

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 [49](#)

Against that time (if ever that time come)
When I shall see thee frown on my defects,
Whenas thy love hath cast his utmost sum,
Called to that audit by advised respects;
5 Against that time when thou shalt strangely pass,
And scarcely greet me with that sun, thine eye,
When love, converted from the thing it was,
Shall reasons find of settled gravity;
Against that time do I ensconce me here,
10 Within the knowledge of mine own desert,
And this my hand against myself uprear
To guard the lawful reasons on thy part.
To leave poor me thou hast the strength of laws,
Since why to love I can allege no cause.

Shakespeare, Sonnet 130

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun,
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
5 I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks,
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
10 That music hath a far more pleasing sound.
I grant I never saw a goddess go:
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

John Milton (1608–1674)
Paradise Lost, Book 1, ll. 1–26

Of Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit
Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal tast
Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
5 Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat,
Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top
Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed,
In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth
10 Rose out of Chaos: Or if Sion Hill
Delight thee more, and Siloa's Brook that flow'd
Fast by the Oracle of God; I thence
Invoke thy aid to my adventurous Song,
That with no middle flight intends to soar
15 Above th' Aonian Mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime.
And chiefly Thou O Spirit, that dost prefer
Before all Temples th' upright heart and pure,
Instruct me, for Thou know'st; Thou from the first
20 Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss
And mad'st it pregnant: What in me is dark
Illumin, what is low raise and support;
That to the highth of this great Argument
25 I may assert Eternal Providence,
And justifie the wayes of God to men.

Paradise Lost, Book 1, in *The John Milton Reading Room*, ed. Thomas H. Luxon (Dartmouth College, 2023). Consult this digital edition for notes. These are only the very first lines of a ten-thousand-line epic in twelve books. *Paradise Lost* was first published in 1667 and revised for a second edition in 1674.

Anna Lætitia Barbauld (1743–1825)
Washing-Day

..... and their voice,
Turning again towards childish treble, pipes
And whistles in its sound.—

The Muses are turned gossips; they have lost
The buskined step, and clear high-sounding phrase,
Language of gods. Come, then, domestic Muse,
In slipshod measure loosely prattling on
5 Of farm or orchard, pleasant curds and cream,
Or drowning flies, or shoe lost in the mire
By little whimpering boy, with rueful face;
Come, Muse, and sing the dreaded Washing-Day.
Ye who beneath the yoke of wedlock bend,
10 With bowed soul, full well ye ken the day
Which week, smooth sliding after week, brings on
Too soon;—for to that day nor peace belongs
Nor comfort;—ere the first grey streak of dawn,
The red-arm'd washers come and chase repose.
15 Nor pleasant smile, nor quaint device of mirth,
E'er visited that day: the very cat,
From the wet kitchen scared and reeking hearth,
Visits the parlour,—an unwonted guest.
The silent breakfast-meal is soon dispatch'd
20 Uninterrupted, save by anxious looks
Cast at the lowering sky, if sky should lower.
From that last evil, O preserve us, heavens!
For should the skies pour down, adieu to all
Remains of quiet: then expect to hear
25 Of sad disasters,—dirt and gravel stains
Hard to efface, and loaded lines at once
Snapped short,—and linen-horse by dog thrown down,
And all the petty miseries of life.
Saints have been calm while stretched upon the rack,
30 And [Guatimozin](#) smil'd on burning coals;
But never yet did housewife notable

Greet with a smile a rainy washing-day.
 —But grant the welkin fair, require not thou
 Who call'st thyself perchance the master there,
 35 Or study swept, or nicely dusted coat,
 Or usual 'tendance;—ask not, indiscreet,
 Thy stockings mended, though the yawning rents
 Gape wide as Erebus; nor hope to find
 Some snug recess impervious: shouldst thou try
 40 The 'customed garden walks, thine eye shall rue
 The budding fragrance of thy tender shrubs,
 Myrtle or rose, all crushed beneath the weight
 Of coarse checked apron,—with impatient hand
 Twitched off when showers impend: or crossing lines
 45 Shall mar thy musings, as the wet cold sheet
 Flaps in thy face abrupt. Woe to the friend
 Whose evil stars have urged him forth to claim
 On such a day the hospitable rites!
 Looks, blank at best, and stinted courtesy,
 50 Shall he receive. Vainly he feeds his hopes
 With dinner of roast chicken, savoury pie,
 Or tart or pudding:—pudding he nor tart
 That day shall eat; nor, though the husband try,
 Mending what can't be helped, to kindle mirth
 55 From cheer deficient, shall his consort's brow
 Clear up propitious;—the unlucky guest
 In silence dines, and early slinks away.
 I well remember, when a child, the awe
 This day struck into me; for then the maids,
 60 I scarce knew why, looked cross, and drove me from them;
 Nor soft caress could I obtain, nor hope
 Usual indulgencies; jelly or creams,
 Relic of costly suppers, and set by
 For me their petted one; or buttered toast,
 65 When butter was forbid; or thrilling tale
 Of ghost, or witch, or murder—so I went
 And shelter'd me beside the parlour fire:
 There my dear grandmother, eldest of forms,
 Tended the little ones, and watched from harm,

