Sonnet 68

Most glorious Lord of lyfe that on this day,
Didst make thy triumph over death and sin:
And having harrowed hell didst bring away
Captivity thence captive us to win:
This joyous day, deare Lord, with joy begin,
And grant that we for whom thou diddest dye
Being with thy deare blood elene washt from sin,
May live for ever in felicity.
And that thy love we weighing worthily,
May likewise love thee for the same against:
And for thy sake that all lyke deare didst buy,
With love may one another entertayne.
So let us love, deare love, lyke as we ought,
Love is the lesson which the Lord us taught.

8. Easter.
9. A reference to the apocryphal account of Christ's descent into hell, after his Crucifixion, to rescue the captive souls of the just.
1. "When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive" (Ephesians 4.8).
2. I.e., grant also that we, weighing thy love rightly, might love thee in the same way.
3. I.e., at the same cost.
4. "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15.12).

Sonnet 75

One day I wrote her name upon the strand,
But came the waves and washed it away:
Agayne I wrote it with a second hand,
But came the tyde, and made my paynes his pray:
Vayne man, sayd she, that doest in vaine assay:
A mortall thing so to immortalize,
For I my selve shall lyke to this decay,
And eek my name bee wiped out lykewise.
Not so, (quod I) let baser things devise:
To dy in dust, but you shall live by fame:
My verse your vertues rare shall eternize,
And in the hevens wryte your glorious name.
Where whenas death shall all the world subdew,
Our love shall live, and later life renew.

3. I.e., Cupid.
4. I.e., do they give the name of virtue to ungratefulness?

Splendidis longum valedico nugis.

[I bid a long farewell to all that bright nothingness]
William Shakespeare (1564–1616), from Sonnets (1609)

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;
Sometimes too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
And every fair from fair sometimes declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimmed;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;
Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest 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.

8. Divested of its beauty.
9. Own, with a play on owe.
1. I.e., when you are grafted to Time in this immortal poetry.

129
Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame
Is lust in action; and till action, lust
Is perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame,
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust;
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;
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.

7. I.e., lust, when put into action, is an expenditure of "spirit" (life, vigor, also semen) in a waste (desert, with a play on the crotch, or "waist," of shame).

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.
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
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.
At the round earth's imagined corners, blow
Your trumpets, angels; and arise, arise
From death, you numberless infinities
Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go;
All whom the flood did, and fire shall, o'erthrow,
All whom war, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,
Despair, law, chance, hath slain, and you whose eyes
Shall behold God, and never taste death's woe.

But let them sleep, Lord, and me mourn a space;
For, if above all these, my sins abound,
Tis late to ask abundance of thy grace
When we are there. Here on this lowly ground,
Teach me how to repent; for that's as good
As if thou'hadst sealed my pardon with thy blood.

3. The Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
4. One who acts in the name and by the authority of the supreme ruler.
5. Unless you make a prisoner of.

5. The first eight lines of the poem recount the events of the end of the world and the Second Coming of Christ; Donne alludes specifically to Revelation 7.1: "I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth."
6. See note 3, p. 319. [At the end of the world, "the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Peter 3.10).]
7. "But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God" (Christ's words to his disciples, Luke 9.27). According to 1 Thessalonians 4.17, believers who are alive at the time of Christ's Second Coming will not die but will be taken directly to heaven.

9. Arising from the unbalanced humors, inexplicably changeable.
1. A fever, attended with paroxysms of hot and cold and trembling fits. "Fantastic": capricious, extravagant.
GEORGE HERBERT (1595–1633)

**Redemption**

Having been tenant long to a rich Lord,
Not thriving, I resolved to be bold,
And make a suit unto him, to afford
A new small-rented lease, and cancel th' old.1

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 return'd, and knowing his great birth,
Sought him accordingly in great resorts;
In cities, theatres, gardens, parks, and courts:
At length I heard a ragged noise and mirth
Of theeves and murderers: there I him espied,
Who straight, Your suit is granted, said, & died.

