

In truth the prison, into which we doom
Ourselves, no prison is: and hence for me,
In sundry moods, 'twas pastime to be bound
Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground;

From "Nuns Fret Not at Their Convent's Narrow Room," William Wordsworth

Wanda Coleman on her "American Sonnets":

Sometime in the late 80s I reread all of Shakespeare's sonnets, sonnets by Melville and others . . . All that was left was to work out my criteria . . . Since jazz is an open form with certain properties – progression, improvisation, mimicry, etc., I decided that likewise the jazz sonnet would be as open as possible, adhering only to the loosely followed dictate of number of lines. I decided on 14 to 16 and to not exceed that, but to go absolutely bonkers within that constraint. I also give the sonnets a jazzified rhythm structure, akin to platter patter and/or scat and tones like certain Beat writers . . . I decided to have fun – to blow my soul.

Frederick Douglass

-Robert Hayden (1913-1980)

When it is finally ours, this freedom, this liberty, this beautiful
and terrible thing, needful to man as air,
usable as earth; when it belongs at last to all,
when it is truly instinct, brain matter, diastole, systole,
reflex action; when it is finally won; when it is more
than the gaudy mumbo jumbo of politicians:
this man, this Douglass, this former slave, this Negro
beaten to his knees, exiled, visioning a world
where none is lonely, none hunted, alien,
this man, superb in love and logic, this man
shall be remembered. Oh, not with statues' rhetoric,
not with legends and poems and wreaths of bronze alone,
but with the lives grown out of his life, the lives
fleshing his dream of the beautiful, needful thing.

Sonnet 130: My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun

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.

Love is Not All (Sonnet XXX)

-Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950)

Love is not all: it is not meat nor drink
Nor slumber nor a roof against the rain;
Nor yet a floating spar to men that sink
And rise and sink and rise and sink again;
Love can not fill the thickened lung with breath,
Nor clean the blood, nor set the fractured bone;
Yet many a man is making friends with death
Even as I speak, for lack of love alone.
It well may be that in a difficult hour,
Pinned down by pain and moaning for release,
Or nagged by want past resolution's power,
I might be driven to sell your love for peace,
Or trade the memory of this night for food.
It well may be. I do not think I would.

**Sonnet 12 When I do count the clock that tells the time
(the “procreation sonnet”)**

When I do count the clock that tells the time,
And see the brave day sunk in hideous night;
When I behold the violet past prime,
And sable curls all silver'd o'er with white;
When lofty trees I see barren of leaves
Which erst from heat did canopy the herd,
And summer's green all girded up in sheaves
Borne on the bier with white and bristly beard,
Then of thy beauty do I question make,
That thou among the wastes of time must go,
Since sweets and beauties do themselves forsake
And die as fast as they see others grow;
And nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make defence
Save breed, to brave him when he takes thee hence.

My #12

I hate clocks & mirrors I hate all roses
& trees especially trees even evergreens
are felled & strung with lights & ornaments
I hate ornaments & wind-up crèches
playing “Silent Night” with plastic cows breathing
over a plastic baby I hate babies please don't have one
it will ruin yr beautiful tits forever
you'll have to push a stroller a 40-pound shopping cart
before you like a plow 18 years you'll toil
what a waste paint something green
get a show somewhere with white walls
& people drinking wine I love wine I love
taking it in my mouth then kissing
it into yours having enough / & time

Sonnet 73: That time of year thou mayst in me behold

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west,
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed whereon it must expire,
Consum'd with that which it was nourish'd by.
This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

My # 73

it's that time of year ice in the trees
snow like dirty light piled beside the trash bags
city gardens behind chain link fences
mired in white except for an occasional rat
everyone lately has cancer
Philip Seymour Hoffman is dead of an overdose
everyone's sad & fascinated
black night is falling in a song
I prefer the one about the glow-worm
illuminate yon woods primeval
come to bed my aeronautical glimmer
draw a treble clef a few notes will swoop down
nothing lasts anyway
& we leave nothing behind