

Scorn not the Sonnet¹

William Wordsworth
written 1827; published 1827

Scorn not the Sonnet; Critic, you have frowned,
Mindless of its just honors; with this key
Shakespear unlocked his heart; the melody
Of this small lute gave ease to Petrarch's wound;
5 A thousand times this pipe did Tasso sound;
With it Camoëns soothed an exile's grief;
The Sonnet glittered a gay myrtle leaf
Amid the cypress with which Dante crowned
His Visionary brow: a glow-worm lamp,
10 It cheered mild Spenser, called from Faëryland
To struggle through dark ways; and, when, a damp
Fell round the path of Milton, in his hand
The Thing became a trumpet; when he blew
Soul-animating strains – alas, too few!

Works Cited

Wordsworth, William. "Scorn Not the Sonnet." *The Longman Anthology of British Literature*. Vol. 2A. Second Edition. Ed. David Damrosch. New York: Longman, 2003. 464.

¹In this record of his abiding devotion to the form and its tradition, Wordsworth combats the tendency to regard sonnet-writing as a less mature endeavor than epic poetry or tragic drama; in Wordsworth's day, many women poets were writing sonnets, with the effect of making sonnet-writing seem a "feminine" poetry, as opposed to "masculine" epic. He cites a range of major Renaissance poets who composed sonnets and sonnet sequences.