(1633)

1. I.e., the old Covenant of Works, abrogated under the Covenant of Grace.

**Prayer (I)**

Prayer, the church's banquet; angels' age,
God's breath in man returning to his birth;
The soul in paraphrase,2 heart in pilgrimage;
The Christian plummet,3 sounding heaven and earth;
Engine against th' Almighty, sinner's tower,
Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,
The six-days' world transposing4 in an hour;
A kind of tune which all things hear and fear:
Softness and peace and joy and love and bliss;
A kind of tune which all things hear and fear:
The land of spices; something understood.

(1633)

1. This extraordinary sonnet is a series of epithets without a main verb, defining prayer by metaphor.
2. Clarifying by expansion.
3. A weight used to measure ("sound") the depth of water.
4. A musical term indicating sounds produced at another pitch from the original.
5. The food God supplied to the Israelites in the wilderness.
6. I.e., everyday heaven.

JOHN MILTON (1608–1674)

**On the Late Massacre in Piedmont**

Avenge,2 O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold;
Even them who kept thy truth so pure of old
When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones,3
Forget not: in thy book4 record their groans
Who were thy sheep and in their ancient fold
Slain by the bloody Piemontese that rolled
Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans

The vales redoubled to the hills, and they
To heaven. Their martyred blood and ashes sow
O'er all th' Italian fields, where still doth sway
The triple tyrant:5 that from these may grow
A hundredfold, who having learnt thy way
Early may fly the Babylonian woe.6

(1655)

1. The Waldensians (or Vaudois) were a proto-Protestant sect dating to the 12th century who lived in the valleys of northern Italy (the Piedmont) and southern France; Protestants considered them a remnant retaining apostolic purity, free of Catholic superstitions and graven images ("stocks and stones," line 4). The treaty that had allowed them freedom of worship was bypassed in 1655 when the armies of the Catholic duke of Savoy conducted a massacre, razing villages, committing unspeakable atrocities, and hurling women and children from the mountain tops. Protestant Europe was outraged, and in his capacity as Cromwell's Latin secretary Milton translated and wrote several letters about the episode. The sonnet incorporates details from such letters and the contemporary newsbooks. Here Milton transforms the sonnet into a prophetic denunciation.
2. Cf. Revelation 6.9-10: "the souls of them that were slain for the word of God . . . cried with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood . . .?'"

Methought I saw my late espoused saint1
Brought to me like Alcestis2 from the grave,
Whom Jove's great son to her glad husband gave,
Rescued from death by force though pale and faint.
Mine, as whom3 washed from spot of childbed taint,
Purification in the old law did save,4
And such, as yet once more I trust to have
Full sight of her in heaven without restraint,
Came vested all in white, pure as her mind,
Her face was veiled, yet to my fancied sight5
Love, sweetness, goodness, in her person shined
So clear, as in no face with more delight.
But O, as to embrace me she inclined,
I waked, she fled, and day brought back my night.

(1658)

1. There is some debate as to whether this poem refers to Milton's first wife, Mary Powell, who died in May 1652, three days after giving birth to her third daughter, or his second wife, Katherine Woodcock, who died in February 1658, after giving birth (in October 1657) to a daughter. The text can support either, but the latter seems more likely. The sonnet is couched as a dream vision.
2. In Euripides' Alcestis, Alcestis, wife of Admetus, is rescued from the underworld by Hercules ("Jove's great son," next line) and restored, veiled, to Admetus; he is overjoyed when he lifts the veil, but she must remain silent until she is ritually cleansed.
3. As one whom.
4. The Mosaic Law (Leviticus 12.2—8) prescribed periods for the purification of women after childbirth (eighty days for a daughter).
5. She is veiled like Alcestis, and Milton's sight of her is only "fancied"; he never saw the face of his second wife, Katherine, because of his blindness.
While summer-suns o'er the gay prospect played'

While summer-suns o'er the gay prospect played,
Through Surrey's verdant scenes, where Epsom spreads
Mid intermingling elms her flowery meads,
And Hascombe's hill, in towering groves arrayed,
Reared its romantic steep, with mind serene,
I journeyed blithe. Full pensive I returned;
For now my breast with hopeless passion burned,
Wet with hoar mists appeared the gaudy scene,
Which late in careless indolence I passed;
And autumn all around those hues had cast
Where past delight my recent grief might trace.
Sad change, that Nature a congenial gloom
Should wear, when most, my cheerless mood to chase,
I wished her green attire, and wonted bloom!