70 Anxiously fond, though oft her spectacles
With elfin cunning hid, and oft the pins
Drawn from her ravelled stocking, might have soured
One less indulgent.—
At intervals my mother's voice was heard,
75 Urging dispatch: briskly the work went on,
All hands employed to wash, to rinse, to wring,
To fold, and starch, and clap, and iron, and plait.
Then would I sit me down, and ponder much
Why washings were. Sometimes through hollow bowl
80 Of pipe amused we blew, and sent aloft
The floating bubbles, little dreaming then
To see, [Mongolfier](#), thy silken ball
Ride buoyant through the clouds—so near approach
The sports of children and the toils of men.
85 Earth, air, and sky, and ocean, hath its bubbles,
And verse is one of them—this most of all.

The Works of Anna Letitia Barbauld, with a Memoir by Lucy Aikin (London: Longman, 1825), 1.202-206, [HathiTrust](#). Transcription from *A Celebration of Women Writers*, ed. Mary Mark Ockerbloom. The poem first appeared in 1797. The epigraph, Ockerbloom notes, is from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*.

William Wordsworth (1770–1850)
Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey
On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour
July 13, 1798

Five years have passed; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters! and again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a sweet inland murmur.¹ — Once again
5 Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
Which on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.
The day is come when I again repose
10 Here, under this dark sycamore, and view
These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,
Which, at this season, with their unripe fruits,
Among the woods and copses lose themselves,
Nor, with their green and simple hue, disturb
15 The wild green landscape. Once again I see
These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines
Of sportive wood run wild; these pastoral farms
Green to the very door; and wreathes of smoke
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees,
20 With some uncertain notice, as might seem,
Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,
Or of some hermit's cave, where by his fire
The hermit sits alone.

Though absent long,
These forms of beauty have not been to me,
25 As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart,

1. The river is not affected by the tides a few miles above Tintern.

30 And passing even into my purer mind
With tranquil restoration:—feelings too
Of unremembered pleasure; such, perhaps,
As may have had no trivial influence
On that best portion of a good man's life;
35 His little, nameless, unremembered acts
Of kindness and of love. Nor less, I trust,
To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
40 In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world
Is lighten'd:—that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame,
45 And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

50 If this
Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft,
In darkness, and amid the many shapes
Of joyless day-light; when the fretful stir
Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,
55 Have hung upon the beatings of my heart,
How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee
O sylvan Wye! Thou wanderer through the woods,
How often has my spirit turned to thee!

60 And now, with gleams of half-extinguish'd thought,
With many recognitions dim and faint,
And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
The picture of the mind revives again:
While here I stand, not only with the sense
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts

65 That in this moment there is life and food
 For future years. And so I dare to hope
 Though changed, no doubt, from what I was, when first
 I came among these hills; when like a roe
 70 I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
 Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,
 Wherever nature led; more like a man
 Flying from something that he dreads, than one
 Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then
 75 (The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,
 And their glad animal movements all gone by,)
 To me was all in all.—I cannot paint
 What then I was. The sounding cataract
 Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
 The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
 80 Their colours and their forms, were then to me
 An appetite: a feeling and a love,
 That had no need of a remoter charm,
 By thought supplied, or any interest
 Unborrowed from the eye.—That time is past,
 85 And all its aching joys are now no more,
 And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
 Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur: other gifts
 Have followed, for such loss, I would believe,
 Abundant recompence. For I have learned
 90 To look on nature, not as in the hour
 Of thoughtless youth, but hearing oftentimes
 The still, sad music of humanity,
 Not harsh nor grating, though of ample power
 To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
 95 A presence that disturbs me with the joy
 Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean, and the living air,
 100 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
 A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,

And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
105 And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye and ear, both what they half-create,²
And what perceive; well pleased to recognize
In nature and the language of the sense,
110 The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.

