

SONNETS:

➤ Always has 14 lines – *Shakespearean and Italian Sonnet*

➤ **Shakespearean:** 3 quatrains and a rhyming couplet:
abab cdcd efef gg

Rhyming couplet at end summarizes the theme.

➤ **Italian Sonnet:** Usually divided into octave (first 8 lines) and sestet (last 6 lines)

➤ **Definite** break in thought and often the octave conveys the problem and the sestet the solution.

➤ **Octave- abbaabba rhyme scheme**

➤ **Sestet** – varies and may have cdecde or cdcdcd or cddcef rhyme schemes.

Modern poets often combine the two sonnet forms but still use the 14 lines format.

Shakespearean Sonnet

- 14 lines
- 3 quatrains
- 1 rhyming couplet at end
- rhyme scheme: abab cdcd efef gg
- Shakespeare wrote many sonnets

Italian Sonnet

- 1 octave (8 lines)
- 1 sestet (6 lines)
- rhyme scheme: abab cdcd eff egg
- rhyme scheme varies in sestet
- made famous by Petrarch (Italian poet)
- Octave: usually an introduction or description
- Sestet: usually contains the theme

London 1802 (William Wordsworth 1770-1850)

This is a typical example of an *Italian Sonnet*. The poet describes the English people as stagnant and selfish in this poem.

London, 1802

Addressing Milton directly – as if in conversation with him

1 Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour:
2 England hath need of thee: she is a Fen.
3 Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,
4 Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
5 Have forfeited their ancient English dower
6 Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;
7 Oh! raise us up, return to us again;
8 And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.
9 Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart:
10 Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:
11 Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
12 So didst thou travel on life's common way,
13 In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart
14 The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

Metaphor

Octave(8 lines)

Comparison

Sestet(6 lines)

Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour:

•The poet calls out to Milton (famous poet) and wishes that he was still alive in the present day



**England hath need of thee: she is a fen
Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,**

•The speaker thinks that Milton could help England; he sees the country as a "fen" (2) – a kind of swamp – full of gross standing water. You know, the kind of gross marshy pond that's covered in algae and slime and warty toads?

**Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
Have forfeited their ancient English dower
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;**

- The speaker is distressed by the fact that certain elements of traditional English life have lost their magic.
- To go piece by piece, he's worried about religion ("altar"), war/military concerns ("sword"), literature ("pen"), the home ("fireside"), and the economy ("the heroic wealth of hall and bower").
- He's concerned with his perception that these things are no longer tied to the "inner happiness" of the English people; in former days, they were fundamentally linked to the rightful success of the nation – this is the "dower" (a kind of gift) that the speaker refers to – but now these institutions have lost their meaning.

Oh! raise us up, return to us again;

- The speaker declares that "we" (the English people of his time) are selfish and debased, and he begs Milton to help them get out of their slump. This is because it is his opinion that England has stagnated morally by comparison to Milton's period

And give us manners, virtue, freedom,



power.

John Milton

- The speaker thinks that Milton could inspire the English to be better all around – nicer, more virtuous, and more powerful.

Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart:

- Milton was a very special guy (according to the speaker). The poet compares the older writer to a star, something removed from the mass of humanity, and superior to the rest of us.

**Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,**

- Here, the speaker's not actually talking about Milton's speaking voice – instead, he's referring to his poetic voice. Basically, he claims that Milton's poetry was as powerful and amazing as the forces of the natural world, like the sea and the sky.

**So didst thou travel on life's common way,
In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart**

•Instead of continuing to rave about Milton's many virtues as a poet, the speaker takes the last few lines to let us know that Milton was a good guy, too. Instead of being arrogant and all-important he followed "life's common way" (12) just like the rest of us, and lived his life happily and virtuously.

The lowliest duties on herself did lay

- Milton, according to the speaker, didn't just rest upon his laurels and get all arrogant about how awesome he was; the closing lines of the poem emphasize his humble nature.
- Instead of taking it easy, Milton took on "the lowliest duties" (14) – that is, he didn't avoid unglamorous tasks.
- We wonder what exactly the speaker is thinking of here. Perhaps he's referring to Milton's intense observations of human nature.

Analysis of poem

In the octave (first 8 lines) the poet introduces us to the situation and the **conditions in England**.

In the sestet (next 6 lines), Wordsworth explains why **Milton** could improve the English condition. Milton's soul, he explains, was as bright and noble as a star and "dwelt apart" from the crowd, not feeling the urge to conform to norms. Milton's voice resembled "the sea", "pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free". Furthermore, Milton never saw himself as above others but instead "travel[ed] on life's common way", remaining happy, pure (cheerful godliness), and humble (taking the "lowliest duties" on himself).

"London, 1802" portrays something of Wordsworth's moralism and his growing conservatism. He often tried to convey the message of morality to his readers. Here again, pleads with the English people to return to morality and selflessness. He criticizes them for lacking "manners, virtue, [and] freedom." But he also refers to "inward happiness" as a right, or "dower," and asks Milton to bestow "power" as well as virtue on the English.

The **themes** include morality, humanity and the natural environment. He describes Milton's soul: "soul was like a Star," because he was different even from his contemporaries in terms of being a virtuous man. The speaker feels that Milton's voice was like the sea and the sky, a part of nature and therefore natural: "majestic, free." The speaker also compliments Milton's ability to embody "cheerful godliness" even while doing the "lowliest duties." As stated above the speaker on several instances refers to Milton as a celestial/godly being.

SACAI Eng FAL Poetry Support Material: London 1802 (W Wordsworth)

According to Wordsworth, England was once a great place of happiness, religion, chivalry, art, and literature, but at the present moment those virtues have been lost. Wordsworth can only describe modern England as a swampland, where people are selfish and must be taught about things like "manners, virtue, freedom, power."

Note: Wordsworth **compliments** Milton by comparing him to things found **in nature**, such as the stars, the sea, and "the heavens." For Wordsworth, being likened to nature is the **highest compliment possible**

Structure and format

- "London, 1802" is an **Italian sonnet** with a rhyme scheme of abbaabbacddece.
- The poem is written in the **second person** and addresses the late poet **John Milton, who lived from 1608–1674** and is most famous for having written Paradise Lost.
- The poem has two main purposes: (1) to pay homage to Milton by saying that he can save the entirety of England with his nobility and virtue; (2) to draw attention to what Wordsworth feels are the problems with English society.