(1777)

William Lisle Bowles (1762-1850)

To the River Wensbeck

As slowly wanders thy sequestered stream,
Wensbeck! the mossy-scattered rocks among,
In fancy's ear still making plaintive song
To the dark woods above, that waving seem
To bend o'er some enchanted spot, removed
From life's vain scenes; I listen to the wind,
And think I hear meek sorrow's plaint, reclined
O'er the forsaken tomb of one she loved!—
Fair scenes, ye lend a pleasure, long unknown,
To him who passes weary on his way—
The farewell tear, which now he turns to pay,
Shall thank you,—and when'er of pleasures flown
His heart some long-lost image would renew,
Delightful haunts! he will remember you.

(1789)

Mary Robinson (1757?-1800)

Sappho and Phaon 24

O THOU! meek Orb! that stealing o'er the dale
  Cheer'st with thy modest beams the noon of night!
On the smooth lake diffusing silv'ry light,
Sublimely still, and beautifully pale!
What can thy cool and placid eye avail,
  Where fierce despair absorbs the mental sight,
While inbred glooms the vagrant thoughts invite,
To tempt the gulph where howling fiends assail?
O, Night! all nature owns thy temper'd pow'r;
Thy solemn pause, thy dews, thy pensive beam;
Thy sweet breath whisp'ring the moonlight bow'r,
While fainting flow'rets kiss the wand'ring stream!
Yet, vain is ev'ry charm! and vain the hour,
That brings to madd'ning love, no soothing dream!

(1796)

Charlotte Smith (1749-1806)

Written Near a Port on a Dark Evening

Huge vapors brood above the clifted shore,
Night on the ocean settles, dark and mute,
Save where is heard the repercussive roar
Of drowsy billows, on the rugged foot
Of rocks remote; or still more distant tone
Of seamen in the anchored bark that tell
The watch relieved; or one deep voice alone
Singing the hour, and bidding "Strike the bell."
All is black shadow, but the lucid line
Marked by the light surf on the level sand,
Or where afar the ship-lights faintly shine
Like wandering fairy fires, that oft on land
Mislead the pilgrim—such the dubious ray
That wavering reason lends, in life's long darkling way.

(1800)
SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE (1772–1834)

To the River Otter

Dear native brook! wild streamlet of the west!
How many various-fated years have past,
What blissful and what anguished hours, since last
I skimmed the smooth thin stone along thy breast,
Numbering its light leaps! Yet so deep impressed
Sink the sweet scenes of childhood, that mine eyes
I never shut amid the sunny blaze,
But straight with all their tints thy waters rise,
Thy crossing plank, thy margin's willowy maze,
And bedded sand that veined with various dyes
Gleamed through thy bright transparence to the gaze!
Visions of childhood! oft have ye beguiled
Lone manhood's cares, yet waking fondest sighs,
Ah! that once more I were a careless child!

1792 (1797)

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH (1770–1850)

Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802

Earth has not anything 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
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theaters, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendor, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

1802 (1807)

Surprised by Joy

Surprised by Joy—impatient as the Wind
I turned to share the transport—Oh! with whom
But thee,5 deep buried in the silent tomb,
That spot which no vicissitude can find?
Love, faithful love, recalled thee to my mind—
But how could I forget thee? Through what power,
Even for the least division of an hour,
Have I been so beguiled as to be blind
To my most grievous loss!—That thought's return
Was the worst pang that sorrow ever bore,
Save one, one only, when I stood forlorn,
Knowing my heart's best treasure was no more;
That neither present time, nor years unborn
Could to my sight that heavenly face restore.