Nor, perchance,
If I were not thus taught, should I the more
Suffer my genial spirits to decay:
115 For thou art with me, here, upon the banks
Of this fair river; thou, my dearest Friend,
My dear, dear Friend, and in thy voice I catch
The language of my former heart, and read
My former pleasures in the shooting lights
120 Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while
May I behold in thee what I was once,
My dear, dear Sister! And this prayer I make,
Knowing that Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
125 Through all the years of this our life, to lead
From joy to joy: for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
130 Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith that all which we behold
135 Is full of blessings. Therefore let the moon
Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;
And let the misty mountain winds be free

2. This line has a close resemblance to an admirable line of Young, the exact expression of which I cannot recollect.

To blow against thee: and in after years,
 When these wild ecstasies shall be matured
 140 Into a sober pleasure, when thy mind
 Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,
 Thy memory be as a dwelling-place
 For all sweet sounds and harmonies; Oh! then,
 If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,
 145 Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts
 Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,
 And these my exhortations! Nor, perchance,
 If I should be, where I no more can hear
 Thy voice, nor catch from thy wild eyes these gleams
 150 Of past existence, wilt thou then forget
 That on the banks of this delightful stream
 We stood together; and that I, so long
 A worshipper of Nature, hither came,
 Unwearied in that service: rather say
 155 With warmer love, oh! with far deeper zeal
 Of holier love. Nor wilt thou then forget,
 That after many wanderings, many years
 Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,
 And this green pastoral landscape, were to me
 More dear, both for themselves, and for thy sake.

William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads, with a Few Other Poems* (London: J. & A. Arch, 1798), 201–210, [Internet Archive](#); transcription from [Project Gutenberg](#). The footnotes are Wordsworth's. The "Sister" is literally [Dorothy Wordsworth](#), and she and William were literally on a walking tour in Wales. The ruined abbey at Tintern, on the banks of the River Wye, was a tourist spot (and thanks to Wordsworth, it still is).

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822)
England in 1819

An old, mad, blind, despis'd, and dying king,
Princes, the dregs of their dull race, who flow
Through public scorn—mud from a muddy spring,
Rulers who neither see, nor feel, nor know,
5 But leech-like to their fainting country cling,
Till they drop, blind in blood, without a blow,
A people starv'd and stabb'd in the untill'd field,
An army, which liberticide and prey
Makes as a two-edg'd sword to all who wield,
10 Golden and sanguine laws which tempt and slay,
Religion Christless, Godless—a book seal'd,
A Senate—Time's worst statute unrepeal'd,
Are graves, from which a glorious Phantom may
Burst, to illumine our tempestuous day.

“England in 1819,” ed. M. T. Wilson, in *Representative Poetry Online* (Toronto: University of Toronto Libraries, 2002). Consult this [digital text](#) for annotations. The poem was written in 1819 in response, notably, to the [Peterloo Massacre](#), in which voting-rights protesters were killed by police in Manchester, England. Because of censorship laws, it was unpublishable at the time; it first appeared in print in 1839.

Wallace Stevens (1879–1955)
The Idea of Order at Key West

She sang beyond the genius of the sea.
The water never formed to mind or voice,
Like a body wholly body, fluttering
Its empty sleeves; and yet its mimic motion
5 Made constant cry, caused constantly a cry,
That was not ours although we understood,
Inhuman, of the veritable ocean.

The sea was not a mask. No more was she.
The song and water were not medleyed sound
10 Even if what she sang was what she heard,
Since what she sang was uttered word by word.
It may be that in all her phrases stirred
The grinding water and the gasping wind;
But it was she and not the sea we heard.

For she was the maker of the song she sang.
The ever-hooded, tragic-gestured sea
Was merely a place by which she walked to sing.
Whose spirit is this? we said, because we knew
It was the spirit that we sought and knew
20 That we should ask this often as she sang.

If it was only the dark voice of the sea
That rose, or even colored by many waves;
If it was only the outer voice of sky
And cloud, of the sunken coral water-walled,
25 However clear, it would have been deep air,
The heaving speech of air, a summer sound
Repeated in a summer without end
And sound alone. But it was more than that,
More even than her voice, and ours, among
30 The meaningless plungings of water and the wind,
Theatrical distances, bronze shadows heaped
On high horizons, mountainous atmospheres
Of sky and sea.

It was her voice that made
The sky acutest at its vanishing.
35 She measured to the hour its solitude.
She was the single artificer of the world
In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,
Whatever self it had, became the self
That was her song, for she was the maker. Then we,
40 As we beheld her striding there alone,
Knew that there never was a world for her
Except the one she sang and, singing, made.

Ramon Fernandez, tell me, if you know,
Why, when the singing ended and we turned
45 Toward the town, tell why the glassy lights,
The lights in the fishing boats at anchor there,
As the night descended, tilting in the air,
Mastered the night and portioned out the sea,
Fixing emblazoned zones and fiery poles,
50 Arranging, deepening, enchanting night.

Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
The maker's rage to order words of the sea,
Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,
And of ourselves and of our origins,
In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.

The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens (New York: Knopf, 1954), 128–129. Digitized in [Literature Online](#). The poem was first published in Stevens's collection *Ideas of Order* (New York: Alcestis Press, 1935; Knopf, 1936). "Ramon Fernandez" may or may not refer to the Mexican-born French-language critic [Ramón Fernández](#).