma, trying to be a man. We
stood in the road, and my father talked about jazz,

how sometimes a tune is born of outrage. By June
the boy would be locked upstate. That night we

got down on our knees in my room. If I should die
before I wake. Da said to me, it will be too soon.

II. 1991

25 Into the tented city we go, we-
 akened by the fire's ethereal

 afterglow. Born lost and cool-
 er than heartache. What we

 know is what we know. The left
30 hand severed and school-

 ed by cleverness. A plate of we-
 ekdays cooking. The hour lurk-

 ing in the afterglow. A late-
 night chant. Into the city we

35 go. Close your eyes and strike
 a blow. Light can be straight-

 ened by its shadow. What we
 break is what we hold. A sing-

 ular blue note. An outcry sin-
40 ged exiting the throat. We

 push until we thin, thin-
 king we won't creep back again.

 While God licks his kin, we
 sing until our blood is jazz,

45 we swing from June to June.
 We sweat to keep from we-

 eping. Groomed on a die-
 t of hunger, we end too soon.

Lighthead (New York: Penguin, 2010), 6–8.