1813–14 (1815)

5. The poet's daughter Catharine, who died in 1812, at age four.
On First Looking into Chapman's Homer

Much have I traveled in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.

Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
That deep-browed Homer ruled as his demesne;
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific—

And all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise—
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

1. Translations from Homer's Odyssey, in particular book 5, by George Chapman, a contemporary of Shakespeare.
2. Greek and Roman god of poetic inspiration.
3. Spanish conqueror of Mexico; in fact, Balboa, not Cortez, was the first European to see the Pacific, from Darien, in Panama.

Ozymandias

I met a traveler 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,
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:

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
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

Mary at the Feet of Christ

Oh! blest beyond all daughters of the earth!
What were the Orient's thrones to that low seat,
Where thy hushed spirit drew celestial birth?
Mary! meek listener at the Savior's feet!
No feverish cares to that divine retreat
Thy woman's heart of silent worship brought,
But a fresh childhood, heavenly truth to meet,
With love, and wonder, and submissive thought.
Oh! for the holy quiet of thy breast,
Midst the world's eager tones and footsteps flying!
Thou, whose calm soul was like a wellspring, lying
So deep and still in its transparent rest,
That e'en when noontide burns upon the hills,
Some one bright solemn star all its lone mirror fills.

1. 1816
2. 1817
3. 1818
4. 1835
5. Greek name for the Egyptian monarch Ramses II (thirteenth century B.C.E.), who is said to have erected a huge statue of himself.
Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882), *from The House of Life* (1870–1881)

**Silent Noon**

Your hands lie open in the long fresh grass,—
The finger-points look through like rosy blooms:
Your eyes smile peace. The pasture gleams and glooms
‘Neath billowing skies that scatter and amass.
All round our nest, far as the eye can pass,
Are golden kingcup fields with silver edge
Where the cow-parsley skirts the hawthorn-hedge.
‘Tis visible silence, still as the hour-glass.
Deep in the sun-searched growths the dragon-fly
Hangs like a blue thread loosened from the sky:
—So this wing’d hour is dropt to us from above.
Oh! clasp we to our hearts, for deathless dower,
This close-companioned inarticulate hour
When twofold silence was the song of love.

Christina Rossetti (1830–1894)

**In an Artist's Studio**

One face looks out from all his canvases,
   One selfsame figure sits or walks or leans:
We found her hidden just behind those screens,
That mirror gave back all her loveliness.
A queen in opal or in ruby dress,
   A nameless girl in freshest summer-greens,
A saint, an angel—every canvas means
The same one meaning, neither more nor less.
He feeds upon her face by day and night,
   And she with true kind eyes looks back on him,
Fair as the moon and joyful as the light:
   Not wan with waiting, not with sorrow dim;
Not as she is, but was when hope shone bright;
   Not as she is, but as she fills his dream.

(1856)

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861), *from Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1845–1846)

**13.**

And wilt thou have me fashion into speech
The love I bear thee, finding words enough,
And hold the torch out, while the winds are rough,
Between our faces, to cast light on each?—
I drop it at thy feet. I cannot teach
My hand to hold my spirit so far off
From myself—me—that I should bring thee proof
In words, of love hid in me out of reach.
Nay, let the silence of my womanhood
Commend my woman-love to thy belief,—
Seeing that I stand unwon, however wooed,
And rend the garment of my life, in brief,
By a most dauntless, voiceless fortitude,
Lest one touch of this heart convey its grief.
Thomas Hardy (1840–1928)

**Hap**

If but some vengeful god would call to me
From up the sky, and laugh: "Thou suffering thing,
Know that thy sorrow is my ecstasy,
That thy love's loss is my hate's profiting!"

Then would I bear it, clench myself, and die,
Steeled by the sense of ire unmerited;
Half-eased in that a Powerfuller than I
Had willed and meted me the tears I shed.

But not so. How arrives it joy lies slain,
And why unblooms the best hope ever sown?
—Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain,
And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan. . . .
These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown
Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain.

(1866)

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Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889)

**God's Grandeur**

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;¹
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed.² Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell:
the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for⁰ all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward,
Springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

(1877)

---

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939)

**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?

(1923)

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1. i.e., chance (as also "Casualty," line 11).

0. Despite.
1. In a letter of 1883, Hopkins writes: "I mean foil in its sense of leaf or tinsel, and no other word whatever will give the effect I want. Shaken goldfoil gives off broad glares like sheet lightning and also, and this is true of nothing else, owing to its zigzag dints and crossings and network of small many cornered facets, a sort of fork lightning too."
2. i.e., as when olives are crushed for their oil.

5. In Greek mythology, Leda, raped by Zeus, the supreme god, in the guise of a swan, gave birth to Helen of Troy and the twins Castor and Pollux. Helen's abduction by Paris from her husband, Menelaus, caused the Trojan War. Leda was also the mother of Clytemnestra, who murdered her own husband, Agamemnon, on his return from the war. Yeats saw Leda as the recipient of an annunciation that would found Greek civilization, as the Annunciation to Mary would found Christianity.
Futility

Move him into the sun—
Gently its touch awoke him once,
At home, whispering of fields half-sown.
Always it woke him, even in France,
Until this morning and this snow.
If anything might rouse him now
The kind old sun will know.
Think how it wakes the seeds—
Woke once the clays of a cold star.
Are limbs, so dear achieved, are sides
Full-nerved, still warm, too hard to stir?
Was it for this the clay grew tall?
—O what made fatuous sunbeams toil
To break earth’s sleep at all?

(May 1918)

XII

Here war is harmless like a monument:
A telephone is talking to a man;
Flags on a map declare that troops were sent;
A boy brings milk in bowls. There is a plan

For living men in terror of their lives,
Who thirst at nine who were to thirst at noon,
Who can be lost and are, who miss their wives
And, unlike an idea, can die too soon.

Yet ideas can be true, although men die:
For we have seen a myriad faces
Ecstatic from one lie,

And maps can really point to places
Where life is evil now.
Nanking. Dachau.

(W. H. AUDEN (1907–1973), from Sonnets from CHINA (1938))

Love, we must part now: do not let it be
Calamitous and bitter. In the past
There has been too much moonlight and self-pity:
Let us have done with it: for now at last
Never has sun more boldly paced the sky,
Never were hearts more eager to be free,
To kick down worlds, lash forests; you and I
No longer hold them; we are husks, that see
The grain going forward to a different use.

There is regret. Always, there is regret.
But it is better that our lives unloose,
As two tall ships, wind-mastered, wet with light,
Break from an estuary with their courses set,
And waving part, and waving drop from sight.

(1943–44)

PHILIP LARKIN (1922–1985)
September Song

Born 19.6.32—Deported 24.9.42

Undesirable you may have been, untouchable you were not. Not forgotten or passed over at the proper time.

As estimated, you died. Things marched, sufficient, to that end. Just so much Zyklon\(^2\) and leather, patented terror, so many routine cries.

(I have made an elegy for myself it is true)

September fattens on vines. Roses flake from the wall. The smoke of harmless fires drifts to my eyes.

This is plenty. This is more than enough.

(1968)

1. Hill was born on June 18, 1932, one day before the birthdate given here.
2. Hydrocyanic acid, used in fumigation; also (Zyklon-B) used in the gas chambers of the Nazi concentration camps.

Seamus Heaney (1939–2013)
The Forge

All I know is a door into the dark.
Outside, old axles and iron hoops rusting;
Inside, the hammered anvil's short-pitched ring,
The unpredictable fantail of sparks
Or hiss when a new shoe toughens in water.
The anvil must be somewhere in the centre,
Horned as a unicorn, at one end square,
Set there immovable: an altar
Where he expends himself in shape and music.
Sometimes, leather-aproned, hairs in his nose,
He leans out on the jamb, recalls a clatter
Of hoofs where traffic is flashing in rows;
Then grunts and goes in, with a slam and flick
To beat real iron out, to work the bellows.

(1969)